

## Whirling dervishes of Turkey to perform Jan. 25 at UCSD

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WHIRLING DERVISHES OF TURKEY TO PERFORM JAN. 25 AT UCSD

The Whirling Dervishes of Konya, Turkey will perform their ritual of spiritual rebirth involving music and the whirling ceremony at 8 p.m., Jan. 25 in Mandeville Auditorium at the University of California, San Diego.

Called a sema, the Turkish ritual will include nine men dressed in white with tall, conical, camel-hair hats accompanied by 12 musicians. As the music gathers momentum, the dancing dervishes, with arms outstretched and long skirts twirling, move from slow, almost somber movement to more vigorous, ecstatic whirling. The dancers are said to be creating a link between earthly existence and rapturous, divine love. They are also generating a precise, heightened mental state in which they are fully aware of every movement and its importance.

Audiences have called the performance mesmerizing, uplifting, soothing, soporific.

The Whirling Dervishes' Jan. 25 performance is sponsored by the UCSD University Events Office.

The Whirling Dervishes made their U.S. debut in 1978 for audiences in Houston and Austin, Texas; Washington, D.C., and New York. They performed for a sold-out tour of 15 U.S. cities in 1994, and are touring the U.S. again this year. The music accompanying the whirling dancers has been released on Atlantic records.

The Whirling Dervishes are devotees of Mevlana ("our master") Rumi, a 13th century poet and leader of Sufism or Islamic mysticism. Rumi ended a poem with the prophetic line: "Dazed by the marvels of love, our whirling endures." The Mevlevi sect of Islam, with Mevlana Rumi as its spiritual father, is known throughout the world as the Whirling Dervishes. It has kept the tradition of whirling to spiritual ecstasy alive for more than seven centuries.

Legend has it that Rumi's whirling began in 1247 in a small garden in Konya, when he began to spin on an axis, reeling of agony and rapture in longing for a spiritual teacher who had been murdered. It is said he whirled for reunion with his creator. He whirled until his heart felt pure.

Today the whirling is a precisely choreographed ceremony that requires great concentration. Some see it as a reenactment of death and resurrection. The dervishes enter the performance area cloaked in long, black coats that represent entombment of the spirit. After a long procession they drop their cloaks, symbolically leaving their tombs and worldly attachments. Underneath are long, wide, white skirts and white jackets which represent funeral shrouds. The tall hats represent tombstones. With the whirling - - always counterclockwise, contrary to time and in the direction of returning to the source -- the skirts billow outward, representing the spirit of the dancers ascending upward.

The accompanying musicians play the ney (reed flute), the rebab (an ancient Oriental violin), the tanbur (an ancient lute), the kanun (a zither-like instrument), kudums (small kettle drums) and cymbals. The music is

complex, designed to evoke varying moods, some joyous and celebratory, others somber and heart-wrenching. Singers chant poetry and passages from the Koran.

Today the Whirling Dervishes perform only one major sema a year in Konya, Turkey, on the anniversary of Rumi's death. The government of Turkey is secular and the spiritual ceremony has come to be looked upon as a cultural symbol, an art form.

Tickets for the Jan. 25 performance at UCSD are \$16 general admission; \$14 for UCSD faculty, staff and senior citizens, and \$12 for students. Tickets are available at the UCSD Box Office, 534-6467, and at Ticketmaster outlets. For further information, call the UCSD University Events Office at 534-4090.

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