



Sunday, October 7, 2018, 3pm
Hertz Hall



Sandeep Das and the HUM Ensemble
Delhi to Damascus

Sandeep Das, *tabla, composer*
Suhail Yusuf Khan, *sarangi*
Rajib Karmakar, *sitar*
Issam Rafea, *oud*

This afternoon's program will be announced from the stage.

*The concert will be performed without intermission
and will last approximately 75 minutes.*

Cal Performances' 2018–19 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

D*elhi to Damascus* is a celebration of the historical and cultural ties between India and Syria. The two countries have a deep connection that dates back to 130 BCE, when they were integral to the legendary Silk Road. This connection facilitated a vibrant cultural, linguistic, and musical exchange as witnessed in their common Sufi music tradition and the ancient Indo-Iranian and Indo-European Sanskrit language that was used in Hindu Vedas but originated in Syria and travelled to India.

This shared heritage inspired *tabla* maestro Sandeep Das to initiate a first-of-its-kind *Delhi to Damascus* project. For this collaboration Das sought out the participation of Syrian *oud* master Issam Rafea. Together, they are joined by Indian vocalist and *sarangi* player Suhail Yusuf Khan and *sitar* virtuoso Rajib Karmakar.

The repertoire ranges from an exploration of traditional Indian *ragas* to a masterful melodic interplay of Arabic *maqams*, from deep-rooted Sufi poems to lyrical *thumri* and *dadra* (traditional and old forms of singing), and from classical rhythm cycles to pulsating folk grooves. The dynamic strumming of the *oud* with *sitar* and *oud* with *sarangi*—rare combinations—along with powerful *tabla* rhythms recalls the glories of the fabled Silk Road. The music takes listeners on a mesmerizing journey, filled with exquisite poetry and lyrical exposition, along the winding roads from Delhi in India to Damascus in Syria and transports the audience to a time and period from long ago.

Delhi to Damascus paints a lush picture of the human spirit transcending all borders, surviving, and thriving. It evokes images of merchants with their caravans travelling through desert sand to trade in bustling bazaars of ancient cities like Damascus and Jaisalmer.

This is a powerful example of music as the universal language of love and human connection. It is a reflection of our common history and embraces unity over divisiveness. It is a spiritual journey that transports the audience from harmonic trances into a world of vivid sound, color, and beauty.

Sandeep Das (*tabla, composer*) is one of the leading *tabla* virtuosos in the world. Having established himself as India's top *tabla* master, he has also built a prolific international reputation. Das is one of the few Indian classical musicians who has collaborated and performed with, and composed for, major symphony orchestras, string quartets, and jazz musicians, and he is regularly featured in concerts at prestigious venues including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Hollywood Bowl, Royal Albert Hall, and the Concertgebouw. He played the BBC Proms in 2004 and 2009, performed at the United Nations General Assembly Hall in New York in 2008, and is the only Indian artist to have performed for the Opening Ceremony of the Special Olympic Games in Shanghai. Das has appeared before dignitaries including the Queen of England, the Queen of Thailand, the Pope, and other international leaders. His collaboration with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silkroad Ensemble (SRE) in *Sing Me Home* won the 2017 Grammy Award for Best World Music Album. Das has also received two previous Grammy nominations, in 2005 and 2009. He received the Brother Thomas Fellowship and New England Choice Artist of the Year award for 2017.

Das has composed several pieces combining both percussion and melody. His latest composition, *King Ashoka*, was premiered recently by Yo-Yo Ma and the Silkroad Ensemble and also toured in Asia. Das' *Tarang* was used as the theme music for *Blind Sight*, a documentary about the first Mt. Everest expedition by six blind climbers. *Mohini* became the theme music for the NHK Japanese television channel's documentary on the Silk Road. *Srishi*, a percussive and rich composition, has been performed worldwide.

Das is also the founder of HUM (Harmony and Universality through Music). HUM's mission is two-fold: to promote global understanding through performance and education, and to provide learning opportunities and scholarships for specially abled children with potential in any genre of art to empower them to lead self-reliant lives. Since its inception, HUM has grown in size and it now supports six specially abled children through national scholarships, the first program of its kind in India.

Das trained intensively, starting at the age of seven, in the centuries-old Indian tradition of Guru-Shishya Parampara—of living with his guru, Pandit Kishan Maharaj and learning and practicing music as a way of life, more than as simply an art form. His training and life experiences provide a unique, educational example for students and ensembles. Das has been on faculty at the Harvard Education School Summer Institute for the past five years and has been an artist-in-residence at universities including Dartmouth, Brandeis, UC Santa Barbara, UC Santa Clara, Juilliard, the Berklee School of Music, and UC British Columbia.

A gold medalist in English literature at the Banaras Hindu University in India, Das is an artist, performer, composer, and cultural and educational entrepreneur. He currently resides in Boston.

Suhail Yusuf Khan (*sarangi*), a devoted *sarangi* player, was hailed as a child prodigy in the world of Indian classical music. He draws from a rich family musical heritage and is an eighth-generation *sarangi* player

At the age of seven, Khan started learning to play the *sarangi* under the tutelage of his uncle and grandfather. He gave his first live performance at the age of 11, with his grandfather and uncle. Since then Khan has performed in India and around the world. He has toured the UK and United States extensively.

Khan is a multifaceted artist who is also a composer, singer, and song writer. His versatility extends to varied genres of music, from Indian classical compositions to contemporary rock fusion, jazz fusion, world music, and folk music fusion. The British Council, New Delhi named Khan a cultural ambassador from India to the UK. Khan also has the honor of being a graded musician with All India Radio, the Indian public radio broadcaster.

Rajib Karmakar (*sitar*) is a Los Angeles-based *sitar* artist, composer, and educator who combines tradition with experimentation to create new musical forms. He draws from a deep grounding in Indian classical music and experience with a wide variety of contemporary world

music, rock, and jazz. Karmakar has performed extensively in India and around the world. He received his MFA in music from the California Institute of the Arts, and currently is the founder and director of the Los Angeles International Music and Arts Academy.

Issam Rafea (*oud*) was named Best Composer at the 2010 Dubai International Film Festival for his work on the film *Matar Ayloul* (*September Rain*). Chair of the Arabic music department at the High Institute of Music in Damascus and principal conductor of the Syrian National Orchestra for Arabic Music from 2003–13, he has studied under Fayez Zahr El-Din, Aref Abdallah, and Askar Ali-Akbar. In 1995 Rafea received his bachelor's degrees in *oud* and double bass performance, as well as in conducting, from the High Institute of Music in Damascus. He also teaches *oud* at the institute. In Syria, Rafea has been an active composer and arranger for television and theater since the 1990s.

In addition to solo appearances with the Syrian National Symphony Orchestra, Rafea has performed internationally and participated in music festivals in Algeria, Spain, France, Egypt, and Iraq. He is the co-founder and *oud* player for the contemporary Arabic music group Hewar, which has performed in countries including the UAE, Egypt, Germany, the UK, France, Japan, and the United States. Rafea also founded Twais Quartet, a group that performs both original compositions by Rafea and traditional Arabic music. He collaborates internationally with groups including Gorillaz, arranging works for performances by the Syrian National Orchestra for Arabic Music. Additionally, Rafea participated in a series of concerts and workshops during 2010 with students of the Royal Academy in Denmark as part of a Syrian-Danish cultural cooperation program.

In 2013 Rafea came to the United States to direct the Middle Eastern Music Ensemble and give a series of presentations and performances at Northern Illinois University's School of Music. Also that year, Rafea was invited to participate as a performer and workshop instructor in a University of Minnesota symposium on Arab-American culture and history.