

Conversations Across Cultures

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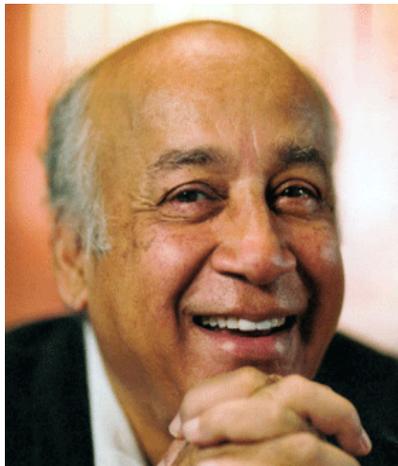
Conversations Across Cultures
SOUTH ASIAN IMAGINARIES
Art, Film and Music from South Asia
Symposium, exhibition & concert.
October 31— November 1, 2008

Music Panel

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Shirish Korde, composer
Peter Manuel, ethnomusicologist
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Shirish Korde, composer



Shirish Korde is a composer of Indian descent who spent his early years in East Africa. He arrived in the United States in 1965, already well versed in the traditions of Indian and African music. He studied Jazz at Berklee College of Music, composition and

analysis with Robert Cogan at New England Conservatory, and Ethnomusicology, especially

Asian Music (including Indian drumming with Sharda Sahai), at Brown University. Currently, he is Professor of Music at the College of the Holy Cross.

Shirish Korde is celebrated for "integrating and synthesizing music of diverse cultures into breathtaking works of complex expressive layers" Musical America. He is among "a few contemporary composers who have been deeply touched by music of non-Western cultures, Jazz, and computer technology and who has created a powerful and communicative compositional language" Computer Music Journal. His distinctive music has been performed throughout the U.S. and Europe. Shirish Korde's compositions are characterized by a life-long search for a personal musical language, which is characterized by the influences of diverse musical traditions ranging from the throat singers of Tuva, and Vedic chanting of India, to the shimmering colors of the Balinese Gamelan. His close collaborations with musicians from diverse musical traditions are a hallmark of his distinctive voice. The recent violin concerto, Svara-Yantra, a collaboration with virtuoso violinist, Joanna Kurkowicz, and master tabla player, Samir Chatterjee, was premiered in Katowice, Poland by the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in the fall of 2005. A reviewer called Svara-Yantra "a haunting work, richly imbued with Indian colors and musical tradition, which offers something unique and powerful with all manner of exotic and imaginative texture and color from both soloist and orchestra."

Svara-Yantra was performed by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in Wellington at the Asia Pacific Festival in New Zealand in February 2007, and the Koszalin Philharmonic in Poland in June 2007. This work was recently released on the Chandos label as an mp3 and is available as a CD on Amazon.com and Neuma Records. Nesting Cranes, for flute and string orchestra, was premiered in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Music NOW series by flutist, Jennifer Gunn, under the direction of Ludovic Morlot, in April of 2007. A song cycle based on the life of Phoolan Devi, India's Bandit Queen, which combines the classical traditions of North and South India with contemporary musical techniques was premiered by Da Capo Chamber Players at Merkin Hall, New York in June 2006. In the 2007-8 season, the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra gave the U.S. Premiere of Svara-Yantra. There were several performances throughout Massachusetts under

the direction of Ben Zander, featuring violinist Joanna Kurkowicz and tabla master Samir Chatterjee. In May 2008, the Boston Musica Viva presented the world premiere of *Songs of Ecstasy* featuring Zorana Sadiq, soprano, chamber ensemble and Indian classical dancer, Wendy Jehlen, at Tsai Performance Center at Boston University. The Da Capo Chamber Players of New York played Korde's commissioned work, *Blue Topeng 2*, for chamber ensemble and Balinese Gamelan soloists in a series of concerts in the spring of 2008 in New York. Peggy Pierson and Windsor Music will premiere a new oboe quartet in their series in Lexington, MA in the spring of 2009.

Presentation Abstract

Raga, Tala & Rasa

In my presentation, I will discuss three of my recent compositions including the two chamber operas *Rasa* and *Chitra*, and my violin concerto - *Svara-Yantra*.

Since 1991, I have composed five large scale music theater works that explore in different ways musical and theatrical genres of Asia, and especially India. *Rasa* (1991), a chamber opera for soprano, choir chamber ensemble, and ten actors/dancers is based on the highly acclaimed novel, *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee. *Jasmine* is the story of an Indian immigrant woman's odyssey from a village in India to the U. S. and the many transformations that she goes through. Vedic Chant and music of Tuva, overtone singing, rhythmic compositions for tabla and South Indian Dance, Jazz and computer generated as well as computer sampled sounds are seamlessly integrated into the score to portray the many transformations that Jasmine, the heroine, undergoes. *Rasa* was revised and expanded in 1998 with a generous grant from the NEA. It was presented at Miller Theatre, Columbia University in the fall of 1998 as part of the Sonic Boom Festival.(see score/CD and CD ROM).

Chitra, is an opera/dance drama. It was commissioned by the Boston Musica Viva and the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University, and was presented at the Tsai Performance Center, in Boston in 2003. *Chitra*, which is based on a play by Rabindranath Tagore, is a seventy-five minute work and features a virtuoso soprano (narrator), a Bharat Natyaman (Indian Classical) Dancer, and

a Balinese Shadow Puppet Master/Dancer. The work synthesizes elements of Indian (Sanskrit) Drama and Balinese Shadow Puppet Theatre. The score draws formally on structures of North Indian Music: Alap, Tabla compositions, Ragas, and Ghazal as well as Balinese Musical Styles, the Kecak Monkey Chant and the vocal styles of the Balinese Dalang. Chitra texts are set in several languages: Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Balinese (Kawi), and English. *Chitra* was presented by the Fleet Boston Celebrity Series in 2003 in Boston.

