

Sufi singer Gulfam Sabri revives musical memories in Kabul

The Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) sponsored a young talented Sufi singer, Gulfam Sabri, to represent India at the Chishtia Conference organised by the Afghan Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism in Kabul on December 1 and 2, 2005.

Not many people remember that the roots of the famous Chishtia school of Sufism originate at Chist-e-Sharif, about 120 kms east of Herat in western Afghanistan. Today, the traditions of the Chishtia school are best symbolised at the shrines in Ajmer Sharif and Hazrat Nizamuddin in Delhi.

Accompanying Gulfam Sabri were Afzaal Ahmed Zahoor on the violin and Mohammad Akbar on the tabla and dholak.

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His Majesty Zahir Shah has long been a connoisseur of Indian classical and semi-classical music. Well-known Indian musicians like Ustad Vilayat Khan and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan have performed at the Royal Court in Kabul and later in Rome, where the King spent nearly 30 years in exile.

Among the notables who graced the occasion at the Embassy Residence were the Information, Culture and Tourism Minister Dr. Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, Mines and Industries Minister Eng. Mir Mohammad Sediq, Youth Affairs Minister Amena Afzali, National Security Advisor Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, representatives of the diplomatic community and a large number of Indians working in Afghanistan.

For three evenings, the cold air of Kabul resonated with the warm strains of classical



From left, Mohammad Akbar (on the tabla), Gulfam Sarwar Sabri (vocals), Afzaal Ahmed Zahoor (on the violin).



Guests at Gulfam Sabri's performance at the Embassy Residence included, from left, Dr. Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism; Ashraf Ghani, Chancellor, Kabul University; Musa Maroofi, Chairman, Afghan Independent Commission on Radio and TV; Amena Afzali, Minister of Youth Affairs; Mir Mohammad Sediq, Minister of Mines and Industries; and Habibullah Qaderi, Minister of Counter-Narcotics.

compositions by Amir Khusro — *Abr Mi Bar Do Mann Me Shamam Az Yoor Juda...* and *Nami Danam Chi Manzil Bud Shab Joye Ke Man Budam...*

Gulfam Sabri endeared himself to the local audience when he performed compositions of Ustad Sar-a-hang, the best-known Afghan singer and composer of the 20th Century, especially *Nigora Ka Saye Chashmam Sarayad...*

Crossing borders, compositions of Baba

Bulle Shah such as *Tera Ishq Nachaya...* and Baba Farid, *Ni Main Hardam Rehndi Udaas...* had everybody clapping in rhythm. The evening inevitably drew to a close with lighter compositions and ghazals starting with Ahmad Faraz's ever-popular *Ranjish Hi Sahi...*

"Music like this has not been heard in Kabul for many years," recalled old timers with nostalgia as they applauded Gulfam Sabri for encores. ■