

HANS RAJ HANS

SONGS FROM THE LAND OF FIVE RIVERS

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STREAMS OF SPIRIT

"ONE OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN PUNJABI
FOLK MUSIC AND SUFIANA KALAM."

– *India Today*



PROGRAM NOTES

Singing the Divine: Sufi Music's Message to the Ages

If you're lucky enough to find one of the few remaining music stores in Delhi or any other major South Asian city, you'll see that a substantial section is devoted to Sufi music. Songs with Sufi texts have comprised the fastest growing musical market segment in the past few years, and this genre is now threatening to overtake Bollywood. Indeed, no Bollywood film is complete these days without its own Sufi anthem. Meanwhile, Sufi channels abound on our favorite online music and video servers.

What accounts for the Sufi music craze? Individual performers like the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and his nephew Rahat Fateh Ali Khan have championed the genre worldwide since the 1980s. Bringing qawwali out of the shrines of India and Pakistan and onto the Western concert stage, these pioneers have joined forces with the trance and world music movements to create a remarkable fusion of East and West. Sufi music has shown itself to be infinitely adaptable, thriving in idioms ranging from raga to reggae to rock.

At first glance it seems that audiences in South Asia and beyond are attracted to Sufi music for its trance-inducing properties. After the waning of the West's fascination with the psychedelic sitar of Ravi Shankar, we have discovered a new source of transcendental bliss, this time with driving rhythms, soaring melodies and vocal gymnastics that sound like a scat singer on ten cups of chai.

But our yearning for altered states of consciousness is not the entire story; the texts of Sufi music deserve a closer look. Written by poet-saints hundreds of years ago, these songs emerged out of a world fragmented by religious schisms and sectarian tensions, a world in which God was held prisoner by the priesthood, a world where wandering beggars sought the divine within while kings

luxuriated in apostasy. These saints, like Baba Farid, Bulleh Shah, Guru Nanak, Kabir Das and Meera Bai, crossed the gulf between Hinduism and Islam and broke down the borders between India's multifarious castes, creeds and races. The saints knew that intolerance was the most dangerous weapon invented by humanity, and that the only defense was Love. One of the deepest insights of Sufism is that only in loving each other can we experience the exalting force of divine love itself.

Even if the countless fans of Sufi music don't understand medieval Urdu or Punjabi or Hindi, the music pulls together people from different faiths, backgrounds and nations; the message comes through in the passion of the songs. In listening to Hans Raj Hans, Sanam Marvi, Abida Parveen, Nusrat, Kailash Kher or any of the great interpreters of the poems of the Sufis, we hear a voice that seems to emerge from the dawn of time. It rises slowly out of the depths, in a rich low register, moving slowly like a holy river meandering across the rainy plains. Before we can be lulled into peaceful dreams, the pace quickens, the vocalist starts to run into a higher range, as if storming the walls of heaven. Cascades of sound follow as each word, each syllable, is woven into a mesmerizing tapestry of tones. Sometimes a master juggler, sometimes an Expressionist painter, the singer creates the *samaa'*, not a mind-numbing trance but an intensified state of awareness where the face of the divine begins to be visible, the voice of the divine audible within the glory of the music. In our own age of strife and violence, we wonder, does Sufi music give voice to the human call to the divine, or is it the voice of the divine calling to us?

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BIOGRAPHY

HANS RAJ HANS

A national treasure in India and renowned across the globe, Hans Raj Hans is among the finest performers in the Sufi tradition, presenting this genre of music in its truest form. His significant contributions to the field of music extend to Punjabi folk music and movies as well as Indian classical music and Bollywood. Beloved among the most prestigious musicians and film personalities, he was invited by the legendary Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan to perform for the film *Kachche Dhaage*.

In appreciation of his contribution to Sufiana singing, San Jose University in California appointed him a visiting professor of Sufism. Numerous awards include the Padam Shree Award; Punjab State Singer Award; Lifetime Fellowship at Punjabi University, Patiala; and the Sangeet Natak Academy Award.

Along with President Bill Clinton, Hans Raj Hans helped raise 2.5 million dollars for the Gujarat earthquake victims through the Indo-American Foundation. He is an active participant in fundraising initiatives around the world for humanity, peace and Save a Girl Child causes.

Dedicating his life to Sufism and promoting his message of love, peace and brotherhood through his music, he considers it his responsibility to pass along the teachings of the great Sufi saints. With his desire to see music as non-commercial education, his lifetime dream is to establish a Sangeet Ashram for the preservation of traditional tunes and Sufism.