

**Asia Society and CaravanSerai  
Present**

**New Sufi Sounds of Pakistan:  
Arif Lohar with Arooj Aftab**



**Saturday, April 28, 2012, 8:00 P.M.**

**Asia Society  
725 Park Avenue at 70<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York City**

**This program is 2 hours  
with no intermission**



# New Sufi Sounds of Pakistan

## Performers

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Arooj Aftab	lead vocals
Bhriugu Sahni	acoustic guitar
Jorn Bielfeldt	percussion

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Arif Lohar	lead vocals/chimta
Qamar Abbas	dholak
Waqas Ali	guitar
Allah Ditta	alghoza
Shehzad Azim Ul Hassan	dhol
Shahid Kamal	keyboard
Nadeem Ul Hassan	percussion/vocals
Fozia	vocals

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### **AROOJ AFTAB**

Arooj Aftab is a rising Pakistani-American vocalist who interprets mystical Sufi poems and contemporizes the semi-classical musical traditions of Pakistan and India. Her music is reflective of *thumri*, a secular South Asian musical style colored by intricate ornamentation and romantic lyrics of love, loss, and longing. Arooj Aftab restyles the traditional music of her heritage for a sound that is minimalistic, contemplative, and delicate—a sound that she calls “indigenous soul.” Accompanying her on guitar is Boston-based Bhriugu Sahni, a frequent collaborator, originally from India, and Jorn Bielfeldt on percussion.

Arooj Aftab: vocals  
Bhriugu Sahni: guitar  
Jorn Bielfeldt: percussion

### **Semi Classical Music**

This genre, classified in Pakistan and North India as light classical vocal music. *Thumri* and *ghazal* forms are at the core of the genre. Its primary theme is romantic — persuasive wooing, painful jealousy aroused by a philandering lover, pangs of separation, the ache of remembered pleasures, sweet anticipation of reunion, joyful union. Rooted in a sophisticated civilization that drew no line between eroticism and spirituality, this genre asserts a strong feminine identity in folk poetry laden with unabashed sensuality.

The word *thumri* comes from the original word *thumakna*, which means to dance gracefully. *Thumri* may be traced to 4th century B.C. as an art form for singing love songs. The historic role of the singer-courtesans played a major part in the development of this genre. Renowned singer-courtesans who studied music with renowned music maestros of their time gave the *thumri* such stature that it spilled outside the courtesan's domain into the repertoire of great male classical vocalist, like Punjabi classical music great Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. Now, it is customary for most full-scale classical *khayal* recitals to conclude with a *thumri*.

The *ghazal* poetic form consists of rhyming couplets and a refrain with each line sharing the same meter. The form is ancient, originating in 6th century Arabic verse. It is one of the principal poetic forms from the Indo-Persian-Arabic civilization in the eastern Islamic world.

The *ghazal* spread into South Asia in the 12th century through the influence of Sufi mystics and the royal Muslim courts. Although the *ghazal* is most prominently a form of Dari poetry and Urdu poetry, today it is found in the poetry of many languages of the Pakistan and Indian sub-continent. It is a genre that has the ability for a wide range of expression around its central themes of love and separation and the beauty of love in spite of that pain.

### **Man Kunto Maula**

(Sufi poet: Amir Khusrau, 13<sup>th</sup> century; Language: Arabic, Farsi, Urdu)

*Man kunto Maula, fa Ali-un Maula* is part of a *hadith*, or statement by the Prophet Muhammad, that he made upon his return from his last pilgrimage in 632 AD, a few months before he died. It means, "Whoever accepts me as their spiritual guide, Ali is his spiritual guide as well." Ali was the Prophet's cousin and an important figure in Islam. The poem describes the state of being one with love.