Svara Yantra, a double-concerto for violin, tabla and orchestra, explicitly explores notions of Raga and Tala in a multi-movement work. This work which is a synthesis of contemporary musical techniques, Indian music and elements of Jazz was premiered in Poland in 2005. *Svara Yantra* represents my most recent exploration of Indian musical ideas in the context of a Western symphony orchestra.

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Peter Manuel, ethnomusicologist



Peter Manuel teaches ethnomusicology at John Jay College and the CUNY Graduate Center. He has researched and published extensively on musics of India, the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, the Spanish Caribbean, and elsewhere.

Three of his books have earned prestigious awards. An amateur sitarist, jazz pianist, and flamenco guitarist, he teaches seminars on Indian music, Latin American music, world popular music, aesthetics, and other topics. His books include *East Indian Music in the West Indies: Tan-singing, Chutney, and the Making of*

Indo-Caribbean Culture (Temple University Press, 2000; winner of the Caribbean Studies Association 2001 Gordon K. Lewis Best Book Award), Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae. (Temple University Press, 1995, with Michael Largey and Ken Bilby; winner of the Caribbean Studies Association 1996 Gordon K. Lewis Best Book Award, and "Outstanding Academic Book" award of Choice 1996, 2nd edition, 2006), Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; also co-published by Oxford University Press – India, 2001), Essays on Cuban Music: North American and Cuban Perspectives. (University Press of America, 1991), Thumri in Historical and Stylistic Perspectives. (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), and Popular Musics of the Non-Western World: An Introductory Survey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; winner of an Ascap-Deems Taylor Award).

Presentation Abstract

North Indian Sufi Popular Music in the Age of Hindu and Muslim Fundamentalism

In the last five years the North Indian music scene has been enlivened by the rise of a variety of self-described Sufi music genres, which coexist with more traditional forms of Sufi music such as devotional qawwali. This development is best appreciated in the context of two broader socio-historical trends of the last twenty years. One is the exponential growth of the Indian bourgeoisie, as enabled by economic liberalization policies. The other is the growth and entrenchment of the Hindutva movement, animated by an implicit or explicit antagonism toward Muslims. In the wake of these trends has emerged a fresh elite interest in traditional genres like qawwali and Punjabi Sufi song, as well as the advent of a panoply of new or newly categorized genres including Sufi rock, Sufi khyal, Sufi tappa, Sufi kathak, Sufi new-age music, Sufi dholak playing, Sufi ragas on sarod, and Sufi bharat natyam.

In this presentation I survey these developments and aspects of the controversy they have inspired. For detractors, the Sufi music vogue is a shallow, elite-oriented commercial fad having little to do with the essence of Sufism, lacking any basis in tradition, largely neglecting hereditary performers, and promoting a superficial tokenism rather than a genuine and

informed appreciation of Islam and Muslims. For defenders, the new Sufi music forms reflect a healthy and progressive reaction against intolerant fundamentalism as well as an aesthetic openness suited to the sensibilities of a newly expanded, self-conscious, and cosmopolitan upper class.

Contact & Affiliation

Peter Manuel

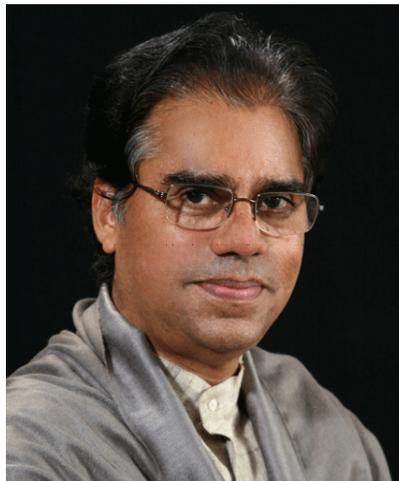
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Joseph Palackal, ethnomusicologist



Joseph Palackal is an Indic musicologist, singer, and composer. He earned degrees in Hindustani classical vocal music, psychology, and Christian theology in India and a doctorate in Ethnomusicology from the Graduate Center of the City

University of New York. His scholarly interests are in the area of music and religion in South Asia. He has contributed articles to several international publications, including The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, and the Garland Encyclopedia of World Music. He is principal vocalist for over thirty releases in five languages. He made his debut in New York in the off-Broadway show Nonsense, and has lectured at the Julliard School and Columbia University. He is also the founder president of the Christian Musicological Society of India. Currently, he is completing his book on the Syriac chant traditions in South India.

Presentation Abstract

Kerala, the Cradle of Christianity in South

Asia: The Cultural Interface of Music and Religion

The six million Christians in Kerala, on the southwest coast of India, follow a variety of liturgical and musical traditions some of which date back to the early Christian era. This film explores the historical embeddedness of these traditions that came about as a result of the region's commercial, cultural, and religious interactions with the Middle East, Europe, and America. The narrative follows the events that led to the introduction of the Chaldean, Antiochene, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other liturgies along with the musical styles associated with them. Over the centuries, these styles have become an integral part of the musical mosaic of Kerala. A renewed attempt in the recent past to interpret Christianity in Indian terms has contributed to adaptations of semi-classical and bhajan styles of music into Christian worship. The film documents excerpts from the current practice of chants in East Syriac, West Syriac, Latin, Sanskrit, English, and Malayalam. The film also showcases a unique performance context in which Hindu instrumental ensembles share space in a church festival, indicating the extent of religious harmony that exists in the region; the festival includes several ritual elements that the Portuguese missionaries introduced in the sixteenth century. Drawing attention to the lesser known aspects of the religious, musical, and linguistic complexity of the region, the film presents yet another reason to call Kerala as "God's own country."

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