

New Sufi Sounds of Pakistan

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 also 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.

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 townfolk 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 *tumba* and *algoza*, 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 *melas*, 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.

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

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 Muham-
mad'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

*Oddi vaath naye lainda koi
Tey kalmay binna nai mildi toi*

*Dum gutkoon, gootkun ...
karay Saeinae*

*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*

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

Ho naa kar teeya khair piyari

Maan daindiya galaryaan

Din din talhi juwani jaandi

Joon sohna puthia lariyaan

Aurat marad, shehzaday sohney

O moti, O laa lariyaan

Sir da sarfa kar naa jairey

Peen prem pya lariyan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The song lyric interpretations and program notes were created by Arif Lohar and Zeyba Rahman.

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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