

Asia Society and CaravanSerai
Present

**New Sufi Sounds of Pakistan:
Arif Lohar with Arooj Aftab**



Saturday, April 28, 2012, 8:00 P.M.

**Asia Society
725 Park Avenue at 70th Street
New York City**

**This program is 2 hours
with no intermission**



New Sufi Sounds of Pakistan

Performers

Arooj Aftab	lead vocals
Bhriugu Sahni Jorn Bielfeldt	acoustic guitar percussion
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Arif Lohar	lead vocals/chimta
Qamar Abbas	dholak
Waqas Ali	guitar
Allah Ditta	alghoza
Shehzad Azim Ul Hassan	dhol
Shahid Kamal	keyboard
Nadeem Ul Hassan	percussion/vocals
Fozia	vocals
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AROOJ AFTAB

Arooj Aftab is a rising Pakistani-American vocalist who interprets mystical Sufi poems and contemporizes the semi-classical musical traditions of Pakistan and India. Her music is reflective of *thumri*, a secular South Asian musical style colored by intricate ornamentation and romantic lyrics of love, loss, and longing. Arooj Aftab restyles the traditional music of her heritage for a sound that is minimalistic, contemplative, and delicate—a sound that she calls “indigenous soul.” Accompanying her on guitar is Boston-based Bhriugu Sahni, a frequent collaborator, originally from India, and Jorn Bielfeldt on percussion.

Arooj Aftab: vocals
Bhriugu Sahni: guitar
Jorn Bielfeldt: percussion

Semi Classical Music

This genre, classified in Pakistan and North India as light classical vocal music. *Thumri* and *ghazal* forms are at the core of the genre. Its primary theme is romantic — persuasive wooing, painful jealousy aroused by a philandering lover, pangs of separation, the ache of remembered pleasures, sweet anticipation of reunion, joyful union. Rooted in a sophisticated civilization that drew no line between eroticism and spirituality, this genre asserts a strong feminine identity in folk poetry laden with unabashed sensuality.

The word *thumri* comes from the original word *thumakna*, which means to dance gracefully. *Thumri* may be traced to 4th century B.C. as an art form for singing love songs. The historic role of the singer-courtesans played a major part in the development of this genre. Renowned singer-courtesans who studied music with renowned music maestros of their time gave the *thumri* such stature that it spilled outside the courtesan's domain into the repertoire of great male classical vocalist, like Punjabi classical music great Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. Now, it is customary for most full-scale classical *khayal* recitals to conclude with a *thumri*.

The *ghazal* poetic form consists of rhyming couplets and a refrain with each line sharing the same meter. The form is ancient, originating in 6th century Arabic verse. It is one of the principal poetic forms from the Indo-Persian-Arabic civilization in the eastern Islamic world.

The *ghazal* spread into South Asia in the 12th century through the influence of Sufi mystics and the royal Muslim courts. Although the *ghazal* is most prominently a form of Dari poetry and Urdu poetry, today it is found in the poetry of many languages of the Pakistan and Indian sub-continent. It is a genre that has the ability for a wide range of expression around its central themes of love and separation and the beauty of love in spite of that pain.

Man Kunto Maula

(Sufi poet: Amir Khusrau, 13th century; Language: Arabic, Farsi, Urdu)

Man kunto Maula, fa Ali-un Maula is part of a *hadith*, or statement by the Prophet Muhammad, that he made upon his return from his last pilgrimage in 632 AD, a few months before he died. It means, "Whoever accepts me as their spiritual guide, Ali is his spiritual guide as well." Ali was the Prophet's cousin and an important figure in Islam. The poem describes the state of being one with love.

