



Advance Program Notes

Taj Express: The Bollywood Musical Revue
Friday, February 24, 2017, 7:30 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

Taj Express: The Bollywood Musical Revue

Cast

Mikhail Sen as *Narrator*
Hiten Shah as *Arjun*
Tanvi Patil as *Kareena Kaboom*

Male Dance Performers

Ashish Gakwad
Devendra Singh
Gaurav Pathak
Himanshu Parihar
Imran Shaikh
Kiran Waghchawre
Mohsin Shaikh
Niraj Lama
Pawan Thombre
Rahul Sonawane
Suresh Chavan

Female Dance Performers

Ankita Sheth
Beena Patel
Hetal Seta
Kavita Khillare
Khushbu Vakani
Puja Banarji
Priya Shetty
Sadhwi Majumder
Shraddha Dandge
Shruti Sinha
Sneha Singh

Musicians

Chandan Raina, guitarist
Anish Kale, percussionist
Avadooth Phadke, flautist

Producers/ Management Crew

Shruti Merchant, *producer*
Pranav Merchant, *executive producer*
Stephan Alcaraz, *technical director*
Aruna Poojary, *stage manager*
Miguel Fernandez, *lighting director*
Alessio Comuzzi, *sound director*
Riccardo Dondi, *on-tour sound director*
Erik Birkeland, *on-tour company manager*

Creatives

Shruti Merchant, *director*
Vaibhavi Merchant, *director of choreography*
Toby Gough, *writer*
Ankush Dhawan, *chief assistant director*
Shruti Merchant, Rajitdev Easwardas, Deepak Singh, Tejaswi Shetty, Pratik Utekar, Shampa Sonthalia, and Rahul Shetty, *choreographers*

Salim & Sulaiman Merchant, *music composers original title track*

Abhijit Vaghani, *music director*
Monty Sharma, *background score*
Bipin Tanna, *costume designer*
Mohammad Yusuf Shaikh, *head of wardrobe*
Dinesh Suvarna Koraga, *makeup artist*

Tour Direction

Tim Fox and Alison Ahart Williams
Columbia Artists Management, LLC
New York, New York
cami.com

Taj Express: Act One

THE SWANS OF GODDESS SARASWATI

An invocation of the goddess of knowledge, wisdom, and music

BOLLYWOOD AT THE OSCARS

A.R. Rahmans double Oscar-winning smash hit song, *Jai Ho*, from the film, *Slum Dog Millionaire*, is the inspiration for composers from all over India.

THE BEETHOVEN OF BOLLYWOOD

Shankar, a young aspiring film score composer, is given the dream job of writing the music for the new Bollywood Romance, *Taj Express*.

THE SILVER SCREEN SIREN

Shankar writes three sizzling hits for the *Bollywood Diva*. The heroine of the film, Kareena Kaboom, is India's hearthrob, but deep in her heart she dreams of escaping her celebrity status.

THE KING OF THE STREETS AND THE RHYTHMS OF THE GODS

Arjun, the hero of the movie, runs a classical dance school for street children to break the cycle of gangland violence in Mumbai. Here they dance for Lord Ganesh, to remove all obstacles from their lives.

MONSOON RESCUE

Two worlds collide as Arjun saves Kareena from a potential disaster. Shankar and his studio musicians create the music of their meeting.

THE CALL OF ADVENTURE

In their first encounter in the refuge of his dance school, Arjun offers Kareena the keys of freedom.

GANGLAND MUMBAI

Shakal, the villain of the Underworld, wants to take Arjun's dance school to be part of his nightclub empire. The conflict between these two gangs erupts in an epic dance battle of the street.

BOLLYWOOD BRAINSTORM

Back in the studio the musicians create the music for the Diwali party, where Kareena's new star partner will be revealed, Showbiz Khan.

TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT

All the Bollywood stars walk the red carpet to celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights. The identity of Kareena's new boyfriend is the question on everybody's lips.

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Arjun and Kareena find a moment to be alone. In the studio, they share their first dance as the flames of their romance begin.

