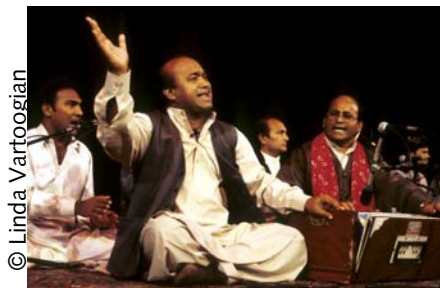




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2007/8



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Qawwali

Qawwali is the hypnotic, highly improvisatory, devotional music of Sufism, the mystical school of Islamic thought where truth and divine love are achieved through personal experience. Originally performed at Sufi shrines throughout what is now India and Pakistan, Qawwali music became hugely popular around the world through the recordings and tours of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

Qawwali is a vibrant musical tradition that stretches back more than 700 years, to 8th century Persia. However, Qawwali in the form we know today, was essentially created by the artist, poet and philosopher Amir Khusrau in the late 13th century in India by fusing Persian and South Asian musical traditions.

Strong, expressive voices and explosive hand-clapping characterize Qawwali. A typical ensemble consists of ten to

SUFI MUSIC OF PAKISTAN
QAWWALI MASTERS

MEHR & SHER ALI

twelve male performers who convey a religious message through music and song based on mystic poetry by Sufi masters. The poems usually deal with divine love, the sorrow of separation and union with the beloved, these concepts being symbolically reinforced and illustrated by the music.

Mehr and Sher Ali

Brothers Mehr and Sher Ali were born in the Pakistani border-town of Kasur in the early 1950s and received their earliest training in classical music from their father who was a classical court singer in the small Sikh principality of Patiala (now in India). Their father later became a disciple of Fateh Ali Khan, the father of the famous Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and young Sher Ali was the student of Bakhshi Salamat Ali Qawwal.

Mehr Ali and Sher Ali thus acknowledge that the family of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is their "Ustad Gharana" or "Teacher House", a term imbued with veneration among musician circles in Pakistan and North India.

Mehr Ali was taught by Muhammad Ali Fareedi, an ordained Sufi Qawwal of the shrine of the 13th century Sufi, Baba Farid.

Mehr and Sher are Qawwals who have achieved the rare

combination of both musical quality and authentic text rendition: Sher is known for his ability to understand the importance of rhythm and render classical modes in a strong voice, while Mehr's heart-rending voice strikes the heart when the poetry contains words of entreaty or sorrow. Amjad Ali on the *tabla* (drum) generates more classical detail on his *tabla* than is normally expected of a qawwali *tabla* player and explains, "I strive to recite poetry with my hands."

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

Adam Nayyar of Lok Virsa in Pakistan, the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, will travel with group and will be available for lecture demonstrations and workshops for all ages.

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