



Darbar 2024: Indian Classical Music festival shines light on UK grown talent...Jasdeep Singh Degun and Kirit Singh

Posted On: 24th October 2024 **By:** [Asian Culture Vulture](#)

More British born musicians are headlining one of the country's most popular classical music festivals...

OFTEN referred to as the largest celebration of Indian classical music outside India, Darbar returns to the Barbican Centre in London for what will be its 19th year.

There are a whole series of concerts, workshops, yoga sessions and even a pop up market featuring culturally diverse and relevant businesses. The Darbar festival runs for four days ending on Sunday, October 27.

While well-known names in the Indian classical field such as violinist Dr L Subramaniam and sarod player Amaan Ali Bangash and vocalist Aruna Sairam, are well-known to aficionados, there is also an opportunity to see and hear the music of rising British-based classical music stars – among the latest crop of emerging talents is sarod player and award-winning composer Jasdeep Singh Degun and Dhrupad vocalist Kirit Singh.

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Kirit Singh Dhrupad vocalist



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Kirit Singh was immersed into Sikh culture from birth – both his parents, while of European heritage, followed Sikhism before they met and married and came to know each other through the Sikh community.

He grew up in North London and was drawn to music in the Gurudwara (Temple) and its form there – Shabad Kirtan.

Interested in music generally – he also learnt the piano – his interest in Indian classical music was fired up when one of his friends brought home a Dilruba – a stringed instrument and one that has a long association with Sikhism.

While he attended Imperial University in London and studied computing, he continued to explore musical traditions and started to sing – he is a fluent Punjabi speaker, having grown up among the community.

It was under the tutelage of Pandit Uday Bhawalkar that his interest in Dhrupad vocals began to seriously develop.



Asian Culture Vulture | 24 October 2024

He told www.asianculturevulture.com: “There was a kind of stillness, a peace that I found in it, soothing – and something I didn’t find in other genres. Some people say it’s a bit meditative – but really this is a very highly evolved art form and when I started I realised that I wanted to learn more.”

For a while after university, he worked in the City but the pull of the music was too great and profound and quit his job to take his art further.

“I wasn’t really happy just working in front of computer screen all day, and I can remember being touched by the music I was studying and it having a profound effect on me,” he explained and leaning on the savings he made he furthered his field of study and inquiry.

He went to Pune and Kolkata, where Pandit Bhawalkar taught initially before moving permanently to the latter city, in West Bengal.

On Kirit Singh’s return to the UK, he studied for a Ph.D, focusing on the Shabad Kirtan tradition and Hindustani music in Punjab. The royal courts of the region patronised the arts, and Hindustani music with its roots across communities, Sikh, Muslim and Hindu, flourished.

Singh performs on Saturday evening (October 26) at the Barbican alongside Jasdeep Singh on the Jori. It is the first time Kirit Singh will be headlining a Darbar concert. (*See listings below*).

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Jasdeep Singh Degun sitarist and composer



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Jasdeep Singh Degun is one of the UK's most prominent Indian classical musicians – his version of '*Orpheus*' for Opera North, mixing Indian classical vocals with a traditional western orchestra won him awards and many accolades and his Instrumentalist of the Year gong at the 2024 Royal Philharmonic Society Awards signalled that the Leeds born and raised-sitarist as one the genuine breakout stars of the Indian classical music scene in Britain.

His performance at Darbar tomorrow evening (October 25) in an unrelated double bill, alongside Shalmalee Joshi represents a long held ambition – since a teen, he has been attending Darbar – long before he took up playing the sitar professionally – and dreamed of headlining one day at a venue such as the Barbican.

Friday's performance is the culmination of a UK wide tour and promotion of his album, '*Anomaly*', which was made with the assistance of music supremo Nitin Sawhney and under one-time pop maestro Peter Gabriel's World Records label.

Playing at Darbar is clearly a big deal for the sarod player who will be accompanied by Anubrata Chatterjee on tabla – a performer he deeply admires.



Asian Culture Vulture | 24 October 2024

“I think I’ll only get one sit down with him before and it’s the first time I will be playing with him. He’s a superstar musician from India – it’s wonderful to get him. Sandeep Virdee (Darbar artistic director) is always challenging us and putting us with musicians we wouldn’t normally get.”

It’s clear that he sees the Barbican performance, which is essentially a solo, and his first headline concert at Darbar, as a distinct career highlight.

“It’s like being put in the deep end and rising to the challenge and letting the music do the talking. I am really looking forward to it. It’s hugely exciting.”



Other stars of Darbar 2024: Dr L Subramaniam; Aman Ali Bangash;
Aruna Sriram



Asian Culture Vulture | 24 October 2024

He said the last two years have been a bit of a rollercoaster – he is much better known in classical musical circles and more western enthusiasts are hearing performers like him and warming to Indian classical music because there is beginning to be some active crossover.

His tour has taken him to venues small and large and opened him up to new worlds – he is part of the team composing music for the new BBC TV crime drama, ‘*Virdee*’ set in Bradford and first created by celebrated Asian author, AA Dhand. He has also been commissioned to write music for BBC Radio 3.

He may be feted in new and expanding classical circles but one thing is certain.

“My first love is doing concerts like Darbar.”

Listings

Jasdeep Singh Degun and Anurbrata Chatterjee, The Barbican, Friday, October 25 (tomorrow), The Barbican Centre

Kirit Singh and Jasdeep Singh, Saturday, October 26

Both Silk Street, Barbican London EC2Y 8DS

Darbar Festival October 24-27

Tickets/further info and check ticket availability for above:

<https://www.darbar.org/festival-lineup/darbar-festival-2024>