



THANK YOU

for giving us a Digital Identity



***Supported by Folk and Tribal Arts Cultural Society,
An Autonomous Body of Department of Culture,
Government of Uttar Pradesh***



Director's Message

On behalf of all of us at Anahad foundation, we are grateful for your generosity toward our initiative! Your support aids our journey of helping underprivileged folk artists/musicians from various villages and communities to eliminate their dependence on other occupations for the survival of their livelihoods and eradicate the financial crisis that dawns upon them. We are incredibly thankful for your support.

Folk musicians who live in secluded villages are bound to find jobs in fields that they are not very efficient in and inevitably end up working as underpaid employees. Most of them live in places that lack decent infrastructure and modes of education that might supplement their knowledge toward earning a livelihood for their families and making a substantial difference in the evolution of their communities. These issues can be resolved to a great extent if they understand the working of an online social presence that would help them reach out to the masses and showcase their talents.

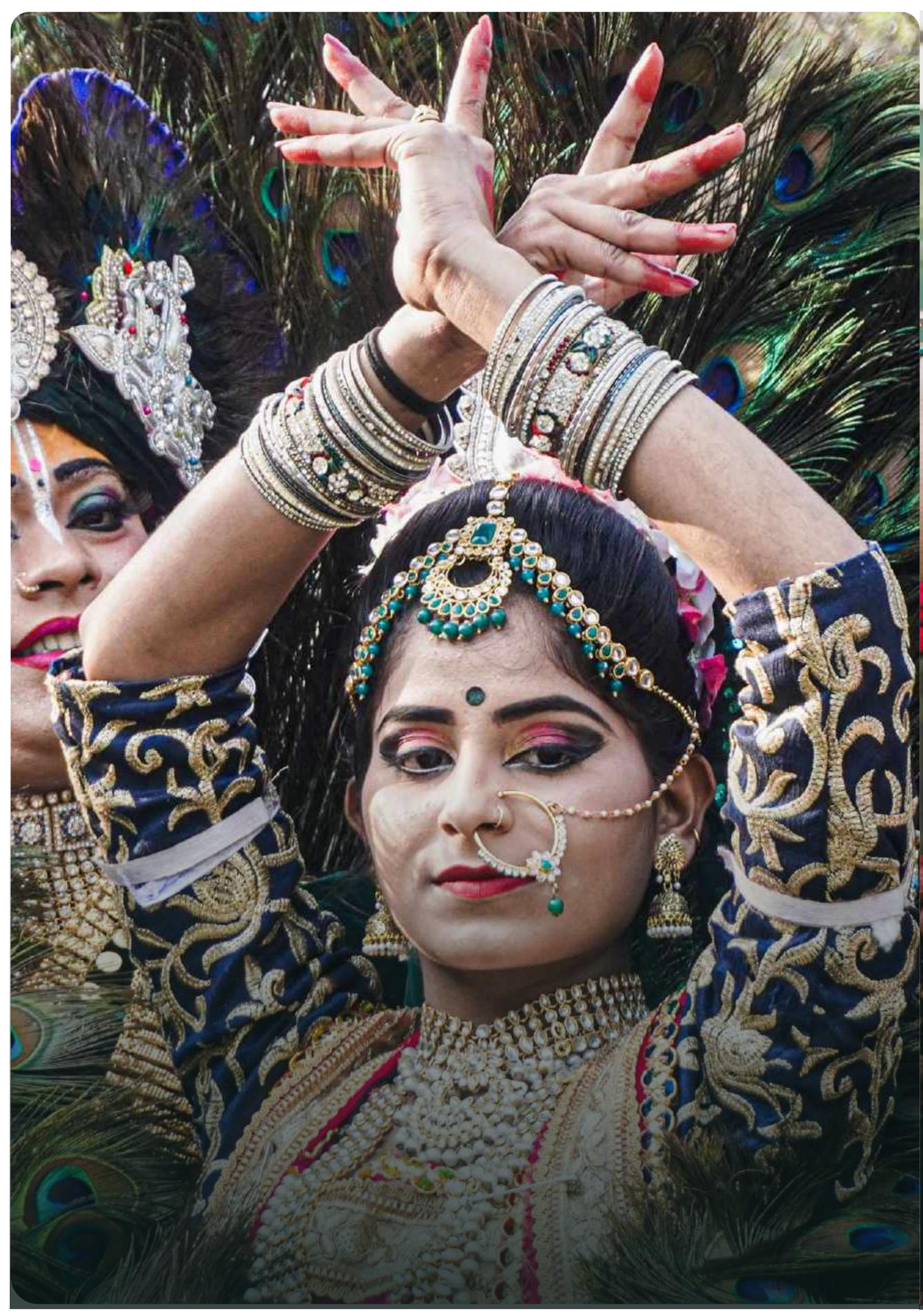
Our initiative, Backpack Studio, through which we reach out to several artists every year and help them record and document their traditional melodies to enhance their grasp on professionalism in the process of recording their pieces of art and laying them down on various online platforms like Youtube. This would elevate their influence as well as prevent the art forms from getting extinguished with time.

With your support and belief in us, we have successfully achieved the empowerment of 250 artists. Thank you again for giving this responsibility to our Organisation. This time we were able to expand in the Uttar Pradesh region, resultant we made 50 music videos of the 25 groups. The recordings done by us will bring the artists, a sense of identity on a digital platform and make them self-reliant. For the artists having their song recorded, they gain respect for themselves by others in their musical community. A good portion of the normal recording in any field is usually concerned with the entertainment industry and so when someone asks, what is recording music? this industry tends to be what they're asking about. It is because of support like yours that Anahad has been able to prevent and reduce the dependency of folk artists on middlemen, through conservation and preservation of Indian folk musical heritage.

The prototype done in the Braj, Awadh and Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh was highly productive and thus we are looking forward to work more in other parts of the state. We are glad to express that we stride successfully on the path towards achieving our objective of preventing folk music from fading away and preserving this traditional form of art for the survival of their culture.

ABHINAV AGRAWAL
(DIRECTOR, ANAHAD FOUNDATION)





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FATEHPUR SIKRI

AZEEZ CHISHTI & Group

Azeez Chishti, 60, is a vocalist and harmonium. He is the head of Qawwals in Fatepur Sikri a historical city one hour away from Agra in Uttar Pradesh. Azeez and his group sing qawwalis in Hindi, Urdu and Rasi languages. They mostly sing in the Yaman, Bhairavi and Peelu raag. For them, it is the best way to connect with the Almighty. Delhi's Sufi saint Amir Khusrow of the Chishti order of Sufis is credited with fusing the Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Indian traditions in the late 13th century in India to create Qawwali as we know it today. However, musical instrument use found its way into Qawwali and modern performers of musical Qawwali will justify their use of instruments by saying that the Sufi Saints do not stop them when they use them near their shrines. Instruments such as Harmoniums, tabla and dholak are now common in many Qawwali parties. The group starts the qawwali by beginning gently and building steadily to a very high energy level to induce hypnotic states both among the musicians and the audience. Almost all their Qawwalis are based on a Raga from the Hindustani classical music tradition. The group is an amalgamation of senior and highly talented group members like which has Shahjuddin Warsi, 50, who plays the Tabla, Shamma Khan, 62, sings the chorus, Mohammad Shakir, 25, sings the chorus, Mohammad Umar, 34, plays the harmonium and is also part of the chorus and Dildaar Warsi, 23, plays the Banjo. From the instrumental prelude where the main melody is played on the harmonium, accompanied by the tabla, which is improvised by variations of the melody.

“Tracing qawwali with the chief qawaal of Salim Chishti Dargah.”

Braj is not just the land where the love of Radha and Krishna blossomed but is also the place where the Mughal Emperor reached their cultural and architectural pinnacle. Sufi saints like Salim Chishti and Amir Khusrow emoted their divinity through Sufi Kalams. To experience such a performance by Azeez Chishti Ji, who also happens to be the Chief Qawwal of Salim Chishti Dargah, we headed to Fatehpur Sikri. Fatehpur Sikri has a rich cultural and historical heritage. It happened to be the capital of Mughals during the reign of Akbar. The majestic and the grandeur of the city can be felt even today. Due to time constraints, we could only visit Buland Darwaza. Heading towards the main gate walking up forty-two steps, we could feel the strong vibrations of the Azan around us, and with the sunrays of the golden hour falling on the red and buff sandstone gateway was a breathtaking experience.

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Being in a trance-like state with this visual, we saw the inscription on Buland Darwaza reading, ‘The World is a Bridge, pass over it, but build no houses upon it. He who hopes for a day may hope for eternity, but the world endures but an hour. Spend it in prayer, for the rest is unseen.’ Buland Darwaza is the highest gateway in the world and is the epitome of Mughal architectural mastery. The moment we entered, a flock of pigeons flew over us with a few kids rushing in our direction to smite us with their sweet charm and poetry.

The sky that day was clear, and the reflection of Salim Chishti’s Mazar, which is another marvel of Mughal architecture, on the reflecting pool was something from which you just can’t take your eyes off. With all this awe and amazement, we suddenly saw a person in his 60’s moving his fingers effortlessly across the keys of the harmonium and singing in his full-throated mellifluous voice, belting out one of the Kalams of Amir Khusrow just in front of the Dargah. We instantly understood this was Azeez Chishti. He holds the experiences from singing with his father Noor Mohammad Qawaal, who happens to be his Guru. His journey has been remarkable, from singing for the All India Radio to becoming the Chief Qawwal of the Dargah.

As a conversation evolved around him, we discovered that their family has been performing at the service of Hazrat Salim Chishti Dargah for generations. Azeez Ji himself has been with the shrine for the last 50 years. Azeez Chishti’s forefathers have been part of Akbar’s court and used to get a salary from the royal treasury. The whole Dargah experience was quite captivating, where we got a chance to spend some time with our spiritual self in the true sense. To film Azeez Ji and his group, we chose the campus of a college named MBD Intercollege in the village Dura in the district of Agra, surrounded by dense green fields.

There, with his qawwali team, he gave an exuberant performance. They performed Nat sharif, “Na ming hanam che majhol”, a Kalam by the great Sufi Saint Amir Khusrow, and it was followed by “Kahun Kaise Sakhi”, a beautiful song of divine love.

“Kahun kaise sakhi, mohe laaj lage,

(What to tell you, my friend, I feel very shy)

Mohe piya ki nazariya maar gayi,

(My beloved has made me fall in love with his eyes)

Maine laaj ka ghoonghat khol diyo”

(Keeping my shyness aside I have confessed my love in him)

Due to a lack of financial growth in the musical field, these artists have to look for other jobs to earn a livelihood for their families. Currently, at the age of 68, Mohammad Azeez Chishti, despite being an amazingly talented artist who has done so much for generations, had to struggle for financial assistance. He is a severe diabetic patient and had to take Insulin to keep his sugar levels in control. When asked, he was unwilling to teach his coming generations the art of qawwali as he fears that the future ahead is very grim and unpredictable.



AZEEZ CHISHTI

Contact Info - 9720782434

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 60-year-old artist from Mohammad Azeez Chishti has been learning music through Qawwali (Hindi, Urdu, and Farsi). At the early age of 6, he began to learn, seeking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring/sumptuous/tremendous passion. He considers his father - Noor Mohammad Qawaal, and Peer Mohammad (Noora Peera) as his gurus speaks very highly of their teaching and their achievements in the field of music. His songs are, therefore, very similar to that of theirs. He also believes that he has inherited from his father, who had a natural talent for mastering the art of singing Qawwalis and playing the Harmonium. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father, and ever since then, he picked up the Harmonium, and never stopped learning. He also knows how to write Shayaris apart from singing Qawwali and has performed in various locations within the country. He has received several awards for his numerous stage performances and pulled off brilliant performances at festivals in states like Bihar, Mumbai, Jaipur, Delhi. He regards his performance at Delhi as the most memorable experience.

SHAHJUDDIN WARSI

Contact Info - 7895552830

Role - Tabla

A 50-years-old artist from Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, Shahjuddin Warsi, has been learning music through folk and classical music. He comes from a family having music in their tradition, and he began to play the Tabla taking inspiration from his ancestors. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Karim Khan, who also happens to be his uncle(chacha), his first guru who taught him how to play Dholak. Shahjuddin also speaks highly of Sahabuddin Khan, his professional Tabla Guru from Jaipur. He owes his playing style to them. He also believes that he has inherited music from his ancestors, who have a natural desire for mastering the art of music, especially Qawwali. Their family has a heritage of Qawwali and folk music, and his children are also following the same footsteps- one of his sons is a well-known Ghazal singer in their locality. Apart from being an established tabla player, he is also well-known for playing Dholak and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has received great recognition from his performances in states like Kolkata, Mumbai, Darbhanga, Delhi, Jaipur, and Pune.



SHAMMA KHAN

Contact Info - 9720782434

Role - Naal, Dholak

A 62-years-old artist from Agra, Shamma Khan, has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet and Qawwali. At a very young age, he began to learn to play the Naal, which we, in general, call the Dholak. He got inspired by his Guru, Karim Ustad Ji, from Agra. According to him, there can not be any greater inspiration than a Guru. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He belongs to the Agra Gharana and dedicates all his achievements in the field of music to his guru. He is also a very dedicated artist and believes that music from his life will go only after his demise. When he was in his youth, he would take part in village jagrans, Bhagwat paaths, and thus picked up the naal and never stopped learning. Apart from playing with the Qawwali Groups, he also accompanied several artists for events like Jagrans, folk performances, etc. Shamma Khan has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has done few studio sessions with Anwar Saheb but considers himself more of a stage performer.



MD. SHAKIR

Contact Info - 8218735655

Role - Chorus

A 22-years-old artist from Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, Mohammad Shakir, has been learning music through his family's heritage of Qawwali form. At a very young age, he began to play the Dholak taking inspiration from his father, Kallu Ustad, who played the instrument in Bollywood chartbuster films like Pardes & Watim. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father, Kallu Ustad, as his guru and mentor. He speaks very highly of his teaching as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of their songs have been written by Sayars & Sufi saints like Amir Khusro, Mollana Zami, Badam Bansi and are based on traditional Kalams and compositions. He also believes that his interest in music comes from his family's musical lineage and from their ancestors, who have had a natural desire for mastering and passing the art of singing Qawwali to the next generation. When he was a child, he would try imitating his father and so picked up the instrument and never stopped playing. He also sings in the chorus and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has received love and appreciation in numerous stages in India while performing with his father and Azeez Chisti Ji.



MD. UMAR

Contact Info -

Role - Chorus, Dholak

A 34-years-old artist from Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, Mohammad Umar has been learning music through his ancestral musical lineage of Qawwali. He has been accompanying his father, Kallu Khan, for the last eight years and draws all his inspiration from him. After studying till 5th grade, he left his studies and started working as a tourist guide. Despite all the ups and downs in his life, he has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous joy. He considers his father and Azeez Chisti Ji as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Md. Umar also believes that music has the power to cure people not just of their ailments but by providing a deep sense of peace and relaxation. He is also familiar with the art of playing a dholak, apart from singing in the chorus. He has performed in various locations within the state, throughout the country and wishes to go abroad. Apart from singing in the Dargah, he also plays Dholak at jagrans and bhajan mandalis and pulled off brilliant performances at festivals across India. He regards his performance at Taj Mahotsav, Agra, as the most memorable experience he has had.



DILDAR WARSI

Contact Info - 8384886611

Role - Banjo

A 23-years-old artist from Agra, Dildar Warsi, has been learning music through Qawwali and Hindustani Classical Music. At the tender age of 7, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his elder brother Ustad Haider Ali, who now stays in Delhi. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Ustad Haider Ali, Noor Khan, and Mohammad Dilshad Hussain as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teaching as well as caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus written/made/sung to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his brother, who has a natural talent for mastering the art of playing the banjo. When he was a child, he would try to observe his elder brother Haider Ali, and thus picked up the banjo also known as and never stopped learning. He only knows how to play the Bulbul Tarang and with it, he has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has also received training on classical music and has pulled off brilliant performances at festivals in and around Uttar Pradesh only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance at Taj Mahotsav, Agra as the most memorable experience.





MD. SHUEB CHISHTI

Contact Info - 9808645264

Role - Chorus

A 24-years-old artist from Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, Md Shuaib Chishti has been learning music through his ancestral legacy of Qawwali music. When he was a kid, he began to play the Dholak taking inspiration from his father, Azeez Chishti. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers his father to be his biggest inspiration, and guru under whose guidance he first learned dholak, then when his father saw his progress, taught him vocals, and currently, he is giving lessons on how to play the harmonium. He speaks very highly of his teaching as well as achievements in the field of music. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his ancestors, with a natural desire for mastering the art of singing Qawwali and Sufi kalam. It is believed that their ancestors have been performing at the dargah of Baba Salim Chishti from the days of Akbar. He feels very strongly about his family's musical heritage and wishes to the Qawwali music and the art of devotional Sufi music forward. He also explains that one of the reasons why chose to do music is to be there for their music and the heavy burden of keeping the legacy of his family alive along with his father, Azeez Chishti.







 MATHURA

MONIKA TOMAR & Group

Mayur dance signifies an episode of love between Radha and Lord Krishna and belongs to the Braj region of Uttar Pradesh. In this dance form, Radha, pinning for Krishna after a brief separation, decides to console herself by the sight of peacocks, whose feathers Krishna wears on his crown, at the Mor Kutī. Lord Krishna knowing her mind from afar, playfully causes the peacocks to disappear, leaving Radha distraught. He eventually yields to Radha's entreaties, and himself appears in the guise of a peacock to dance with his beloved. Monika Tomar and her group perform this dance beautifully with her troupe of musicians, namely Sourav Kaushik, 36, a Dholak player; Vikas Nagar, 16, who plays the Tabla; Shyam Goswami, Chorus singer, and Manjira expert. Monika has excelled in semi-classical folk forms and Mayur Nritya. She started learning Kathak while she was a child and has completed the six-year course in the same dance form. She is a skilled Charkhula dancer also who performs with a 65kgs set up having 108 lamps lit up. She is also a dance teacher and teaches kids various dance folk forms. The group has performed at various stages in the states like Rajasthan, UP, Haryana, etc., in India, whereas they have also performed in South Korea internationally. For the group, Mayur Nritya is their life. Monika directs and produces the dance with all her heart and soul and ensures that it reaches people. Their melodies are captivating, and their dance transpires through word-of-mouth, as most of them haven't had the privilege to get a college education and gain the required marketing skills.

“Unveiling the love story of Radha and Krishna.”

Braj as a region has many mythological and religious connotations attached to it. In Hindu beliefs, it is one of the most important places of pilgrimage. Mathura is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna. In Brajbhoomi, the love of Radha-Krishna blossomed, the stories of their eternal love are very prominent in all the art forms of Braj. To witness such a dance form, the team contacted Monica Tomar, the lead dancer of the Mayur Nritya Dance Group. Mayur Nritya draws its inspiration from the ethereal episodes of love between Radha and Krishna. This dance form has its origin in the Braj region of Uttar Pradesh.

The story narrates that Radha was grieving for the love of her beloved Lord Krishna in separation. Seeing Radha in such pain, Lord Krishna decides to console her by the sight of peacocks, whose feathers Krishna wears on his crown. Mayur Nritya is a very vibrant and colourful dance form and engrosses one immediately in its charm. The dance form has a beautiful blend of Birth Ras and Shringar Ras. The dance form involves magnificent dramatic characteristics and facial expressions apart from its graceful dancing moves. Witnessing Mayur Nritya for the first time, the audience can sense how the beautiful love stories of Radha & Lord Krishna are strongly engraved in the hearts of the people and the artists here in Braj. And the strong devotion that every artist shares for their art form is so evident in their performances.

Monica Tomar is a classically trained dancer and is currently in her 6th year of Kathak. Apart from doing stage shows, she also teaches dance in Dr RM Shah Global Public School. Though she does all forms of folk dances of Braj, Mayur Nritya and Charkula nritya hold a special place in her heart. Her dance group specializes in Mayur Nritya & Charkula nritya and involves very dedicated and devoted artists. These artists are trying their best to pursue their passion as a full-time profession. The dancers in the group exhibit a performance quality, valued for their artistry. Shika, who played the character of Radha Rani skillfully, communicated and interpreted the ideas of her despair from being away from her beloved in her given movement vocabulary she captivated everyone.

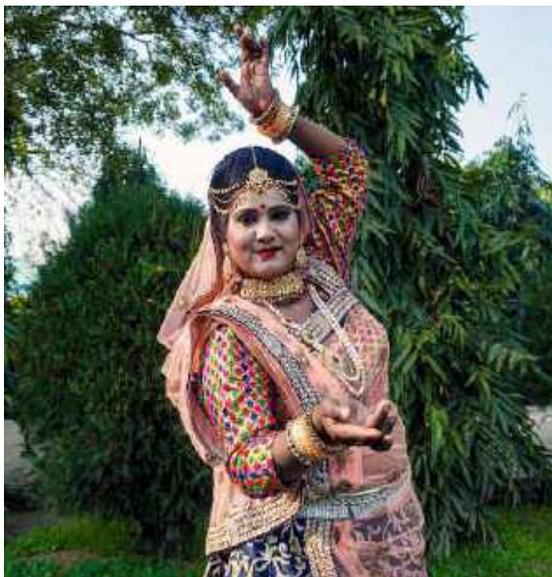
Their group is highly appreciated by their audience because of their visuals. It can end disbelief by communicating ideas through emotions. Their dance is beautifully accompanied by a group of musicians, led by Sachin Brijwasi, who is a folk and bhajan singer of great repute. They sang rasiyas like “tohe mor baanake naachaungi man mohan baansi dhaare.” Their melodies beautifully encompassed the story of the love between Lord Krishna and Radha. How Lord Krishna, with his eagerness to please his beloved, transforms into a peacock and dances.

The music group also has equally experienced Shyam Goswami, 38, a manjira player and chorus singer, and Sourav Kaushik, who plays with all his heart. For tabla, the group has the very young and vividly talented Vikash Nagar, who is just 16 years old. Interestingly, he came along with his father once to watch the groups’ performance but ended up putting on a splendid performance by himself. India is so blessed to have such skilled artist and is indeed a matter of great pride that we belong to a country with amazing and unique cultures and forms to exhibit.

Apart from performing the traditional way, she is also given credits for choreographing Braj Vandana, Makhan Leena, Charkhula. At the age of 38, she has already established herself to be a prolific dancer with no doubts, but she’s blessed with a philanthropic heart. She has been very instrumental in teaching dance to young dancers from the marginalized sections of the society, and once they get to imbibe the art well, she makes them a part of the group and carries them along for her performance. “Dance is my lifeline, and whatever I have achieved, it became possible only because of dance. I want to dedicate my life to dance and wish to keep performing till my last breath.” Saying this she and her group gave a dazzling performance on:

“Ek din shri kunwar raadhika mor kuti aai,
(One day, Krishna and Radha came to the peacock garden)

Mor wahan ekhu naay paaye”
(But they didn’t find any peacock there)



MONIKA TOMAR

Contact Info - 8869026606

Role - Team Leader

A 38-year-old artist from Mathura has been learning dance through Mayur Nritya and Kathak. At the tender age of 4, she began to learn dance and took inspiration from Shri Devi. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. She considers Thakur Radha Rani as her Guru. Most of her dances are thus, performed in a similar style. She also knows how to perform folk dance apart from Mayur Nritya and has performed in various locations within the country like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and many more. Globally, she has also performed in South Korea. She has pulled off brilliant performances at numerous dance festivals to mesmerize the crowds and regards their appreciation as the most memorable experience. She lives in a family of 3 people and has a son. Thus, she also has to work as a dance teacher at school to make ends meet. Despite all her struggles, she strives to keep developing her craft. Monica dreams to keep dancing all her life and to see herself succeed through the art that she loves so much.

SACHIN BRIJWASI

Contact Info - 9837286511

Role - Vocals, Harmonium

A 36-years-old artist from Mathura, Sachin Brijwasi has been learning music through the blessings of god. He began to play the tabla from a very young age taking inspiration from the diaspora of incredible musicians who lived in and around him, he credits his observation skills to be his first guru. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He did his masters in music (tabla) from Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad. He has always idolised great artists like Ravi Rakesh from delhi and Misra ji from Firozabad and considers them as his biggest inspiration and speaks very highly of their teaching as well as caliber in the field of music, and that's reflected in his playing style. He also believes that music is a great gift to mankind and says, "whether there is joy or sorrow, will keep doing music today and tomorrow." When he was in his youth, he would try to imitate the tablist and dholak player in his village and thus picked up the dholak and never stopped learning. Apart from Braj Lok Geet, he is also very proficient in light music and performs with various reputed ghazal, bhajan and sugam sangeet artists. He has performed in various locations within the state and the country.



SOURAV KAUSHIK

Contact Info - 6397117751

Role - Dholak

A 36-years-old artist from Mathura, Sourav Kaushik, has been learning music through the blessings of God. He began to play the tabla from a very young age taking inspiration from the diaspora of incredible musicians who lived in and around him and credits his observation skills to be his first guru. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He did his masters in music (tabla) from Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad. He has always idolized great artists like Ravi Rakesh from Delhi and Misra Ji from Firozabad and considers them as his biggest inspiration and speaks very highly of their teaching and caliber in the field of music, and that is reflected in his playing style. He also believes that music is a great gift to mankind and says, "Whether there is joy or sorrow, I will keep pursuing music today and tomorrow." When he was in his youth, he would try to imitate the tablist and dholak player in his village and thus picked up the dholak and never stopped learning. Apart from Braj Lok Geet, he is also very proficient in light music and performs with various reputed ghazal, bhajan, and sugam sangeet artists. He has performed in several locations within the state and the country.



VIKASH NAGAR

Contact Info - 9568561075

Role - Tabla

A 16-years-old artist from Mathura, Vikash Nagar, has been learning music through Braj Lok geet. From a very tender age, he began to play percussion seeking inspiration from his father, Amarjeet Nagar. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father to be his first guru. Then, under the able guidance of Shree Brijawasi Nagar, he has been taking tabla and dholak lessons and speaks very highly of their teaching and caliber in the field of music. He is still in a very nascent stage of his musical journey and is trying to observe and absorb as much as he can, from his gurus and the world around him. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his family and especially his father, who has a natural desire for mastering the art of playing percussive instruments. When he was a child/ in his youth, he would try to imitate Amarjeet Ji, his father, and thus picked up the dholak and never stopped learning. Vikash is a proficient Tabla player but is also well-versed with playing Dholak and Nakkara. He has performed in various locations within the state and is highly appreciated for them..



SHYAM GOSWAMI

Contact Info - 9837286511

Role - Chorus, Manjira

A 38-years-old artist from Mathura, Shyam Goswami, has been learning music through Braj Lok geet. He has no formal training in music as such, but by observing and spending time with other musicians, he inculcated the art of singing. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Sachin Brijwasi to be his Guru, his mentor, and his biggest inspiration. He has been with Sachin Ji for the past 25 years and speaks very highly of his teaching and caliber in the field of music. He mostly accompanies Sachin Brijwasi and sings songs that are being written and scripted traditionally. He also believes that music is his lifeline, and he owes all his achievements to music. Without music, he feels his life would be meaningless. Shyam is a singer and a Manjira Player, and, has performed in various locations within the state and the country. Along with Sachin, they have won the hearts of many devotees across the nation only to dazzle the crowds. He is also into Bhagwat paath and has toured India twice, singing Bhagwat. He lives in a family of 6 people and has a wife, two kids, an elder brother, sister in law, and their kids. Thus, he also has to pursue music professionally to make ends meet.









 HATHRAS

PREM SHARMA & Group

To preserve the true essence of what they do, this group makes the younger generation learn about music and songs directly from their elders. While doing so, they want these newcomers to understand and embrace the values of their roots. In this rapidly changing world, such a system of transmittance of knowledge leads to close interaction, which is crucial to conserve the loss of traditions. They mostly sing folk forms like Rasiya, swang, beher, etc. The group leader, Pandit Prem Sharma, is a 63-year-old man who makes sure that he is immersed in music all the time. The groups jam every day for hours and have perfected their art. They have expertise in the Hathrasi Rasiya and wish to achieve name and fame in the same. The group has the following members, Pawan Kumar Rajput, 35, has a bit of a problem with his vision but still plays the harmonium brilliantly. Salim Baba, 60, a wonderful man, plays an instrument called “Tasha”; Navneet Kumar Bhardwaj, 28, a proficient Dholak player; Harpal Singh, 52, a chorus singer who accompanies Prem Sharma Ji; and Bipin Kumar Sharma, 37 and Om Prakash Nayak, 62, both are important chorus singers of the group. The group travels from villages to villages to perform. They had given numerous performances in several places. Many people left, and many people joined the group. Still, their purpose remains unshaken, that is, to conserve not only the music but the cultural heritage of Braj.

“A performance led by faith.”

Just like when you talk about Braj, one immediately associate it with the divine love of Radha-Krishna, the land of Braj is also known for its belief in cows. Here, cows are equally respected and worshipped. After documenting artists from the core of Mathura and Agra, understating and listening to forms like Rasiya, Djikri Bhajan, phaag, and hori, we arrived at a remote village through an off-road driving experience in the district of Hathras. To our utmost surprise, the location where we had to document Prem Kumar Sharma was a Cowshed (Goushala). Initially, we thought it would be difficult to record there as we had no clue how to avoid the sound of the cows during their performance. But we were astonished by the cooperation we got from the villagers and their cows.

Prem Ji is a very down-to-earth person, and his humility was shining through his presence and conversations. We first met during the research trip, and since then, his groundedness has won our hearts. Prem Ji has inherited the musical skills and knowledge from his father Shri Asarfi Lal Sharma, who inspired him to take up music as a profession. For formal training, he reached out to Lala Chandomal Ji, to be his Guru.

During the documentation, they performed some unique and rare folk forms of Braj like Bahar, Hathrasi Tadda Rasiya, and Kalanga. It was only after meeting him that we got enlightened about the fact that Braj ki rasiya is different from Hathrasi rasiya. Though it is assumed that rasiya has its origin in Braj, but with time there have been some variations with respect to different regions. How Hathrasi rasiya evolved is still not very well known. It is believed to be a subgenre of Rasiya. Some believe that it emerged during the 20th century. It is an akhara (club) based style, where the performers are involved in Musical poetic duels known as the jawabi kirtan. The first song that they performed was a “Bahar” song that began with a lyrical verse :

“Mere baal sakha dukh paaye hain bhaare,
(Oh my childhood friend you have had your share of problems)

Baal sakha dukh paaye bhaare itt cho naay padhaare”
(Dear friend, why didn't you come to me earlier when you had so many problems)

As Prem Ji started singing, we could feel the grief and a deep sense of melancholy instantly, such as the impact of his performance that it just wrenched the hearts of everyone who were present there, and many were in tears after that. It took us some time to get over it before heading to his next performance. Prem Sharma and his group have been performing together for a while now. Though none of the members in the group, including Prem Ji, have proper formal musical training but the love for music that they possess in their hearts has bound them together for years now. The group is a good fit of young and old, from Prem Kumar Sharma, 63, who is the eldest, to Navneet Kumar Bharadwaj, 28, which beautifully reflects Prem ji's intent to carry forward the tradition of passing on their musical talents down to the future generations.

As a group leader, Prem Ji is also responsible for sticking the group together and keeping them motivated towards music as half of the members are into other professions to sustain their livelihood. The group comprises seven members in total. They have Pawan Kumar Rajput, 35, a harmonium expert, equally holds command over Kanjari, a dedicated and devoted musician who never let his vision issue come as a hindrance in his life and musical growth. Navneet Kumar Bhardwaj, 28, plays Dholak, is a self-taught musician. He credits everything to divine grace. He wishes to devote more time to music and aspires to be a well-known musician in the country. Harpal Singh, 52, sings with Prem Sharma giving him company as chorus, whereas Bipin Kumar Sharma, 37, and Om Prakash Nayak, 62, both play important roles in the chorus singing of the group. Salim Baba, 60, a true gentleman, plays an instrument called “Tasha”.

“Music is life, and it does not just calm your ears and minds, but also your soul. It's so powerful that it reliefs you at the time of despair.” After their performance for the documentation, we had a very personal conversation with him over a cup of tea and pakoras made with an extra touch of love and compassion by Prem Ji's wife. As we moved on with the conversation, Prem Ji got a little emotional when we asked him about the melancholic voice of his, and with teary eyes, he shared some of his tragedies that ended his musical life as he stopped singing for many years.



PREM KUMAR SHARMA

Contact Info - 9758291323

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

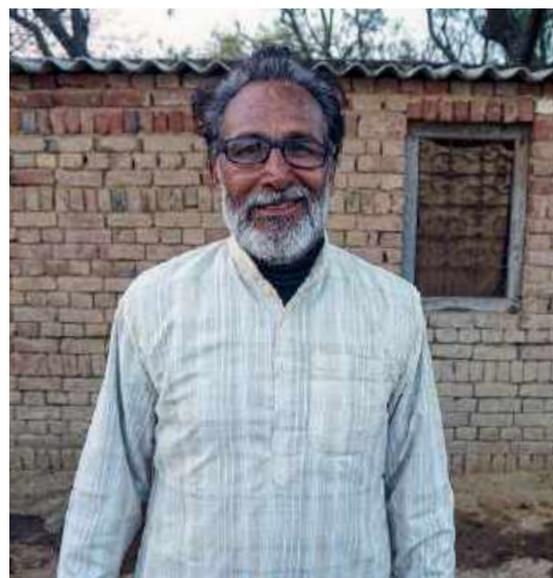
A 63-year-old artist from Hathras, Pandit Prem Kumar Sharma, has been learning to create music through Rasiya, Lokgeet, Hathrasi Rasiya. At the young/tender age of 8, he took inspiration from his father, Shri Ashraf Lal Sharma. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Shri Ashraf Lal Sharma and Lala Chandomal as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teaching and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are, therefore, sung to be in a similar style as theirs. He recognizes Shri Shri Ashraf Lal Sharma, his father, as his mentor, who has a natural desire for mastering the craft of singing who had a natural talent for mastering the art of singing Jawabi Kirtan, Rasiya, Lokgeet, and Hathrasi Rasiya. As a child, Pandit Prem Ji would try to imitate his father, and that is when he picked up the Harmonium and never stopped playing or singing. He also knows how to play Harmonium apart from singing and has performed in various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at Aligarh Mandal, Rajasthan (Alwar, Bharatpur), Western Uttar Pradesh only to amaze the crowds, and regards his performance at Alwar as the most memorable experience he has had.

Salim Baba

Contact Info - 8755242300

Role - Tasha

Salim Baba, 60, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Qureshi (Muslim) community. Salim Baba hails from a village of Hathras district and lives with his wife, two daughters, a son. Salim Baba has nurtured his musical skills from the Roshan Gharana of Raya. There, he tasted his first exposure to Tasha, Dholak, and Nakada. Along with Braj Lokgeet, he is also into classical music. He belongs to a musical lineage and has been pursuing music for a living from a very young age. He draws all his inspiration from Roshan Khan Sahab. To him, he is more than a Guru, and according to him, Roshan Sahab was a repository of knowledge who lived music. As an accompanist, he has performed in almost all districts of Uttar Pradesh, Mumbai, Rajasthan, Delhi, Haryana. He considers every performance to be, extremely special, as he puts all his heart and soul into them. It is also resonated in the form of love and appreciation that he receives for his shows. He has no charges as such and accepts whatever gets offered to him. He manages his performances himself.



Navneet Kumar Bharadwaj

Contact Info - 7465943094

Role - Dholak

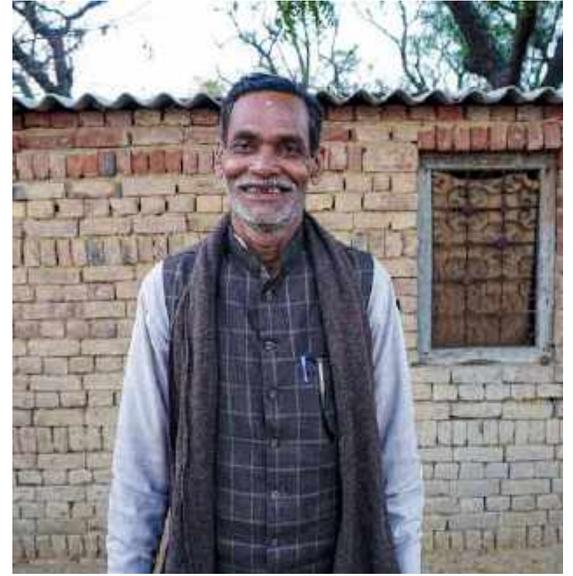
A 28-year-old artist from Hathras, Navneet Kumar Bharadwaj, has been learning music all by himself with no formal training. From a very young age, he used to participate in the village Jagrans', Bhagwat Paaths, and that is how he started embedding the different subtleties of music in his life. He then began to play the dholak taking inspiration from his cousin, who used to be a master of the instrument. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He is also a very religious person and gives thanks to the divine for their blessings and grace for associating him with music. He has no Guru, more sort of an Ekalavya of the modern times, he considers his devotion and the divine Lord to be his teacher. Presently, he accompanies various artists from the village and nearby areas. He has not come up with any compositions of his own. Navneet Ji is a true lover of music and has remained unmarried, so that, he can devote more time to harness his skills. His hard work and dedication reflect in his performances. He tries his best to get better every day and wishes to bring more names and laurels to his family and village.

HARPAL SINGH

Contact Info - 8006630588

Role - Chorus

Harpal Singh, 52, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Thakur community. Harpal Singh hails from the Hathras district and lives with his wife, three sons, three daughters, and two daughters-in-law. He has studied till intermediate and works as a farmer for livelihood. Under the able guidance of Late Shri Dharamveer Singh Ji, he got the lessons of Rasiya and Braj Lokgeet. He loves singing, and from a very young age he was drawn towards music and used to enjoy being with musicians of his villages and being in the vibes of the musical ecosystem. He draws all his inspiration from Guru Dharamveer Ji. Harpal Ji feels that one of the most visible specialties of Braj Lokgeet is its playfulness. Even the tradition of Braj is the best in all the three lokas (The 'Swarga Lok' or 'Heaven', The 'Mrityu Lok' or 'Earth', and The 'Patala Lok' or the 'abode of the Asuras', also known as the 'infernal abode'). According to him, Music is a meaningful form that one experiences in his or her lifetime. He emphasizes that if one does not sing the name of Lord Rama, then their life is meaningless.



OM PRAKASH NAYAK

Contact Info - 8449859650

Role - Chorus

A 62-years-old artist from Hathras, Om Prakash Nayak, has been learning music through Braj Lok Geet. He belongs to the Banjara community and began to pursue music as a mere hobby taking inspiration from his grandfather, Baba Sahab. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion and dedication. He considers Dharamvir Nana as his Guru and speaks very highly of his teaching and caliber in the musical field. He only sings folk music with command over Braj Lok Geet. He also believes and hopes to leave this bodily form in the melody of Ram Bhajan. He is not a musician professionally, but as and when he gets an opportunity, he never misses it and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. Along with Prem Kumar Sharma Ji, he has pulled off brilliant performances at several festivals in Rajasthan and Haryana to dazzle the crowds. After the sudden demise of his wife, he lives in a family with three sons, two of whom are married. Thus, he also has to run a pan shop to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to die in the name of Lord Rama.

