

Asia Society
in Association with the Indo American Arts Council and
South Asian Journalists Association (SAJA)

present

Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India

William Dalrymple, Shah Jo Raag Fakirs & Paban Das Baul ©Teamwork Productions, Susheela Raman © Jack Vartoogian FrontRowPhotos
Theyyam Dance group © Linda Vartoogian FrontRowPhotos



William Dalrymple

Paban Das Baul

Shah Jo Raag Fakirs

Susheela Raman

Theyyam Dance group

Featuring: **William Dalrymple**
Paban Das Baul & the Bauls of Bengal
Shah Jo Raag Fakirs
Susheela Raman
Theyyam Dance Group (Hari Das)

Friday, June 18 and Saturday, June 19, 2010 at 7:30 PM



About *Nine Lives*, the book

A Buddhist monk takes up arms to resist the Chinese invasion of Tibet then spends years trying to atone for the violence by hand printing the best prayer flags in India.

A Jain nun tests her powers of detachment as she watches her best friend ritually starve to death. A woman leaves her middle-class family in Calcutta and her job in a jute factory, only to find unexpected love and fulfillment living as a tantric in a skull-filled hut in a remote cremation ground. A prison warden from Kerala becomes, for two months of the year, a temple dancer and is worshipped as an incarnate deity; then, at the end of February each year, he returns to work.

An illiterate goat herd from Rajasthan keeps alive an ancient 4,000-line sacred epic that he, virtually alone, still knows by heart. A devadasi - or temple prostitute - initially resists her own initiation into sex work, yet pushes both her daughters into a trade she now regards as a sacred calling.

Nine people, nine lives. Each one taking a different religious path, each one an unforgettable story. Exquisite and mesmerizing, and told with an almost biblical simplicity, William Dalrymple's explores how traditional forms of religious life in South Asia have been transformed in the vortex of the region's rapid change. A distillation of twenty-five years of exploring India and writing about its religious traditions, *Nine Lives* is a modern Indian Canterbury Tales which introduces you to characters and takes you deep into worlds you would never have imagined existed.

William Dalrymple weaves a story in his latest book *Nine Lives* through the rich variety of South Asian devotional music and spiritual transformation. Featuring, the Shah Jo Rag Fakirs, Theyyam dancer Hari Das from Kerala, Tamil vocal artist Susheela Raman and Bengali recording artist Paban Das Baul and Mimlu Sen.

Curated and narrated by Dalrymple, each element of this concert represents a spiritual tradition from his book, which explores how forms of religious life in South Asia have been transformed in the modern world.

Program

Reading Introduction by **William Dalrymple** & Chapter 1 and Story on Bauls

Performance **Paban Das Baul & Mimlu Sen**

Reading **William Dalrymple** reads from chapter 2

Performance **Theyyam Dance Group**

Intermission

Reading **William Dalrymple** reads from Chapter 3

Performance **Shah Jo Raag Fakirs**

Reading **William Dalrymple** reads from Chapter 4 and conclusion –

Performance **Susheela Raman** with **Sam Mills** and **Atef Durvesh**

Approximately 2 hours followed by a reception and book signing

About the Artists/groups

William Dalrymple (author) wrote his first book, *In Xanadu: A Quest* (1989), at 22 years of age, and in 1989, moved to Delhi to research *City of Djinn: a year in Delhi* (1993), which went on to win the 1994 Thomas Cook Travel Book Award and the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award. His next book *From the Holy Mountain: a Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (1997) was followed by *The Age of Kali: Indian Travels and Encounters* (1998). *White Mughals* (2002), the book which marked Dalrymple's shift from travel writing to history, won the 2003 Woolfson Prize for History, and the Scottish Arts Council Book of the Year Award. In 2006, William Dalrymple published *The Last Mughal: the Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857*. *The Last Mughal* won the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize and the Crossword Prize for Non-Fiction. His most recent book, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* was published by Bloomsbury October 2009, to great acclaim, and went straight to number one in the Indian bestseller list. williamdalrymple.uk.com