BYE BYE BOLLYWOOD

Arjun and Kareena escape the glare of publicity, but the Bollywood party rages on. The adventure begins.

Taj Express: Act Two

DANCE OF CREATION

Kareena takes the first step of her journey in the Temple of Lord Shiva in Varanasi, the world's oldest city.

FIND KAREENA!

Shankar and musicians come under pressure to finish the music. In the story Shakal is contracted to bring Kareena back to work.

WISDOM OF THE POETS

Kareena and Arjun journey to Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India.

RHYTHM OF CHANGE

Shankar and musicians perform the music of Kareena's spiritual enlightenment.

THE GARDEN OF LOVE

Kareena finds purity in the blooming of the lotus flower as Saraswati blesses their union.

REVELATION

Shakal arrives to confront Arjun and Kareena, but an astonishing secret is revealed.

OPEN THE GATES

The palace of Ranthambore welcomes home the missing prince of the land.

HANDS BIND HEARTS

The rituals of love in an Indian wedding

LOVE.DANCE.SING.

Kareena and Arjun discover the land they share between them.

THIS IS THE END

Shankar says good night to the musicians and meditates on the process of creation. He has one last song to write.

ROLL THE CREDITS

The cast and crew all join together to dance at the end of the shoot. Actors, dancers, musicians, camera crew, makeup, and costume celebrate the making of the great adventure romance, *Taj Express*.

Program Notes

A young aspiring Indian composer, Shankar, is given his first big break in the film business to create the music for a brand new Bollywood movie, *Taj Express*. Music is the key factor in the success of a Bollywood movie. Shankar dreams of writing a song as successful as A.R. Rahman's Oscar-winning smash hit, *Jai Ho*, in the movie, *Slumdog Millionaire*. *Jai Ho* means "be victorious," and writing the music for *Taj Express* is Shankar's big opportunity to claim his own victory.

Shankar invites the audience into his studio and his creative world to share the secrets of how this Bollywood movie is made. He takes the audience through the script, page by page, making the music for each character and event in this roller-coaster romance. He must write music for passionate dance numbers, thrilling fight scenes, dramatic car crashes, and high energy celebrity parties in the first act. Then he must create the score for the stunning landscape of a train journey, ritualistic dances, festival celebrations, and some dramatic revelations in the second act.

Taj Express is the love story between Kareena, a beautiful actress, and Arjun, a handsome hero of the streets. At first it seems that they are both from opposite worlds, but their love for dance brings them together. Arjun rescues young people from the streets and offers them a training in classical dance. Kareena longs for freedom from the pressures of being a celebrity and a showbiz relationship that her producer is forcing her to adopt for publicity. Deep in her heart she is searching for fulfillment. The story of Goddess Saraswati is the allegory for her story, the pursuit of knowledge through rejection of material possessions, and her subsequent escape from the clutches of Lord Brahma. Arjun knows the path she must take to find enlightenment. She must rediscover the essence of dance, poetry, and meditation and the meaning of true love. For this discovery, she must leave Bollywood and the world she knows behind.

Traveling on board one of India's iconic steam engines, Arjun and Kareena escape on a thrilling adventure across this colourful, exotic, and magical land.

The journey takes them from the film studios of Mumbai to the southernmost tip of India, from the temples of Varanasi to the fields of Punjab, ending with a fabulous wedding in the Royal Palaces of Rajasthan.

No Bollywood story is complete without a villain, and this story is no different. Shakaal, an underground mob boss, has a vendetta against Arjun and a mission to bring Kareena back to Bollywood or destroy them both.

In the final dramatic encounter, Shakaal is defeated and Arjun is revealed to be an undercover prince who marries Kareena in a fabulous, opulent Indian wedding.