BIPIN KUMAR SHARMA

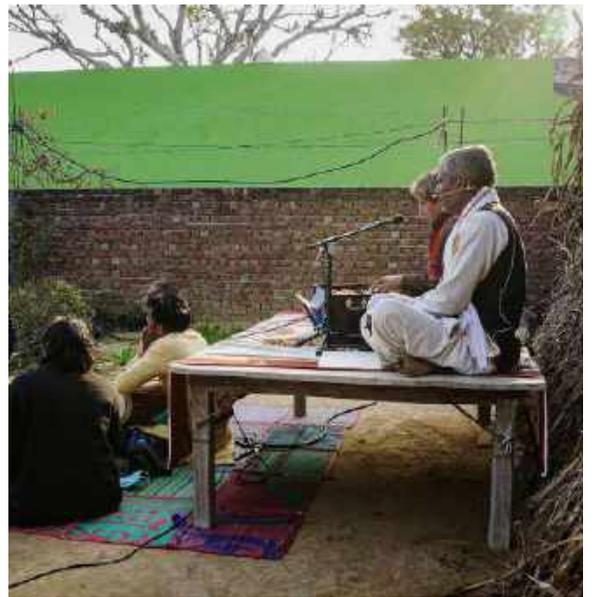
Contact Info - 8881876673

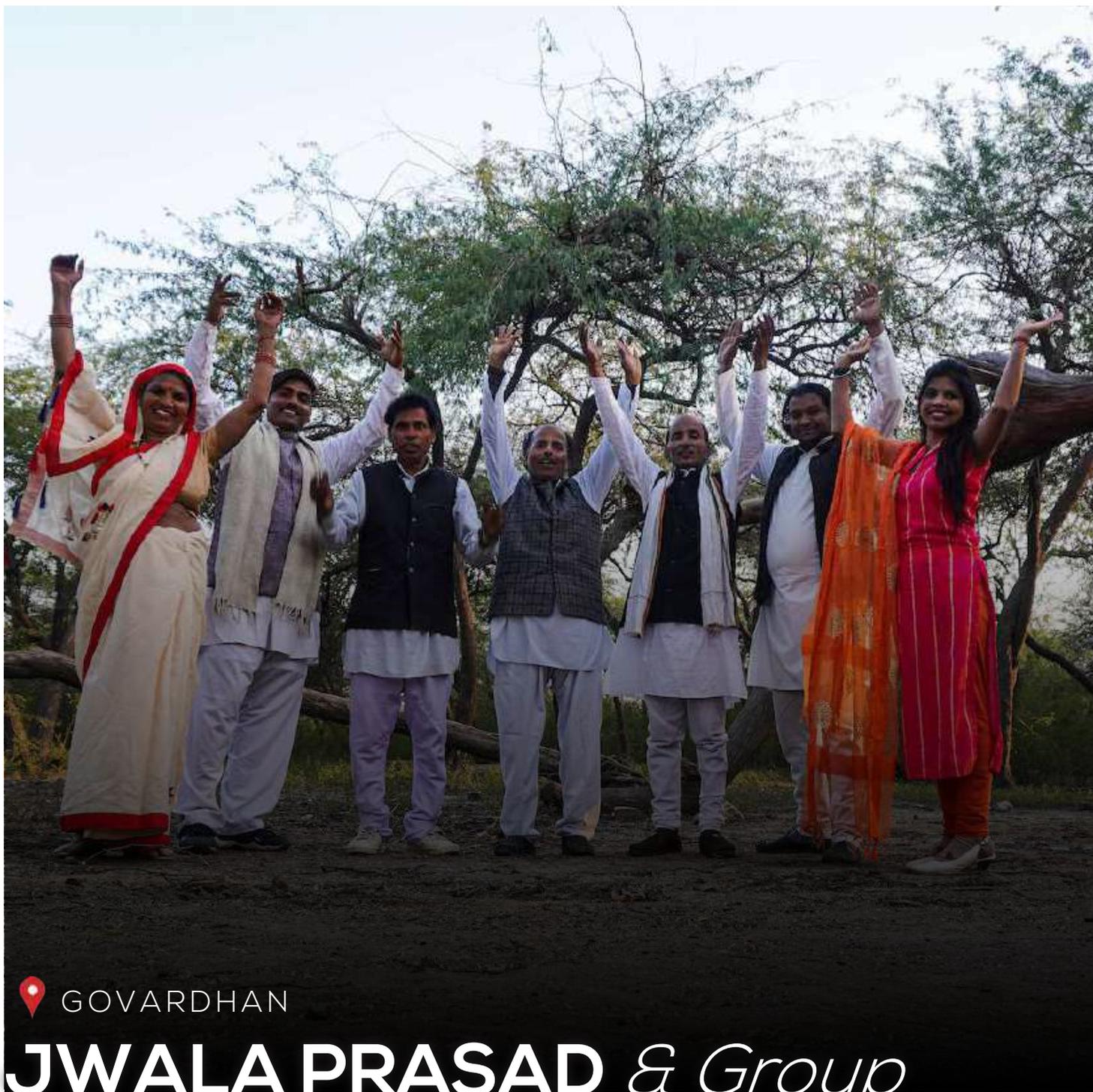
Role - Manjira

Bipin Kumar Sharma, 37, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh. He belongs to the Brahmin community. Bipin Kumar hails from Hathras district. He lives with his wife, one daughter, one son, and he has three brothers. He has studied till 12th grade and runs a Sound system Supplier Shop for livelihood. Bipin Kumar has no formal training in this field, and he plays Manjira solely out of his love for music and as a hobby. He is only into Braj Folk music and mostly accompanies his father, Prem Kumar Sharma Ji for his performances. Apart from manjira, he also sings in the chorus at times. From a very young age, he was drawn towards music and used to enjoy being with musicians of his villages and being in the vibes of the musical ecosystem. It then worked as a catalyst in the sound system agency that he owns today. He stayed associated with music, if not as a performer but definitely as an audio system provider. Bipin Ji draws all his inspiration from his father, Prem Kumar Sharma Ji. He not just considers him to be his Guru, but also as his life's mentor. Along with the group of musicians led by Prem Kumar Sharma, he has performed in almost all the districts of Uttar Pradesh and keeps himself available for Prem Ji whenever wherever it is required.









GOVARDHAN

JWALA PRASAD & Group

Shri Jwala Prasad and his group of instrumentalists are a small group but play a very crucial part in conserving the Braj folk. The group sings beautiful songs from Braj folk, and they hail from the village Dura near Fatepur Sikri. Jwala Prasad, 55, is the group leader and has managed the group for the past 15 years. He is the group leader and is quite a versatile musician who is on a B.High Grade – Flute Player (All India Radio, Agra), B.High Grade – Dholak Player (All India Radio, Agra), B.High Grade – Harmonium Player (All India Radio, Agra) and B.High Grade – Singer (All India Radio, Agra). They are plenary instrumentalists and vocalists with a lost art form which they have combined with the popular religious traditions and the artistry required to express the emotions of the folk. Their intense knowledge of classical music helps with their performances and improvisation of older folk melodies. They like to perform with the music played in various Ragas such as Desh, Kalyan, and Bhairavi and Taals like Kaharva, Dadra, and Deepchandi. They are very confident and consistent regarding their musical abilities and thoroughly enjoy their musical sessions. The group receives its inspiration from folk music and flute by Late. Ram Krishna Prasanna embraces music as their positive direction in life. They started their musical journey together and have helped one another in their musical endeavours with utmost care and compassion. Their music is a beautiful blend of traditional folk and classical music, melancholic melodies and intuitive interplay merge to unique effect, creating a soundscape making one absorb the vibe.

“Notes of surrender and reverence.”

About 23 km from Mathura is Govardhan, a place with many legends associated with it. The most known legend, where Krishna is lifting the Govardhan hill, to protect the villagers defeating the ego of demigod, Indra, who threatened to bring in a flood if he is not worshipped. It is a very sacred pilgrimage site. Many people come here to do the Parikrama, as a mark of remembrance to Lord Krishna.

To set the location, we reached Kusum Sarovar in Govardhan. Surrounded by lush green forests, dotted with vibrant flowers, Kusum Sarovar is a serene spot. According to popular belief, Lord Krishna and his Gopis met at this pond. It's said that Goddess Radha would come here under the pretext of collecting flowers for her friends but would secretly meet with Lord Krishna and have playful conversations.

It has been quite a journey, as we were moving ahead with this documentation. It felt more grounded as we were swaying to the breeze that carries the melodies of Radha-Krishna in Braj. The artist whom we are meeting here was multi-talented and generous, Jwala Prasad, a humble soul to the core. He is originally from Doora in Agra, but he chose to be at Govardhan for the documentation.

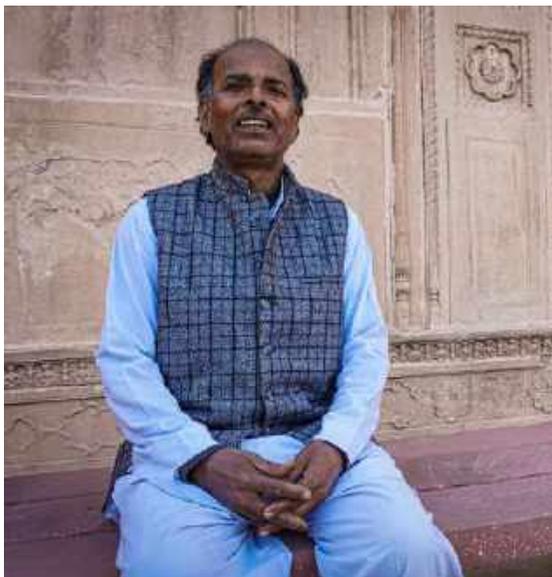
Jwala Prasad is a very veteran artist of this region. Apart from being an amazingly talented singer, he is an equally good flute player and a percussionist. He is also responsible for nurturing many renowned musicians from this region. Jwala Ji is very respected and admired for his sincerity and commitment towards folk music, and we could feel it during his performance. Jwala Ji is a highly acclaimed AIR artist, who believes that music is closely associated with our culture. He says, “Music is keeping us rooted to our traditions and cultures, and folk music is the pulse of it.” Jwala Prasad draws all his inspiration from his mother, Chandu Devi, also an AIR artist. She not just motivated Jwala Prasad but was also instrumental in getting Satoshi Devi, Jwala Prasad's wife, and daughters to take up music seriously, who eventually became the core members of Jwala Prasad's musical group.

His group included his wife Santosi Devi, 50, an A grade artist from AIR, Agra, she gives all the credits to her husband, who also happens to be her guru, for all her achievements. Her voice added so much pathos and vulnerability to their performance that one could feel the melancholy in the air. She supports Jwala Ji perfectly in the chorus. Another member of this group is Rita Saikya, who is also the daughter of Jwala Prasad Ji, her vocal harmonies in the chorus compliment her parent's singing meticulously.

Their extensive repertoire of traditional Braj tunes is punctuated by songs, many of their compositions beautifully carrying the essence of the land. Jwala Ji's group was unique, as they mostly performed their own composed songs. Another crucial member of the group is Suresh Chand, a very charming person in his late 50's, who carried a sweet in the entire performance. He backs up the vocals and harmonium. He and Jwala have been friends for a long time now. They started their musical journey together and have helped one another in their musical endeavours with utmost care and compassion.

Their music is a beautiful blend of traditional folk and classical music, melancholic melodies and intuitive interplay merge to unique effect, creating a soundscape that absorbs you into it immediately. The location decided for the performance of Jwala Prasad, was in a forest just next to Kusum Sarovar. We reached the place and were welcomed by a troop of monkeys. Initially, we were a little sceptical of doing the documentation there, as we did not know how to avoid the sound of the monkeys, and we also had to take care of our equipment. But to our surprise, the moment Jwala Prasad and his group started singing, the troop of monkeys went into a trance. That was indeed a special moment, of how music can connect with nature and its creatures.

Jwala Prasad and his group performed a wide range of songs, they started with a Devi bhajan, praising the strength of the goddess and asking for her blessings, followed by their own composition. The third song was a hindola geet, a song that was sung for Krishna, while gopis rocked him on decorated swings. The last song was again a self-composed melody, where they shared the story of Lord Ram's marriage with Sita. Their music showcases their instrumental music, in a very dynamic way. They had to be careful while writing their songs that it does not dilute the aesthetics of the folk music, Braj.



JWALA PRASAD

Contact Info - 9759518486

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

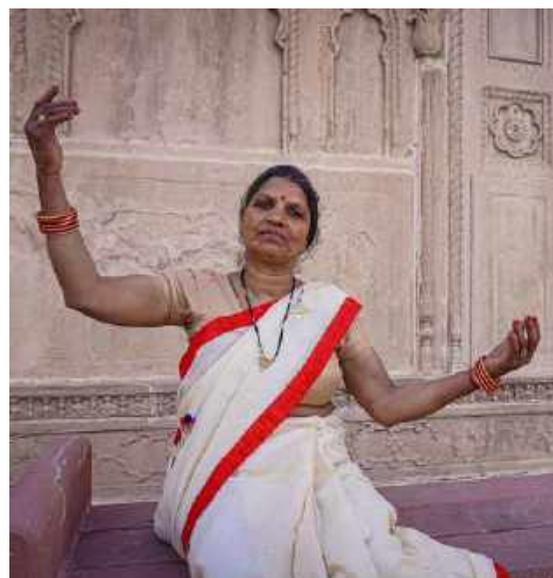
A 55-year-old artist from Dura, Shri Jwala Prasad, has been learning music from Braj Folk forms. At the young age of 5, he began to learn by taking inspiration from Late. Ram Krishna Prasanna. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring and tremendous passion. He considers Lt. Ram Krishna Prasana (Agra), Lt. Bhagwati Prasad (Dayalbagh Agra), Lt. Omprakash (Maniya Agra) and Shri. Rajesh Sharma (Akashwani Agra) as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus written, composed, and sung to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from Late. Ram Krishna Prasana Ji, who has an innate talent for singing and playing the flute. In his childhood, Jwala would try and imitate playing the flute and thus picked up the instrument and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play flute and sing and has performed in various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at Taj Mahotsav, Agra, Mathura, Guwahati, Gwalior, Aligarh, Delhi, etc. He regards his performance at Guwahati as the most memorable experience.

Santosh Devi

Contact Info - 8477923031

Role - Chorus

A 50-year-old artist from Dura, Agra, Santosh Devi, has been learning music through Braj ki lokgeet. She began to learn folk music from her husband, Shri Jwala Prasad, taking inspiration from her mother-in-law, who was very supportive in taking her music. She has been working hard towards achieving proficiency in her craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. Interestingly, besides being a singer, she takes care of her family and does the household work. She considers Jwala Prasad as her Guru and life mentor speaks very highly of his teaching and achievements in the field of music. She mostly accompanies her husband in the chorus and at times contributes to the compositions. She is also A Grade singer approved by ALL INDIA RADIO, Agra. Santosh strongly feels that folk music 'Braj Lokgeet' is very closely linked with their tradition. "Music is keeping us rooted to our culture. Folk music is our life, and without it, there's no life", says Santosh Devi. She has accompanied her husband far wide and has performed in numerous locations within the country. She has received recognition letters and awards from Rita Bahora and Hema Malini for her contribution towards folk music.



Rita Saikya

Contact Info - 9760838710

Role - Chorus

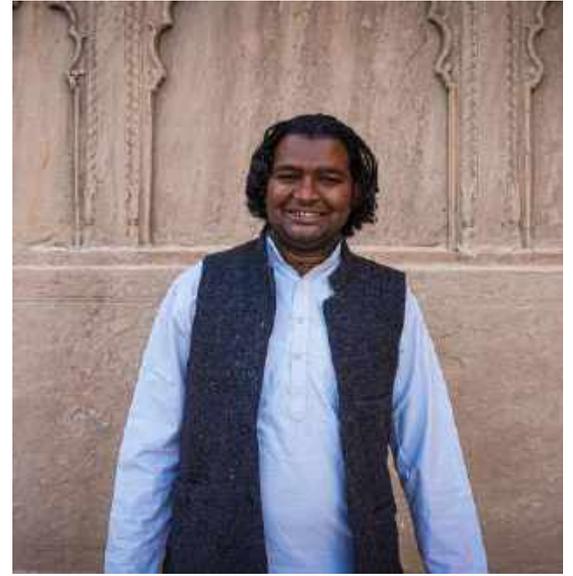
A 31-year-old artist from Dura, Agra, Rita Saikya, is a chorus singer who found her father, Jwala Prasad, and her grandmother, Chandu Devi (an AIR artist), as her inspiration. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with soaring passion. She considers her father, Jwala Prasad, as her Guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of her songs are thus written, made, and sung to be in a similar style. She believes to have inherited this talent from her grandmother, who has a natural talent for mastering the art of singing Braj ki Lokgeet. When she was a child, she would try to imitate Chandu Devi and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. She also knows how to sing bhashan, ghazal apart from braj ki Lokgeet and has performed only in All India Radio and has done no stage shows yet. Rita lives in a family of 5 people with her father, mother, two brothers, and sister. She is still pursuing her studies, completed her Bed, and also into social work. Despite all her struggles, she strives to keep developing her craft and dreams to work towards folk music, especially, Braj lokgeet and wishes to take this music to greater heights.

LALARAM

Contact Info - 9759518486

Role - Tabla

A 28-year-old artist from Dura, Agra, Lalaram has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet, Bhajan, jagraans. He began to play tabla & dholak taking inspiration from his Guru Jwala Prasad. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Jwala Prasad as his guru. He speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Lalaram only accompanies Jwala in his songs written to be in a similar style. He also believes that music carries the power to console the heart and the soul, and it is something that can awaken even a dead person. When he was in his youth, he would try to participate in the jagraans and thus picked up the tabla and never stopped learning. Lalaram also knows how to play dholak apart from tabla, and has performed in various locations within the state and across the country. He has received great applause by performing for some of the biggest stages and shows in Agra, Bharatpur, Jaipur, Maharashtra, but considers his hometown to be the best place to perform. He lives in a family of 11 people and has a mother, seven siblings, a wife, a son, and a daughter. Thus, he also has to work as a full-time musician to make ends meet.

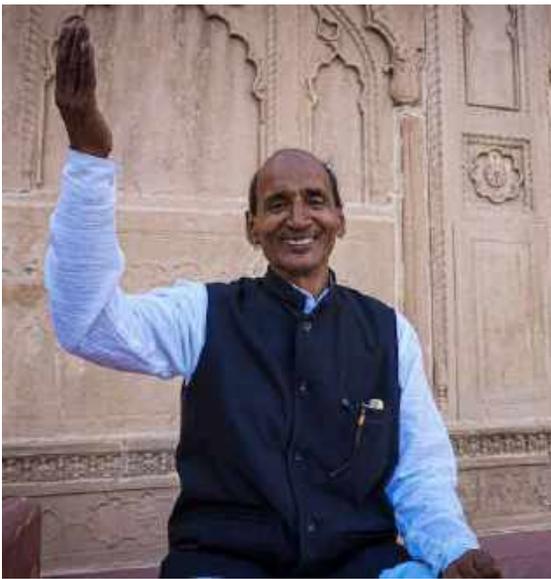


SURESH CHAND

Contact Info - 8171430611

Role -Harmonium, Chorus

A 55 -years-old artist from Dura, Agra, has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. He began to sing first taking inspiration from Jwala Prasad. Jwala motivated him to sing with his first and then seeing his dedication, helped him learn the harmonium. He considers Jwala Prasad as his guru speaks very highly of their teaching and caliber in the field of music. He has been accompanying Jwala Prasad from the beginning of his musical journey and sings Jwala 's compositions mostly. He also believes that music is a very delightful experience, it tends to bring a sense of calm and peace into our lives. Music is something that holds the power to connect you with the divine. He also takes part in jaagraans, Bhagwat mandalis apart from doing folk music and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has received many laurels and appreciation by performing at Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Bihar, and Haryana for numerous festivals. Suresh has pulled off brilliant performances at national and state-level government festivals and has dazzled the crowds. He regards his performance at Maharashtra as the most memorable experience.

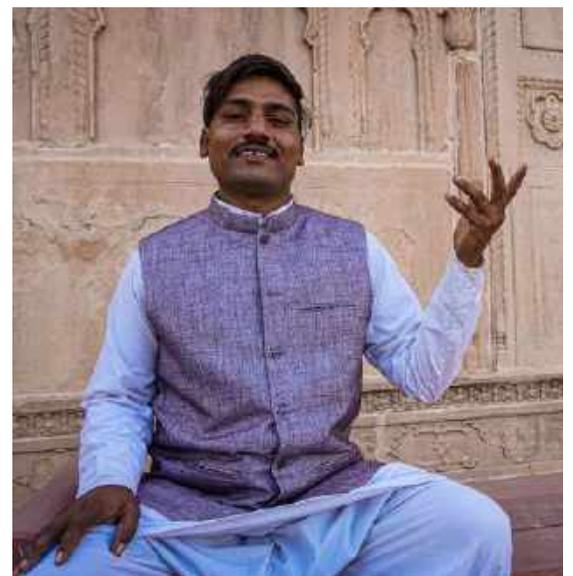


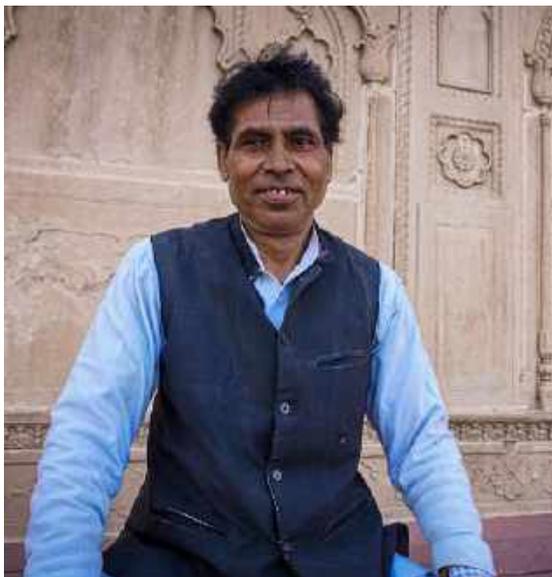
KANHA

Contact Info - 9759518486

Role - Manjira, Chorus

A 28 -years-old artist from Dulara village in Fatehpur Sikri, Kanha has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. At a very tender age, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father, Late Shri Shivran Singh, who was a singer himself. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers his father to be his first guru and regards Jwala as his mentor who helped better his understanding of the field of music. Most of his songs are written by their Kavi (poet) Rajendra Prasad to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been inherited from his father, who has a natural desire for mastering the art of singing. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father, whenever his father used to take him for jagraans, Bhagwat paaths and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play harmonium, dholak, jhinka, and manra apart from singing and has performed in various locations within the state and few states like Madya Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Haryana in the country. He always cherishes performing in Braj Bhoomi, and regards performing here the best because the people are very emotional and devotional.





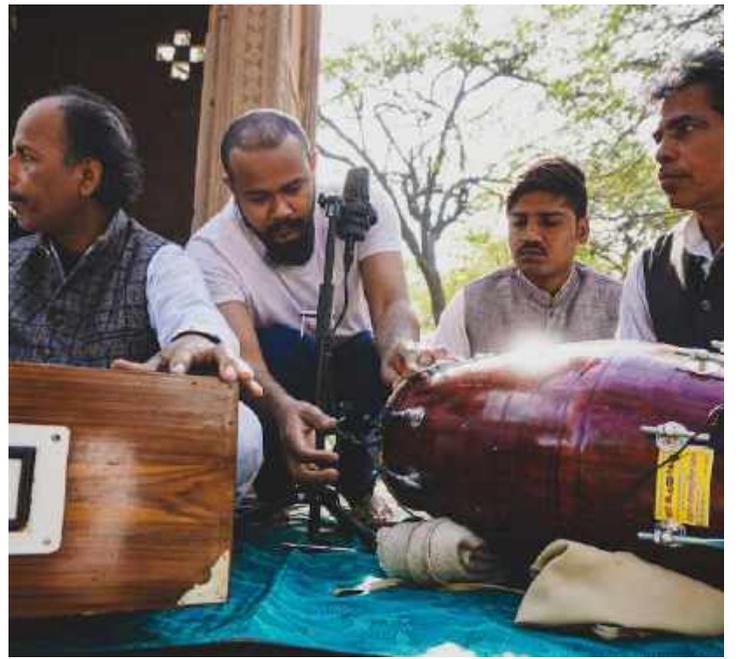
DHARMENDRA SINGH

Contact Info - 9690109951

Role - Dholak

A 45-year-old artist from Dura, Agra, Dharmendra Singh, has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. He began to play and took inspiration from Jwala Prasad. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Jwala Prasad as his Guru and speaks very highly of their teaching and caliber in the field of music. He only accompanies Jwala Prasad in his shows and has performed in various locations within Uttar Pradesh and the entire stretch of our country. Apart from doing Braj Lokgeet, he is also very active in the Bhagwat circuit. Along with Jwala, he has also been involved in many studio sessions and has performed for AIR, Agra. He lives in a family of 5 people with his wife, two daughters, and a son. For a living, he has been professionally involved in music for a while now. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to take his music forward and aspires someday, in the future, to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.







 MATHURA

JAGDISH BRIJWASI & Group

Jagdish Brijwasi, 54, is a brilliant harmonium player and singer. He excels in playing the tabla as well. He leads a folk group with Ravi Joshi, 35, a skilled Chorus singer; Amarjeet, 50, Dholak, Nakkara Player and Chorus singer; Suresh Chand, 55, Manjira and Percussion Instrumentalist; Parvez Ali, 25, a Harmonium Player; and Brijwasi Nagar, 23, Tabla and Dholak expert. Jagdish Brijwasi founded this group 4-5 years ago, and since then, he has been managing and taking care of the members. The groups have performed everywhere in India and internationally in Africa, Nepal, etc. The group is fluent with various folk forms from the regions of Braj, but their expertise lies in the Holi Geet and Mayur Nritya. Holi is possibly one of the prominent festivals in India. Preparations for this festival begin almost a month in advance, and everybody participates- regardless of their caste and religion. Traditionally, children of a village collect wood from all houses, and after offering the prayers, everybody gets together to burn pyre and celebrate the symbolic defeat of evil. Everyone celebrates the next morning with 'gula', i.e., a dry colored powder and colored water. Colors, mud, muck - everything is allowed to be thrown at each other. The mood is exuberant, and the singing and dancing add to the joy of it. The music related to holi continues for the whole month even before the festival. Many Holi songs have an element of the Risqué in them, but - it is to be taken in the right spirit because it is traditionally allowed on Holi and Jagdish along with his group does justice to this genre to be specific.

“Pitch perfect to the colours of Braj.”

From the lanes of Mathura and Vrindavan, the spirit of Holi has spread all over the world. Holi is a celebration of not just colours but also life and love. In Braj, Holi is celebrated to commemorate the divine love of Radha for Krishna, which can be found in the folktales and folk music of Braj. Holi in Braj is famous in the entire world, and on this trip, we experienced the different colours of Braj and its diversity. But the trip wouldn't be complete without listening to the region's famous holi geet, which is also known as Faag at times, as it is also celebrated to welcome the arrival of the spring season.

To experience phaag, we ushered in to meet the very charismatic singer and performer of Mathura, Shri Jagdish Brijwasi, 54, a brilliant harmonium player and singer. He excels in playing the tabla as well. He started his musical journey as a ghazal singer but could not hide away his devotion to folk music and the divine, which got him into Braj Lok geet and bhajans. He has a strong Hindustani, classical base with a visharad degree credited to him by North Central Zone Cultural Centre (NCZCC), Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.

He leads a folk group that has Ravi Joshi, 35, who sings as the chorus, a self-taught musician. He regards Jagdish very highly and considers him as one of his prime inspiration, who has guided him thoroughly in his musical journey, Amarjeet, 50, plays Dholak, Nakkara and is also a part of the chorus, Suresh Chand, 55, plays Manjira and Percussions, Parvez Ali, 25, plays harmonium and Brijwasi Nagar, 23, plays Tabla and Dholak.

Jagdish Brijwasi made this group around 4-5 years ago, and since then, he is managing and taking care of the members. The groups have performed everywhere in India and Africa, Nepal, etc. The group is fluent in various folk forms from the region of Braj, but expertise in Holi geet and Mayur Nritya. From Folk songs to light music, the group gives mesmerizing performances every time they are on the stage. They love to sing in Darbari and Shivrangini raga. The group has strong classical knowledge, which can be seen in their performance. For the group, music is like God, whom they worship every day of their lives. The group aspires to go around the world and share more about the rich cultural heritage of the Braj region.

**“Jo saiyan aaye Braj me ulat ke,
Hori me khelungi Shyamso daatke.”**

**“Faagun beeto jai taanak gori,
Rasiya te batarai lijo.”**

Jagdish expresses, “Music is my god, my worship. And I owe everything to music”. On asking what prompted him to get into music, he said he once heard someone performing, “Maa ke parivaar aur saraswati ke darshan” and “Tu mehelo ki Rani from Dharamveer, and that just changed his life. He considers Mallu Bhai, Ameer Sahab, Ghulam Sabir Sahab, Rajendra Krishna, Dr Hari Charan Verma as his gurus, and speaks very highly of their teaching as well as calibre in the field of music. Most of his songs are written in a similar style. He has also sung in films like Sajan Tere Pyaar Mein, Sun Meri Soniyee with singers like Vandana Vajpai.

**“Phagun beto jai sakhiri,
(The season of Phaag will get over, friend)**

**Phagun Beto jai tanak gori “
(The season of Phaag will get over, lady)**

From Folk songs to light music, the group give such mesmerising performance every time they are on the stage. They love to sing in Darbari and Shivrangini raga. The group has strong classical knowledge and one can see the same in their performance. For the group music like God whom they worship every day of their lives. The group aspires to go around the world and share more and more about the rich cultural heritage of the Braj region.



JAGDISH BRIJWASI

Contact Info - 9410618165, 9690393912

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

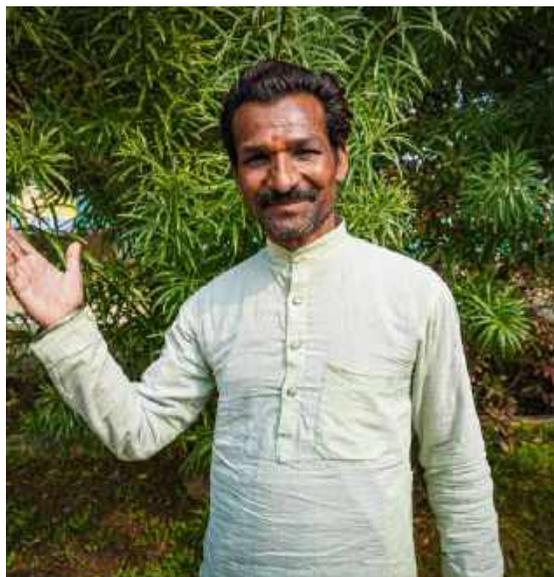
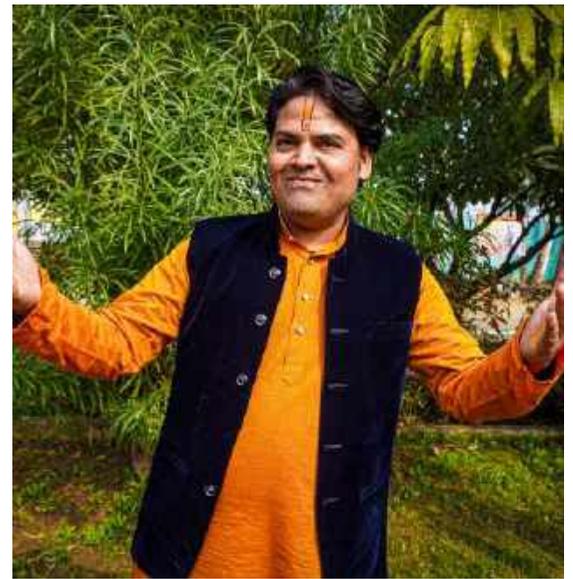
A 54-year-old artist from Mathura, Jagdish Brijwasi, has been learning music through Lok Sangeet and Classical music. The song, Tu Mehelo ki Rani from Dharamveer truly inspired him and motivated him to learn music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Mallu Bhai, Ameer Sahab, Ghulam Sabir Sahab, Rajendra Krishna and, Dr Hari Charan Verma as his gurus, and speaks very highly of their teaching and calibre in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, made to be in a similar style. For him, his music is God and his only way of worship. He also knows how to play Tabla, and Harmonium apart from Vocals and has performed in various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at festivals everywhere in India and other countries like Africa, Nepal, etc to amaze and galvanize the crowds, and regards his performance at Goa, India, as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 5 people and has a son and 2 daughters. Thus, he also has to work as a businessman to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles and hard work, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to take forward the knowledge he has and spread amongst everyone he knows someday, in

Ravi Joshi

Contact Info - 9690393912

Role - Chorus

A 35-years-old artist from Mathura, Ravi Joshi has been learning music through his independent interest in Braj Lok Geet. Taking inspiration from Jagdish Brijwasi, he chose the path of music and started learning vocals. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Jagdish Brijwasi as his guru and speaks very highly of his teaching and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, written by him or songs that have been performed traditionally for ages, to his credit he has also composed few bhajans keeping the essence in a similar style. He also believes that music is everything, without music life is empty. He says his first love would always be music. He is also an AIR-approved artist and has 3-4 audio video cassettes to his kitty of achievements. Along with his Guru, Jagdish Brijwasi, he has performed in several locations within the state and the country. He has received many laurels and recognition in stages and festivals across the nation and pulled off brilliant performances at festivals and conventions in the state and national circuit only to galvanize the crowds and regards his performance at Port Blair as the most memorable experience.



Amarjeet

Contact Info - 9568561075

Role - Nakkara

A 50-years-old artist from Mathura, Amarjeet has been learning music traditionally through their rich family heritage of percussionists playing Braj Lok Geet. Even though he has no educational qualification, from a very young age, he started playing the nakkara, drawing inspiration from his ancestors. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Ramesh Nagar Ji as his guru and mentor and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Having an innate talent and a rich ancestral heritage of musicians, Amarjeet picked up the art of singing and playing percussion instruments. When he was a child, he would imitate his father and thus accepted the nakkara and never stopped learning. He is a Dholak player, singer, and Nakkara player, who has performed in several locations within the state and the country. He has received love and appreciation in many stages and festivals for his exuberant performing skills and pulled off brilliant performances at Faridabad, Bareilly, and all across the districts in Uttar Pradesh and have dazzled the crowds. He regards all his performances as memorable.

SURESH CHOUDHURY

Contact Info - 9690393912

Role -Manjira

A 55-years-old artist from Mathura, Suresh Choudhury, has been learning music through {Art form}. He never had any formal music training but took dholak lessons taking inspiration from Chaman Nagar. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Chaman Nagar, and Jagdish Brijwasi as his gurus speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. He draws all his inspiration from them and mostly accompanies them in their performances. He plays traditional melodies of Braj and has never tried composing something of his own. He loves music unconditionally. Soon after completing his 6th standard, he devoted his life to music by taking lessons and participating in jagrans and bhajan mandalis. When he was in his youth, he would try to imitate the musicians of his village and thus picked up the Dholak & manjira and never stopped learning. He is a proficient Manjira player, he plays the Dholak and is also a chorus singer. He has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has received a lot of love and appreciation in all his performances and pulled off brilliant performances at festivals in Chennai, Madras, Kolkata, Agra, Delhi to mesmerize the crowd.



PARVEEZ ALI

Contact Info - 8849787744

Role -Harmonium

A 25-years-old artist from Mathura, Parvez Ali, has been learning music through folk and classical music. He holds a Prabhakar Degree in Harmonium and is also recognized as a B high-grade artist in classical and sugam sangeet by All India Radio (AIR). He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his Badde Abba, Kallu Ustad as his guru, speaks very highly of his teaching and calibre in the field of music. He draws all his inspiration from Ustad Bhure Khan Sahab, a very well-known harmonium player of the region, and he aspires to be like him one day. He also believes that the folk music in Braj is very devotional and is an interesting blend of classical and light music. He belongs to the Agra Gharana, and when he was a child, he would try to imitate his ancestors and thus picked up the harmonium and never stopped learning. Apart from folk music, he is also a very well-trained classical musician who enjoys playing raagas like Pahari. He has performed in various locations within the state and the country with some of the top artists from the region. He has received love and appreciation in most of his shows and pulled off brilliant performances at some of the best festivals of the nation only to dazzle the crowds

BRIJWASI NAGAR

Contact Info - 8445587560

Role - Dholak

A 23-year-old artist from Mathura, Brijwasi Nagar has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. He has no formal training in classical music as such, he began to play the dholak taking inspiration from Chaman Nagar. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Chaman Nagar as his guru speaks very highly of his teaching as well as calibre in the field of music. He also draws most of his inspiration from his father. According to him, he inherited the craft of playing Dholak from his ancestors, who have a natural desire for mastering the art of music and passing the legacy to the next generation. During his childhood, he would pick up the dholak and imitate his father, and since then, he has never stopped learning. He is skilled with the percussion instruments like Dholak and Tabla and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has received many awards and titles through his performances for several festivals and shows. Brijwasi Ji has pulled off brilliant performances at most of his shows and has won several hearts.









📍 VRINDAVAN

HARI BABU KAUSHIK & Group

Hari Babu Kaushik, 76, is a legend in this field of folk music from the Braj region. The group performs Haveli Sangeet that plays an important role in enriching the heritage of Braj music. Haveli Sangeet is a form of Hindustani classical music sung in Havelis (now called temples). The essential component is called 'Dhrupad'. It originated in Mathura in Braj in Northern India. Pandit Hari Babu Kaushik belongs to the Mushti Margiya Samprada, established by Prabhu Vallabh Acharya. It takes the form of devotional songs sung daily to Krishna by the Pushtimarg sect. The bandish, Khayal, sung in various Gharanas of Hindustani classical music, is derived from Haveli Sangeet, where they are performed in their complete and original form. Haveli Sangeet is another name for the Hindu temple music practiced by the followers of Vaishnavism and is considered a part of a rich historical tradition. Essentially a tribute to Lord Krishna, its form includes devotional renditions like Kirtans, Bhajans, and Bhava Nritya, all related to religious cult worship. Although a mix of classical and folk music, the style is inherently borrowed from the Dhrupad and Dhamar. Haveli Sangeet is commonly played at the many temples of India, like the Radha Vallabh of Vrindavan, Krishna of Nandgaon, Uttar Pradesh, and Sri Nathji of Nathdwara, to name a few. Over time, the Haveli Sangeet lost its popularity in India and is almost extinct. But this group with Hari Babu Kaushik has still kept it intact and is determined to pass it on to the next generation as well.

“In sync with spirituality and devotion.”

After spending some heart-wrenching time in Braj, trying to understand its folk music and to capture the pulse of this land, Hari Babu Kaushik was a divine treat with his Haveli Sangeet. Haveli sangeet is a form of music that traces its origin to the historical traditions of temple-based music. One of the most essential components of this music is Dhrupad. Haveli sangeet is more sophisticated in comparison to the bhajans we listen to. Haveli sangeet is a beautiful fusion of classical music and folk.

To meet Haribabu and his group, the team reached Vrindaban, a very sacred place for the Hindus. According to Indian mythology, Lord Krishna spent most of his childhood days in Vrindavan. To receive us, Mayur Kaushik, Haribabu’s son, was waiting at the Akshaya Patra temple. The Akshaya Patra Foundation is a committed non-profit organization responsible for feeding millions of underprivileged children in India. Their motto is to eradicate hunger and malnutrition from India.

From there, Mayur Ji took us inside the temple for the flower arti(Phool-arti), a ritual in which people offer flowers to the deity. The entire documentation team was in a state of awe after watching the beauty of Radha-Krishna deities carved from white marbles. Along with Haribabu Kaushik Ji, the team joined the Satsang and sang the melodies of Krishna Bhajan with all the emphatic devotees over there. With a sense of contentment, we went to the spot where we planned to document Haribabu’s performance. Unfortunately, we couldn’t, because of the ongoing construction work, and it led to some improvisation on our end. A special crowd-controlling team, was hence formed, to manage the flow of vehicles passing by. But eventually, the entire documentation came out very well.

Haveli sangeet primarily is a form of worship in which the offerings are presented to the divine. Haribabu started with a solo sarangi performance as an offering to awake Lord Krishna from his sleep, followed by a song on Krishna’s Srinagar. All the songs that they performed depicted the very essence of Lord Krishna and his daily activities. Haveli sangeet emphasizes more on the spiritual aspect rather than entertainment. Haveli sangeet is meant more for the seekers of the divine. During the research trip, we crossed paths with one such seeker, who is a follower of Lord Krishna’s consciousness. He was currently trying to find the path of his spiritual quest to the Lord through Haveli sangeet under the close guidance of Haribabu Kaushik. He was also present for the documentation, with a simple wish of getting a chance to listen to his Guru, singing the verses of Krishna.

Hari Babu Kaushik comes from Mushti Margiya Samprada, established by Prabhu Vallabh Acharya. It takes the form of devotional songs sung daily to Krishna by the Pushtimarg sect. Apart from being a majestic vocalist with a divine voice to support even at the age of 78, he is also a renowned and respected Sarangi player. He belongs to a musical family from generations they are into Haveli sangeet. The generation next is also taking up their traditional music with utmost care and empathy.

Kriti Kaushik, 20, Haribabu’s granddaughter, is also a member of his group. She expresses her concern over the lack of popularity of the haveli sangeet and aspires to take the art form ahead with more dedication. According to her, more people can experience this divine musical tradition if they knew about it. It was very heartwarming to see such young minds being so committed to this dying art form. On asking why Haveli Sangeet is on the verge of extinction, Hari Babu firmly pointed out a lack of understanding of the form among the general audience. Moreover, the decline of the Haveli Sangeet, in recent times, is due to the lack of trained mentors and schools that can pass on the Heritage of Haveli sangeet to the next generation.

The group has a beautiful blend of young and experienced musicians with highly experienced artists. To name, these are Manmohan Kaushik, the lead vocalist; Mayur Kaushik, a Harmonium Player, and singer; and Mukesh Kaushik, a benevolent Sarangi Player; Pt. Mohan Shyam Sharma, who accompanies tabla and Pakhawaj(a double-headed drum); and Kriti and Sourav. Sarangi and Pakhawaj are two very crucial instruments used in Haveli Sangeet. The intricate patterns and improvisations woven by Mohan Shyam Ji and Hari Babu created a dialogue that we were spellbound seeing and listening to such artistry..

To get the depth of Hari Babu’s voice, a very unique, mic-ing pattern, was designed and the result that came out of it was simply amazing. It was one of the best documentation of the entire Braj journey, and the experience of recording and shooting such elegant artists was gratifying.



HARIBABU KAUSHIK

Contact Info - 7520023234

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

Hari Babu Kaushik, 76, a vocalist and a Sarangi artist, has a wife and five sons in their family. He belongs to the Mushti Margiya Samprada, established by Maha Prabhu Vallabahacharya.

