



The Performing Arts Program of The Asia Society presents

The Sabri Brothers

Singers of the Inspiring Devotional

QAWWALI MUSIC FROM PAKISTAN

Cover design by Yoshikazu Ogino.

Libretto

Translations of six poems sung by the Sabri Brothers on their "Qawwali Music from Pakistan" tour of the United States, March 9-April 15, 1978, under the auspices of the Performing Arts Program of The Asia Society.

1. *Qaul and Tarana* by Amir Khusro
2. *Sar-E-Lamakan* ("The Ascent") by Sheikh Saadi and Amber Shah Warsi
3. *Girte Howe Jab Maine Tera Naam Liya Hai* ("As I Was Falling") by Kausar Niazi
4. *Na Samjho Khak Ka Putla* ("Do Not Take Me for a Figure of Clay") by Amber Shah Warsi
5. *Khwaja Ki Diwani* ("Enchanted by Khwaja") by Sahrai Sanbhari
6. *Tu Rehnawarde Shoq Hai Manzil Na Kar Qobool* ("The Wanderer") by Iqbal

These translations from the Urdu were prepared by Professor Said Khan, Farida Huma, and Sarzana Shaikh and edited by Geoffrey Paul Gordon.

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Introduction

Among the Sufi mystics, the practice of listening to *qawwali*, a combination of music (*sama'*) and poetry, is a popular means of intensifying the love of God and inducing spiritual ecstasy. The musical genre is "folk," with much improvisation and repetition. The poetic content may or may not be mystical. The use of terms such as "the Beloved," suggesting the transposition of the vocabulary of earthly love to convey the power and transcendence of divine love, is quite common in Sufism. The "face" and "tresses" signify the spiritual qualities of the master. "Wine" means the knowledge and love of God. The "tavern" refers to the spiritual master, for his heart is said to be the repository of the love of God. When "wine" intoxicates the Sufi, it diverts his mind from all earthly passions, giving him pure spiritual delight. The listener, through his own knowledge and understanding, is expected to interpret the secular in terms of divine love.

The singer usually starts with some well-known love song, though to emphasize a point he may bring in verses from other poems or even posit his own ideas. Sometimes two singers carry on an interesting test of their individual skills at improvisation while the rest of the group acts as a chorus with vigorous hand-clapping. The music, poetry, and gestures so move the listeners that they respond with rhythmic movement.

Qaul and Tarana

Ali¹ is the master of my master, master of all.
From where does this surge of feeling come?
My body is like the rabab,² my heart like the tambourine,
Rhythms throb in my veins,
Every hair on my body sings a note,
And that music is your name.

Ta na na na, ta na na na, rey³
Ta na na na ta na na rey,
Ta na dhim ta na dhim ta na them
Them them, ta na na na na na na na na,
Thhe they lana thitey theay lana,
Ta dha na dhrey, ta na na dhrey, ta na na na dhrey,
Ta na na dhrey, ta na na na dhim,
Hey tey lana, hey tey lana, dhig, dhig, dhig,
Ta na na na
Dhig, dhig, dhig, ta na na dhig dhig ta na na na na na na
Nittarey, titharhey, tirik coo coo, coog,
Thuy thuy thatey dha ghirunk, dhum kut tauk,
Thathey thakran tha,
Ta na na dhrey, ta na na dhrey, ta na na dhrey,
Ta na na tinathem ya li ya li
Ya ley, yila laley, yila laley, yila laley, rey,
Ali, my master, master of all.
Ta na na na rey, ta na na na rey
Ta na thim, ta na thim, ta na thim, thim, thim
Ta na na na na na na na

Qaul and Tarana

Ali, the master of all
Ali, the master of all
Ali, the master of all.

Oh Ali, lift up the veil from your brilliant face
So it may illuminate the world,
You are a mystery, by God,
Even to the eye that sees the inner truth,
Ali, you are my master, and I am your slave,
Ali, my master, Ali, the master of all.

