



UMS PRESENTS

ASIF ALI KHAN QAWWALI ENSEMBLE

Asif Ali Khan, Lead Vocals

Raza Hussain, Harmonium and Solo Vocals

Sarfraz Hussain, Harmonium and Solo Vocals

Ali Khawar, Tabla and Chorus

Imtiaz Hussain Shibli, Chorus

Waheed Mumtaz Hussain, Chorus

Shah Nawaz Hussain, Chorus

Manzoor Hussain Shibli, Chorus

Umar Draz Hussain, Chorus

Friday Evening, March 21, 2014 at 8:00

Rackham Auditorium • Ann Arbor

**62nd Performance of the 135th Annual Season
Global Music Series**

Photo: Asif Ali Khan; photographer: Cynthia Sciberras.

PROGRAM

This evening's program will be announced by the artists from the stage and will be performed without intermission.

This evening's performance is supported by Penny and Ken Fischer and Mohamad Issa and the Issa Foundation. Additional support provided by the University of Michigan Museum of Art, with lead funding provided by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.

Asif Ali Khan's tour is organized by Robert Browning Associates.

Asif Ali Khan is managed by Zaman Production, Paris, France.

Asif Ali Khan's tour is made possible by a grant from the Asian Cultural Council to City Lore, a fiscal sponsor for Robert Browning Associates.

PROGRAM NOTES

"It is the courage of each, it is the power of flight, Some fly and remain in the garden, some go beyond the stars."

— Amir Khusrau, 13th Century

Americans were first introduced to the ecstatic singing of South Asia known as qawwali in 1975 when The Asia Society organized the first tour of the US by the famed Sabri Brothers of Pakistan. A subsequent tour in 1978 culminating in a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall was greeted with wild enthusiasm by devotees and initiates alike. The tour is commemorated by a recording on the Nonesuch Explorer series that almost exceeded the limit of a long-playing vinyl recording of the time at 52.24 minutes. While the Sabri Brothers and other qawwali ensembles visited the US from time to time, it was not until Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was invited to perform at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in 1989 and his subsequent residency at the University of Washington in 1992 that qawwali began to be heard again in the US outside the South Asian community. In 1993, a 13-city tour of North America, organized by the World Music Institute, cemented Nusrat's reputation in the US and helped to build a far wider interest in qawwali.

Qawwali means literally "utterance" in Urdu. The word stems from the Arabic *qawāl* meaning an axiom or dictum relating to religious subjects, the recitation of which helps to purify both thought and deed. Associated in particular with the Sufi Chishti Order, it has its origins in the Medieval mystical practice of *sama'* (Arabic — listening, audition). *Sama'*, like *zikr*, the ceremony of remembrance, in which the names of God are repetitively invoked, is an essential vehicle for revelation and union with the divine. Both *sama'* and *zikr* may also be seen as instrumental in advancing

the great classical music traditions of the Muslim world — the Turko-Arabic *maqam* and the Persian *dastgah* which, in turn, influenced the North Indian *raga* tradition. Thus, while music as a secular pursuit has largely been condemned by orthodox Islam, for most Sufis it has traditionally been a fundamental prerequisite.

By the end of the 11th century, *sama'* was a spiritual concert which included sung poetry by a soloist or chorus with instrumental interludes. The concert took place under the direction of a *sheikh* or *pir* (religious leader). The faithful participated by listening in a state of inner contemplation, which might lead to a state of trance. The main argument amongst Sufis has centered on the use of music to achieve a state of ecstasy; while some see music as a means to get closer to the Divine, others see musical trance as an end in itself, implying that the state of ecstasy is a manifestation of God.

The art of qawwali, as with most of the great Asian musical and literary traditions, is transmitted orally. The mystical verse associated with qawwali is best appreciated by listening. The vehicle of music is used to bring one closer to the experience of the inner truth. The qawwal will dwell on certain words, often repeating them, taking the audience into the discovery of hitherto obscure meanings. Thus mundane objects are imbued with deeper meaning — a spinning wheel becomes the wheel of life. Repeating a sentence or phrase until all meaning is exhausted and it becomes meaningless, is a means to bring the audience closer to *ma'rifat*, inner truth. Thus, as with the Buddhist repetition of a mantra, semantic reality is negated and

a new truth emerges that transcends linguistic barriers.

