

Lamont School of Music

North Indian Classical Ensemble

Shilpi Nikhil

Director, Spring 2026

With guest artists

Joginder Singh Viridi, vocal

Nabin Shrestha, tabla

Sarah Morelli, sarod

Monday, June 5, 2026

7:30 p.m.

Frederic C. Hamilton Family Recital Hall



Robert & Judi Newman Center
for the Performing Arts

Program

Tonight's program brings together artists from the University of Denver and the broader Denver community in two interrelated traditions of North Indian classical performance: kathak dance and Hindustani vocal music.

The first half of the evening features kathak in the lineage of Pandit Chitresh Das. Following intermission, we are honored to present a featured Hindustani vocal performance by senior artist Joginder Singh Viridi, accompanied by tabla artist Nabin Shrestha. Viridiji has been both an accomplished musician and a generous presence within Colorado's South Asian musical community for decades; it is a privilege to celebrate his artistry this evening.

Together, the evening reflects the interdependence of music, rhythm, movement, oral tradition, and community across generations of artists and learners. Thank you for joining us.

—Sarah Morelli

Kathak Performers (unless otherwise noted):

Helena Bolle, Tarini Sharma, Mahee Kulkarni, Pras Sapkota, Elizabeth Bangiyev, Brinda Rajendrakumar, Ajanta Bhattacharjee, Ishika Thakre, Jyoti Upadhyay, Priti Upare Thakre, Shruti Sharma, Samantha Neufeld, Shreya Subedi

Accompanying Musicians:

Shilpi Nikhil, recitation
Nabin Shrestha, tabla
Sarah Morelli, sarod
Alex Uhrlaub, harmonium

Rangmanch: "Coloring of the Stage"

Rangmanch, literally "coloring the stage," is a traditional opening that prepares and defines the performance space. Through mudrās (hand gestures), rhythmic movement, and ritual enactment, the dancer performs a pūjā, invoking the forces of creation, preservation, and transformation: Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshvara.

Thāt

Thāt is rooted in the refined aesthetics of North India's court traditions. It emphasizes poise, restraint, and nuanced expressivity (nazākat and andāz). Stillness, gaze, and the measured placement of weight become as significant as virtuosity, as each rendering unfolds uniquely through rhythmic play, swift turns, crisp stances, and intricate footwork.

Kathak Yoga

Tarini Sharma, Mahee Kulkarni

Kathak Yoga, developed by Pandit Chitresh Das and his disciples, integrates rhythm, melody, and movement into a single embodied practice. The dancer recites the tāl, sings the repeating laharā, and executes intricate rhythmic phrasing simultaneously, demanding sustained coordination of mind, breath, and body. Tonight's performance features kramlaya tatkar (ascending speeds of Tatkar footwork). Originally cultivated as an inward, self-refining practice, Kathak Yoga becomes even more demanding in performance, requiring focus, stamina, and clarity from these young dancers.

"Takita dhikita takadimi" Sequence

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"Takita dhikita takadimi" is a foundational rhythmic phrase shared by kathak and tabla. In this piece, the dancers move through multiple speeds, progressively intensifying its density within the 16-beat tīntāl cycle. Footwork patterns and swift turns sonically articulate the rhythmic phrase in dynamic interplay with expansive upper-body movement and choreographic variation.

Pranām – "Bansuri Baj Rahi"

The kathak portion of tonight's program concludes with pranām, an offering of gratitude to teachers, musicians, audience, and the art form itself. Often described as a "meditation in motion," pranām invites the dancer to attune to something larger than the self, acknowledging the earth upon which we dance and the oral tradition through which knowledge has been passed from generation to generation.