#### **Poem**

*Maula, Maula  
Ho Miyaan Ji  
Maula, Hoo Allah*

*Aflak se laaee jaati hai  
Seenon mein chhupayee jaati hai*

*Tawheed ki mein saagar se nahin  
Aakhon se pilaae jaati hai*

*Jisney dekha marr hi gayaa  
Jisney dekha Maula dikha*

*Terey chashmey siyaah mein hai jadoo  
Ghair ka dokha mujhko na dena*

#### **Translation**

Lord, Lord  
O, Lord  
Lord, Allah

A love that is as vast as the sky and the oceans kept hidden in one's heart

An intoxication that is imbibed through the eyes of the seeker

Whoever glimpsed it went into an ecstatic state  
Whoever glimpsed it, glimpsed Divine (love)

In your divine eyes are magical  
Don't betray me as though I am a stranger to you

*Tujh mein main aur mujh mein too*

I am in you and you are in me – we are one

*Man kunto Maula*

Whoever accepts me as their spiritual guide

*Man kunto Maula*

Ali is their spiritual guide, spiritual guide, spiritual guide

## **Mohabbat Karney Waley**

*(Ghazal; Poet: Hafeez Hoshiapuri; Language: Urdu)*

### **Poem**

*Mohabbat karne waale kam nah honge  
Teri mehfil mein lekin hum nah honge*

### **Translation**

You are the beloved of many  
However, I must say, I will not be among  
your lovers

*Zamaane bhar ke ghum yaa ek tera gham  
Ye gham hoga to kitne gham na honge  
Teri mehfil mein lekin hum nah honge*

This is a lifetime of sadness, as I love you  
the most. Having this sadness removes so  
many other sadnesses

However, I must say, I will not be among  
your lovers

## **Aaye Na Baalam (Thumri style; Language: Urdu) / Udhero Na**

### **Poem**

#### ***Aaye Na Baalam***

*Kya karoon sajani aaye na baalam  
Kya karoon sajani aaye na baalam  
Tarapat beeti mori un bin ratiyaan  
Aaye na baalam  
Kya karoon sajani aaye na baalam  
Rowat, rowat kal nahi aaye  
Tarap, tarap mohe raam kal nahi aaye  
Nisdin mohe birhaa sataye  
Yaad aawat jab unki batiyaan  
Aaye na baalam  
Kya karoon sajani  
Aaye na baalam  
Aaye na baalam*

### **Translation**

What shall I do my friend, my beloved will  
not come (to me)  
My nights are spent yearning for him  
What shall I do my friend, my beloved will  
not come (to me)

The pangs of separation burn bright in my  
heart / Like fire on wet wood  
Tomorrow doesn't arrive even as I weep  
endlessly

I pine without him night and day,  
Whenever thoughts of him come to mind  
What shall I do my friend, my beloved  
refuses to come (to me)\

#### ***Udhero Na***

*Ye aainey mein chehra mera to nahin  
Ye aainey mein chehra mera to nahin  
Tum bhi dikhaai diyey har char duaar  
Kahin, kahin, kahin, kahin  
Aakhon mein siley huey ho  
Udheron na  
Udheron na*

This obsession is following me  
It is everywhere  
The images in mirrors are not mine  
The images mirrors are not mine  
Your image is embedded in my mind's  
eye/Your image is stitched into the lining  
of my eyes  
Unravel it  
Unravel it

## Baghon Mein Padey Jhooley

(Thumri; Language: Urdu)

### Poem

*Baagon mein pade jhoole*

*Tum bhool gaye hamako ham*

*Tumko nahi bhoole*

*Ye raks sitaaron ka*

*Sun lo kabhi afsaana*

*Taqdeer ke maaron ka*

*Saawan ka maheena hai*

*Saajan se juda rah kar*

*Jeena bhi kya jeena hai*

*Raavi ka kinaara hai*

*Har mauj ke honthon par*

*Afsaana hamaara hai*

*Ab aur na tadapaao*

*Ya hamko bula bhejo*

*Ya aap chale aao*

*Ya hamko bula bhejo*

### Translation

Swings are swinging in the garden

While you have forgotten (me)

I have not forgotten (you), the way you  
have forgotten us

This heart is without hope, our love left  
unfulfilled

(You stayed away) fearing you would get a  
bad reputation.

Swings are swinging in the garden

While you have forgotten (me)

What is a sky without rain clouds (in the  
monsoon)

But a life unfulfilled and incomplete

Don't make me pine anymore

Or ask me to come to you

Either you come to me

Or ask me to come to you

## Na Ja Balam Pardes

(Thumri; language: Urdu)

### Poem

*Na ja balam pardes*

*Na ja balam pardes*

*Na ja balam pardes*

*Na ja balam pardes*

*Kab se piya tori raah takat hun*

*Kaisey bhejun sanje suhaag*

*Na ja balam pardes*

### Translation

Oh my love, please do not leave and go to  
foreign lands

Oh my love, please do not leave and go to  
foreign lands

How I wait for you, watching the path by  
which you may arrive

How do I send you my blessings?

