

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS
THE WHIRLING DERVISHES OF DAMASCUS,
AL-KINDÎ ENSEMBLE & SHEIKH HAMZA SHAKKÛR
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17 AT 8:00 P.M. IN ZELLERBACH HALL

“You have to listen with your heart, rather than your body” -- Sufi poet Rumi

BERKELEY, October 21, 2004 – A rare evening of sacred music and dance from Syria features the mesmerizing **Whirling Dervishes of Damascus, Al-Kindî Ensemble**, one of the most influential groups in classical Arab music, and **Sheikh Hamza Shakkûr**, master of liturgical song, on **Wednesday, November 17 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall. French-born **Julien Jalal Eddine Weiss**, founder of Al-Kindî Ensemble and the organizing force behind the tour, has rejuvenated interest in Arab music throughout the world by bringing together acclaimed artists from countries including Iraq, Egypt and Syria. The Whirling Dervishes are accompanied by **Ziyâd Kâdî Amin**, *ney* (reed flute), **Qadri Dalal**, *qud* (lute), **Adel Shams el-Din**, *riqq* (tambourine with small bells) and Sheikh Hamza Shakkûr, a *muqri* (Koran reader) and *munshid* (hymnodist) at the Great Mosque of Damascus. Sufism, a departure from traditional Islam, has had an enduring appeal to liberal Muslims and Western audiences, with the poetry of Rumi outselling all other poets in the United States.

WHIRLING DERVISHES OF DAMASCUS

The Sufi tradition of devotional whirling dates back to the poetic incantations of 13th-century Persian mystic Rumi, whose followers, *Mawlawi*, adopted ecstatic dancing in their religious ceremonies as a means of achieving higher states of consciousness and connecting with the divine. **The Whirling Dervishes of Damascus** are the present day practitioners of this ancient art. While most Westerners associate whirling with Turkey, local traditions have existed in Syria, Egypt and Iraq since the 16th century and have continued to exist there even after the dissolution of all Sufi brotherhoods in Turkey.

Damascus is historically one of the principal centers of Islam, the former capital of the Umayyad dynasty and a stop in the pilgrimage to Mecca. The *Mawlawi* met in places known as *takiyya* and adopted the original chants grouped in suites (*wasla*), particular modes (*maqam*), and unique rhythms. Certain influential mosques like the Great Umayyad Mosque of Damascus adopted specific vocal repertoire. The *sama'* (sacred concert) includes improvisation, vocals, prayers, poetry and composed instrumental passages. Basically serene in mood and subtly inventive, the *sama'* features strictly measured rhythms that lead the assembly progressively into a state of meditation.

The ecstatic dancing may not be performed in mosques, where the use of instruments, introduced in the mystical brotherhoods in the 17th century, is strictly forbidden. Whirling is often performed for official religious holidays such as the 27th day of Ramadan and has become an emblem of national identity for Syrians.

AL-KINDÎ ENSEMBLE

Al-Kindî Ensemble was founded in 1983 by the French-born virtuoso of Arab zither **Julien Jâlal Eddine Weiss**. Born in Paris in 1953, Weiss, like many young men of the 1960s, studied the guitar. On a trip to Morocco, he fell in love with Arab music after hearing a recording by legendary Iraqi *oud* player, Muir Bushir. By the 1970s he had decided to master the *qanoun* – the Arab zither – a quest that took 20 years of study with masters all over the Arab world. Three years after forming Al-Kindî Ensemble, Weiss converted to Islam and is a devoted practitioner of Sufism. Weiss' work has infused new energy into classical Arab music. "I engaged musicians, singers, instrumental virtuosi and masters of the tradition of exceptionally high standard, recognized as such in their country of origin." he says. As both a soloist and accompanist in the ensemble, Weiss continues his life mission of exploring Arab music and bringing its beauty to the rest of the world. In keeping with his objective, Weiss served for 10 years on the board of UNESCO furthering the dialogue between East and West.

Al-Kindî Ensemble includes **Ziyâd Kâdî Amin** (reed flute) considered to be the best exponent of the *ney* in Syria; **Muhammad Qadri Dalal** (lute) acclaimed for his smooth, rounded sound emanating from the Turkish tradition; **Adel Shams el-Din** (percussion) an original member

of the ensemble and master of the most complex rhythmic cycles. **Suleyman Al-Khichn** (vocalist) and **Abdallah Chakour** (vocalist) complete the group. Al-Kindî Ensemble has more than a dozen recordings that, along with on-going fascination with Sufism, have brought the group enormous popularity in Europe.

SHEIKH HAMZA SHAKKÛR

Sheikh Hamza Shakkûr, along with Weiss, is the star of the tour. A *muqri* (Koran reader) and a *munshid* (hymnodist), he was born in Damascus in 1947 and is the disciple of Saïd Farhat and Tawfiq al-Munajjid. Sheikh Shakkûr's task is to assure the continuity of the traditional repertoire of the *Mawlawi* order. As the choir master of the Great Mosque in Damascus he serves at official religious ceremonies in Syria where he is immensely popular. His bass voice with its richly vibrant timbre has made him one of the greatest living interpreters of Sufi devotional songs. His art is uncompromisingly sober, to the exclusion of all affectation. He develops his improvisations within the framework of a centuries-old tradition, where prayer blends with dance and art. The Islam he represents, far from being fundamentalist, is that of mysticism and happiness. Replying to his soaring, powerful invocations to God, the musicians of Al-Kindî Ensemble alternate subtle flourishes and arabesques, while the dervishes whirl on stage.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **The Whirling Dervishes of Damascus, Sheikh Hamza Shakkûr & Al-Kindî Ensemble** on **Wednesday, November 17** at **8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$22.00, \$30.00, and \$42.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Wednesday, November 17 at 8:00 p.m.

**Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph Ave., Berkeley**

World Stage

The Whirling Dervishes of Damascus

Hatem al-Jamal

Maher al-Jamal

Hicham al-Khatib

Ahmad Al-Khatib

Al-Kindî Ensemble

Julien Jâlal Eddine Weiss, artistic director and qânûn (zither)

Ziyâd Kâdî Amin, *ney* (reed flute)

Qadri Dalal, *qud* (lute)

Adel Shams el-Din, *riqq* (percussion)

Suleyman Al-Khichn, vocalist

Abdallah Chakour, vocalist

Sheikh Hamza Shakkûr, vocalist

Program:

The Whirling Dervishes of Damascus are accompanied by Al-Kindî Ensemble and Sheikh Hamza Shakkûr in an evening of ceremonial Syrian dance, poetry, music, and chanting.

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