

# Dalton Wed@7:30pm: *Live and Interactive!*

**2018–2019 Season**  
**303rd Concert**

Wednesday 13 February 2019

Dalton Center Recital Hall

7:30 p.m.

*Pre-Concert talk with Dr. Robert White at 7 p.m.*

**ARJUN VERMA, Sitar**  
**NITIN MATTA, Tabla**

*Program to be announced from stage.*

This concert is a **Bullock Performance Institute** (BPI) presentation. BPI events are made possible through the cooperation and support of several community fine arts units: the Donald P. Bullock Music Performance Institute; the Western Michigan University College of Fine Arts and School of Music; and WMU's chapters of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia and Sigma Alpha Iota music fraternities.

Building emergencies will be indicated by flashing lights and spoken announcement within the seating area. If the notification is for fire, please exit the building immediately. The tornado safe area in Dalton Center is along the lockers in the brick hallway to your left as you exit to the lobby behind you. In any emergency, walk—do not run—to the nearest exit. Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during the performance. Because of legal issues, any video or audio recording of this performance is forbidden without prior consent from the School of Music. Thank you for your cooperation.

## **BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

**to Indian classical and Arjun's teacher, Ali Akbar Khan**

Among the classical music traditions of the world, North Indian classical music is one of the heavyweights. Its highly sophisticated and detailed structure dates back several millennia, yet within its modern practice, it allows generous freedom for improvisation as well.

One of this tradition's most legendary musicians was sarode player Ali Akbar Khan, who was one of the main ambassadors of this music to the western world in the 20th century, along with his contemporary, sitar player Ravi Shankar, who was trained by Ali Akbar Khan's father.

When Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan first began touring the West in the 1950s, North Indian classical music was little known outside of India. By the time these two musical emissaries finished their illustrious careers, North Indian classical music was firmly established on the worldwide stage as one of the great musical traditions of the world, and it had indelibly affected countless listeners and musicians throughout the world—influencing the likes of The Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, The Byrds, Truth Hurts, M.I.A, John Coltrane, Norah Jones, John McLaughlin, and many, many others.

North Indian classical music, one of the deep and sophisticated musical traditions of the world, has a large repertoire of hundreds of traditional melodic structures (raagas), with thousands of songs and instrumental pieces composed in each. The raagas were created by various musical masters over the course of many centuries of musical development in India, and each one expresses a particular collection of emotions. Some raagas are over a millennium old, while others were composed in modern times. Some are very light, whimsical, and romantic, while others are extremely brooding, melancholy, or contemplative. Each raaga has certain defining musical features such as characteristic phrases, melodic ornaments, ascending/descending patterns, and strong/weak notes. But within this structure, the performer has the freedom to improvise and weave their own unique musical tapestry.

North Indian classical rhythms are based around a circular, rather than linear, concept of rhythm. The basic rhythmic structures are taalas—rhythmic cycles of generally 4–16 beats. The movements which employ drum accompaniment

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are centered on improvising around a melodic theme of a certain length, set to a corresponding rhythmic cycle—somewhat similar to the structure of many jazz tunes. As in jazz, the performers also generally take turns improvising new lines, or in some cases, playing bits of traditional fixed repertoire. One of the common rhythmic motifs you may hear is the *tihai*—an ending phrase repeated three times, in which the last note of the last phrase hits the strong downbeat of the rhythm cycle, forming a sort of musical exclamation mark at the end of a solo line.

In its complete format, a single piece of Indian classical music can be as long as a symphony, and has a similar structure of large movements. When playing a *raaga*, performers generally pick and choose which of the traditional movements to play. Some of the main movements include:

Alaap – Melodic solo without any fixed rhythmic meter

Jor – Melodic solo with simple meter

Gat – Melodic theme and variations set to a particular rhythm cycle, with tabla drum accompaniment

Sath Sangat – Melodic and percussive instruments improvising at the same time

Sawal-Jawab – “Question and answer;” trading musical ideas of increasingly shorter rhythmic lengths

Jhala – Fast, rhythmic finale

**ARJUN VERMA** is a sitarist trained by the legendary Maestro Ali Akbar Khan. Verma has spent his entire life steeped in the tradition of North Indian classical music. The son of internationally performing sitarist Roop Verma, a disciple of Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar, Verma began learning sitar from his father at age five.