Biographies

CAST

MIKHAIL SEN, *narrator*

Mikhail Sen is an actor trained at Drama Centre in London and the Boris Shchukin Theatre Institute in Moscow. He has worked across film, television, and theatre with well-known directors, such as Derek Bond, Daniele Bartolini, Mahesh Dattani, Anna-Helena McLean, and Kussum Haider, among others. His body of work also involves collaborative productions with companies like the Royal Court (U.K.) and MoonFool Theatre (U.K.). Recent credits include *The Stranger*, *Legend of Lovers*, *9 Jakhoo Hill*, *Flypaper Trap*, and *The Love of the Nightingale*.

HITEN SHAH, *Arjun*

Having been so deeply involved with dance since his childhood, Hiten Shah never realized when dance became the language he spoke. He has carved his way to Bollywood as a dancer for the past decade. He has performed meticulously around the world in Bollywood's leading musicals, movies, and stage shows. The experience has not just added to his growth but has also given him the opportunity to lead. He looks forward to entertaining the world with his best performances for years to come.

TANVI PATIL, *Kareena Kaboom*

Tanvi Patil is a performer trained in jazz, hip-hop, Indian folk, and Bollywood. She feels dance is a communication of the body and soul and to express that is too deep to find in words. The nuances of stage—the music, the lights, the sweat, the extravagant costumes, and last but not least the applause by the audience—is what it takes to quench her thirst as a performer.

SHRADDHA DANDGE, *dancer*

Trained in Bollywood and Indian folk since childhood, Shraddha Dandge knows what is needed to bring the “oomph” to the dance floor.

ASHISH GAKWAD, *dancer*

Ashish Gakwad is a professionally trained Bollywood, contemporary, and hip-hop performer. He is also good at Kalaripayatu—a martial arts style originating from South India.

NIRAJ LAMA, *dancer*

Niraj Lama was a member of the Desi Hoppers crew that represented India at the World Dance Championship in Los Angeles, returning home with the Crowd Favorite trophy. He was also featured in *America's Got Talent* Season 11 and is proficient in hip-hop, B-boy and Bollywood dance.

SADHWI MAJUMDER, *dancer*

Sadhwi Majumder has been trained in Kathak since the age of four and in Bharathnatyam since the age of six by the best gurus in their respective fields. She has a keen interest in different dance styles, such as contemporary, folk, and Bollywood. She was in the top 10 of India's premier dance reality show, *Dance India Dance*, Season 5, and was the finalist in *India's Dancing Superstar*.

Biographies

IMRAN SHAIKH, *dancer*

Imran Shaikh holds a diploma in contemporary and ballet dance, but he is also an accomplished B-boy dancer.

MOHSIN SHAIKH, *dancer*

Mohsin Shaikh is the definition of raw dancing talent. His body can send chills to the audience, and his dance moves can leave the audience taken aback.

PRIYA SHETTY, *dancer*

Priya Shetty is a pure Bollywood dancer, featured in several Bollywood films.

SNEHA SINGH, *dancer*

Sneha Singh is a performer trained in Bharathnatyam, salsa, and hip-hop with a keen interest in the performing arts. She has performed three times at the World Salsa Championships. She was also in the Top 10 of *So You Think You Can Dance-India*.

SHRUTI SINHA, *dancer*

A contemporary and ballet dancer, Shruti Sinha was part of India's premier dance reality show, *Dance India Dance*, Season 5. She is also well trained in the Malkhamba, a traditional Indian gymnastics.

RAHUL SONAWANE, *dancer*

Rahul Sonawane was a part of India's first-ever hip-hop crew, which was also a finalist of *India's Got Talent* Season 1. With a personal fascination for hip-hop and being from a family that loves Bollywood, he is well trained in hip-hop and Bollywood and has been dancing for the past 13 years. He also has an avid interest in music and plans to get into sound engineering and music production in the future.

KIRAN WAGHCHAWRE, *dancer*

Bollywood, hip-hop, Indian, and krump—you name it, and Kiran Waghchawre does it.

CHANDAN RAINA, *guitarist*

Chandan has been playing the guitar for the past 15 years and has performed with top Indian bands, such as 2Blue, Luke Kenny, Bhaskar Collective, Samved, and Gaurav Dagaonkar.

