



# bhai baldeep singh



*Bhai Baldeep Singh was born into a rare family who sustained an unwavering devotion to preserving the Sikh spiritual heritage of gurbani kirtan throughout the tumultuous centuries of Sikh history from the Guru's times to the present day. As a restless seeker of the invaluable rich cultural and spiritual legacy of the Sikh gurus and the old masters, he has relentlessly searched for living masters who still embody the timeless values. Although the Sikhs' loss of the sense of significance in music and culture has become a matter of great concern for him, Bhai Baldeep Singh has remained hopeful. He has devoted his life to documenting and learning from the treasures of the wise ones still among us, and has himself become an exponent of the traditions to ensure their survival as they are passed to the next generations.*

## Kirtan Maryada Exponent

Bhai Baldeep Singh is today the 13th generation exponent of the Sikh *kirtan maryada*. He has assimilated the highly evolved and complex heritage of *shabad-reets* from his granduncles, Bhai Gurcharan Singh and Bhai Avtar Singh, 11th generation singers of *gurbani*. Bibi Jaswant Kaur and Maharaj Bir Singh Namdhari have also initiated him into some of the rare compositions preserved by legendary masters such as Bhai Tabba of Amritsar.

Bhai Baldeep Singh has devoted himself to mastery of all aspects of *kirtan*: melody (*raag*), rhythm (*laya*), mystical poetry (*bani*) and expression (*bhav*). He has imbibed understanding of the deep layers of meaning through his study of Sikh mysticism and philosophy.



## Dhrupad Exponent

*Dhrupad* has been the music of the path for devotees of India's many spiritual traditions since ancient times. The Sikh gurus also expressed deep spiritual mysteries through musical compositions in the *dhrupad* style. Bhai Baldeep Singh has been mentored in the *dhrupad* genre by his granduncles as well as Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Dagar, a 19th generation scion of the *Dagar-vani* and Ustad M. Hafiz Khan, the 134th exponent of the *Khandar-vani*.

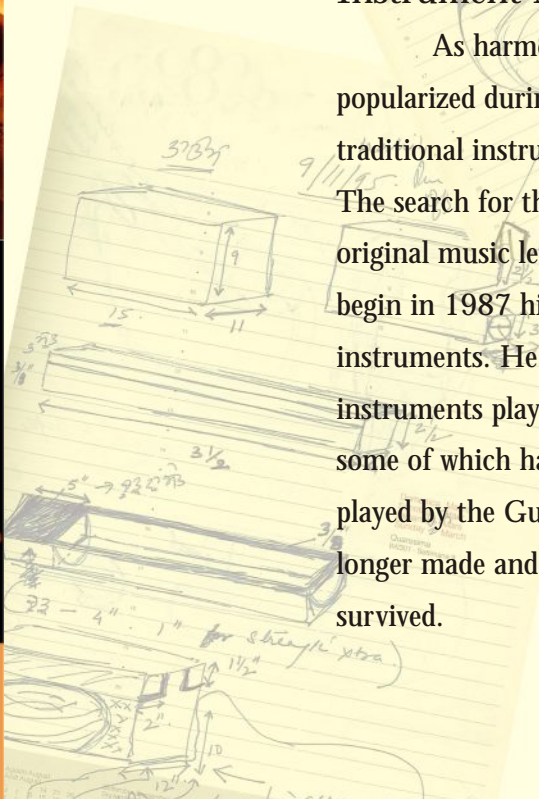
Bhai Baldeep Singh has inspired interest in the structure of the classic poetic forms found in the *Gurubani*, has revived the rare art of singing the 22 *vaars* (odes) and other folk based genres, and has awakened the artistic elements hidden in the old compositions.

## Jori Exponent

Within the musical landscape of the Indian subcontinent, the art of percussion has evolved at a pace parallel to the evolution of melodic sound, equal in beauty and complexity and equally rich in repertoire. From the region of Punjab came the most ancient school of percussion. Bhai Baldeep Singh learned the system (*silsila*) of jori and *pakhawaj/mridang* playing known as *Amritsari baaj* from Bhai Arjan Singh 'Tarangar' (1900-1995), one of the greatest exponents of the art. As a 400-year-old system, Amritsari baaj is one of the oldest surviving percussion traditions in India. Today, Bhai Baldeep Singh is the prime exponent (*khalifa*) of this Punjab *gharana* of classical percussion.