Paban Das Baul & the Bauls of Bengal (7pax)

- **Paban Das Baul** (vocals + *dubki* (tambourine) + *khamak* (plucking drum))
- **Mimlu Sen** (vocals /translations of texts + cymbals)

Bauls of Bengal

The Bauls of Bengal are a group of itinerant mystic minstrels whose beliefs draw on Vaishnavite Hindu and Sufi Muslim thought. The music of the Bauls, refers to a particular type of folk song sung by Bauls. It carries influences of Hindu *bhakti* movements as well as the *suphi*, a form of Sufi song mediated by many thousand miles of cultural intermixing as exemplified by the songs of Kabir.

Paban Das Baul and Mimlu Sen

Paban Das Baul has been a singer since childhood. Born in 1961 in Murshidabad, he incarnates the synergy of his place of origin: between Tantric, Vaishnava, Sufi and Buddhist cultures which he draws upon liberally to embellish his art and music. Paban Das Baul plays and makes with his own hands many musical instruments, the *dubki* - a sort of tambourine, the *khamak* - a plucking drum, the *dotara* - a 5 stringed lute and various percussion instruments. In 1990, Paban created Antar Jantar, a cooperative society of destitute artisans specializing in making folk musical instruments. The rich and melodic musical tradition of India's Bengali region is given a modern sensibility by Paban Das Baul, a master of the *dubki* (a small tambourine) and a hypnotic vocalist. Mimlu Sen is a storyteller, musician, dancer, writer and author of *The Honey Gatherers*. She travels and performs with Paban Das Baul and the baul singers.

Shah Jo Raag Fakirs

Shah Jo Raag belongs to the family of musicians who sing at the shrine of Shah Lateef in Bhit Shah in the traditional manner that was created by the Shah himself about four hundred years ago. Shah Jo Raag is a direct descendant of Shah Jamal who was very close to Shah Lateef and his family has been the keeper of tradition. Every Thursday the session of singing begins after the *esha* (night) prayers and lasts the entire night. During the annual *Urs* celebration the singing goes on nonstop for the three days of the event. The Wai singers dress themselves in black and

chant, strumming the *dhamboor*, the instrument created by Shah himself, and sing “Wai” the kalam of the Shah by turns. Shah Jo Raag has been singing at the shrine for the last thirty years. His group has won awards in Paris, the Lateef Award and Rafi Peer Award in Pakistan.

Susheela Raman, Sam Mills and Aref Durvesh

Tamil Londoner Susheela is one of the most interesting musicians to emerge from the South Asian Diaspora, equally at home with South Indian Classical as with Jimi Hendrix and Fela Kuti, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Aretha Franklin. As a composer, arranger and interpreter she has forged her own unique, inclusive sound and has already gained immense critical and popular acclaim for her records. She has made four albums: *Salt Rain* (2001), *Love Trap* (2003), *Music for Crocodiles* (2005) and *33 1/3* (2007). *Salt Rain* went gold in France and was shortlisted for the UK Mercury Prize; *Love Trap* features Indian devotional songs and, amongst other great musicians, the legendary afro beat maestro Tony Allen on drums. *Music for Crocodiles* features musicians from South India and was partly recorded in Chennai (Madras). Susheela’s *33 1/3* is a collection of characteristically distinctive re-interpretations of songs by (amongst others) Velvet Underground, Dylan, Captain Beefheart, Can and Joy Division. Tonight she is accompanied by long time collaborators guitarist Sam Mills and percussionist Aref Durvesh.

Tevaram is a beautiful ancient song form which developed in the great temples of mediaeval Tamil Nadu. The Tevaram songs are the seven volumes of devotional hymns written by Appar, Sambandar and the 63 Tamil saints, and which were first performed over a thousand years ago. Until recently their words were the common property of all Tamils; now however the tradition is slowly beginning to die out.