ANISH KALE, *percussionist*

Anish Kale's element of sound includes techno house, minimal techno, progressive house, commercial, psychedelic, Euro house, Dutch house, glitch hop, and Bollywood, and he has been in the industry for more than 12 years now. The first instrument he started playing at the age of 13 was the bongos, and he also performs on the darbuka, djembe, rotos, snare, duff, congos, tom, and tabla. Kale has also performed with stalwarts of Indian music, such as Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, Ghazi Khan, and Sukhbir.

Biographies, continued

AVADOOOTH PHADKE, *flautist*

Avadooth Phadke is a fourth-generation flautist. He is classically trained under the guidance of Rupak Kulkarni. Music has been his passion since the childhood. He has performed with Ustad Taufik Qureshi and Maestro Louiz Banks.

CREATIVE TEAM

SHRUTI MERCHANT, *producer and director*

Shruti Merchant began her career assisting her sister, Vaibhavi Merchant, in films like *Dhoom*, *Lakshya*, *Baghban*, *Kuch Na Kaho*, *Kal Ho Na Ho*, *Devdas*, and *Jab Tak Hai Jaan*. She made her debut as a choreographer and won the Big Entertainment Award for best choreography for the song, *Thug Le*, from *Ladies vs. Ricky Bahl*. Prior to directing *Taj Express*, she toured with traveling musicals for over five years as a touring choreographer. She has performed in countries like Australia, the U.K., Switzerland, South Africa, Spain, France, Singapore, and the United States, to name a few. It was during this time that she experienced the global theatre scene firsthand. Touring internationally she has gained experience and knowledge in the field of direction and production of stage shows. With *Taj Express* she has created a groundbreaking song, dance, and drama extravaganza that will entertain and enthrall audiences of all ages the world over. Merchant hopes to have *Taj Express* tour every big and small city around the world to give audiences a true flavor of India.

VAIBHAVI MERCHANT, *director of choreography*

Vaibhavi Merchant is one of Bollywood's leading choreographers. The granddaughter of pioneering Indian choreographer Shri B. Hiralal, Merchant's journey with dance began at an early age. During her career, she has choreographed dance numbers in numerous hit Bollywood films. She has been awarded a National Film Award for her choreography in *Dhol Baaje* from *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*. Her recent hits include *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, *Dhoom-3*, *Fan*, *Sultan*, and *Befikre*. She was also the choreography director for *The Merchants of Bollywood*, which has been touring globally for the past 10 years. With *Taj Express*, Merchant has worked towards bringing the magic of the story on stage through the expression and grace of various dance forms.

PRANAV MERCHANT, *executive producer*

Pranav Merchant has spent his life building businesses in varied industries, including real estate, entertainment, and more and has guided them to profitability. His passion for the international musical business brings him on board the *Taj Express*, where he hopes to introduce audiences in India and abroad to the true essence of India, while creating a global platform to showcase Indian talent. As the executive producer, he has been dedicated to getting some of the Indian entertainment industry's most gifted talents involved in *Taj Express*. Merchant's vision for *Taj Express* is to perform in every country around the world and to evolve the show into seasons that will have audiences hungry for more every time *Taj Express* is back in town.

TOBY GOUGH, *writer*

An award-winning international music theatre writer and director, Toby Gough is the creator of hit musicals such as *The Merchants of Bollywood*, *The Bar at Buena Vista*, *Lady Salsa*, *Soy de Cuba*, *Hemingway's Havana*, and *Havana Rumba!* He is also currently working on two new musicals—*Miami Libre* with Cuban artists living in Miami in collaboration with the Grammy-nominated super group, *Tiempo Libre*, and a new hip-hop project, *In the Dharavi Slums of Mumbai*. He recently produced the Cuban Gypsy project album with world music guru Damian Draghici and other legends of Cuban and gypsy music. Gough is director of *Brazil!Brazil!*, *Irish Celtic*, and *Irish Celtic Generations Musical*. He has created pioneering community engagement and conflict transformation projects in Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia, Africa, and Australia. He directs a world music theatre venue,

Biographies, continued

the World Festival, in collaboration with Brian Cox and Peter Gabriel, which won the Spirit of the Festival lifetime achievement award. He is also the recipient of five Scotsman first prize awards at the Edinburgh Festival and two Spirit of the Festival awards, two Total Theatre awards, and the Guardian International Theatre Award, and he has been nominated for a Grammy Award for his work with Tanzanian musicians the Zawose family.