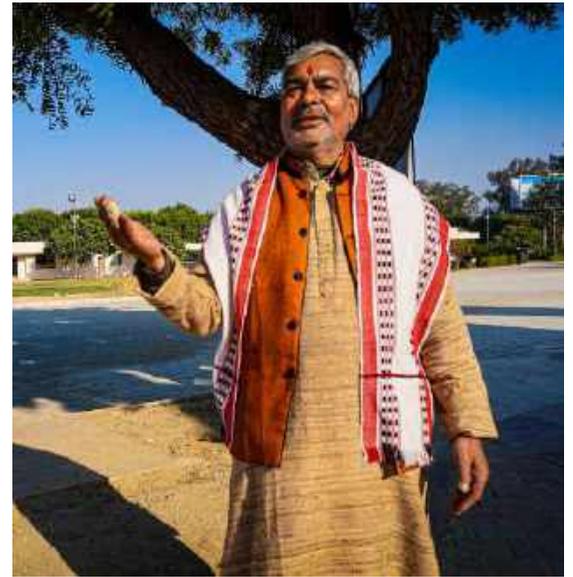
Hari Babu Kaushik is a wonderful Haveli sangeet performer. He was the Ras Leela acharya in 1967. Everything he knows has learned from his father. In 1968, he was the only Sarangi artist in the entire Braj region. He belongs to the Mathura Gharana and highlights that they sing 'Taj bibi and Tansen Ke Padd.' He has been a teacher to several artists belonging to the different religious systems, or as he puts it, from almost every Sampradaya. He believes in "meetha khaana aur meetha bolna," implying, "Eat sweet, Talk sweet." For Sarangi, Swami Kanhaiya Ji from Mukhrai village was his teacher, and later in life, he learned from Ghulam Jhafar from Kanpur. He believes that Music is a kind of devotion through which one can directly connect with the almighty. "Swar is God, Taal is God", he shares. From a very young age, he was exposed to a musical environment in his house, and thus picked up the Sarangi and Haveli Sangeet and never stopped learning.

PT. MOHAN SHYAM SHARMA

Contact Info - 9412625938

Role - Pakhwaj

A 57-years-old artist from Mathura, Pandit Mohan Shyam Sharma is A grade artist approved by AIR and has been learning music through his family's musical legacy. From a very tender age, he began to play tabla taking inspiration from Baba Gopal Das Ji Maharaj, who also happens to be his first guru of Gayan & wadan. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Pt. Shri Totaram Ji, a renowned artist from his region, as his mentor and guru. Apart from that, he also has a Master's degree in Music. He believes that Music is a kind of devotion through which one can directly connect with the almighty. "Swar is God, Taal is God", he shares. From a very young age, he was exposed to a musical environment, and thus he picked up the tabla and then took up Pakhawaj and never stopped learning. Apart from doing Haveli Sangeet, he is also very proficient in Hindustani classical music and has performed with some of the best artists of our nation in various locations within the country and abroad. He has accompanied Debu Choudhury, Gayak Bhisnu Kasal Karji, Shehnai maestro Pt. Anant Lal Ji, Dhrupad Gayak Lavkhus Chaturvedi, Dagar Bhandu.



KRITI KAUSHIK

Contact Info - 9068160301

Role -Chorus

A 20-year-old artist from Mathura, Kriti Kaushik, has been learning music through her family legacy of Haveli Sangeet. She was born and raised in an environment where she could experience music from a very young age, breathing and feeling it from her very birth. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with passion taking inspiration from her grandfather Hari Babu Kaushik. She considers Hari Babu Kaushik as her life guru who showed her the path of Music in her life, and Dr. Amrapali Trivedi, under whom, she is pursuing her graduation from Kishori Raman Girls P.G. College and speaks very highly of their teaching as well as achievements in this field. She also believes that she has inherited music from her ancestors, who have a natural desire for mastering the art of singing Haveli Sangeet. When she was a child, she would try to imitate grandfather and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. Apart from Haveli Sangeet, she is nurturing herself in Sugam Sangeet and has performed in various locations within Uttar Pradesh. For now, she is learning the art of music and sings the compositions of her grandfather.

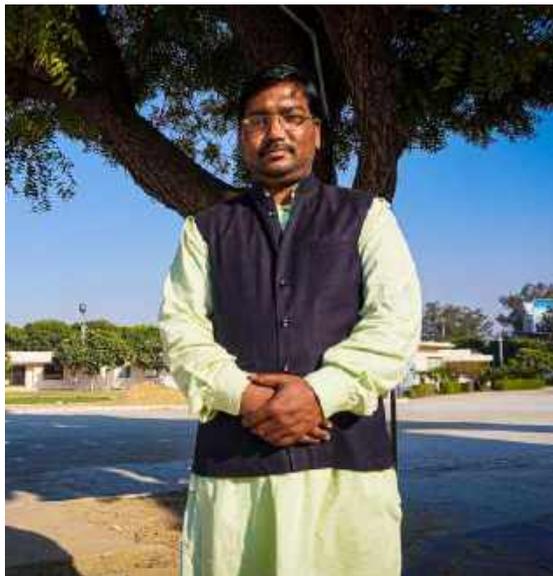


SOURAV CHATURVEDI

Contact Info - 9058809999

Role -Chorus, Harmonium

A 29-years-old artist from Mathura, Sourav Chaturvedi, has been learning music through Braj Lok Geet & Hindustani Shastriya Sangeet. At a young age, he started singing for his family functions, and ever since, his love for music just grew stronger. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Pt. Kanhaiyalal Chaturvedi is his guru and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, written by him to be in a similar style. He also believes that Haveli Sangeet is slowly losing its glory and favor, which should not happen. Currently, he is pursuing music professionally after completing his graduation. He also holds a Praveen degree in vocals. Apart from being proficient in Haveli Sangeet, he equally holds a strong command over other folk music forms of Braj and enjoys Khayal & Dhrupad gayaki, and has performed in locations within the state and the country. He has many studio recordings to his credit and cherishes his studio session in Mumbai. He is a great performer on stage and pulled off brilliant performances at festivals and conventions in Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir to galvanize the crowds.



MANMOHAN KAUSHIK

Contact Info - 9358812311

Role -Sarangi

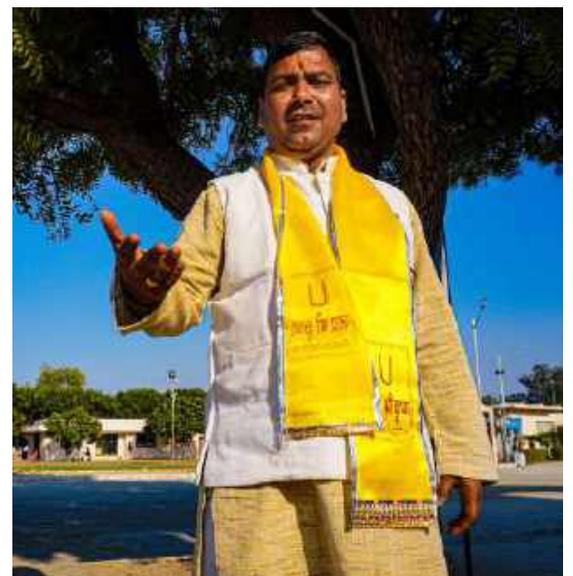
A 42-years-old artist from Mathura, Manmohan Kaushik, has been learning music through the age-old tradition of Haveli Sangeet of their family. Being part of a musical family allowed him to learn at a very young age taking inspiration from his ancestors, most importantly, his Father, Hari Babu Kaushik. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Hari Babu Kaushik as his guru and speaks very highly of their teaching, caliber, and achievements in music. He has also done an MA in music. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from ancestors traditionally, who have a natural desire for mastering the art of singing Haveli Sangeet and playing the Sarangi. Kaushik Gharana is believed to be one of the primary flag bearers of Haveli sangeet for the past five generations. When he was a child, he would try imitating his father, an eminent Sarangi wadak (player) apart from being a great singer and thus picked up the Sarangi and never stopped learning. He also knows how to sing Haveli Sangeet apart from playing the Sarangi and has performed in various locations with various artists within the state and the country.

MAYUR KAUSHIK

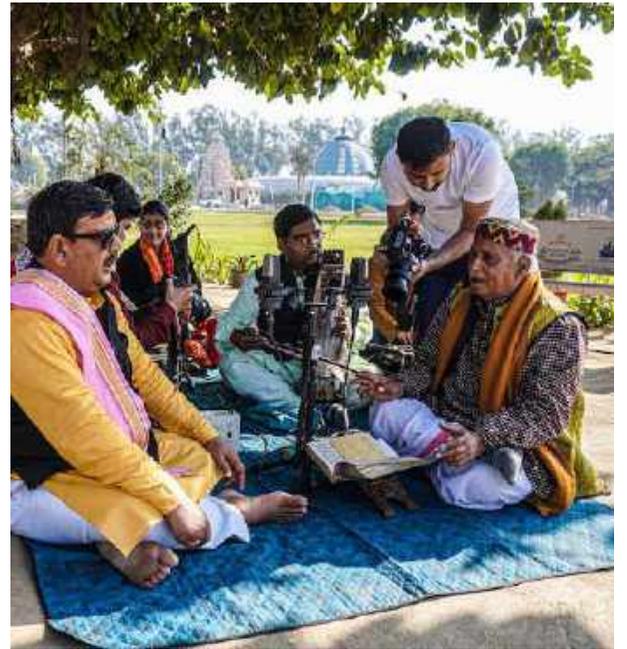
Contact Info - 9897951636

Role -Chorus, Harmonium

A 38-years-old artist from Mathura, Mayur Kaushik has been learning music through his family's legacy of Haveli Sangeet. At the young/tender age of 5, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father, Hari Babu Kaushik. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Hari Babu Kaushik as his guru speaks very highly of his teaching and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are written to be in a similar style. He also believes that he has inherited music from his father Hari Babu Kaushik, who has a natural desire for mastering the art of singing Haveli Sangeet. When he was a child, he would imitate his father and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. Even today, he takes lessons from him every day. He also knows how to play the harmonium apart from singing and has performed in various locations within the country, like Banaras, Agra, Delhi, and Mathura. He also imparts lectures on music, especially haveli sangeet in various institutions and conventions. He regards his performance at his place of birth Mathura as the most memorable experience. He has done many recording sessions for Akashwani.









📍 GOVARDHAN

PAVAN GOSWAMI & Group

Pavan Goswami and his group has been dancing Braj Lok Nritya forms like Charkula, Mayur Nritya, and various other dance forms associated with Rasleela. Charkula is a dance performed in the Braj region of Uttar Pradesh. In this dance, veiled women balancing large multi-tiered circular wooden pyramids on their heads dance to songs about Krishna. Each pyramid has 108 lighted oil lamps arranged in a spiral. This dance form is performed, especially, on the third day after Holi. Charkula dance performance by the group symbolizes happiness as well as joyful bliss. Krishna raised the mount Govardhan, and as if to re-enact the Govardhan Leela, the dancing damsel Braj holds the 50 Kgs Charkula on her head while performing the Charkula dance. Wearing long skirts reaching the toes and a blouse, the dancing damsel covers her body and face with the odhani, and with its lighted lamps on her head and lighted lamps in both the hands, she dances, synchronizing her steps with the beat of the drum. Her movements are finite because of the heavy load on her head. After witnessing a scintillating performance by Pavan and the entire Charkula group, one would never forget the experience. It will surely be a sight which one will carry in their hearts for a long, long time. After completing his 10th standard, Pavan, the group leader, at a very young age, began his journey with just 50 rupees when he used to carry language for various artists. He learned the Charkula dance form taking inspiration from Murarilal Tiwari and his son, who have a well-reputed national-level dance group.

“Ethereal celebration of lights in the forest of Govardhan.”

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” Martin Luther King Jr.

With the setting sun, the light from the Diyas reverberated through space as if to instil upon the blessings of Radha, on her birthplace. Radha is also referred to as the divine counterpart of Krishna. She is the embodiment of devotion, the essence of love for Krishna. To experience the spectacular dance from the Braj region of Uttar Pradesh, we met Pavan Goswami and his troupe. The group excels in Charkula nritya. By the time we set everything up for the performance, it’s all dark. In this dance form, veiled women balancing large multi-tiered circular wooden pyramids on their heads, lit with 108 oil lamps, dance to the strains of ‘Rasiya’ - songs of Lord Krishna.

Charkula is primarily performed on the third day after Holi to celebrate the birth of Radharani. Some legends have it, on getting the news of Radha’s birth, her grandmother was happy, and that she emphatically rushed out of her house with the Charkula on her head, to announce to the entire village that Radha has come to see the light of the earth, Since then Charkula has been a popular and loved dance form of Braj, performed during various occasions of festivities.

Every cultural aspect of Braj has some of the other connections with Lord Krishna and the beautiful tales of Gopis and Radha, hence how was it possible for a dance form or a song, a story or a legend of Braj to remain unblemished from Krishna’s leelas. Trying to figure out how to work in the dark Govardhan forest and as the team was brainstorming, our eyes suddenly witnessed the other Avatar of Pavan Goswami in Krishna’s attire through the lights generated by the lamps on the Charkula. We had our Eureka moment, and without any further ado, we decided to light the location with candles and earthen lamps. To keep the monkeys away from our equipment, who became more active after sundown, we circled the area of our counsel with light.

Charkula dance is a symbol of happiness as well as joyful bliss. Krishna raised the mount Govardhan and as if to re-enact the Govardhan Leela, the dancing damsel Braj raises the 50 Kgs Charkula on her head while performing the Charkula dance. Wearing long skirts reaching the toes and a blouse, the dancing damsel covers her body and face with the odhani, and with its lighted lamps on her head and in both the hands, she dances, synchronizing her steps with the beat of the drum. Her movements were limited, because of the heavy load on her head. The group gave a stunning performance and enchanted everyone on the song ‘ Sawayin dekho toh achak chadh aayo Rasiya’-

“Bansi Bare Mohana,

(Oh! Winner of hearts! Flautist Krishna)

Bansi tanak baja,

(Please, play the flute)

Teri Bansi ne mero maan haro,

(Your flute has taken my heart away)

Mohe ghar aangana na sohaye”

(Now I no longer feel good in my place, my home)

She cannot bend her body, nor can she move her neck. Despite these limitations, the slim, sturdy, and courageous dancer dances, gliding, bending, pirouetting to the tune of the song. The climax is reached, when enraptured by the collective merriment of the occasion, the singers also start dancing, and, with the swift beat of music and movement, the onlookers find themselves carried away by the rejoicing.

After experiencing a scintillating performance by Pawan, and the entire Charkhula group as we were coming out of the forest, we saw majestic Kusum Sarobor sparkling in full moonlight. A sight we will carry in our hearts for a long time.



PAWAN GOSWAMI

Contact Info - 7983550458

Role - Team Leader

A 23-years-old artist from the Braj region of Uttar Pradesh, Pawan Goswami, has been learning music through Braj Lok Nritya forms like Charkula, Mayur Nritya, and various other forms associated with Rasleela. After completing his 10th standard, at a very young age, he began his journey with just 50 rupees when he used to carry language for various artists. He learned the Charkula dance form taking inspiration from Murarilal Tiwari and his son, who have a well-reputed national-level dance group. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Rekha Pal as his first Guru, under whose able supervision, he got to understand the basics of Braj Lok Nritya. Pawan speaks very highly of her teachings and her caliber in the field of dance and music. Most of his performances are very traditional, with no dilution in any form, he adds. When he was in his youth, he had great admiration for dance and tried imitating the dancers around his village. He then started helping those dancers in whatever way possible and never stopped dancing. Apart from dancing, he is also taking singing lessons lately, but his core expertise is in Braj Lok Nritya.

DILDAR KHAN

Contact Info - 9654306392

Role - Vocals

A 30-years-old artist from Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, Dildar Khan has been learning music through Braj Lok sangeet and his family's musical lineage. At a young age, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father and grandfather. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father, Tara Khan as his first guru who taught him the basics. He also wished to take lessons from Shree Prakash Nagar, but, due to his financial conditions, couldn't pursue the same. He speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. He also admires Master Salim from Punjab and considers him as his role model and biggest inspiration. He also believes that music is a gift from his family lineage but somehow feels that they lack the true knowledge of music because of their weak financial status. It is also one of the main reasons he thinks that nobody in his family could make it big. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father and so picked up the will to sing. He is blessed with a good voice, and so he never stopped learning, he adds. He also knows how to sing classical songs, bhajans, ghazals, light, and Bollywood songs apart from doing traditional Braj Lok Sangeet .



TAJ KHAN

Contact Info - 7840876608

Role - Backings/ Chorus

A 27-years-old artist from Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, Tajudin Khan has been learning music through Braj Lok Sangeet and Sugam sangeet that was prevalent in his family. At a young age, he got fascinated by the music prevalent in his family. He then began to take the form more seriously, taking inspiration from his elder brother, Dildar Khan. He also shares his admiration towards Dildar for all the sacrifices he has made for the family. Taj speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. He is still at an early stage of his musical journey and is trying to give as much time as possible apart from his day job. He believes that music is a great source of relaxation and, at the same time, a great medium to understand spirituality. Taj also shares that even though he belongs to a musical family, his interest in music is very new. His first love has always been Archaeology, and even today, he dreams of being an archaeologist or a tourist guide in the future. So far, he has performed in various locations within the state and has mostly accompanied his brother, Dildar, in chorus. He regards his performance at Chandigarh as the most memorable experience.

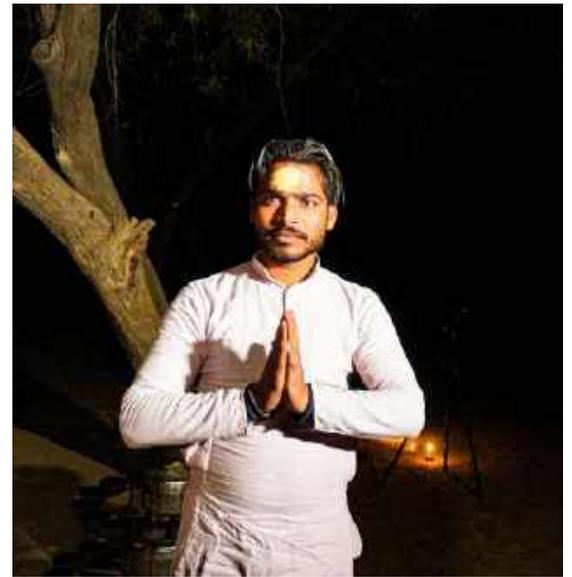


IQBAL KHAN

Contact Info - 9389126385

Role - Nakkara

A 26-years-old artist from Govardhan in Mathura District of Uttar Pradesh, Iqbal Khan, has been learning music through his ancestral musical lineage. He belongs to a family of Shehnai players, and at a young age, he began to learn, taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and got his music degree from Allahabad. He considers his father, Mubarak Khan, to be his Guru, and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are, hence written, to be in a similar style of their teachings and expertise. He also believes that he has received the musical heritage from his ancestors, who had a natural desire for mastering the art of playing Shehnai and other percussion instruments. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father and thus picked up the Shehnai first, followed by Nakkara, and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play Pad and Shehnai, apart from Nakkara. Iqbal has performed in various locations within the state and the entire country. He has received love and appreciation at several festivals and pulled off brilliant performances at state and national level festivals to mesmerize the crowds.



RAJU GOSWAMI

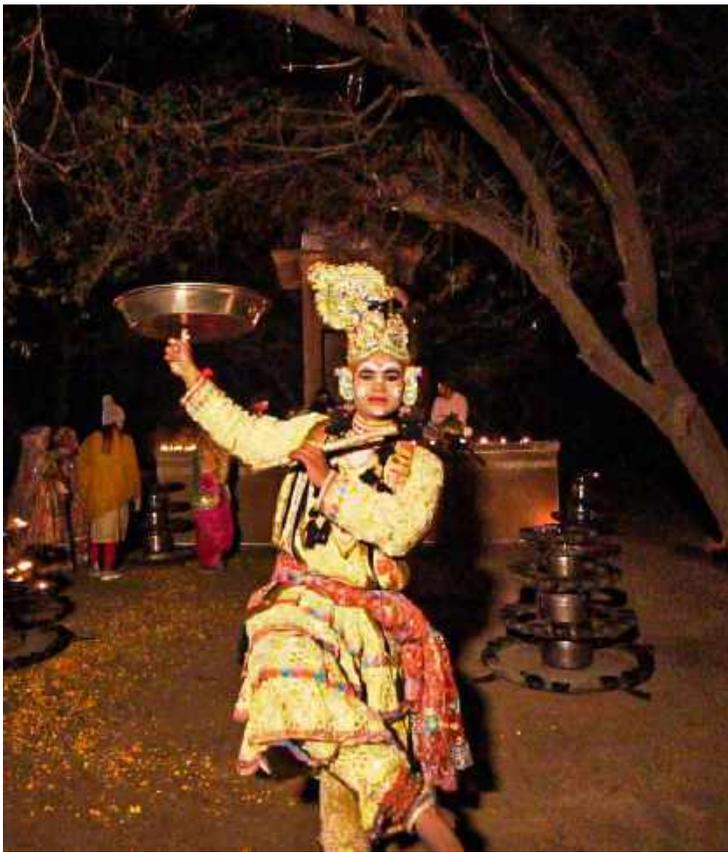
Contact Info - 7983550458

Role - Dholak

A 22-years-old artist from Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, Raju Goswami has been learning music through Braj Lok sangeet and his family's musical lineage. At a young age, he began to learn Dholak taking inspiration from his father and grandfather. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father, as his first guru who taught him the basics. He speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. He also admires Master Salim from Punjab and considers him as his role model and biggest inspiration. He also believes that music is a gift from his family lineage but somehow feels that they lack the true knowledge of music because of their weak financial status. It is also one of the main reasons he thinks that nobody in his family could make it big. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father and so picked up the will to play Dholak. He is blessed with a great talent of playing Dholak and so he never stopped learning, he adds. He also knows how to sing classical songs, bhajans, ghazals, light, and Bollywood songs apart from doing traditional Braj Lok Sangeet .









 BAAD

TEJPAL SINGH & Group

Tejpal Singh Chahar, a 40-year-old young man, is determined to stick to his roots and carry his way forward along with his talented group of musicians. Tejpal has done his 4th year in vocal from NCZCC and Senior Diploma from Agra. He comes from a Jaat community, sings only folk music of the Braj region. He comes from Agra Gharana. The group has Motiram, 52, Tabla Player and Singer; Gopal Singh, 22, Dholak Player; Omprakash, 49, Jhinka expert; Srinath, 48, adorns the Manjira beautifully in his hands and plays it gracefully, whereas, also plays dholak at times, and Kedar Sharma, 45, loves to play manjira. The group specializes in folk forms like Rasiya, Languriya, and Krishna bhajans. They have been together for 20 years and mostly get 7-8 shows every month, but still, the income is quite low. They are always worried about the sustenance of their families. Despite the problems coming their way, they have never left the path of the following music in their lives. They have ardent faith in music. To them, the future looks scary, but they are pretty sure of their passion and hopes. They believe in singing and presenting their music with a sense of authenticity in lyrics and music using their traditional instruments and have made appearances in all the cities like Bharatpur, Mathura, and Agra. The group mostly performs in local festivals and fairs. It was for the first time that the group was recording their songs.

“Melodies of humility and enthusiasm.”

Uttar Pradesh is blessed to have the two major rivers Ganga and Yamuna, passing through the state, making it highly fertile and super viable for agriculture with intensive cultivation. To meet Tejpal, we reached a small village named Baad near Agra. The location for filming Tejpal Singh and his group was literally between a lush green agricultural field. As we reached the spot, we could see Tejpal and his group singing a Devi Geet in a small temple and couldn't resist being a part of the Satsang.

Tejpal hails from Baad village of Agra district and has been a dedicated folk artist of the region. He has a senior diploma degree in vocals from NCZCC (North Central Zone Cultural Centre), Allahabad. Under the guidance of Shri Rajendra Prasad Sonariwale, he gained the wisdom of Braj folks. Tejpal was one of those artists who came from an initiative named Chaukhat ki Gunj, which was started during the lockdown to support the subsistence of local folk artists.

Meeting with him and the group was indeed an overwhelming and gratifying experience because, at the end of the day, all the hard work that the foundation puts in is solely to empower artists like Tejpal. They perform with all their heart but somehow, at times, fail to get the attention. He is from a family of Jats and lives with his father, wife, and four children. He is an ever-smiling person, and his sweetness, as a human being, can be felt in the music. He belongs to the Agra Gharana.

Tejpal has a very dedicated group who look up to him with utmost fondness. Motiram, 52, is a Tabla Player and is trained from the prestigious Agra Gharana. He has done Prabhakar in tabla and has a senior diploma in vocals. Even though he has a classical background in music, he still considers himself to be a folk musician first.

His proficiency is in the folk music of Braj (Braj ke lokgeet). He was also very instrumental in nurturing the younger members of the group.

Gopal Singh, 22, a Dholak Player, is also a disciple of Motiram. He is still at a very nascent stage of his musical journey, but under the supervision of Tejpal and Motiram, he is improving his skills in no time. Omprakash, 49, who is a sweet maker by profession, plays the Jhinka for the group. Srinath, 48, gracefully plays the Matka with spoons, a very simple yet sweet instrument. Apart from matka, he also plays dholak at times. Kedar Sharma, 45, a carpenter by profession but a musician by heart. He admires Tejpal a lot and considers him to be his biggest influence and guru.

It is very overwhelming to see respect and admiration among the group members. Any group can move ahead when there is compassion between the members for their music, and, it is quite evident in this one. They leave the audience mesmerised with their performance on the songs like ' Banaye deyo naath' -

“Tumne sabki dayi hai banaye,

(Hey! Lord, you have made everyone's life)

Banaye deyo naath humari hai”

(Make our life too worthy)

The group is proficient in folk forms like Rasiya, Languriya, and Krishna bhajans. As a group, they have been performing for the last 20 years. Before the Covid 19 pandemic, they were getting 7-8 shows per month, but the earnings made out of it have never been sufficient to meet their family needs. They are always worried as to how they are going to sustain the living for themselves and their families, and hence many of their members are into other professions for a living. Despite the problems coming their way, they have never left the path of the following music in their lives. They have ardent faith in music. To them, the future looks scary, but they are pretty optimistic.

They believe in singing and presenting their music with a sense of authenticity in lyrics and music using their traditional instruments and have made appearances in all the cities like Bharatpur, Mathura, and Agra. The group performs in local festivals and fairs. It was for the first time that the group was recording their songs. This feeling of seeing the artists performing with such enthusiasm motivates us their joy and happiness is our biggest inspiration.



TEJPAL SINGH

Contact Info - 9897813377

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 40-year-old artist from Agra, Tejpal Singh Chahar, learned music through folk forms like Rasiya and Languriya. He began to learn music when he was merely a 7-year-old and got inspired by his teacher back then. Even today, he works hard to achieve mastery in his craft and perseveres the same with tremendous passion. He recognizes Shri Rajendra Prasad from Sonari as his mentor, his Guru, and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the music field. Candidly, Tejpal believes that the gift of music passed on to him from his Guru, who has a natural desire for mastering the craft of singing folk art forms like Rasiya, Languriya, Jagran, and Braj Folk. They belong to the same Agra Gharana, and so, most of his songs are hence written, composed, and sung to be in a similar style. As a child, Tejpal would imitate his elders, and so, he picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He loves to sing in Raag Kalyan, Darbari, and his favorite, Raag Yaman, as it is a form of most folk songs, and he particularly admires it. The aura of his music captures the crowd, and they surely regard his performance at Bharatpur as their most memorable experience.

MOTIRAM

Contact Info - 9761956942

Role - Tabla

Motiram, 52, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh. Motiram hails from Baad village of Agra district and belongs to the Kori Community. He lives with his wife, 2 sons, 1 son, and his parents. Having graduated in the field of Humanities, he chose music for a living. Motiram started learning music from his Guru Shree Manoj Sharma, who acquainted him with Tabla lessons. He also happens to be his prime inspiration to have made him believe in music in its truest sense. Additionally, he is a trained vocalist and learned the art from a Guru in Agra. He cherishes both folk and classical forms of music. Being trained from the prestigious Agra Gharana, he has done Prabhakar in tabla and has a senior diploma in vocals. Even though he has a classical background in the music field, he still considers himself to be a folk musician. His proficiency is in the folk music of Braj. To talk of his favorites, Motiram loves adores performing Rasiya and Hori, which is quite evident, even in their group performances. Along with the group of musicians led by Tejpal Singh, he has performed in almost all districts of Uttar Pradesh and remembers his 1st performance in a local mela with much fondness.



GOPAL SINGH

Contact Info - 7900483903

Role - Dholak

Gopal Singh, 22, a second-year Graduation student, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Jat Community. He hails from Baad village of Agra district and lives with his sister, grandfather, uncles after his parents' demise. He has been performing music for a while now to make a living. Gopal Singh is a self-taught musician who only recently started taking some lessons under Motiram. His expertise is in playing Dholak, and under the supervision of Tejpal Singh and Motiram, he is improving his skills day by day. With no formal training in music in a structured manner, he tends to nurture his music through his ears and his experiences with other folk musicians. His proficiency is in the folk music of Braj (Braj Ke Lok Geet), and he cherishes the Braj Folk forms like Rasiya and Hori. With this group, he has performed in almost all districts of Uttar Pradesh, and he mostly accompanies Tejpal in his self-composed Rasiyas, Hori geets, and renditions of traditional folk songs of Braj. So far, he has performed locally and in some of the nearby states like Rajasthan, Haryana & Bihar. He holds the memories of performing in Rajasthan very strongly.



OM PRAKASH

Contact Info - 8191970298

Role - Jhinka

Om Prakash, 45, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh who belongs to the Jat community. He hails from Baad village of Agra district and lives with his wife, two sons, and one daughter. He is a sweetmaker (Halwai) by profession and is an 8th-grade pass out. Om Prakash has no formal training in music and plays Jhinka as a hobby and out of his love for music. He is solely into Braj Folk music and mostly accompanies Tejpal Singh in his performances. Though he has no musical training, he holds enormous admiration for Guru Ustad Rajendra Singh, who was like their village Guru. Along with the group of musicians led by Tejpal Singh, he has performed locally in and around Agra. To him, music is devotion, a great source of relief. Om Prakash has no distinct fees as such, accepts whatever is offered for his performances, and mostly does this for fun. He desires to dedicate more time and devotion to his playing and music.



SRIPATH

Contact Info - 9758598303

Role - Matka

Sripath, 57, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Khatik community. He hails from Baad village of Agra district and lives with his wife, two daughters, a son, and three brothers. He has studied till 5th grade and runs a Paan Shop for subsistence. Sripath has no formal training in music. He plays Matka, out of his love for music and as a hobby. He is only into Braj Folk music and likes to accompany Tejpal Singh in his performances. Apart from Matka, he also likes to play Dholak, just a little. From a very young age, he was drawn towards music and used to enjoy being with the musicians of his villages and sojourning in the vibes of the musical ecosystem. He draws all his inspiration from Tejpal Singh. Certainly, he acknowledges him as a Guru, but at the same time, he expresses indebtedness to Tejpal for making him a part of his musical voyage. He has performed in almost all districts of Uttar Pradesh with the group and keeps himself available for Tejpal whenever or wherever it is required. He stays with Tejpal and believes in him wholeheartedly. Like the other musicians from his group, he doesn't have any specific demand in terms of payment and accepts whatever gets offered.



KEDAR SHARMA

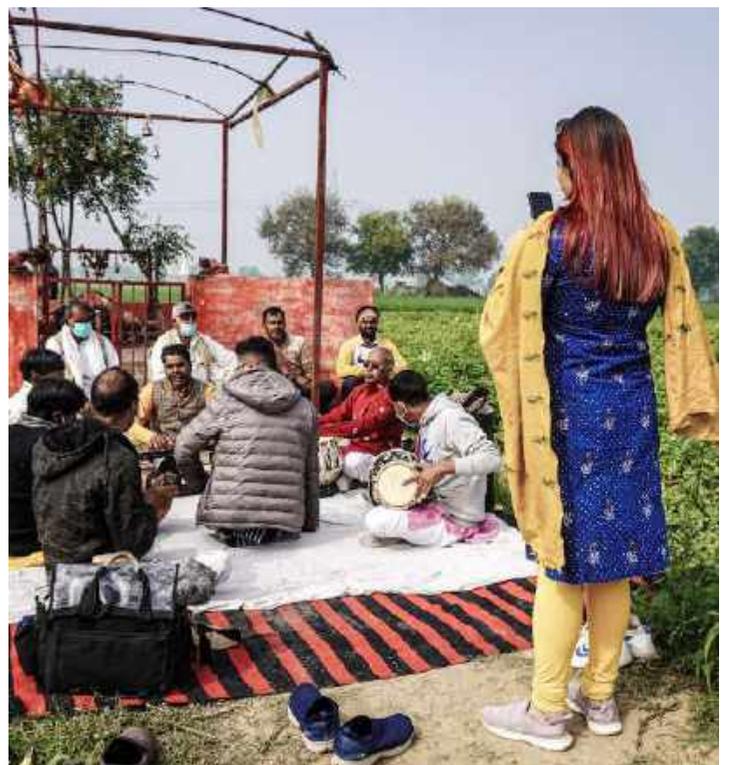
Contact Info - 9997066735

Role - Majira

Kedar Sharma, 45, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Bari (carpenter) community. He hails from Baad village of Agra district and lives with his wife, two sons, six brothers, and his mother. To provide for himself and his family, he works as a carpenter and has also got a furniture house of his own. Kedar has no formal training in music and plays Mara, out of his love for music and as a hobby. He is only into Braj Folk music and particularly accompanies Tejpal Singh in his performances. At times he also does chores for Tejpal as a gesture towards his Guru. From a very young age, he was drawn towards music and relished being with musicians of his villages and the aura of the musical ecosystem. Tejpal Singh is not just a mentor for him but an inspiration. He expresses indebtedness to Guru for making him a part of his musical voyage. Along with the group of musicians led by Tejpal Singh, he has performed in almost all districts of Uttar Pradesh and keeps himself available for Tejpal as and when it is required. Interestingly, Tejpal manages his shows as he performs exclusively for him.









📍 DOORA

MAHAVEER CHAHAR & Group

Mahaveer Singh Chahar, 48, is a folk singer and harmonium player, he even knows how to play dholak. All through his life, he has only been into music. He is an ardent follower of music and keeps his group intact by managing and taking care of each member. The group sings various rare Braj folk forms like Jikri, etc. and all of their songs have a classical base. Mahaveer is the group leader and has been managing the group for the past 15 years. The group constitutes of wondrous members namely, Kapil Choudhary, 18, a Khartaal player; Aso Khan, 50, a percussion instrumentalist and skilled Nakkara player; Bajanlal Khuswaha, 42, a Dholak player; Rajkumar, 52, a Jhinka player and Chorus singer; Jawahar Singh, 62, Singer and Harmonium Player; Raghunath Bhagati, 69, a Majira player and Sabir Khan, 58, also skilled in playing a Khanjari. Raghunath Ji and Sabir Ji are also proficient chorus singers and accompany each other. The group has been performing for the past 20 years, especially, for different Government programs. They were registered officially by the Information and Public Relation Department in 2000. Together, they have performed in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, and Madhya Pradesh. They see their future, and that would be viable only if the government supports them, and they surely have very high hopes for them.

“Crossing paths with magic and euphoria.”

One of the most widespread and drastic changes brought in by modernization is the synthesis of modern western instruments into folk music and songs. The spread of commercial pop styles and Bollywood music brought new sounds and styles which dilutes the basic aesthetics of folk music, and beliefs associated with it.

Its impact on the folk music of Uttar Pradesh is quite evident. To please the greater mass, artists have started singing folk songs in the tunes of popular Bollywood numbers. Not affected by all these tempting glitz and blitzes of modernity, Mahaveer Singh Chahar is a pleasant exception.

After traveling for around 2 hours and covering 70kms from Mathura, we reached MBD Inter College, Doora, where Mahaveer Chahar Ji was getting ready with his group in their bright and colourful traditional attire. Doora is an educational hub in the Agra district as there are two-degree colleges and three inter colleges. Most of the students from the nearby villages come here for higher education. The location chosen for Mahaveer Ji's performance was an old Akhara, where villagers train in wrestling. For simple understanding, it was a traditional village gym. There was also a small temple of Lord Shiva which added a lot to the whole vibe of the place.

Seeing green is always a very relaxing experience. The entire Akhara was surrounded by lush green trees and vivid mustard fields. The stage was all set, and we were waiting for a rustic and raw performance by Mahaveer Singh Chahar and his group. As a group, they are very tight and playful. Except for Kapil Choudhury, 18 years old, all are middle-aged men, with Raghunath Bhagati and Jawahar Singh being in their 60s. But in no way they seemed any less energetic. They were one of the most lively groups in the entire Braj Documentation.

Mahaveer Singh Chahar, 48, is a folk singer of great repute, in the entire Braj and Uttar Pradesh region, along with harmonium he plays dholak. All through his life, the only thing that he understood and believed in was music. In 1998, he appeared in Choupal Krishi Darshan on Doordarshan (DD), and ever since, he is also known as a DD artist in his locality. He is a role model for this group, and for his village, which admires him fondly. He is an ardent follower of music and keeps his group intact by managing and taking care of each member. The group sings various rare Braj folk forms like Jikri, etc., and all of their songs have a classical base.

Mahaveer is the group leader and has been managing the group for the past 15 years. The group has Kapil Choudhary, 18, who plays khartaal and gives backing support, Aso Khan, 50, who does the percussion duty and plays the Nakkara, Bhajan Lal Khuswaha, 42, who plays Dholak, Rajkumar, 52, who plays Jhinka and sings in the Chorus, Jawahar Singh, 62, who plays the harmonium and sings as well, Raghunath Bhagati, 69, plays Majira and sings in the Chorus along with Sabir Khan, 58, who also plays the Khanjari.

Raghunath Bhagati and Sabir Khan are the lifelines of this group. They get involved in their performance so much that you can feel the intense feelings of well-being and happiness they emit in their euphoric storytelling and performance. The group has been performing for the past 20 years, for different Government programs, the group was registered by the Information and Public Relation Department in 2000. They have performed in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, and Madhya Pradesh. They see their future which would be only viable if the government supports them, they have very high hopes for them.

He also knows how to play the harmonium very profoundly, apart from the owner of a raspy vocal chord, and has performed in various locations within the state/country. He has received many awards and laurels from the State and Central government and pulled off brilliant performances at festivals and conventions in UP, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh. The Taj Mahotsav and the Uttar Pradesh divas are the most memorable experiences.

He is a euphoric performer, and his group is equally vibrant. Their performance can move anybody into their grooves. Despite all their struggles, they strive to keep developing their craft and aspire someday in the future to see themselves succeed through the art that they love so much. Despite all their struggles, they strive to keep developing their craft and dreams to educate their audience about this artform. Someday in the future, they see themselves succeed through the art that they love so much.



MAHAVEER CHAHAR

Contact Info - 9412812942

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

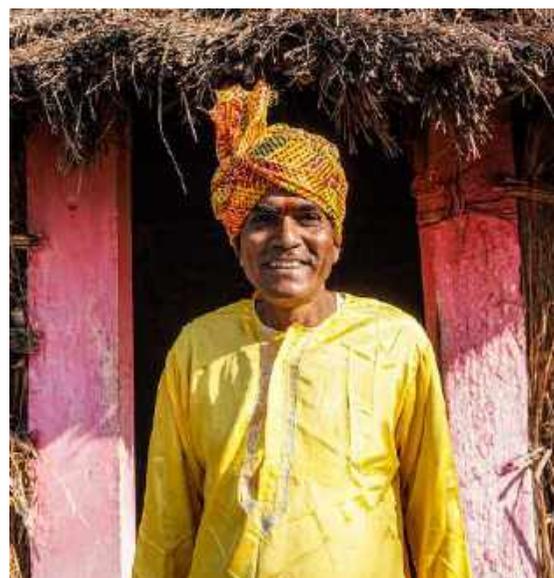
A 48-year-old artist from Dura, Mahaveer Singh Chahar, has been learning music through folk with a classical base. At the young age of 16, he began to play, seeking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He has done a Junior diploma in Music University in Agra. He considers his father and Late Shri Ram Babu Singh as his gurus who speak very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. His Guru taught him the art form of Jikri in 1984, wholeheartedly, even though he was blind. Most of his songs are thus sung to be in a similar style. Mahaveer also believes that music has been passed on to him from his father, who has a natural talent for mastering the art of singing Bhajans. When he was a child, he would try imitating his father and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play Harmonium and Manjira apart from singing. He has been part of various government campaigns for 20 years now. He has received appreciations from distinct administrators across Uttar Pradesh and has performed all over Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh at festivals, concerts, etc.