Susheela’s master, Dharmapuram Swaminathan, who is widely considered a saint in Tamil Nadu, is also recognized as the greatest living authority on Tevaram. He is also probably the last great exponents to be focused on both the spiritual and musical sides of the hymns.

Theyyam Dance Group

Theyyam or Theyyattam is a popular Hindu ritual of worship in North Kerala, India, predominant in the Kolathunadu area (consisting of present-day Kannur and Kasargod districts). It is a living tradition that is over a thousand years old. The term Theyyam is derived from *Devam* or God. People of these districts consider the Theyyam performer as incarnating the deity and from whom they request blessings.

Hari Das

Hari Das, a well-digger and prison warder (and a character in William Dalrymple’s book *Nine Lives*) is a renowned practitioner of theyyam. Three months of the year he performs this spiritual rite, seeking possession by Hindu deities. In his spiritual incarnation Brahmins touch his feet and worship him as a god.

About Teamwork Production

Teamwork Productions is a highly versatile entertainment company, with roots in the performing arts, social action, and the corporate world.

Teamwork Films, India: Teamwork Productions Singapore: Teamwork Films Pvt Ltd UK: Friends of Music and TWF Arts Society and liaison offices in Hong Kong and New York have initiated a wide range of projects in Australia, Canada, France, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Singapore, Spain, UK and USA.

Our expertise lies in the area of Entertainment including Television, Film - documentary and features, Event Management, Social Communication, Creation and Development of Contemporary Performing and Visual Arts Festivals across the world and in nurturing new talent across arts forms.

Teamwork Films has been instrumental in establishing Friends of Music, a pioneering forum for promoting new bands, performers, and musicians. We have produced the Khajuraho Millennium Celebrations & Music Festival, Annual performing arts festivals in Europe, Singapore (Kalaa Utsavam) & Indonesia, an annual season of performing arts across the UK, The Festival of the Great Arc & the annual Ishara International Puppet Theatre Festival. We have programmed extensively in collaboration with The Edinburgh International & Fringe Festival, Valladolid International Film Festival Spain, & International Festivals in Perth, Wellington, Madrid & New York establishing a platform for Indian arts in these cities.

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About Asia Society

The Asia Society is an international organization dedicated to strengthening relationships and deepening understanding among the peoples of Asia and the United States. Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, the Society reaches audiences around the world through its headquarters in New York and regional centers in Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, DC, Hong Kong, Manila, Melbourne and Shanghai. A nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization, the Society provides a forum for building awareness of the more than thirty countries broadly defined as the Asia-Pacific region - the area from Japan to Iran, and from Central Asia to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Through art exhibitions and performances, films, lectures, seminars and conferences, publications and assistance to the media, and materials and programs for students and teachers, the Asia Society presents the uniqueness and diversity of Asia.

The Performing Arts program has been a pioneer in the presentation of traditional and contemporary Asian performing arts in the United States since 1960. It has introduced American audiences to the work of performing artists ranging from some of the greatest figures of traditional music such as sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar, to seminal contemporary dance companies like Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, and American artists influenced by Asian cultures such as Philip Glass. The Society commissioned and produced *Wenji: Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*, a bilingual (Chinese-English) chamber opera by Macau-born Chinese composer Bun-Ching Lam; *In What Language? A Song Cycle of Lives in Transit*, a theatrical production bringing together elements of jazz, hip-hop, and spoken word poetry by Indian American composer Vijay Iyer; *5 Streams*, a cross-media performance directed by Ibrahim Quraishi; and *Kinsmen/Svajanam*, a musical collaboration by two masters of alto saxophone, South India's Carnatic music legend Kadri Gopalnath and Indian American jazz virtuoso Rudresh Mahanthappa. The Society in collaboration with BAM and NYU Center for Dialogues recently presented "Muslim Voices Arts and Ideas", a multi-venue arts festival and conference celebrating the extraordinary range of artistic expression throughout the Muslim world.



Produced by Teamwork Productions