Poem

Maula, Maula
Ho Miyaan Ji
Maula, Hoo Allah

Aflak se laaee jaati hai
Seenon mein chhupayee jaati hai

Tawheed ki mein saagar se nahin
Aakhon se pilaae jaati hai

Jisney dekha marr hi gayaa
Jisney dekha Maula dikha

Terey chashmey siyaah mein hai jadoo
Ghair ka dokha mujhko na dena

Translation

Lord, Lord
 O, Lord
 Lord, Allah

A love that is as vast as the sky and the oceans kept hidden in one's heart

An intoxication that is imbibed through the eyes of the seeker

Whoever glimpsed it went into an ecstatic state
 Whoever glimpsed it, glimpsed Divine (love)

In your divine eyes are magical
 Don't betray me as though I am a stranger to you

Tujh mein main aur mujh mein too

I am in you and you are in me – we are one

Man kunto Maula

Whoever accepts me as their spiritual guide

Man kunto Maula

Ali is their spiritual guide, spiritual guide, spiritual guide

Mohabbat Karney Waley

(Ghazal; Poet: Hafeez Hoshiapuri; Language: Urdu)

Poem

*Mohabbat karne waale kam nah honge
Teri mehfil mein lekin hum nah honge*

Translation

You are the beloved of many
However, I must say, I will not be among
your lovers

*Zamaane bhar ke ghum yaa ek tera gham
Ye gham hoga to kitne gham na honge
Teri mehfil mein lekin hum nah honge*

This is a lifetime of sadness, as I love you
the most. Having this sadness removes so
many other sadnesses

However, I must say, I will not be among
your lovers

Aaye Na Baalam (Thumri style; Language: Urdu) / Udhero Na

Poem

Aaye Na Baalam

*Kya karoon sajani aaye na baalam
Kya karoon sajani aaye na baalam
Tarapat beeti mori un bin ratiyaan
Aaye na baalam
Kya karoon sajani aaye na baalam
Rowat, rowat kal nahi aaye
Tarap, tarap mohe raam kal nahi aaye
Nisdin mohe birhaa sataye
Yaad aawat jab unki batiyaan
Aaye na baalam
Kya karoon sajani
Aaye na baalam
Aaye na baalam*

Translation

What shall I do my friend, my beloved will
not come (to me)
My nights are spent yearning for him
What shall I do my friend, my beloved will
not come (to me)

The pangs of separation burn bright in my
heart / Like fire on wet wood
Tomorrow doesn't arrive even as I weep
endlessly

I pine without him night and day,
Whenever thoughts of him come to mind
What shall I do my friend, my beloved
refuses to come (to me)\

Udhero Na

*Ye aainey mein chehra mera to nahin
Ye aainey mein chehra mera to nahin
Tum bhi dikhaai diyey har char duaar
Kahin, kahin, kahin, kahin
Aakhon mein siley huey ho
Udheron na
Udheron na*

This obsession is following me
It is everywhere
The images in mirrors are not mine
The images mirrors are not mine
Your image is embedded in my mind's
eye/Your image is stitched into the lining
of my eyes
Unravel it
Unravel it

Baghon Mein Padey Jhooley

(Thumri; Language: Urdu)

Poem

Baagon mein pade jhoole

Tum bhool gaye hamako ham

Tumko nahi bhoole

Ye raks sitaaron ka

Sun lo kabhi afsaana

Taqdeer ke maaron ka

Saawan ka maheena hai

Saajan se juda rah kar

Jeena bhi kya jeena hai

Raavi ka kinaara hai

Har mauj ke honthon par

Afsaana hamaara hai

Ab aur na tadapaao

Ya hamko bula bhejo

Ya aap chale aao

Ya hamko bula bhejo

Translation

Swings are swinging in the garden

While you have forgotten (me)

I have not forgotten (you), the way you
have forgotten us

This heart is without hope, our love left
unfulfilled

(You stayed away) fearing you would get a
bad reputation.

Swings are swinging in the garden

While you have forgotten (me)

What is a sky without rain clouds (in the
monsoon)

But a life unfulfilled and incomplete

Don't make me pine anymore

Or ask me to come to you

Either you come to me

Or ask me to come to you

Na Ja Balam Pardes

(Thumri; language: Urdu)

Poem

Na ja balam pardes

Na ja balam pardes

Na ja balam pardes

Na ja balam pardes

Kab se piya tori raah takat hun

Kaisey bhejun sanje suhaag

Na ja balam pardes

Translation

Oh my love, please do not leave and go to
foreign lands

Oh my love, please do not leave and go to
foreign lands

How I wait for you, watching the path by
which you may arrive

How do I send you my blessings?