Oh my love, please do not leave and go to  
foreign lands

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## Arif Lohar Ensemble

Arif Lohar is Pakistan's most treasured singer. Born in the small village of Aach Goch in the Gujrat District of Punjab, Pakistan, Arif Lohar inherited the big talent and traditions of his iconic father, the legendary Pakistani folk singer Alam Lohar. Arif is known for his warm, powerful voice as well as the rich sonic landscape against which he juxtaposes traditional Punjabi songs. While, he embraces his heritage, he re-imagines it with contemporary interpretations. Now a legend himself, Arif blends pop and folk stylings to create a sound uniquely his own. Accompanied by his beloved *chimta*, a traditional percussion

instrument resembling tongs with bells, he continues the tradition of sung storytelling through folk songs centered on perpetuating knowledge, values and social commentary as well as, Sufi poems about love and harmony. Arif is backed by an ensemble of talented Pakistani musicians, some of whom are the sons of the musicians whose fathers performed with Alam Lohar. The ensemble also includes Arif's long time protégé Fozia, a vocalist who goes by one name only.

Arif Lohar: Vocals, chimta

Fozia: Vocals

Allah Ditta: Al Ghoza/Double Reed Flute

Nadeem ul Hassan: Tumkinaari/Drums

Qamar Abbas: Dholak

Shahid Kamal: Harmonium/Keyboard

Shahzad ul Hassan: Dhol

Waqas Ali: Mandolin, Guitar

## **Punjabi music**

Pakistan's Punjab province takes its name from the five rivers that run through it. *Punj* means five and *ab* means water. The rivers, Beas, Chenab, Jeelum, Ravi and Sutlej, are all tributaries of the legendary Indus River. The area's rich soil makes it ideal farming land. Punjab is known for its historic mix of people from different backgrounds and nations - including the Greeks, Persians, Mongols and Afghans - who have created the present rich, layered culture.

Singing and dancing is integral to the way of life for Punjabi villagers and townsfolk alike. Folk and devotional music is the soul of Punjabi culture and very often they are intertwined. As Arif Lohar explains it, in many folk ballads about epic love, there is invariably some reference to the Divine. Folk songs are about life cycles and celebrations of births, marriages, the seasons, harvests, the pain of separation, the joy of love. Devotional Sufi music takes the form of praise songs to the Divine, to the Prophet Muhammad and the great Sufi saints. Simple imagery is used to express emotions of devotion very often, from everyday rural life.

A strong tradition of *Qissa sahity*, or storytelling, is very much part of the music. The historic epics of *Heer Ranjha*, *Sohni Mahiwal*, *Sassi Punnu*, *Mirza Sahiba* among others are all part of this tradition. Ballads are often accompanied by the one stringed *tūmbā* and *algozā*, double reed flute – originally played by shepherds. Alam Lohar made the the *chimta* a popular addition, the metal tongs with chaene, small metal discs welded on top. The resounding beat of the dhol and dholak anchors music.

Gradually, the music emerged from the fields and reached more formal performance arenas such as rural *melās*, or country fairs, or a saint's shrine. Now, many gifted musicians regularly perform in large urban hubs and produce commercial recordings to great acclaim.

## **FOZIA, vocals**

### **Aaj Jaaney Ki Zid Na Karo**

*(Ghazal; Poet: Fayyaz Hashmi, language: Urdu)*

In this *ghazal* of romantic love and yearning, the poet beseeches the loved one not to insist on leaving him after their meeting and instead sit beside him to extend their moment together.

### **Akhaan Jago Mitti Rehdeean Kinno Haal**

*(Geet/traditional song, language: Punjabi)*

This traditional song expresses the intensity of a love that permeates the poet completely, waking or sleeping as, he cannot get his beloved out of his mind he sees her everywhere.