ASO KHAN

Contact Info - 8958286771

Role - Nakkara

A 50-years-old artist from Dura, Agra, Aso Khan, has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. He belongs to a musical family, and he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He is from the Dabar Gharana, Gwalior Gharana. He considers Salawat Khan, his father, as his guru and speaks very highly of their teaching and their caliber in the field of music. His father and family have had a great contribution in getting him to choose music, but he still considers Saraswati Maa as the supreme reason who guided him towards music. He also believes that he received the gift of music from his father, who has a natural talent for mastering the art of playing the Dholak and Nakkara. When he was a child, he would try imitating his father and thus picked up the nakkara and never stopped learning. Apart from being a proficient Nakkara professional, Aso Ji is a Chorus singer and a Dholak Instrumentalist. He has accompanied Mahavir with the chorus for several performances within the state and the country.

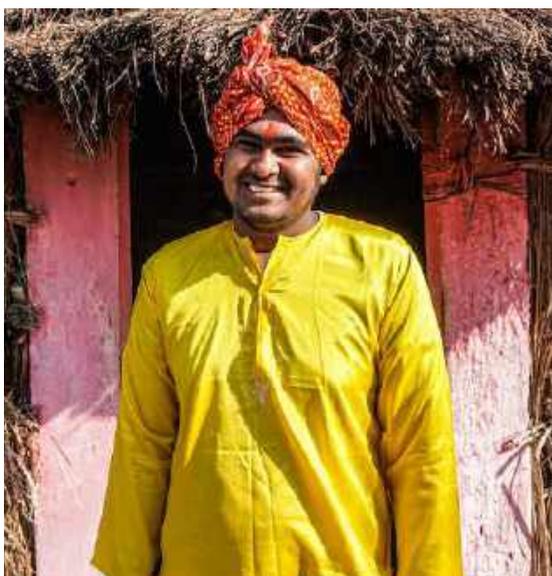


KAPIL CHOUDHURY

Contact Info - 8810698953

Role - Kartaal, Chorus

An 18-years-old artist from Fatehpur Sikri, Kapil Choudhury, has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. He considers his father and Mahaveer to be his source of inspiration, not just for taking up music seriously but also life in general. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He took lessons of Djikiri Bhajan from Shri Siyaram Ji and is currently taking classes on Braj Lokgeet from Mahaveer Chahar. Kapil speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Having said that, he also expresses his desire to learn classical music in-depth and is looking for the perfect guru. He also believes that music has been very helpful in leading his life in a better way. To be under someone like Mahavir is a blessing, and it has helped him understand the value of being devoted towards the art form and disciplined in the approach. He also knows how to play Kartaal apart from singing and has performed in many locations in the country. He also explains how the look and feel of the kartaal in Uttar Pradesh are different from the ones in Rajasthan. He has accompanied Mahibir Ji far and wide from a very young age and has pulled off brilliant performances at Uttar Pradesh Divas, Lucknow, 2021.



SABIR KHAN

Contact Info - 9837039381

Role - Khanjari

A 58-years-old artist from Agra, Sabir Khan has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. At a very tender age his interest in music grew, he began to learn music taking inspiration from Amba Prasad Lawn. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Chedduram Baha as his guru who introduced him to the world of music, nautanki, and as his guru speaks very highly of their teaching as well as caliber in the field of music. He also believes that music has been something that always moved him and he feels connected to. When he was a child, he would try to imitate people around him who used to sing and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play the khanjira apart from taking care of the backing vocals duties and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has been performing with Mahaveer Chahar since 1989 and pulled off brilliant performances at various festivals in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance at Suraj Kund as the most memorable experience till now.



BHAJAN LAL KUSHWAHA

Contact Info - 9758702769

Role - Dholak

A 42-years-old artist from Agra, Bhajan Lal Khuswaha, has been learning music through folk and classical music with a stronghold over jikri bhajan. He has a musical lineage and began to learn music by taking inspiration from his ancestors and family. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Jwala Prasad as his guru and speaks very highly of his teaching and caliber in the field of music. When it comes to playing dholak, he mostly accompanies artists as per their requirements. He also believes that music is a very devotional thing. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his ancestors and thus picked up the dholak and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play the tabla apart from playing the dholak. He is a graduate of the Agra Gharana and has performed in National festivals five times. Apart from being a seasoned studio recording artist, Bhajan Lal is an amazing stage performer and has pulled off brilliant performances at numerous festivals in cities like Patna, Pune, Jamshedpur, states like Jharkhand, Punjab, Rajasthan.

RAJKUMAR

Contact Info - 8445312358

Role - Jhinka, Chorus

A 52-years-old artist from Agra, Rajkumar, has been learning music through Braj Lokgeet. He has been with Mahaveer Chahar for the past 25 years and considers him the biggest influence in his life, and owes everything to him as far as music is concerned. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He has no formal training in music, and it is through his association with Mahaveer Chahar that he is pursuing music. Hence, recognizes in him a life guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus sung to be in a similar style. He also believes that music is a beautiful form since it has life-changing qualities. From a tender age, he was interested in learning music and wanted to be a singer. He also knows how to play Jhinka, apart from singing in the chorus, and has performed in numerous locations within the state and the country, with Mahaveer Chahar. He is so devoted to Mahaveer, that he tags along with him wherever he takes them. Their group has delivered some brilliant performances at Gwalior, Delhi, Lucknow, Mau only to amaze the crowds.





JAWAHAR SINGH

Contact Info - 8477020784

Role -Chorus

A 62-years-old artist from Agra, Jawahar Singh, has been learning music through Braj Lok geet. He has no formal training in music, neither in folk music nor in classical, and got involved in music taking inspiration from the village folks who used to perform bhajans and sing folk music in their village. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Devkinandan Ji as his guru, responsible for teaching village songs, Djikri Bhajan, and has also taught him to play the harmonium. He speaks very highly of their teachings as well as their caliber in the field of music. When it comes to life, he regards his father, Saheb Singh Ji, as his prime inspiration. Jawahar Ji shares that he always had an interest in music, which kept him connected to Braj Lok geet. He believes that music is a basic need of our life, that it is a foundation in itself. He is an approved artist from the Cultural Department of the State and The Center and has performed in numerous locations within the country. He has received many awards and recognition from the local organizations and the state government and pulled off brilliant performances at some of the biggest festivals in the country only to dazzle the crowds.

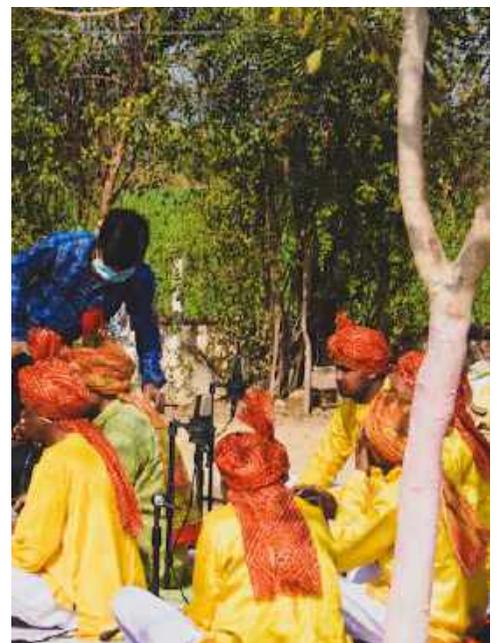
RAGHUNATH BHAGATI

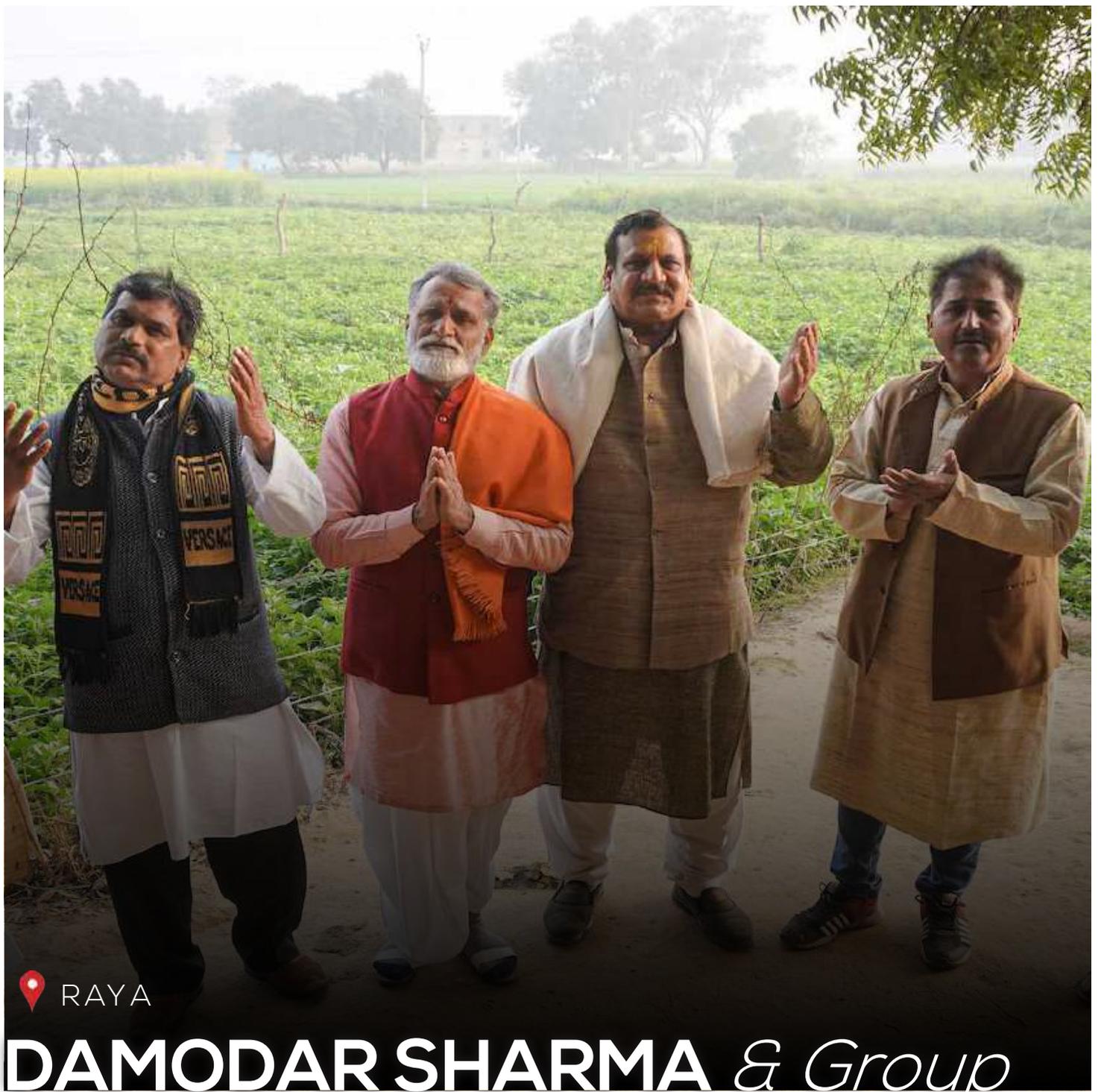
Contact Info - 7017080403

Role - Manjira, Chorus

A 69-years-old artist from Agra, Raghunath Bhagati, has been learning music through {Art form}. From a very young age, he loved listening to music and participating in the village occasions. Fascinating to know, he learned music by observing and looking at artists from his village. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Sidhu Baba, a renowned Kavi (poet) from their village, as his Guru, and draws most of his inspiration from him. He speaks very highly of his teaching as well as caliber in the field of music. He also believes that music is an art that has to be enjoyed, and one needs to feel it. He says, "If you can't enjoy your music, then you can never live your music, and eventually that will reflect in your music, and which will always come as a barrier between you and your audience." He also knows how to play the manra apart from singing in the chorus. With Mahaveer Chahar, he has performed far and wide within the state and the country. At this ripping age of 69, he never stops himself from getting away in the flow and has performed at numerous festivals. He has always managed to mesmerize his audience with not just his singing skills, but also, his vibrant dancing abilities.







RAYA

DAMODAR SHARMA & Group

Damodar Sharma and his group of instrumentalists don't have many members but play a very crucial part in conserving the Braj folk. The group sings beautiful Swangs and Rasiya of Braj folk and hail from the village Raya near Mathura. Their group is the epitome of peace, harmony, and acceptance of different faiths and religions. They are plenary instrumentalists and vocalists who have conserved a lost art form and have combined the popular religious traditions with the artistry required to express the emotions of the folk. Their intense knowledge in the field of classical music helps with their performances and is an improvisation of older folk melodies. They like to perform in various Ragas and Taals, but they are most fond of playing the Yaman, Khamaj Bhairavi, Aheer Bhairav Ragas. Damodar, 57, is the group leader and has managed the group for the past 40 years. Omkar and Damodar are the ones who had formed the group when they were children. Damodar tends to perform with other groups too, but Onkar never plays for anyone else but only his group. His exclusivity makes him more interesting. For payment, the members take whatever Damodar gives them, as he makes the fair share of their charges. The group has Gajhadar Pathak a.k.a Raju, 58, who plays the authentic Israaj; Mohanshyam Pachori, 49, plays the melodious flute; Onkar Nath, 68, plays the Harmonium; Devdar Sharma, 58, plays tabla; and Sattar Ahmed, 49, Dholak. Despite all their struggles, this group understands the importance of developing their musical talents for their families and community.



“Finding rasiya through mists and hues.”

As the quest for the songs of Uttar Pradesh started, one could feel the rush of happiness that feels like a homecoming, as if every lane, every tree is welcoming us with arms wide open. Before this, most of our documentation was in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Himachal, Punjab, Jharkhand, and Karnataka. This was the first time we were getting a chance to document the diverse folk forms of Uttar Pradesh. And the whole vibe of Uttar Pradesh was very welcoming and homely.

The documentation started in Braj, the mystical land of Radha Krishna, and the notes (swars) of Rasiya, talking about the divine love of Radha-Krishna, engulfed us in a deep sense of warmth as we met few artists and learned about the folk forms and different songs during the research trip.

Thanks to All India Radio, we could reach out to artists from Mathura, Vrindavan, and Agra. We got a chance to explore the famous Braj Rasiya, Swang, Mayur nritya, Charkhula to Qawwali. To document one such artist, we reached the calm and beautiful village named Raya, about 16 km away from the Mathura town. As we were getting closer to our destination, we could faintly hear the melodic voice of Pt. Damodar Sharma through mists and lush mustard fields was waiting for us with his group under a tree next to the temple of the village deity Parashuram.

Damodar has a very charismatic persona which reflects in his performance. He started his artistic journey at a very young age when he used to play the role of Ram in Rasleela and nautanki. After the demise of his father, his mother handed him Ramcharit Manas, which has been a source of learning in his life. He has very high regards for his mother and considers her to be his biggest inspiration.

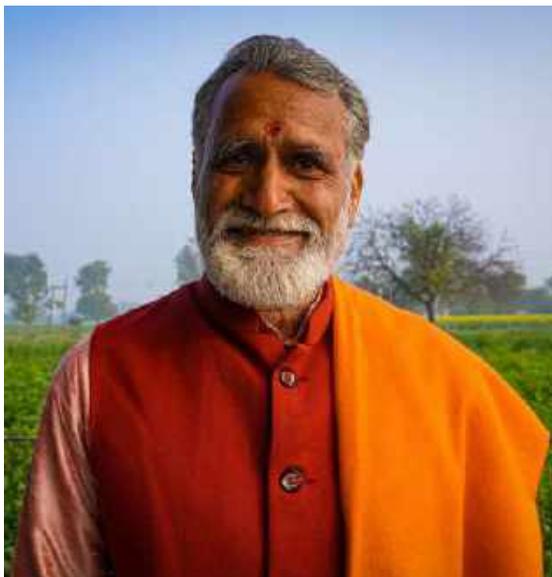
Damodar had his first taste of folk music under the mentorship of Omkar Nath, who also happens to be from his village, Raya. He has been playing the harmonium with him since the 90s. After having his training in folk music, he realized that it's very important to know classical music to make the songs sound more bright and dynamic. Kalyan Sen was his guru, from whom he learned classical gayan and from Prem Rawat - sugam sangeet.

“Music is the gift of Goddess Saraswati. If somebody devotes time with utmost sincerity, then music connects you with the Lord.”

Damodar even at the age of 57, practices and does Riaz ritualistically every day. The reflection of his devotion and sincerity is seen in his team members, who performed along with him. They were very well versed and sorted, and shooting them was a calm experience. The most interesting part of their documentation was this instrument called Esraj, a unique instrument that looks like Sarangi but sounds much sweet and melancholic, and with the notes of Gajendra Pathak, we just went on for a roller coaster ride of emotions. Gajendra Pathak has been pursuing music as a profession from a very young age. He is a multifaceted artist. He has command over many instruments, esraj, sitar, veena, Rudra veena, Saraswati veena. Apart from being a well-known instrumentalist, he is also an AIR-approved Haveli Sangeet singer. This was the first time that we were recording an Esraj. It excited the entire team behind the documentation.

The first song that they performed was a Rasiya named Deja daadh ko Daan in Daan Leela, a song of separation and appeal, where Udhav has been asked to send the message to Krishna that she (Radha) is not playing Holi with anyone, except him. Hence, wants him back at the earliest. The song is full of innocence, and when Mohan Shyam played his flute, we got into the trance of the divine love of Radha-Krishna that we could feel in the air of Raya.

Damodar left singing Rasiya 30-35 years back. Now he is more into swang and has been approved by AIR for it, but we were fortunate to hear two rasiyas from him. He also does Bhagawat Paths and feels very contained to get this opportunity to extend his humble service of preaching the stories and wisdom of the Lord to greater mass. While we were explaining about ATMOS, about the whole idea behind our work, and the listening experience, that the world is going to have for the first time after listening to Indian folk music in Dolby Atmos, we realized the importance of documenting and preserving the varied and rich cultural goldmine of talents around us.



DAMODAR SHARMA

Contact Info - 9557730423

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 57-year-old artist from Raya in Mathura, Damodar Sharma has been learning music through classical and folk forms. At the young age of 12, he began to learn by taking inspiration from his mother. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring/sumptuous/tremendous passion. He considers his mother as his Guru and speaks very highly of her teachings. She was the one who sowed the seed of music into him at a very young age by making him read Bhagwat and Ram Charitramanas to her. Most of his Bhajans are, therefore, sung to be in a similar style as hers. He believes that music has been passed on to him by his mother, who had a natural talent for mastering the art of singing bhajans. When he was a child, he would try to practice the Shlokas in Bhagwat Geeta and Bhajans, and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He is an expert in Ashawari Raag Bhajans and loves to sing the ragas such as Yaman, Khamaj, Bharavi, and Aheer Bhairav. He also knows how to play harmonium apart from singing and has performed in various locations within the country.

GAJADHAR PATHAK AKA RAJU

Contact Info - 9557730423

Role - Esraj

Gajadhar Pathak, 60, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Brahmin (Chaturvedi) community. He hails from the divine land of Radha-Krishna, Mathura, where the chantings of Radhe Radhe resonate in every nook and corner. He lives with his wife and son (currently pursuing CS). Gajadhar has been a professional musician from a very young age. He is a multifaceted artist with a strong command over many instruments, namely Esraj, Sitar, Veena, Rudra Veena, Saraswati Veena, and many more. Apart from being a well-known instrumentalist, he is also an AIR-approved Haveli Sangeet Singer. He holds many musical degrees like Visharad in Gayan & Sitar and Prabhakar in Esraj. He is an A grade-approved artist from AIR belonging to the Braj Gharana. He has many accomplishments to his credits as he has accompanied Pt. Jasraj, Shree Siyaram Tiwari, Pt. Ram Chaturmalik, and he has performed with haveli sangeet maestros like Lakshman & Bal Chaturvedi from Mathura. He has also composed many Lok Taans, a form that is very prevalent in the Chaturvedi community. Gajadhar enjoys accompanying Braj Lok Geet as an Esraj professional apart from playing the sitar in the traditional Hindustani Classical way.

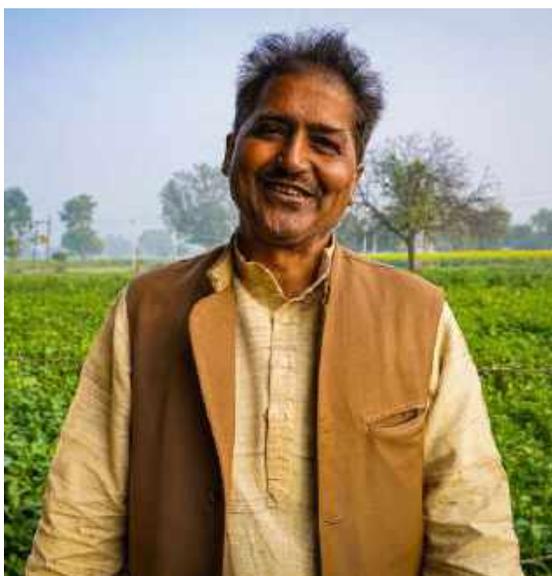


MOHANSHYAM PACHORI

Contact Info - 8630145520

Role - Flute

Mohanshyam Pachori, 49, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Hindu community. He hails from Vrindaban of Mathura district and lives with his wife and two sons. He is a graduate and devoted artist who has been into music for his livelihood. Mohanshyam holds equal command over folk and classical music. He has done his Bisharad from Ghandharv Mandal, Pune, and from Bhatkhande in Flute. He completed his Prabhakar in flute from Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad. Even after an elaborate experience in the field of music for about 35 years, he humbly considers himself to be a folk artist who enjoys accompanying and playing the old traditional songs. His only belief or philosophy is that he has to play the instrument only to give notes, and for him, Swar is peace. He draws all his inspiration from the legends like Shree Panna Lal Ghosh & Shree Hariprasad Chourasia. It is quite fascinating that Shree Panna Lal Ghosh is the reason why Mohanshyam pursued music professionally. He once heard Shree Panna Lal play his Flute, and it was a life-changing experience that motivated him to be an instrumentalist. However, he then started his musical journey under the guidance of Prahlad Das Agarwal as his Guru.

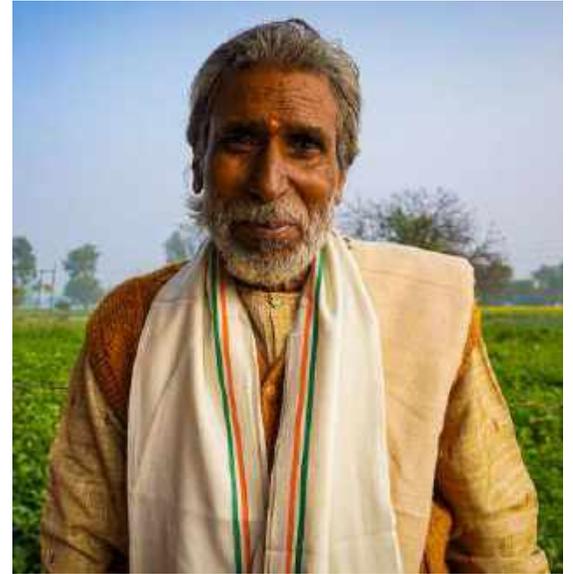


ONKAR NATH

Contact Info - 9897155941

Role - Harmonium

Onkar Nath, 69, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Naayee community. He hails from Raya village of Mathura district. After the demise of his wife, he lives with his four sons & one Daughter. He has studied till 5th grade and has been into music from a very young age. He has grown up seeing his father play Dholak, and after his demise, he had to leave his education and took music as his full-time profession. Onkar has received his training in music from Haridas Sangeet Kala Kendra under the mentorship of Pt. Jagannath Prasad Sharma. All his life, he has accompanied various artists from the region like Haribabu Kaushik, whom he also considers as one of his biggest inspirations, and Damodar Sharma, with whom he has performed since the '90s. He also happens to be Pt. Damodar Sharma's Guru in folk music. During his years so far, he has performed in many cities and cherishes his memories of performing in Shivpuri, Rampur, Mathura, Delhi, Surat, Gwalior the most. He has no managers but currently plays the harmonium only with Pt. Damodar Sharma and believes in him wholeheartedly. He does not have any specific demand in terms of payment and accepts whatever gets offered.

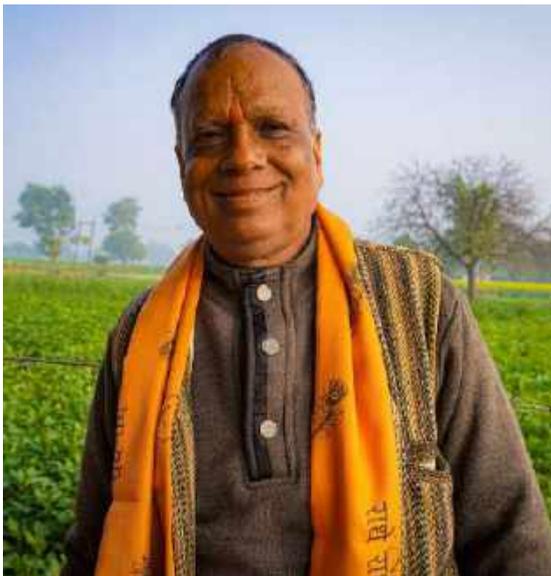


DEVDAŠ SHARMA

Contact Info - 8445565157

Role - Side Rhythm

Devdas Sharma, 58, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh. He belongs to the Brahmin (Pandit) community. Devdas Sharma hails from the colorful and devotional town Mathura of Mathura district. He has two brothers, the elder one is a teacher, and the younger one, Rajesh Sharma, is a renowned Music Composer from AIR, Agra. He lives with his wife and two sons. He holds a Sahitya Ratna degree from Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad. For subsistence, he performs music and Bhagwat Katha. He has Prabhakar, Bisarad and Sangeet Acharya in Tabla, and is a B High-Grade Dholak Artist (AIR). Devdas enjoys playing both folk and classical forms of music. With Dholak, he accompanies Braj Lok Geet and plays tabla in traditional classical music. He belongs to the Mathura Gharana and accompanies other artists, but as far as Taals are concerned, he has composed and improvised a few taals of his own. Apart from Dholak and Tabla, he also shares proficiency in Mara. He draws inspiration from K D Sharma, his elder brother, his guru, and his younger brother, Rajesh Sharma. He has also performed for AIR & DD numerous times, but he cherishes his performance in Bhopal the most.

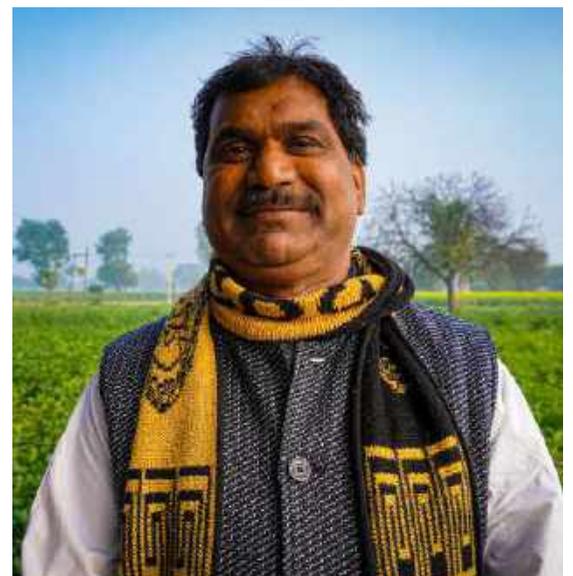


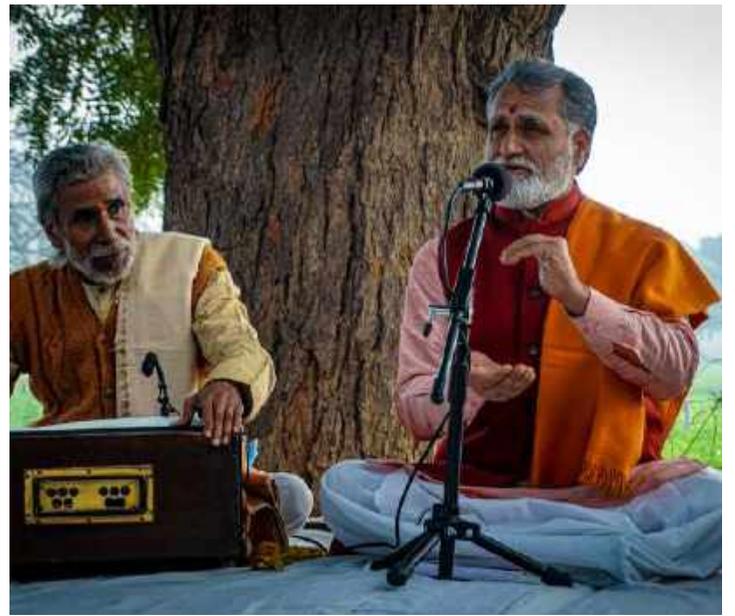
SATTAR AHMED

Contact Info - 9837187753

Role - Dholak

Sattar, 49, is an artist in the folk music spectrum of Braj in Uttar Pradesh and belongs to the Muslim community. He hails from Raya village of Mathura district and lives with his wife, five children (4 sons and 1 daughter). Sattar Ahmed has no formal training in music. He belongs to a musical family and has acquired the art of music in lineage. His family has a known heritage of Shehnai Wadak, an instrument that will lose its charm and meaning in no time after the demise of Ustd. Bismillah Khan. For a living, he has been creating music, playing Shehnai at Weddings and Jagrans. He does not have any training in classical music and plays folk songs mostly with Braj Ke Lokgeet as his field of expertise. He draws all his inspiration from his friend, Bayed Hussain, who used to play Dholak & Shehnai. His Guru was his father, Janab Khudabaksh. He has performed in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and government shows and AIR concerts. He is very active in Public Shows, Bhajan Melas, and Ghazal Shows. He holds the memories of performing in Raya in front of more than 1 lakh people very fondly.









LUCKNOW

KAMLA SRIVASTAVA & Group

Kamla Srivastava is a legend who is 88-year-old by age but an 18-year-old at heart. Born on 1st September 1933, she has been surrounded by music 24X7 ever since she took birth. In her lifetime, Kamla has played various roles and has resided in several offices of duties, i.e., from being a student at Bhatkhande University to being a Professor there. Kamla Srivastava is denoted as the Sangeet Vidushi Professor Kamla Srivastava out of respect by her peers. She is the backbone of this group and is excellent in every folk form of the Awadh region. Kamla sings classical and Awadhi, Bhojpuri, etc. in folk forms. Kamla has been honored with more than 50 awards, including the prestigious Yash Bharti. Along with singing, she can play instruments like harmonium, tabla, violin, and jaltarang. Kamla and the group love to sing in Yaman and Maalkansh raag. Kamla Prasad, 88, is the group leader and has managed the group for the past 40 years. The group has Maheshwar Dayal Nagar, who plays the Harmonium; Satyam Shivam Sundar, 57, a Dholak Player; and Rita Srivastava, a Chorus Singer. They have played all over India in Goa, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, etc. The group sings melodious folk forms like Sohar, Kajri, and others that are a part of Awadh folk music. Sohar is the song sung at the birth of a child - specifically the 'son.' As has been common in Indian society - the birth of a son is a time for celebration, and the Sohar is popular in the entire Hindi belt. In the Bhojpuri dialect - Sohar - means feeling good.



“A legend’s journey of sincerity and self belief.”

“Music is a journey that can take you places and shape your reality.”

The journey of exploring different styles of folk music lead us to Awadh, a region historically ruled by various dynasties such as Delhi Sultanate, Sharqi Sultanate, Mughal Empire, and the British Raj. The capital city, Lucknow, has been known to have one of the richest cultures in the state, be it in terms of art, food, music, or chronicles. Stepping into the capital city itself will bring you closer to the history and development of the state of Uttar Pradesh.

As we proceeded towards exploring various folk musicians and groups of Awadh, we went to Bhatkhande University, one of the first music schools in India, to learn about the art forms that are a part of the culture of Uttar Pradesh. We came across Awadhi folk, Sohar, Thumri, and many other forms of music. The most mesmerizing experience was the passion of the artists from all walks of life. They are learning, teaching, and some have mastered multiple instruments along with vocals.

Prof. Kamla Srivastava was one of those artists who have been learning music since childhood. She has learned all aspects of music in and out, and her vocal ability is truly breathtaking. When you meet her, you can feel the aura of an assertive and humble artist, who knows her music through diligent studying and tremendous experience. Even at the mature age of 88, she seems to be one of the most active musicians in the region, with the chirpy attitude of a young woman at the cusp of adulthood. She has also showcased her talents in multiple states of the country and broadcasted her musical abilities on Sri Lankan Radio.

Her eyes light up like the Pole star as she speaks about her most memorable performance in the state of Goa as she recalls an overwhelmingly positive response from the audience who enjoyed and danced around while she performed to the best of her abilities. While we walked to the Genesis Club, one of the oldest places in Lucknow, Kamla Ji’s charm and ability captured everyone’s attention. With her wit, she brought tremendous energy into every team member. She began performing and introducing various artforms and songs with lyrical translations and, at that moment, we realized how creative she was not only as a musician but also as a conversationalist and a presenter.

We got introduced to various forms of music such as Banarasi Kajri, Sohar, and Awadhi folk addressing the goddesses that are worshipped in the region. The beauty of these songs was like a conversation with God, nature, and the ones we love. Between each song, we would notice her humbleness as she would prepare us for the next song. She did so by telling the story behind her process while learning these different art forms. In her elegance, we lost ourselves and her vocal abilities, at times, gave us goosebumps that we had never imagined. We also got the privilege to experience the brilliant harmonics of the Maheshwar Dayal Nagar Ji, who plays the harmonium with eminent finesse even at the age of 75. His 21 years of experience as a music teacher at Bhatkhande University, is finely reflected in his musical performances.

The highly coveted Dholak player, Satyam Shivam Sundar Ji, is an asset to this group as his ability to incorporate the beat with the harmonics and vocals by Prof. Kamla is masterful and a treat to experience. He claims to have composed over 1000 songs, some of which are on YouTube and other digital platforms. He is also a specialist in folk music melodies. Another brilliant percussionist who plays the Manjira, Rita Srivastava Ji, accompanied these artists, as they executed their musical fortress in the most elegant manner. Their ability to help the audience lose itself into their music and eventually their charming personalities stemmed from limitless experience, talent, and coordination.

While practising Banarsi Kajri, Prof. Kamla stopped, as her voice gave out for a few seconds. She then, humbly apologized and within a few moments, cracked a few jokes and set the mood for another attempt at recording. They did this only to make everyone laugh with her honest acceptance of even the tiniest deviances from the tune. The essence of the music in Awadh lies within the connection to the identity of an individual’s incorporation of values such as diligence, discipline, and most importantly humility. Additionally, the music here translates the emotions into an unforgettable musical experience, with an exploration of one’s creative energy and spiritual identity through the magic of sounds played and sung in harmony.



PROF. KAMLA SRIVASTAVA

Contact Info - 9839047240

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

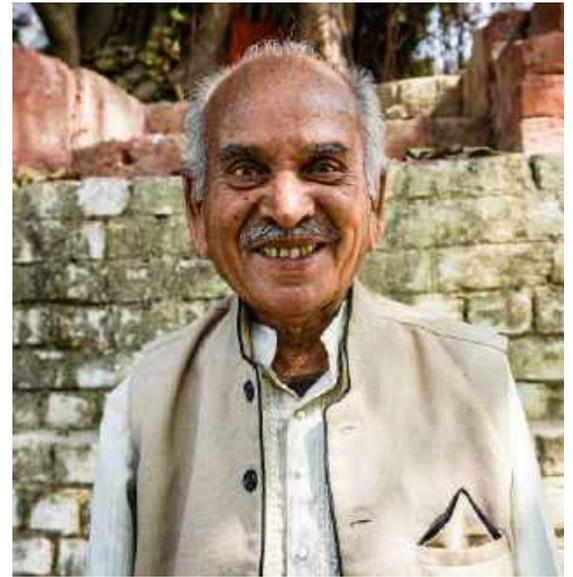
An 88-year-old artist from Lucknow, Prof. Kamla Srivastava, has worked in music through different classical and folk art forms. At the age of 7, she got inspired by the music teacher of her elder sister. Intriguingly, on a fine day, her teacher was teaching vocals to her elder sister and heard Prof. Kamla singing from the other room. She dazzled the music teacher with her ability to pick up music and her vocal strengths, that too, just by listening to the classes her sister attended. The teacher identified her talent and supported her desire to learn music. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with enthusiasm ever since. She considers Dr. S N Yamkar and Prof. Govind Narayan Natu as her gurus and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. She also believes that music is a gift from her family and has a natural talent for mastering the art of singing. She has primarily belonged to the Gwalior Gharana of music and is particularly fond of Raga Yaman and Malkansh. She also knows how to play the Tabla, Sarangi, Harmonium apart from possessing an incredible vocal ability and has performed in various locations within the country. She has received over 50 awards and titles, including the Yash Bharti award.

MAHESHWAR DAYAL NAGAR

Contact Info - 8005387009

Role - Harmonium

A 75-year-old artist from Lucknow, Maheshwar Dayal Nagar, has been working in music through the exploration and mastery of Classical, Awadhi Folk, and Sugam Sangeet. At a very young age during his childhood years, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father, Shri M L Nagar. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with great passion. He considers his father as his guru speaks very highly of his teachings and his caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, performed to be in a similar style. He also believes that he has inherited the art of music from his ancestors. When he was a child, he would try imitating his father and hence picked up the Harmonium and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play classical percussion instruments apart from the Harmonium and has performed in various locations within Uttar Pradesh and other states. He has also presented his talent and abilities internationally. He envisions music as the most integral part of his life, from the day he has become aware of himself as someone who possesses a talent for music. He considers Raga Malkos and Bhopali as his favorites and has made most of his compositions in these forms.



SATYAM SHIVAM SUNDAR

Contact Info - 8005387009

Role - Dholak

A 57-year-old artist from Lucknow, Satyam Shivam Sundar, has been learning music through Semi-classical, light, and folk music. At a young 13, he began his training in music and took inspiration from Pt. Raghunath Mishra and Kewal Kumar Srivastava. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Pt. Dayaram Mishra and Pt. Raghunath Mishra as his gurus, and speak very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus performed in a similar style. He also claims to have composed over 1000 songs, many of which are on Youtube. Besides that, he has worked with various music labels like Apex Digital. He also believes that music was inherited by him from his ancestral lineage, and has spent all his life learning and developing his musical abilities. He wants to support instrumentalists such that they get the recognition they deserve. Apart from Dholak and Tabla, he also plays the Harmonium and has performed in various locations within the country. Internationally, he has performed in Mauritius, pulling brilliant performances only to amaze the crowds.



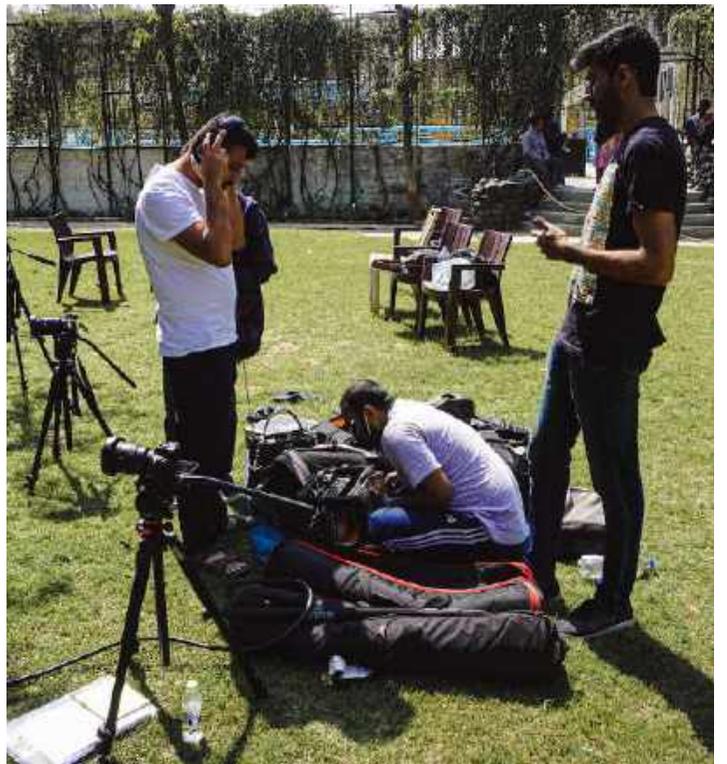
RITA SRIVASTAVA

Contact Info - 8005387009

Role - Manjira

A 68-year-old artist from Lucknow, Rita Srivastava, has been learning music through various folk, classical and semi-classical music art forms of Uttar Pradesh. At a young age, she began to learn music taking inspiration from several artists like Kamla Srivastava. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with soaring passion. She has completed a Visharad in Indian classical music and has a master's degree in Indian History and Monuments. She is quite a versatile artist as she knows how to sing and play multiple instruments such as Harmonium, Dholak, Manjira, Synth, Jaltarang, etc. She also believes that music has been inherited from her from all past generations and runs in her blood. She has received great applause from all of her audiences and pulled off brilliant performances at many folk music festivals across the globe, representing the traditional forms of folk music that reside within the state of Uttar Pradesh only to galvanize the crowds. She also regards her performance in Toronto as the most memorable experience. She has two sons and has always had the responsibility of handling her family and yet she has been able to make huge progress in the field of music.









