



Cindy Byram PR
201-400-4104
cindybyramPR@aol.com
www.cindybyram.com

Pakistan's Sachal Ensemble Launches North American Tour, Beginning Oct 27th

Following their Viral Video of Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" and a Debut with Wynton Marsalis, Pakistani Musicians Find an International Audience

Reviving Lahore's Rich Musical Traditions while Celebrating Western Pop and Jazz

Tour Launches in Vienna, VA (DC market) on Oct 27th at The Barns at Wolf Trap;
Includes Boston, New York, Miami, Toronto, Los Angeles and San Francisco

SACHAL ENSEMBLE 2017 NORTH AMERICAN TOUR			
Fri	Oct 27	Vienna, VA	The Barns at Wolf Trap
Sat	Oct 28	Schenectady, NY	Proctor's Theatre
Sun	Oct 29	Cambridge, MA	Berklee Performance Center
Mon	Oct 30	Saratoga Springs, NY	Saratoga Performing Arts Center
Thu	Nov 2	Easton, PA	Lafayette College / Williams Center for the Arts
Sat	Nov 4	Miami, FL	Miami Dade College / Olympia Theater
Sun	Nov 5	New York, NY	NYU Skirball Center for the Performing Arts
Tue	Nov 7	Calgary, AB, CN	Arts Commons / Jack Singer Concert Hall
Thu	Nov 9	Markham, ON, CN (Toronto)	Flato Markham Theatre
Sun	Nov 12	Phoenix, AZ	Musical Instrument Museum
Tue	Nov 14	Northridge, CA	CSU Northridge / Valley Performing Arts Center
Wed	Nov 15	Stanford, CA	Stanford University / Bing Concert Hall
Sat	Nov 18	Folsom, CA	Harris Center / Stage 1

A jazz song from the late-50s, an Oxford-educated financial advisor and a group of once-celebrated but unemployed musicians -- some of whom no longer even owned an instrument -- are not the standard ingredients from which global hits are made.

But then, the story of the **Sachal Ensemble of Lahore, Pakistan**, is not a standard one.

The 10-piece group, touring the United States for the first time this October / November, combines conventional Western instruments (such as piano, bass, drums) with traditional Pakistani ones, such as *tabla*, *dholak* (a two-headed hand drum) and *sarangi*, a bowed string instrument. Its repertoire on this tour will mix traditional Sufi music, ragas and beloved Pakistani film songs (such as "Ranjha Ranjha," from the movie *Raavan*) with uniquely South Asian spins on Western classics, including The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby," R.E.M.'s "Everybody Hurts," Michel Legrand's "The Windmills of Your Mind," and, of course, their highly distinctive take on Dave Brubeck's hit "Take Five," a video of which became a YouTube hit with over 1 million views.

The international sensation created by the Brubeck “Take Five” video led to, among other things, an invitation in 2013 for the Sachal Ensemble to collaborate with trumpeter and composer **Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra**. The musicians’ extraordinary journey from Lahore to Lincoln Center was captured in *Song of Lahore*, a documentary film by two-time Academy Award-winning director **Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy and Andy Schocken**.

A U.S. album release soon followed on **Universal Music Classics**, also titled *Song of Lahore*, (May 20, 2016) **produced by Grammy Award-winner Eli Wolf** and featuring the Sachal Ensemble collaborating with a diverse group of artists including **Wynton Marsalis, Meryl Streep, Jim James of My Morning Jacket, Nels Cline of Wilco, Madeleine Peyroux and Sean Lennon**.

A recent Pakistan-only release, titled *Jazz and All That*, includes the ensemble's striking versions of Brubeck's "Blue Rondo A La Turk," and songs such as Stevie Wonder's "You've Got It Bad Girl", Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Wave" and Henry Mancini's "The Pink Panther."