Oh my love, please do not leave and go to
foreign lands

Arif Lohar Ensemble

Arif Lohar is Pakistan's most treasured singer. Born in the small village of Aach Goch in the Gujrat District of Punjab, Pakistan, Arif Lohar inherited the big talent and traditions of his iconic father, the legendary Pakistani folk singer Alam Lohar. Arif is known for his warm, powerful voice as well as the rich sonic landscape against which he juxtaposes traditional Punjabi songs. While, he embraces his heritage, he re-imagines it with contemporary interpretations. Now a legend himself, Arif blends pop and folk stylings to create a sound uniquely his own. Accompanied by his beloved *chimta*, a traditional percussion

instrument resembling tongs with bells, he continues the tradition of sung storytelling through folk songs centered on perpetuating knowledge, values and social commentary as well as, Sufi poems about love and harmony. Arif is backed by an ensemble of talented Pakistani musicians, some of whom are the sons of the musicians whose fathers performed with Alam Lohar. The ensemble also includes Arif's long time protégé Fozia, a vocalist who goes by one name only.

Arif Lohar: Vocals, chimta

Fozia: Vocals

Allah Ditta: Al Ghoza/Double Reed Flute

Nadeem ul Hassan: Tumkinaari/Drums

Qamar Abbas: Dholak

Shahid Kamal: Harmonium/Keyboard

Shahzad ul Hassan: Dhol

Waqas Ali: Mandolin, Guitar

Punjabi music

Pakistan's Punjab province takes its name from the five rivers that run through it. *Punj* means five and *ab* means water. The rivers, Beas, Chenab, Jeelum, Ravi and Sutlej, are all tributaries of the legendary Indus River. The area's rich soil makes it ideal farming land. Punjab is known for its historic mix of people from different backgrounds and nations - including the Greeks, Persians, Mongols and Afghans - who have created the present rich, layered culture.

Singing and dancing is integral to the way of life for Punjabi villagers and townsfolk alike. Folk and devotional music is the soul of Punjabi culture and very often they are intertwined. As Arif Lohar explains it, in many folk ballads about epic love, there is invariably some reference to the Divine. Folk songs are about life cycles and celebrations of births, marriages, the seasons, harvests, the pain of separation, the joy of love. Devotional Sufi music takes the form of praise songs to the Divine, to the Prophet Muhammad and the great Sufi saints. Simple imagery is used to express emotions of devotion very often, from everyday rural life.

A strong tradition of *Qissa sahity*, or storytelling, is very much part of the music. The historic epics of *Heer Ranjha*, *Sohni Mahiwal*, *Sassi Punnu*, *Mirza Sahiba* among others are all part of this tradition. Ballads are often accompanied by the one stringed *tūmbā* and *algozā*, double reed flute – originally played by shepherds. Alam Lohar made the the *chimta* a popular addition, the metal tongs with chaene, small metal discs welded on top. The resounding beat of the dhol and dholak anchors music.

Gradually, the music emerged from the fields and reached more formal performance arenas such as rural *melās*, or country fairs, or a saint's shrine. Now, many gifted musicians regularly perform in large urban hubs and produce commercial recordings to great acclaim.

FOZIA, vocals

Aaj Jaaney Ki Zid Na Karo

(Ghazal; Poet: Fayyaz Hashmi, language: Urdu)

In this *ghazal* of romantic love and yearning, the poet beseeches the loved one not to insist on leaving him after their meeting and instead sit beside him to extend their moment together.

Akhaan Jago Mitti Rehdeean Kinno Haal

(Geet/traditional song, language: Punjabi)

This traditional song expresses the intensity of a love that permeates the poet completely, waking or sleeping as, he cannot get his beloved out of his mind he sees her everywhere.

