



HOPKINS CENTER

presents

Music Department Residency

Qawwali Masters: Sufi Music of Pakistan

Mehr Ali and Sher Ali

Post-performance discussion

You are invited to remain in the theater immediately following the performance for an informal discussion with the musicians.

This performance is made possible in part by generous support from the C. Henry Hathaway 1907 Memorial Fund No. 3; the Patricia S. and Robert A. Levinson 1946 Fund in Support of the Hopkins Center's Visiting Performing Artists Program; and the Frank L. Harrington 1924 Fund No. 3.

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Public Radio

Wednesday, April 16, 2008 • 8 pm

Rollins Chapel • Dartmouth College

QAWWALI MASTERS

Sher Ali	<i>lead singer</i>
Mehr Ali	<i>second lead</i>
Jamal Akbar	<i>vocalist</i>
Arif Ali	<i>vocalist</i>
Ejaz Ali	<i>vocalist</i>
Mubarik Ali	<i>vocalist</i>
Qamar Ali Qamar	<i>tabla percussionist</i>
Sharafat Ali	<i>accompanist</i>
Qaiser Abbas	<i>accompanist</i>

PROGRAM NOTES

About Qawwali

Strong voices and explosive hand-clapping characterize the devotional music known as *qawwali*. An ensemble of usually 12 male performers conveys a religious message through music and song based on mystic poetry by Sufi masters. The texts usually deal with divine love (*'ishq*), the sorrow of separation (*hijr, fraq*) and the union (*visal*), these concepts being symbolically reinforced and illustrated by the music. Qawwali blends Iranian and Central Asian poetic, philosophical and musical elements into a North Indian base, combining popular music with classical traditions. Following the same pattern of combination and blending, the texts cover Arabic and Persian, but the main text body is usually in a simple idiom form of Indian languages: Urdu, Hindi, Purbi and Punjabi. Qawwali is derived from the Arabic word *qaul*, literally meaning “saying” but has taken on the meaning of “belief” or “credo” in South Asian languages. Qawwali is spiritual in essence; it is the devotional music of the Sufis to attain trance and mystical experience—originating in the 10th century and blossoming into its present form from the 13th century onwards.

Qawwali is inseparable from the name of a Persian court musician, composer, poet and mystic of that

period: Amir Khusrau (1254-1325). Amir Khusrau experimented with musical forms, combining the Indian and the Persian, the Hindu Bhakti and the Muslim Sufi to produce the present form of qawwali.

Qawwali thus became a popular expression of Muslim devotion open to all faiths throughout Northern India. This form of music rapidly became a vehicle for the Islamic missionary movement in India, while at the same time reinforcing the faith of the Muslims. In many cases, the original Persian mystical text is followed by a translation in the local idiom sung in the same manner as the original. While the orthodoxy continues to reject what they perceive as a blasphemous mixture of music and religion, qawwali remains an expanding form of music enjoying universal popularity in South Asia and beyond. An even more energetic form of qawwali developed around the 16th century in the middle Indus at the crossroads between Iran, Central Asia and India. This form, called the *Punjabi ang*, presents the crystal-clear and profound texts of Punjabi Sufi poetry and folk songs woven into attractive melodies and powerful rhythms. Both Mehr Ali and Sher Ali belong to this branch of qawwali, as did the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

PROGRAM NOTES CONTINUED

The Setting

Although qawwali has today become part of mainstream music, it is traditionally a part of Sufi ritual at the shrine of a saint on a Thursday evening. Large gatherings of qawwali are held at the death anniversaries of Sufi saints, in which their death is celebrated as marriage with the Eternal (*'urs*). Qawwali groups play day and night, the best performing at the end. Qawwalis are heard by “the friends” (a term denoting members of Sufi orders) and by lay audiences attracted by the occasion. Both the audience and the musicians are all male (with the exception of women hidden from the view or on the roof), the musicians face the holy man (*pir*), who is flanked by learned and older members. A narrow aisle is left between the holy man and the performers for members of the audience to offer presents of money to the performers. The audience is seated on the floor, with the outermost circle standing. The musicians are seated in two roughly parallel rows on the floor at the same level as the audience on a circular sheet of white cotton. The back row consists of the chorus, whose members also rhythmically clap their hands, with one *tabla*-player in the middle. The front row starts with the lead singer to the right, and two accompanying singers with harmoniums to his left.

The dialogue between the audience and the musicians is central to the performance of qawwali, and the performers often repeat and dwell on portions which strike a resonant chord in the audience. The impact of vigorous hand-clapping both repetitive and forceful tends to produce in the audience a trance-like state. Persons experiencing the trance brought on by qawwali often speak of an experience of flying. Flight is also the imagery used in several Sufi texts in their endeavor to achieve divine union.