The Sachal Ensemble was created by Izzat Majeed, a Pakistani investor and hedge fund manager turned philanthropist and music producer. Born in Lahore in 1950, it was Majeed’s singular dream to revive the soundtrack of his childhood. His hometown, the second largest city in Pakistan, was once a cultural and artistic center on the Indian subcontinent. **In the 1960s and ’70s, Lahore was at a peak as the home of “Lollywood,” the Pakistani equivalent of India’s Bollywood**. Films featured between 10 to 15 songs and the industry employed a substantial number of musicians, composers and arrangers. Music was essential to the life of the city.

Izzat’s father, Abdul Majeed, was the chairman of the film producers association of Pakistan and a music lover who would take his son to hear all the touring American jazz musicians passing through Lahore. That's how an 8-year-old Majeed got to hear pianist Dave Brubeck at a hall near his family home. Brubeck was still a year away from recording "Take Five," which would become the biggest selling jazz single ever. For the young Izzat, the concert had a profound impact.

"That’s where I got hooked on jazz," says Majeed.

But following a military coup in July 1977, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq became president and his dictatorship set out to “cleanse” Pakistan’s cultural landscape. Most non-religious music was declared sinful and the film industry, weighed down by religious bans, collapsed. In Lahore, even virtuoso musicians had to become taxi drivers or shopkeepers just to keep food on the table.

For all his remarkable success in finance -- he was an advisor to Saudi Arabia’s oil ministry, a banker and the founder of a billion dollar hedge fund -- Majeed's real passions "have always been and will always be about art and music," he asserts. And so, he set out to do something about it.

“These great musicians -- from both folk and classical schools -- were left hungry and jobless,” said Majeed in a recent interview. **“We were losing our instruments, losing our musicians, losing our culture – something had to be done about it.”**

Long a patron of the arts and a lover of poetry (he is a published poet himself), **Majeed founded Sachal Studios, named after the Sufi poet Saeen Sachal Sarmast, in 2003, on Waris Road, once the center of Lahore’s film studios**. He then sought out the city’s great musicians, many of whom had put away their instruments. In fact, Majeed had to buy instruments for several players.

"Some people might look at me as some sort of savior of our musical traditions, whereas the actual fact is that Sachal Studios saved my life," Majeed notes. He assumed that, after retirement, he would spend the

rest of his life making music. But that was not in the stars. Not only did he suffer huge losses in the financial crisis of 2008 but his marriage fell apart. Now happily remarried and settled in Lahore, he recalls how difficult that period was. "But every time I felt as if I was dying inside, the music would revive me. I threw myself into the pursuit of making music - Sachal Studios saved me. All I can say is that, having lost almost everything, I have never been happier than I am right now."

Initially, Majeed and the Sachal Ensemble focused on the region's classical and folk music. But then, he started to dream about the possibility of jazz being played on local instruments, and once he introduced the sounds and concepts of jazz, the musicians "took to it very naturally." As they searched for a broader audience and looked outside Pakistan, they began to explore cross-cultural versions of Western jazz standards, pop and film classics.

Improbably, Sachal Ensemble had a breakthrough when a video of their interpretation of Brubeck's Paul Desmond classic "Take Five" went viral. Brubeck, who died in December, 2012, actually got a chance to listen to it, calling it "the most interesting recording of it I have ever heard."

It's only fitting that the song that opened a world of music for Majeed has now opened the world to the Sachal Ensemble.

[AUGUST 2017}

SACHAL ENSEMBLE MUSICAL LINEUP:

Baqar Abbas – bansuri (flute)
Nadeem Abbas – bass
Rafiq Ahmad – daff (frame drum)
Asad Ali – guitar
Danish Ali – piano
Najaf Ali – dholak (hand drum)
Zohaib Hassan - sarangi (bowed string instrument)
Ijaz Hussain – tabla (hand drum)
Ali Shaiba – drums
Nijat Ali – conductor

VIMEO "Song of Lahore" CD TRACKS:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/SachalEnsembleVEVO/videos>

VIDEO LINKS:

"Take Five" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLF46JKkCNg>

"Rhanja Rhanja with Wynton Marsalis & JALC Orchestra
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-Byu97rhwE>

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