SALIM & SULAIMAN MERCHANT, *music composers*

Salim and Sulaiman are a renowned Indian music composer duo credited with a host of chart-topping hits. In the past decade the duo have composed music for blockbuster Bollywood films, such as *Chak De India*, *Fashion*, *Neal 'n' Nikki*, and *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi*, to name a few. With the title track of *Taj Express*, which was composed exclusively for the show, Salim and Sulaiman have created a score that features traditional Indian sounds while maintaining a global flavor.

ABHIJIT VAGHANI, *music director*

Having started his career with fun and spunky jingles, Abhijit Vaghani made a beeline into mainstream Bollywood, scoring absolutely thrilling and recordbreaking backgrounds and tracks in blockbusters. His eccentric sense of style and individuality equipped the scenes with precision and character. Interpreting visual scenes into matriculate sounds comes naturally to this promising young musician. His productions are greatly appreciated and acknowledged not only within the Bollywood film industry and its audiences, but internationally as well. The national and international acclaim that he has achieved in such a short span of time only proves his dedication and passion for the world of music. His work as a music producer in latest hit movies—*Sarabjit*, *Fan*, *Ki & Ka*, *Kapoor & Sons*, and *Bajirao Mastani*—displays inspirational productions that reflect his passion, drive, and the ability to create unimaginable harmony.

BIPIN TANNA, *costume designer*

Taj Express is Bipin Tanna's second experience with a musical on stage, in addition to various Bollywood movies and TV shows. Designing costumes for the show was an extensive and intriguing project for him, which resulted in over 1,000 costumes and more than 500 accessories featuring exquisite details, colors, glamor, and bling. One of the goals of the show is to put Indian textiles on the international map, and *Taj Express* is as much a journey through the vast array of Indian textiles as it is through India.

Engagement Events

Friday, February 24, 2017, 6 PM

MIX #attheMAC: TAJ EXPRESS: THE BOLLYWOOD MUSICAL REVUE

Cube

Join your friends and make new connections during this evening event for young professionals. Mix #attheMAC includes a reception with India-inspired hors d'oeuvres by the Holiday Inn Christiansburg Blacksburg, two complimentary drinks and a cash bar, and a ticket to *Taj Express: A Bollywood Musical Revue* at 7:30 p.m.

Special thanks to Krisha Chachra, Diana Akers, and Jarret Rhyner

In the Galleries

Artist Spotlight: Candida Höfer (b. 1944, Eberswalde, Germany)

Candida Höfer's resplendent and breathtaking photographs delve into history, bringing into sharp focus architectural splendors of the past. Her magnificent interiors of grand libraries, palaces, opera houses, and theatres reference human achievement of the highest order, yet are devoid of human presence. Infused with this uncanny and profound paradox, these extraordinary works signify far more than literal representations of place. Höfer lives and works in Cologne, Germany. Learn more at artnet.com/artists/candida-hoefer.

View Höfer's stunning, large-scale works *Catherine Palace Pushkin St. Petersburg III* (2014) and *Teatro di Villa Mazzacorati di Bologna II* (2006) in the Ruth C. Horton Gallery through April 1, 2017.

ARTISTS AND ARCHITECTURE: PROJECTION/CONVERGENCE/INTERSECTION

James Casebere, Amy Casey, Dionisio González, Candida Höfer, Matthew Kolodziej, Jean-François Rauzier, and Jennifer Williams

January 19-April 1, 2017

All galleries

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday-Friday, 10 AM-5:30 PM

Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

Always free

To arrange a group tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin at megh79@vt.edu.