

“The Intangible Heritage of Sikh Sacred Music”

The repertoire presented by the group included *dhrupad* and *partāl* compositions from the Sikh Gurus’ time (late 15th to early 18th centuries). This concert aimed to highlight the aspects that distinguish the Sikh *kīrtan* from other better known traditions of Indian music, not only for its array of rare *rāgas* and *tālas*, but also for being shaped by the sounds of unique instruments, such as the *taūs* and the *jorī-pakhāwaj*, whose creation is attributed to the Sikh Gurūs. (The instruments played by Parminder Singh Bhamra and Nirvair Kaur Khalsa have been handcrafted by Ustad Bhai Baldeep Singh, renowned Sikh musician, scholar and instrument maker).

The performance began at 7 PM, hence the concert showcased evening *rāgas* only, following their sequence given in the *Sri Gurū Granth Sahib*, from the first *rāga* of the Sikh Sacred Scriptures (*Srī rāga*) to the last (*rāga Jaijāvanti*).

The *kīrtan* was set according to the traditional structure, beginning with an instrumental introduction (*shān*), followed by *mangalacharan* and *ālāp*. The first *shabad* was a *dhrupad* composition in *Srī rāga*, “Tohī Mohī Mohī Tohī Antar Kaisā” (by Bhagat Ravidās), in *Jhaptāl* (10 beats). The *kīrtan* continued with a composition in *rāga Mājh*, “Terā Mukh Suhāvā Jīo Sehj Dhun Bānī” (Gurū Arjan), in *Sūlfakta tāl* (10 beats). As third piece, the group performed the *shabad* “Vadh Sukh Rainrīe Pria Prem Lagā” (Gurū Arjan), in *Rāga Bihagrā* set to *Panjtal dī Sawārī* (15 beats). An ancient composition that is credited with being an original contribution of Gurū Arjan, is the *partāl* in *rāga Natt*, set to the *shabad* “Koū Hai Mero Sājn Mīt”. This was followed by Gurū Arjan’s “Sājnā Sant Āo Merai”, in *rāg Kanrā*, set to *Chartāl* (12 beats). The *kīrtan* ended with a very meditative composition in *rāg Jaijāvanti*, *Chartāl* (12 beats), on Gurū Teg Bahadur’s *shabad* “Rām Simar Rām Simar”.

Francesca Cassio is currently Associate Professor of Music, and the *Sardarni Harbans Kaur Chair* at Hofstra University, the first endowed chair in Sikh musicology established in the United States. Since 1994 Dr. Cassio has conducted extensive research in India, where she was trained in classical vocal music by Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Khan Dagar, and Vidushi Girija Devi, and in the *Gurbānī kīrtan* repertoire by Ustad Bhai Baldeep Singh. Dr. Cassio is an accomplished scholar, the author of several publications, including a monograph on *dhrupad*. Prior to joining Hofstra, Dr. Cassio was lecturer of ethnomusicology and Indian vocal music at the Conservatory of Vicenza, University of Trento, and twice Visiting Professor at Viswa Bharati University (Shantiniketan, India).

In 2015 she was awarded the Stessin Prize for an outstanding scholarly publication, the article “*Female Voices in Gurbānī Sangīt and the Role of the Media in Promoting Female Kīrtanīe*”.

In 2016, Dr. Cassio and her accompanists successfully performed a series of concerts and lectures at some the major institutions in the USA, among them Columbia, Yale and Harvard University.

www.francescacassio.com

<https://independent.academia.edu/FrancescaCassio>

Parminder Singh Bhamra studied the ancient *Amritsari Bāj* style of Indian percussion for thirteen years under Ustad Bhai Baldeep Singh. Mr. Bhamra also holds degrees from the National School of Dance and Drama (New Delhi) and the Anād Conservatory, where he served as assistant professor in the Department of Percussion. In Spring 2016 served as a visiting scholar in the Department of Music at Hofstra University.

Nirvair Kaur Khalsa is founder and director of Khalsa Montessori School in Tucson, Arizona, and is currently president of Anād USA, a nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of *Gurbānī kīrtan* and other heritage treasures. Ms. Khalsa has followed the Sikh way of life since 1974, and since 1997 she has studied the *Gurbānī kīrtan* and *taūs*, under the guidance of Ustad Bhai Baldeep Singh.



Dr. Francesca Cassio on vocal and *tānpūrā*, Parminder Singh Bhamra on *joṛī-pakhāwaj* and Nirvair Kaur Khalsa on *taūs*, performing at Yale University, April 2016.