**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 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 accompaniment 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 *mela*s, 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.
**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 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
Oddi vaath naye lainda koi
Tey kalmay binna nai mildi toi
Dum gutkoon, gootkun...
karay Saeeinae

te kalma nabi da pare sain
Parhay tay kalma nabi da
Parhay saeein pir merya

Jugni taar khaein vich thaal
Chad duniya dey janjaal
Kuch ni nibna bandiya naal
Rakhi saabat sild 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 ji. Jugni ji. Jugni 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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