



(LYRCD 7411)

**RHYTHMIC ESSENCE: THE ART OF THE DUMBEK**  
R. A. FISH, SOLO DUMBEK

**THE DUMBEK**

The Dumbek (Dhumbek, Doumbac, Darboukka, Darabuke, Tabla)

The dumbek is the principal classical and folk drum of Islamic North Africa and the Middle East. Shaped similarly to an hourglass or goblet, made of metal, clay or wood, with thin animal skin or plastic head stretched across one end, leaving the other end open. This drum produces two main sounds: “dum” in the center of the skin, and “tek” on the edge when struck with open hands.

Essentially the same drum, with slight variations, is called different names in each country of North Africa and the Middle East. In most Arab countries, the drum is known as “Daraboukka,” or “Darabuk,” names most likely originating from the Arabic word “darba” meaning “to strike.” In each case, the pronunciation changes slightly from province to province, In Egypt, the dumbek is called tabla, whereas in India the word tabla is used to describe a different drum. (The Indian “tabla” consists of two drums ; one high pitched called “tabla” and the other low in pitch called “baya.”) The name “dumbek” is of Persian origin. For centuries this drum has conveyed the essence of Middle Eastern rhythms for dancers and listeners.

Mr. Fish performs here on a clay drum created by potter Barbara Lund of Bloomington, Indiana. He favors this drum for its characteristic high “teks,” low “drums” and extremely fine musical articulation.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Robert Arthur Fish began the study of the drumset in 1961 at the age of thirteen. Within six months he was performing for variety shows and orchestras, as well as performing professionally in local dance bands.

From 1968-1970 he studied at Berklee School of Contemporary Music in Boston. His principal teacher at Berklee was the highly regarded jazz drummer Alan Dawson. While in Boston, Mr. Fish worked with legendary Brazilian jazz saxophonist, Victor Assis Brazilin, and the Pousette-Dart Band among others.

In 1973, he moved to New York City and began the study of Indian tabla with Vishwanath Mishra of Varinasi and later continued studying with K. Paramjyoti of Delhi. He also studied hand technique in western drums with Joe Cusatis. During the '70's Mr. Fish performed on drumset with the Drifters and Mary Travers of Peter, Paul and Mary. For Ms. Travers, he combined the Indian tabla with the drumset. This led to his playing with the Perry Robinson quintet. It was with Mr. Robinson's group that he first incorporated the dumbek with tabla, drumset and percussion.

In 1983 Mr. Fish met prominent American Composer/educator Judith Sainte Croix and entered a collaboration which includes many of Ms. Sainte Croix's works for children's theater and workshops, concert repertory, and recordings featuring World Percussion. In this recording, Mr. Fish explores the essence and capabilities of the dumbek as a solo instrument utilizing stick technique in open-hand playing, adapted from the western drumset.

## TRACKS AND TIMING

1. African Dance (Fish) - 9:09
2. Whirling Dervish Rhythm (Fish) - 8:48
3. Pakistani Sufi Rhythm (Fish) - 10:29
4. Middle Eastern Dance (Beledi/Beledi/Cliftetelli) - 9:57
5. Ghawazee (Fish) - 10:00
6. Rhythmic, Essence (Fish) - 10:47

## ANNOTATED TRACK INFORMATION

### 1. African Dance

A tribute to African is perhaps essential to any comprehensive exploration of percussion and rhythm.

The main rhythm of this entire piece evolved. When I was working with the Indian Tabla in 1981. I noticed my left fingers would fall on the baya, the lower drum, quite easily and strike twice with each stroke. When I translated this rhythm to dumbek, I felt the essence of Africa was present in this characteristic doubling of the single stroke. I consider this piece a work in progress, ongoing and eternal.

## 2. Whirling Dervish Rhythm

To become one with God in whirling is a truly unique method of transcendence. I've always admired the dancers capable of this feat. I chose a setting of 3/4 time. This composition emphasizes a deeply resonant Dum to create a mesmerizing rhythm.

## 3. Pakistani Sufi Rhythm

This rhythm always intrigued me as a self-perpetuating entity, continuously listenable, encouraging further repetition. It is a rhythm one could compose to improvise to, dance to, etc.

I first heard this rhythm performed by the Sabri Brothers', Indian tabla players, highlighted on the baya as a transitional motif. Translating the rhythm from tabla (which is played with the finger), to the dumbek (which is played openhanded with considerably more force), added an exciting dimension to this Pakistani Sufi rhythm. I wear a string of Indian ankle bells on my left wrist to emulate the feeling of a dancer's movement.

## 4. Middle Eastern Dance

Beledi (festive opening dance rhythm),  
Chiftetelli, (Dance of viels, Dance of fertility),  
Beledi (festive closing dance rhythm).

These are fundamental, rhythms of belly dancing, the traditional Middle Eastern dance form. I perform them simply with my own creative influence, especially in Chiftetelli, where I utilize triplet taps characteristic of my drumming and blend this with traditional articulation.

## 5. Ghawazee

Ghawazee comes from an ancient post-Islamic group of female dancers and musicians, and is essentially an Egyptian rhythm of celebration with different melodic motifs. I've extracted two motifs and added my own 8 note composition as an ending or turnaround motif.

Also in the middle of Section 3 the nay-like flute performs two motifs based on my singing of the names of two female dancers names: Setarah (Star of Persia) and Jamila (Beauty).

Cara Silvernail performs here on a Nepalese end-blown flute.

## 6. Rhythmic Essence

I consider this drum solo to be a totally improvised piece exploiting all the possibilities of the dumbek, rhythmically and tonally. As an ongoing creative process, the rhythms under this title are always changing with subtle roll-like transitions. The Chinese healing bells and wind chimes were added to enhance the effect broaden the overall depth of perception.

I pray you enjoy listening and dancing to these rhythmic pieces. Yours in Rhythm and Music. -- R.A. Fish

#### CREDITS

Digitally recorded by John Price at The Playroom Studio, New York City.

Nepalese end-blown flute, on Ghawazze, played by Cara Silvernail.

Digital mastering by Suha Gur, on the Sonic Solutions system, Digital Soundworks, New York City.

Wind Chimes and Chinese healing balls on “Rhythmic Essence” played by Nick Fritsch.

Produced by Nick Fritsch.

Back photo by Mona Siebke.

Cover design by Duy Ngo.



**Lyrichord Discs Inc.**

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: [nick@lyrichord.com](mailto:nick@lyrichord.com) Web: [www.lyrichord.com](http://www.lyrichord.com)

© and (P) Lyrichord Discs Inc. These texts (including images) are published under copyright by Lyrichord Discs Inc. All rights are reserved.  
The texts, and the music associated, with them, may only be republished, duplicated or sold, with written permission from Lyrichord Discs Inc.