“All power is subject to my will,
Yet I am subject to the will of Ali.
My devotion is my sword,
And I am the sword of Ali.
The sky is in my hands,
And I am in the hands of Ali.
The earth is under my feet,
And I am under the feet of Ali.
Ali is my leader,
I am the slave of Ali.
A thousand lives Girami⁴ would give up in the name of Ali,”
Ali, my master, Ali, master of all.

The one whom the prophet called his own flesh
Is his true heir.
The one born in Kaaba⁵ and who died in the sacred mosque
Is truly the keeper of the House of God.

Sar-E-Lamakan ("The Ascent")

You, the last of all prophets,
The object of our adoration.
In all that we can see around us,
Your being is evident.
We gain insight into the truth through you,
You are the secret of the existence of the world.

It was a beautiful night
In a peaceful world of gentleness and love.
This state of bliss inspired Allah to call his beloved to Him.
Thus at the invitation from the Omnipresence
The prophet started on his ascent to the Highest.
The beauty of the prophet was such that even
Allah could not bear the separation.

And Muhammad ascended to the heavens.
Unequaled in his devotion and virtue,
This prophet of wondrous beauty,
The guiding star, the eternal light, the brilliant sun,
The radiant moon,
Truly is Muhammad.
Who else can reach such heights!

Leader of the Caravan of Islam,
Bringer of peace and blessings to this world,
Last of all messengers, and the leader of all prophets.

Paradise is your abode.
Your face more brilliant than the sun,
Your hair like the darkness of the night,
Your body like the light of the world,
Your person, the pride of mankind,
Reflection of the glory of God.
Who else can reach such heights!

As he rose on Barak, the heavenly steed,
The winds swept below his feet
Transcending all, the earth and the sky.
His tresses blew about him,
And the world was filled with fragrance.
The birds sang, and the buds burst open in joy, exclaiming:
"Who else can reach such heights!"

Moses stood on one side,
And Jesus, the son of Mary, on the other.
Gabriel stood at the back, and they all asked:
"Who else can reach such heights!"

Listen, oh people, to the tale of this holy event,
Hear how this whole world was bathed in light!
When the Lord wished to see Muhammad,
He told Gabriel to go
And invite his beloved prophet to visit Him.
So Gabriel took the heavenly steed
And hastened as the Lord had commanded,
Telling everyone on the way
To prepare for the auspicious occasion.
And all those present joined in saying:
"Who else can reach such heights!"

Sar-E-Lamakan

He is the most precious of God's creations,
This friend of God's, this prophet mine,
A reflection of the Light Divine,
The illumination of the universe.
Without him there would have been no sky,
No moon, no star, no dawn, no night,
No universe at all.
He is the light,
The culminant of all virtues.
Without him there would be no awareness
Of the creator or the created,
There would be no reaffirmation of the greatness of God,
There would be no world, no kings, no guardians of the world,
No clouds, no rain, no waves or water in the river,
No Adam or Eve, no Jesus, no Moses, no Scriptures, no Koran.
Without Muhammad nothing would have existed,
He who is the source of light for
The sun and the moon and the stars in the sky,
The secret of the land and the seas, the gardens full of leaves,
The color of the flowers,
And the songs of the birds.
He who brought light to this world that was dark,
He who distinguished the name of Islam,
He who gave us the moon and the stars
Which illuminate the universe.
The light that flashed on Mt. Sinai
Was in fact his light,
He who rescued Kaaba from the idols,
And made the idolators repent.

Sar-E-Lamakan

Where else would Hasan and Husain⁶ have achieved grace?
If Ali had not been born,
The trials and tribulations of mankind
Would have been without solution.
If God had not created Muhammad,
There would have been no creation.
He gave us all knowledge,
His beauty is the perfect light,
It is through him we have all won God's mercy.
He is the true meaning of the Koran,
He is inimitable perfection,
He knows and reveals the truth,
He is the sublime reflection of the Eternal Being.
The Lord Himself has said: "Peace upon him and his kin."

The religion of Ambar Warsi⁷ is the love of Muhammad,
And all his thoughts and words have only one theme:
Peace be on him and his kin.
I cannot describe his perfection,
For he is perfection itself.
How can I add to his beauty,
When that beauty is the source of all enlightenment.
In virtue he is the ultimate virtue.
My heart and soul can only send peace upon him and his kin.

