

Asia Society and Center Stage  
Present

# Khumariyaan



**Sunday, October 12, 8:00 P.M.**

**Asia Society**  
725 Park Avenue at 70<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York City

This performance is approximately  
70 minutes and will be followed by  
an artist Q & A



# Khumariyaan

## Peshawar, Pakistan

On tour as part of Center Stage<sup>SM</sup>

**Farhan Bogra** *rubab and Pashtoon sethar*  
**Aamer Shafiq** *rhythm guitar*  
**Shiraz Khan** *percussion (Zerbaghali)*  
**Sparlay Rawail** *lead guitar and Ghungro percussion*

### About the Band

Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province is home to the Pashtoon people with influences from Persia, Central Asia and India. The estimated twenty nine million Pashtoon people in Pakistan derive from a larger ethnic group, spread from northwest Pakistan to southeast Afghanistan. Pashtoons speak an East Iranian language—Pashto—and have a distinctive culture, that includes a code of honor which revolves around hospitality and generosity to guests, and religious piety. Music, particularly folk music, has been an important part of the culture. At the end of most concerts, no matter what genre, a band will play a folk tune and everyone will dance.

The Pashtoon folk music traditions have suffered in the last several decades, with local well-educated families eschewing it as too low-brow, while it has simultaneously incurred the wrath of religious fundamentalists who saw this music as antithetical to proper practice of Islam as they interpreted it. This tension in Pakistan has affected many musicians—popular musicians were banned from performing, music shops burned, and instrument makers discouraged from their craft and driven into poverty. However the music continues, whether at private celebrations or at friendly jam sessions inspired by MTV, Coke Studios and later by the internet and mobile phones. At house parties or regular, small music societies, young players gather, create music in situ, and draw on global inspirations from Chuck Berry to Indian film hits.

It is within this context that Khumariyaan developed their own musical style which combined the local folk *rubab* with other modern and traditional instruments. The central folk instrument of the Pashtoon people is the *rubab*, a plucked lute. The *rubab* is a double-chambered lute, with a deep, waisted body. It is made from one hollowed piece of carved mulberry wood, and a goat skin membrane decorated with mother of pearl covers the lower body. It has 3 main playing strings, tuned a fourth apart (originally made of animal gut, now nylon), 4 frets, 2-3 long drone strings, and up to 13 sympathetic strings (made of steel). It was likely invented in the 18th century.

Khumariyaan's Farhan Bogra became intrigued with the *rubab*, and the group combines this signature Pashtoon instrument with the strong sonic qualities of traditional instruments, including the djembe-like *zerbaghali* (wooden goblet drum) and Pashtoon *sehtar* (smaller long-necked plucked lute). They added acoustic guitar to the mix, to create a music that they feel reflects their generation, a popular hybrid sound that has captured the spirit of young people today.

The group sprang from a chance meeting in 2008. Three are self-taught: Aamer Shafiq

used to pause old music videos of his favorite metal guitarists to catch where their fingers were on the fret board. Shiraz Khan, from an early age, was drawn to percussion and eventually began to play drums like his father. About a year later, Sparlay Rawail, a student at the National College of Arts, met the three band members at a concert and joined them in an impromptu jam session. The four-member group was complete with Rawail's Spanish guitar providing resonance and energy to the band and youth-based feel.

Khumariyaan is front and center in the movement to revitalize instrumental traditions and to bring them out of the shadows—taking risks to play live, encouraging other aspiring musicians to take up their ancestors' instruments, and reinvigorating the live music experience for audiences throughout the region and across Pakistan.

Without lyrics, Khumariyaan's pieces can move audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds instantly. "Sometimes, it can feel much harder to get the audience to connect to a piece that's purely instrumental," adds Shafiq. "But if you make that connection and you're targeting multi-cultures, then instrumentals allow everyone to relate. It's bridge building."

