



# Shadaj Music Festival

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Lexington High School, Lexington, MA



[www.shadaj.org](http://www.shadaj.org)



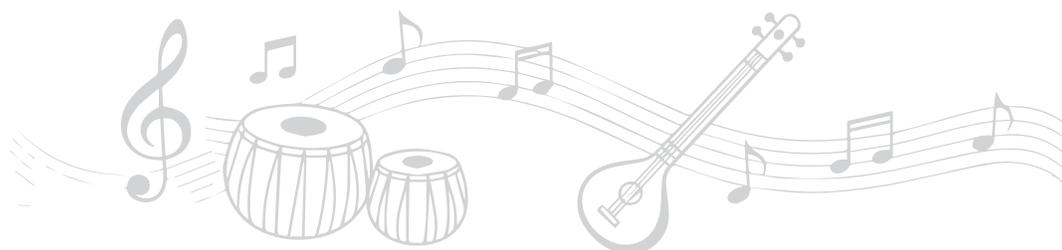
## Mission and Vision

Shadaj, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, aspires to preserve and nurture a rich classical music heritage that has drawn together people of diverse traditions over centuries.

Shadaj's mission is to cultivate, nurture and promote Indian Classical Music in its most authentic form through intimate concerts, music appreciation sessions, open mic sessions as a platform for cultural integration and community outreach. We believe that cultural exchange through music is a great way to build our community and serve the next generation.

## Activities

1. **Baithak Style Music Concerts:** In an intimate Baithak setting, the artist and the audience experience the music together, and the performance can reach great heights, an experience often lost in large halls. Shadaj events feature some of the world's most revered and celebrated Indian classical virtuosos.
2. **Annual Shadaj Music Festival:** Shadaj Music Festival is a very popular annual event attended in large numbers by diverse communities, a wonderful platform for cultural integration through music.
3. **Music appreciation sessions, lecture-demonstrations, and dialogue with the artist:** These sessions provide the audience a unique opportunity to learn about the intricacies of music in an interactive session with the artist.
4. **Open Mic Sessions:** This is Shadaj platform for talented local musicians and advanced students of music to showcase their creative side. This is a great ecosystem for emerging musicians to gain performance experience while building an active community of students and listeners.
5. **Teaching Music:** Shadaj offers students a unique opportunity to study Indian Classical Music with both local teachers and visiting master musicians from India.
6. **Community outreach and cultural integration through music:** Shadaj actively engages with diverse communities by hosting outreach events through collaborations with organizations such as Berklee School of Music, Handel and Haydn Society, Lexington Community Education, Lexington Public Schools and Lexington Symphony.





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MAURA T. HEALEY  
GOVERNOR

KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

March 2026

Dear Friends:

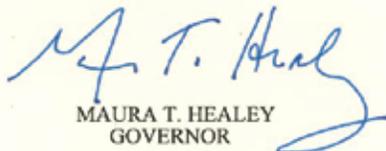
On behalf of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Lieutenant Governor Driscoll and I welcome you to the Shadaj Music Festival, an annual celebration of Indian classical music.

Shadaj, Inc. has long served as a steward of artistic excellence, dedicating its resources to the preservation and promotion of Indian classical music throughout the Greater Boston area. Over the past decade, the organization has fostered cultural exchange through intimate concerts, music appreciation sessions, open mic sessions and community outreach events, presenting over 200 concerts and programs featuring many of the world's most distinguished musicians.

Lieutenant Governor Driscoll and I recognize the contributions Shadaj, Inc. has made to the enrichment of Massachusetts' cultural landscape. This organization has strengthened community bonds and advanced cross-cultural understanding to serve future generations. This annual festival stands as a testament to the power of music in connecting traditions, inspiring dialogue and deepening an appreciation for a shared cultural heritage.

Lieutenant Governor Driscoll and I are thrilled to support the 2026 Shadaj Music Festival. We extend our appreciation to the organizers and performers for their continued dedication to the arts and our warm wishes to all in attendance for a meaningful and memorable celebration.

Sincerely,

  
MAURA T. HEALEY  
GOVERNOR

  
KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

# Shadaj Music Festival

Saturday, March 28, 2026

## Program Schedule

10 AM - 11 AM Registration

### **Concert 1**

11 AM - 1 PM **Dr Ashwini Bhide Deshpande** (Vocal),  
Sanjay Deshpande (Tabla), Abhishek Shinkar (Harmonium)

1 PM - 2 PM Lunch break

### **Concert 2**

2 PM - 3:30 PM **Pratik Shrivastava** (Sarod),  
Tejavrush Joshi (Tabla)

3:30 PM - 4 PM Tea break

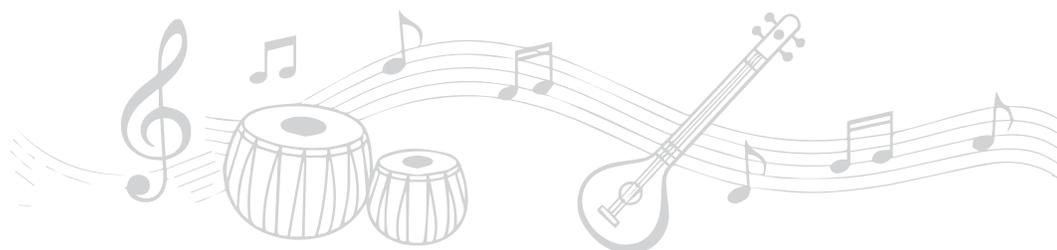
### **Concert 3**

4 PM - 6 PM **Rakesh Chaurasia** (Flute),  
Amit Kavthekar (Tabla)

6 PM - 7:30 PM Dinner break

### **Concert 4**

7:30 PM - 9:30 PM **Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty** (Vocal),  
Gourab Chatterjee (Harmonium), Soumen Sarkar (Tabla),  
Meher Paralikar (Vocal)



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## Message from the Chairperson

It is with great pleasure and a deep sense of gratitude that I welcome you to the Annual Shadaj Music Festival 2026.

“Music is enough for a lifetime, but a lifetime is not enough for music,” reflected Sergei Rachmaninoff. In the Indian tradition, this truth is lived rather than stated. Music breathes through our rituals and celebrations, our moments of devotion and reflection, shaping not only how we listen, but how we live. Shadaj was born from this understanding — to carry this living tradition across oceans and generations, and to keep its flame gently, yet resolutely, alight.

The spirit of this festival lies in the meeting of many voices and paths, vocal and instrumental, each distinct yet bound by a shared reverence for the classical form. Today, we are honored to present artists whose artistry embodies both depth and continuity: Padma Bhushan Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty, Pratik Shrivastav, Grammy Award–winner Rakesh Chaurasia, and Padma Shri Vidushi Dr. Ashwini Bhide Deshpande.

Such an offering is never the work of a few. It is shaped by the quiet dedication of our committee members, the support of their families, and the tireless service of our volunteers, whose unseen efforts give this festival its life and grace. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to our audience, whose enthusiastic response to last year’s festival inspired us to make this gathering an annual celebration. I extend my sincere thanks as well to our collaborators, patrons, donors, and sponsors for their enduring faith in our mission.

May this day of music offer stillness, wonder, and moments of shared transcendence.

### **Shriniwas Sane**

Chairman, 2026 Shadaj Music Festival



## Artist Profiles

### Vidushi Ashwini Bhide - Deshpande

Vidushi Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande stands as one of the most luminous voices of Hindustani classical music — an artist in whom discipline dissolves into poetry and the architecture of a *raga* is transformed into pure emotional experience. Rooted deeply in the illustrious Jaipur-Atrauli *gharana*, Ashwini-ji's brilliance revealed itself early: she completed her *Sangeet Visharad* at just sixteen and soon afterward won the President's Gold Medal at the All India Radio Music Competition, marking the rise of a prodigious new talent.

Her early training under Pandit Narayanrao Datar, followed by the uncompromising guidance of her mother and *guru*, Smt. Manik Bhide, and the profound mentorship of Jaipur stalwart Pandit Ratnakar Pai, shaped an artist with a flawless command of complex *raga* design-and the imagination to illuminate it from within. In her *khayal*, structure becomes sculpture: each phrase carved with precision, each movement glowing with quiet, meditative intensity. Her voice can stretch the horizon with a single expansive *aakar*, then fall into a whisper that seems to breathe the *raga's* innermost secret. Equally compelling in *thumri*, *dadra*, *abhangs*, and *Sanskrit stotras*, Ashwini-ji brings a rare purity of intention to every form she touches. As a composer, she has enriched the living tradition through her revered *bandish* collections Ragarachananjali, cherished for their lyrical elegance and structural integrity. Honored with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the Rashtriya Kumar Gandharva Samman, and the Padma Shri, Vidushi Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande remains one of the most transformative and visionary voices of our time — an artist whose music does not merely render a *raga*, but reveals its soul.



### Sanjay Deshpande

Sanjay Deshpande is a *tabla* virtuoso whose music flows with both precision and poetry — a rhythmic journey where discipline meets devotion. Born into a musically rich family in Pune, he began his training under Pandit P.V. Sabade before undergoing years of rigorous *taalim* with Pandit Suresh Talwalkar of the Farukhabad *gharana*. His art was further shaped by the legendary Ustad Allarakha Qureshi, and today he continues to refine his craft under Pandit Yogesh Samsi and Pandit Vivek Joshi.

