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Passing it On

Preserving New Jersey's artistic and cultural heritage.



From Cape May to The Palisades, New Jersey is home to diverse communities with traditional folk arts, shaped by the aesthetics and values of the cultures they represent. The State Arts Council is committed to supporting the artists at the heart of these communities, working to pass distinctive art forms from one generation to the next, and preserve their cultural legacy.

Each year the New Jersey State Council on the Arts awards Folk Arts Apprenticeship Grants to help Apprentice artists hone their skills under the guidance of a Master artist in the same craft. Here we shine a light on their work: from them, to us, to you, we are "Passing It On".

Hindustani Vocal Music

Finding Freedom within the Discipline



Andrew Shantz at right with his Guru, Sanjoy Banerjee, just before a session in Long Island City, NY – October 9, 2018

Meet [Andrew Shantz](#), a Michigan-born, devoted Hindustani classical music apprentice and teacher, who is in the midst of his second [N.J. State Folk Arts Apprenticeship](#) with Guru (master teacher), [Sanjoy Banerjee](#). The story of his journey towards the embrace of N.J.'s Hindustani classical music community begins with a trip to Kolkata, India, which Andrew assumed would be "just an informational trip" to assuage his curiosity in the Indian harmonium, a widely used keyboard instrument of North India. He traveled there not long after receiving a degree in Jazz Piano from William Paterson University in Wayne, N.J., and to his delight discovered a profound interest in Hindustani vocal music. Andrew was soon initiated into the music, then one trip turned into several more to meet with his Guruma (mother-teacher), Madhumita Saha ji, exploring his new found passion for this ancient traditional art form and his connection with the culture. In order to keep his studies more consistent, eventually it was arranged for him to begin advanced studies of Khayal – the pure classical form of Hindustani music, based on the raga system – here in the U.S. with Sanjoy ji, while continuing to study semi-classical music with his Guruma. Currently, Andrew and Sanjoy ji are working rigorously on an important step in Andrew's artistic development; preparing him for his debut performances in India this winter. There, he will receive critical feedback and guidance from the community. This pilgrimage is but one example of Andrew's dedication and represents the cultural immersion he has steeped himself in during the past 10-plus years of studies. Developing to a level of mastery requires a process of learning the intricacies of the form that takes many years and the right teacher, but it seems Andrew is well on his way.

[Sanjoy Banerjee](#), a highly recognized performer of Hindustani classical music and a successful teacher with students from around the world, beams when speaking about one of Andrew's best qualities as a student, "his sincerity". Sanjoy ji tells us that "a music student may have promising talent, but if they are not sincere in their studies they won't keep advancing". Noting the requisite commitment and skill of an

apprentice, he continues by emphasizing that to successfully rise up in the tradition, "you must find freedom within the discipline". It has been recognized by the Hindustani community that Andrew's sincerity is true and ongoing, as is his desire to find his own sense of freedom inside the practice of the music. One only needs to meet them both to see that the story of a Jazz musician seamlessly co-existing with Hindustani classical music traditions just comes together so naturally, and simply, makes perfect sense.

Q & A with the Apprentice & Guru



Andrew Shantz, in performance

Had you ever been interested in classical Indian music or culture before your initial trip to India?

ANDREW: *As a jazz musician one hears about Indian music from peers and historical anecdotes. Most jazz musicians know for example, about Ud. Zakir Hussain and his well-known jazz musician collaborators like John MacLaughlin. One also hears about Miles Davis' incorporation of Indian elements into his music. I also became aware of John Coltrane's interest in Indian music and his plan to begin studying Indian music with Ravi Shankar before John Coltrane's passing. Of course, the Beatles connection with Ravi Shankar and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi along with the general interest that has developed in the U.S., especially since the sixties in Indian spirituality, yoga, and meditation, etc.*

Have you made discoveries about the relationship between your Jazz background and Hindustani classical music?

ANDREW: *There were skills that I possessed as a jazz improviser that relate to the improvisation that is part of Hindustani vocal music traditions. I already could track improvisational options in the moment and could coordinate those options within a set rhythm cycle. The general difference between the two is that Jazz is intellectually frenetic while Hindustani is more deliberate. Each has their strengths and issues to consider.*

You are so committed to this art form and community. What is the inspiration for this?

