



HOPKINS CENTER  
FOR THE ARTS

presents

# Riyaz Qawwali

Programmed in collaboration with Dartmouth's MLK Jr. Celebration

Post-performance discussion with the artists

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*Funded in part by the Wetzel Family Fund for the Arts and the Visiting Performing Artist Fund.*

Fri • January 19, 2018 • 8 pm  
Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College

# Program

Musical selections will be announced from the stage. This performance is presented without intermission.

Performers include numerous vocalists and perform on the following instruments:  
harmonium, *tabla*, *dholak*, *cabassa*, *cajone*, *chimta* and *shunkh*.

## Program Notes

*Qawwali* is a venerable yet refreshing musical tradition that dates back to the late 13th century. The word *qaul* refers to an “utterance (of the prophet),” and the first *qawwals* (*qawwali* artists) repeated these *qauls* by making them the subject matter of their *qawwalis*. *Qawwali* is an amazing genre of music, with lively rhythmic cycles, gripping melodies and a unique approach to adding improvisational poetry.

The songs which constitute the *qawwali* repertoire are mostly in Urdu and Punjabi (almost equally divided between the two), although there are several songs in Braj Bhasha and Persian. The poetry is implicitly understood to be spiritual in its meaning and the central themes are love, devotion and longing (for the Divine). *Qawwalis* are classified by their content into several categories:

**Hamd:** praise for Allah

**Naat:** praise for the Prophet Muhammad

**Manqabat:** praise for either Imam Ali or one of the Sufi saints

**Marsiya:** dirge lamenting the death of much of Imam Husayn’s family in the Battle of Karbala

**Kafi:** devotional poem on the theme of heroic and romantic folk tales, often used as a metaphor for mystical truths, with spiritual longing characterized by a musical refrain that sets a mood much like in a *ghazal*

**Munadjaat:** song where the singer displays his gratitude to Allah through a variety of linguistic techniques

**Ghazal:** poetic form consisting of rhyming couplets and a refrain. Although the *ghazal* is most prominently a form of Persian and Urdu poetry, today it is found in the poetry of many languages.

In addition to paying homage to traditional *qawwali*, Riyaz Qawwali also weaves various South Asian songs and poems into the *qawwali* framework, using *qawwali* as a universal message of oneness that transcends religious boundaries:

**Bhajan:** the bhakti movement of Hindu devotion

**Shabad:** hymn or paragraph or sections that appear in the Guru Granth Sahib (holy text of Sikhism)

While the name of a *qawwali* ensemble is usually tied with the lead singer (or *qawwal*), Riyaz Qawwali is not the name of the group’s leader, and the ensemble aims to move away from specific backgrounds of the musicians so as to concentrate on the devotional music. The word *riyaz* means “to practice.” The practice refers to the many audiences (literal and figurative) that a musician aims to please through his musical journey, including the musician’s teacher or *guru* (also called the *ustad*), the audience, and the spirit above. Because of *qawwali*’s interactive nature, the audience plays a large part in the concert.

# About the Artists

Riyaz Qawwali's mission is to expose *qawwali* to new audiences, while still paying homage to traditional *qawwali* that has been in existence for 700+ years. The ensemble wants to expand the reach of the genre to new venues and people of other faiths and traditions. The founding members of Riyaz Qawwali chose *qawwali* because it houses unique musical elements in its repertoire not found in any other form of South Asian music. Riyaz Qawwali combines this with poetry from famous South Asian poets of multiple linguistic and religious backgrounds to create a universal message of oneness. Riyaz Qawwali incorporates works from poetic giants like Mirza Ghalib, Amir Khusrow, Bulleh Shah, Mir Taqi Mir, Sant Kabir and Guru Nanak, and in doing so, hopes to expose these poets' works to new audiences and younger generations. Riyaz Qawwali also uses numerous languages to represent the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in South Asia. These languages include Urdu, Punjabi, Persian, Gujarati and Hindi.

As an ensemble, Riyaz Qawwali represents the unique diversity and plurality of South Asia. Most *qawwali* troupes are composed of Muslim family members, but Riyaz Qawwali is composed of musicians who, while settled in the United States, represent the diversity of South and Central Asia; they are of Indian, Pakistani, Afghani and Bangladeshi descent, and come from various religious and spiritual backgrounds, including Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. Trained in Eastern and Western classical music, the group has been professionally performing *qawwali* for a decade, appearing across the US at such venues and festivals as the Asia Society (Texas), the 2015 GlobalFEST and the Richmond (VA) Folk Festival. The ensemble is under the artistic direction of Sonny Mehta, its lead vocalist, whose musical influences include Ravi Shankar, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Sher and Mehr Ali, Jagjit Singh, Pandit Jasraj, Bhimsen Joshi and Abida Parveen. This is Riyaz Qawwali's first engagement at the Hopkins Center for the Arts.

# Connecting Artists to the Community

*While at Dartmouth, Riyaz Qawwali visited classes in the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and Music departments, performed for students and faculty at an Interfaith dinner hosted by the Tucker Center and Living Learning Communities, met with students from the Al Nur Muslim Student Association, and will participate in a post-performance discussion. For more information on Hop Outreach & Arts Education, call 603.646.2010 or visit [hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach](http://hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach).*

# Upcoming Events



## ***Jabber* by Geordie Productions**

Sun • February 4 • 2 pm

Fast-paced drama probes teens' struggles with social media and culture-based bullying.

*Recommended for ages 12 and up.*



## **World Music Percussion Ensemble**

Hafiz Shabazz, director

Sat • February 17 • 8 pm

Contemporary music and dance styles from Africa and Latin America.



For tickets or more info, call the Box Office at 603.646.2422 or visit [hop.dartmouth.edu](http://hop.dartmouth.edu). Share your experiences! #HopkinsCenter

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