Girte Howe Jab Maine Tera Naam Liya Hai ("As I Was Falling")

The heart not full of love for You is a barren heart.
One not completely lost in You is not a true believer.
Thoughts of the Beloved are the nourishment of life,
While these thoughts live, I fear not extinction.

As I was falling, I called Your Name,
And my Haven tendered comfort.
I wonder whose name escaped my lips,
Calming the storm that menaced my boat.
As I was falling, I called Your Name,
And my Haven tendered comfort.

Whenever the cycles of the universe begin to threaten me,
I hear Him say, "Wait! I am on my way."

As I was falling, I called Your Name,
And my Haven tendered comfort.

How can I say that the sorrows of life burden me.
He was beside me throughout the journey.
As I was falling, I called Your Name,
And my Haven tendered comfort.

O Inquisitor⁸ of the town! You yourself are a lover of wine.
The merry-makers have shouldered the blame for no reason.
I could not reach Him, but I kept thinking of Him.
These thoughts have served me well.

The memory of you, O Faithful One, did not leave me
even at death.

I perished for You, but Your thoughts remained alive
in my heart.

I could not reach Him, but I kept thinking of Him.
These thoughts have served me well.

_____ Garte Howe Jab Maine Tera Naam Liya Hai _____

May God bless love for the Beloved.

My world was happy through all upheavals.

These were parting words to the object of my desire:

“May God bring us together again if we live.”

I could not reach Him, but I kept thinking of Him.

These thoughts have served me well.

At every trial in life, the thought of You comforted me,

At every turn I called Your Name.

There is no better guide than the Haven itself.

I offered thanks at every step of the journey.

I still prostrate myself in submission, but gone is my former joy.

The changing times have taken their toll.

Na Samjho Khak Ka Putla
("Do Not Take Me for a Figure of Clay")

I am a glimpse of hidden secrets,
I am the key to power and knowledge,
From the beginning, the adored of the angels,
For I am heir to Adam, the Original Man.

I am the beginning of the beginning, I am the end of the end.
Do not take me for a figure of clay, for I am the Glory of God.
My being is nonexistent, but that nonexistence is real.

He is my mirror, and I am His.

Do not take me for a figure of clay, for I am the Glory of God.

I am the adored of the angels,

I am the favorite of the Supreme Truth.

I worship Love. I am its Lord.

I am the gleam of Kaaba, the beauty of the idols,
the ornament of the world,

I see Truth, I evince Truth, I know Truth.

Do not take me for a figure of clay, for I am the Glory of God.

Tattered at times, at other times, elegant,

I am in love with myself, the object of my own desire.

Do not take me for a figure of clay, for I am the Glory of God.

In Kaaba, in the temples, monasteries, and mosques,
At times, I am the object of veneration, at times,
a mere guide.

Do not take me for a figure of clay,
for I am the Glory of God.

Na Samjho Khak Ka Putla

I am on earth, in the skies and stars,
In the breeze, in the spring;
Amongst the beautiful and rosy-cheeked,
The gorgeous and the splendid;
In the sea and the shore,
In the hills and waterfalls,
In the garden of bliss,
In the pages of the book of love,
In the memorials of every era;
Amongst the beggars and the kings,
Amongst the powerful and the poor,
I am in the wine, the cup and the merrymaker.

I am amongst the most beautiful,
In every hill and dale.

I am a part of the worshippers' chant
And the strings of the musicians' instruments.

I soar without limit,
I have everywhere a nest.

When the secret of existence and nonexistence was still hidden,
I was in communion with God.

Do not take me for a figure of clay, for I am the Glory of God.

He is the One who praises and is praiseworthy,
He is part of Creation but also unique,
He is the Lover sometimes and the Beloved at others.

Do not take me for a figure of clay,
for I am the Glory of God.

In His virtue and piety,
He is sometimes beggar, and sometimes king,
Seeking at times, content at others.