A recipient of the Ahmedjan Thirakwa Scholarship for solo excellence, Sanjay-ji has performed at premier festivals including Sawai Gandharva, ITC Sangeet Sammelan, and Dover Lane, and has toured widely across North America, Europe, and Asia.

Equally admired as an accompanist and soloist, he has performed with India's foremost vocalists — among them Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, Dr. Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande, and Smt. Vasundhara Komkali — and is a regular, cherished presence at Shadaj concerts.

Through his teaching and his acclaimed cross-cultural collaborations such as Wind from Ayuta, Sanjay-ji continues to expand the *tabla's* voice — at once thunderous, meditative, and deeply human.

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## Siddhesh Bicholkar

Siddhesh Bicholkar is one of India's most accomplished young harmonium artists, celebrated for his lyrical phrasing, tonal richness, and sensitive artistry. Immersed in music from childhood, he began his training under Shri Sharad Mathkar, and later came under the tutelage of the legendary Pandit Tulsidas Borkar, whose mentorship shaped his command of both solo and accompaniment traditions in Hindustani music.



Inspired by his first *guru*, Siddhesh-ji also took up the rare and intricate art of the Jaltarang, a path few contemporary musicians pursue. With an instrument personally crafted by Shri Mathkar, he has brought renewed attention to this delicate and mesmerizing form, presenting Jaltarang recitals alongside his acclaimed harmonium performances.

Recipient of several prestigious music scholarships and government accolades, Siddhesh-ji is currently a faculty member at Sharda Sangeet Vidyalaya, Mumbai, where he continues to mentor aspiring musicians. His music is marked by a balance of precision and poetry — the quiet confidence of an artist deeply rooted in tradition yet unafraid to explore new soundscapes.

## Pratik Shrivastava



Pratik Shrivastava is one of the most striking young voices of the *sarod* today — an artist celebrated for his crystal-clear *taans*, superb *layakari*, and a rare ability to let the instrument sing with vocal fluidity. Born into a distinguished musical family in Kolkata, Pratik-ji was initiated into the *sarod*'s discipline and devotion by his grandfather Pandit Rabi Chakraborty, and later guided by his uncle Dr. Rajeeb Chakraborty, both esteemed exponents of the Maihar *gharana*. This early grounding gave him both lineage and a fearless instinct for exploration.

Pratik-ji began touring internationally as a teenager, earning awards and representing India at the International Children's Festival in Amman, Jordan, where his artistry drew early acclaim. Today, he continues to refine his craft under two towering mentors — vocal maestro Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty and *sarod* virtuoso Pandit Tejendra Narayan Majumdar — absorbing the full breadth of both *gayaki* and *tantrakari* traditions.

His musical imagination is wide and curious: alongside Hindustani classical music of the North and South, Pratik-ji draws inspiration from jazz, flamenco, and psytrance, influences that subtly color his creativity while remaining anchored in classical discipline.

With a *sarod* voice that can meditate in stillness or blaze with rhythmic brilliance, Pratik Shrivastava stands among the most compelling young torchbearers of the Maihar tradition — a musician shaped by lineage, mastery, and an unmistakable artistic voice.

## Tejovrush Joshi

Tejovrush Joshi is among the promising young *tabla* artists of the Hindustani classical tradition, known for his clarity of tone, nuanced accompaniment, and command over rhythm. Born into a musical family, he was introduced early to the world of melody and rhythm — his mother, Smt. Shalmalee Joshi, is a noted vocalist of the Jaipur-Atrauli *gharana*, and his father, Shri Sunil Joshi, is a respected music composer.

Tejovrush-ji has trained for over thirteen years under Late Pandit Bapusaheb Patwardhan of the Farrukhabad *gharana*, a distinguished disciple lineage tracing back to Ustad Ahmedjan Thirakwa. His performances — both solo and as an accompanist — have been featured at esteemed venues across India and abroad, where he has been lauded for his precision, sensitivity, and youthful energy.

He has also earned numerous honors at intercollegiate, state, and national levels, marking him as one of the bright emerging talents in Indian percussion.



## Rakesh Chaurasia

Rakesh Chaurasia is one of the leading voices of the *bansuri* today, carrying forward a lineage that has shaped Indian classical music for generations. A nephew and direct disciple of flute maestro Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Rakesh-ji was trained in the rigorous *gurukul* tradition, absorbing both technical mastery and a musical philosophy rooted in discipline and humility. Under his *guru's* guidance, he developed the defining qualities of the Chaurasia school - tonal purity, expressive depth, and serene power.

Renowned for his ability to draw remarkable emotional range from a simple bamboo flute, Rakesh-ji combines a refined command of *swar* and *tala* with an exceptionally fluid blowing technique. His music balances meditative calm with expressive freedom, leading to collaborations across classical, semi-classical, and contemporary genres, including Indian film music.

An early international milestone came when the BBC invited him to conclude its 24-hour global broadcast celebrating the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. His achievements have since been recognized with major honors, including the Indian Music Academy Award, the Aditya Birla Kalakiran Puraskar, and the Guru Shishya Award. In 2024, he received two Grammy Awards for the collaborative album 'As We Speak'.

Despite global acclaim, Rakesh-ji remains deeply grounded, continually refining his art while honoring his *guru's* legacy.



## Amit Kavthekar

Amit Kavthekar is a distinguished *tabla* virtuoso and Ganda-Bandh disciple of the legendary Ustad Allarakha, representing the Punjab–Farukhabad *gharana* with rare depth and versatility. Introduced to the *tabla* at the age of six and later trained by Ustad Zakir Hussain, Amit-ji carries forward a lineage defined by rhythmic precision, creativity, and grace.



He has performed with many of India's greatest maestros — including Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, and Pandit Jasraj — and has appeared at renowned venues such as Google Talks and the United Nations Day Concert. His collaborations extend into jazz and world music, most recently with guitarist Al Di Meola, reflecting his openness to global soundscapes.

Now an integral part of Boston's classical music community, Amit-ji teaches and mentors through the New England School of Music, where he nurtures the next generation of percussionists. His presence has become a rhythmic heartbeat of the city — blending tradition and innovation, bridging continents through the universal language of rhythm.

## Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty

Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty is a towering force in Hindustani classical music — a vocalist whose every phrase carries the weight of tradition and the electricity of discovery. A leading exponent of the Patiala *gharana*, he trained under luminaries such as Ustad Munawar Ali Khan, Pandit Jnan Prakash Ghosh, and Ustad Latafat Hussain Khan, absorbing a lineage known for its regal sweep, dazzling *sargam*, and majestic improvisational command. From this foundation, he forged a voice that is instantly recognizable: powerful, unrestrained, and yet capable of dissolving into breathtaking tenderness.

What makes Pandit Chakraborty singular is his extraordinary range — not just of notes, but of emotion. In a single concert, he can unfold a *khayal* with expansive grandeur and, moments later, shift into *thumri*, *dadra*, *bhajan*, or Bengali semi-classical repertoire with disarming intimacy. His music does more than impress; it reaches. Audiences across India, Europe, and America have long felt his gift for connection — the sense that each listener is personally invited into the emotional world of the *raga*.

Beyond the stage, his contribution to the future of Indian music is profound. As the founder of Shrutinandan, one of India's most respected training institutions, he has nurtured a generation of musicians through a rare blend of discipline, compassion, and deep artistic insight.

Honored with the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan, Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty remains a monumental presence — an artist whose voice can thunder with authority or whisper with devotion, and whose lifelong dedication continues to shape the very landscape of Indian classical music.



## Gourab Chatterjee

Gourab Chatterjee is a distinguished harmonium exponent and accomplished Hindustani classical vocalist whose artistry embodies both depth and versatility. Introduced to music at the age of five by his mother, Smt. Ajanta Chatterjee, he later trained under Shri Jainul

Abedin and Pandit Sunil Bose of the Agra *gharana*, before becoming a Scholar at the ITC Sangeet Research Academy, where he refined his craft under Pandit Arun Bhaduri.

As a harmonium accompanist, Gourab-ji has shared the stage with some of India's foremost maestros, including Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty, Ustad Rashid Khan, Vidushi Girija Devi, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, and Smt. Kaushiki Chakraborty. His playing is celebrated for its vocal-like phrasing, intuitive sensitivity, and finely tuned sense of rhythm and space.

Equally accomplished as a vocalist, Gourab-ji brings a deep understanding of *raga* and emotion to every performance. Through his academy, Philharmony, he continues to mentor young musicians and promote the timeless dialogue between voice and instrument that lies at the heart of Hindustani classical music.

## Soumen Sarkar

Soumen Sarkar is an accomplished *tabla* artist whose music blends precision, power, and poise — the hallmarks of the rich tradition he represents. Trained under the guidance of *tabla* maestro Pandit Anand Bodas, Soumen-ji's style reflects both technical mastery and an instinctive feel for melody and rhythm.