"In our country and particularly in our region, playing music, or indeed anything that is art, is a form of resistance, a resistance that many have paid for with their lives, yet the Pashtoons love their music," says Rawail. "By introducing Western and local instruments in one line up, we hope to remove the stereotypes from our culture, and bring back a love for music, and indeed, more importantly, a love for the musician."

### **The Artists**

#### **Farhan Bogra**, rubab and Pashtoon *sethar*

A rubab virtuoso, Farhan is a cultural activist deeply engaged in cultural preservation. As the provincial coordinator of Institute for the Preservation of Art and Culture in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK) he represents Pashtoon music and culture all over Pakistan and across the border into Afghanistan.

#### **Shiraz Khan**, percussion (Zerbaghali)

Shiraz provides the percussive backbone to all the tunes that the band comes up with, using a native instrument that nearly faced extinction—the Zerbaghali, similar in shape to a djembe. Holding a bachelor's degree, Shiraz met with Farhan at their university and the duo got together with Aamer Shafiq to form Khumariyaan's initial trio.

#### **Aamer Shafiq**, rhythm guitar

Aamer met Farhan and Shirz while at university, and discovered that the solo notes of the rubab were complemented by the rhythm of the guitar almost as if it were instinctual. A well known guitar player in his own right, Aamer gladly took up the role of being the fusion and western element in the band.

#### **Sparlay Rawail**, lead guitar and Ghungro percussion

A lecturer at the National College of Arts, Sparlay met the three band members at a concert and joined them in an impromptu jam session about a year after the trio got together. During the first half minute, it became clear to them all that the urgency, dynamics and repetitive grooves of Rawail's lead guitar upped the vibrancy, resonance, gravity and energy of the band.

### **About Performing Arts at Asia Society**

Asia Society's Performing Arts Program is an intrinsic component of Asia Society's commitment to sharing vital aspects of Asian culture by placing creative expression at the center of a more comprehensive understanding of culture. Whether it is experimental artists exploring new territory or traditional artists bringing to life the voices of a great legacy, the Performing Arts Program has created a powerful platform for connecting and engaging with Asian culture within a deeper cultural context. We have presented extraordinary artists from renowned names such as Lang Lang, Tan Dun, Abida Parveen, Shen Wei, David Henry Hwang, Sardono and Malavika Sarukkai, to the latest emerging voices. Beginning in 1957, with New York's first performance by Indian maestro Ravi Shankar, the Performing Arts Program has since presented over a thousand performances, including original commissioned work from Asian and Asian-American artists, as well as American artists influenced by Asia, such as Phillip Glass and Vijay Iyer. From Indonesian hip-hop to electronica from Shanghai; experimental dance to the deeply moving traditions of India's *Kuttiyatam*, Burmese *Zat Pwe* or Chinese *Kunqu* opera, we foster artistic exchange and provide creative opportunities for artists. For more information, please visit [asiasociety.org](http://asiasociety.org)

### **Asia Society Staff**

**Rachel Cooper**, Director, Global Performing Arts and Cultural Initiatives

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### **About Center Stage**

Now in its second season, Center Stage introduces performing artists from abroad to American communities. Seven outstanding contemporary dance and music ensembles from Morocco, Pakistan, and Vietnam will perform, interact, and begin meaningful dialogues with Americans during independent month-long tours scheduled from June through November 2014. Artists touring as part of Center Stage help build mutual understanding via cultural expressions and people to people exchanges. From coast to coast, many performances and off-stage activities are open to the public.

*Center Stage is a public diplomacy initiative of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. It is produced by the New England Foundation for the Arts in cooperation with the U.S. Regional Arts Organizations, and supported by the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation and the Asian Cultural Council. General management for Center Stage is provided by Lisa Booth Management, Inc.*

### **Khumariyaan Center Stage Tour Staff**

**Pat Kirby**, Company Manager

**Robert W. Henderson, Jr.**, Technical & Production Coordinator

This program is part of the Asia Society's ongoing initiative, *Creative Voices of Muslim Asia*.