

# Baluji's Inner vision

## MUSIC MAESTRO SHRIVASTAV TALKS ABOUT THE ORCHESTRA, UK TOUR AND NEW ALBUM

by ASJAD NAZIR

**SOMEONE who has been blind from a young age, multi-instrumental musical genius Baluji Shrivastav has made a name for himself on the world stage.**

Although he has played with A-list stars like Stevie Wonder, Chris Martin and Shakira to name a few, perhaps his greatest achievement has been bringing together blind musicians from around the world for his Inner Vision Orchestra and touring with them. They play music from around the world, skillfully combining contrasting genres and always leaving audiences enthralled with their performances.

The maestro, who has just released an album with the critically acclaimed orchestra, has embarked on a UK tour with them. *Eastern Eye* caught up with Baluji to find out about the tour, the orchestra's debut album, key advice he would give young musicians, the future of Indian classical music according to him and more.

**How would you describe your amazing musical journey?**  
Music is my life, and as I have grown so music has grown with me.

**You have achieved an incredible amount in your career so far. What keeps the passion alive for you?**

Every day I discover some new way of listening and responding to sound and that is a constant inspiration. Metropolitan cities like London are a blessing for me, because there are different kinds of music and voices everywhere.

**What can we expect from your tour?**  
Expect music from many different cultures, different moods, stories and personalities who will inspire and uplift you, will move you to laughter and also cause you to shed a few tears.

**Are there any particular songs you like performing?**

I personally enjoy Sanskrit, Indian folk and singing in Dari, Arabic and Kalabari from Africa.

**How much do you enjoy being on stage with the Inner Vision Orchestra?**

I love the stage because it makes me feel totally alive. Being the MD [musical director] of the orchestra is a great privilege for me to share our inner vision.

**How much of the set is pre-planned and how much is improvised?**

We have rehearsed the set intensively. I would say 50 per cent is fixed and the other 50 per cent improvised. The more we work together, the greater is our communication and musical understanding. Still, we have surprises up our sleeves.

**Tell us about the band's debut album?**

This is a live recording from our tour in 2013 and is our first album together, so it is very exciting for us. There are 12 tracks on it, which include Sanskrit, Dari, Arabic, Japanese, Kalibari, Italian and English songs. But there are also instrumental pieces, with sitar, oud, piano, tabla, viola, violin, guitars, keyboards, gopi and cymbals. It has the energy of a live recording and live experiences, which personally I prefer to over-produced albums.

**How does this compare to other music projects you have worked on?**

It's totally unique. It's so global, but because we are all blind, we have a different way of communication based on more feeling and listening than other groups I have performed with. Also, the experience of working has changed people's lives, giving confidence and much-needed exposure to them.

**Who will the album appeal to?**

Good question. People who are interested in music, different languages, cultures and are looking for something different. It will definitely appeal to people who enjoy good tunes and melodies.

**Do you have a personal favourite song on there?**

It changes with each performance.

**What can we expect from you next?**

As far as Inner Vision is concerned, an even bigger orchestra, because there is a long waiting list of great musicians wanting to be part of this. Of course more albums too, hopefully a commission to compose something special for the next tour and to form links internationally.

**Who would you love to collaborate with?**

Stevie Wonder and Ravindra Jain.

**You play a lot of instruments, but is there a new one you would like to learn?**

I would like to learn the dijeridoo.

**You have done some stunning collaborations. Which was your favourite?**

They were all special in their different ways. I particularly enjoy touring with Amorphous Androgynous, Jimi Tenor, Akram Khan, Nahid Siddiqui and Jazz Orient. Classical highs were performing with Zakir Hussain, Anindo Chatterji, Ustad Faiez Khan and Sanju Sahai. Also, recording with Shakira, Massive Attack and at Hard Rock Calling with Stevie Wonder.

**Which of the musicians taught you the most?**

My mother, because she was my first guru, and All India Radio.

**What do you think is the future of Indian classical music?**

There are new artists coming through, which is great, but there needs to be investment from the government. It needs to acknowledge that Indian classical music is one of the great treasures the country can offer the world. The music is not only a musical gift, but it is also linked with Nada Yoga, and can have a deeply beneficial effect on those who perform and listen to it. Musicians also need to be more generous and open-minded to different approaches in teaching and presentation.

**Does it need to fuse with other genres to survive?**

Yes, but it also needs to be true to itself. It is so vast that as long as the classical knowledge is there, it can extend to other forms. Great artists respond to what is around them, according to their



■ Inner Vision Orchestra tour dates  
 October 4 @ 5pm: New College Worcester, The Chapel, Whittington Road, Worcester; T: 01905 763933  
 October 10 @ 7.30pm: Barnfield Theatre, Barnfield Road, Exeter, Devon; T: 01392 271808  
 October 15 @ 8pm: Ropetackle Arts Centre, Little High St, Shoreham-by-Sea; T: 01273 464440  
 October 18 @ 7.45pm: New Wolsey Theatre, Civic Drive, Ipswich; T: 01473 295900  
 October 25 @ 7.30pm: Central Library, St George Square, Luton; T: 01582 878 100



knowledge and have integrity. Listening and responding is the essence. When I say listening, I also mean feeling, feeling silence and atmosphere. Music is the most abstract and refined of all the arts.

**What is your greatest unfulfilled musical ambition?**

I would say it is to hear my Urdu opera on the big stage.

**Why do you love music?**  
Because it is life, it is love, it is peaceful, joyous and liberating.

**What piece of advice would you give young musicians?**

Find a good teacher and practice with dedication for there is no shortcut, and don't be in too much of a hurry for success. *Shiksha* – good learning, *Deeksha* – listening to others and playing with

them and *Pariksha* – testing your progress, are all key.

**Finally, why should we pick up your new album?**

You will enjoy it and it will help us fund the orchestra. Spread the joy.

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