

explains). It is an emotional visit, but an inappropriate one for a sadhu and leads his guru to assert that Ramnath is headed into “darkness.”

In addition to an understanding of Hinduism, some background on sadhus is necessary for students to get the most from the videos. For instance, the idea, and indeed the controversy, that a sadhu may have flaws isn’t something that the video series specifically discusses. The fact is, many Indians are skeptical of the authenticity of some sadhus and find them suspect. “Living with the Dead,” for example, explicates the controversy surrounding Ramnath, a decisively human side to the story, but fails to provide enough context to Indian and Hindu culture to allow students to see and understand the larger picture. Brief explanations of sadhus’ concept of renunciation, enlightenment, spirituality, self-mortification, and so forth, preferably with the aid of pictures, should be sufficient for upper-level high school students and lower-level college students. There are, indeed, some very useful resources in print and on the internet for essential information and photographs, including Dolf Hartsuiker’s *Sadhus: India’s Mystic Holy Men*, to assist teachers in presenting this material.

While it is not crucial that students view all three videos, a broader picture begins to emerge when they do. Shown consecutively, the three videos provide students with knowledge of the variety of lifestyles, objectives, and beliefs of sadhus. Some comparisons are straightforward—for instance, the austere living conditions of Lotan Baba and Ramnath contrasted with Jayendra Saraswati’s comfortable life in his large monastery/temple complex, with millions of rupees being donated for building a university and library in the name of his guru. Other comparisons are not so easy and demand more analysis from students. The concept of the worldly detachment of sadhus also is elucidated through all three videos. Students cannot help but notice the attitudinal difference between an accessible village sadhu such as Lotan Baba and the powerful sadhus of the Kanchi temple of Jayendra Saraswati, who so strictly abide by the rule that people cannot touch sadhus that they are frequently flanked by several men acting literally as bodyguards.

Overall, *Sadhus: India’s Holy Men* is an excellent resource for teachers of religion and Indian culture and society. The complexity of some of the background necessary to view the videos and of the religious concepts inherent in the stories makes the series better suited to at least upper-level high school students. However, the wonderful scenes of India’s urban and rural landscape throughout the videos, in addition to those of religious worship, can speak effectively even to younger students. Also touched on, especially in “The Living God,” are several unconnected, but not irrelevant, issues present in India, such as the caste system, inter-religious conflict and violence, arranged marriages, and poverty. While this inclusiveness can give the impression that the videos try to do too much, the issues can serve as further topics for student discussion.

The primary flaw of the series is the failure to provide a more complete picture of Indian society vis-à-vis religion and sadhus. The videos misguidedly portray all of India as religiously devout and sadhu obsessed, instead of its true mixture of tradition and modernity. But, when the videos are coupled with appropriate con-

textual discussion of religious devotion and ritual, students are able to understand the local significance and larger meaning of the religious acts highlighted in the videos. And because students easily become engaged and interested in learning after witnessing the intensity with which the sadhus treat their role as India’s religious leaders, *Sadhus* is undoubtedly a real asset for Indian religion and culture teachers in the pre-collegiate or college classroom. ■

JON ZELJO is the Chair of the History Department and Coordinator of the Chinese Studies Program at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC, and teaches courses on East Asia, modern China, and Asian religions.

A Voice from Heaven

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

Directed by Guiseppe Asaro
Produced by Guiseppe Asaro,
Alessandro Storza, Shafiq Sad-
diqui, and Vikas Bhushan, MD

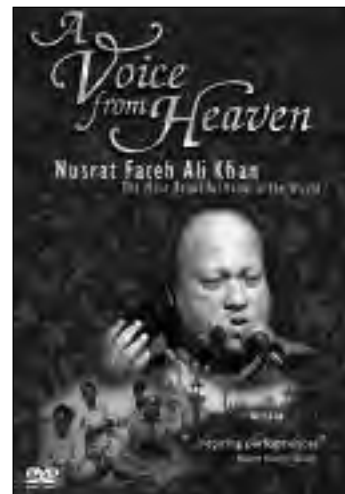
2001. DVD. Color. 75 minutes.

Distributed by Winstar Home
Entertainment

Web site:

<http://dvds.ontheweb.com>

Crossmedia Communications
419 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016



A *Voice from Heaven* is a music documentary that provides a glimpse into the life of famed *qawwali* singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan along with information about the music of *qawwali* and the Sufi mystic tradition. *Qawwali* is a devotional music performed by Muslims primarily in South Asia. A significant expression of Sufism, it is believed to be a path for union with the divine. *Qawwali*’s poetry is derived from mystic Sufi poets such as Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273), and the *qawwal* (singer of *qawwali*) is believed to convey the very essence of Sufi mysticism through text and song. The vocal style is light classical in nature, and requires intense improvisation, flexibility, and a thorough knowledge of lyrical content. A rigorous and energetic performance style is highly desired, and Nusrat, considered one of the greatest performers in this genre, delivers accordingly.

