

Asia Society and Pakistani Peace Builders
in association with the Mohatta Palace Museum

present

Voice of the Sufi

A Musical Journey from Pakistan

Featuring: Nadir Abbas
Haji Sultan Chanay
Zeb and Haniya
Akhtar Chanal Zehri
Soung Fakirs
Abida Parveen
Finale with all the artists

Thursday, July 22, 2010 at 7:30 PM

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Asia Society and the Rubin Museum of Art are the Festival's Program Partners



About the Program

“Be overflowing with peace and joy, and scatter them wherever you are and wherever you go.”
Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti

Committed to presenting the diversity of Islam, Asia Society is proud to host tonight’s concert “The Sufis of the Indus: A Musical Journey from Pakistan” as a Program Partner of the Pakistani Peace Builders New York Sufi Music Festival. This program is part of Asia Society’s ongoing Creative Voices of Islam in Asia initiative.

Nadir Abbas – vocalist

Haji Sultan Chanay – *rabab*

Zeb and Haniya

Akhtar Chanal Zehri – vocalist

Soung Fakirs

Abida Parveen

About the Artists

Nadir Abbas — is a classical music vocalist and a protégé of Ustad Salamat Ali Khan of the *Shyam Chaurasi Gharana* (school). The *gharana* takes its name from the founders’ village of Shamchaurasi in the Hoshiarpur district of Punjab. The *gharana* was founded in the 16th century by Mian Chand Khan and Mian Suraj Khan, contemporaries of Mian Tansen at the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar. The vocal style has its roots in the ancient sacred music tradition of *dhrupad* that emanates from the Indo-Pak Subcontinent. Over time, with the rise in popularity of the *khyal* tradition on the subcontinent, the *gharana* has focused through successive generations of Shyam Chaurasi musicians on developing that tradition and particularly, of duet jugalbandi performances. Some of the most memorable classical music in this form in modern times has been sung by Salamat Ali Khan and his older brother Nazakat Ali Khan. After intensive training with Ustad Salamat Ali Khan, Nadir Abbas graduated from the Karachi based National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) and now teaches there. For this concert, he will perform a special program of Sindhi *kafis**.

**Kafi*: is the classical form of Sufi *kafi* poetry, mostly in Punjabi, Sindhi and Seraiki languages, and originates from the Punjab and Sindh regions of the Subcontinent. Some well-known *Kafi* poets include, Baba Farid, Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Sachal Sarmast and Khwaja Ghulam Farid. The poetry style lends itself to the *Kafi* genre of singing, popular throughout South Asia, especially Pakistan and India. Over the years, both *Kafi* poetry and its rendition have experienced rapid growth as various poets and vocalists added their own influences to the form creating rich variations. Yet, through it all it remained centered on the dialogue between the Soul and the Creator, symbolized by the murid (disciple) and his Murshid (Master) and often by the lover and his Beloved. Musically it blends elements of *tapa*, *khayal* and *thumri* forms.

Haji Sultan Chanay - is the highly respected *rabab* virtuoso from Pakistan. He is a Pakhtun with roots in the North West Frontier currently living in Northern Balochistan. The rabab is essentially a Central Asian instrument that traveled into the Subcontinent over time. Haji Sultan plays his instrument in the timeless Central Asian style. For his mastery of the instrument, he was honored with the President's Pride of Performance award and is known for the lyricism and resonance with which he plays his instrument.

Zeb and Haniya duo draw on their heritage from Pashtun Kohat in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and are considered one of the more popular contemporary music ensembles in Pakistan since the release of their debut album, "Chup" in July 2008. Their songs are mostly in Urdu, with some lyrics in Pashto and Dari. Zeb and Haniya are known for seamlessly mixing folk inspired music with bluesy styling and jazzy rhythms to create a unique, layered sound. The duo, who are cousins, began writing music together when studying as undergraduates at Smith College and Mount Holyoke College in the United States. Newsweek Magazine profiled them in an article recently and named them "... one of Pakistan's hottest pop duos... Zeb and Haniya's brand of folksy music draws on that Pashtun heritage and can easily fit into the province's longstanding Sufic tradition."

