

## Pakistan: Qawwali Music



Qawal Najmuddin Saifuddin & Brothers, 2011

### Qawal Najmuddin Saifuddin & Brothers

In the 13th century, Hazrat Yameenuddin Abul-Hasan Amir Khusrou, a legendary musician, unparalleled poet, soldier, Sufi and philosopher, trained a group of 12 young men in the art of qawwali, a form of Sufi devotional music. Named the Qawal Bachchay Gharana of Delhi (or Delhi Gharana), this prominent musical tradition has been practiced by descendants of the original members for more than 700 years.

Qawal Najmuddin Saifuddin & Brothers, (direct descendants of Khosrou) live in Karachi on an alley named Qawwal Bachhon Ki Gali (literally translated to 'Qawwal children's alley'). They have toured throughout Europe performing in seminars, festivals, and symposiums for the general public and government dignitaries.

Najmuddin Saifuddin, the leader of group, was appointed to carry on the spiritual Sufi tradition and

propagate its message of love, peace and humanity. The brothers sing in honor of their late father, Ustad Bahauddin Khan Qawwal.

The award-winning ensemble presents qawwali singing in various languages including Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Saraiki, Birj Bhasha, Poorbi, Sunskirt, as well as in English.

### About Qawwali

Qawwali is a traditional form of Islamic song found in India and Pakistan. A qawwal is one who sings qawwali, or the sayings of the prophets and praises of God. The qawwali is closely linked to the spiritual and artistic life of northern India and Pakistan, and is usually performed at Sufi shrines throughout South Asia. The central themes of qawwali are love, peace, devotion, and man's eternal

search for divine inspiration. Songs are usually between 15 to 30 minutes long and tend to begin gently and build steadily to a very high energy level.



Qawwali musicians perform seated in two rows. Photo by Shalalae Jamil.



Harmonium. Photo by Shalalae Jamil.

A group of qawwali musicians is called a *party* (or *Humnawa* in Urdu). Usually there are eight or nine men who sit cross-legged on the ground in two rows. The first row typically includes a lead singer, two side singers, and one or two harmoniums. The second row is made up of percussionists who play the tabla and dholak drums and a chorus of singers who repeat key verses and help guide the performance with clapping.

### Harmonium

The harmonium is a free-standing keyboard instrument that is like a small organ. It produces sound by air being blown through sets of reeds much like an accordion. The air is usually supplied by bellows operated by foot, hand, or knees. It is the primary musical instrument used as accompaniment by qawwali singers.