His artistry has taken him across the world, performing in prestigious festivals and workshops throughout the United States, Europe, and South Asia. Over the years, he has shared the stage with many of India's foremost musicians, including Pandit V.G. Jog, Padma Vibhushan Vidushi Girija Devi, and Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty, and continues to collaborate with celebrated ghazal and light-classical artists such as Ghulam Ali and Hariharan.

Soumen-ji's journey — shaped by deep *taalim*, unwavering dedication, and global experience — has earned him recognition as one of the most respected and versatile *tabla* exponents of his generation.



## Meher Paralikar



Meher Paralikar began his musical journey at the age of eight under Pandit Padmakar Thatte, later receiving advanced *taalim* from Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty at Shrutinandan Gurukul, Kolkata. A Senior Scholar at the ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Meher has performed at renowned festivals including Swarmangesh, Malhar, and Lonavala-Khandala Sangeet Sammelan, and frequently accompanies his esteemed *guru* in concert.

Recipient of several prestigious honors — including the National Scholarship, Maharashtra Gaurav Award, and Yuva Kalakar Puraskar — Meher is recognized for his mellifluous voice and evolving artistry, carrying forward the tradition of the Patiala *gharana* with devotion and grace.

## Tanpura Players:

Sonali Tambe, Seemantini Nadkarni, Madhavi Marathe, Sameer Bildikar

### Share Your Experience

We invite you to share photos and short videos from the festival and tag @shadajbaithak on YouTube, Instagram or Facebook. You may scan QR code to connect and share your memories.



FaceBook



YouTube



Instagram

# The Semitones of Neithertime: A Personal Journey Through Shadaj

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

I remember the night Rajesh Godbole came to our house, probably for one of our regular bridge games. That evening, he casually posed a question that would quietly change the cultural landscape of our community: I'm thinking of starting a new classical music organization — what do you think? His idea was simple yet ambitious — intimate *baithaks* where audiences could engage directly with artists, ask questions about music, performance, and life, and then listen to a full concert the next day with a deeper understanding.

I was skeptical. Boston already had a vibrant Indian classical music scene, and I wasn't sure another organization was necessary. Still, the prospect was tempting: closer access to musicians, conversations about motivation and nuance, and the chance to listen with newly gained insight. That was how Shadaj began, inaugurated with its first concert by Vidushi Arti Anklikar.

From the very beginning, the quality of performances was unquestionable. The caliber of artists Shadaj brought — and continues to bring — has been exceptional. The pre-concert Q&A sessions at Rajesh's home offer a rare opportunity to engage deeply with artists. Initially, as a non-Marathi speaker, I found these sessions frustrating since many discussions drifted into Marathi. Over time, after good-natured but persistent conversations, that changed, making the sessions more inclusive.

The privilege of sitting at close quarters with legends of Hindustani music — Pandit Rajan and Sajan Mishra, Ustad Shahid Parvez Khan, Vidushi Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, Vidushi Kaushiki

Chakraborty, Pandit Sanjeev Abhyankar, Pandit Anand Bhate, Rahul Sharma, Rakesh Chaurasia, Jayateerth Mevundi, and others — listening to them speak candidly about their music and lives cannot be overstated. Indian classical music is often shrouded in mystery and perceived elitism; these interactions stripped away barriers and made the art form accessible and human. Those were carefree days of shared listening, post-concert discussions over chai and samosas, and friendships formed through music.

**“As an Indian American, this feels nothing short of revolutionary — a quiet but profound shift, reminiscent of the cultural awakening sparked decades ago by Pandit Ravi Shankar’s historic performances in the West.”**

Then came COVID-19. The world fell silent, and with it, live performance spaces disappeared. Online concerts emerged hesitantly — often solo

performances using electronic accompaniment. While deeply appreciated, they lacked the fullness of the concert experience. During this bleak period, Shadaj rose to the occasion. At a time when stages worldwide were dark, Shadaj ensured artists continued to perform with dignity, accompanied live, and audiences experienced authentic concerts online. Viewers tuned in from around the world. Performances by Pandit Venkatesh Kumar, Pandit Anand Bhate, and many others brought light into a period dominated by fear and isolation. In recognition of this extraordinary effort, Shadaj received the Community Pride Award from the India International Film Festival of Boston for sustaining Indian classical music during the pandemic.

Equally remarkable is the community Shadaj has built. Over the years, Lexington, Massachusetts, has become an epicenter for Indian classical music. Shadaj has hosted hundreds of events, including *baithaks*, large-scale concerts, lecture

demonstrations, workshops, and outreach initiatives, while retaining the warmth of a close-knit community.

Education has always been central to Shadaj's mission. Its most groundbreaking achievement is its partnership with Lexington Public Schools and Lexington Community Education. Through this collaboration, tabla has been introduced into the regular music curriculum for nearly 8,000 students across nine schools — an unprecedented initiative in the United States. This program places Indian classical music firmly within mainstream arts education, fostering cross-cultural understanding from an early age. As an Indian American, this feels nothing short of revolutionary — a quiet but profound shift, reminiscent of the cultural awakening sparked decades ago by Pandit Ravi Shankar's historic performances in the West.

Shadaj's newly instituted Open Mic series further strengthens this ecosystem. It offers local performers and students a welcoming, non-judgmental platform to perform. Having attended several sessions, I've been struck by the depth of talent within the community. These events make the music approachable and encourage dialogue — asking questions of friends and fellow musicians feels far less intimidating than addressing maestros.

The tenth anniversary of Shadaj was marked by the launch of the full-day Shadaj Festival of Music 2025, held at the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum in Lexington. It was a huge success. Audiences loved it and demanded more. And so a new tradition is born- the Annual Shadaj Festival. Top artists as well as upcoming artists will be featured, continuing with Shadaj's mission of excellence.

On a personal level, engaging with Shadaj means

becoming part of a living, breathing musical community. You meet people with varying degrees of familiarity with classical music. You attend Q&A sessions where artists speak openly about their craft, *gurus*, and journeys. Sometimes, you even host artists at home, forming relationships beyond the stage. Ticketing is seamless, concerts start on time — Indian Standard Time does not apply — and venues are thoughtfully chosen. The Pilgrim Congregational Church in Lexington, with its bright hall and iconic quilted backdrop, feels like home. Shoes are left outside, seating accommodates all needs, and after a brief introduction, the music — it's always about the music — begins — perhaps with a *raag* like *Marwa*...

the lonely cry of a single bird  
drowns in the gentle lapping  
of the water waves  
as the trees give up their green and turn dark

what hold do these shades of dusk  
have on my heart  
turning it into a thing of sensation  
of longing, loss...

you who I do not know  
you sing a raga  
that blends  
into the semitones of neithertime...

the breeze swirls around your voice  
as the stars flare

and I am lost ...  
and I am found ...

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Suraja Menon Roychowdhury  
Shadaj Member and Music Lover

### Did you know?

Shadaj organizes Music Appreciation sessions with artists prior to concerts, where the audience can engage in interactive learning with the artist. Look out for announcements and the website for more details prior to concerts.

# The Art of Composing a Bandish

Dr. Vikas Kashalkar

Composing a *bandish* represents one of the highest states of musicianship. A *raag* is like a deep cave of jewels — but this cave does not open at a mere command of “open sesame.” Its key is found only through devotion to the *Guru*. Once a student discovers this key through the grace of their *guru*, the brilliance of the jewels inside can be overwhelming. One cannot possibly gather all that treasure. Each one picks up what they can hold — fragments of beauty, glimmers of insight — and becomes absorbed in arranging these jewels into a meaningful form. This is when a *bandish* is born. Each person is drawn to different aspects of *raag* in its exploration: some are mesmerized by the minute details of *swaras*, others are swayed by the complex rhythmic possibilities (*laya*), and still others are taken by the *raag*'s emotional power.

A *bandish* is a beautiful ornament crafted from *swar*, *laya*, and words. A truly great *bandish* achieves a harmonious blend of its constituent elements, where aptly chosen words gracefully carry the *swar* and *laya* (rhythm). Too many words, overly complex phrases, excessive rhythmic complexity, or heavy, ornate vocabulary can ultimately diminish the *bandish*'s beauty and utility. A good composition requires a deliberate and balanced use of all three elements: word choice, notes, and rhythm.

*Bandish* composition is not always a premeditated act. Often, the poetic idea and the melodic inspiration must arise simultaneously, merging organically. When composition becomes driven by external motives, its aesthetics may suffer. For example, creating a *bandish* in *Yaman* simply to force the *sam* to land on *teevra Ma* is not an artistic intention; it is a technical exercise. Such

compositions often produce an attractive *mukhda*, but the rest of the *bandish* may feel weak or forced. Furthermore, introducing unnecessary complexity — such as composing an *anāgat mukhda* (a phrase that begins before the first beat) — can be counterproductive if the *bandish*'s goal is to simplify *raag* elaboration. While the *mukhda* may be admired, the complex entry point often causes singers to struggle or “fumble” when accurately catching the *sam*. In other cases, poor compositional choices can also lead to unfortunate distortions of the text. The *Malkauns bandish* “*pag laagan de...*” is a classic example — frequently mispronounced as “*pagala gan...*,” an unfortunate and inappropriate distortion. Does this imply that only simple *bandishes* should be composed? Certainly not. Art always seeks the golden mean — the perfect balance between simplicity and sophistication. When this balance is achieved, the musical depth, aesthetic beauty, and expressive power of the *bandish* are elevated.