INTERMISSION

Featured Hindustani Vocal Performance

Joginder Singh Viridi (vocal) and Nabin Shrestha (tabla)

Khyāl: Vilambit (slow) and drut (fast) compositions in Rāg Hamsadhwani

Please silence your cell phones

Ghazal: “Dhuan Banake Faza Mein” by Nazir Baaqri in Rāg Chandrakauns, Dādrā tāl (6 beats)

dhuāñ banā ke fazā meñ uḌā diyā mujh ko
maiñ jal rahā thā kisī ne bujhā diyā mujh ko

(Someone) turned me to smoke and dispersed me into the wind while the flame of love still flickered within me, someone extinguished me.

taraqqiyoñ kā fasāna sunā diyā mujh ko
abhī hañsā bhī na thā aur rulā diyā mujh ko

(Someone) told me stories of progress and promise; before I could even laugh, made me cry.

maiñ ek zarra bulandī ko chhūne niklā thā
havā ne tham ke zamīñ par girā diyā mujh ko

I, a speck of dust, set out to touch the heights; but the wind seized me and cast me back to earth.

na jaane kaun sā jazba thā jis ne khud hī ‘nazīr’
mirī hī zaat kā dushman banā diyā mujh ko

I do not know what emotion it was, says Nazir, that made me an enemy unto myself.

North Indian Classical Ensemble

Tarini Sharma
Mahee Kulkarni
Pras Sapkota
Elizabeth Bangiyev
Samantha Neufeld
Shreya Subedi
Alex Uhrlaub

Sureela Guest Dancers

Helena Bolle
Ajanta Bhattacharjee
Brinda Rajendrakumar
Ishika Thakre
Jyoti Upadhyay
Priti Upare Thakre
Shruti Sharma

The guest dancers performing this evening are part of a nonprofit kathak school founded by Sarah Morelli in collaboration with DU graduates who sought to continue their study beyond their university years and make sustained kathak training accessible to the broader community. Originally established as Sureela, the school operated as Leela Denver during the Covid years. Sureela, meaning “in tune” or “melodious,” reflects the school’s commitment to attunement: to rhythmic and melodic alignment, to study within a direct lineage, and to cultivating the whole artist.

Announcing the DU Fund for Indian Classical Music

The Lamont School of Music is proud to announce the DU Fund for Indian Classical Music.

This fund has been created to support performances and other programming that furthers education in music traditions from the Indian subcontinent.

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You may also contact Laura Mack at Laura.Mack@du.edu or 303-871-6267 to make your donation.



Biographies

Joginder Singh Viridi is a highly respected Hindustani vocalist and senior cultural figure within the Denver Front Range South Asian arts community. Born in Dharamsala, India in 1935, Viridiji began singing Sikh shabads in the gurdwara at the age of nine and soon began formal training in Hindustani classical music under Pandit Charanji Lal Jagyasu in Lahore. Following the Partition of India and Pakistan, he continued his musical studies through dedicated independent practice. At the age of thirteen, he resumed formal training with Master Prakash of the Kirana gharana, studying with him throughout his college years. He later continued advanced study with Ustad Maqsood Ali Khan in Lucknow, further deepening his grounding in the Kirana tradition. He performed regularly for All India Radio stations in Jalandhar and Shimla and appeared in music conferences and performances across India, including in Jalandhar, Lucknow, Bareilly, and Asansol (West Bengal).

Alongside his musical training, Viridiji pursued engineering studies and completed a PhD from Allahabad University in 1964. Viridiji later served as a professor at Modern College for Women and Khalsa College of Education under Punjab University before traveling to Canada and the United States in 1974 and settling permanently in the United States in 1976.

Over the decades, Viridiji has remained one of the foundational figures in the development of Hindustani classical music along Colorado's Front Range, helping to sustain and nurture North Indian vocal traditions within the region's growing South Asian community. Known especially for his khyal and ghazal performances, Viridiji is admired for the depth, warmth, and expressive subtlety of his musical style, as well as for his longstanding commitment to teaching and mentorship. Many students and community members throughout the area have been shaped by his guidance, generosity, and musical insight.