Drawing and holding the attention of a heterogeneous audience is the skill that the performers of qawwali attain. They claim that qawwali breaks the barriers of language and draws people closer to di-

vinity. They do this by attempting to alter the state of consciousness of the audience in order to make them more receptive to the content, which is of a syncretistic and mystical nature. The form has been perfected over the centuries and is claimed to lift the audience to exaltation even if they do not understand the words. Form and content are interlinked in qawwali and a complete appreciation is possible only with a knowledge of both. For example, when expressing the pain of separation from a distant beloved, the lead singer changes the music to long drawn out pieces to emphasize the distance, while words expressing union are compressed into a rapid rendition.

The Instruments

In the past, the instrumentation of qawwali was a double-headed drum (*dholak*) and a bowed lute (*sarangi*, *dilruba*) and an earthenware pot. The instrumentation today consists of a pair of hand-pumped harmoniums in the front row, supported by either a *dholak* or a pair of drums (*tabla*) in the middle of the second row. The larger left drum of the *tabla* is given a coating of freshly-kneaded dough (*atta*) in the center to give it more resonance. In the case of the *dholak*, the inside of the membrane on the left side is coated on the inside with a special glue mixed with oil (*bhed*) for the same effect. A large earthenware pot (*ghara*) is sometimes also used for the rhythm with anklets tied on the wrist of the pot player (*ghungru*), as well as the iron rings on the fingers to strike the side of the pot. A booming sound is created by striking the mouth of the pot with the open hand, sharp percussive sounds by hitting the rings against the sides and the tinkling of bells by shaking the wrist in mid-air. Clapping by the performers in the second row completes the instrumentation.

The Music

The qawwali opens with instruments playing the main tune of the piece to be performed, the *naghma*.

PROGRAM NOTES CONTINUED

The *naghma* permits musicians to tune their instruments and to develop a musical consensus, in which the base reference note is also defined. The *naghma* also introduces to the audience the main elements of the melody to follow, except sometimes for an enclosed cycle of melody within the main cycle. In the course of the *naghma*, the harmoniums, accompanied by the drums and claps, have an opportunity to show their art and skill in the absence of voice. The beat also follows the main rhythm cycle used in the main body of the item and is fast. The *naghma* ends with an abrupt silence. In the silence, the lead singer may tell the audience about the item he is going to present. The silence can be gently broken by a very short singing without any words or rhythm (*alap*).

When words appear for the first time, they present a Persian quatrain, (*ruba'i*) or a Punjabi couplet, the *dohra*. Technically, the *ruba'i* is the Farsi term for a quatrain with a specific meter and rhythmic pattern. In qawwali however, it may be any number of lines in any of the qawwali languages. The *ruba'i* or *dohra* opens with a couplet sung by the lead singer with the harmonium; the claps and drums are muted. The couplet is repeated by the main accompanist. The content of the *ruba'i* is linked to that of the main qawwali, but is usually the work of another poet. The *ruba'i* also establishes the general mood of the qawwali, which picks up from the *ruba'i* with a startling entry by the drum, followed a few beats later with the entire clapping ensemble.

The main qawwali starts in a moderate or slow beat (*vilampat*) and finally develops to a faster tempo (*drut*). There is one major refrain (*takrar*) throughout the qawwali and it is this refrain that gives any particular qawwali its name. The qawwal generally chooses one text by a single poet (a *ghazal* by Amir Khusrau in Persian, a *kafi* by Bullhe Shah in Punjabi, or any contemporary poet). However, couplets from other poems by the same poet are permitted in the main text. If a couplet or line is taken from any oth-

er poet and chosen to highlight the concept or feeling being conveyed in one part of the main text, this auxiliary verse is known as *girah* (literally, a knot). The *girah* is usually delivered as an intensive emotional interjection. *Girahs* are often more of a chanted recitation than a tune, although the same beat is retained; however, an accomplished accompanying singer can present a *girah* in a specific *raga*, usually the pentatonic *pahari*, though other ragas can also be used. The lead qawwal launches a refrain and hands it over to the chorus while resting and preparing for his next solo entry, which is either a *girah* or the next couplet of the main text. The *girah* repertoire ranges from couplets from Amir Khusrau, Usman Marvandi, Bu 'Ali Qalandar, Bullhe Shah and Shah Husain to those composed by the main singer himself or even a "divine" inspiration (*amad*) during the qawwali.