Akhtar Chanal is a beloved folk singer from Pakistan. He belongs to the Zehri tribe of the Balochistan province. Performing with an instrument named *dhamboora* which originated in Turkey, Chanal's performances consist of soulful singing and rhythmic dances. He learnt folk singing and legends from his forefathers who were shepherds by profession. Singing largely in Brahui, one of the languages spoken in Baluchistan, Akhtar Chanal recorded his most popular song, *Dana pe Dana* in 1990 and became an instant sensation. He has performed in various festivals held across Pakistan and made numerous television appearances. Internationally, he has performed to a crowd of 125,000 people in New York, where he received an enormous response, one that he says, 'was enough for his entire life.' An ardent believer in peace and tolerance and harboring intense pride for his country, Akhtar Chanal Zehri has become a cultural ambassador for many Pakistanis all over the world.

Soung Faqirs from the Shrine of Sachal Sarmast, Sindh Province: The Soung Faqirs belong to an ancient tradition of Sufi shrine singers from the Sindh province. Arising from the Thar Desert's folk tradition, they sing in praise of the Allah, the Prophet Mohammad and Sufi saints. Soung Fakirs' true to their name 'sing together' while capitalizing on their universal message in their unique style of singing.

Abida Parveen Pakistan's *Reigning Queen of Sufi* music was born in Sindh and raised in an environment of deep mysticism and Sufi poetry. Abida initially received musical training from her father Ustad Ghulam Haider. She attended his music school where her musical foundation was laid and later trained with Ustad Salamat Ali Khan from the Shyam Chaurasi Gharana. Her forte is singing kafis in Sindhi, Seraiki and Punjabi. It is a form that she has brought to the attention of the world much as, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan has the Qawwali tradition. More recently she has incorporated the poetry of Amir Khusrau into her repertoire. Abida has sung in myriad languages such as Farsi, Urdu and other Pakistani languages. She has enthralled audiences from South Asia to Africa and beyond. Through exquisite renditions of mystic poetry, Abida's music has become a form of worship and food for the soul making every performance a memorable experience.

Strongly believing that Sufism and music are inseparable and their message of love and peace is universal, Abida Parveen has created a niche for herself and has attained legendary status for her

vivid musical imagination. The Daily Telegraph of London described her as “one of the world’s great singers – even if you can’t understand her.” This talent has earned her numerous awards including the Pakistan Television Award, the President’s Pride of Performance and the highly prestigious Sitara-e-Imtiaz (the Star of Excellence).

About the New York Sufi Festival

This concert is part of the New York Sufi Music Festival, an initiative aimed at projecting Pakistan’s peaceful human face and culture. This effort, which brings together multi-generational musicians inspired by and performing Sufi poetry from all over Pakistan is spearheaded by Ambassador Abdullah Hussain Haroon, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations. It is conceived and organized by Pakistani Peace Builders, a new initiative of New Yorkers, Pakistani-Americans, and Pakistanis. The aim of the Pakistani Peace Builders, an independent cultural-diplomacy campaign, is to celebrate and express the longstanding values of tolerance, respect, and commitment to universal human rights which characterize the vast majority of Pakistanis

Following the terrorist attack on the Sufi shrine of Data Durbar in early July and the attempted terrorist bombing in Times Square in May, Festival Co-Directors, Mahnaz Fancy and Zeyba Rahman, state that "Arts and culture have a wide-reaching transformative power that, by touching us emotionally, can shift perspectives in a moment. In this troubled time, as lifelong New Yorkers and cultural professionals, we are dedicated to engaging artistic means to provide a more nuanced understanding of Muslim and South-Asian culture. We see this Festival as an offering from Pakistan that carries an important healing message at a time when it is most urgently needed."

Staff

Festival Co-Directors: **Zeyba Rahman** and **Mahnaz Fancy**

With Gratitude

Ambassador Abdullah Hussain Haroon, Hameed Haroon, Hamid Akhund, Yusra Askari and Mohatta Palace Museum.

Special thanks

Elodie Da Silva, Mumtaz Mustafa, Dan Dolgin and Brian Neff.

Tonight’s program is part of *Creative Voices of Islam in Asia*, and made possible by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art and the New York State Council on the Arts. *Creative Voices of Islam in Asia* is a multidisciplinary initiative using arts and culture as a springboard to understand the diversity of Islam as a creative inspiration. Integrated programs provide a platform for myriad voices and perspectives, giving audiences the context for a deeper understanding of Muslim artists and their societies.

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