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The Divine is All Around - Rare Elements: Omar Faruk Tekbilek

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#### Inspired Turkish Master Omar Faruk Tekbilek Remixed for *Rare Elements*

The divine is everywhere, in the breath of a reed [flute](#), the clank and hum of machines, or the slammin' beats of an electronic track. This is Turkish virtuoso Omar Faruk Tekbilek's message, and he hears it everywhere.

When Tekbilek came to the USA to build upon his successful music career back home, he was faced with the task of supporting his family in a country where he did not know the customs or language. For 17 years, he operated a loud and hot steam press in a clothing factory. At first depressed by this fact, one day Tekbilek had a revelation: if he had to put his dreams to the side and work this difficult job, he would make the best of it. The next day he heard a symphony in the factory machines. Suddenly the steam press sounded like a saxophone. "The hum was so loud around me, there was music around me. I had never heard it before because my mind had been away, not there where I was, where I had been for months. When I accepted the situation, I cried for joy," Tekbilek recalls.

Tekbilek found a new delight in the factory, a revelatory remix of everyday sounds. Now new sides of Tekbilek's Sufi-inspired songs and compositions jump out on *Rare Elements: Omar Faruk Tekbilek* (5 Points Records; June 9, 2009), the second installment in the *Rare Elements* series of musical meetings between global master musicians and the world's most creative remixers: Junior Sanchez, Tommie Sunshine, Flosstradamus, [Amon Tobin](#), Albert Castillo, Nickodemus and Zeb, Kodomo, Joe Claussell, Cheb i Sabbah, and Jordan Lieb.

For Tekbilek, music has four corners: the mystical, inspired by his deep Sufi faith; the folkloric; the romantic and personal; and the contemporary that unites all the other elements with modern instruments and current sounds to form a new palette. These elements reflect facets of love of the creator, adoration of a lover, or the rootsy joie de vivre of a traditional Turkish tune in songs like "Sufi," about the name of God sounding in

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every breath, or "Selemet," an Arabic tune transformed into a loving ode to Tekbilek's wife.

A prodigy, Tekbilek's talent lay beyond his innate skill as a musician. It flowed from his spirit. One hot summer day in his native town of Adana, "my mother opened the door and jumped when she saw me inside playing my flute. She felt sorry for me, as I was inside, and told me to go out and play," Tekbilek smiles. "I told her not to worry, that I was having fun. I was deep in trance. I was also going to school to become a cleric, an imam. I realized then that, when I was playing, I was in the same state of mind as when I was praying."

Tekbilek soon mastered the nay, the traditional end-blown [bamboo flute](#) whose seven holes mirror the heads seven orifices, the baglama lute, and a bevy of [percussion instruments](#). "The great joy of my life is to play all instruments on a song," Tekbilek laughs. As a young man, he moved to Istanbul, explored Western styles, became a popular studio musician, and picked up knowledge and wisdom from the head nay player of the Mevlevi Sufi order, before eventually landing in upstate New York, where he worked in a clothing factory as he rebuilt his musical career from scratch.

Now an established performer regularly touring the world, the once skeptical Tekbilek began to embrace the remix project as a way of reaching out "to a different dimension, a different mentality," and offering new listeners "a taste of the timbre, a taste of the melody" that would leave them longing for more. It might seem an uneasy union: A Turkish musician who plumbed the sacred nature sound, entranced by a homemade flute at the tender age of 12, and a posse of producers with laptops who hail from New York to Algeria to Brazil.

But behind Tekbilek's nimble nay, Sufi chants, or Turkish folk melodies is a pulse that unites his work with the best of dancefloor grooves. "Whatever instrument you are playing, you are percussionist in a sense," Tekbilek explains. "Because in all spiritualities, it is the same. If there is no stroke, there is no sound. The breath hits bamboo, the bow hits the violin, and the pick hits the bouzouki." Or the needle hits the record, the beat kicks in, and people begin to move.

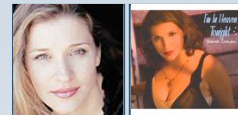
Corners of the club scene have always reveled in the close connection between [dance](#) and trance, between rhythm and transcendence, something which Sufi poet Rumi discovered in a marketplace as he spun to the sound of a goldsmith's hammer, and the whirling dervishes have explored ever since. "When you spin, suddenly you are everywhere," Tekbilek reflects. "Your body-mind connection becomes very apparent. It goes out of control and your awareness of mind becomes more dominant. You become more aware of the breath. It's an act of meditation."

DJs are always hungry for new and exotic sounds, eager to toss them into the mix, but Tekbilek insisted that the melodies and timbres of his music be more than just world music window dressing. Instead, he dialogued with

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


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remixers to keep the spirit of his work alive. When he first heard the remix for "Whirling," a medley of traditional Sufi songs, he was surprised that the DJs had decided to leave out the nay part and asked that they reincorporate it into the track. "Without the nay, there is no soul," Tekbilek explains. The producers kindly obliged.




Despite the occasional bumps in the remix road, Tekbilek is bemused, appreciating the chance to get his message out in dancefloor-friendly form. "This is an opportunity to offer the younger generation phrases, words, rather than whole thing all at once. This is still good. It's a connection with music lovers," Tekbilek exclaims. "I am after taste, soul, and feeling. One note, but with feeling."

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