

Bollywood Masala Orchestra Brings a Taste of India to North America



The performers of Bollywood Masala Orchestra and Dancers of India, who are traveling to 35 cities in the U.S. and 15 cities in Canada to share an authentic and modern taste of India. (Columbia Management Artists Inc. photo)

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SONIA WARAICH, India West

SAN LEANDRO, Calif. — Setting dance to live music combining brass band and traditional Indian instrumentation, Bollywood Masala Orchestra and Dancers of India is bringing an experimental, authentically Indian audiovisual experience to audiences across North America.

With 17 Indian performers, including acrobats, four dancers and musicians playing instruments ranging from the snare drum and clarinet to the tabla and dholak, "The Spirit of India" is bringing a mix of traditional, Bollywood and original music to 35 cities in the U.S. and 15 cities in Canada.

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The 11 performances include original compositions, Bollywood songs and dances such as "Dhoom Taana" from "Om Shanti Om," and traditional Rajasthani songs and dances.

Currently touring California, Rahis Bharti, 32, founder and artistic director of Bollywood Masala, said the idea behind "The Spirit of India" was to create something new.

After the sold-out performance in Berkeley Oct. 11, Bharti said the crowd was entranced by the music and performances, which they hailed traditional and authentic while also being modern and contemporary.

"I love experimentation, and I love to create new things and new projects," Bharti told **India-West**. "We need to create bridges between the cultures." Bharti said he wanted to combine the sounds of the brass band, which is a staple in Indian weddings, with the traditional sounds of Rajasthan to create something new. But Bharti said the sounds are so different it was far from an easy task.

"The brass band is already a loud sound," the musician said. "It's not so easy to combine two different sounds — strong and traditional — together." But the challenge was not insurmountable for the group, which has already performed 150 shows since it was started three years ago.

Bharti said he has worked with merging unique sounds to create something new for a long time.

"I have worked a lot with flamenco and Spanish musicians, I've worked with African musicians," Bharti said. "So we are open to other cultures also." Though he usually works with musicians, for this show, Bharti said he had been working with the dancers and acrobats on every other aspect of the show as well.

Bharti, who comes from seven generations of musicians based in Jaipur, Rajasthan, has already done over a thousand performances, including for Queen Elizabeth and Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#), in 85 countries over the last 14 years with his traditional Rajasthani group Dhoad Gypsies of Rajasthan.

As cultural ambassadors of Rajasthan, the musician said he and his groups have been sharing the richness of Indian culture with the world for over a decade.

"We have a rich heritage of music and dance in India," Bharti told **India-West**, "and that's what we are sharing and bringing to the world."

They will next be performing Oct. 18 at 7:30 p.m. in San Diego as part of the San Diego Symphony's International Passport Series. Tickets can be purchased by calling (619) 235-0804 or visiting www.sandiegosymphony.com.