For his percussion related research, Bhai Baldeep Singh has interacted with the masters of various traditions. Ustad Gyani Darshan Singh, Pandit Shankarrao Shindey Bua Appegaonkar, Bhai Narinder Singh, Pandit Laxmi Narayan Pawar, Pandit Gopal Das, Pandit Balkrishan Sharma, Bhai Mohinder Singh, Bhai Balbir Singh and Ustad Altaf Hussain constitute his peer group. From the *Bhramari-kathak* exponent Budhadeb Chattopadhyaya, Bhai Baldeep Singh received insights into the usage of *pakhawaj* in *Kathak*.



As harmonium and *tabla* became popularized during the 20th century, the traditional instruments fell to the wayside.

The search for the authentic sound of the original music led Bhai Baldeep Singh to begin in 1987 his research into the original instruments. He discovered that many of the instruments played in the Guru's court, some of which had been both created and played by the Gurus themselves, were no longer made and playable relics had not survived.

Realizing they would have to be made, he looked for craftsmen and after a five-year search, was fortunate to find a skilled instrument maker who still remembered the craft. From 1993 to 1995 Bhai Baldeep Singh learned the craft of instrument making from Gyani Harbhajan Singh, who had not made an instrument in over forty years. Through this encounter he has undertaken a project to revive almost all the instruments dating back to the times of the Sikh gurus by personally handcrafting them. Bhai Baldeep Singh established a workshop to revive the instruments and the craft, and has begun training the next generation of instrument makers. Today he has the unique distinction of having carved by hand the nomadic rabab (also known as the *dhrujadi-rabab*), *saranda*, *taus*, and *dilruba*. He has designed a new *tanpura*. He is also credited with reviving jori and *pakhawaj-mridang* of Punjab.

His interest in traditional music of all cultures has inspired friendship with Western musicians and instrument makers. In January 2002, he made a violin based on the Stradivarius violin in Spring City, Utah (USA), under the guidance of his friend, Paul Hart, a renowned bowed instrument maker. In February 2004 he collaborated with Alain Herou a famous Parisian bow maker, on a new bow design for the *taus*.





## Musical Performer

Bhai Baldeep Singh is a much sought after musical performer, as both a vocalist and percussionist. His singing style has been enriched by the contributions of masters and musicians belonging to different traditions, and his personal talent, along with his unique involvement and inspiration, make his rendering of the traditional *kirtan* an entirely new and refreshing experience, in which the reminiscences of the ancient Indian atmosphere and the awareness and the sensibility of a contemporary mind come together to give new life and meaning to the musical tradition he represents. His grasp and understanding of the musical subtleties and his fertile imagination and creative abilities make of his singing not only a sincere devotional expression but also a very interesting display of vocal possibilities and challenges, intermingled by a feeling that reveals the singer's involvement in his own spiritual awareness and practice.



Bhai Baldeep Singh is known for purity in the rendition (*nikaas*) and his adherence to the grammar of the ancient percussive poetry, which is now only rarely heard. While the school of percussion he represents is very old, Bhai Baldeep Singh brings to bear on it a very contemporary mind, which is sensitive to the eternal values of ancient music systems. His feel for string instruments and very special ability to craft instruments himself, gives his percussion playing a special tonal musicality. His knowledge as scholar, vocalist, instrument maker, string player and percussionist reveal an integrated approach, which gives an added dimension to his percussion playing.

Bhai Baldeep has performed in concerts throughout the world. His concerts have become significant demonstrations of the symbiosis of *Gurubani* with *raga-naad-laya ved*. Recent performances have included: the India Habitat Centre, India International Centre, the Batala Sangeet Sammelan, the Concert for Peace and Understanding (Grace St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Tucson, Arizona, 2003), Guru Maanyo Granth (Talkatora Gardens, New Delhi), the Congress of the World Parliament of Religions (Barcelona, Spain, July 2004) and the Concert for Peace and Understanding (Berger Center for the Performing Arts, Tucson, Arizona, 2004). He was also invited perform a *jori/pakhawaj* solo as well as sing in order to inaugurate the prestigious Kalidas Sammelan in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh (November 2004).





