

## Sarvar Sabri

Sarvar Sabri is a Birmingham-based composer and a leading classical dance accompanist. He has worked with many prolific Kathak dancers in the UK from the stars of the traditional genre such as Pratap Pawar, to younger, contemporary dancers, including Akram Khan. Since settling in Britain in 1989, Sabri has been in great demand to perform as a soloist, accompanist to Indian classical dance, instrumental and vocal music as well as a fusion musician, pioneering Indo-Jazz.

Sabri is from an accomplished musical family in New Delhi, India; his father, Ustad Sabri Khan, is globally recognised as master of the sarangi (a sarangi has three main gut strings and about 37 sympathetic strings and is carved from wood). Members of the Sabri family have played the 'sarangi', a difficult and highly regarded instrument, for seven generations though Sarvar Sabri chose to focus his musical energies on the tabla. Sabri's brothers Gulfam and Kamal are also multi-talented vocalists and musicians, playing the santoor, tabla and sarangi between them.

In India, Sabri was schooled by the best tabla masters, and won a government scholarship to study under one of the greatest music teachers in India, Ustad Bundu Khan. However, Sabri's father knew only too well the hardships of being a musician and urged his son to follow an alternative career path. By 1980, Sabri had earned two degrees, in commerce and in music from universities in India.

In the late 1970s, Sabri had begun travelling across India accompanying his father on tours. Sabri's talent was obvious and he was soon asked to perform in his own right. Several world tours followed, where he provided musical accompaniment to the leading Kathak dancers of the day, including Pandit Durga Lal and Rajendra Gangani. Sarvar Sabri toured Europe and North America in 1982 with a group of classical musicians and visited England for the first time that year. At this time, he established connections through the UK South Asian classical dance and music circuit which led to numerous opportunities as a classical dance accompanist. Sabri continues to accompany touring classical dance performances at national theatres and also works with companies drawing on other dance traditions such as the African dance company 'Kokuma'. In 1993-1994, Sarvar Sabri was recognised for his work with dance and received the Art Council's 'Composer for Dance' award. In several interviews over the last few years, Sabri has said, *"Some say my forte is playing for dance, but I see myself as a Tabla player, moulding myself to the needs of the form I work with, depending on the context."*

In 1986, British Asian theatre company Tara Arts, co-commissioned Sarvar Sabri to compose music for their touring production, 'Miti ki Gadi' or 'The Little Clay Cart'. This was the first of many compositions Sabri undertook for various theatre and radio productions. He has subsequently composed music for Tamasha Theatre, Theatre Taliesin in Wales, Urban Turbans and BBC Radio.

By 1989, Sarvar Sabri had made his permanent home in Birmingham and had joined the multi-cultural music ensemble, Shiva Nova. He believes his move to Britain provided opportunities to work with musicians from different backgrounds and explore diverse musical disciplines. With Shiva Nova, Sabri toured nationally and internationally and made several TV appearances. The late 1980s also saw Sabri record albums with several UK-based pop groups and perform at the WOMAD and Glastonbury music festivals.

Sarvar Sabri's diverse experiences of his first ten years in Britain encouraged him to stretch the boundaries of his own musical traditions and experiment with those of western classical, jazz and popular music. In 1995, he formed his own group, The Sabri Ensemble. Comprising of Sarvar Sabri (tabla), his brother Kamal Sabri ('sarangi'), Alvin Davis (saxophone), Lisa Mallet (flute), Trevor Lines (Double bass and percussion), Mark Lockett (piano, keyboards and percussion) and Jozef Rememy (percussion), the musicians are trained in a variety of traditions including South Asian, Latin-American, Jazz and western classical music. In their endeavour to explore the richness of diverse musical styles, compositions vary between fully composed pieces to those with 'loose ends' which require the musicians to understand each other's music, respond and improvise. The ensemble regularly tour and perform at major international music festivals and released their debut album, 'Dhin-Na', in 2001 on Wriggly Pig Records.

Sarvar Sabri began teaching the tabla in the early 1990s at the Birmingham Conservatoire and continues to teach part of the Indian Music degree course there. Independently, Sabri regularly leads educational projects involving children of different age groups and abilities and participates in residencies and workshops with theatre and dance schools across the country. He also produces long-term projects with arts development organisations such as Sampad and collaborates on music development initiatives with local education authorities, The Prince's Trust and the British Council.

As a solo musician, Sarvar Sabri released his first album on ARC Music International, 'Master Drummer of India', in 1989. He has subsequently released several classical albums including collaborative family albums entitled 'Family Tradition' with his father and brothers. Sabri has recorded with international pop and fusion bands from Finland and was a contributor to ARC Music's 1998 album 'Masters of Percussion' which included percussion musicians from India, Egypt, Ghana and Latin America. More recently, he has since recorded albums with major record labels including BMG Finland and Germany and has released instrumental music, Music India Ltd.

As a jazz fusionist, Sabri has collaborated, recorded and toured with renowned saxophonists Martin Speake, Iain Ballamy and Birmingham Jazz. Having recently completed 'The Journey', a trio album with saxophonist Martin Speake and sitarist Dharambir Singh on Sanctuary Records (2004), Sarvar Sabri is presently recording a new solo classical album. In 2004 he undertook solo performances across India and an international tour with prolific composer, Judith Weir, storyteller Vayu Naidu and musicians from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in May 2005. In addition, Sarvar Sabri composed music for 'Red', a new international dance production created by the Sonia Sabri Dance Company in 2005.