Mahi Yaar Dee Gharoli / The Friend's Clay Water Pot

(Kafi; poet: Sachal Sarmast, 1739 – 1829, language: Sindhi)

The *kafi* is a classical musical composition that is most often used with spiritual praise songs or poems dedicated to the *murshid* or spiritual guide and the Divine. The poems can also refer to the transitory world and describe the disciple's pangs of separation and longing for closeness to the Beloved Divine or *Murshid*. Sometimes, the poem in the *kafi* form can also describe more secular social or political themes.

This poem, by Sindhi Sufi poet Sachal Sarmast, draws on the imagery of an everyday household chore from medieval times of filling a clay pot with fresh drinking water from the well.

In Sufism, the potter represents the Divine who give shape to clay pots. Water contained in the pot implies life's sustaining essence.

The poet Sachal Sarmast uses the metaphor of the clay water pot as a symbol for the striving disciple on the spiritual path who, goes through many trials in order to gain proximity to the Divine.

The poetic composition tells the tale about the clay pot's trials:

I was beaten, shaken and kneaded like the potter's clay / Then I was put onto the wheel and churned round and round / Finally, the fire engulfed me; initially it felt as though I was separated from You / Then, as the fire blazed away, my life was consumed in You.

ARIF LOHAR

Qissa Mirza Sahiba

(Poet: Peelu, language: Punjabi)

In the Punjab, the famed oral storytelling tradition known as *qissa* developed from the *qasida* tradition of Arabs and came to South Asia with the development of Islam and Arab migrants to the region. *Qisse* are traditional morality tales of epic love, valor and honor that transmit the importance of essential social values. *Qisse* passed down generationally, infuses Punjabi folk music with depth and richness and can be recited or sung. The tradition is so deep rooted in Punjabi culture that great Sufis guides are known to quote from the stories in imparting spiritual messages. Such is the case with the *qissa* of *Mirza Sahiban*, one of four major tragic romantic stories in Punjabi culture.

The poet Peelu's story about Mirza and Sahiban, childhood playmates and children of two leaders from the Punjab who fell in love with each other when they grew up. They kept their love secret and Sahiban's parents arranged her marriage to the son of a powerful family. With her wedding looming, Sahiban sent a message to Mirza and he rescues her. Sahiban's brothers follow and catch up with them. As Mirza, an accomplished archer, prepares to fight her brothers, Sahiban breaks his arrows knowing he would not miss his target when he shot and her brothers would die. She believed that her brothers, when her brothers got closer, would see how deep her love for Mirza was and would welcome him to their family. The brothers were not swayed and fought Mirza to death. As he lay dying, Mirza told Sahiban that he would not have shot at her brothers and instead would have fired arrows into the air as a warning.

Bol Mitti Deya Baweya

(Poet: Alam Lohar, 1965, language: Punjabi)

This is a Sufi morality tale or *bayaan* written by Arif's father, the legendary singer and poet Alam Lohar. The poem reflects the need to be humble and grateful to the Divine as we are created from clay and return to the earth no matter what our material wealth or accomplishments. He highlights the importance of the Sufi message of remaining loving and peaceful through life.

Alif Allah Chambey di Booti

(*Jugni*; Sufi poet: Sultan Bahu, 17th century; Language: Punjabi)

Arif Lohar's father, the legendary singer Alam Lohar, is credited with developing the *jugni* as storytelling style. *Jugni* literally means a female firefly and is a medium for the poet and singer to share stories about life's journey in its many aspects and specific commentary. The poems can either be centered on life cycle events or be Sufi poems that are spiritual praise songs. In the context of Sufism, the *jugni* is a metaphor for the soul and a means to express affinity to the Divine, to the Prophet Muhammad and to Sufi saints. The Sufi context is what the Lohars, Alam and Arif, anchor their *jugni* repertoire in.

Arif Lohar has taken the *jugni* to new heights of popularity with his contemporary interpretation of *Alif Allah Chambey di Booti*, the 17th century poem by Sufi mystic Sultan Bahu. This *jugni* is a praise song and declaration of the poet's devotion to the Divine, the Prophet Muhammad and Sufi saints.