The documentary begins by describing the *qawwali* performance and its contexts in relation to the basic tenets of Sufi religious philosophy, all of which unfold through a number of brief interviews. Interviewees include South Asian London DJs, record producers, relatives, collaborators, and admirers of the genre and of Nusrat. The broad range of interviews provides diverse and interesting viewpoints, but several interviewees contribute little to

the subject, and the film could do without them. Few scholars of qawwali are interviewed, however, although their commentary is excellent and informative.

After exploring the role of music among Sufis, the film addresses the often neglected but interesting role of women in qawwali, and includes some of the most poignant singing in the film, performed by several of Nusrat's female students. An exploration of Nusrat's family background presents his initial impetus for performing qawwali, and his significant public performances after the death of his father, who was also a qawwal. Nusrat is known outside of India and Pakistan primarily due to his association with popular music artists such as Peter Gabriel. A discussion of Nusrat's "internationalization" also includes the controversy regarding use of his music in Hollywood film soundtracks. Nusrat is the most recognized and beloved qawwali singer, and his untimely death has left a void in the qawwali musical community. The film ends by introducing a possible successor, his nephew Rahat.

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Rahat Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Nusrat's nephew, and Farruck Fateh Ali Khan, Nusrat's brother, provide music for the film. Although qawwali is played throughout the film, the variety of songs is limited and footage is drawn from only a few concerts. Using a select number of songs, however, does provide continuity for the film, and the cumulative effect makes an impact on the listener by the end of the documentary.

While the film is certainly appropriate for college, high school, and even middle school, both the content and the structure of the video require some preparation by the instructor, regardless of level. In terms of content, one unfortunate drawback is the film's lack of emphasis on lyrics and poetry. Since the Sufi poetry is of primary importance, it would be highly beneficial to familiarize students with translations to illustrate the use of metaphor and depth of devotional expression. The technique used in formatting the documentary alternates short segments of concert footage and interviews, with overlying voice narration. The truncated concert clips, however, do not provide those unfamiliar with the genre to grasp an overall sense of the musical form, and students should listen to a qawwali song in its entirety.

This documentary is accessible to students with little or no familiarity with Islam, Sufism, or qawwali, but is equally interesting to those who are more knowledgeable. The narration is succinct and clear, and explains complex ideas in a straightforward manner that will provide abundant material for further classroom discussion.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

- Read examples of Sufi poetry and discuss the use of metaphor and symbolism.
- Listen to a song in its entirety for its overall form and specific musical characteristics.
- Compare the composition, performance practice, and function of the qawwali ensemble to other singing ensembles and devotional genres more familiar to students such as gospel.
- Introduce the idea that each qawwali song is never a final product but rather an unfinished version—one improvisation or

interpretation among many.

- Discuss the role of women in Islam and in qawwali.

SUGGESTED LISTENING

Songs of the Mystics, Abida Parveen (a well-respected female Sufi devotional singer), Navras NRCD 5505/6.

The Sabri Brothers—Greatest Hits, Shanachie SHA 64090

Qawwali: Vocal Art of the Sufis, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, JVC World Sounds, VICG 5030

SUGGESTED READINGS

Barks, Coleman. 1997. *The Essential Rumi*. San Francisco: Harper.

Barks, Coleman. 2002. *The Soul of Rumi: A New Collection of Ecstatic Poems*. San Francisco: Harper.

Schimmel, Annemarie. 2001. *Rumi's World: The Life and Work of the Great Sufi Poet*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Wilson, Peter L. 1999. *Drunken Universe: An Anthology of Persian Sufi Poetry*, 2nd edition, Pacific Grove, CA: Cole Publishing Company. ■

NATALIE SARRAZIN is a Lecturer in Music and South Asian Studies at the University of Virginia. She holds a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from the University of Maryland and a Masters in Music Education from Johns Hopkins University.

Kutiyattam (A CD-ROM)

Sanskrit Theater of India

By Farley Richmond

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Web site: www.press.umich.edu

Phone: 800-621-2736



This multimedia, interactive CD-ROM is a visually rich and appealing survey of the ancient South Indian theater of kutiyattam, associated with temples and religious ritual since the tenth century CE. Special temple servant castes produce the dance-story performances that are considered to be visual sacrifices to the temple deity.

The main musical instruments are a special kind of drum with an elaborate repertoire, hand cymbals, and a small hand drum. After years of comparative research on performing arts in India, Richmond learned that kutiyattam is probably the only kind of performing art in India that still carefully follows the ancient Sanskrit treatise, the *Natyashastra*.

An unusual feature of kutiyattam is that actors playing male roles chant in Sanskrit, and while playing female roles they chant in Prakrit (also an ancient, classical language). The theatrically