The development of the qawwali follows the normal pattern of the song in North Indian music: the composed piece in both instrumental and vocal music generally has two sections, *astai* and *antara*. The former is the main part of the composition and is said to be usually limited to the lower and middle register, while the *antara* extends from the middle to the upper registers.

Below are two examples of qawwali:

I am Alone Without My Lover

(Desert song of mystic separation, using the simple idiom of a village girl in love - by Ghulam Farid, 19th century Sufi poet)

Clasp your hands in prayer,
may desire for lovers not arise!
In disguise, I walk through the carnival,
I'm bored by my female companions
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
I can't carry on without my lover
Pay no heed to the water of Bahrein
Let this free woman have her separated lover
Pay no heed to Makhdum Hussain

PROGRAM NOTES CONTINUED

I am alone without my lover
Without the beloved, I am solitary
I gave up my honor and lost my fortune
Roaming lonely in the streets
I am alone without my lover
Without the beloved, I am solitary
Oh, Farid, love is exquisite torment
These days, I have sent my lover away
I am alone without my lover.

From this color, I have become colorless
Friend Farid, in a house without a lover
Go and see the desolation
I am alone without my lover
Without my dark lover, life is a torment
I am desolate, the world is happy
I am alone, without my lover
Without the beloved, I am solitary
I am alone without my lover
The desire for separated friends
Awakens my hidden sorrows
With every blink, because of the foreigner
The summer rain touches my eyes
Allah knows the waiting of years gone by
Say, Farid: "May those homes be happy where
lovers meet"
I am alone without my lover
Without the beloved, I am solitary
I am alone without my lover
Oh, Great Creator,
pay no heed to the king of the east
Of the night when you met
your friend in the heavens
Pay no heed to the Ka'ba
No, I can't go on
Oh, I can't go on without my beloved
No, I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
Oh, powerful God, to tell you the truth
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
If your lover leaves, then you will know what
separation means
You will have to tell the world, the heart is not

happy without the lover
Either bring me my lover or destroy me,
I don't want to live in this world
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
Oh, my lover, what will you take today for my
looking at you to my heart's content?
Oh, lover, oh beautiful one,
have some pity, come now
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
Oh, lover, I say to God
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
Keep paradise to yourself
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
Oh, lover, prove some cruelty of this unfortunate
woman if you don't come
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
And I am yours, my cruelties are yours,
come and don't delay
Let our love not see the morning light,
show me your face now
I entreat the Kazi, Saint and Fakir,
take me crying in your arms
Oh I can't go on, no, no I can't go on
Oh, girlfriends, share my pain,
find a successful ruse
Love, Love, Love
Oh, my girl-friends I am betrothed
to my lover Ranjha
I, the betrothed of my Ranjha, I, I
To this my God and prophet is witness
I, the betrothed of my Ranjha, I, I
The Lying Mullah dispenses false edicts
I, the betrothed of my Ranjha, I, I
Oh, I was divided at the time of creation
I, the betrothed of my Ranjha, I, I
The woman Hir sent a message to the Kadi:
"Why the anger at my herdsman?
Know him not as a herdsman, but as the pure one
This herdsman is the king of eternity
Your musk, amber and sandalwood
Are but dust under the feet of my herdsman"
Hir has made Ranjha her God

PROGRAM NOTES CONTINUED

The lying world merely Babbles
I, the betrothed of my Ranjha, I, I
I will not sit in the wedding palanquin
of the Kheras
No, no
My heart is not there
I, the betrothed of my Ranjha, I, I
I have become the betrothed of Ranjha
My father forces me
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
For the people, love seems easy
My all-consuming love leaves nothing behind
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
For the people he seems a herdsman
He is the Mecca of my heart
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
Bullhe Shah has spoken the truth
And Shah Inayat is his master, girl
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
The yearning love of the spinning girl endures
Love, love,
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless

Girl, The Spinning Wheel of Mine is Priceless

(Based on a poem of the Sufi Poet Bullhe Shah (1680-1753), the spinning wheel symbolizes the unity of existence and being)

Oh, ignorant one, know the spinning wheel
Don't set it in motion, lest there be chaos
Put the filament of sincere conviction on the

spindle
and make yourself the pivot of perception
Buy wool in that one's name and
prepare it with grace
Spin the wave of love incessantly
For who knows which thread will be favored
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
Many died seeking God, but none touched me to
illuminate me
Bullhe Shah, I am devoted to him,
who sat with me and explained it
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
The yearning love of the spinning girl endures
O king, you seek outside,
but your friends have blinded you
When I look, my friend is inside me
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
Beyond the Mecca, beyond the monastery,
I sought him everywhere
Now it dawns on me that I must knock
on the door of my heart
If the beloved is not in the heart, there is nothing
If the friend is not at home, there is nothing
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
This the wise people say
Girl, this spinning wheel of mine is priceless
The yearning love of the spinning girl endures
Love, Love, Love
(I give you knowledge, understand this)
The yearning love of the spinning girl endures