Now at age 91, Viridiji continues to embody a remarkable legacy of musicianship, cultural continuity, and artistic devotion. The University of Denver's North Indian Classical Ensemble is honored to recognize and celebrate his enduring contributions through this featured guest artist performance.

Sarah Morelli is a kathak dancer, scholar, and Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music. Her artistic practice is grounded in extensive training with kathak master Pandit Chitresh Das and Hindustani music maestro Ali Akbar Khan (voice and sarod), as well as senior disciples including Pandit Rajeev Taranath, Dr. George Ruckert, Gretchen Hayden, Steve Oda, and Madhuri Devi Singh.

As a kathak performer, Sarah has presented full solos and leading roles at venues including the Royal Opera House in Mumbai, LA's Ford Amphitheatre, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Puducherry. She is a founding soloist with the Leela Dance Collective and a member of the Temporal Taal Collective, which brings Indian classical music into dialogue with jazz and global traditions.

In Colorado, she is founder and director of Leela Denver, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, formerly known as Sureela, dedicated to cultivating the next

generation of kathak artists and audiences through sustained training, mentorship, and public performance. Sarah also maintains an active scholarly profile. She serves as President of the Society for Asian Music and Book Reviews Co-editor for the journal *Ethnomusicology*. Her monograph, *A Guru's Journey: Pandit Chitresh Das and Indian Classical Dance in Diaspora* (University of Illinois Press, 2019), and her co-edited volume *Music and Dance as Everyday South Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2024), reflect her ongoing commitment to the embodied and inclusive study of South Asian arts.

Nabin Shrestha began studying tabla at the age of eight under the guidance of Guru Shri Rabin Lal Shrestha, drawing additional inspiration from his brother, Rajendra Shrestha. While pursuing his academic studies in music, Nabin received a scholarship from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) to continue his musical training in India. During his time there, he had the opportunity to study with distinguished artists including Ustad Shri Faiyaz Khan and Shri Tansen Shrivastav. After completing a Master's degree in music, he continued advanced training under the legendary tabla maestro "Taalmani" Pandit Suresh Talwalkar.

Nabin has recorded a variety of projects, including Raaganubhuti, a Hindustani classical vocal album; Redrums, a fusion project featuring traditional drums from Nepal; and Murchchhanaa, a jazz fusion album. We are incredibly fortunate that he is based in Colorado, where he performs with artists across a wide range of musical genres, records, composes music, and offers tabla instruction.

He has presented workshops, lectures, and demonstrations at institutions including the University of Denver, University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado College, Naropa University, and the University of New Mexico. Recent projects have included collaborations with Sheela Bringi and Elden Kelly, and with the Temporal Taal Ensemble, including presentations of "Nightfall Rhapsody" with symphonies across the country, including at Johns Hopkins University, University of Northern Colorado, Stockton University, and Rowan College, as well as a full-evening performance in St. Petersburg, Florida. Through performance, teaching, and collaboration, Nabin continues to foster meaningful artistic connections across communities and musical traditions.

Shilpi Nikhil has trained in kathak for nearly two decades in both India and the United States, studying within two major lineages. She began her training under Jigyasa Giri of the Lucknow gharana and, for the past decade, has immersed herself in the California gharana tradition of Pandit Chitresh Das. Since 2015, she has studied closely with Dr. Sarah Morelli in Denver, who continues to guide her as guru and mentor.

In addition to her performance work, Shilpi has contributed to Dr. Morelli's research through Hindi-English translation, including material featured in *A Guru's Journey*, an ethnography of Pandit Chitresh Das's artistic legacy. A committed educator, she is busy as faculty at Leela Denver, as Founder and Artistic Director of Celestial Dance Academy (teaching light classical dance and kathak-influenced choreographies), and currently as Adjunct Faculty Instructor for the DU North Indian Classical Ensemble.

Shilpi recently presented a traditional kathak solo under the guidance of Dr. Morelli—a significant milestone in her ongoing artistic journey.



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