

# D E R V I S H



## Sound Installation

**Metrònom, Fundaçio Rafael Tous d'Art Contemporani,  
Barcelona, Spain  
February-March 1997**

In Muslim Spain, Cordoba's most splendid years were graced by philosophers and musicians Al-Farabi and Averroës of Saragossa. Al-Farabi (d.950) wrote the *Kitab al-musiqi al-kabir -- The Grand Book on Music*. It is to Al-Farabi that we owe the more precise definitions of rhythms as they were introduced to Spain. He limits the traditional series of them into seven groups. It is Al-Farabi who also brought the Sufi tradition to Spain. The physical structure of this work mimics the rotating dances of the *dervish*.

For the installation at Metrònom, six speakers with 9° spotlamps are attached to the end of long strands of aircraft cable. On the ceiling are motors/control boxes which rotate while transmitting the audio signals to the speakers and electricity to the lamps.

Played through each speaker is an individual track of recorded music from the book by Al-Farabi. Track 1 plays rhythms 1 & 2, Track 2, rhythm 3, Track 3, rhythm 4, Track 4, rhythm 5, Track 5, rhythm six and Track 6 plays rhythm 7. These are performances on the Arabic *oud* played by Tom Chandler of Berkeley, California.

The rhythms accidentally combine in the ambient space to create a synthetic set of accidental melodies that recall not only Arabic music, but the core sounds of Spanish folk music. The lamps swing small spots of light around the room, disturbing the solidity of the architecture with rapidly shifting shadows and directionality of sound.

These traditional music fundamentals combine to create an culturally ambiguous space where European and Arabic traditions melt together in a contemplative environment of unending rhythm.

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