*Excerpted and edited from the liner notes from the recording
Qawwali, the Essence of Desire by Adam Nayyar*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The music of this group has its origins with the Talvandi classical school of Hindustani music. **Mehr** and **Sher Ali** were born in the Pakistani border-town of Kasur in the early 1950s and received their earlier training in classical music from their

father, who was a court classical singer at the small Sikh principality of Patiala (now in India). Their father then became the disciple of Fateh Ali Khan, the father of the famous Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and young Sher Ali was the student of Bakhshi Salamat

ABOUT THE ARTISTS CONTINUED

Ali Qawwal. Mehr Ali and Sher Ali thus acknowledge that the family of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is their *Ustad Gharana* or “Teacher House,” a term imbued with veneration among musician circles in Pakistan and North India. Mehr Ali was taught by Muhammad Ali Fareedi, an ordained Sufi qawwal of the shrine of the 13th century Sufi, Baba Farid. Mehr Ali was thus trained in Sufi philosophy, poetry, texts and rituals.

All qawwals must have a deep knowledge of Sufi poetic texts. In practice, this often means sacrificing musical quality to retain purity of text. Mehr and Sher are qawwals who have achieved the rare combination of both musical quality and authentic text rendition: Sher is known for his ability to understand the importance of rhythm (*lai-kari*) and render classical modes in a strong voice, while Mehr’s heart-rending high-pitched voice strikes the heart when the poetry contains words of entreaty or sorrow. The drummer, The late *tabla* drummer Amjad Ali generated more classical detail on his *tabla* than was normally expected of a *qawwali tabla* and used to say, “I strive to recite poetry with my hands.”

After Amjad’s sudden death while playing during a religious concert in Lahore in 2000, the Ali brothers immediately took his son Qamar Ali into their ensemble. Seven years later, 33-year old Qamar has blossomed into a musician who welds the group together with his virtuosity. Over the past decade, the traditional practice of absorbing young musicians from the family continues. Thus Mehr Ali’s son, 28-year old Mubarak Ali and Sher Ali’s son, 24-year old Ejaz Ali, are both now part of the ensemble. “I’m almost 60 and my younger brother Sher Ali is past 55,” says Mehr Ali. “It is befitting that our children learn what we know and carry both the message and the music forward.”

In 2008, the ensemble is a harmonious balance of experience and vigor with the capacity to grow into the future. The musical quality of the group has matured to a high art. The audience is treated to a musical and phrasal symmetry with Mehr Ali, Sher Ali and his son Ejaz on the left calling out the lines, followed by a powerful response from younger musicians at the other end of the front line.

The group feels that their music brings harmony and peace to the soul and projects the message of love and unity for all. “We sometimes go into a trance during our performance, so moved are we by the text and music,” says Mehr Ali. They believe that qawwali goes beyond the limitations of orthodox religion and is a universal invitation to all living beings to share in the feelings of the powerful emotion of pure love, the pain of separation and the joy of union.

This is Mehr and Sher Ali’s first performance at the Hopkins Center.

Adam Nayyar is executive director at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts in Islamabad, Pakistan. He was co-organizer of the Festival du Pakistan at Avignon, France in 1984. He worked as the ethnomusicologist for the prize-winning (Florence 1986) film *Musiques du Pakistan* (Les Films du Village, Paris 1985), and *Pardesi* (EthnieVisions Paris 1993), which received honorable mention at the Cannes Film Festival in the Musical Documentary category. Nayyar has authored and co-produced two audio compact discs (Buda Music Paris 1995, 1996) on qawwali and liturgical music of Pakistan. His published works on music include *Women in Folk Theatre*, and qawwali and program documentation for a series of international concerts. He has lectured extensively on the traditional music of Pakistan in Japan, Germany, the U.K. and France.

CONNECTING HOP ARTISTS TO THE COMMUNITY

At Dartmouth, members of Qawwali Masters visited several Music Department classes; joined area musicians for a devotional music exchange; performed in two local schools and for Dartmouth students; gave a lecture/demonstration exploring the social and religious context of qawwali; and participate in a post-performance discussion. For more info on Hop Outreach & Arts Education, call 603.646.2010 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu.

COMING EVENTS

For tickets or information call the Box Office at 603.646.2422 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu.

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White White Black Stork

A haunting tale of forbidden love by the renowned Uzbek theater company.

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