### **Mahi Yaar Dee Gharoli / The Friend's Clay Water Pot**

*(Kafi; poet: Sachal Sarmast, 1739 – 1829, language: Sindhi)*

The *kafi* is a classical musical composition that is most often used with spiritual praise songs or poems dedicated to the *murshid* or spiritual guide and the Divine. The poems can also refer to the transitory world and describe the disciple's pangs of separation and longing for closeness to the Beloved Divine or *Murshid*. Sometimes, the poem in the *kafi* form can also describe more secular social or political themes.

This poem, by Sindhi Sufi poet Sachal Sarmast, draws on the imagery of an everyday household chore from medieval times of filling a clay pot with fresh drinking water from the well.

In Sufism, the potter represents the Divine who give shape to clay pots. Water contained in the pot implies life's sustaining essence.

The poet Sachal Sarmast uses the metaphor of the clay water pot as a symbol for the striving disciple on the spiritual path who, goes through many trials in order to gain proximity to the Divine.

The poetic composition tells the tale about the clay pot's trials:

*I was beaten, shaken and kneaded like the potter's clay / Then I was put onto the wheel and churned round and round / Finally, the fire engulfed me; initially it felt as though I was separated from You / Then, as the fire blazed away, my life was consumed in You.*

## ARIF LOHAR

### Qissa Mirza Sahiba

(Poet: Peelu, language: Punjabi)

In the Punjab, the famed oral storytelling tradition known as *qissa* developed from the *qasida* tradition of Arabs and came to South Asia with the development of Islam and Arab migrants to the region. *Qisse* are traditional morality tales of epic love, valor and honor that transmit the importance of essential social values. *Qisse* passed down generationally, infuses Punjabi folk music with depth and richness and can be recited or sung. The tradition is so deep rooted in Punjabi culture that great Sufis guides are known to quote from the stories in imparting spiritual messages. Such is the case with the *qissa* of *Mirza Sahiban*, one of four major tragic romantic stories in Punjabi culture.

The poet Peelu's story about Mirza and Sahiban, childhood playmates and children of two leaders from the Punjab who fell in love with each other when they grew up. They kept their love secret and Sahiban's parents arranged her marriage to the son of a powerful family. With her wedding looming, Sahiban sent a message to Mirza and he rescues her. Sahiban's brothers follow and catch up with them. As Mirza, an accomplished archer, prepares to fight her brothers, Sahiban breaks his arrows knowing he would not miss his target when he shot and her brothers would die. She believed that her brothers, when her brothers got closer, would see how deep her love for Mirza was and would welcome him to their family. The brothers were not swayed and fought Mirza to death. As he lay dying, Mirza told Sahiban that he would not have shot at her brothers and instead would have fired arrows into the air as a warning.

### Bol Mitti Deya Baweya

(Poet: Alam Lohar, 1965, language: Punjabi)

This is a Sufi morality tale or *bayaan* written by Arif's father, the legendary singer and poet Alam Lohar. The poem reflects the need to be humble and grateful to the Divine as we are created from clay and return to the earth no matter what our material wealth or accomplishments. He highlights the importance of the Sufi message of remaining loving and peaceful through life.

### Alif Allah Chambey di Booti

(*Jugni*; Sufi poet: Sultan Bahu, 17<sup>th</sup> century; Language: Punjabi)

Arif Lohar's father, the legendary singer Alam Lohar, is credited with developing the *jugni* as storytelling style. *Jugni* literally means a female firefly and is a medium for the poet and singer to share stories about life's journey in its many aspects and specific commentary. The poems can either be centered on life cycle events or be Sufi poems that are spiritual praise songs. In the context of Sufism, the *jugni* is a metaphor for the soul and a means to express affinity to the Divine, to the Prophet Muhammad and to Sufi saints. The Sufi context is what the Lohars, Alam and Arif, anchor their *jugni* repertoire in.



Arif Lohar has taken the *jugni* to new heights of popularity with his contemporary interpretation of *Alif Allah Chambey di Booti*, the 17<sup>th</sup> century poem by Sufi mystic Sultan Bahu. This *jugni* is a praise song and declaration of the poet's devotion to the Divine, the Prophet Muhammad and Sufi saints.