Regular participants in qawwali sessions often use the concept of flight or travel to describe their experience. This is a phenomenon well known to shamans and practitioners of religious ceremonies involving trance-like states. This sensation of flight brought about through rhythmic music and chant is known as *hal*. The manifestation of this ecstatic state can range from a simple swaying of the head or body to violent convulsions. At such times as when a member of a congregation at a gospel revival meeting is “possessed by the Holy Spirit,” friends will shield him from harm until he is eased back into a state of “normalcy.” The great masters of qawwal are able to move entire audiences to a *hal* even if they do not understand a single word of the language.

Qawwali texts are taken mostly from the great Medieval Persian mystical poets such as Amir Khusrau, Jalal’uddin Rumi, and Hafez, as well as Indian saints such as Nizamuddin Auliya (14th century) and popular Punjabi poets such as Bulleh Shah (18th century). While most qawwals are in Urdu or Punjabi, there are others in Persian and regional South Asian languages. Rarely is a complete poem recited – rather the singer will join segments or verses from different poems or add lines from another text to emphasize a point. Each Qawwali song has, at its core, a principle poem, often a *ghazal*. The poem is usually preceded by two introductory parts; an

instrumental prelude (*naghma*) played on the harmonium and an introductory verse sung solo in a recitative style (*rubai* or *doha*). This introduction serves to indicate the topic of the main poem and to test the audience’s response. If it is favorable, the qawwal continues with the main poem in the same mode; if not, then he will chant another verse introducing a different poem. The poetry is often allegorical and charged with symbolism. Much of it has a seemingly erotic or romantic nature but is not intended to be taken literally. Yet the profane world is never denied – for what is human is Divine and what is Divine is human. The frequently used term “Beloved” refers to divine love (for God or his Prophet, Mohammed). Terms such as “face” and “tresses” signify the spiritual qualities of the master; building a “house” signifies the pursuit of material well-being. Much use is made of the terms “wine” and “tavern” where wine is the love of God which intoxicates the initiate and the tavern refers to the spiritual master or Sheikh, whose heart is the repository of God’s love.

The analogy of qawwali to African-American gospel is valid in more ways than one, for, out of both idioms, a secular form has evolved. Just as soul music grew out of the music of the African-American church, in recent years qawwali style music, albeit with different lyrics, can be heard in Bollywood movies, as “disco” or as background music for television shows.

Program note by Robert H. Browning.



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Scan for an interview with Farina Mir (Director of the U-M Center for South Asian Studies) on how attending a performance by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan changed her life.

Download a free QR code reader app on your smart phone, point your camera at the code, and scan to see multimedia content; or visit www.umslobby.org to find these stories.

THE POETRY

Qawwali is an art that is transmitted orally. The texts of tonight's songs are drawn from ancient Persian Sufi poetry as well as more recent Punjabi literature. They are sung in Urdu, Punjabi, and Farsi. Since songs for a qawwali performance are chosen according to the mood of the artists and their assessment of the audience, there is no set program. Traditionally a performance will begin with a *hamd* (in praise of God) and

continue with a *na't-i-sharif* (in praise of Mohammed). Verses dedicated to various Sufi saints will follow. After that, the artist's choice of verses is governed by his assessment of the audience, taking particular note of the preferences of any spiritual leader or important person in attendance.

For an example of a song text, Asif Ali Khan will perform "Dam dama must Qalandar," with lyrics noted below:

Dam dama must Qalandar

Dhamal (mystical song or dance) in homage to the Sufi saint Lal Shabaaz Qalandar, from Sewan Sharif, Sindh – Punjabi

Text by Hazrat Sabri

My heart, my heart, my heart is drunk
on Qalandar!

Say it with Heart! The Ruby, the generous one,
Shabaaz Qalandar! Lord of the Walis¹!

Your Sewan is the city of the blissful,
The Beautiful One! The one housing the line of
the Prophet.

The great pilgrimage is made for him,
He who visits your Sewan.

Finer than Paradise, that's the bazaars of Sewan!