📍 LUCKNOW

SEEMA BHARADWAJ & Group

Dr. Seema Bharadwaj, 55, is a wonderful singer with a melodious voice who sings Thumri and Dadra. Thumri (is a vocal genre or style of Indian music. The term 'Thumri' is said to be derived from the Hindi verb 'Thumakna', which means to walk with dancing steps to make the ankle-bells tinkle. This form is associated with dance, dramatic gestures, mild eroticism, evocative love poetry, and folk songs, especially from Uttar Pradesh. However, there are regional variations. The text is romantic or devotional, and the lyrics are usually in the Uttar Pradesh dialects of Hindi called Awadhi and Brij Bhasha. The exact origins of the Thumri are not very clear, given that there are no historical references to such a form until the 15th century. The first mention of Thumri goes back to the 19th century, with a link to the classical dance form Kathak. It was the Bandish Ki Thumri or Bol-Baant, and it evolved in Lucknow in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. Seema Bharadwaj is the group leader and has been managing the group for the past 15 years. The group has several talented members like Arun Bhatt, a skilled Tabla Player; Prakhar Pandey, Chorus Singer; Maheshwar Dayal Nagar, who plays Harmonium; and Zeeshan Abbas, 28, a Sarangi Player. The sensational beats of Arjun Ji's Tabla and the symphonic Sarangi come together so well that losing oneself into the experience seemed like the only viable option. The group has performed, all across the country, for many festivals of different cities like Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, etc.

“An undeniable concordance of melody.”

The state of Uttar Pradesh, being the most populated, is bound to be one of the most cultured states within the country, and being in the heart of the state is a privilege for all explorers of art and culture. As we moved further in our exploration of music in Awadh, we learned about more classical and folk art forms in the state. Some were purely musical, and others had a few dance forms accompanying the beats. Most of the folk music that we discovered brought together various elements of nature. This time, our journey has brought us to a highly educated and accomplished musician and singer of a congruent opinion, Dr Seema Bharadwaj.

The team’s first interaction was at Bhatkhande University, one of the oldest educational institutions of Lucknow when it comes to the field of music and art forms related to it. Everyone at the University would speak of how well-read and educated she is and her expertise in music. Being an academic and an accomplished music teacher, she ushered in confidently as we discussed different art forms to be explored in the region of Awadh, the most prominent ones being Sugam Sangeet and Thumri.

Inspired by her mother during her childhood, she began learning from her at the tender age of 6. Eventually taking advanced training in music at Bhatkhande University and eventually joined as a staff. Her spirit and maturity about how she approaches her work and practice in music are commendable. Her belief that music lies in every individual and goes hand in hand with nature is reflected in her undeniable vocal finesse. She elaborated her experience with musical practices as a profoundly spiritual experience that she discovered during childhood and youth. One of her stories about how nature and their attraction, while she practised her vocals, was the most awe-inspiring as she told us about the money plant that would grow in the direction that she’d sit in instead of growing out the window towards the sun.

The next afternoon, we experienced her vocal grace along with her fellow artists who were diverse in terms of their experience as there was a young student who was being taught by her, two highly experienced and coveted musicians from the University, and a Sarangi maestro, Zeeshan Abbas. While Arjun Bhatt Ji, a highly coveted Tabla player in the city of Lucknow, came in with a cheerful attitude only to enliven the scene with his vibrant smile. He went on to talk about the beats and percussion he has mastered so diligently through his experience in playing the Tabla. Prakhar Pandey, the young student who is learning and developing his vocal skills with a dazzling talent assisted the group in highlighting her choruses with his backing vocals. His eyes were twinkling, and his smile was serene. As silent as he was during the setting up of our portable studio equipment before the recording, his deep and soothing voice only added up to the charm of the show.

When we began recording their songs, we heard Dr Seema’s beautiful voice bloom and set an undeniably concurring tone with each instrument sounding in harmony with each other. The sensational beats of Arjun Ji’s Tabla and the symphonious Sarangi came together so that losing ourselves into the experience seemed like the only viable option. These songs, primarily spiritual, were concordant to the kind of stories Dr Seema had shared with us, attracting a dancing peacock to the site of the recording. It was a statement made by nature to set this performance apart post which she started singing -

“Sakhi sanwaro Girdhar Gopal,

(Friends let’s ornament Girdhar Gopal)

Jaake mora mukut kundal kaan sobhit,

(Adorn him with a peacock-feathered crown and beautiful earrings)

It was the harmony of music with the natural spirit of these highly talented folk artists that made a mark on all our minds and their masterfulness that gave us all this experience of a lifetime. As we left the site with wonder and awe in our hearts, our holy grail was the spirit of music wrapped into the humility of these artists who set out to preserve, perform, and at the same time master the originality of the outset of tunes that rule a billion hearts in the country.



DR. SEEMA BHARADWAJ

Contact Info - 9305225210

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A brilliant and highly talented 55-year-old artist from Lucknow, Dr. Seema Bharadwaj, has a commendable experience in music through various art forms like Sugam Sangeet, Thumri, Ghazals, and Classical music. At the young age of 6, she began to learn seeking inspiration from her mother, who was also a folk singer for Akashwani. She has achieved mastery in her craft and pursues it with a tremendous passion which is evident in her performances. She considers Prof. Dr. Prem Singh Vinod and Ugantar Sindoor as her mentors in music and talks very highly of their teachings and caliber music. Most of the songs she sings are thus, made to be in a similar style. She has inherited the craft of music from her mother, who had a natural talent for mastery in her vocal abilities. When she was a child, she would try to imitate her and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. She also knows how to play Harmonium apart from singing and is quite fond of writing and singing bhajans. Her versatility has been such that she also loves to write poems and sometimes recites them along with music performed in various locations within the country. Her humility and belief that art does not discriminate and everyone should pursue artistic endeavors in their lives.

ARUN BHATT

Contact Info - 9453432315

Role - Tabla

A 58-years-old artist from Lucknow, Arun Bhatt, has been learning music through multiple art forms like Hindustani classical music and folk forms of Awadh. He belongs to a musical family and began to learn music from a very young age taking inspiration from the rich musical tradition of his family. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Pt. Sitaram Bhatt, Pt. Gopinath Bhatt, and Pt. Kedarnath Bhatt as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. The influence of his ancestors is quite evident in his playing style. He holds a bisharad and Praveen degree in music and is also an A-grade artist approved by AIR. Arun also believes that music has been passed on, to him, from their musical lineage, especially his father, PT. Kedarnath Bhatt, who has a natural desire for mastering the art of playing the tabla. When he was a child/in his youth, he would try to imitate his father and thus picked up the tabla and never stopped learning. He belongs to the Lucknow Gharana, and when it comes to his playing style, he considers it to be the Faruqabadi style. He is an expert on all the vidas in playing the tabla and has performed in several locations within India.

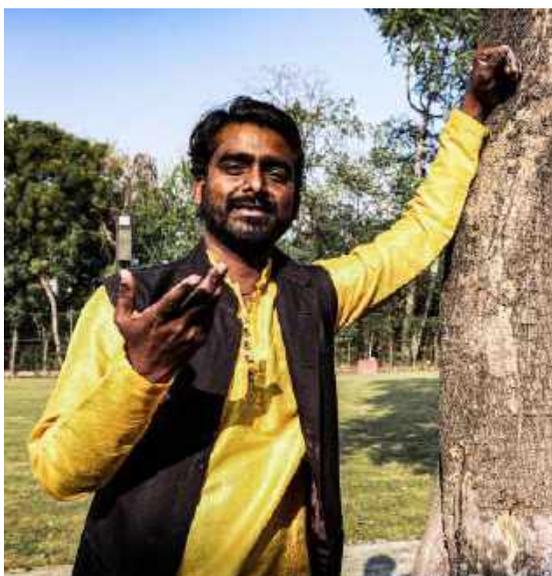


ZEESHAN ABBAS

Contact Info - 9453432315

Role - Sarangi

A 28-years-old artist from Lucknow, Zeeshan Abbas has been learning music through various folk art forms of Awadh as well as Purvanchal. At a very young age, he began to play music taking inspiration from his ancestors. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Ustad Wazir Hussain Khan (AIR-DELHI), Ustad Roshan Ali Khan (PATNA), and Pt. Lt. Binod Kumar Mishra as his gurus speaks very highly of their teaching as well as caliber in the field of music. He has done bisharad in Sarangi from Sonipat Gharana and in vocals from Agra Gharana. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his ancestors traditionally, who has a natural desire for mastering the art of playing the Sarangi. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father and Grandfather, Fazal Khan Sahab and thus picked up the Sarangi and never stopped learning. He also knows how to sing ghazals and sufi Kalams apart from playing the Sarangi and has performed in various locations with various artists within the state and the country. He has received love and appreciation from performing at various festivals and stages and pulled off brilliant performances at festivals in Mumbai and Pune.

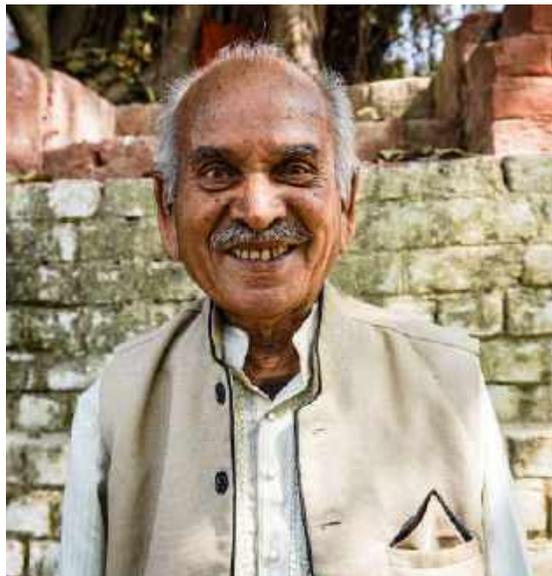


PRAKHAR PANDEY

Contact Info - 7985024773

Role - Chorus

A 22-years-old artist from Lucknow, Prakhhar Pandey has been learning music through various art forms from classical to folk to light music. He has a post graduate degree in music from Bhatkhande and is preparing for PhD now. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion from a very early age. He considers Siddha Nath Mishra, Rameshwar ji his first gurus who taught the basics and elementary knowledge, he did his bisharad under Vinit Pawaiya and under Seema Bharadwaj he learned Thumri and also did his Nipon. He speaks very highly of their teaching as well as caliber in the field of music. He acknowledges Seema ji his Guru Maa and regards her as his biggest inspiration. Apart from classical and folk music he is also into light and film music and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. Though at this point of time he mostly accompanies Seema Bharadwaj but also does live shows performing ghazals and semi classical songs and pulls off brilliant performances at many government shows only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance at Sangeet Natak Academy as the most memorable experience.



MAHESHWAR DAYAL NAGAR

Contact Info - 9453432315

Role - Harmonium

A 75-year-old artist from Lucknow, Maheshwar Dayal Nagar has been working in music through the exploration and mastery of Classical, Awadhi Folk, and Sugam Sangeet. At a very young age during his childhood years, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father, Shri M L Nagar. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with great passion. He considers his father as his guru speaks very highly of his teachings as well as his caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus performed to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been inherited to him. When he was a child/in his youth, he would try to imitate his father and thus picked up the Harmonium and never stopped learning. He also knows how to classical percussion instruments apart from the Harmonium and has performed in various locations within the state of Uttar Pradesh as well as other states and presented his talent and abilities abroad. He envisions music as the most integral part of his life since the day he has become aware of himself as someone who possesses a talent for music. He considers Raga Malkos and Bhopali as the ones he is the fondest of and has made most of his compositions in.









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KAMAYANI *Group*

Kamayani was derived from the group's leaders - Kamini Mishra and Yamini Pandey. This singer-sister duo is a magnificent amalgamation of perfect notes and rhythm. They belong to Mallik Gharana. Kamini Mishra, 58, is a motherly figure for the group who beautifully takes care, from small details to big decisions. Yamini Pandey, 47, is a B high grad artist in Awadhi folk, and just like Kamini Mishra, is highly talented with sweetness mixed in her voice. The sisters were trained from early childhood along with their five other siblings. The group has Ankit Singh, who plays Dholak, and Harshit Sharma, who plays the Harmonium and sings sometimes. The duo has a musical lineage, and they feel very proud of it. The journey has been boundless for them, and as artists, they have grown a lot since they first decided to perform. They feel music has evolved to keep pace with people's preferences. Different genres have come up, and each has its importance, but the group has always maintained the authenticity of the Awadhi folk intact. The kind of art, culture, and traditions that emerged out of a province has almost come to define an entire genre of music today. As an artist from Awadh, who grew up in Awadh, and is recognized with it, Kamayani's muse came early to them. The music of Awadh ranges from nautanki, Dadra, thumri, ghazal, khayal, Sohar, banna, mubaraqbadi, kajri, chaiti, and the groups perform all of these. Despite the step-motherly treatment given to folk, people need to talk about it. A lot of literature has also originated in Awadh and the duo finds themselves as a medium.

“Reigniting fire in life through music.”

Awadh is one of the most diversity-driven regions of Uttar Pradesh in terms of its history as it has been ruled under various dynasties. Most importantly, The Hindu mythological story of Lord Rama, who was born in the region of Awadh is told here as ages-old folklore that holds a very high spiritual significance for everyone who resides here. Awadhi folk music captures the story of Lord Rama through a song called Chaiti - Ram Janam. Most of the music that has originated from here is spiritual in nature.

Using different Taals and Ragas to express various occasions, from the wedding ceremonies of Gods and Goddesses to childbirth being compared to the birth of Lord Rama in every household has been the essence of music in this region. While exploring these folk art forms, we came across a group of expert musicians who show nearly unmatched talent in expressing their emotions and reciting the folklores solemnly.

They call themselves the Kamayani group. The name is ingeniously derived from the names of the duo of sisters who lead the vocals adeptly along with instrumentalists that are highly qualified in their respective fields. It was an honour and a privilege to meet both the sisters who are making a real impact on the world of music, using their talent to promote their local culture across the country. Conversations with them were vivid and informative as we learned about the folk forms of Awadh as well as Purvanchal. Their humility despite the possession of incredible talent was quite reassuring. The duo is so well versed with the intricacy of the traditional Awadh folk song that they sang the ‘Chait mass mein’ only to explain about the song, which goes like this -

“Awadh maa Ram ji janam liyo Rama, chaita hi maase,
(It is the month of Chaita, Lord Rama took birth in Awadh)

Sab nar naari mil mangal gaawe,
(All men and women are singing happily)

Ghar ghar baajat badhaiya”
(Congratulatory songs are being sung in each house)

They also spoke highly of their fellow artists, Ankit Singh ji, who is a highly qualified musician and currently a researcher in the cultural arts focusing on the classical dance form of Kathak. His passion for music was commendable as he came with a broken foot covered in a thick plaster covering it and yet adjusted himself according to what the situation demanded just for his passion for music. The brilliant percussionist, Harshit Sharma, was one of the most exciting and witty individuals we would meet on this journey. His eyes sparkled as the singers took a snap decision on enhancing the recording experience with a song that involved a rare beat pattern known as “Dedh taal”, which involves a changing pattern in a single song.

A huge field of Mulberry trees located in a serene corner of the Janeshwar Mishra park was chosen as the location for their recording. The rustic ambience of the place generated a naturally instinctive and artful mindset in everyone present for this performance. As the artists began performing the first song called Chaiti, which is about the birth of Lord Rama in the spring season, the mellow winds began to feel like silk rubbing against the skin. The contribution of each of the artists coming in harmony was one of the most profound experiences one can get.

Being a multitasking musician, Ankit, also had an incredible vocal ability and supported both the sisters with his backing vocals beautifully in a song called Nakta which had beautifully written lyrics along with one of the most soothing melodies ever created. By the end of the performance, there was none who wished to wrap up, and yet they left us feeling satisfied and fulfilled. Recording with the studio-quality equipment for the first time, these artists gave us all a once-in-a-lifetime experience that will be cherished by each and everyone who was in the vicinity while it unfolded in the most peculiar yet graceful manner possible.



YAMINI PANDEY

Contact Info - 9415542650

Role - Vocals

A 47-year-old artist from Lucknow, Yamini Pandey, has been learning music through various folk art forms about the Awadh region like Chaiti, Sohar, Kajri, etc. At a young age, she began to learn singing, taking inspiration from her grandmother. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. She considers Mohanlal Kunwar and Kewal Srivastava Ji as her gurus and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Most of her songs are thus, sung in a similar style. She also believes that she inherited the art of music from her grandmother, who had a natural talent for mastering the craft of singing. When she was a child, she would try imitating her and thus picked up the will to sing. This helped her feel motivated towards getting the right guidance for developing her vocal ability. She belongs to the Malik Gharana of classical music and comes from a very supportive family. Her demeanor is quite humble as she doesn't like bragging about her achievements in the field of music. Her brilliant performances at various state-level events like the Lucknow Mahotsav and Chaiti Mahotsav receive great amounts of praise from her audiences.

KAMINI MISHRA

Contact Info - 9984604000, 8318180765

Role - Vocals

A 58-year-old artist from Lucknow, Kamini Mishra, has been learning music through various folk art forms about the Awadh region like Chaiti, Sohar, Kajri, etc. At a young age, she began to learn to sing. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. She considers Mohanlal Kunwar, Ravi Raj, Srishti Mathur, and Kewal Kumar Srivastava as her gurus, and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Most of her songs are thus made to be in a similar style. She believes her talent in music always came to her naturally, and her teachers helped her develop her incredible ability through their teachings over the years. She left singing in 1980 and continued to pursue her interest again in 2011 after being inspired by her gurus. After this, she delivered a brilliant performance in the Lucknow Mahotsav, where she received great appreciation from the crowd. She was then highly motivated to explore more events. Her singing ability clearly shows her ability to galvanize large crowds, and her humility reflects her true nature as a human being. Her attention towards developing folk music as an art form that the youth pursues is quite evident.



ANKIT SINGH

Contact Info - 8318180765

Role - Harmonium

A 30-year-old artist from Lucknow, Ankit Singh, has been learning music through various styles such as classical, semi-classical, Ghazal, and multiple folk music forms like Poorvi, Rajasthani as well as Marathi. At a young age, he learned music taking inspiration from his father, who was quite fond of playing the flute. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Pt. Janardhan Mishra Ji and Dr. Shristhi Mathur, a professor at Bhatkhande University as his gurus and speak very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. His versatility as a musician is one of his greatest qualities that give him the ability to pick up any genre of music, and he plays them with incredible finesse. He strongly believes that music is a gift that every artist gets from God, and that, it needs to be developed through rigorous practice each day. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father whenever he would sing and thus picked up the will to learn and grow in the field of music. He also knows how to play various traditional instruments like Tabla and Dholak apart from the harmonium and has a brilliant vocal ability to support his team with backing vocals.

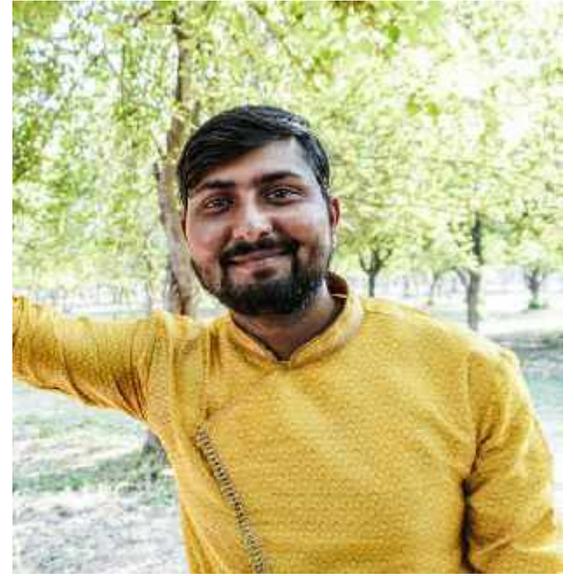


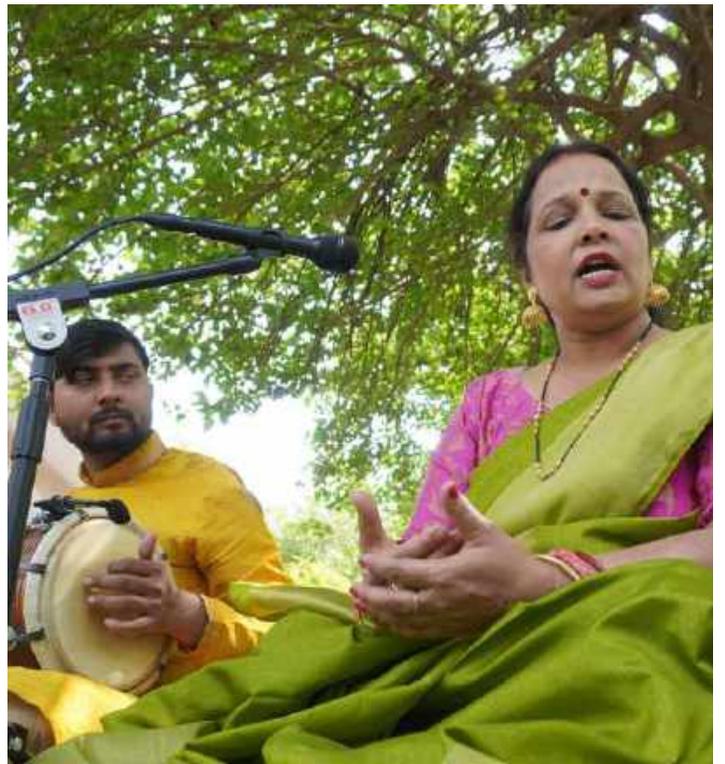
HARSHIT SHARMA

Contact Info - 8957111566

Role - Dholak

A young 25-year-old artist from Lucknow, Harshit Sharma, has been learning music through various classical and semi-classical art forms and traditional folk music forms of Uttar Pradesh. At the tender age of ten, he began to learn music and believes that he got it as a gift from God. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Arun Bhat as his guru speaks very highly of his teaching ability and achievements in the field of music. Learning from Arun Bhat has given him the ability to pick up all kinds of beat patterns and play them with undeniable finesse. He has been trained in classical music, and completed a Visharad in Indian classical from Bhatkhande University, but considers 'Ghazals, also known as light music as his specialty. Apart from that, he feels that he has been developing mastery in all forms of Awadhi folk music. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various folk music festivals like Agra Mahotsav and Dev Mahotsav in Lucknow and considers all his performances unforgettable. Having all of these responsibilities while practicing music every day can be tricky, but he does everything, with complete ownership.









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SP CHAUHAN & Group

A 50-year-old artist from Jaunpur, SP Chauhan, has been learning music through many art forms played traditionally and sung in Uttar Pradesh. At the young age of 20, he started learning music taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He also believes that music is a gift that has been given to him by god. When he was a child, he would imitate his father and thus, picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. The brilliance of Awadhi folk comes into light as you meet and watch artists such as SP Chauhan and the troupe he leads. As a vocalist, SP Chauhan displays undeniable brilliance and passion in his songs. Behind that is a person who is bold and honest as he talks about the art of the region fervently. The group has highly experienced musicians who have been learning and playing musical instruments even before reaching adolescence, most of them inspired by the traditions in their family. Sony Niyazi, their Harmonium expert, goes by in Lucknow and pretty much everywhere, was the one providing them with harmony through his skills in playing the Harmonium. Originally a Banjo player who has also mastered the Keyboard, this brilliant musician specializes in Qawali and Bhajan music. A brilliant rhythm and percussions specialist, Rakesh Kumar accompanied him with young tabla artist, Dulare Hussain, and an excellent chorus and backing vocalist Akhilesh Vishwakarma.

“Life with awadh folk as it is.”

The region of Awadh, in Uttar Pradesh province of India, is one of the most culturally influenced regions within the country. As various rulers and dynasties came and left along with the appointments of different governors, Awadhi culture has seen a transformation like no other in the country. Yet, the cultural arts have stayed somewhat preserved with its multiple residents, taking interest in keeping their traditions intact.

The folk music of Awadh got affected by these changes to a much greater extent. Meeting the artists of Awadh is always an honour since many of them have taken rigorous training in classical and folk music and show tremendous ability in their craft. This region has produced great artists and musicians, a lot of them highly coveted and renowned in their areas.

The brilliance of Awadhi folk comes into light as you meet and watch artists such as SP Chauhan and the troupe he leads. As a vocalist, SP Chauhan displays undeniable brilliance and passion in his songs. Behind this is a person, who is bold and honest, and talks about the art of the region, fervently.

“Western influence has brought the has had a huge amount of impact to the Awadhi folk music”, he says. Further in the conversation, he adds, “It is the vulgarity that I don’t appreciate. I can never support it and perform such songs. Authenticity is the most important thing, in my opinion.” Unlike most other artists, he began learning during his years in college. His passion for music even got him to drop out of college that he had joined to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in commerce. Taking inspiration from his father, like most other artists in his troupe, he started singing bhajans at Jagrans and hasn’t stopped learning and growing in the field of music ever since. With passion and enthusiasm, he began with his performance of ‘Sejiya se’ -

“Sejiya se saiyan rus gayile ho rama,

(My beloved got upset in his sleep, oh Rama)

Koyal tohari boliya”

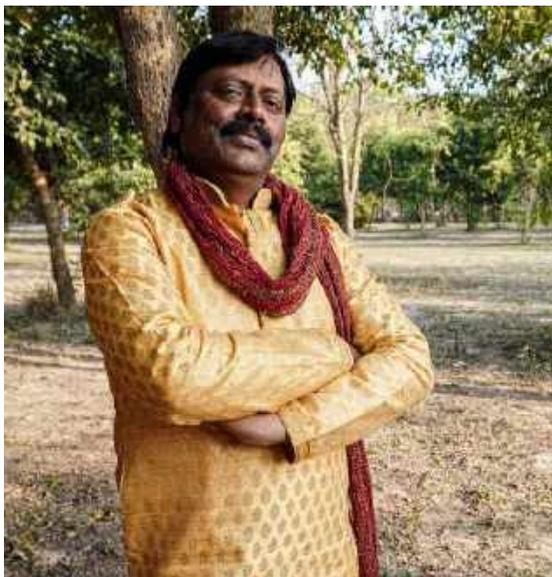
(Cuckoo, your voice)

His visit to Lucknow to look for a job lead him to his guru, Baleshwar Ji. He speaks very highly of Guru Ji in terms of music and teaching abilities. For him, it was a life-altering decision as hearing him sing once was enough to compel his guru to ask him to practice and master the art. We had to choose a location that would do justice to his authenticity and perseverance, complementing the original style and meaningful lyrics of the ancient art styles such as Kajri and Chaiti.

Gomti Nagar was our choice of locality right by the river Gomti that branches out of Ganga. Under a large field of Mulberry trees in the beautifully built Janeshwar Mishra park, we sat with him and got to a lot about various art forms within the spectrum of Awadhi folk. Along with him came highly experienced musicians who have been learning and playing musical instruments even before reaching adolescence, most of them inspired by the traditions in their family.

Sony Niyazi, the name their Harmonium expert goes by in Lucknow and pretty much everywhere, was the one providing them with harmony through his skills in playing the Harmonium. Originally a Banjo player, who has also mastered the Keyboard, This brilliant musician specializes in Qawali and Bhajan Sangeet.

A brilliant rhythm and percussions specialist, Rakesh Kumar had accompanied him with a young tabla artist, Dulare Hussain, and an excellent chorus and backing vocalist Akhilesh Vishwakarma. They came together as a group, and they know each other inside and out. It was evident in their masterly coordination and rhythmic understanding of how to perform and improvise accompanying each other. The sound of their music hitting our eardrums was just awe-inspiring, and as we heard their beats, we began to flow with the music. The vocal ability of SP Chauhan coming in chorus in a symphonic togetherness with the band truly gave us the experience of a lifetime.



SP CHAUHAN:

Contact Info - 9415004986

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

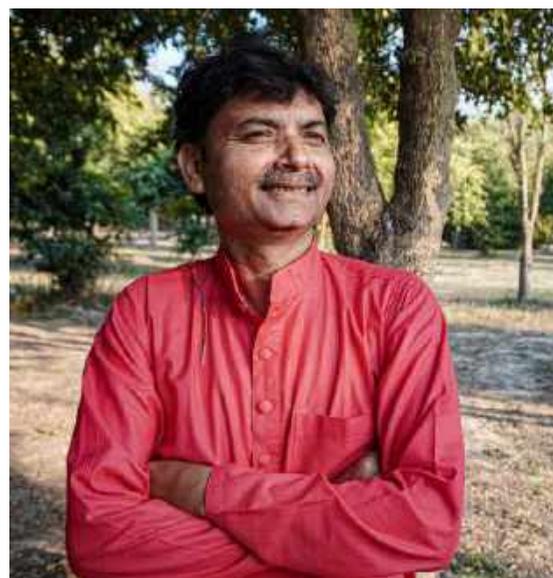
A 50-year-old artist from Jaunpur, SP Chauhan, has been learning music through many art forms that are traditionally played and sung in Uttar Pradesh. At the young age of 20, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Baleshwar as his guru speaks very highly of his teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He first encountered his guru when he came to Lucknow looking for a job. He was once offered a chance to record a few songs when Baleshwar heard him singing. He also believes that music is a gift that has been given to him by god. When he was a child, he would try imitating his father and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. Chauhan has performed in several locations within the country and has been a part of multiple Nukkar Naatks, i.e., a musical street play with mythological and socio-cultural stories. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various festivals and places where even the media cannot reach only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance at Rashtrapati Bhawan as the most memorable experience.

SONI NIYAZI

Contact Info - 9965524983

Role - Harmonium

A 41-year-old artist from Lucknow, Soni Niyazi, has been learning music through Chaita, Kajri, and various other traditional art forms of Uttar Pradesh. At the young age of 12, he began to play Banjo taking inspiration from his father, who also used to play Banjo and was a coveted folk musician in his circle. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father, Syed Mujeeb, as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He also specializes in Qawali and Bhajan music. Sony thinks that he has his father, who had a natural desire for mastering the art of music. When he was a child, he tried imitating his father and thus picked up the Banjo and never stopped learning. He also knows how to Harmonium apart from Banjo and has performed all over the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances in several cities and internationally in South Africa, which is also his most memorable experience. He has also represented the local art forms in the middle east and port of Spain. Despite all his responsibilities and struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams.



RAKESH KUMAR

Contact Info - 9965524983

Role - Dholak

A 31-year-old artist from Lucknow, Rakesh Kumar, has been learning music through various traditional art forms of Uttar Pradesh like Biraha, Chaiti, and Kajri. At the young age of 10, he began to learn music, taking inspiration from his father, who was a talented Banjo player. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, made to be in a similar style. Rakesh inherited the craft from his father, who had a natural desire for mastering the art of music using his skills on the Banjo. When he was a child, he picked up the Dholak and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play Tabla, apart from Dholak, and has performed in various locations within the country. He wishes to go to Mumbai and has pulled off brilliant performances at many festivals to mesmerize the crowds and regards his performance in Delhi as the most memorable experience. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.

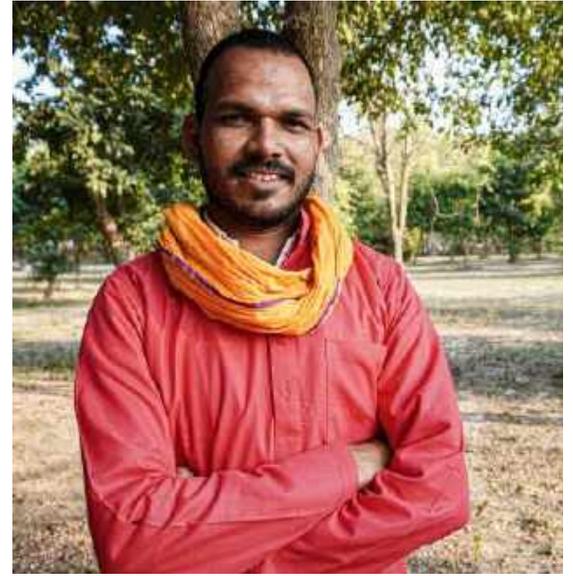


AKHILESH VISHWAKARMA

Contact Info - 7408739080

Role - Manjira, Chorus

A 26-year-old artist from Lucknow, Akhilesh Vishwakarma, has been learning music through many traditional art forms such as Biraha, Kajri, and Chaiti. At a very young age, he began to learn to play music taking inspiration from his friends and relatives who are into music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Shakil Ansari as his guru speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus sung to be in a similar style. He also believes that he must stick to the older traditional tunes and work to preserve them. When he was a child, he would try imitating the older musicians around him and thus picked up the will to learn singing and never stopped learning. He has learned classical vocals from Bhatkhande University in Lucknow, which is one of the best institutions to learn music. He has pulled off brilliant performances all around Uttar Pradesh and Bihar only to dazzle the crowds. He lives in a family of 5 people. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.



DULARE HUSSAIN

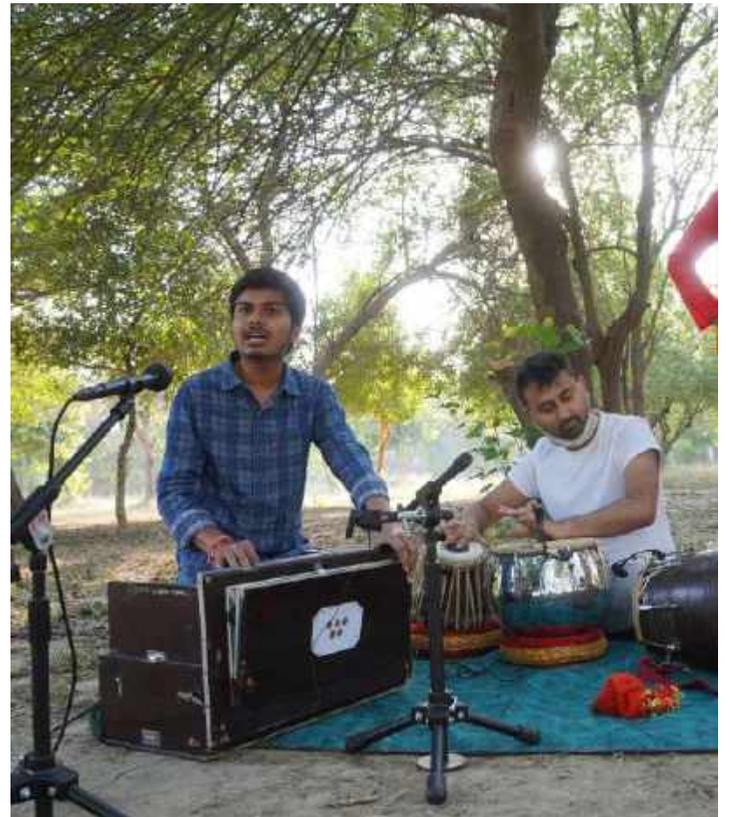
Contact Info - 9965524983

Role - Tabla

A 39-year-old artist from Lucknow, Dulaare Hussain, has been learning music through multiple folk forms of Uttar Pradesh. At a very young age, he began to play Tabla taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring/sumptuous/tremendous passion. He considers his father, Muktar Hussain as his guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, written, composed, and sung to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been inherited from his father, who had a natural desire and talent for mastering the art of playing Tabla. He belongs to the lineage of Bismillah Khan also knows how to play traditional instruments such as Shehnai apart from Tabla, and has performed in various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at many festivals to mesmerize the crowds and regards his performance in Delhi as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of seven people and has three daughters. Despite all his responsibilities and struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.









LUCKNOW

MALVIKA HARIOM & Group

Malvika Hari Om, 48, is vividly known for her melodious and sweet voice. Malvika is trained under Kewak Kumar from Bhatkhande Music University. When she sings, the entire atmosphere gets along with her voice and creates an atmosphere that resonates rhythmic music everywhere. She and her group perform various art forms in Awadh folk like Nakta, Chaiti, Kajri, Sohar, etc. The group has Chandresh Pandey, who plays the Harmonium, Shailendra Singh, who plays Dholak, and Deependera Kunwar, who plays Flute. All the group members are from All India Radio, Lucknow. The group has performed all over the state of Uttar Pradesh. The performances by these groups are so breathtaking, that one feels like listening to them repeatedly. For the entire group, their Gurus (teachers) are their elders from whom they have taken their learnings. They wish to make their name in the entire world and want to become famous in such a way that their family, their country, and their community feel proud of them. They want to leave a mark in the world with music as its basis and lead their folk music with pride and respect. The group wants to work with musicians from all over the country and the world. The group has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals in multiple locations like Mauritius, only to galvanize the crowds. They aspire to go around the world and represent the beautiful traditional Awadh folk music.

“Capturing the scintillating and radiant voice.”

“It is not your pen you are looking for, it is your tongue and those who speak with it.”

At times in life, we seem to hold on to things that we have already lost. As we begin to search for them, we gradually realize that the more we look for them, the farther away they move from us. The quote by Ruth Forman is hence excerpted to express the importance of communicating. It does not matter if you want to write under no circumstances should your ability to speak be lost as it is the source of receiving what we want.

We wish to find artists who are bold enough to have an upbeat and optimistic presence. While recording, we explored the music of Awadh and pointed our speech in the right direction. We found the same in Malvika Hariom, the scintillating singer, and ‘Shaeirah’ from Lucknow. Her radiant eyes and beautiful smile will capture your attention as soon as you get the chance to be in her presence. Even more captivating is her charisma, as she boldly commands attention not just by the words that she writes but also by her skills in recitation.

No wonder she was one of the first artists to be shortlisted during the planning of this exploration. When we got to interact with her, even her choices were exclusive while shortlisting the songs she was going to perform, and we could feel that the experience was going to be a one-off. Along with her came a highly talented and peculiar set of instrumentalists who were all aces in their departments. The percussionist, Shailendra Singh, is an expert at drums and has a versatile talent. He plays multiple instruments like an Egg shaker, Khanjri, Whistle, Xylophone, and more. He played these during a single performance using techniques to provide a surround sound experience, and it was wondrous.

Another team member, Chandresh Pandey, is a proficient Harmonium player with a witty personality and a cheerful attitude. It also reflects in his music with the burst of positive emotion that he can generate is incredible. In harmony with the flute specialist, Deependra Kunwar is an artist who displays extreme dexterity in his performances. Each performance is a reflection of his brilliance in his craft.

As the performance began with a Devi geet of the Awadh, everyone slowly blended into the energy surrounding us. The song, “Tohri saran hum Aaye” was presented most beautifully and lifted the spirit of everyone present at Janeshwar Mishra Park, Lucknow and it goes like-

“Tohri sharan hum aaye ho ambe maiya,

(We have come into your refuge, Oh Goddess Ambika!)

Ambe maiya, jagdambe maiya,

(Goddess Ambika, the mother of all)

Tohri sharan hum aaye ho ambe maiya,

(We have come into your refuge, Oh Goddess Ambika!)

Laal mandirwa laal kewariya”

(Red temples, red doors)

The music itself was so peculiar with so many percussion instruments played by a single artist, that it set the mood for the second song. It was a sweet Mela geet, recited from the point of view of a woman, asking her lover to slow the car down as she is afraid of speed, and eventually, as the car slows, she receives a call from her family urging her to return immediately. The tables turn, and she asks him to drive faster as she is getting late, and reaching home is the need of the hour.

Much of their music, later on, was based on playful and flirtatious emotions that took the edge off and made a brilliant transition from spiritual to an act of amusement, relaxation, and entertainment.



MALVIKA HARIOM

Contact Info - 7703036606

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 48-year-old vocalist and Shayara from Lucknow, Malvika Hariom has been learning music through traditional folk art forms of Uttar Pradesh from a very young age. She took inspiration from her mother when she was a child and has worked hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. She considers Kewal Kumar as her Guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and achievements in the field of music. She, therefore, sings songs in a similar style as his. Most of her performances comprise the songs that will put you through a musical joy ride and create one of the most memorable moments of your lives. Malvika believes that she inherited the art of music from her mother and eventually from her daughter, who has a natural desire for mastering the art of singing through western music. She also knows how to write amazing 'Shayari' apart from possessing an excellent vocal ability and has performed in various locations around the globe. She learned the art of poetry through Devi Dayalu Ji's Ghazals and has a keen interest to keep following it as her profession. Her 'Shayari' can be heard on the internet through Youtube and many other websites as she has gained immense popularity over the years.

CHANDRESH PANDEY

Contact Info - 9919679372

Role - Harmonium

A 40-year-old artist from Lucknow, Chandresh Pandey, has been learning music through classical and folk art forms of Uttar Pradesh. Chandresh Pandey took inspiration from his grandfather at a very young age and began to learn music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. Apart from his grandfather, Mr. Satyadev Tiwari, he considers Pt. Daramnath Mishra, Mujib Ahmed, and his current teacher Bihari Verma as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. He, therefore, has been able to learn and adopt different styles within the folk music spectrum and has become a highly versatile artist in this domain. He also believes that he has inherited music from his ancestors, who had a natural desire for mastering various art forms. In his youth, he would try to imitate his grandfather, and that is when he picked up the Harmonium and never stopped learning. Chandresh Ji also plays other traditional instruments like Dholak apart from Harmonium and has performed in several places in India. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals in multiple locations, like Mauritius, only to galvanize the crowds.