In Hindustani classical music, *raag* precedes *bandish*. A *raag* is not created by the *bandish*; rather, it is revealed through it. Each *bandish* illuminates a distinct facet of the *raag* and subtly suggests which aspect of the *raag* is to be brought forward. One *bandish* may emphasize the contemplative expanse of the *mandra saptak*, while another within the same *raag* may highlight the radiance of its *uttarang*. In one composition, the *vadi swar* may remain understated, while in another, the beauty of a *vivadi swar* may be gently unveiled.

The *taal*, its *laya*, the words of the *bandish*, and their meaning all play a vital role in sustaining the *raag*'s inherent and persistent emotional state —

the *sthayi bhaav*. The *mukhada*, lyrics, and rhythmic framework must therefore be chosen and treated with care to effectively communicate this emotional core.

Equally important is the interpretation of the words. Their meaning is often layered and context-dependent. For instance, when a *bandish* speaks of “*milan ko jiya mora chahat hai*,” the idea of *milan* refers to an inner, empathetic, or spiritual union rather than literal or physical love. In lighter forms such as *thumri*, the same words may invite a different interpretation. The words themselves can never be disregarded; their apt use in a composition for emotional depth and ease of expression will help the *bandish* come alive.

*Bandishes* belonging to different musical forms naturally inhabit different *layas*. *Dhrupad* is traditionally rendered in a slower, expansive tempo, while *tarana* is more often sung at a brisk pace — though exceptions certainly exist. Beyond stylistic conventions, the *raag* itself plays a decisive role in determining *laya* and this consideration is very important in *bandish* composition. For instance, *bandishes* in *Raag Hamir* do not lend themselves to very slow tempos, whereas *vilambit laya* is especially suited to *bandishes* in *Raag Darbari*.

The choice of *taal* is similarly guided by the inherent *laya* and character of the *taal* itself. *Keherva* is unsuitable for *vilambit* presentations, just as *Jhumra* cannot effectively support *drut bandishes*. *Taal*, therefore, is selected not arbitrarily but to match the *raag's* intrinsic tempo and emotional weight.

A well-composed *bandish* clearly reveals the structure of its *taal*. While the *bandish* must be

closely aligned with the rhythmic framework, the primary function of *taal* is to shape and support the contour of the *bandish*, not to dominate it. Although *Jhumra* and *Deepchandi* both consist of fourteen beats, they serve very different expressive purposes; *Deepchandi* cannot accommodate a *vilambit bandish* without sounding mismatched and incongruent, and *Jhumra* simply will not work for a *drut* composition.

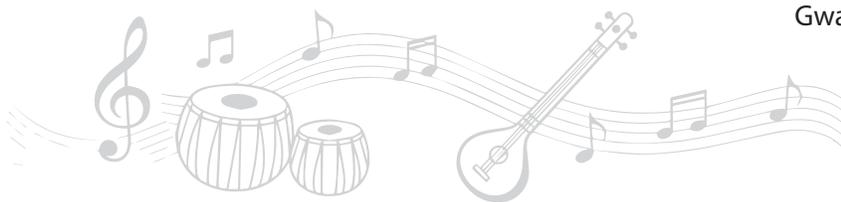
Finally, the poetic content of a *bandish* also dictates its *laya*. A composition that expresses urgency or eagerness — such as “*begi begi aao more saiyya*” — cannot be rendered in a slow tempo without undermining its emotional intent. *Laya* must align with both the musical structure and the emotional meaning of the words, allowing the *bandish* to communicate its *rasa* with clarity and authenticity.

For the performer, the foremost responsibility is to discern what the *bandish* seeks to emphasize — to understand the composer’s intent in both musical and emotional terms. Only with this understanding can these elements be meaningfully unfolded in the *raag vistaar*. Merely singing a *bandish* and truly presenting it (*pesh karna*) are fundamentally different acts. Presentation demands sensitivity, balance, and deliberate intention. The goal is not mere technical correctness, but the creation of an ambience through which the essence of the *raag* is revealed and experienced through the *bandish*. If the act of composing a *bandish* marks a pinnacle in a musician’s creative journey, then presenting it with integrity and depth is an equally profound responsibility that every performer must undertake with seriousness and care.

Dr. Vikas Kashalkar

A renowned vocalist from  
Gwalior, Agra and Jaipur *Gharanas* and a  
prominent musicologist and teacher

Translated by Sonali Tambe



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# Rakesh Chaurasia: In Conversation

Interview by Rajesh Godbole

**You were born into a musical lineage. How did your journey as a student of music begin?**

Being born into the Chaurasia family meant that my journey as a student began almost from infancy. The call of the flute came naturally. Simply observing Babuji (Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia) create music was fascinating, and perhaps subconsciously my journey as a student began then. Learning the basic grammar of Indian classical music along with the technique of holding and blowing into the *bansuri* is something every student goes through. Practising simple phrases that gradually become complex is part of this process. A deep understanding of each *raga* — its nuances and distinct characteristics — is a lifelong pursuit. Even today, I consider myself a student.

**When did you first perform on stage, and what did those early experiences teach you?**

My first performance was at the age of six for a television program. At nine, I made my first public appearance at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, followed by a performance at Rang Bhavan at eleven. At that age, the feeling is sheer exhilaration. The learnings come later, with maturity.

**Beyond your Guru, what influences have shaped your music?**

Every artiste brings a personal touch to their music, shaped by years of *riyaz*, contemplation, and external influences such as nature, culture, and other art forms. Having witnessed performances by many legends from India and abroad, I have consciously worked on my own music — embellishing it while keeping intact the traditional aspects imbibed from my *Guru*.

**You perform both Indian classical and world music. How do you approach this balance?**

Indian classical music is meditative and spiritual — an inward journey. World music tends to excite the senses. When I perform with world musicians, I make a sincere effort to maintain a balance, allowing the music to appeal to a wider audience while remaining rooted.

**You recently won Grammy Awards for *As We Speak* and *Pashto*. What did working with Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer, and Ustad Zakir Hussain mean to you?**

My learnings from all three artistes have been phenomenal. My interactions with Ustad Zakir Hussain ji, in particular, have influenced not only my musicality but also my life. From him, I have imbibed lessons that I apply every day.

**What kind of music do you listen to today?**

I do not restrict my listening to just one tradition. Along with my Guruji's music, I listen to vocalists, instrumentalists, folk artistes, Carnatic musicians, Indian fusion, Hindi film music, jazz, African tribal music, and more. There is so much to learn from every genre.

**If you had to describe one defining quality you admire in certain legendary musicians, what would it be?**

- Ustad Zakir Hussain – Universal
- Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia – Innovation
- Pandit Bhimsen Joshi – Intensity
- Pandit Ravi Shankar – Ambassadorial spirit
- Vidushi Kishori Amonkar – Introspection
- Begum Akhtar – Pathos

### What, in your view, makes a concert truly effective?

One of the most important factors is the performing artiste's state of mind. Preparation (tayyari) and creativity are equally important. Other factors that cannot be overlooked include venue acoustics, a balanced sound system, mutual respect with accompanists, and audience interaction.

### Do you prefer intimate *baithaks* or large festival concerts?

Baithaks allow for a more personal interaction with the audience. At our Vrindaban Gurukul, initiatives like *Anubhav* — where senior artistes share their musical journeys — are especially beneficial for students. Large festivals, on the other hand, offer opportunities to listen to and interact with many artistes, which is a learning in itself. As a performer, *baithaks* allow closeness, while festivals help reach larger audiences — both are important.

### How important is an informed audience for classical music today?

An informed audience is wonderful, but it can sometimes become overly critical, which may affect the joy of listening. In my opinion, an appreciative audience is far more important than an educated one. Efforts by organizations such as Shadaj to promote Indian classical music are much needed and deeply appreciated. I extend my full support.

