

Disco Dances from Turkey – Another Angle: Disco Sulukule

Additional Liner Notes by Holger Lund

During the 1970s, belly dance emerged as a highly popular dance style in Turkish cities. Its origins lie in a complex history that encompasses various musical and cultural roots. In general, belly dance falls under the category of urban dances with an *alaturka* (Eastern-style) orientation. However, it was influenced by an early Western entertainment industry that Orientalized it in the late 19th century.

One possible derivation of belly dance can be traced to *Çiftetelli* dances which originated from the Ottoman-Balkan tradition in the 19th century. These dances were initially associated with the palace belly dances and later underwent a transformation in the first half of the 20th century in Sulukule, a historic district in Fatih (Istanbul) that had been dominated by Roma for a long time. The dances then spread to Anatolia. *Çiftetelli* dances are a combination of Balkan, Persian, and Arabic dances influenced by the Roma culture, reflected in both the dance and music. These dances have been linked with belly dance customs in Turkish urban regions since the 1950s. The spread of *Çiftetelli* to Anatolia saw a return to the cities. This occurred in the 1950s when large numbers of rural inhabitants migrated to urban areas, bringing with them *Çiftetelli* enriched with melodies derived from traditional dance music in Anatolia. This also intersects with the Anatolian facet of *Anadolu pop*, where *Çiftetelli* dances urbanized Anatolian music.

In the 1970s, the *alaturka* repertoire persisted with the formalization of the *dansözlük* (dancer) in the ‘Sulukule Entertainment Houses’. *Sulukule dansözs* (dancers from Sulukule) dispersed and commenced performances at various nightclubs and hotels in Istanbul for entertainment events, gradually dominating the Turkish entertainment industry.

Other urban venues for the *alaturka* repertoire include Western establishments such as *bar* (pub), *dansing* (ballroom), and non-western places like *meyhane* (taverns) and *müzikli kahvehane* (musical cafes). *Gazinos* (music restaurants), which feature a blend of European and Turkish styles, provide even greater opportunity for hybrid content.

The ‘Sulukule Entertainment Houses’ and *Gazinos* were the most significant venues for the music on *Disco Dances from Turkey*.

The “Sulukule Entertainment Houses” were not impoverished establishments; they were Turkey's most costly entertainment venues during the 1970s. They featured a blend of *Çiftetelli* and belly dancing, which incorporated increasing amounts of Western pop instrumentation into their music. Many of the *Çiftetelli* and belly dance record sleeves featuring partially-clad women reflect the popularity of striptease and revue shows in these entertainment venues, as well as the highly successful sexploitation genre of Turkish cinema during the 1970s. A similar influence can be seen on the original record sleeves that accompany *Disco Dances from Turkey*.

Yet, the 'Sulukule Entertainment Houses' were not only costly but also highly favoured. According to Gonca Girgin, “enjoying Sulukule *dansöz* in Sulukule was so popular [...] that the music industry bosses of the period focused on ‘taking this entertainment to the feet of the people’ who could not go to the Sulukule with the records released”. The albums provided a form of mobile delivery service for those who were unable to visit Sulukule, enabling them to experience the same joy as those who could. *Sulukule Ekibi Evinizde* [The Sulukule Team is at Your Home] is the title on a record sleeve from 1979 (Gonca Girgin). The music on *Disco Dances from Turkey* could be received in a similar vein.

During the 1970s, *dansings* (ballrooms) gradually transformed into *diskotek* (discotheque) after the Hilton Istanbul introduced the first one in Turkey in 1971. The disco music popular during this period comprised imported Western disco-pop music, as well as disco versions of local dance music and Disco Folk, the latter being an extension of the *Anadolu pop* style that blends western pop music with Anatolian *Türkü* and *Aşık* (folk music) tunes.

Disco Dances from Turkey represents a musical fusion of several genres. It blends elements of *alaturka* repertory, mainly *Çiftetelli* and belly dance, with influences from Western pop music and *Anadolu pop* and *Disco Folk*, featuring Anatolian folk music. The album *Disco Dances from Turkey* epitomises the era by mixing pop and disco styles, culminating in a unique genre of *Anadolu Çiftetelli belly dance disco-pop*. In essence, it is akin to *Disco Sulukule*, the title of another popular release from this period.

Thanks to Gonca Girgin for her inspiring article “On the Marginal Requisites: Overview of Popular Urban Dances in Türkiye” (*Musicologist*, 2023).