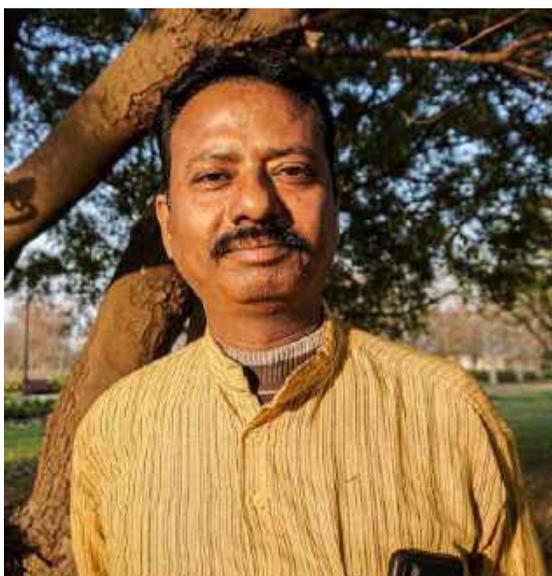


SHAILENDRA SINGH

Contact Info - 9236087260

Role - Side Rhythm

A 46-year-old artist from Lucknow, Shailendra Singh, a.k.a. Bobby has been learning music through multiple classical and folk music art forms. He is just as versatile as he is peculiar with the range of instruments that he can play for side rhythm. He began playing Bongos initially and started learning from RD Sharma Ji. He also considers AV Verma as his guru and speaks very highly of their teaching and achievements in the field of music. Most of the songs he performs are thus, from a similar style or form of folk music. His passion for music is such, that he keeps thinking about creating a rhythm or a beat, even when he is not surrounded by any musical instrument. This passion has led him to perform, all over the country and showcase his skills in various folk music festivals. He is so creative that in 2017, he collaborated with a puppeteer for a musical performance and received applause from his audience. He also knows how to play pad drums apart from being an expert acoustic drummer. He lives in a family of five people and is married to another musician recognized by All India Radio. Thus, he believes that he is quite fortunate to have received music as a gift and has a brilliant mindset towards following his passion.

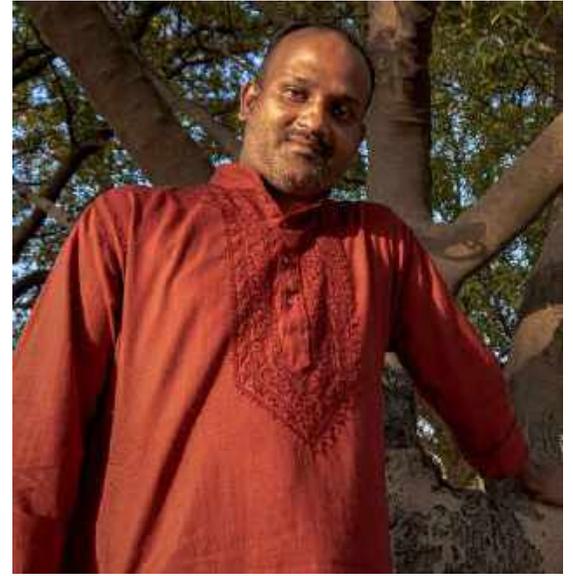


DEEPENDRA KUNWAR

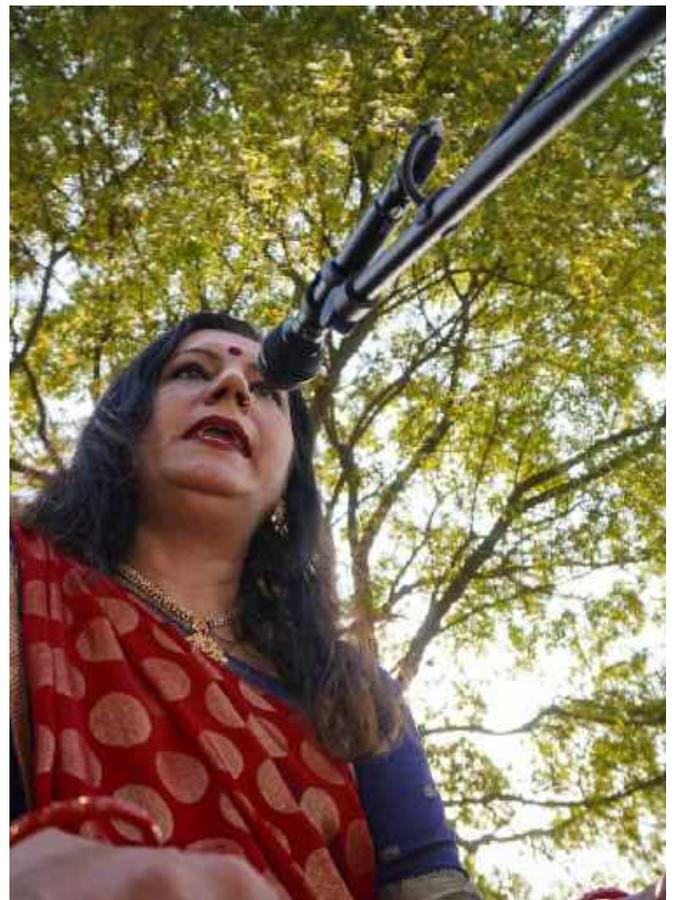
Contact Info - 7275442573

Role - Flute

A 36-year-old artist from Lucknow, Deependra has been learning music through many traditional folks and classical art forms. Taking inspiration from his mother as she used to play flute during his childhood. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers his father, Pt. Mohanlal Kunwar, as his Guru and speaks very highly of their achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, made to be in a similar style. He also believes that he has inherited music from his father, who has always had a natural desire to master the art of music. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father, and thus picked up a keen interest in learning various instruments and never stopped. He also knows how to play Indo-fusion music apart from semi-classical and has performed in various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at multiple festivals only to amaze the crowds with his performance. He has also played in the movie Lucknow Central, but he has quite a humble demeanor when addressing his achievements. He encourages everyone in his family to pursue their passion and dreams in music as well as life.









 AYODHYA

SHEETLA PRASAD & Group

The beauty of the state of Awadh lies in the richness of its culture as the region itself has experienced diversity in the most literal sense. One could say it is the definition of diversity in cultures, contending with each other during the past and eventually coming together during the modern age. Its music reflected a similar tenor once we started getting into the deeper art forms that very few people had heard of and even fewer understood well enough to pass on to the next generations. This search for long-lost folk melodies leads us to Sheetla Prasad Verma, officially a senior government employee in the office of the District Magistrate of Ayodhya. When we met his humble personality, he welcomed us with a warm smile on his face. As we started talking to him, he began to inform us about various lost forms of folk art that are vanishing due to the influence of western culture within the region. He has spent the last two decades working towards reviving these forms of art, and he seeks to create a generation of young people who wish to become self-dependent through these. Having studied sociology as a subject of his Master's degree, he seems to have the will and ability to put all of that knowledge to good use devoting it to this goal. Well-known among the folk music communities within the region, he got us in touch with various highly skilled and experienced musicians who never had the chance to make it big but carry the weight in terms of talent to achieve the same.

“Marking time with pharwahi, an age old tradition of Awadh.”

The beauty of the state of Awadh lied in the richness of its culture as the region itself has experienced diversity in the most literal sense. One could say that it is the definition of diversity in cultures, contending with each other during the past and eventually coming together during the modern age. Its music reflected a similar tenor once we started getting into the deeper art forms that very few people had heard of and even fewer understood well enough to pass on to the next generations. This search for long lost folk melodies leads us to Sheetla Prasad Verma, officially a senior government employee in the office of the District Magistrate of Ayodhya.

When we met his humble personality, he welcomed us with a warm smile on his face. As we started talking to him, he began to apprise us about various lost forms of folk art that are vanishing due to the influence of western culture within the region. He has spent the last two decades working towards the revival of these forms of art and seeks to create a generation of young people who wish to become self-dependent through these. Having studied sociology as a subject of his Master’s degree he seems to have the will and ability to put all of that knowledge to good use for the revival of folk music in the region and is completely devoted to this goal. Well known among the folk music communities within the region, he got us in touch with various highly skilled and experienced musicians who never had the chance to make it big but carry the weight in terms of talent to achieve the same.

From specialists in harmonics to expert percussionists and also folk dancers who brilliantly express each emotion on their faces while performing their art, we saw raw talent residing within the confines of unexplored regions of the most populated state of the country. Eventually, we were lead towards fields of Mustard with beautiful yellow flowers blooming under the sun on a pleasant afternoon in the month of February. There were young dancers and a few adolescent singers who are nurturing their talents and highly experienced musicians to balance out the spectrum of diversity yet again. Sounds of the music also began to attract a crowd from the surrounding villages and a few puppies who were covertly playing around the fields.

Spirituality seemed to be the soul of the music around here as it has been for years in the Hindu culture. Their performance began with a short prayer a ceremony that started with strong drumming of the Nakkada and then a strident chime of a conch shell to mark the beginning of the performance. Men were wearing colourful clothes and makeup along with bells on colourful bottoms that would go on to add to the percussions while the beats were given by musicians. Women were wearing even more brightly coloured sarees with light makeup only to enhance their natural beauty. The dancers merrily moved on to the subtle arm and leg movements in coordination with each other.

The cultural breakdance had begun and a sudden transition to rapid coordinated formations was a treat to watch. They were telling a story about the wedding of Lord Rama and Goddess Sita that was taking place in the most peculiar way. Men carried large Bamboo sticks with rubber grips on the lower end and flutes in their hand while women carried clay pots, supporting them on their head with the help of their hands. The dancers slowly began to act out representations of Indian Gods beginning with Lord Rama with a bow and arrow in their hands and eventually imitating Lord Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva as the guests in the wedding ceremony with the song, that goes like-

“Raja janak ji ke sundar bitiyawa se vyaahan chale Shri Ram ho,
(Lord Ram is on his path to marry Raja Janak’s beautiful daughter)

Vyaahan chale Shri Ram ho”
(Lord Ram is on his path to marry)

The intensity and passion while carrying out the act was a mesmerising sight and was so accurately done that one would understand what kind of feeling each of these gods would represent. The colours and flavours of such different art forms was a mesmerising and humbling sight and told us an unforgettable story about the hidden richness in culture within the region. It was not only the historic and spiritual representations that gave us this realization but primarily the unfolding of strength, talent as well as passion of these artists which truly moved our hearts.



SHEETLA PRASAD VERMA

Contact Info - 9935130553

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 50-year-old artist from Ayodhya, Sheetla has been working towards reviving the ancient folk music and dance art forms of Awadh for over two decades. Dedicating his life towards the folk music community through the revitalization of long-lost art forms like Phurwahi, Keharwa, Jogni, Karinga, and other ages-old forms of folk art, he has set out on a mission to make the artists of Awadh self-sustaining. He considers Swargya Srinivas Das as his guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and his caliber in the field of music. Most of the songs that he performs are thus, made to be in a similar style. His primary focus is to eliminate the crudity that the modern culture has induced in these art forms recently due to dilution over the years. He sings along with the musicians, directs the acts, and does the choreography for the dance group for their performances. Over the years, Verma Ji has developed various creative ways to present the dance on stage. He has done a lot of shows, not only within the Awadh region or the state of Uttar Pradesh, but across multiple states of the country. Belonging to the Awadh Gharana, he also writes his songs and considers Rupak and Dadra to be his favorite taals.

BHAGWAN DAS

Contact Info - 6307993360

Role - Harmonium

A highly experienced 62-year-old artist belonging to Ayodhya, Bhagwan Das has been learning music through art forms such as Phurwahi and Keherwa. At the tender age of 13, he began to learn music but unfortunately had to drop out of his education. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He plays Banjo as his primary instrument of expertise and considers Anup Lakhnawi and as his guru, and speaks very highly of their teachings and their achievements in the field of music. He also believes that music has been a path he chose for himself and developed a natural desire for mastering the art without any family history in music. Bhagwan Ji is also skilled at playing Harmonium other than Banjo and has performed in different places in his state and Delhi. He has received acknowledgment from many political figures during his performance in the capital and mesmerizes the crowds with his proficient musical abilities. He lives in a family of 4 people and has two sons. To make ends meet, he usually performs in events. But due to the unprecedented COVID-19 Pandemic, his sustenance has flagged. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams.



ANJANI KUMAR

Contact Info - 7800639412

Role - Nagada

A 32-year-old artist, belonging to Ayodhya, Anjani Kumar, has been learning music through Phurwahi and Keherwa. At a very young age, he began to learn to play music taking inspiration from Sheetal Prasad. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Basaji Ramnathji and Sheetal Prasad Ji as his Guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, made to be in a similar style. He received the gift of music from his father, who had a natural talent for mastering the art of playing Nagada. When he was a child, he tried imitating his grandfather and thus picked up the will to perform and never stopped learning. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various cultural festivals in places like Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Delhi and has always amazed the crowds. He lives in a family of 9 people and has two young sons to raise. Despite all his responsibilities and struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft. He dreams to help conserve the traditional art forms of Uttar Pradesh someday, in the future, and to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.



SHUBHAM KESARWANI

Contact Info - 7800347197

Role - Dholak

A 26-year-old artist, Shubham Kesarwani, belonging to Ayodhya, has been learning music by playing Dholak. At the young age of 10, he began to learn music taking inspiration from the elders. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. Receiving the gift of music from his family lineage, he had a natural desire for getting the art of playing Dholak. Following the steps of his elders, he picked up the will to play Dholak and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play various other traditional instruments apart from Dholak and has performed in several locations within the state. He has received and pulled off brilliant performances at many festivals only to impress the crowds. He lives in a family of 6 people and has four brothers. Being one of the highly responsible members of his family, he has to work regularly to maintain regular income to make ends meet for his family. He has pulled off brilliant performances at multiple festivals in Assam, Orissa, Punjab, and many more states of the country to amaze the crowds with his energetic Dholak playing.



BHARAT:

Contact Info - 8840959975

Role - Chorus

A 24-year-old artist in the prime of his life native to Ayodhya, Bharat has been learning music through various Awadhi art forms like Keherwa, Phurwahi, and Surahi. At the young age of 12, he began learning music taking inspiration from different artists living within the region. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Mannulal Ji and Mukesh Kumar as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. These gurus have inspired him to choose a similar path in his life as he aims to be a teacher, eventually passing on his knowledge of many art forms to the generations to come. He also believes that music is a natural gift for him, and he has an innate talent for mastering the art of singing. He also knows how to play instruments like Dholak and holds a Prabhakar from Prayagraj Sangeet Samiti. He has performed in various locations within the country and considers his performance at Nagaland and Port Blair as the most memorable experiences. He lives in a family of seven people and has four siblings. Thus, he has various responsibilities at home and yet manages to practice his craft each day.









AWADHI LOK KALA SAMITI

A 35-year-old artist from Ayodhya, Mukesh has been learning music through Keherwa, a dance form developed in the Awadh region of Uttar Pradesh. At the age of 25, he began learning singing by taking inspiration from Sheetla Prasad Verma. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Sheetla Prasad Verma as his guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and caliber. Most of his songs are in a Keherwa style. He knows how to play Harmonium and Johri apart from singing and has performed in various locations within the state. The group does a rare art form called Keherwa, which emerged in ancient times in the Province of Awadh. Most musicians in the country know Keherwa taal as a simple 8-beat pattern equally divided into two divisions. Nearly nobody knows about the long-lost art form that was built around it and goes by the same name. The group has Ram Achhaibar who plays manjira, Bharat, 24, plays Dholak, Tanya Mishra, 18, sings along with Chorus, Vishal Pandey who sings, Harim Ram, who plays Dholak, Parjapat Bhagalu, 40, plays Manjira and Amarsi, 44 is a vocalist. They have played all over India in Goa, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, etc. Mukesh, despite all his social work, strives to keep developing his craft and dreams of becoming an icon for the youth through his music to keep Bhojpuri folk forms alive among the hearts of the people. The group strives to keep developing their craft and wants to make an impact in the field of music someday in the future to see themselves succeed.

“Grasping a long lost art form.”

A place of folktales and strong religious beliefs, Ayodhya is subjected to various opinions and historic discussions. In Indian mythology, it is the place of birth of Lord Rama and is considered the holy land around which the epic of Ramayana is set and revolves. Music and folklore have gone hand in hand since humans have started living in communities. Tales about gods and goddesses have been told to almost every child in India during their years of development.

These tales have taken various forms inspired by storytelling through religious texts to music. One such form of music and dance emerged in ancient times in the province of Awadh. This dance form was called Keherwa. Most musicians in the country know Keherwa taal as a simple 8-beat pattern equally divided into two divisions. Nearly nobody knows about the long-lost art form that is built around it and goes by the same name.

Our journey brought us to the location of the origin of this art form. In Ayodhya, we met Mukesh Kumar, who works to revive this art form and leads a troupe of Keherwa musicians and dancers. These are individuals who have a passion for music, dance, and performing their craft. They come from humble backgrounds and with passion for performance in their eyes, glaring as they made their way to the sight of the recording.

Right by the large fields of mustard was the place chosen for their performance. Mukesh himself seemed to be very excited as he had done very few semi-professionally recorded videos for old folk songs before. As an artist, he began learning at a later stage in his life, and during his mid-twenties, he felt that this was a great opportunity, and despite his natural talent in folk music and singing, he seemed to be quite polite and humble.

Along with him was a talented vocalist, Bharat, who had been singing since childhood and had a deep, and yet beautiful voice while he recited the songs and impressed everyone present in and around the place. Another highly talented singer, Tanya Mishra, also has a vibrant smile and a generally playful attitude in life. Along with these instrumentalists who held up to 40 years of experience, their team comprises a wholesome group of people with highly diverse experiences. Within a few minutes, the people from the surrounding villages came to the site as they were even more excited to witness this event. They even helped us out there with the provision of water in a large container.

They began to sing, and the people around, especially the kids, who seemed to be making noises earlier, listened with high devotion. The dance was an energetic one with swift arm and leg movements done in coordination and harmony. Eventually, the dancers moved onto acrobatic formations showing the sort of strength and athleticism the Keherwa dancers of ancient times must have required to pull off this art form.

The song expressed the story of how Lord Rama was able to impress each and everyone at the ceremony of the selection of Goddess Sita's groom. The kind of vigour he displayed as he picked up Lord Shiva's bow and broke it with his brute strength. It was an auspicious occasion as Goddess Sita was getting married to a man of her selection.

“Hey Awadh ke lalna,

(Oh Lord of Awadh!)

Aaj Mithilapur mein aaye hain Awadh ke laalna”

(Awadh's beloved has arrived at Mithilapuri, Oh Lord)

It shows how vital our religious texts have been in the development of music in our country. The folklores of India have shaped the way that art and culture are looked upon, and the music and dance of the folk represent jaw-dropping techniques used by the artists. It is only a matter of exploration to find values within our spectrum of traditions that can teach us how to be and sometimes be or not be; to show strength and vigour in life and never think that anything is beyond our grasp or reach.



MUKESH KUMAR

Contact Info - 9305541182

Role - Team Leader

A 35-year-old artist from Ayodhya, Mukesh has been learning music through Keherwa, a traditional dance form developed in the Awadh region of Uttar Pradesh. At the young age of 25, he learned singing and got inspired by Sheetla Prasad Verma. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Sheetla Prasad Verma as his guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and his caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, made to be in a Keherwa style. He can play Harmonium and Johri, apart from singing, and has performed in various locations within the state. He also believes that he inherited this craft from Mutu Dada, his great grandfather, who had a natural desire for mastering the art of singing and playing folk music. During his childhood years, he would try to imitate Mutu Dada, and thus, picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He lives in a family of 12 people with his wife and brothers. Despite all his social work, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to become an icon for the youth through his music to keep the Bhojpuri folk forms alive in the hearts of the people.

RAM ACHHAIBAR

Contact Info - 7390875958

Role - Manjira

A 55-year-old artist from Ayodhya, Ram has been learning music through Keherwa, a traditional art form of music, but is on the brink of extinction from the cultural arts of Awadh. At the young age of 12, he started learning to play the Manjira taking inspiration from his grandfather. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with great passion. He considers his father and grandfather as his Gurus and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, written, composed, and sung in a similar style. Apart from Manjira he has also gained expertise in playing another side rhythm instrument known as Huduk. He believes that he has inherited music from his ancestral lineage. When he was a child/in his youth, he would try to imitate the elders in his family and thus picked up the Manjira and never stopped learning. He also knows how to sing apart from Manjira and has performed in various locations within the state. Apart from being a trained folk singer and percussionist, he has also performed 'Nautanki' as a part of his cultural expertise in various places around Ayodhya, making him one of the most experienced and versatile artists within the region.



BHARAT

Contact Info - 8840959975

Role - Vocals

A 24-year-old artist in the prime of his life belonging to Ayodhya, Bharat has been learning music through various Awadhi art forms like Keherwa, Phurwahi, and Surahi. At the young age of 12, he began to learn music taking inspiration from several artists living within the region. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Mannul Ji and Mukesh Kumar as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. These gurus have inspired him to choose a similar path in his life as he aims to be a teacher, eventually passing on his knowledge of many art forms to the generations to come. He also believes that music has been given to him as a natural gift from nature due to which he has a natural talent for mastering the art of singing. He also knows how to play instruments like Dholak and holds a Prabhakar from Prayagraj Sangeet Samiti. He has performed in various locations within the country and considers his performance at Nagaland and Port Blair the most memorable experiences. He lives in a family of seven people and has four siblings. Thus, he has various responsibilities at home and yet manages to practice his craft each day.



TANYA MISHRA

Contact Info - 7007440999

Role - Chorus

A young 18-year-old artist living in Ayodhya, Tanya Mishra, has been learning music through ancient folk art forms of the region. At a young age, she began to learn to play music, taking inspiration from her interest in the field of music. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with soaring passion. She considers Arun Mishra as her guru and speaks very highly of her teachings and achievements in the field of music. She usually seeks life advice from her father and another highly talented musician who performs with her regularly. She has completed her Bachelors in music as well as a Prabhakar in classical vocals. Tanya knows how to play the harmonium apart from singing and has performed in various locations within the state. She is a prime example of an all-rounder in the field of art as she also acts and has pulled off brilliant performances at folk music festivals only to galvanize the crowds and regards her first performance at Ayodhya as the most memorable experience. She lives in a family of four people and has the responsibilities of an elder sister. Despite all her struggles, she strives to keep developing her craft and dreams.



VISHAL PANDEY

Contact Info - 7379991625

Role - Chorus

A youthful 18-year-old artist belonging to the city of Ayodhya, Vishal Pandey has been learning music through multiple art forms like Keherwa, Phurwahi, and many other art forms belonging to the state of Uttar Pradesh. At the young age of sixteen, he began to learn music taking inspiration from popular artists within the region such as Pawan Singh, who is considered to be a superstar in the Bhojpuri entertainment industry. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers the elders of his hometown and Sheetla Prasad Verma as his gurus, and speaks very highly of their teachings. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He has a burning desire to learn music as his passion as well as his profession. He practices his art forms every day, and believes that through his music, he can change the lives of the people. He began singing Shri Ram Charit Manas at the age of 16. He has received various opportunities to act in Bhojpuri films and pulled off brilliant performances in films like Jigarwaale. He carries a 'never give up attitude and believes that the pursuit of music is the only path that will lead him to achieve all his goals in life.



HARI RAM

Contact Info - 8933882573

Role - Dholak

A 50-year-old artist belonging to the city of Ayodhya, Hari Ram has been learning music through the art of playing Dholak for traditional music and dance forms such as. At the young age of 15, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with sumptuous passion. He considers his father, Bhagwati Prasad, as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as caliber in the field of music. He also believes that music has been inherited to him, in the form of natural talent. He also knows how to play the Tabla and Morchang, apart from Dholak and has performed in various locations within the state. He lives in a family of 9 people with four daughters and three sons. Despite all his responsibilities and struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to create an impact for the folk music community of his region someday in the future. He wants to give back to the folk music community through learning and eventually teaching different folk art forms to the following generations to save them from extinction.





PARJAPAT BHAGALU

Contact Info - 9305541182

Role - Manjira

A 40-year-old artist, belonging to Ayodhya, Parjapat Bhagalu, has been learning music through various art forms such as Keherwa and Phurwahi. At the young age of 15, he began learning how to play a Manjira taking inspiration from his uncle, whom he denoted as Sundar Chacha. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Sundar Chacha as his guru in music and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus, written to be sung in a similar style. He lives in a family of six people with 3 boys and a girl. Despite all his responsibilities and struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much. He also believes that music he inherited from his family lineage. When he was in his youth, he would try imitating his uncle and thus picked up the Manjira and never stopped learning. He also knows how to act and sing in Nautanki apart from playing the Manjira and has performed in various locations within the country. With all these talents he has been able to galvanize the audiences in many local cultural festivals on various occasions.

AMARSI

Contact Info - 9305541182

Role - Chorus

A 44-year-old artist who belongs to Ayodhya, Amarsi, has been learning music through Keherwa and many other corresponding art forms of Awadh. At the young age of 15, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers music as his family tradition and his father as his guru. He speaks very highly of their teachings as well as their caliber in the field of music. Amarsi believes that he has inherited music from his forefathers, who had a natural desire for mastering the art of singing and playing music. In his youth, he would try to imitate his elders and thus picked up the will to learn music. Since then, he has never stopped learning. He lives in a family of 6 people and has two daughters and two sons who also work to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to make a good living from live performances someday, in the future, to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.







VARANASI

MANNU YADAV & Group

A 48-year-old artist from Banaras, Mannu Yadav, has been learning music through various folk art forms such as Biraha and Kajri. He began to learn music taking inspiration from his father, who used to sing as a hobby. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion and dexterity, as he also completed his MA in music. He also believes that music has been an integral part of his life since he discovered his talent and began having a desire to master the art of singing and storytelling. When he was a child, he would imitate his father and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play various instruments such as Dholak and Khartaal apart from possessing the brilliant vocal ability and has performed in several locations around the globe. He has received the Ustaaad Bismillah Khan National award in 2007 and pulled off breathtaking performances at various festivals and regards his performance at the Nehru-Wangchuk center in Bhutan as his most memorable experience. Accompanying him, his team consists of four talented musicians who have spent their lives pursuing masterly musical abilities with their respective instruments. Bijendra, an expert in playing the harmonium, was one of the most talented and excellent-sounding musicians. Along with him, a young artist named Lal Bahadur, or as they affectionately called him, Molu, is a young Dholak player only in his early twenties and yet showing terrific ability in providing the beats for the songs that these artists present.

“A journey to the inner sounds of spirituality.”

A musical journey can be regarded as an exploration of one’s inner sounds of spirituality. It carries the potential to bring to the surface the value systems that constitute the elements of the integrity of the individual. To activate such value systems, we left our homes to understand the landscape and the music that lies in the eastern region of Uttar Pradesh which is called Purvanchal.

In South-eastern Uttar Pradesh, on the banks of the river Ganga, lies one of the seven sacred cities of India. This city is called Banaras and is one of the most well-known places in this region. Within the city, and the villages around, reside a population that has been creating and enjoying various forms of folk music like Banarasi Kajri and Biraha. As we sought the artists who have mastered these forms of art over the years, we came across a much-coveted and highly educated artist and a researcher in music, Mannu Yadav. He has made his name within the communities and audiences that enjoy the mentioned forms of music and has completed two Doctoral degrees simultaneously.

To meet such a brilliant mind in the field of music, along with his students, who have also been making a mark as they complement his abilities while accompanying him during various national and international level events was an honour and a privilege. Along with his ensemble, he has presented Biraha in places like Mauritius, Bhutan, and even the Red Fort in New Delhi. As we met him, his professional attitude towards his art and his peers was a pleasing sight at first, but we had never seen him in action before. Unlike other art styles, he insisted that he should perform while standing up and most definitely showcase his skills in the manner that he does in every performance. This posed a bit of a challenge for us to record him, but it was done in the best possible manner.

Accompanying him was his team that consisted of four talented musicians, who have spent their lives in pursuit of mastering musical abilities with their respective instruments. Bijendra, an expert in playing the harmonium, was one of the most talented and excellent musicians we had seen in a while. Along with him, a young artist named Lal Bahadur, or as they affectionately called him, Molu, was a young Dholak player only in his early twenties and yet, showing terrific ability in providing the beats for the songs that these artists presented to us. Chhangoor, a percussionist who uses Khartaal to perfection and has been by his side for most of his performances, around the country as well as the globe, got inspired by his father who was also a folk musician and displayed tremendous musical finesse. Siding with Budhai, an even more experienced percussionist, who claimed to possess abilities in various traditional musical instruments such as the Manjira, Dholak, and Bansuri (flute) was another crucial piece of the story that these artists were a part of during this exploration.

One can say with surety that the Mannu Yadav and his group are masters of the folk form Beher which goes like this:

“Chandrachond bhakt hain ki,

(Chandrachond is a follower)

Shivji ke rahilein,

(Of Lord Shiva)

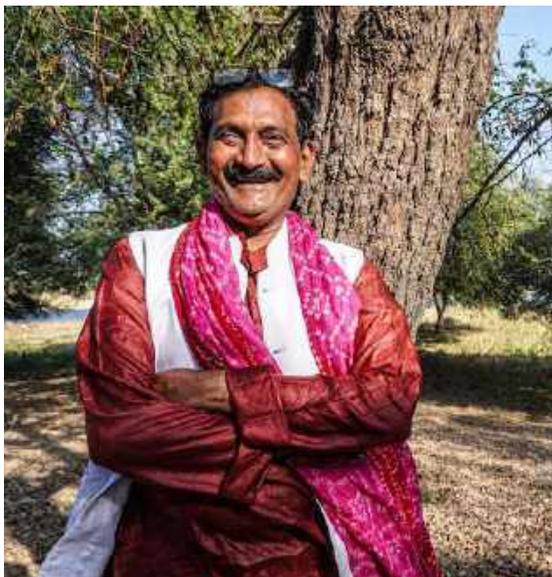
Kayilein jab tap bariyar ho,

(He made himself go through penance)

Tap bal dekhi hil gayile asanwa”

(Shiva was moved by all the hardships Chandrachond took upon himself)

On the bank of the river Ganga, we were amazed and rendered speechless by their music and storytelling abilities, only having to clap as hard as we could as they finished performing the Banarasi Karji that we had been aspiring to watch for so long. This marked our journey to Banaras, in search of musical brilliance, an undeniably successful one indeed.



DR. MANNU YADAV

Contact Info - 9415994909

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 48-year-old artist from Banaras, Dr. Mannu Yadav, has been learning music through various folk art forms such as Biraha and Kajri. He began to learn music taking inspiration from his father, who picked up singing as a hobby. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and perseveres the form with rising passion and dedication, as he also completed his MA in music. He believes that music has been an integral part of his life since he discovered his talent and began having a fondness for mastering the art of singing and storytelling. When he was a child, he tried imitating his father and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. Dr. Mannu also knows how to play various instruments such as Dholak and Khartaal apart from possessing impressive vocal ability and has performed in several locations around the Globe. He was honored with the Ustaaad Bismillah Khan National Award in 2007 and performed at various festivals to galvanize the crowds. Jogging down his memory lane, he shares the most memorable experience that he has had at the Nehru-Wangchuk Center in Bhutan. He cherishes this performance and considers it to be amongst his best ones.

CHHANGOOR

Contact Info - 9005523414

Role - Khartaal, Chorus

A 41-year-old artist from Banaras, Chhangoor has been learning music through traditional art forms of Uttar Pradesh, such as Biraha and Kajri. At the young age of 15, he began to learn music taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers his father as his Guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are hence, resemble a similar style as that of Guru Ji. Chhangoor feels as if the music was conventionally passed to him by the elders of his lineage. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father and thus picked up the instruments such as Khartaal and never stopped learning. With his experience, he now knows how to support the chorus, apart from playing Khartaal. He has delivered splendid performances at various locations within the country, at many local festivals, and has mesmerized the masses every time. He lives in a family of 6 people and has four sons to take care of. Despite all his responsibilities and struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.



BUDHAI

Contact Info - 7755851698

Role - Manjira, Chorus

A 56-year-old artist from Banaras, Budhai has been learning music through various art forms like Kajri and Biraha. At the young age of 13, he began to learn Manjira as well as Khartaal. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father as his Guru and yearns to accommodate his expertise in the compositions. Furthermore, his work is majorly inspired by his father, his Guru. He also possesses the skill of playing other instruments like Harmonium apart from Manjira and Dholak and has performed various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at many local festivals only to amaze the crowds. He lives in a family of 5 people and is the leading Male Memory. Making it through the highways of life, he has always adored his craft and wishes to succeed with it. Through his music, he yearns to teach more and more people about this art form.

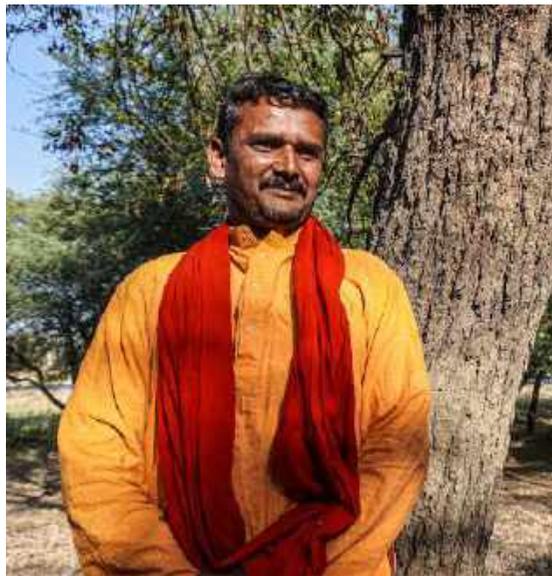
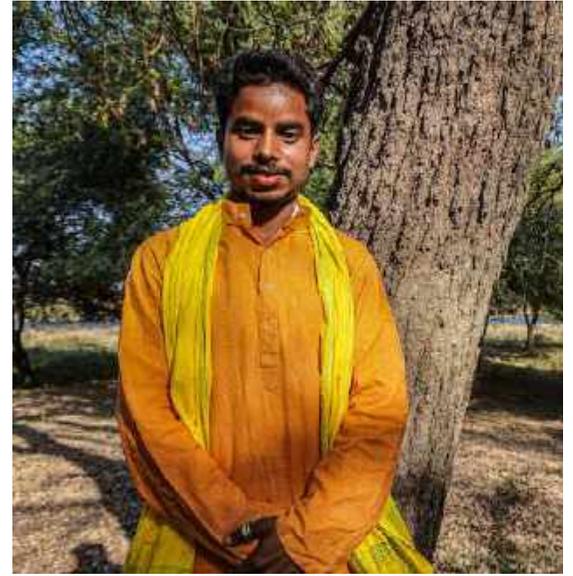


LAL BAHADUR

Contact Info - 7081905416

Role - Dholak

A 21-year-old artist from Banaras, Lal Bahadur, who is dearly known as 'Molu' among his friends, learned music through Karji and Biraha. At the young age of 10, he began to learn to play drawing inspiration from Dr. Mannu Yadav. Since then, he keeps learning every day to refine his craft and perseveres the form with soaring passion. He considers Dr. Mannu Yadav as his Guru Ji and speaks very highly of his teachings and excellence in the field of music. Most of Lal Bahadur's songs are, hence sung, in a similar style as his. He also believes that music has been passed onto him by his forefathers. When he was a child, he would try to imitate the senior artists of his village and thus picked up the will to sing and perform. Molu knows how to play Khartaal and Jhaal apart from Dholak and has performed in various locations within the country. He lives in a family of 5 people and has three younger siblings, being the eldest one himself. This young artist wishes to create a big name for himself and his art with his performances.



BIJENDRA

Contact Info - 8081129559

Role - Harmonium

A highly experienced 48-year-old artist from Banaras, Bijendra has been learning music through many traditional art forms such as Kajri and Biraha. He considers his father as his Guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and his caliber in the field of music. Interestingly, as a nine-year-old, Bijendra was inspired by his father, a singer and a harmonium player. Bijendra also believes that the gift of music has been passed onto him from his family lineage. When he was a child, he would try to imitate his father and thus picked up the Harmonium. Since then, he has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with sumptuous passion. This talented artist also sings Bhajans apart from playing Harmonium and has performed in various locations within the country and represented the art forms abroad. He has pulled off brilliant performances across India, only to galvanize the crowds and regards his performance at Bhutan as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of eight people and has two sons and two daughters. Thus, he also has to work as a Farmer and Labor personnel to make ends meet. Notwithstanding all his struggles, he strives to keep expanding his craft and enlightening the coming generations.









VARANASI

ASHOK KUMAR & Group

Ashok Kumar, being an artist, is a brilliant musician who picked up folk music as his interest and passion at an early stage in life. Meeting his guru at the famous 'Kumbh Mela' was a defining experience for him as he took guidance to seek the path of becoming a folk musician. The group is highly skilled in the folk domain of singing Chaita, which are semi-classical songs, originating from the Indian subcontinent, sung in the Hindu calendar month of Chait. These songs are rendered during the Holy month of Sri Rama Navami in March/April. It falls under the light classical form of Hindustani classical music. The songs typically have the name of Lord Rama. The group has a few highly experienced instrumentalists who have made a mark in the folk music community of the region. A brilliant Dholak player only in his early thirties, Motilal is a treat to watch as he has already gained about two decades of experience in folk music. He knows how to play various instruments like Khartaal and Manjira as well. Others in the group are also quite versatile as musicians. Banarasi, a Jhaal player who possesses a tremendous ability to support the vocalists with his backing vocals. Fateh Bahadur, another highly experienced musician who handles the harmonium with undeniable finesse during their live performance of a folk form locally known as Chaita. Along with Ramcharan Rajbhar's side rhythm on Manjira and Avadesh Yadav's ability on the Khartaal, the group displays a brilliant set of performances.



“A tantalizing display of guru - shishya parampara.”

Among one of the most ancient cities of the country, also known as Kashi, the city of Banaras is a treasure for going on a spiritual journey and experiencing the true colours of India. Many people visit this city every year in search of spiritual enlightenment. Some attend the major festivals in this historic city that represent its rawest form from an ancestral era.

Varanasi is also known as the cultural capital of the country. On the bank of Holy River Ganga lies the Ghats of Banaras, built to represent the cycle of life and death. The small streets contrast the serenity of the Ghats as they are the busiest streets one can experience. There is chaos as well as the hustle and bustle of traffic every day. Therefore, the people of Banaras always claim that life in Banaras never dies or fades out.

Within the chaos of this world is an ecosystem of highly talented individuals, especially when one is looking to find a folk musician. People in Banaras are devoted to the gods they worship and pray every day. It has helped the evolution of folk music forms in the region throughout history. Along with these forms came various artists, who have the tremendous musical ability with vocals and traditional instruments such as Harmonium, Khartaal, and Dholak.

Ashok Kumar, one such artist, is a brilliant musician who picked up folk music as his passion at an early stage of his life. Meeting his guru at the famous ‘Kumbh Mela’ was a defining experience for him as he took guidance to seek the path of becoming a folk musician. On the Gadwa Ghat in Banaras, we meet Ashok Kumar right by the riverbank of the Ganges. Along with a five-piece troupe of musicians, he came and began telling us about his experience in the field of folk music. His knowledge about the folk forms of Uttar Pradesh is commendable.

While returning from the riverbank, we were surrounded by the greenery just like the Ghats were. We observed that being so close to nature can inspire art to grow and develop a culture of enrichment and abundance. In his company were a few highly experienced instrumentalists who have made a mark in the folk music community of the region. A brilliant Dholak player only in his early thirties, Motilal, was a treat to watch as he had already gained about two decades of experience in folk music. He knew how to play the percussion instruments like Khartaal and Manjira.

Other members in the group were also quite versatile as musicians. A wondrous team member named Banarasi is a Jhaal player who possesses a tremendous ability to support the vocalists with his backing vocals. Another member named Fateh Bahadur was a highly experienced musician who handled the harmonium with undeniable finesse during their live performance of a folk form locally known as Chaita, which goes like -

“Kitna sukhad din ayile ho rama chait mahinwa,
(Lord Rama’s birth has made this day Chaita month auspicious)

Shri Ram li hain laye janamwa ho rama chait mahinwa”
(Lord Rama’s birth has made the Chaita month auspicious)

Along with Ramcharan Rajbhar’s side rhythm on Manjira and Avadesh Yadav’s ability on the Khartaal, the group displayed a brilliant set of performances right by the riverside. It was so natural that they could easily manipulate and improvise their songs and lyrics to entertain the audience even during their song introduction. The humility of these artists was such that when asked about his songwriting experience, Ashok Kumar chose to express gratitude towards his current guru, Dr Mannu Yadav saying that he would never put his name on a song written by him. He went on to add that the song belongs to his teacher; he would only give credit to his teacher for his creation.

It reflects on the principles of each folk artist in their community. They are raised in an environment where respect for their Gurus is basically innate. They also stick together with their group for all their performances and contribute to the community through organized social work. Besides their masterful musical pieces, a single interaction with these artists could be an opportunity to learn.