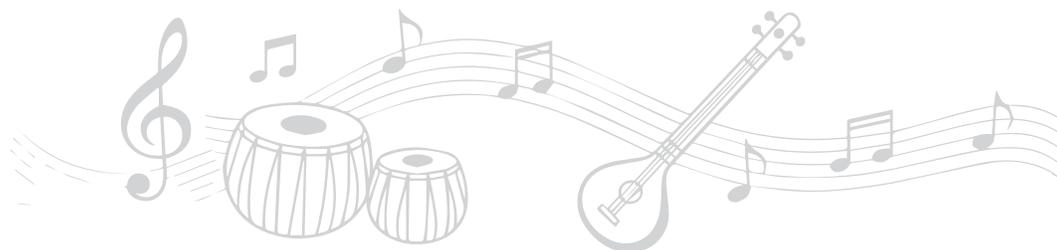


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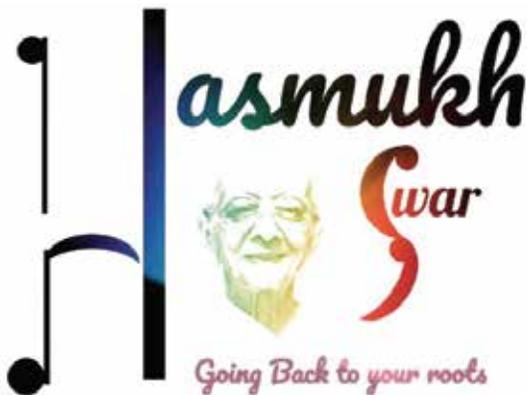


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## Shadaj Baithak Series 2026



*Saturday, February 28, 2026*

**Ambarish Das (Vocal)**

Amit Kavathekar (Tabla), Hirak Modi (Harmonium)

*Saturday, May 2, 2026*

**Abhishek Lahiri (Sarod)**

Subrata Bhattacharya (Tabla)



*Saturday, May 30, 2026*

**Gandhar Deshpande (Vocal)**

Sanjay Deshpande (Tabla), Siddhesh Bicholkar (Harmonium)

Morning Ragas - Hindustani Classical Vocal Concert

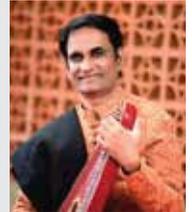
*Saturday, June 13, 2026*

**Prasad Khaparde (Vocal)**

Ramdas Palsule (Tabla), Abhinav Rawande (Harmonium)

Friday: Music Appreciation Session

Saturday: Hindustani Classical Vocal Concert



*Saturday, September 12, 2026*

**Pandit Vijay Koparkar (Vocal)**

Yogesh Karale (Tabla), Kaavya Valiveti (Harmonium)

*Saturday, October 24, 2026*

**Pandit Nayan Ghosh (Sitar)**

Ishan Ghosh (Tabla)



*Saturday, November 7, 2026*

**Manjiri Asnare (Vocal)**

Sanjay Deshpande (Tabla), Dnyaneshware Sonawane (Harmonium)

Diwali Pahat - Hindustani Classical Vocal Concert of Morning Ragas

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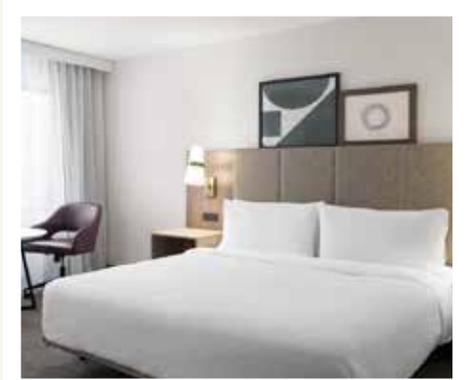
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# In Conversation with Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty

Interview by - Sameer Bildikar

**Through the course of the past century and longer, the Patiala *Gharana* has been at the helm of mellifluous rendition of Raga Sangeet. What attributes make the Gayaki stand out and distinguish it from other schools of music?**

Presentation of music should normally be with pleasing sounds or euphony. But because of some misconceptions or incorrect training system, some musicians produce cacophony or harsh sound in the name of music. Generally, rough throwing of *swaras* or musical notes makes a skeletal image of a *raga* or a song. A right musician should make it so soft and melodious that the said image should assume a soft, cute image and not a skeleton with a rough look. If a *raga* is presented crudely with a mindless random application of *swaras*, it comes to be nothing more than a gargling sound, particularly when the act of *taan sargam* is done in speedy flow.

The pathfinder musicians of the Patiala *Gharana* like Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Sahib and Barkat Ali Khan Sahib noticed these flaws in earlier works of *raga* music. They took great efforts to weed out all those rough and crooked ways and instead laid out new vistas whereof they became exponents of: (a) straight approach with *raga* notes, (b) soft mellifluous throwing, (c) elimination of meaningless texts of *raga* song lyrics, (d) practice of *shuddha aa-kaar*, *shuddha vaani* (lyrical pronunciation), clarity of perfect pitch, and special emphasis on singing in open or full-throated voice, and also importance of *taal/laya* and clarity of *soor* (perfect melody), particularly in *taankari*.

In reference to the Patiala *Gharana*, a few more words should be said. Ali Baksh Khan Sahib and Fate Ali Khan Sahib, who were named as Alia-Fattu, had created this Patiala *Gharana*, but Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Sahib raised it to a highly respectable pedestal. In his laid-out path and direction, I have all through cultivated their *gayakee* and tried to absorb its essence in my performance of *raga* music and also in the rendition of other genres of music, and most importantly in my making a unique scientific training system through my long-cherished dream music academy, Shrutinandan.

**Are there any changes that you brought about to the overall aesthetics or presentation style of the *gharana*?**

So long, almost all have tried to sing a *raga* or any song assessing that from the outward image. But I am training my students to develop an inner vision so that they can assess music from within, in particular reference to aesthetics, and not mechanically or technically alone. Secondly, I have emphasized expressing the purity of a *raga* ingrained in its core instead of exaggerated show-off portraying cosmetic or gymnastic-type elements, including excessive speed of *taan sargam* or other stunt acts. Besides, I stress upon holding long lilting notes, soothing the ears of listeners with honey-sweet charm rather than restless movements with short notes unnecessarily. I also emphasize literature-rich lyrical texts with high thoughts and mood (*bhaav*) in place of old, cheap, and clichéd ones.

**What makes *Sargam* such an integral part of your music? How does it help to express, delineate, or expand any *Raga*?**

Music is essentially a melodic expression of *sargam* or musical notes. Hence, *sargam* is obviously an integral part of our music. As it is, musical notes are primarily like the wooden structure of an idol. Through step-by-step progress, it comes alive to be a finished idol. The same way, from the intra and inter movements of musical notes and other micro-notes, including their expansion and contraction, melody (*soor*) comes oozing out of them. As already said, music is the culmination or the end result of *sargam* — the twelve notes — of which some are pronounced and produced in vocal rendition to be lexical and some as non-lexical.

In our training system, the vision of musical notes could not be developed because students were always taught to follow the process of blind listening to what their *gurus* would be singing before them. So, to get rid of such barriers or limitations, it is most important to develop the inner vision so that students can clearly see every movement or detailed position of the musical notes being used in singing any song or any raga.

**Your mastery over lighter forms, especially the thumri, is truly a unique experience. What makes a thumri effective? We have often heard of Purab Ang and Punjab Ang thumri. Is there truly a marked difference between the renditions of the two?**

*Thumri* is a highly adorable genre in Indian *raga* music. God has created men and women of different shape, size, and texture — both soft and hard. Likewise, in *ragas* some are soft and some are bold or a little harder in nature. *Thumri* is like a fairy-type damsel or a cute woman of softer nature. So *thumri* is generally composed in *ragas* of softer nature. When *thumri* is sung, those particular *ragas* are chosen and treated carefully so that not a single jerky touch can do any harm to its pretty, soft cuteness.

Other than commonly popular *ragas* like *Piloo*, *Kafi*, *Khamaj*, *Tilang*, *Bhairavi*, *Gara*, etc., *thumri* can also be sung in others, but for that very high-end *taalim* and development of vision is a must; otherwise, the artiste concerned would miserably fail to take out the soft, juicy, lilting extract from a certain *raga* of seemingly stony look, however much the text of the lyric is full of soft sentimental appeal.

Between the two chief streams of *thumri*, *Purab Ang thumri* (Varanasi) is a bit slower with deep emotional expression (*bhaav*) and graceful, intricate ornamentation within the *raga* framework, while the same *Purab Ang* but Lucknow-style *thumri* is structured and its emphasis rests on *bandish*. This style is called *Dhanakshari thumri*. Originally, there was no trace of *thumri* roots in Punjab. *Ustad Kale Khan Sahib*, uncle of *Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan* and his brother *Ustad Barkat Ali Khan*, came to Lucknow to learn *thumri*. The name of Punjab-style *thumri* came into existence firstly because of *Ustad Barkat Ali Khan* and secondly *Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan*, particularly for their exceptional mellifluous rendition. *Punjab Ang thumri* (*Patiala*) is, however, livelier, faster, and more mercurial, incorporating faster tempos, complex rhythmic patterns, and unexpected note combinations, often borrowing from folk styles or *tappa*, creating a more energetic, rhythm-focused performance. These are the basic marked differences between the two.

**We would like to see new audiences get trained in the art of listening and appreciating finer aspects of Indian Classical Music. To that effect, what would be your advice to organizations such as Shadaj or artists on creating a learned audience?**

Singer and listener duo is basically the two sides of the same coin. A singer's life is incomplete without the existence of a listener. So the urge of making good listeners basically rests upon the singers. As time changes, so changes everything around, particularly the level of patience and taste of listeners. The time frame and other aspects of music should therefore be tailor-made in such a way that a balance is struck so that raga music does not lose its intrinsic values and characteristics and listeners also do not lose their thirst for Indian perennial music.