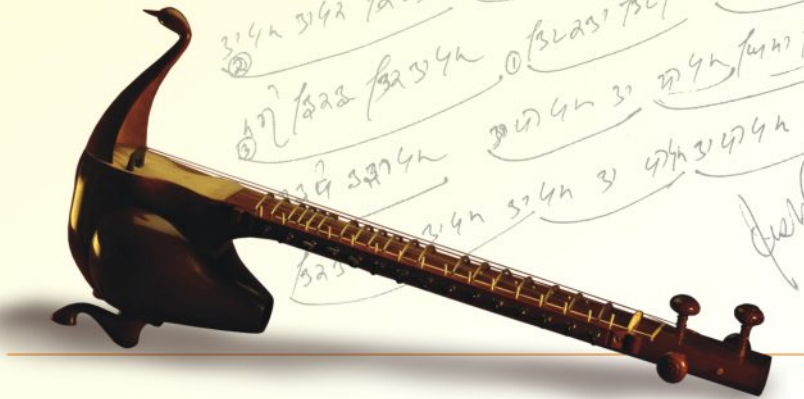
## Documentation and Preservation

After the partition of Punjab in 1947, the Sikh diaspora resulted in a tragic interruption in the transmission of the ancient oral traditions. Most of the remaining masters who remember the old traditions are themselves now very old. Compelled to document their knowledge before it is lost forever, Bhai Baldeep Singh has embarked on an arduous and painstaking task of preservation and documentation of the sacred musical practices and renditions of the Sikhs. Aware that all oral traditions face a similar threat to their survival, he is committed to documenting the musical heritage of many cultures.

Bhai Baldeep Singh has traveled the backroads to villages throughout India and Pakistan as well as abroad to countries in Asia, Europe and North America in search of those who remember. Using state-of-the-art media technology he has collected audio and visual recordings of priceless value. This research has led to three documentary films on the subject of *kirtan* as well as a multi-media computer-based presentation. Over 400 hours of vintage-value *kirtan* recordings are a rare treasure with him now. The documentation research is an ongoing project.

Public interest in patronage for the arts has waned along with public awareness of the cultural heritage. Bhai Baldeep has worked to reawaken a sense of community responsibility and interest in giving generously to the arts and the artists. Leading by example, Bhai Baldeep Singh has provided (since 1993) financial support to many of the elderly musicians some of whom have been featured in his documentaries, and has personally sponsored scholarships for aspiring young musicians, including some of his own students.

To further ensure the future preservation of this heritage, Bhai Baldeep Singh has founded the Indus Valley Conservatory and Anad Records. The conservatory will train students in music and other cultural treasures, exposing them to classes with the living masters and the wealth they have to share. Anad Records is already publishing recordings under the World Music Heritage Series of various artists/exponents from the oral traditions available to the listeners of today. As the community is sensitized to the beauty of the authentic folk and classical art forms, interest in the preservation efforts will grow.



## Scholar and Teacher

To ensure that the precious heritage of *kirtan* among the Sikhs continues to survive and flourish, Bhai Baldeep Singh developed a comprehensive educative process. It consists of the original practices of *nada yoga* and the teaching and learning modes traditionally prevalent among the Sikhs. He travels around the world sharing his knowledge of the tradition and its conventions with all who seek to learn. He has conducted workshops and seminars in Europe, North America, South-East Asia and Australia.

Since 1996, Bhai Baldeep Singh has met with a group of students in the United States for two intensive 12-day workshops per year. As a patient craftsman he has worked to carve voices into musical instruments and through the *kirtan* practice has unlocked the treasures found in the mystical poetry of the Guru's *bani*. He continues to nurture percussion and voice talents of his students in India and abroad.

Bhai Baldeep Singh's lecture-demonstrations and concerts have drawn enthusiastic response at many institutions and universities including Hofstra University (New York), Punjabi University (Patiala), Universita La Sapienza (Rome), Centre for South Asia Studies at the University of California (Berkeley), Oriental University of Napoli (Italy), Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar), Sangeet Natak Academy (New Delhi), N.C.P.A. (Mumbai), Dalai Lama Foundation for Universal Responsibility, Dhrupad Mela (Varanasi), Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery (February 2003 and January 2004, Phoenix, AZ). Several of his articles, poems and papers have been published in respected academic journals.

## Continuing Efforts

Interest in Bhai Baldeep Singh and his many projects continues to grow. In 1997 he was conferred the Ustad Bhai Batan Singh Memorial Award for his invaluable contribution to the revival of Kirtan and for bringing back to life some of the extinct instruments.

In 2003 Delhi State honored Bhai Baldeep Singh with its annual award (2002-03) for contribution to music. The same year he was conferred the “Sikh Gaurav” Award at Amritsar. The release of “Jori”, his first solo CD album, in 2004 has attracted international attention.

Preserving the grace and grandeur of our noble traditional spiritual and cultural heritage within the context of life in the modern world is a daunting and delicate task. Bhai Baldeep Singh encourages all who share an appreciation for these timeless treasures to become participants in their preservation.





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