ASHOK KUMAR

Contact Info - 8948932903

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 35-year-old artist from the Ahir community of Banaras, Ashok Kumar, has been learning music through many art forms like Chaita, Kajri, and Biraha. At the young age of six, he began to learn singing by taking inspiration from his great grandfather, who he used to call Mutu Dada. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Dr. Manu Yadav and Padma Shri Swargiya Hiralal Ji as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are in a similar style as his. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from family lineage naturally. When he was a child, he would try to imitate Mutu Dada and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. Fascinating to know, he is also a Harmonium instrumentalist and has performed in various locations within the state and country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at many festivals in places like Mumbai, Delhi, Chandigarh to galvanize the crowds and regards his performance at Imphal as the most memorable experience. Despite all his responsibilities, he is one of the most hardworking and yet humble musicians from Uttar Pradesh.

MOTILAL

Contact Info - 9005356510

Role - Dholak

A 32-year-old artist from the Chamar community of Banaras has been learning music through biraha, kajaree, and chaiti. At a very young age, he got inspired by Fatelal Ji, a Harmonium teacher from his village, and began to learn music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Raja Ram Ji as his Guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in music. Most of his songs resonate a similar style as his. He has performed in various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals to galvanize the crowds and regards his performance at Allahabad as the most memorable experience. He lives in a joint family of 13 people and has a wife, three sons, a mother with six brothers, and a sister-in-law. Thus, he also owns a vegetable shop to make ends meet. Notwithstanding all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to continue music for life and, someday in the future, to see himself succeed through the art that he strives so much for.



FATEH BAHADUR

Contact Info - 9764583590

Role - Harmonium, Chorus

A 42-year-old artist from the Chamar community of Banaras has been learning music through Biraha and Chaiti. He began to play Harmonium after taking inspiration from Ashok Kumar. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Gullu Ram as his Guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and achievements in music. Most of his songs are in a similar style as his. He also knows how to sing Bhajan Kirtan apart from playing Harmonium and has performed in Lucknow and Prayagraj. He has pulled off brilliant performances at music festivals and shows only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance at Prayagraj as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 5 people and has a daughter and two sons. Thus, he only makes music to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to perform music all his life and sees himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.



BANARASI

Contact Info - 9621185935

Role - Chorus

A 42-year-old artist from the chamar community of Banaras has been learning music through Chaiti, Biraha, and other folk art forms. At a young age, he began to play Jhaal by taking inspiration from other artists in his village. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He also knows how to sing apart from playing Jhaal and has performed in various locations within the state. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals to dazzle the crowds and regard his performance at Prayagraj as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 3 people and has a son. Thus, he only performs music with his group to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to get recognition someday, in the future, to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.



RAMCHARAN RAJBHAR

Contact Info - 7392069029

Role - Chorus

A 45-year-old artist from the Rajbhar community of Banaras has been learning music through Biraha. He began to play Manjira by taking inspiration from other artists in the village. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He has performed in various locations within the state. He lives in a family of 7 people and has two daughters and three sons. Thus, he only performs music to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to get more work someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much. He has pulled off brilliant performances at music festivals to dazzle the crowds and regard his performance at Allahabad as the most memorable experience.



AVADESH YADAV

Contact Info - 8948932907

Role - Khartal, Chorus

A 40-year-old artist from the Ahir community of Banaras has been learning music through Biraha, Chaiti, and Phagua. He began to play Kartaal by taking inspiration from Ashok Kumar from his music group. He lives in a family of 5 people and has 2 sons and a daughter. Thus, he only performs music to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to educate his audience about this artform. Someday in the future, he sees himself succeed through the art that he loves so much. He has performed in various locations within the state and country like Delhi, Mumbai, Allahabad, and Prayagraj. He has pulled off brilliant performances at music festivals only to dazzle the crowds and regards all his performances as the most memorable experience. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion.









📍 VARANASI

SUCHARITA GUPTA & Group

A 59-year-old artist from Banaras has been learning music through Folk and Classical. She began to learn classical music at a very young age and took inspiration from Nirmala Devi and Siddheshwari Devi. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. Her group has a brilliant Tabla player, Lalit Kumar, who is a teacher and a Tabla accompanist at Banaras Hindu University, and Saurabh Srivastava, who is learning classical vocals under her supervision. As someone who believes that music can cure the soul, he displays the purity in his music exceptionally well and believes that music runs in his family. She considers Lt. Padma Das Ji, Vidhushi Savita Devi, and Pt. Hariram was her guru and spoke very highly of their teachings. Most of her songs are sung in a similar style. When she was a child, she used to listen to Music and Thumri was her favorite that inspired her to learn. She also knows how to play Harmonium and Table apart from Vocals and has performed in various locations within the country. She has pulled off brilliant performances at Ganga Mahotsav, Bhojpuri Sammelan, Netaji Indoor Stadium, and others and regard her music CD inauguration by the President of Mauritius in November 2009, as the most memorable experience. One thing for sure, when the groups begins the performance, you are assured to get goosebumps as Sucharita's voice engraves into ones' soul.

“Healing notes of surrender and emotions.”

In the Southeastern pocket of Uttar Pradesh, also known as Purvanchal, lies the cultural capital of the country, Banaras. Banaras is so rich in its culture that the streets themselves can leave you feeling overwhelmed within a few days. Accommodating various cultures of the country and even the world, Banaras constitutes a population that comes from ethnic groups belonging to every nook and corner of India. The Ghats smell of Ganges and the hustle and bustle within the city sounds like loud music to your ears. Within these sounds lies the music, that has typical Bhojpuri flavour in the truest possible sense.

The artists that reside within this city understand their folk music either through family tradition or tremendous passion for the art. Most of them, highly experienced and accomplished in their field, have had the chance to represent their culture around the globe. One such artist is Sucharita Gupta, a classically trained vocalist and has represented the Bhojpuri culture, specializing in Thumri and Sohar folk forms. Belonging to the Bengali community and coming from the state of Assam, when we spoke to her, she agreed to meet us at the Gurudham Temple, which was constructed in 1814 by the orders of Maharaja Jay Narayan Ghoshal, who was the emperor of Bengal at the time. She came along with one of her students, Saurabh Srivastava, who is learning classical vocals under her supervision. Accompanying them was a brilliant Tabla player, Lalit Kumar, a teacher and a Tabla accompanist at Banaras Hindu University. As someone who believes that music can cure the soul, he displays the purity in his music exceptionally well and believes that music runs in his family.

Once we got into a conversation with her, we could deeply fathom the identity Sucharita Ji has created of herself as a teacher. Her focus primarily being on empowering every individual through the spiritual journey that music has the power to put them through. She has been working towards achieving her goals, by making it possible for women from various regions, through her online classes and currently teaches over 50 students from all around the globe. Her presence as a teacher exists in Indian metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and even in the US as she also has students in New York City. Being a guru in classical vocals, she expressed her emotions towards the lack of support women usually get in our world, especially if they want to achieve goals that are considered relatively unorthodox.

As we all made our way through Gurudham temple together, we realized our good fortune in terms of the opportunity to understand the breathtaking structure, primarily due to its intelligently designed architecture. It had eight courtyards with eight entrances, each of which would have light and shade during different times of the day. This made it quite convenient for us to select a good location for them to record their songs without having to sit under the sun. When they started performing, we couldn't believe our eyes and ears as soon as we heard Sucharita Gupta's captivating voice in complete harmony with the beats of the Tabla and the sweet-sounding Harmonium played by Saurabh Sharma.

“Bahut dinan ke baad,

(After so many days)

Shyam sang hori mai khelungi,

(I shall play Holi with my beloved)

Pitambar Nilambar honge”

(Brahma and Shiva will also witness)

Her 'Holi geet' was in itself a display of excellent vocal ability, which she believes in teaching and passing on to many of her students with the help of offline as well as online classes. Her belief that anyone can learn music at any point of time in their lives through the help of a good teacher is what makes her harmonious and a skilled music guru that she is. Along with her student, as well as the amazing instrumentalist, Lalit Ji, who shows complete faith in her teachings as well as musical ability, she made a mark on our mission to discover the talent that resides within the region. Experiencing her performance abilities was one of the most memorable moments of lives that is going to be cherished forever.



SUCHARITA GUPTA

Contact Info - 9839247472

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

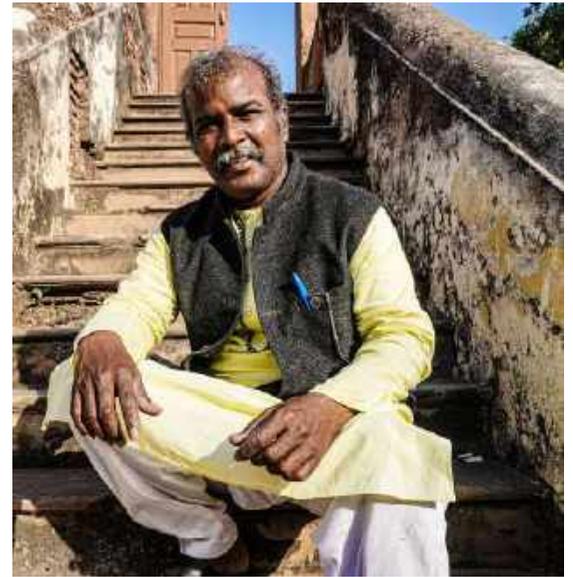
A 59-year-old artist from Banaras, Sucharita is a well-versed Folk and Classical Singer. She began to learn classical music at a very young age and reaped inspiration from Smt. Nirmala Devi and Smt. Siddheshwari Devi. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. She considers Lt. Padma Das Ji, Vidhushi Savita Devi, and Pt. Hariram as her Gurus and converses very highly of their teachings and their achievements in the Musical field. Most of her songs are, therefore, sung to be in a similar style as theirs. When she was a child, she used to listen to music, and Thumri (her favorite) was one form that inspired her to learn. It was the birth origin of her interest in this craft, and since then, she never ceased to learn. Apart from being a vocalist, she knows her way around Harmonium and Tabla and has performed in various locations within the country. She is known for her brilliant performances at Ganga Mahotsav, Bhojpuri Sammelan, Netaji Indoor Stadium, and others. Sucharita is an inspiring musician who mesmerizes the crowd with her music. To add to her list of achievements, she regards her Music CD inauguration by the President of Mauritius in November 2009 as the most memorable experience.

LALIT KUMAR

Contact Info - 9415295535

Role - Tabla

A 53-year-old artist from Varanasi, Pandit Lalit Kumar is a professional of classical and semi folk forms of music. At the naive age of 10, he began to learn Tabla, taking inspiration from his family. He works hard to achieve mastery in his craft and pursues it with commendable passion. In his life, he has acquired the gift of music from three gurus, first his father, Shree Sundar Lal Ji, then Ram Ji Mishra, and then Padma Vibhushan Pandit Kishan Maharaj Ji. He belongs to the Banaras Gharana of classical music. He has also composed many music compositions for Bhajans. Apart from being a maestro in Tabla, he is also a teacher and tabla accompanist at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Drawing inspiration from him, his son Kumar Sarang plays Santoor and is profoundly interested in music. Lalit Ji belongs to a musical lineage, he drew inspiration from his father, and his daughter also sings. It can be, therefore, said that music resides in the soul of his family. He strongly believes that music purifies one's soul and says that if one sings with a pure mind, then all the body parts attain pureness with its essence. For the future, he wishes to do Sangat with all the great musicians and to serve others with his knowledge of Music and Tabla.



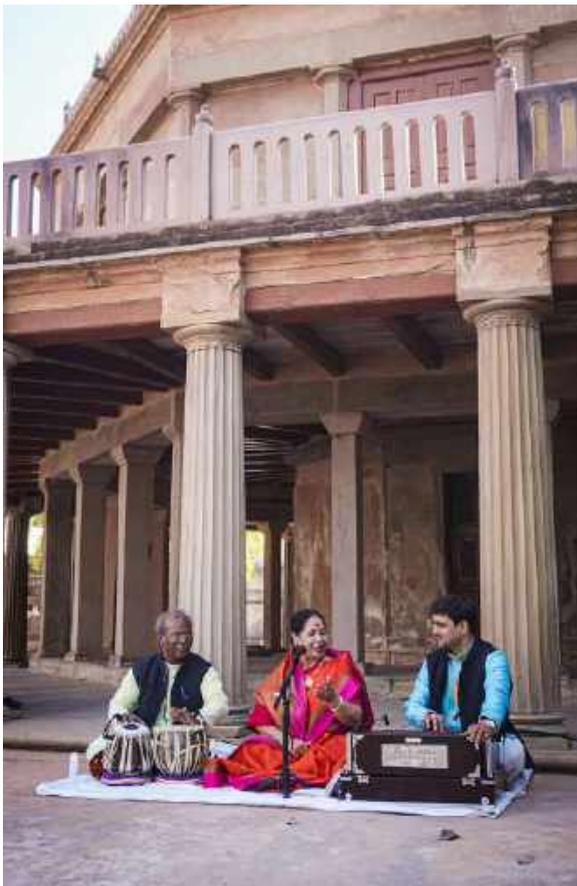
SAURABH SRIVASTAVA

Contact Info - 9598940451

Role - Harmonium

A 34-year-old artist from Varanasi has been learning music through folk and classical forms. Since his childhood, he began to learn taking inspiration from Classical music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Shrimati Sucharita Gupta Ji as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the musical field. He sings with her in most of her songs in a similar style. Saurabh has done his education from BHU and is a Ph.D. scholar. His expertise lies in semi-classical, purvanchali folk, Bhojpuri, bhajan, ghazal. He has written more than 100 songs, mostly creating music for natak. He has composed a few on ragas, namely Desh. He has performed at Ganga Mahotsav in Varanasi, Durga Kund Mahotsav, chat Mahotsav, and various shows in Nainital. Amongst all these accomplishments, the most memorable stage show is when he did Ganga Mahotsav as he was very young, and so it has a special place in his heart. He has also appeared for Shows at the Mahua Channel ON Television. Being a musician is his sole profession and source of income. He believes that music is one source where one can get connected with God very easily.







📍 GHAZIPUR

JEEWAN RAM & Group

A 35-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Jeewan Ram has been learning music through Dhobia. At the tender age of 7 years old, he took inspiration from his grandfather and started learning music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. The group led by Jeewan performs the beautiful Dhobia dance. As Ghazipur is very close to Bihar, the culture of both states is seen in music & dances. The Dhobia dance of this area, is a very famous folk dance of this district when accompanied by enchanting music generated by Harmonium, Tabla, Dhol, Majeera, Nagara, Jhanjh, and Kartal at a magic spell on the spectator. Dhobia dance is common among the Washerman community, and this district produces some dancers of national repute. Among the rural folk, telling stories and legends singing are common. As the group began their dance, one could see their acrobatic ability taking their performances to a different level. In this artform, four dancers in the center and two wearing the suit of a horse and acting as riders. They are surrounded by an 8 piece band of folk musicians playing traditional musical instruments. They began their stunning dance, with their acrobatic ability taking their performances to a different level. Four dancers danced in the center, and two wore the suit of a horse and acted as riders. They are surrounded by an 8 piece band of folk musicians playing traditional musical instruments.

“Emanating a vibrant and vivid performance.”

Purvanchal is one of the most cultural regions of India in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. It is the home to the cultural capital of the country, Banaras, and has seen many cultures come and go over the centuries that have passed. This place has become the hub for a mixed bag of every culture that stems from different parts of the country and is one of the most accepting places in the world.

Only about eighty kilometres from Banaras is a city known as Ghazipur. This city is famous because of its high-quality production of opium poppy, among other things. Ghazipur was once a very important riverport for the British empire and its alluvial soil traversed from the Ganges makes this place all the more valuable in terms of crop production, but between all that lies the cultural part of this place that consists of various folk art forms. One such art form found here on our journey through the region is known as the Dhobiya dance. This dance has its music played by talented artists from multiple villages within the district. Meeting one of the leading groups was an honour as we got in touch with Jeewan Ram, who was born and brought up in a village and began his journey as a cultural artist at a very young age.

As we drove through the highway that leads to his village, we could see large fields of various crops grown on a single piece of land, which showed us how efficient the village people are with using the fertile soil to its best. On narrow roads, we drove, and there was always a thin line between driving and off-roading. Finding Jeewan Ram, dressed in his traditional attire, riding through the villages on his bike was quite relieving as well.

He guided us through the beautiful fields, enriched with green crops that were getting ready for harvest within a few weeks. It was a magnificent sight to watch. We eventually stopped at a small temple on the edge of the village, next to a large groundwater pool, filled with kids taking turns to dive. They were so excited to see a car drive in their village for recording that they began tailing us until we stopped. Once we opened our cameras to capture their expression, they would smile and slowly start to flee the frame.

Besides all, the smiling kids were the real artists, getting ready to give us their best performance within a small hut next to the temple. The makeup was uncanny as men were dressed as women, and yet it represented the idea of being an equal so well. The whole ensemble was quite diverse in terms of age. From artists in their mid-twenties to Ram Janam Ji, who claims to be ninety-nine years old and says he’s been performing since the late 1960s. As they began their dance, we could see their acrobatic ability taking their performances to a different level. Four dancers danced in the centre, and two wore the suit of a horse and acted as riders. They were surrounded by an 8 piece band of folk musicians playing traditional musical instruments. The song they started with was - Azaadi ke Godanwa, which goes like -

“Godai sakhiya hum ajadi ke godanwa,

(All the women of the country are getting tattoos)

Godanwa par Gandhi baba, rashtra pita shubh namwa,

(Tattoo of Gandhi’s name- the respected father of the nation)

Lilra pe Lakshmibai, Jin lad gaye british sangwa,

(Tattoo of Lakshmibai’s name on forehead- the one who fearlessly fought the British)

Dushman bhaagele paranwa godai sakhiya”

(The tattoo about how they claimed their victory)

Watching them perform the Dhobiya dance, and sing traditional songs in their village right by the temple, was simply distinguished. Being in the home of the origin of these art forms made it more complete, and looking at these artists mesmerize everyone in the village, let alone the people recording them was simply an outstanding experience of a lifetime.



JEEWAN RAM

Contact Info - 7652099092

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A 35-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Jeevan Ram, has learned music through Dhobia. At the tender age of 7 years old, he took inspiration from his grandfather and started learning eventually. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his grandfather as his Guru Ji and speaks very highly of his teachings and his caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus written, composed, and sung to be in a similar style. He also believes that he resonated with music because of his grandfather, who had a natural desire for mastering the art form of Dhobia. As a child, Jeevan Ji tried imitating his grandfather, and this childlike play became a cornerstone for why he picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play Jhanjh apart from doing vocals and has performed in various locations within the country. He has earned numerous achievements in state-level and national-level competitions and has represented Dhobia across the country. Jogging down his memory lane, he treasures a performance that he delivered on 26th January in Delhi, representing the art form on the Republic Day of India.

NANDU RAM

Contact Info - 7408056290

Role - Dand Taal

A 68-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Nandu Ram, has been learning music through Dhobia Nritya. He started learning to sing at an early age of 11, taking inspiration from his mother. He has been working hard since then towards achieving mastery in his craft and has never looked back. He considers Ram Janam Ji as his Guru Ji and speaks very highly of his teachings and caliber in the field of music. Nandu Ram Ji feels as if the music was conventionally passed to him by the elders of his family and community, with the desire to instill folk music into the lives of these new generations, especially during festivals and auspicious occasions. Fascinating to know, he is also a Khartal instrumentalist and has performed in various locations within the state and country. He has pulled off brilliant performances for the Mahua channel and Ganga channel on Television and has continued to captivate his audiences. He once performed in South Africa and recalls this as the most memorable experience he has had. He lives in a Joint family of 14 people with four sons and two daughters of his own.

Making it through the highways of life, he has always adored his craft and wishes to succeed with it.



RAMJANAM

Contact Info - 7652099092

Role - Chorus

A 99-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Ramjanam, has been learning music through Dhobia. He began to perform in front of audiences in 1967, taking inspiration from his grandfather. He is one of the oldest and most skilled personalities, let alone a musician from the state of Uttar Pradesh, and his interest in music never ceases. He considers Dhukharan Baba Ji as his Guru Ji and speaks very highly of his teachings and excellence in the field of music. Most of Ramjanam Ji's songs are, hence made, in a similar style as his. He also believes that the art of music transpired to him from his family lineage, and he decided to take it forward for all his life with sheer persistence and dedication. Given his profound skills as a chorus singer, he also knows how to play a Khartaal. Ramjanam Ji has performed in various locations within the district of Ghazipur and has pulled off brilliant performances at local cultural festivals for many audiences. He lives with his son and grandson, who are both artists. Despite the pains and struggles that come with age, he is still willing to develop his craft. He sings bhajans and Dhobia Geet with the younger musicians of his village and imparts his expertise in the field.



VIKASH KUMAR

Contact Info - 9795256630

Role - Pakhawaj

A 22-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Vikash Kumar, has been learning music through Dhobia nryta. He has been working hard since he was 13 and continues practicing the art form with tremendous passion. Known to be a Pakhawaj Player, Vikash Ji also knows how to sing and has performed in various locations within the state and other parts of the country. He has been invited to perform for the Mahua channel on Television and has done numerous shows across India. He lives in a family of 3 people with his two brothers. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep perfecting his craft, dreams to study further and continues to pursue music. When asked about his future, this young performer wishes to see himself succeed through the craft of his music. Making it through the highways of life, he has always adored his craft and wishes to succeed with it. Through his music, he yearns to teach more and more people about this art form. Jogging down his memory lane, he treasures a performance that he delivered on 26th January in Delhi, representing the art form on the Republic Day of India.



TRIBHUVAN

Contact Info - 9598018564

Role - Manjira

A 34-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Tribhuvan, has been learning music through Dhobia. At a very young age, he began to play jhaal by taking inspiration from himself. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father, Lal Ji ram, as his mentor, as his Guru Ji. Most of his songs are thus written, composed, and sung to be in a similar style. Tribhuvan Ji also knows how to play Jhaal apart from Jodi and has performed in various locations within the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at numerous music events and Bhojpuri shows. When asked, he recalled these to be his most memorable experiences. He lives in a family of 14 people and has six daughters and a son to provide a living for. Hence, he also has to work as a vegetable vendor to make ends meet. Tribhuvan Ji wishes to teach his children about his craft and also to succeed through the art of music that he cherishes.

SALTU RAM

Contact Info - 7309478168

Role - Ranasingha

A 28-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Saltu Ram, has been learning music through Dhobia. At a very young age, he began to play Ranasingha by taking inspiration from Shree Musan Ram. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with persistence and passion. He considers Musan Ram as his Guru and speaks very highly of his teachings and caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are, thus, made to be in a similar style as his. He also knows how to dance apart from playing Ranasingha and has performed in various locations within the country, like Lucknow, Mumbai, Delhi, Punjab, etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances across India, only to galvanize the crowds and regards his performance at Mathura show Lok Rang Mahotsav as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 4 people with his two sons. Thus, he works as a professional dancer to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to educate his audience about this artform. Someday in the future, he sees himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.





RAM AWADH

Contact Info - 7235025947

Role - Chorus

A 59-year-old artist from Ghazipur, Ram Awadh, has been learning music through Dhobia. From a very young age, he began to play kasawar by taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Rama Kushwaha Ji as his Guru and speaks very profoundly of his teachings and strengths in the field of music. Most of his songs thus resonate with the style of Guru Ji's teachings. Ram Awadh Ji has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances across the nation and regards his performance at Chennai as the most memorable experience he has had. He lives in a family of 7 people with his four sons and a daughter to provide for. The highways of life aren't always easy, but to build around them, and to make a path for oneself is quite laudable. Ram Awadh Ji has created his journey with the music that he treasures, and he wishes to teach the coming generations with this beautiful art form that he treasures so dearly.

DEEPU MANJIRA

Contact Info - 7652099092

Role - Manjira

Purvanchal is one of the most cultural regions of India in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. It is the home to the cultural capital of the country, Banaras, and has seen many cultures come and go over the centuries that have passed. This place has become the hub for a mixed bag of every culture that stems from different parts of the country and is one of the most accepting places in the world. Only about eighty kilometers from Banaras is a city known as Ghazipur. This city is famous because of its high-quality production of opium poppy, among other things. Ghazipur was once a very important riverport for the British empire and its alluvial soil traversed from the Ganges makes this place all the more valuable in terms of crop production, but between all that lies the cultural part of this place that consists of various folk art forms. One such art form found here on our journey through the region is known as the Dhobiya dance. This dance has its music played by talented artists from multiple villages within the district. Meeting one of the leading groups was an honour as we got in touch with Jeevan Ram, who was born and brought up in a village and began his journey as a cultural artist at a very young age.







VARANASI

SAROJ VERMA & Group

A 57-year-old artist from Banaras has been learning music through Sohar and Kajri. At a young age, she began to learn folk and classical singing and took inspiration from Chhanulal Mishra and Swargiya Vagheshwari Devi. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in her craft and pursues it with soaring passion. Along with Bijay Sharma on the Harmonium, another coveted musician from Banaras, the group has a Shehnai player Ustad Fateh Ali Khan, who is a special artist and believes that the talent for playing shehnai is vanishing from the world and needs to be saved and Dholak player from the region, Pt. Subhash Kanaujiya. The whole group possesses extraordinary talent and experience in Indian classical and folk music forms. This bunch of artists has a tremendous ability to capture and galvanize their audiences. Their songs smoothly pick up with harmony along with the Shehnai as the beats of Dholak joined into the right amount of punch to every song. Saroj Verma's vocals would fit the combination so well that each and everyone present over there would lose themselves to the music. Despite all their struggles, they strive to keep developing their craft and dreams to write more books to educate future generations about folk and classical music in the future to see themselves succeed through the art that they love so much.

“A galvanizing accord of melodies.”

Uttar Pradesh has various parts, each with its speciality in culture, food, and people. These parts have different colours, architecture, and other things for which they are recognized nationwide. The one thing common among these is their rich history, which shows in most of their cultural art forms of music and dance.

The region known as Purvanchal is no different, especially the ‘cultural capital’ known as Kashi, or more commonly, Banaras. It has been a hub of all languages and religions like Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhism that were the most noticeable ones. These have persisted in their presence in the region during different periods in history. At present, people of all religions stay in the city in harmony and participate in many kinds of music and dance forms that originated here.

Primarily, in the city of temples, one such temple was built by Maharaja Jay Narayan Ghoshal, who was the ruler of the empire of Bengal in 1814. This temple is mesmerizing in its architecture and the art, showcased in the form of beautifully designed sculptures.

This location makes it one of the best and most serene places in the middle of the city to record folk musicians perform art forms such as Thumri, Sohar, and Chaiti. While making our journey through the city, we were fortunate enough to come across an artist, Saroj Verma, who is highly experienced and possesses an excellent vocal ability. She has been performing these art forms for a long time and has the experience of collaborating with many different instrumentalists.

As we spoke to her about these art forms, we learned new things and understood the musical culture of the place much more closely. She entered the premises along with Bijay Sharma on the Harmonium, another coveted musician from Banaras, and holds decades of experience. Accompanying them for the Shehnai was Ustaad Fateh Ali Khan, an artist who believes that the talent for playing Shehnai is vanishing and needs to be saved, along with one of the most knowledgeable artists and Dholak player from the region, Pt. Subhash Kanaujiya. The songs that groups encompass the traditional Purvanchal folk songs, out of the 2 tracks the one which we enjoyed the most was ‘Teen Vachan’, that goes like -

“Teen vachan mora maana,

(I want you to grant me these three promises)

Tab tose raaji balamwa,

(Then alone, I will agree to spend my life with you)

Jauva ki rotiya rahari ke daliya,

(Chapati made of Millet flour, and curry made with the pulse of Toor)

Tani yeke saan ke khiyayi da,

(I want our meals to have them both)

Tab tose raaji balamwa”

(Then alone, I will agree to spend my life with you)

The whole group possesses skilful talent and experience in Indian classical and folk music forms. It was quite evident as they slid into their practice right before beginning their performance. These are a bunch of artists who have tremendous ability to capture and galvanize their audiences. Their songs smoothly picked up with harmony along with Shehnai, as the beats of Dholak joined, giving every song the right amount of punch. Saroj Verma’s vocals would fit the combination so well, that everyone present would lose themselves to the music. It was an unforgettable experience.



SAROJ VERMA

Contact Info - 9838945119

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

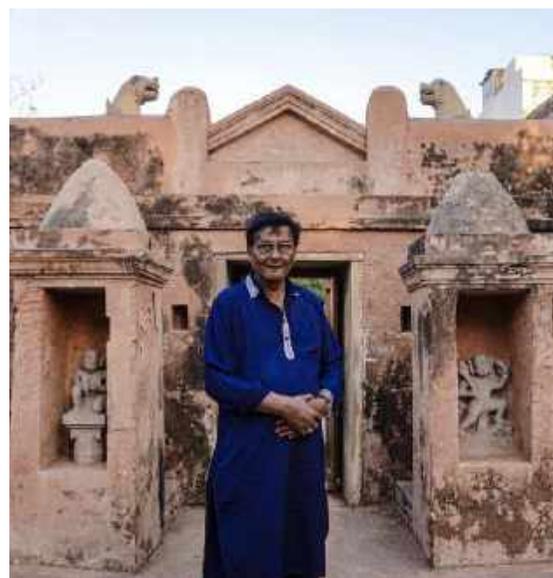
A 57-year-old artist from Banaras, Saroj, has learned music through Sohar and Kajri. At a young age, she began to learn folk and classical singing and got inspired by Chhanulal Mishra and Swargiya Vagheshwari Devi. She is a hardworking artist, who keeps learning every day to refine her craft, and perseveres the form with soaring passion. She considers Chhanulal Mishra and Swargiya Vagheshwari Devi as her Guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of her songs are hence analogous with their forms. A proficient writer of birth and death songs, Saroj also writes Sanskar apart from singing Kajri. She has performed in various locations within the country and is known to be a great artist who has worked for broadcasting networks like Akashwani Radio and Doordarshan A-grade, ICCR Panel, UP state programs, and ICCR. She lives in a family of 5 people and is blessed with two daughters and a son. Notwithstanding all her struggles, she strives to keep developing her craft and desires to write more books to educate future generations about folk and classical music to keep the art alive.

BIJAY SHARMA

Contact Info - 9792847451

Role - Harmonium

A 70-year-old artist from Banaras, Bijay Sharma, has been learning music through Chaiti and Kajri. At a very young age, he started learning music and got inspired by Iswar Lal Nepali. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. Bijay Sharma found a Guru in PT. Pashupati and speaks very profoundly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are hence, written in a similar style as that of Guru. Apart from being a Harmonium Player, he also knows how to play Accordion and Sitar and has performed in various locations within the country. He has delivered splendid performances at Taj Mahotsav and Ganga Mahotsav and has mesmerized the masses every time. Jogging through the memory lane, he regards his performance at Motihari, Bihar, as the most unforgettable experience. He lives in a family of 6 people and has two sons to provide for. Consequently, he also has to work as a Music Teacher to make ends meet. Notwithstanding the hardships, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to educate the coming generations with the art form he cherishes.



USTAAD FATEH ALI KHAN

Contact Info - 9335479639

Role - Flute

A 49-year-old artist from Banaras who learned through Thumri and Dadra, Ustaad Fateh Ali Khan, is a renowned Instrumentalist. He began to play when he was just a 7-year-old, taking inspiration from Ustad Pyaare Hussain Khan. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. Ustaad found his Guru in Sikandar Khan and Manawar Khan. He is fond of their teachings, and his work is majorly inspired by the work of these two great artists. He also possesses the knowledge of other instruments like Flute and Vocals apart from Shehnai. His performances are widely recognized in various locations within the country and Internationally like, the USA, Canada, and Europe. He has received the Indira Gandhi Surmani Award 2010 and Banaras Rattan 2013 for his extraordinary performances. For him, every performance has something special about them, and every experience is novel. He lives in a family of 5 people and is gifted with three daughters. Despite all his hardships, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to make Shehnai one of the most important and majorly played instruments in the coming future.

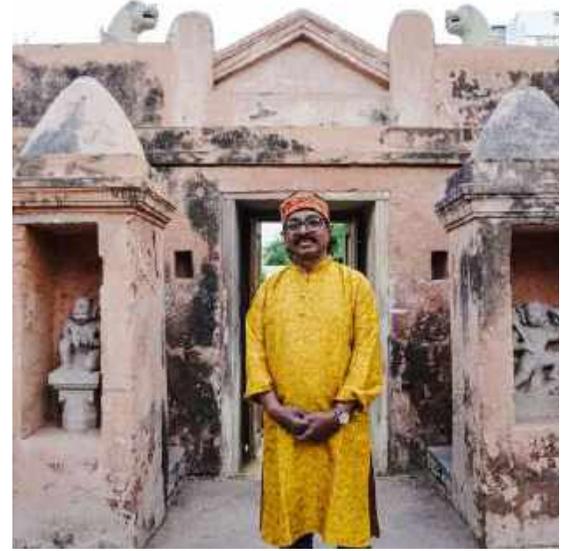


PT. SUBASH KANAUJIYA

Contact Info - 8317078144

Role - Tabla

Always tuned to the right beat, percussionist, this 48-year-old artist from Banaras, who learned music through Dholia nritya, Nautanki, Alha gaurau nritya, and other popular folk art forms. At a very young age, he began to play the percussion instrument, Dholak, by taking inspiration from his father, Lt. Basant Kanauya. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father and Banaras Mangal Prasad as his Guru and yearns to accommodate their expertise in his compositions. He can also play other musical instruments (nearly 29 instruments) apart from Dholak and has performed in various locations within the state and the country. He has received the title of 'Dholak Samrat' from the Rajyapal in 2003 and received 'Banaras Ratna' in 2014. He lives in a family of 6 people, and is gifted with two sons and two daughters. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to give his life to music, to the art that he cherishes the most.





📍 JAUNPUR

BABLU YADAV & Group

A 47-year-old artist from Banaras, Bablu has been learning music through art forms like Sohar. At the young age of 14, he began to sing in school. He took massive inspiration from artists like Ramdev Bullu, Hira Paras and Dr. Mannu Yadav. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He along with his groups sings various folk form of eastern Uttar Pradesh but masters in Sohar. Sohar is the song sung at the birth of a child - specifically the 'son'. As has been common in Indian society - the birth of a son is a time for celebration and the Sohar is popular in the entire Hindi belt. In the Bhojpuri dialect - Sohar - means feeling good. The same form has different names in different regions such as Somar, Sohla, Sohilo or Sogar. The songs are usually congratulatory in tone but some even describe the pains of pregnancy and childbirth. Under Bablu's leadership comes six brilliant and highly experienced instrumentalists who displayed unwavering finesse with their respective traditional instruments. These multitalented artists possess great vocal and musical abilities, especially the Dholak artist, Subhash Ji, who is also a farmer. Despite having to handle a farm of wheat and different kinds of vegetables, he has never let himself get distracted from practising music. This kind of commitment can be seen in other percussionists such as Daroga Ram, Lavkush Prasad, Ashok Kumar, and Santosh Kumar, all of whom can play each and every percussion instrument required to play their songs.

“Decoding the unorthodox with exuberance.”

Folk music has been the traditional way of expressing various emotions that one feels during occasions of each kind; love, wedding, anniversaries, celebrating childbirth, or even mourning the death of a loved one. The melodies that are sung by the common folk have been passed on to each generation since humans began to form communities.

Similar ways of communication have been observed in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which is seen as the cultural capital of the country due to the rich history that it has seen over the centuries passed by. As previously ruled by the Hindus and eventually getting accommodated into the Mughal dynasty when they ruled over the Indian lands, the culture here has been a mixture of various flavours and this can be observed in multiple forms of folk music that has developed during these historical developments. Within the borders of this state lies the city of Kashi, or as it is commonly known nowadays, Banaras. This city is a mesmerizing overlap of many cultures and various art forms that represent these cultures and it is bound to create artists that are talented and masterful in their display of these art forms. One such artist is Bablu Bawra from Mirzapur, who is one of the most versatile artists and cheerful human beings that one can have the opportunity to meet during the exploration of talents within Uttar Pradesh.

Bablu Bawra, along with his group of various talented instrumentalists, agreed to meet us at the Gurudham Temple, which is an amazingly designed structure built in 1814 by Maharaja Jay Narayan Ghoshal, who used to rule the Bengali Empire during the early 19th century. This intelligently designed temple has eight courtyards that surround the temple from all directions and has eight different entrances. This made it incredibly easy for us to find picturesque locations within the confines of the temple to record the musical performance of his group.

Bablu Bawra is a highly open-minded and creative artist who does not shy away from portraying unorthodox characters that have the potential to blow your mind and make yourself move along with the beats of his music and his awe-inspiring vocal ability. His ability to capture the attention of his audiences through his expressive ‘ada’ or style during his performances is something that helps him deliver in an outstanding manner. We were moved by his unbelievably encapsulating display of transgender dancers that visit one’s place after a child is born in order to celebrate the birth.

“Mukh dekh khush Jaso maiyya,

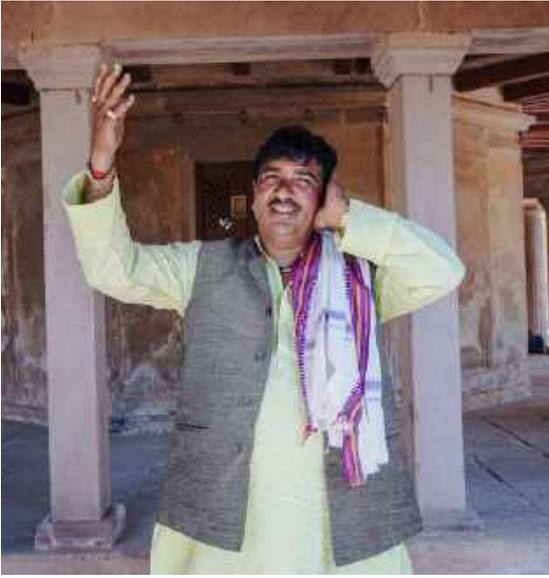
(Mother Yashoda’s filled with joy the moment she caught a glimpse of Kanha)

Te janme Kanhaiya”

(Kanha has taken birth)

Under his leadership came six brilliant and highly experienced instrumentalists who displayed unwavering finesse with their respective traditional instruments. These multitalented artists possess great vocal and musical abilities, especially the Dholak artist, Subhash Ji, who is also a farmer. Despite having to handle a farm of wheat and different kinds of vegetables, he has never let himself get distracted from practising music. This kind of commitment can be seen in other percussionists such as Daroga Ram, Lavkush Prasad, Ashok Kumar, and Santosh Kumar, all of whom can play each and every percussion instrument required to play their songs. These instruments include simple-looking yet quite technical instruments like Khartaal, Manjira, and Jhaanjh.

All of them come from humble backgrounds and earn very little through their performances even though they are recognized by most of the organizations that conduct folk music festivals. Bablu Bawra himself is one of the most humble artists within the region and shows incredible promise while portraying different characters in his performances, engaging the audience in the most vivid fashion. Such remarkable abilities of this group caught our eye once and forever and we couldn’t fathom what we were experiencing without moving with the music ourselves. One of the most awe-inspiring displays of unorthodox characters being acted out during a musical performance was observed and being the forte of this group, they truly have a long way forward within the folk music spectrum.



BABLU YADAV

Contact Info - 9935261715

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

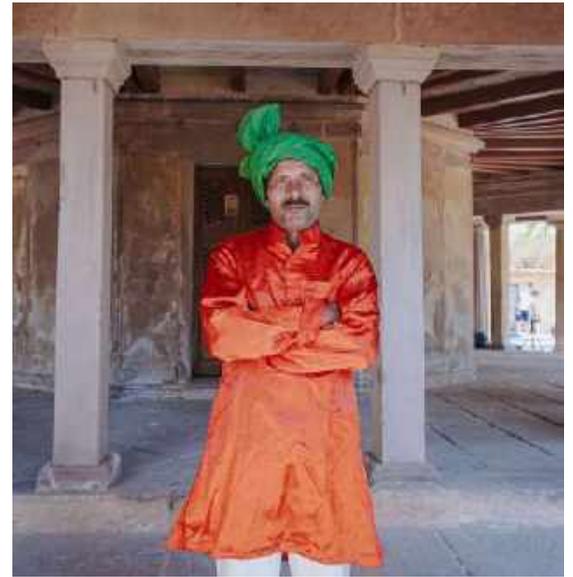
A 47-year-old artist from Banaras, Bablu has been learning music through art forms like Sohar. At the young age of 14, he began to sing in school. He took massive inspiration from artists like Ramdev Bullu, Hira Paras, and Dr. Mannu Yadav. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. Most of his songs are hence analogous with their forms. He also believes that the art of music transpired to him from his family lineage, and he decided to take it forward for all his life with sheer persistence and dedication. When he was a child, he would try imitating the elders and senior artists and thus picked up the will to learn music and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play Khartaal apart from vocals and has performed in various locations around the country. He has pulled off brilliant performances at different music festivals in Mumbai, Kolkata, Silchar, and Banaras and has catered amazingly to many audiences. When asked, he regards his performance at the Banaras Deepwali as the most memorable experience due to the 'once more' chants by the audience in the presence of Prime Minister Modi.