ANDREW: *The basis of being a part of the Hindustani music community is the fundamental attraction and connection to the music and its accompanying value system, and wish to be a part of its continuation and advancement. I do sometimes look back at how far I have taken this interest and the things I have been willing to sacrifice along the way, even some degree of development with my piano skills specifically, although on the overall creative level, it has enhanced what I do, so that is the ultimate payoff.*

Can you both speak to the spiritual component of the



Guru, Pt. Sanjoy Banerjee (at center), Apprentice, Andrew Shantz (at right), in performance

music? And how does that tie into the performance of it?

SANJOY: *Our music started with the recitation of religious texts in methodical rhythmic scale thousands of years ago. It was mainly a religious activity, or you could say, an offering to God. It remains a process of meditation for both the performers and listeners. For me, Indian classical vocal music is a spiritual and meditative practice, and a wonderful form of*

communication. Practicing the music helps to build up a heightened level of concentration. The greater the concentration, the more perfect you can make the sounds. Then in performing the music, the singer can more easily transfer that energy to the listener, and the better one can communicate with the audience.

ANDREW: *India is a very spiritual place. The idea of spiritualism is much more fluid and integrated in the culture than it typically is here in the west. It's in the music, it is not separate, and it has an effect on one's well-being. For example, practicing long-notes will actually improve the quality of your voice.*

How has this Apprenticeship been beneficial to you?

ANDREW: *Actually, the format of master-apprentice learning is consistent with the traditional Guru-Shishya Parampara (literally meaning master-disciple tradition) that all Indian classical music study is based on. It's considered the only viable way to learn this art form. During these apprenticeships I have gained knowledge, repertoire, and skill, and I have expanded my teaching practice, with more than 30 students in three locations in N.J.*

Andrew, can you elaborate on how you've been involved in the Hindustani music community here in N.J. and what your future plans may be?

ANDREW: *I have consistently been growing my activities in the Indian classical music community in N.J. I am performing and teaching more and more each year, and I am currently president of [Suromurchhana Inc.](#) (N.J. Chapter) a cultural organization established by the students of Pt. Sanjoy Banerjee ji to support Indian classical music in our area. Through a NJSCA Arts Project Support Grant I submitted on behalf of [Ananda Mandir](#) (the largest Bengali religious & cultural association in N.J.), I will help organize a full-day pan-South Asian classical music festival with performers from a wide range of South Asian classical musical lineages, including myself. I am very grateful to be able to teach this music that I love and support, and expand the community that surrounds it. I look forward to singing Hindustani classical music for the rest of my life at the highest level I can achieve, and to passing on my insights to as many students as possible.*

**Watch Andrew in performance!
A traditional presentation of Raag Desh.**



The first composition was created by Sanjoy ji's teacher, Vidushi Malabika Kanan ji.

– **Learn more about Andrew and his music school**

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Vanguard Music Studio, in Denville, N.J.

From the Author

Having the opportunity to meet, interview, and promote NJ's Folk/Traditional Artists is quite simply an honor. The artists featured in every issue of this publication are renowned in their communities, playing a vital role in keeping their cultural identities alive through the art forms they practice and master. Because they merit being experienced and celebrated, it is the Council's hope to bring these distinctive cultural traditions into focus and to share them with all New Jerseyans. I am more than happy to oblige that pursuit. In writing these issues, it is my hope that I can convey a bit of the marvel of the artists' work to you, so that you might better understand and take pride in the richness of our state's splendid diversity. Please, feel free to "pass it on"!

–Stephanie Nerbak–



The title for this publication was inspired by Rita Moonsammy's book entitled,
Passing it On, Folk Artists and Education in Cumberland County, New Jersey, published in 1992.

Click [HERE](#) for additional information about the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, their Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program and other Grant Opportunities for New Jersey's Artists.



The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, created in 1966, is a division of the NJ Department of State. The Council was established to encourage and foster public interest in the arts; enlarge public and private resources devoted to the arts; promote freedom of expression in the arts; and facilitate the inclusion of art in every public building in New Jersey. The Council receives direct appropriations from the State of New Jersey through a dedicated, renewable Hotel/Motel Occupancy fee, as well as competitive grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Please visit www.artsCouncil.nj.gov.

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