On the other hand, organisers should also come forward to make good concerts of *raga* music available to music lovers on affordable terms. Further, they need to organise lec-dems or workshops with sufficiently knowledgeable and effective musicians, which are of prime importance and dire necessity. *Shadaj* is, however, seriously trying that, yet more such well-orchestrated workshops and question-answer sessions should be arranged on a regular basis to educate listeners and critics at the same time.

In this context, I would like to say a few more words in reference to the compositions of lighter genres. Let me first clarify that no musical composition can excel if that is guided only by the strictures of the *raga* rule book. Any music composition with a *raga* base becomes excellent only when the concerned *raga* is followed more in spirit than in the letter of the rules alone. Hence, good compositions of songs are mostly

framed with the intrinsic sweet essence of the *ragas* concerned and not according to their skeletal structures. From Jaidevji, Naushadji, Madan Mohanji to Rahul Dev Burmanji of past times have all trained under different *gurus of raga sangeet* and used their teachings in Bollywood film music compositions. If we go further back, none of the immortal composers like Rabindranath, Nazrul, Atul Prasad, Rajani Kanta, D. L. Roy, and the like are exceptions to this. It may not be out of place here to mention that songs of Marathi dramas are all based on different *ragas* and hence transcended to immortality. In contrast, nearly no composition of song in the last ten years or so has stood immortal, mostly for the reason that they were all beyond the ambience of Indian *raga* music and resorted to cheap rhythm patterns accompanied by loud sound design of Western instruments. So the importance of *raga* music is always there and should always be clarified to listeners of all genres of Indian music.

**Do you believe Indian Classical Music is a balance between intellectual and emotional music? How should an artist maintain the balance?**

Of course, Indian classical music is a happy combination of intellectual and emotional fibres of music. But to strike a balance between them, the artiste concerned should be efficient enough to handle ambidextrously the rules of *taal*, *laya*, and *chhanda* (rhythm) as well as other emotional grains dealing with proper treatment of nuances befitting the particular piece of music being presented. The importance of clear message and pointed direction in lyrics and expression thereof plays an extremely important role, which is really missing in our vocal rendition of *raga* music, leaving a gulf to be bridged between the artistes and the listeners.

**What does it mean to internalize a *gharana*? How do you adapt all the learning and yet maintain your *gharana's* individuality?**

To internalize a *gharana* means to try to absorb or own up a particular style of singing. If somebody has to learn music of different *gharanas*, first he has to learn to decipher all different *gharanas* (schools) or styles of music very meticulously. It is a rigorous practice, but without it he will lose track of all different styles and will virtually lead to gross confusion. So it is altogether a very difficult task to maintain the individuality of one's own *gharana* without mixing it up with others. Say, I am singing the *raga* Malkaus with five notes, which is fixed and known to all *raga* musicians and even discerning listeners. But the question is in what way and how respectfully and adoringly I am able to close-knit my relationship with the *raga*, and again in what way its impact is touching the hearts of listeners. The artistes concerned are therefore responsible to take care of all such interactive phenomena while performing in a concert.

**For a musician, does having a formal college education and degrees help in learning and analyzing the science, art, and aesthetics of Indian Classical Music?**

In our education system, first of all, there is hardly any definite place of music in the regular curriculum through which students can achieve a clear musical perception along with general academics. Secondly, whatever little is there, no clear musical syllabus with proper vision exists to develop performing abilities in students, nor are properly knowledgeable faculties provided. So there is practically no opportunity to learn the science, art, or aesthetics of Indian classical music at all.

**You have also studied Carnatic music in great detail. How has it helped enrich your music?**

True enough that I have picked up many a gem from the Carnatic music domain that helped my musicianship to surge ahead towards completeness. To talk about it briefly, I need to clarify that the fundamental difference between Hindustani and Carnatic music lies in their style of singing and rhythm patterns. Carnatic music follows a more structured approach. It relies mostly on fixed compositions called *kritis*, while showcasing the artiste's virtuosity and ability to embellish within the framework of

compositions that are mostly pre-composed. But in Hindustani styles, there is more freedom in singing with *vilambit laya* (much slower tempo). Here, the main rhythm instruments — *tabla* and *pakhawaj* — can produce sound with a little more modulation and sustainability. The *tabla* and *bayan* are constructed in such a way that sounds do not die immediately after production. The sounds can sustain for a little while, which enables singers to produce musical notes at a much slower pace or tempo. This is the uniqueness in the arena of Hindustani music. So it may be said that Carnatic music is based more on mathematics, particularly in reference to their rhythm instruments and *taala* system, whereas Hindustani music is based on aesthetics and improvisatory ways in playing its rhythm instruments and in vocal rendition, with the advantage of applying *meend ang* (gliding movements with musical notes).

### **What caused your foray into the world of Jazz? Do you find the comparison between Raag Sangeet and Jazz apt?**

Jazz and Indian Classical Music (ICM) both thrive on improvisation, sophisticated rhythm, and melodic exploration, but differ in their core frameworks. Jazz centres on complex Western harmony (chord progressions), with improvisation layered over it, while ICM (Hindustani/Carnatic) focuses on intricate melodic modes (*ragas*) and rhythmic cycles (*taalas*) with rich ornamentation. In Indian music, *taala* (rhythm structure) is cyclic, but jazz rhythm is linear. Within a particular framework of musical notes, the scope of singing Indian *ragas* is unlimited, whereas in the casting of musical notes in jazz music, this particular framework is not maintained. Both can explore profound spiritual dimensions, with jazz influenced by Indian culture. In modal explorations, jazz shares common ground with Hindustani music by staying on a single tonality for extended periods. Indian *raga* music dates back more than a thousand years, whereas Western jazz dates back a maximum of two hundred years.

### **In an age of Instagram and TikTok, do you predict any marked changes that might occur to khayal gayaki?**

It goes without saying that in this age of Instagram and TikTok, audience attention is definitely reducing, and it does not need any prediction that there has been a considerable restructuring of the *raga* music frame with minimization of *alap vistar* and other portions of presentation. But here a point is to be seriously noted: whenever audiences come to any show, they normally come with a mindset to attend it till the end. If it is a football or cricket match or a cinema show or anything of the like, we do not witness attention breaking in a few minutes. That means such shows are so communicative with the attending crowd that attention is never broken in a short while. I therefore leave this onus on the shoulders of music performers to relook into their performances and suggest finding ways and means so their deliverables are beautifully communicated, leaving no room for breaking audience attention before the end of the show, barring unforeseen emergencies. Performers should put more effort into raising the intrinsic values and in-depth gems of Indian music most piously in an interactive way, and at the same time with newer costumes and packaging suiting the changing trends of time, without doing any harm to the sanctity of Indian *raga* tradition. In this way, performers of all genres of music should come forward with renewed vision, thereby giving longer life to our country's pride and unfaltering heritage—the Indian music.



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#### **Did you know?**

Shadaj organizes Open MIC sessions featuring local talent. A fun time to enjoy chai, snacks, and mingling with local artists and music lovers.

Thematic music concerts are also part of an Open MIC where local artists present a concert on a specific theme. Check out the schedule. Scan the QR code.

# The Living Swar

Anjali Malkar

While recording the Breath Well album in Lonavala, I watched as the music was translated into '*Naad Resha*' — visual lines of sound on the studio screens. As the sitar, mridang, and vocals filled the air, across the screens the music manifested as vibrant, colorful geometries. It felt like watching an echocardiogram of sound. Outside the studio walls, these sounds are often veiled by layers of environmental noise, where only the most astute listener can recognize their original essence. Inside, however, the naad exists in its pure, naked truth.

Observing this process brought me back to my childhood music lessons — most notably, the practice of '*Shadj Sadhana*' (also known as *Kharaj Sadhana* or *Kharaj Bharana*).

As a young girl, the profound depth of the note *Sa* eluded me. To avoid my mother's reprimand, I would dutifully hold down the *shadj* key on my harmonium for an hour, focusing my breath as instructed. Now, forty-five years later, the true weight of that single note is finally revealing itself to me.

Every *swar* is essentially a *naad* — primordial, steady, and neutral until it is touched by human thought and emotions. *Shadj Sadhana* is the process of breathing life into that stillness. As a foundational note of the *saptak*, the importance of *shadj* is absolute. As I contemplated the sheer dimension, gravity, and stillness of this *Sa*, the physical and mental synergy between the mind, intellect, throat, and breath became strikingly clear.

When we envision the form of a *raag*, we use the *saptak* as our ladder — descending into the depths of the *mandra* or ascending through the *madhya*. In this movement, the independent *shadj* is no longer solitary; it begins to absorb the shadows and traces of the surrounding notes.

From this very foundation, the *raag* begins to breathe. I was finally beginning to grasp the wisdom of the stalwarts who insisted that a *raag* must reveal its entire soul from the very first note. As I contemplated the nature of individual swars, I realized that *Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha*, and *Ni* do not exist at rigid intervals. Rather, they are like celestial bodies held in orbit by the gravitational pull of the *shadj*. This imagery led me to a startling realization: in the realm of pure sound, 'right' and 'wrong' are often illogical constructs. Music is not a series of calculated measurements, but a delicate, living equilibrium.