As a teenager, Verma was deeply inspired by the preeminent sarode maestro, Ali Akbar Khan, and he ultimately moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to study directly with Ali Akbar Khan for eight years. In 2007, Verma was awarded a Shenson Fellowship by the San Francisco Foundation to support his continued study at the Ali Akbar College of Music. Since the Maestro’s passing in 2009, Verma has continued his training under the able guidance of Ali Akbar Khan’s son, Alam Khan. Verma has also received guidance from Smt. Annapurna Devi.

Verma’s playing is based on the musical approach of Maestro Ali Akbar Khan. He has developed innovative sitar techniques inspired by the Maestro’s style, and is also influenced by sitarist Nikhil Banerjee. Verma’s playing also incorporates musical elements drawn from his long apprenticeship with his father, Roop Verma. The combination of these influences results in a style encompassing the deeply contemplative as well as the exhilarating elements of Indian music.

With 25 years of performance experience at venues such as Prague Castle, Pattee Arena, the Fillmore, Fox Theater, the New School, and the United Nations in Geneva, Verma has emerged with a unique voice on the sitar—both within the tradition of North Indian classical music, and through his innovative cross-genre collaborations with Celtic, Jazz, and Western classical musicians.

In 2014, Verma performed with Houston Grand Opera in the world premiere of Jack Perla’s *River of Light*. This groundbreaking work combined North Indian classical music with Western Classical Opera, and presented a story about carrying on ancient traditions in the modern world. Following the success of this project, Perla invited Verma to collaborate with him in the creation of his opera, *Shalimar the Clown*, commissioned by Opera Theatre of St. Louis. Verma was a musical advisor for the integration of Hindustani classical music into the work, in addition to composing several of the melodic themes for both voices and instruments. *Shalimar* premiered in 2016 with the St. Louis Symphony and lead singers Andriana Chuchman and Sean Panikkar, featuring Verma as the sitar soloist, and was met with enthusiastic praise from the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Chicago Tribune.

Verma began performing at the age of seven, and has played concerts in the United States, Europe, and India, including performances with Alam Khan, Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri, Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead, Fareed Haque, Pandit Sharda Sahai, Ustad Shabbir Nisar, Kai Eckhardt, Krishna Das, Maya Kherani, Salar Nader, Nilan Chaudhuri, Indranil Mallick, Anirban Roy Chowdhury, Sean Panikkar, Andriana Chuchman, and the St. Louis Symphony.

Verma’s music has received critical acclaim from leading publications, including the New York Times, *Sruti Magazine*, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and the San Francisco Chronicle.

In addition to performing, Verma teaches sitar and North Indian classical music at the Ali Akbar College of Music, the East-West School of Music, and the California Jazz Conservatory.

**NITIN MITTA** is one of the most sought after tabla players of his generation. Apart from being a dynamic soloist, he is a highly sought after accompanist who has performed with some of India’s most celebrated classical musicians worldwide. Mitta received his early training in tabla from Pandit G. Satyanarayana and continued his further studies in tabla under Pandit Arvind Mulgaonkar. Mitta has also made a mark as a versatile collaborator in other spheres. He joined forces with 2010 Grammy nominee pianist Vijay Iyer and electric guitarist R. Prasanna to produce a studio album titled *Tirtha* that blends elements of contemporary jazz with the North and South Indian traditional ragas. He’s also the percussionist for two-time Juno award winner, renowned singer Kiran Ahluwalia.

Mitta maintains a busy schedule of performances and tabla workshops, traveling throughout the U.S., Europe, Canada and India. He has performed at several prominent venues including the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, UCLA Royce Hall and Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to name a few. He actively imparts tabla training to young enthusiasts here in the United States.