Poem

*Alif Allah chambay di booti,
tey meray murshid mann vich lai hoo
Ho nafi uss baat da paani dey kay*

Har ragaay harjai hoo

*Ho joog joog jeevay mera murshid
sohna*

*Hatay jiss ay booti lai ho
Pir meraya jugni ji*

*Ae way Allah waliyan di jugni ji
Ae way nabbi pak di jugni ji
Ae way maula ali wali jugni ji
Ae way meray pir di jugni ji
Ae way saaray sabaz di jugni ji*

*Dum gutkoon, gootkun...
karay Saeen ae
te kalma nabi da pare sain
Parhay tay kalma nabi da
Parhay saeein pir merya*

*Jugni taar khaeein vich thaal
Chad duniya dey janjaal
Kuch ni nibna bandiya naal
Rakhi saabat sidk amaal*

*Jugni dig payee vich roi
Othay ro ro kamli hoi
Oddi vaath naye lainda koi
Tey kalmay binna nai mildi toi*

Translation

My spiritual guide has planted the fragrant seed of love in my heart
Which flourished with modesty, piety and acceptance of his existence

The Divine is present in every throbbing pulse of mine
My spiritual guide is ever present

The one who infused life into me
I have the spirit of my guide

The spirit of all the messengers who brought His message to this earth
The spirit of the Holy Prophet
The spirit of Ali (the Prophet Muhammad's cousin) and his followers
The spirit of my saint
The spirit of all his words

Every time I think of you the Divine, I feel breathless
So I recite the Kalma (the Muslim prayer that attests to the reciter's belief) whenever I think of the Divine

O my creation, share whatever you have
Remove yourself from worldly concerns
There is nothing that you can get from other human beings that you can take to the after life
Just keep your actions and intentions pure and true

So absorbed was the creation that she stumbled into a ditch
There she wailed relentlessly
But there was no one who enquired about her
Remember, there is no salvation for anyone without remembering your Creator

*Ho wanga charha lo kuriyon
Meray daata dey darbaar dian*

Put on your bangles, girls
Those that you get at your spiritual guides
shrine

*Ho naa kar teeya khair piyari
Maan daindiya galaryaan
Din din talhi juwani jaandi
Joon sohna puthia lariyaan*

Daughter, don't be proud of your youth
Your mother scoffs and scolds you
That with each passing day, your youth
slips by
Even gold when put in the furnace molds
itself, there is absolutely no permanence

*Aurat marad, shehzaday sohney
O moti, O laa lariyaan
Sir da sarfa kar naa jairey
Peen prem pya lariyan*

Women, men, are so beautiful and princely
Like pearls, like gems
Those who are not self centered
They are the ones who truly love humanity

*O daatay day darbaan chaa akho
Pawan khair sawa lariyan*

Whenever you visit the shrine of any saint
God fulfills all your wishes and showers
you with his blessings

*O wanga charha lo kuriyon meray
daata tey darbar diyan
O wangha charha lo kuriyon meray
daata tey darbar diyan*

Put on your bangles, girls; those that you
get at your spiritual guide's shrine
Put on your bangles, girls; those that you
get at your spiritual guide's shrine

*Dum gutkoon, dum gutkoon,
dum gootkoon, gootkoon gootkoon
Jugni ji Jugni ji Jugni ji*

I am breathless, I am breathless, I am
breathless
Firefly, firefly, firefly

DHAMAL: Dama Dam Mast Qalandar

(Sufi Poet: Khwaja Ghulam Farid; 19th century, Language: Seraiki)

Dhamal, in mystical rituals of Pakistan is the act of mystical circling, the whirling movement similar to that of the Turkish Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes.

This Sufi poem is sung in honor of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, one of the most important Sufi mystics who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries in current day Pakistan's Southern Sindh province region of Sehwan.

Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (red royal falcon) is the Sufi name given to Syed Muhammed Usman who was from Marwand, Azerbaijan. At 20 years old, he became a Sufi and traveled to and settled in the southern Sindh region of Sehwan in the 13th century in what is current day Pakistan. He went on to become the most popular of all Sufi saints from that period on. He is revered by Hindus as well as Muslims and known to have actively worked for peace between Hindus and Muslims during the course of his life. Hindus regard him as a reincarnated divinity. He is known by several other names with fondness including, *Jhule Lal* or, the precious one.

Lal, or red, refers to the red robes he wore. *Lal* is also the word of affection that mothers from the region of Punjab use to refer to a young child. *Qalandars* are

wandering Sufi mystics who are most prevalent in Central Asia, Pakistan and India. They are known for spreading the message of peace, humanism and love. *Shahbaz* literally means a falcon but, within this context, is a reference to his soaring spiritual flights. So revered is he, that mystical poems sung throughout the country invoke his name. Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is known to have practiced *dhamal*, the mystical circling, whirling movement like that of the Turkish Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes. To this day, musicians play large kettledrums (*bher*) in the courtyard of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's tomb and dervishes do the *dhamal* as part of their spiritual practice every evening after prayers. Some visitors to the shrine, men and women, dance with abandon to the drumbeats to the point of trance.

Poem

*O laal meri pat rakhio bala jhoole laalan
Sindri da Sehvan da, sakhi Shabaaz
Qalandar*

*Dama dam mast Qalandar, Ali dam dam
de andar
Dam mast qalandar mast mast*

*Chaar charaag tere baran hamesha, Pan-
jwa mein baaran aayi bala Jhoole laalan*

*O panjwa mein baalan aei, O panjwa mein
baalan aayi bala*

*Jhoole laalan, Sindri da Sehvan da, sakhi
Shabaaz Qalandar
Dama dam mast Qalandar, Ali dam dam
de andar*

*Hind Sind peera teri naubat vaaje, Naal
vaje ghadiyaal bala jhoole laalan,
O naal vaje, O naal vaje ghadiyaal bala
jhoole laalan*

Har dam peera teri khair hove

*Naam-e-Ali beda paar laga jhoole
laalan / O naam-e-Ali, O naam-e-Ali beda
paar laga jhoole laalan*

*Sindri da sehvan da sakhi Shabaaz
Qalandar / Dama dam mast Qalandar,
Ali dam dam de andar*

Translation

O red robed one, may I always have your benign protection, Jhulelal. O, the lord and friend of Sindh and Sehwan, the red robed one, the Divine-intoxicated Qalandar

The Divine in every breath of mine, all glory to you
Breathlessly enraptured, ecstatic *Qalandar*, ecstatic, ecstatic

Your shrine is always lit with four lamps, and here I come to light a fifth lamp in your honor

Here I come with the fifth O Lord, friend and Master of Sindh and Sehwan

The red robed friend and Master of Sindh and Sehwan, Divine-intoxicated Qalandar
The Divine in every breath of mine, Ali's breath in mine, glory be to you

Let the gong bells ring out your esteemed name out loud in Hind (India) and Sindh
Let the gong ring out loud for your glory day and night by the watchman and people

O Lord, may you prevail every time, everywhere

I pray for your well being, in the name of Ali

I pray to you to help my boat cross in safety (in the river of life)

This program is part of Asia Society's ongoing initiative, *Creative Voices of Muslim Asia*, a multidisciplinary initiative using the arts as a springboard to understand the diversity of Islam as a creative inspiration. Through an integrated program that brings together expertise from across the geographic and cross-disciplinary depth of the entire community and organization, *Creative Voices* will not only provide a platform for myriad voices and perspectives, but will provide audiences with the context for a deeper understanding of Islamic artists and their societies.

For more information please visit asiasociety.org/creativevoices

Co-presented with *Caravanserai: A place where cultures meet*, a groundbreaking, multi-year, US national initiative conceived by Arts Midwest that celebrates global diversity while building bridges to a better tomorrow through a series of artistic residencies and public programs. The focus of *Caravanserai's* first edition is Pakistan. Since fall 2011, through the spring of 2012, some of Pakistan's finest artists have toured the US sharing their art and stories about Pakistan with different communities.

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