Once the *shadj* is grounded, the student moves to rigorous practice of *swar alankars*. Initially, this

seemed like a mundane exercise but it was transformed the moment it was touched by the grace of a *meend*, the resonance of a *gamak*, the playfulness of a *khatka*, or the spark of a *kan*.

Through these embellishments, my rigid scales began to breathe, automatically laying the foundation for the intricate, seamless weave of *aalapi*.

From the very beginning, the mastery of *laya* felt like an insurmountable challenge to me. I struggled desperately to stay within the framework of the *taal*, using hand gestures to map out *taal's* structure while playing *taanpura* with one hand. It was a constant, exhausting trade-off: if I focused on the gestures, my *swars* would falter; if I leaned into the melody, the *taal* would slip away. Even when both seemed to align, the specific count of the *matras* remained elusive. Balancing melody, rhythm, and physical gestures felt like a high-stakes juggling act — a struggle I maintained for years.

In an attempt to 'fight fire with fire,' I started learning tabla to conquer my fear of *taal*. As I

immersed myself in the instrument, its resonant language began to captivate me: the deep, damp resonance of *Dha*, the metallic brilliance of *Dhin*, the sharp nasality of *Tin* and *Na*, and the sweetness of *Tirakita*. I began to crave the 'aas' — the echoing breath that connects one *matra* to the next. The once-rigid, angular edges of the *taal* softened, and the *aavartan* transformed from a linear struggle into a beautiful, dancing circle.

In the hopscotch games of my childhood, we were obsessive about the stone — it had to land precisely in the center of the chalked square. Now, in the far more intricate game of music, my ambition was much the same: to ensure my ornamented swars landed with perfect poise within a specific section (*khand*) of the *taal*. As I began to treat this pursuit with the joy of a child at play, the doors to a hidden world swung open. I found myself moving beyond the surface, tracing the path from *naad* to *swar*, and from *swar* to the delicate microtones of *shruti*. I began to feel the pulse of *laya* through the *laghu* and *guru*.

As my understanding deepened, I realized that each legend of our tradition was a gatekeeper to a different dimension of *naad*. I heard the deep, oceanic resonance of Ustad Amir Khan and watched Pandit Bhimsen Joshi's notes soar into the *taar saptak* like a kite gliding effortlessly against a high sky. The sweetness of Ustad Abdul Karim Khan pierced the heart like a silken dagger, while Mallikarjun Mansur's crystal-clear notes seemed to travel toward eternity. In Kumar Gandharva, I saw a solitary sailor embarking on a vast, mystical voyage, while Ustad Faiyaz Khan's voice enveloped the listener with a tender affection. Pandit D.V. Paluskar's voice felt as pure as a devotee who had just emerged, cleansed, from sacred waters.

The brilliance of our women maestros is no less dazzling, each offering a distinct luminosity to the *saptak*. I think of Vidushi Hirabai Barodekar, whose *swar-lagaav* carried a divine serenity, and Pandita Kesarbai Kerkar, who commanded the notes with a breathtaking, regal ease. Vidushi Manik Varma's voice held the gentle warmth of a gracious host, welcoming the listener into a sanctuary of sound.

In Vidushi Malini Rajurkar, I found an unveiled, direct honesty, while Vidushi Kishori Amonkar's music was a masterclass in free-spirited, avant-garde expression. Vidushi Prabha Atre's compositions possessed a universal elegance that spoke to every soul, and Begum Parvin Sultana's artistry captivates with high-glamour romanticism.

I found myself completely submerged in the vastness of their artistry, losing all sense of time and self in the profound beauty of their music. The music of these stalwarts was finally becoming a language I could understand. It began to resonate within me. I was no longer just a listener; I had become a lifelong friend to their sound.

I was often met with the skeptical inquiries of lay listeners: 'What is actually happening in this music?' or 'Why are you obsessed with these archaic lyrics about *Piya* and *Nanand*?' Some even asked, with genuine confusion, 'Do you repeat the same words because you've forgotten the rest?' These questions initially saddened me, especially when I noticed that the emotional depth of a Hindi film song was so easily grasped, while the classical *bandish* remained a mystery. However, when I stepped outside my own devotion to look through their eyes, I began to understand the disconnect. The answer lies in the hierarchy of the art form: here, the *swar* and *raag* are the protagonists, and the words are their ornaments. The poetry is concise by design, allowing the artist to weave an intricate tapestry of *naad*. We repeat words not out of forgetfulness, but to explore the infinite textures and resonance of *swar* and *laya*. It is an abstract art that uses sound to create a chiaroscuro of light and shadow, leading the listener into a realm of the unknown. Ultimately, Indian Classical Music is not just about melody; it is a profound journey that reveals the very essence of existence. It is one of the most sublime ways to communicate the profound reality of our being.

Anjali Malkar

A Hindustani classical vocalist,  
a music historian and writer

Translated by Sonali Tambe

# Nurturing Young Hindustani Musicians in America

By Kedar Naphade

Over the last twenty-five years of performance and teaching Hindustani classical music in the US, I have had the privilege of working with many students. I am blessed that a few of them have grown into capable performers — soloists and accompanists who are recognized professionals, working with the finest artists in the tradition.

As I reflect on this journey, I am deeply grateful for the direct inheritance from my *Guru*, Pandit Tulsidas Borkar, whose guidance over three decades has shaped every aspect of my life.

## The Teaching Philosophy of Pandit Tulsidas Borkar

Pandit Borkar's teaching was rooted not in rigid technical demands, but in profound human understanding. He possessed a rare ability to sense precisely where a student stood — musically, emotionally, and intellectually. Rather than a mandatory curriculum of difficult or monotonous practices, he would initiate students with a small composition that was engaging, musical, and just within reach. The student would master it while genuinely enjoying the process.

Buoyed by this early success, students returned with enthusiasm. In this gentle and encouraging way, Guruji built confidence, self-esteem, and a lasting attachment to music — well before introducing greater complexity, which naturally followed, once the student was invested.

Guruji recognized that every student is different. Some gravitated toward rhythm, others displayed a natural flair for speed and technical brilliance, while some possessed a contemplative temperament suited to the slow unfolding of a *raga*. Others felt drawn toward devotional music, *thumri*, or *natyageet*. He adjusted the curriculum to the student's nature and strengths. This individualized approach also lies at the heart of

my own teaching today.

## Challenges for Students in the United States

Teaching Hindustani classical music in the US presents additional challenges. Students grow up far from the cultural soil that nourished this tradition. For them, Braj, Awadhi or even Hindi may not be immediately accessible. The imagery of monsoon clouds, the spiritual subtext, and the social settings in which compositions, *raag* and *taal* emerged can feel distant and abstract.

This gap must be bridged thoughtfully and deliberately.

I invariably discuss the lyrics, the cultural and spiritual context, and the poetic sensibilities of the composer. When a student understands why a particular word carries emotional weight, or how devotion shapes a melodic phrase, the music deepens immediately.

**“Our purpose is simple yet far-reaching: to create better human beings through music and service.”** Equally important is relating to the student as a whole person. I often talk to them about their lives

beyond music — their sports activities, the teams they follow, their friends and school experiences. Creating an atmosphere of openness, understanding, and friendship helps establish trust and connection. This, too, is a key lesson I absorbed from my *Guru*.

## The Harmonium Institute

Inspired by Pandit Borkar's monumental legacy and by insights gained over two decades of teaching, I founded The Harmonium Institute, a non-profit organization in 2022.

Our purpose is simple yet far-reaching: to create better human beings through music and service.

Every activity at the Institute flows from this purpose. To serve a diverse student body with varying learning styles, we have developed a four-pronged teaching model.

## 1. Structured Video-Based Courses

These courses provide clear, sequential instruction in technique, fingering, bellows coordination, and progressive musical concepts. They allow for repetition, consistency, and self-paced learning.

## 2. Personalized One-on-One Mentoring

This is where the deeper work happens. In these sessions, learning is customized to the student's strengths and inclinations. We engage in rich dialogue around *raga* aesthetics, rhythmic complexities, the meaning of lyrics, and cultural and spiritual context.

This approach mirrors the hallowed *guru-shishya parampara* — the traditional Indian pedagogical system in which knowledge is transmitted not merely through instruction, but through shared experience, observation, and a lifelong bond between teacher and student.

## 3. Student Community Workshops

We organize day-long and multi-day workshops led by me and other respected artists — vocalists, tabla players, and instrumentalists. Students learn, practice, and grow together.

These workshops are not just limited to harmonium students. We actively include students of vocal music, tabla, and other instruments. This creates a living cultural community, ensuring that young musicians in the diaspora do not remain isolated practitioners of a distant tradition. They form friendships, collaborate musically, and perform together at community events, competitions, and concerts.

## 4. Gurukul-Style Residential Retreats & Performances by Maestros

In multi-day residential musician retreats, students perform with and listen to other senior musicians from the community — sharing meals, internalizing values, and living the art form in a holistic environment.

We also host performances by some of the finest globally acclaimed musicians in the tradition. Experiencing a maestro unfold a *raga* at close quarters conveys far more than hours of

explanation, and often leaves a lifelong impression on young learners.

## Service for Character Formation

True to our purpose of creating better human beings through music and service, we integrate selfless service into the fabric of our programs.