## Poem

*Alif Allah chambay di booti,  
tey meray murshid mann vich lai hoo  
Ho nafi uss baat da paani dey kay*

*Har ragaay harjai hoo*

*Ho joog joog jeevay mera murshid  
sohna*

*Hatay jiss ay booti lai ho  
Pir meraya jugni ji*

*Ae way Allah waliyan di jugni ji  
Ae way nabbi pak di jugni ji  
Ae way maula ali wali jugni ji  
Ae way meray pir di jugni ji  
Ae way saaray sabaz di jugni ji*

*Dum gutkoon, gootkun...  
karay Saeen ae  
te kalma nabi da pare sain  
Parhay tay kalma nabi da  
Parhay saeein pir merya*

*Jugni taar khaeein vich thaal  
Chad duniya dey janjaal  
Kuch ni nibna bandiya naal  
Rakhi saabat sidk amaal*

*Jugni dig payee vich roi  
Othay ro ro kamli hoi  
Oddi vaath naye lainda koi  
Tey kalmay binna nai mildi toi*

## Translation

My spiritual guide has planted the fragrant  
seed of love in my heart  
Which flourished with modesty, piety and  
acceptance of his existence

The Divine is present in every throbbing  
pulse of mine  
My spiritual guide is ever present

The one who infused life into me  
I have the spirit of my guide

The spirit of all the messengers who  
brought His message to this earth  
The spirit of the Holy Prophet  
The spirit of Ali (the Prophet Muham-  
mad's cousin) and his followers  
The spirit of my saint  
The spirit of all his words

Every time I think of you the Divine, I feel  
breathless  
So I recite the Kalma (the Muslim prayer  
that attests to the reciter's belief) whenever  
I think of the Divine

O my creation, share whatever you have  
Remove yourself from worldly concerns  
There is nothing that you can get from  
other human beings that you can take to  
the after life  
Just keep your actions and intentions pure  
and true

So absorbed was the creation that she  
stumbled into a ditch  
There she wailed relentlessly  
But there was no one who enquired about  
her  
Remember, there is no salvation for  
anyone without remembering your Creator

*Ho wanga charha lo kuriyon  
Meray daata dey darbaar dian*

Put on your bangles, girls  
Those that you get at your spiritual guides  
shrine

*Ho naa kar teeya khair piyari  
Maan daindiya galaryaan  
Din din talhi juwani jaandi  
Joon sohna puthia lariyaan*

Daughter, don't be proud of your youth  
Your mother scoffs and scolds you  
That with each passing day, your youth  
slips by  
Even gold when put in the furnace molds  
itself, there is absolutely no permanence

*Aurat marad, shehzaday sohney  
O moti, O laa lariyaan  
Sir da sarfa kar naa jairey  
Peen prem pya lariyan*

Women, men, are so beautiful and princely  
Like pearls, like gems  
Those who are not self centered  
They are the ones who truly love humanity

*O daatay day darbaan chaa akho  
Pawan khair sawa lariyan*

Whenever you visit the shrine of any saint  
God fulfills all your wishes and showers  
you with his blessings

*O wanga charha lo kuriyon meray  
daata tey darbar diyan  
O wangha charha lo kuriyon meray  
daata tey darbar diyan*

Put on your bangles, girls; those that you  
get at your spiritual guide's shrine  
Put on your bangles, girls; those that you  
get at your spiritual guide's shrine

*Dum gutkoon, dum gutkoon,  
dum gootkoon, gootkoon gootkoon  
Jugni ji Jugni ji Jugni ji*

I am breathless, I am breathless, I am  
breathless  
Firefly, firefly, firefly

### ***DHAMAL: Dama Dam Mast Qalandar***

*(Sufi Poet: Khwaja Ghulam Farid; 19<sup>th</sup> century, Language: Seraiki)*

*Dhamal*, in mystical rituals of Pakistan is the act of mystical circling, the whirling movement similar to that of the Turkish Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes.

This Sufi poem is sung in honor of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, one of the most important Sufi mystics who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in current day Pakistan's Southern Sindh province region of Sehwan.

Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (red royal falcon) is the Sufi name given to Syed Muhammed Usman who was from Marwand, Azerbaijan. At 20 years old, he became a Sufi and traveled to and settled in the southern Sindh region of Sehwan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in what is current day Pakistan. He went on to become the most popular of all Sufi saints from that period on. He is revered by Hindus as well as Muslims and known to have actively worked for peace between Hindus and Muslims during the course of his life. Hindus regard him as a reincarnated divinity. He is known by several other names with fondness including, *Jhule Lal* or, the precious one.

*Lal*, or red, refers to the red robes he wore. *Lal* is also the word of affection that mothers from the region of Punjab use to refer to a young child. *Qalandars* are

wandering Sufi mystics who are most prevalent in Central Asia, Pakistan and India. They are known for spreading the message of peace, humanism and love. *Shahbaz* literally means a falcon but, within this context, is a reference to his soaring spiritual flights. So revered is he, that mystical poems sung throughout the country invoke his name. Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is known to have practiced *dhamal*, the mystical circling, whirling movement like that of the Turkish Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes. To this day, musicians play large kettledrums (*bher*) in the courtyard of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's tomb and dervishes do the *dhamal* as part of their spiritual practice every evening after prayers. Some visitors to the shrine, men and women, dance with abandon to the drumbeats to the point of trance.

## Poem

*O laal meri pat rakhio bala jhoole laalan  
Sindri da Sehvan da, sakhi Shabaaz  
Qalandar*

*Dama dam mast Qalandar, Ali dam dam  
de andar  
Dam mast qalandar mast mast*

*Chaar charaag tere baran hamesha, Pan-  
jwa mein baaran aayi bala Jhoole laalan*

*O panjwa mein baalan aei, O panjwa mein  
baalan aayi bala*

*Jhoole laalan, Sindri da Sehvan da, sakhi  
Shabaaz Qalandar  
Dama dam mast Qalandar, Ali dam dam  
de andar*

*Hind Sind peera teri naubat vaaje, Naal  
vaje ghadiyaal bala jhoole laalan,  
O naal vaje, O naal vaje ghadiyaal bala  
jhoole laalan*

*Har dam peera teri khair hove*

*Naam-e-Ali beda paar laga jhoole  
laalan / O naam-e-Ali, O naam-e-Ali beda  
paar laga jhoole laalan*

*Sindri da sehvan da sakhi Shabaaz  
Qalandar / Dama dam mast Qalandar,  
Ali dam dam de andar*

## Translation

O red robed one, may I always have your benign protection, Jhulelal. O, the lord and friend of Sindh and Sehwan, the red robed one, the Divine-intoxicated Qalandar

The Divine in every breath of mine, all glory to you  
Breathlessly enraptured, ecstatic *Qalandar*, ecstatic, ecstatic

Your shrine is always lit with four lamps, and here I come to light a fifth lamp in your honor

Here I come with the fifth O Lord, friend and Master of Sindh and Sehwan

The red robed friend and Master of Sindh and Sehwan, Divine-intoxicated Qalandar  
The Divine in every breath of mine, Ali's breath in mine, glory be to you

Let the gong bells ring out your esteemed name out loud in Hind (India) and Sindh  
Let the gong ring out loud for your glory day and night by the watchman and people

O Lord, may you prevail every time, everywhere

I pray for your well being, in the name of Ali

I pray to you to help my boat cross in safety (in the river of life)

This program is part of Asia Society's ongoing initiative, *Creative Voices of Muslim Asia*, a multidisciplinary initiative using the arts as a springboard to understand the diversity of Islam as a creative inspiration. Through an integrated program that brings together expertise from across the geographic and cross-disciplinary depth of the entire community and organization, *Creative Voices* will not only provide a platform for myriad voices and perspectives, but will provide audiences with the context for a deeper understanding of Islamic artists and their societies.

For more information please visit [asiasociety.org/creativevoices](http://asiasociety.org/creativevoices)

Co-presented with *Caravanserai: A place where cultures meet*, a groundbreaking, multi-year, US national initiative conceived by Arts Midwest that celebrates global diversity while building bridges to a better tomorrow through a series of artistic residencies and public programs. The focus of *Caravanserai's* first edition is Pakistan. Since fall 2011, through the spring of 2012, some of Pakistan's finest artists have toured the US sharing their art and stories about Pakistan with different communities.

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