DAROGA RAM

Contact Info - 9935261715

Role - Khartaal

A 40-year-old artist from Banaras, Daroga Ram, has been learning music through various folk forms native to the Uttar Pradesh region. He began to take inspiration to learn folk forms such as Sohar, Kajri, and Keherwa at a very young age when he heard the ritualistic spiritual music played with passion in his village. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Bablu Yadav as his guru in music and speaks very highly of his teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are, thus, made to be in a similar style. When he was a child, he would try to imitate the elders of his village, and hence he developed the will to learn music and never stopped. He also knows how to play Jhaal and Manjira apart from Khartaal and has an excellent backing vocal ability. He has performed in various locations within the country. He has also pulled off brilliant performances at many cultural festivals to amaze the crowds and regards his performance at Banaras Deepwali as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of nine people and has five daughters and a married son. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to educate his audience about this artform.



SUBHASH

Contact Info - 9935261715

Role - Dholak

A 35-year-old artist from Banaras, Subhash has been learning music through the traditional art forms like Kajri, Sohar, and Chaiti. From a very young age, he began to learn music by taking inspiration from Bablu Yadav. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Bablu Yadav as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in the field of music. He also believes that he inherited music from his family lineage. When he was a child, he would try to imitate the elders of his village as they played and sang bhajans and thus picked up the will to sing and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play Tasha apart from Jodi and has performed in various locations within the country. He has received rousing responses from his audiences and pulled off brilliant performances at many festivals only to galvanize the crowds. He lives in a family of ten people and has two sons and two daughters. Thus, he also has to work as a farmer and a tractor driver to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to educate his audience about this artform. Someday in the future, he sees himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.

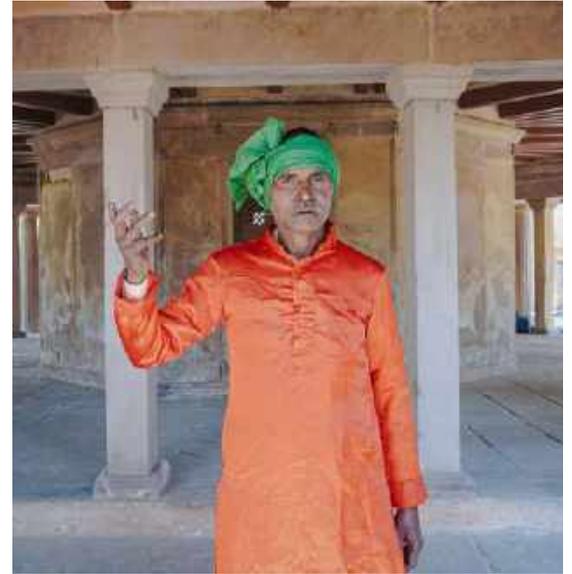


BACHELAL MASTER

Contact Info - 7348057246

Role - Harmonium

A 54-year-old artist from Banaras, Bachelal Ji has been learning music through various art forms native to Uttar Pradesh. These forms, known as Sanskaar Geet hold many categories from which Sohar is very popular. At a young age, he began to learn music taking inspiration from the elders of his village. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Guru Naruktam as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are, thus, made to be in a similar style. He is an expert in Harmonium and has performed in various locations within the state and country like Lucknow and Mumbai. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various rang manchis to dazzle the crowds, and regards his performance at Mumbai as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 5 people and has two daughters and a son. Thus, he also has to work as a farmer to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to live his life peacefully and someday, in the future, to see himself succeed through the art that he strives for.

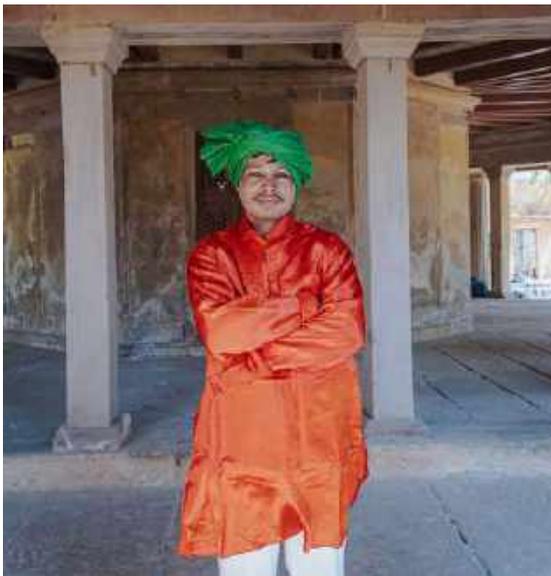


LAVKUSH PRASAD

Contact Info - 8756242916

Role - Manjira

A 42-year-old artist, Lavkush Prasad, has been learning music through Biraha, Sohar. For the last 19 years, he has been into music and took inspiration from Late. Bholaram. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Bholaram as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings and their caliber in music. Most of his songs are made to be in a similar style. He also knows how to sing apart from playing manjira and has performed in various locations within the state and the country like Balia, Ghazipur, Gorakhpur, Kolkata, Mumbai. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance at Mumbai as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 6 people and has four daughters. Thus, he also has to work as a farmer to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to keep pursuing music and someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art which he treasures like his life.

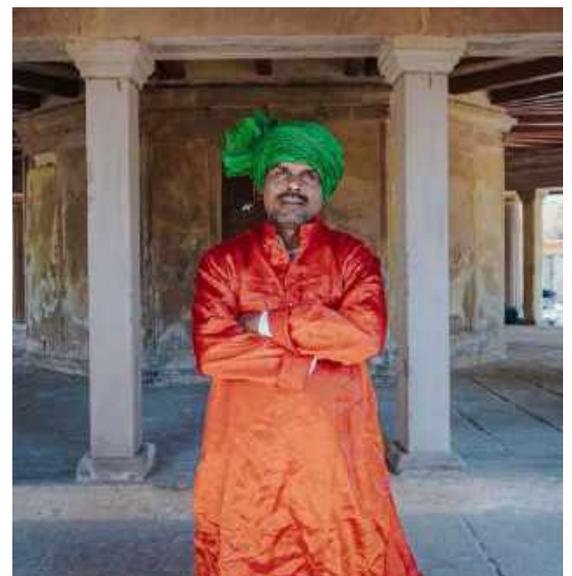


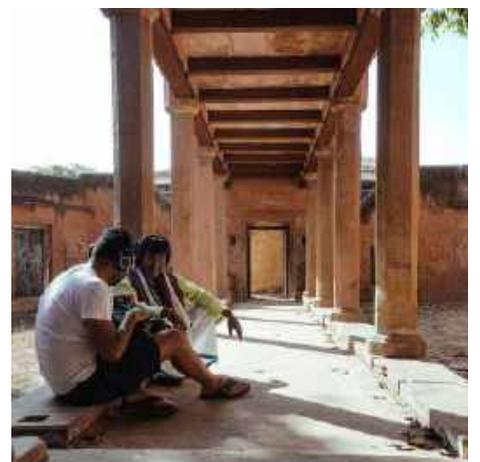
SANTOSH KUMAR

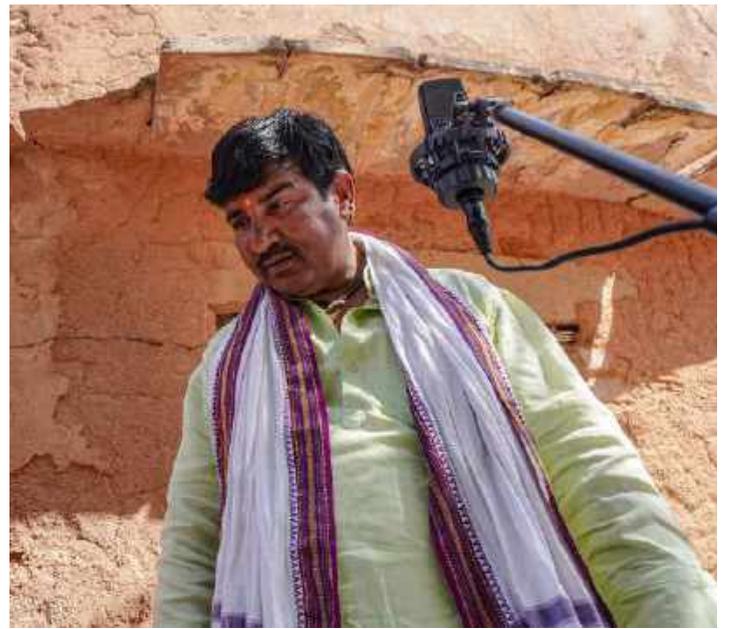
Contact Info - 9918892282

Role - Khartal

A 38-year-old artist from the Harijan community has been learning music through Biraha and Sohar. He began to learn music by taking inspiration from classical and folk music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Bablu Yadav as his guru speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are made to be in a similar style. He also knows how to sing apart from playing kartaal and has performed in various locations within the state. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various music shows and events to galvanize the crowds and regards his performance at Banaras as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 7 people and has three sons and two daughters. Thus, he also has to work as a farmer to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to stay forever with music and, someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.









 MIRZAPUR

URMILA SRIVASTAVA *& Group*

Kajri is sung in a large region - Mirzapur is considered the real home of the Kajri. According to a folk tale of Mirzapur - there was a woman called Kajli whose husband was in a distant land. Monsoon arrived and the separation became unbearable, she started crying at the feet of the Kajmal Goddess. These cries took the form of the popular Kajri songs. There are two forms of Kajri singing in UP - one within which it is sung on a performance platform and the other when it is sung by women on monsoon evenings while dancing in a semi-circle- this is known as the 'Dhummuniya Kajri'. Accompanying her is Sufia Begum on backing vocals, Ajay Chowdhary on Dholak, Ram Garib Das on Harmonium and Shree Prakash Srivastava on Manjeera. This 72-year-old artist from Mirzapur has been learning music through Kajri, Banni, Sohar and other art forms. She began to learn music by taking inspiration from the land of Mirzapur, which she feels inspires her to sing. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. She considers Smt. Nalini Kalelkar and Smt Amita Dutt as her gurus, and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus sung to be in a similar style. She has performed in various locations within the state and the country and also got the chance to perform in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Mauritius and Bhutan. She has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals only to dazzle the crowds.

“Weaving of Mirzapuri Kajri.”

One of the best-known singers of the region, Urmila ji is known especially for her Kajris (a form of singing popular in the monsoon season), though her repertoire is very vast. She has released her own cassettes and is also invited widely to sing at formal and informal gatherings - mostly in urban settings. She has a very gentle & subtle style of singing with minimal body movements but a lot of expressions.

One of the most popular and well-known forms of folk music - Kajris are often sung by classical and semi-classical musicians. The word Kajri is possibly a derivative of Kajal - meaning Kohl or Black. In a country of sizzling hot summers - the black monsoon clouds bring with them relief and great joy - with a need to sing out loud. This is the moment for the Kajri to be sung.

Even though Kajri is sung in a large region - Mirzapur is considered the real home of the Kajri. According to a folk tale of Mirzapur - there was a woman called Kajli whose husband was in a distant land. Monsoon arrived and the separation became unbearable, she started crying at the feet of the Kajmal Goddess. These cries took the form of the popular Kajri songs. There are two forms of Kajri singing in Uttar Pradesh - one within which it is sung on a performance platform and the other when it is sung by women on monsoon evenings while dancing in a semi-circle- this is known as the ‘Dhunmuniya Kajri’. Accompanying her is Sufia Begum on backing vocals, Ajay Chowdhary on Dholak, Ram Garib Das on Harmonium and Shree Prakash Srivastava on Manjeera.

At the age of fifteen, the shadow of the parents rose from the head. The responsibility of the three innocent brothers was on their shoulders. Then as the elder sister, she started to work in fields and started writing a new chapter. Folk song singer Urmila Srivastava, who has kept the limelight of her mother with the fragrance of music culture and culture of her soil, got her singing done not only in the country but also in the foreign land. She has given a lot of applause with wah-wah by singing the melodious songs.

At All India Bhojpuri Sammelan in 1992, she has received hundreds of honour letters including ‘Kajri Sammani’ in Delhi, Bhikhari Thakur Samman in World Bhojpuri Sammelan in Mumbai, Bhojpuri Council Kolkata in West Bengal, ‘Kokil’ and Mahendra Mishra Puradiya Samman in 2009 on Mauritius soil. Urmila Srivastava, who has earned a reputation as a Kajri singer, specializes in singing Devi songs, Dadra, Kaharwa, Purvi, Chaiti, Holi, Jhumar, Khemta, Banni-Banna, Sohar, Lachari and Videsiya.

At the age of fifteen, both her parents left. The struggle started from there. Her father was a minor employee in the bank. After the parents left, the responsibility of raising three younger brothers suddenly came to her head. During this time, she learnt folk music by heart and ran the family from the grain produced in the fields. Urmila said that she also suffered injuries while ploughing the field with oxen. She educated her three brothers and got their weddings done on their own. In 1972, she got an opportunity to teach at Arya Kanya Inter College.

With her strength and motivation of preventing the folk songs genre from fading away, she enthralled the audience in Dubai, Bhutan, Mauritius and Singapore, captivating the audience with the magic of their songs in various provinces of the country. Apna Utsav (Mumbai), Bhojpuri Sammelan Kolkata, Teej Festival Chandigarh, North Indian Lokotsav (Mumbai), Haryana 25th Birth Anniversary, Kumbh Mela (Haridwar), Gwalior Fair, Ramayana Fair, Lokranjan Fair (Jodhpur), Alap Festival Hyderabad, Bhopal Utsav Mela, she got success in winning the hearts of people with her singing.

For over three decades, Urmila Srivastava has been a high performer of All India Radio and Doordarshan. There are dozens of audio cassettes in the Indian Shopping Festival Dubai, which feature programs at 16 venues in the Dubai market.

The whole group possesses amazing talent and experience in Indian classical as well and folk music forms. This bunch of artists help tremendous ability to capture and galvanize their audiences. Their songs smoothly picked up with the harmony along with the Shehnai as the beats of the Dholak joined into the right amount of punch to each and every song. Urmila’s vocals would fit the combination so well that each and everyone present over there would lose themselves to the music. Despite all their struggles they strive to keep developing their craft and dreams to write more books to educate future generations about folk and classical music in the future to see themselves succeed through the art that they love so much.



URMILA SRIVASTAVA

Contact Info - 9794705119

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

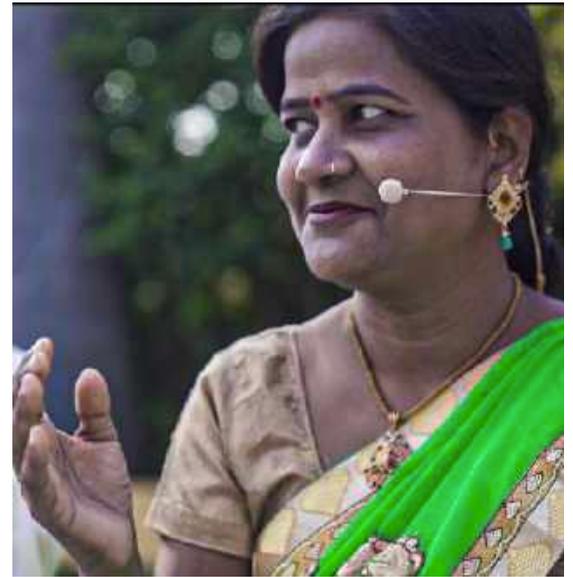
A 72-year-old artist from Banaras has been learning music through Kajri, Banni, Sohar and other art forms. She began to learn music by taking inspiration from the land of Mirzapur, which she feels inspires her to sing. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. She considers Smt. Nalini Kalelkar and Smt Amita Dutt as her gurus, and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus sung to be in a similar style. She has performed in various locations within the state and the country and also got the chance to perform in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Mauritius and Bhutan. She has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals only to dazzle the crowds. She lives in a family of 5 people and has 2 sons and a daughter. Thus, she also has to work as a professor in order to make ends meet. Despite all her struggles she strives to keep developing her craft and dreams to make a comeback again on the stage someday in the future to see herself succeed through the art that she loves so much.

SHAILA AKA SUFIYA BEGUM

Contact Info - 6393496960

Role - Backing Vocals

A 38-year-old artist has been learning music through Kajri. Since childhood she has that love for music which made her learn music, her inspiration was her team leader Urmila ji. She has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. She considers Urmila ji as her guru and speaks very highly of her teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus sung to be in a similar style. She also knows how to sing Bhajans and other lok geet apart from Kajri and has performed in various locations like Delhi, Bombay, Lucknow and Allahabad etc,. She has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals only to dazzle the crowds. She lives in a family of 4 people and has 2 sons. Thus, she also owns a salon in order to make ends meet. Despite all her struggles he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to continue music all her life and, someday in the future to see herself succeed through the art that she loves so much.

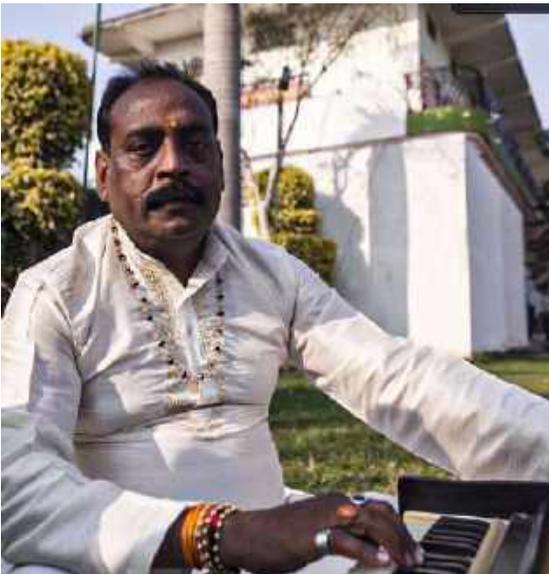


SHIVLAL GUPTA

Contact Info - 9935042840

Role - Harmonium

A 47-year-old artist Shivlal Gupta has been learning music through Kajri and other lok geet. At a young he used to see his parents sing and that how he began to learn music by taking inspiration from them. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Shri Ramdhari Gupta, Dwarkanath Arahari, and Maqbool Ustad Ji as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his parents who had a natural desire for mastering the art of singing. He also knows how to sing kajri apart from playing Harmonium and has performed in various locations within the state and the country like Banaras, Allahabad, Mumbai etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances at different music festivals only to amaze the crowds. He lives in a family of 6 people and has 2 daughters and 2 sons. Thus, he also has to work as a lawyer in order to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to performe kajri on international stage, someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.



RAHUL KUMAR

Contact Info - 9140252662

Role - Tabla

A 35-year-old artist Rahul Kumar, has been learning music through Classical and Folk art forms. At a young he began to play Tabla by taking inspiration from his mother and grandfather who was a classical singer. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers Prithvi Kumar Narang as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his mother who had a natural desire for mastering the art of singing. He also knows how to sing Classical and Folk songs apart from playing Tabla and has performed in various locations within the state and the country like Mumbai, Delhi, Rajasthan etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances at music events only to galvanize the crowds. He lives with his father. Thus, he only performs music in order to meet his daily needs. Despite all his struggles he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to give all his life to music, and someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.

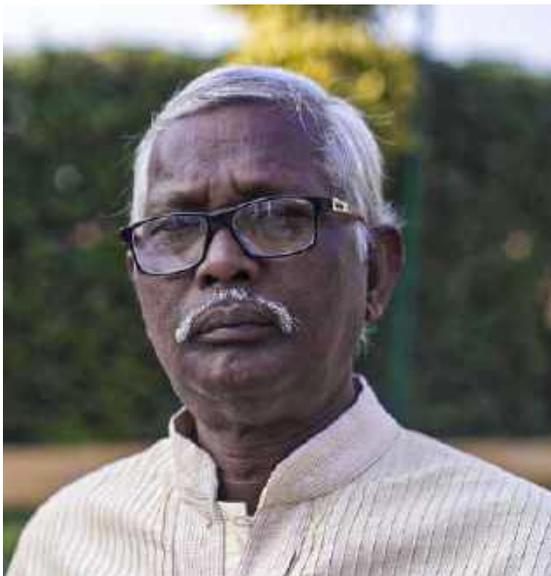


PANCHAM RAM GAUTAM

Contact Info - 7800876358

Role - Dholak

A 58-year-old artist Pancham ji has been learning music through folk. At a young he began to play dholak by taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Mithai Lal Ji and Abdul Hakim Khan as his gurus and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He also knows how to sing classical and folk songs apart from playing dholak and has performed in various locations within the state and the country like Bombay, Delhi, Banaras, Bihar etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various music shows only to dazzle the crowds and regards all his performance as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of 7 people and has 2 sons and 3 daughters etc. Thus, he also has to own a tea stall in order to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.



BANKE LAL

Contact Info - 8127121247

Role - Shehnai

A 45-year-old artist Banke Lal has been learning music through Folk Music. At a young he began to play Shehnai by taking inspiration from his grandfather. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Ustad Sannu Khan as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his grandfather who had a natural talent for mastering the art of singing. He has performed in various locations within the state and the country like Delhi, Mumbai, Chandigarh and Lucknow. He has pulled off brilliant performances at various music festivals only to galvanize the crowds. He lives in a family of 9 people and has 4 sons and 3 daughters. Despite all his struggles he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to play shehnai till his last breath, and someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art.





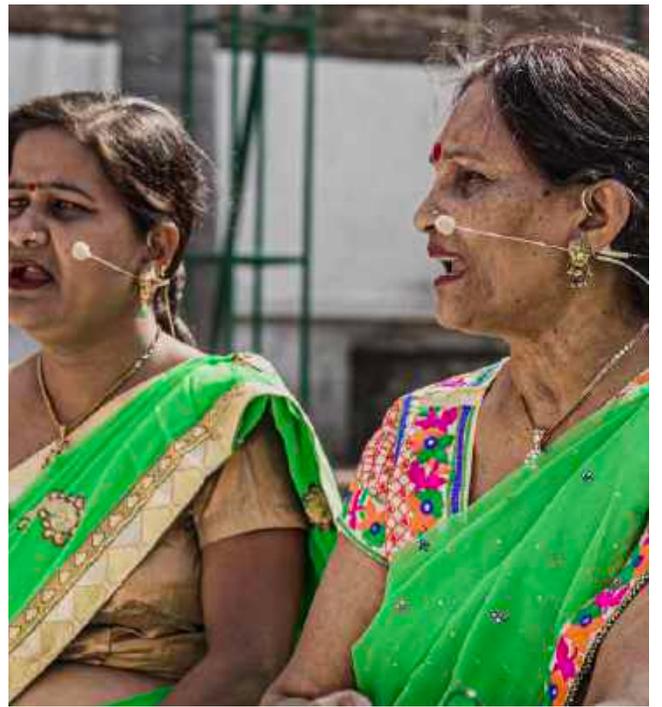
PAPPU LAL

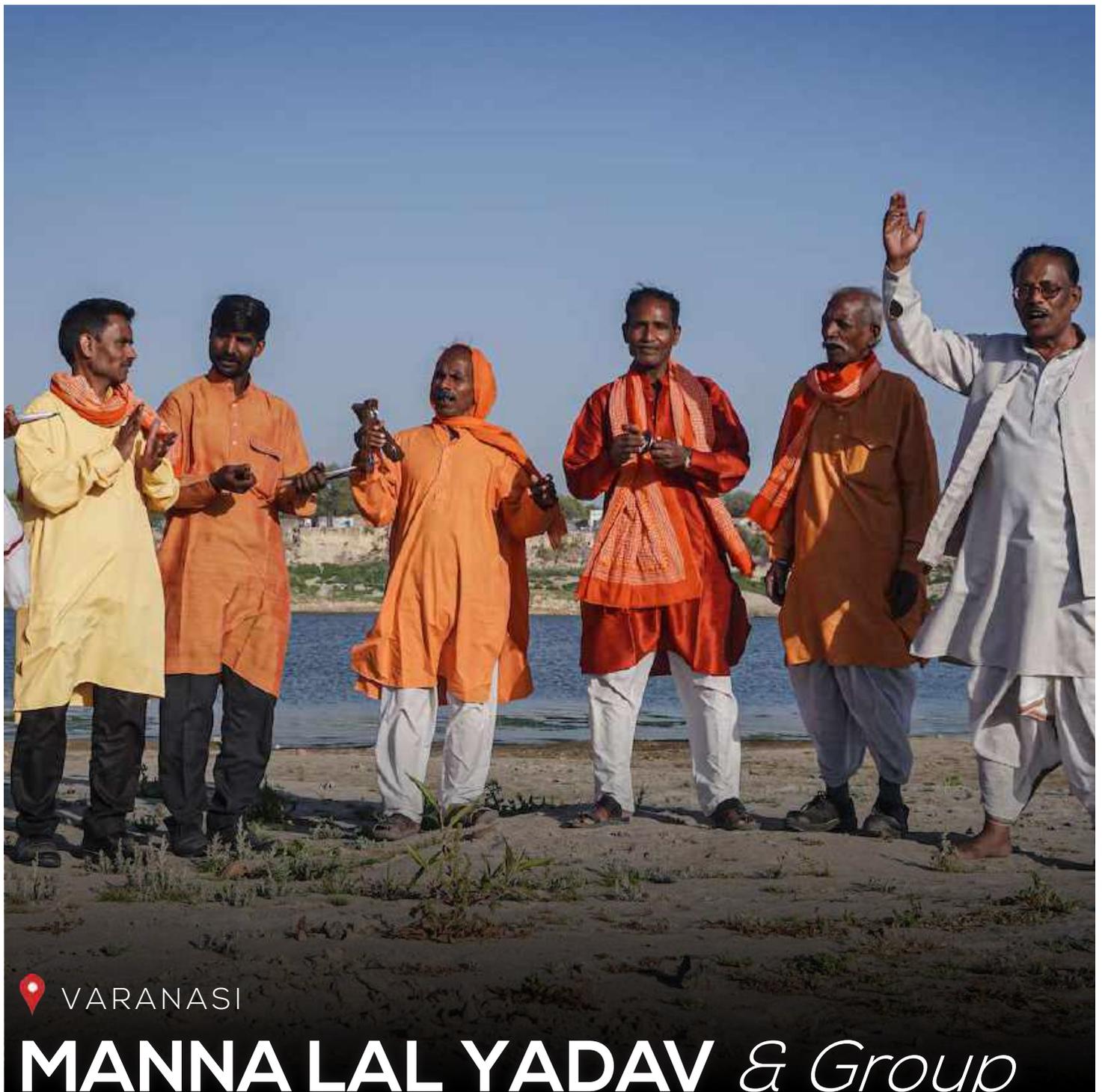
Contact Info - 9792846682

Role - Manjira

A 52-year-old artist from Pappu Lal has been learning music through Kajri Artform. At a young he has been learning music by taking inspiration from his father. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Pancham Ram as his guru and speaks very highly of their teachings as well as caliber in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He has pulled of brilliant performances at various music events only to dazzle the crowds. He lives in a family of 8 people and has 2 sons and 2 daughters. Thus, his only source of income is music. Despite all his struggles he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to live by music and, someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art for which he strives in his life.







VARANASI

MANNA LAL YADAV & Group

Manna Lal Yadav, along with his brother Jawaharlal Yadav performs and sings around the whole country representing the age-old Bhojpuri folk art forms such as Sohar, Biraha, and Kajri. Both of them have their beliefs aligned towards preserving and promoting these art forms through their musical performances that have the potential to inspire the youth towards following a similar path forward. They have been singing and performing in various events for many decades now and began learning music at a very young age of 8 years. Getting inspired by their Guru, Munshi Ram Yadav, they have made a mark in the field of music through their live broadcast at Akashwani since 1976. Along with an ensemble of five incredibly talented musicians, Manna Lal and Jawahar Lal, despite being brothers, had a very contrasting demeanor and signified the Yin and Yang of their group. Manna Lal is a patient and humble artist that he is, and Jawahar Lal being an individual with a highly energetic and communicative personality when it came to interactions. The group sings a lot of Nirgun geet very profoundly. The group has percussionists, who are highly experienced and also have the ability to support the vocalists with a Chorus. Raju plays the Khartaal, Paras Nath plays Jhaal, and the highly respected elder among them Telho plays the Manjira. Supporting these highly trained artists, Lal Ji, with his ability to help and, to the chorus and excellence with the music on the Harmonium. Despite all their struggles, they strive to keep developing their craft and dreams to educate their audience about this artform.

“Songs of love and separation by the Ganges.”

The city of Banaras is one of the most ancient, cultural and spiritual hubs of India. Previously known as Kashi and home to various temples, Mosques, and Monasteries, this place is where a huge part of the Indian population comes in search of the achievement of Nirvana. This city is not just popular among Indians, but also internationally renowned as a place to visit for a spiralling and satisfying spiritual journey.

The place, therefore, has attracted many cultural art forms and musical aficionados to live within the city’s hustle and bustle to learn and grow as artists. The streets of Banaras themselves never go silent. It is said that life in Banaras never dies, and rightly so, being home to such talented artistic folk musicians, this place is one of the loudest places in the country. As you move into the streets, you can hear the bells ringing in old temples built in every nook and corner. The Ghats have a different vibe altogether, as they lie peacefully on the bank of river Ganga and yet attract a great crowd due to their picturesque beauty.

Beside the Assi Ghat and all of the ghats of Banaras, is the riverbank that looks like a beach filled with patches of grass due to its fertile nature. One such area on the river banks is called the ‘Gadwa Ghat’ and this is where we met the much-coveted folk music group of Banaras lead by Manna Lal Yadav. Along with his brother, Jawaharlal Yadav, he performs and sings around the whole country, representing the Bhojpuri folk art forms such as Sohar, Biraha, and Kajri.

Both of them have their beliefs aligned towards preserving and promoting these art forms through their musical performances with the potential to inspire the youth towards following a similar path forward. They have been singing and performing in various events for many decades now and began learning music at a very young age of 8 years. Getting inspired by their Guru Munshi Ram Yadav, they have made a mark in the field of music through their live broadcast at Akashwani since 1976.

Along with an ensemble of five incredibly talented musicians, they came towards the site of recording, walking along the riverbank in their colourful traditional dress. Manna Lal and Jawahar Lal, despite being brothers, had a very contrasting demeanour and signified the Yin and Yang of their group. Manna Lal, being the patient and humble artist that he is, and Jawahar Lal being an individual with a highly energetic as well as communicative personality when it came to handling interactions.

Their group had percussionists, who were highly experienced and could support the vocalists with a Chorus. Raju, who would play the Khartaal, Paras Nath, who would play Jhaal, and the highly respected elder among them, Telho Ji, who would play the Manjira. Supporting these highly trained artists was Lal Ji, with his ability to help and excellence in music on the Harmonium. Ravi Prakash Yadav, son of Manna Lal Ji, was the one to take up the responsibility of handling all their interaction while being a part of the chorus group himself. When he guided them towards the set that we had created to record them right next to the river, we could see how cheerful they were in anticipation of presenting us with their music.

As they began performing, we could see the look of passion on Manna Lal’s face as he gave his best as he would in every song. Their Kajri was followed by a long and yet tantalizing display of Biraha that lasted over eight minutes. The vocals of both the brothers came in complete harmony with the Harmonium and the percussions as they recited stories of various gods and goddesses in uplifting voices by the river, on the banks of Ganga, it was a moment to remember and they began with the song, which goes like -

“Gaave ganga ke kinare jogi sanyasi,
(Saints and hermits sing at the banks of Ganges)

Bhole baba ke nagariya dhanya baye kashi,
(Lord Shiva’s city, Kashi is blessed)

Kashi me ganga ki mahima badi nyari”
(Ganges is highly praised in Kashi)



MANNA LAL YADAV

Contact Info - 7499559027

Role - Team Leader/ Vocals

A very talented 69-year-old artist has been learning music through Bhojpuri art forms like- Khemta, Kajri, Kewahrwa, Dadra, Chhapri, and Jatsar. At a young age, he began to take inspiration from classical music and movies and eventually met his guru. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Munshi Ram Yadav and Akhadapattu Guru as his gurus who speak very highly of their teachings and achievements in music. Most of his songs are sung in a similar style. He also knows how to play Khartaal, Harmonium, and Dholak apart from Vocals and has performed in various locations within the country like Lucknow, Patna, Chhapra, Bhagalpur, Rampur, etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances at many music festivals and rallies only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance in front of former chief minister Chaudhary Charan Singh as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of six people and has three sons and a daughter. Thus, he also has a textile business to make ends meet. Notwithstanding all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and wants to pass on the treasure of music to his future generations, and dreams to see himself succeed through the art .

JAWAHAR LAL YADAV

Contact Info - 9415684097

Role - Vocals

A 66-year-old phenomenal artist has been learning music through Khemta, Kajri, Kewahrwa, Dadra, Chhapri, Jatsar. At a young age, he began to take inspiration from classical music and movies and eventually met his guru. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Munshi Ram Yadav and Akhadapattu Guru as his gurus who speak very highly of their teachings and achievements in music. Most of his songs are sung in a similar style. He also knows how to play Khartaal, Harmonium, and Dholak apart from Vocals and has performed in various locations within the country like Lucknow, Patna, Chhapra, Bhagalpur, Rampur, etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances at many music festivals and rallies only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance in front of former chief minister Chaudhary Charan Singh as the most memorable experience. He lives in a family of six people and has three sons and a daughter. Thus, he also has a textile business to make ends meet. Notwithstanding all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and wants to pass on the treasure of music to his future generations, and dreams to see himself succeed through the art that he strive for.

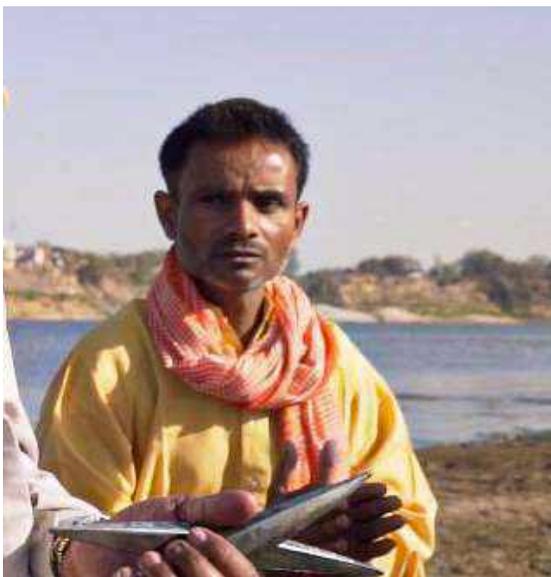


RAVI PRAKASH YADAV

Contact Info - 6386264363

Role - Chorus

A 34-year-old talented artist has been learning music through Bhojpuri music. At a very young age, he got inspired by his father (Manna Lal Yadav) and uncle (Jawahar Lal Yadav) and began learning music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his father who has a natural talent for mastering the art of singing and playing Khartaal and Jhaal. When he was a child, he would imitate his father and started to sing and never stopped learning. He lives in a family of four people and has a daughter and a son. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to open his music institute. Someday in the future, he sees himself succeed through the art that he loves so much. He also knows how to play Khartaal, Harmonium, and Dholak apart from Vocals and has performed in various locations within the country like Lucknow, Patna, Chhapra, Bhagalpur, Rampur, etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances at many music festivals and rallies only to dazzle the crowds.

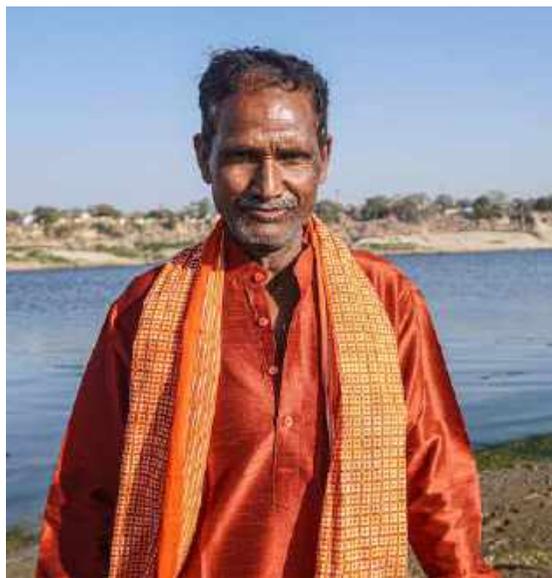
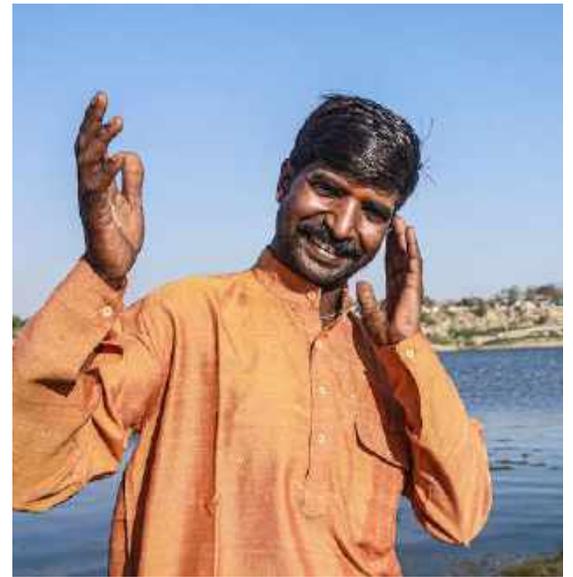


RAJU

Contact Info - 7523960493

Role - Dholak

A 32-year-old talented artist from Manna Lal's group has been learning music through classical and folk art forms. At the young age of 10, he began to play dholak by taking inspiration from his father who used to play dholak. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers his father as his guru speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in music. Most of his songs are made to be in a similar style. He also believes that music has been passed on to him from his father, who had a natural talent for mastering the art of playing dholak. When he was a child, he would imitate his father and thus picked up the dholak and never stopped learning. He also knows how to play Kartal and jhaal apart from dholak and has performed in various locations. He has pulled off brilliant performances at music events only to dazzle the crowds. He lives in a family of six people and has two daughters and parents. Thus, he also has to work as a barber to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to educate his audience about this artform. Someday in the future, he sees himself succeed through the art that keeps him going.



LAL JI

Contact Info - 9252181349

Role - Harmonium

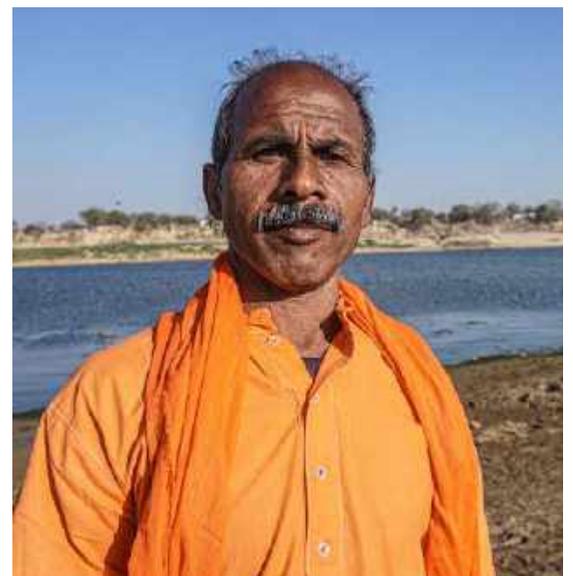
A 61-year-old artist from the Harijan community has been learning music through Bhojpuri and Biraha artforms. He began to play harmonium by taking inspiration from folk music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with tremendous passion. He considers Ganga master as his guru speaks very highly of their teachings and caliber in music. Most of his songs are sung in a similar style. He has performed in various locations within the state and the country, like Allahabad, Delhi, Jodhpur, Madhya Pradesh, etc. He has pulled off brilliant performances at different music festivals with Manna Lal Ji and has catered amazingly to many audiences. He lives in a family of seven people and has a son, two daughters, and two grandchildren. Thus, he also has to work as a farmer to make ends meet. Despite all his hardships he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.

PARAS NATH

Contact Info - 7080376025

Role - Jhaal

A 55-year-old artist from the Vind community has been learning music through classical and folk art forms. He began to learn music by taking inspiration from his guru Kashi Kavi Ji. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with sumptuous passion. He considers Kashi Kavi Ji as his guru speaks very highly of their teachings as well as achievements in the field of music. Most of his songs are thus made to be in a similar style. He also knows how to sing apart from playing Jhaal and has performed in various locations within the state like Mirzapur, Banaras, and Chandauli. He has pulled off brilliant performances at music events only to dazzle the crowds and regards his performance at Mirzapur as the most memorable experience, as the crowd went crazy when his group performed kajri. He lives in a family of six people and has a son, two daughters, and a father. Thus, he also has to work as a farmer to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to continue his love for music and someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art.





TELHO

Contact Info - 7499559027

Role - Manjira

A 76-year-old artist from the Harijan community has been learning music through Biraha, Bhojpuri artform, and classical music. He has been working hard towards achieving mastery in his craft and pursues it with soaring passion. He considers his group leader Manna Lal as his guru speaks very highly of their teachings and achievements in music. Most of his songs are made to be in a similar style. He can also sing apart from playing manjira and has performed in various locations within the state and the country and got an opportunity to perform on an international stage. He has pulled off brilliant performances at music shows only to amaze the crowds. He lives in a family of three people and has a daughter. Thus, he only performs music to make ends meet. Despite all his struggles, he strives to keep developing his craft and dreams to get some financial support someday in the future to see himself succeed through the art that he loves so much.









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