During workshops, retreats, and guest-artist concerts, students volunteer to handle logistics, hospitality, food, stage and sound setup, and green-room support. They take responsibility for welcoming artists, managing event flow, and caring for guests. This is intentional. Learning to serve cultivates humility, empathy, and maturity.

We also organize holiday food drives, through which our community provides meals to those in need, reinforcing the idea that music and service must ultimately flow outward into society.

## Growing The Legacy

For spiritual elevation, the Bhagavad Gita advocates dutiful ethical living and a four-fold path of selfless service, devotion, meditation, and knowledge. At the level of fundamental principles, most major religions of the world — Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism — emphasize comparable dimensions: ethical action, devotion, surrender, inner discipline, and transformative wisdom, albeit expressed through distinct theological and cultural frameworks.

Music directly develops the faculties of devotion, meditation, and knowledge. Selfless service explicitly develops *Karma Yoga*. Together music and service shape not just accomplished musicians, but hardworking, disciplined, mindful, ethical, and compassionate human beings, on the path to enlightenment.

As I perform, practice, and teach today, I often feel the alive and vibrant presence of Borkar Guruji — his gentleness, his brilliance, his sacrifice, and his profound humanity. The Harmonium Institute is a continuation of His legacy to future generations in a new land.

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Kedar Naphade

A prominent harmonium soloist and accompanist and a teacher in NJ

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# My Journey with Hindustani Music

Pat Lambdin

I traveled to India for the first time when I was 21 years old. I had just finished college and thought that backpacking through India by myself would be a great adventure. To my family and community, my desire to embark on such a trip was baffling and downright strange. As a non-Indian, white American kid, I had no real exposure to Indian people or culture for much of my childhood. The people around me could not understand what drew me to India.

It sounds strange to say it, but it seems to me that my attraction to Indian culture and Indian music was actually quite natural for me. I am quite aware that this makes no logical sense when you trace the history of my life and upbringing—but what I mean is that it was somehow deeper than my cultural circumstances. It was something that called to me, something I could not look beyond.

My encounter with India has inspired me and worn me down; it has confused me and delighted me; it has broken me open and altered my life. Many travelers have said to me that you have to surrender to India when you go there, or she'll eat you alive. For the foreign, Western person, I think this is often true. India can feel chaotic, overwhelming, and deeply confusing. She is a paradox—both intoxicating and disturbing at the same time.

But what has to be surrendered? For me, it has been my sense of control, my need to understand, my logic, my tightly held beliefs, my unconscious cultural values, my sense of timeliness, and my self-sufficiency. My journey with Indian classical music has required all of the same kinds of surrender.

When I was preparing to write this, I kept asking myself, "Why have I chosen to study Hindustani music?" I actually came up with more reasons for giving it up and forgetting about it than anything else! From a logical point of view, it makes more sense for me to focus on the music of my own culture than to learn the sarod—an immensely challenging

instrument requiring countless hours of lonely practice. The whole endeavor has involved spending lots of money traveling back and forth to India, getting sick in Banaras many times, and, of course, forever remaining an outsider to a culture I can never fully be a part of.

And yet, I remain a devoted student of Hindustani music. I return to my guru's home in Banaras again and again, like a faithful pilgrim of music. This journey is not rational or logical for me. It is a labor of love. It is a pilgrimage of the heart and a matter of the soul.

I met my guru, sitar artist Pandit Shivrath Mishra, during one of his concert tours of North America. I was simply in the right place at the right time. His Bageshree still resounds in my heart from that fateful evening in May. Though it took me some years to begin learning from him and his family in earnest, the experience of my guru's music made such a profound impact on me that it was impossible to consider learning from anyone else. For a while, I attempted to play Indian ragas on a six-string banjo. I removed the frets and tuned it like a sarod, but it could never truly be one. When I finally decided to start playing the sarod, I was ready to begin the real journey, and there was no going back.

It is my guru's generosity and love—his willingness to teach me and open his heart to me—that has impacted me more than any particular element of raga music. The Mishra family gave me a sense of belonging that has been indispensable to my learning process. Even though I am a foreigner, they have been gracious enough to accept me and remain patient as I learned to function in a different culture.

The language and cultural barriers have been a constant challenge, but when it comes to the music, barriers dissolve and there is only the raga. Witnessing my guru become animated and energized as the raga envelops him in a mood of

bliss and pure happiness has been one of my great joys. In these moments, the expression “Music is Love,” which my guru often preaches, is palpably felt, and the transmission transcends all boundaries of culture and language.

Spending time around a creative master has allowed me to tap into a deep reservoir of inspiration. I believe that a successful journey in Hindustani music requires a particular kind of mentoring. For me, the relationship I have with my guru, and the link I have to the Banaras *gharana*, are the lifeblood of this journey. This relationship—marked by a special intimacy unlike any student-teacher relationship I have previously experienced—has sustained me through the trials of learning and the many times I have considered giving up.

I have grown a lot since that first trip to India. I am a little less naïve and a little wiser, or so I like to believe. I still have no good reason for doing what I am doing in the realm of Indian classical music. All I know is that I love it, and I want to keep going. And so, I continue to surrender to this odd, beautiful path.

The heart speaks  
Without reason or logic  
Needing no permission

When I surrender the need to understand  
Understanding comes  
Yet it is devoid of explanation

The deepest part of music lives outside the mind  
It is not a calculated and complex tihai  
It is a spontaneous and unforeseen one

Delighting and surprising you  
When it arrives at the sam  
Just in the nick of time

Then another cycle begins  
And again, you take the risk and trust  
Carried by the flow of music

**Pat Lambdin**

A Vermont-based music therapist  
sarod Player and a disciple of Pt. Shivnath Sharma

## Share Your Experience

We invite you to share photos and short videos from the festival and tag @shadajbaitthak on YouTube, Instagram or Facebook. You may scan QR code to connect and share your memories.



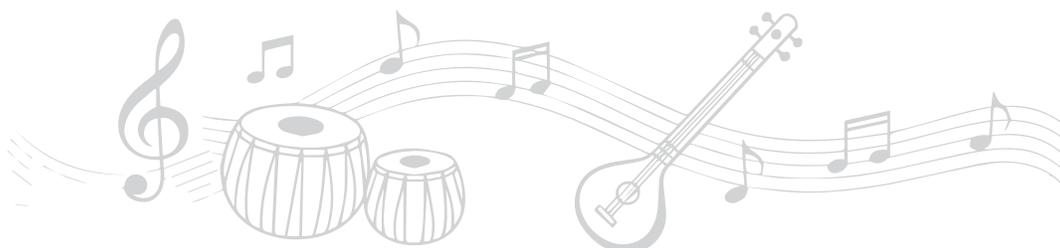
FaceBook



YouTube



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## A Year of Baithaks: Shadaj 2025

### ***Saturday May 3, 2025***

Pandit Tejendra Narayan Majumdar (Sarod)  
with Pandit Tanmoy Bose (Tabla)  
Swadesh by Tanmay Deochake (Harmonium)  
with Atharv Kulkarni (Keyboard), Soham Gorane (Tabla)

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### ***Friday, May 16, 2025***

Ravi Chary (Sitar), Kunal Gunjal (Santoor),  
Amit Kavthekar (Tabla)

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### ***Friday, September 19, 2025***

Music Appreciation Session with Siddharth Belamannu

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### ***Saturday, September 20, 2025***

Siddhartha Belmannu (Vocal) with  
Roopak Kallurkar (Tabla), Prasad Kamat (Harmonium)

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### ***Saturday October 25, 2025***

Pt Buddhaditya Mukherjee (Sitar), Arnab Chakraborty (Sarod),  
Soumen Nandy (Tabla), Shankh Lahiri (Tabla)

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### ***Saturday, November 8, 2025***

Saurabh Kadgaonkar (Vocal) with  
Bharat Kamat (Tabla), Amey Bichu (Harmonium)



## Community Partners



Lexington Public School

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Bangla O Biswa

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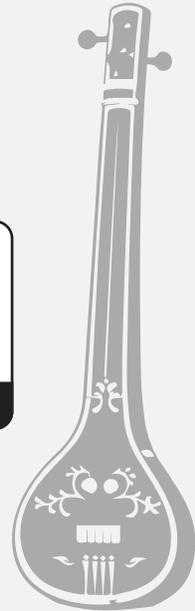
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#### Learn More

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or

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Scan me!

#### Did you know?

The Governor of Massachusetts announced April 5th as Indian Classical Music Day in 2025. Scan the QR code to see the Governor's proclamation.

#### Did you know?

Shadaj's active collaboration with America's oldest performing arts organization, the Handel and Haydn Society, is underway. This partnership will introduce Indian classical music to a broader audience and foster cultural exchange. Handel and Haydn's chorus, based on Hindustani classical music, is making a historical cultural exchange.

SRA (Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata) chose Shadaj to be its exclusive partner to provide a platform for its scholars in the US.



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# *Shadaj Music Festival*

## 2026

**Saturday, March 28, 2026 : 10am - 10pm**

**Lexington High School, Lexington**



[www.shadaj.org](http://www.shadaj.org)