Khwaja Ki Diwani (“Enchanted by Khwaja”⁹)

Many plan to go, but the plans go awry.
Only those pleasing to Khwaja¹⁰ may reach Ajmere.
My friend! From town to town, on various paths I walk,
Kindling the fire of love.
I have lost my home, and even my being.
I am consumed by the fire of love.
Ashes on my face declare my faith,
And repentance as my instrument accompanies my songs
to Khwaja.
Enchanted, I am enchanted by Khwaja!
O Angels of Justice! Do not poison your words with hatred.
Khwaja himself will protect me,
Behold the measure of my faith.
In the name of God, remove my shroud and see!
I am enchanted by Khwaja.
Strange is the coincidence, quite strange,
The One who has grieved me, can also cure me.
For people of heart there is no difference between
Kaaba and the Temple,
One is as much a place of the Adored as the other.
Our concern is not with the dignity of Kaaba nor with
the beauty of the Temple.

Khwaja Ki Diwani

The door of the Beloved is our goal, wherever it be.
Those who have the time may study the inscription on
Kaaba or the Temple.
We see nothing but love.
To the lover, the only true path is love,
And longing for the Beloved the only worship.
The heart is always with the Beloved, the heart is everything.
One must know the import of the heart.
People of reason may laugh at my madness;
Only experience will bring understanding.
How can men understand the place of love
When it is so far beyond our ken?
Muslims urge me to the Mosque, Hindus to the Temple,
Sikks to the Gurdwara, and Christians to the Church.
I reject all, for I am enchanted by Khwaja.

Tu Rehnawarde Shoq Hai Manzil
Na Kar Qobool
(The Wanderer)

You are a wanderer by choice, do not accept the Haven.
Even should Laila¹¹ be in it, do not ride in the litter.¹²

Why are you silent in the garden, like the morning dew?
Open your lips, you are the ecstasy in the music
of creation.

You are a wanderer by choice, do not accept the Haven.
Even should Laila be in it, do not ride in the litter.
The secret of my fiery words is locked within my bosom.
Seek a reflection of Destiny in the mirror of my heart.
You are a wanderer by choice, do not accept the Haven.
Even should Laila be in it, do not ride in the litter.

Do not remain a trickling brook, rise to be a
flooding river.

Do not accept the Haven, even if offered.

Do not be fooled by the idols of this world.

Shun company, do not seek the warmth of the group.

At the dawn of creation, Gabriel himself told me:

"Do not accept the heart that is slave to reason."

O Unknowing One: You are the light in the mirror of time,
You are the final divine message to this world.

At the dawn of creation, Gabriel himself told me:

"Do not accept the heart that is slave to reason."

The darkness of night will recede with the coming
of the sun.

The garden will swell with the music of the unity of God.

At the dawn of creation, Gabriel himself told me:

"Do not accept the heart that is slave to reason."

Idolatry wears many faces; Truth but one.

Permit no compromise of Truth.

Footnotes

- ¹ The cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. He was the third elected Caliph after the Prophet's death. While Muhammad is regarded as the Messenger of God, Ali is regarded as a friend of God (friendship suggests a nearness to God, a mystical communion). It is that mystical tie that accounts for the frequent mention of Ali's name in the songs of the Sufi mystics.
- ² A stringed instrument.
- ³ Mnemonic musical symbols (rhythmic memory aids).
- ⁴ A Persian mystical poet.
- ⁵ The Kaaba in the city of Mecca is the sacred center of the Muslim world. It is toward the Kaaba that Muslims face in prayer; it is to the Kaaba that they go in pilgrimage. Ali was born there.
- ⁶ Hasan and Husain were the sons of Ali and Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet.
- ⁷ The writer of this poem.
- ⁸ A civil official responsible for the enforcement of moral laws (generally ridiculed by the poets).
- ⁹ This poem illustrates the influence of Hindi love poems. Love is expressed in the words of a woman longing for her beloved.
- ¹⁰ Khwaja Mueenuddin Chisti, a mystical saint, buried in Ajmere, India.
- ¹¹ A popular Arabic romance. Qays (the madman), denied access to his beloved, Laila, wanders in the wilderness, hoping to catch a glimpse of her.
- ¹² A *mahmal*, or litter carried on a camel, used by Arab women of means.

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