Where Shabaaz lives 'tis a strange country
The moon and the stars hide here

Men, heady, and intoxicated with joy dance the
dhamal²

The naubat³ rings out here
Adding a rich note to the landscape
Hymns to Ali full of joy ring forth in the bazaars
The shade of Saint Ghaus⁴ falls across him
He occupies a remarkable rank in this world.
A beggar who arrives at his abode
Will not go away with empty hands

A descendant of Hassan and Hussein⁵, Sayed⁶,
the Guardian of religion

By the grace of the sacrifice of Karbala
By the grace of the Prophet's gaze
Listen to the humble demands of Asif
By the grace of Hassan and Hussain

My precious Ruby, make the raft of my
expectations arrive safe and sound!

¹ Friends of God

² Mystical dance

³ Percussion solo played at shrines

⁴ The highest level of holiness a person can achieve – here in reference to Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani

⁵ Grandsons of the Prophet

⁶ Descendant of the Prophet

ARTISTS

A SIF ALI KHAN was born in 1973, the youngest son of Manzoor Hussain, a well-known singer from a famous Pakistani musical family. He traces his musical ancestry back more than 350 years. His great-grandfather, Mian Maula Baksh, was one of the most famous classical singers of the Indian subcontinent and founded his qawwali (Sufi music) group more than 80 years ago. After partition, his grandfather, Santoo Khan, moved the family to Pakistan in 1947 settling in Lahore. Here the group, known at this time as Santoo Khan Qawwal, became extremely popular both for its wide repertoire of classical, spiritual (Sufi), and popular songs as well as their superb command of the Urdu, Persian, and Punjabi languages. The group was one of the first to record qawwali music, and was regularly heard on All Pakistan Radio.

Santoo Khan died in the late 1980s whereupon his son Manzoor Hussain took over the leadership. By this time, all seven of his sons, including Asif Ali, were performing with the group. From his early days as a teenager, Mr. Khan was praised for his outstanding vocal qualities. In the early 1990s, his father introduced him to the legendary Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan who was acknowledged as Pakistan's greatest qawwali singer of the 20th century. Asif Ali's impeccable diction, brilliant inventiveness, and sincerity inured him to the master. He became Nusrat's premier student in 1995, and, within a short while, took over the vocal leadership for the group from his father. In 1999, he was elected "Best Young Pakistani Qawwali" by Lok Versa (National Institute of Folk Heritage of Islamabad). While continuing to offer his singing at religious shrines throughout Pakistan, he has embarked on numerous concert tours in Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Middle East over the past 10 years.

He was first invited to Europe in 2002 when he performed at the prestigious Festival les Orientales in St. Florent le Viell, in western France. In 2004, he returned

to Europe to perform at the Kunst Palast Museum in Dusseldorf, Germany and the Cité de la Musique, Paris. In 2005, he embarked on a major European tour performing in Holland, Portugal, Switzerland, Spain, and six cities in France, including Paris where he performed to a capacity audience at the Institut du Monde Arabe. Another European tour in 2008 brought him to major festivals in France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Slovenia, and Italy. In 2011, he appeared at WOMEX in Copenhagen and, in 2012, he performed in Istanbul, Shanghai, Australia, and at the Olympic Games in London. His huge popularity brought him back to Europe in 2013 when he was invited to perform at the WOMAD festivals in London and Moscow and major festivals in Portugal, Belgium, France, and Germany.

Since the death of the world famous Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan in 1997, there have been many contenders to inherit his place as "Emperor of Qawwali." There is no doubt now that Asif Ali Khan has emerged as the one of the genre's reigning princes. While remaining true to the Punjabi tradition that was Nusrat's hallmark, he has developed a style and presence all of his own.

Asif Ali Khan's tour is organized by **ROBERT BROWNING ASSOCIATES**. Robert Browning was the co-founder of the Alternative Museum and the World Music Institute in New York. Under his direction these two organizations presented more than 1,800 concerts and US-organized tours by some of the most influential artists from Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, including Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Masters of Persian Music, and The Gypsy Caravan. For more information, please visit www.robertbrowningassociates.com.

UMS welcomes Asif Ali Khan and the Asif Ali Khan Qawwali Ensemble as they make their UMS debuts this evening.