

AHIMSA: a multi-media musical journey with the Arohi Ensemble, celebrating the redemptive power & relevance of non-violence.

“Ahimsa is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.” - *Mahatma Gandhi*

Synopsis:

Arohi is an ensemble of virtuoso performing artists from India and the US, led by award-winning sitar player, composer, ensemble leader and activist Paul Livingstone. This fall 2015, the ensemble will release a new CD ‘*Ahimsa*’ celebrating non-violence as a vehicle for change through social, political and spiritual renewal. We are engaged in presenting a unique multimedia concert in conjunction with this release. We strive to engage our audience around the positive values of non-violence and sacrificial love in the historical context of 20th century political upheaval, democratic reform and social justice movements. We seek to demonstrate the continued relevance of Ahimsa (active non-violence) today in the face of violent social, civic and international conflict around the world. Our vision is to present an extraordinary artistic collaboration bridging history with current human rights struggles as we highlight the power of non-violence as an effective strategic philosophy of action.

A flowing narrative of themes woven through extended passages of dynamic music will utilize brief stories and quotes along with historic images, spoken word and animation. Creating a visceral experience of the painful struggles of non-violent civil disobedience, we will explore the transformative, revolutionary power that is unleashed through the sacrificial commitment to non-violent civil disobedience girded by the spiritual depth, moral and social vision of Gandhi and King among other visionary leaders.

As artists, we seek to inspire others through a contemporary global expression of innovative music as we validate the relevance of Ahimsa today. Accompanying the music will be a multimedia presentation that connects us with the visceral and sacrificial historical context of non-violent civil-disobedience. This year we celebrate anniversaries of key moments in the lives of the greatest spiritual and social leaders of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. The media aspect of the presentation will utilize creative projections of iconic historic imagery, quotes, graphics, animation and video, along with the dynamic music by the Arohi Ensemble.

Historical Context & Concept

We celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi’s 1915 return to India from South Africa, and the 50-year anniversary of Dr. King’s work culminating in the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The program will highlight their rich legacy of thought, social action and positive creative work. Inspired by the non-violent democratic movements they led, we recognize an interwoven legacy between India and the US and support the ongoing non-violent movements for social change around the world.

We recognize the profound inspiration and influence of Gandhi’s movements in India for independence and the abolition of “untouchability”. The spiritual writings of Leo Tolstoy and his direct correspondence were a catalyst for Gandhi’s work in South Africa. The ensuing

commitment to direct social action through non-violence was a torch passed from Gandhi to King directly into the American Civil Rights legacy. Both became national icons that ushered in dramatic social, political and spiritual transformation for millions of people in both India and the US. Their blueprint of direct action became a technique that has lived on through other Americans such as Mexican-American activist Cesar Chavez. This legacy of struggle for human rights and dignity through non-violent social uplift movements is being replicated today through the struggles of Ferguson and beyond.

In tribute to the inspiration of these two giants of social justice, we dedicate this cd 'Ahimsa' and musical work to Martin King's deep admiration of Mahatma Gandhi. Through this presentation we commemorate significant dates including the centenary of Gandhi's triumphant 1915 return to India from South Africa and the founding of his '*satyagraha ashram*', a live in community dedicated to non-violence as a philosophy and way of life in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

Additionally, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act that was signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson. This law, a direct result of King's leadership made illegal the racist tactics that white lawmakers in the southern states had enacted to deprive the vote from black citizens. We recognize in these struggles for justice an important and under-recognized link between India the United States of America and the world.

In these two historical events, 50 years apart, we recognize Gandhi's direct influence on King, and celebrate the legacy of non-violent civil disobedience - a legacy that is today more relevant than ever. We will explore this confluence with the musical synthesis of a Negro Spiritual and an Indian *bhajan* (devotional song) to culminate the concert.

Goal and Audience

Our goal is to educate, entertain and elevate audiences into an appreciation of these powerful values by engaging this historical context around the joyful experience of a multi-media concert. The music of Arohi attracts audiences young and old, including aficionados and fans of the classical traditions of east and west, as well as those who prefer the dynamism and raw energy of jazz, blues and rock music. Artists and audience come together in performances that highlight the incredibly rich musical forms of both India and the West, through an engaging and compelling amalgamation of musical traditions, visuals and artistic ingenuity.

Arohi Ensemble, Artistic personnel

The Arohi Ensemble is a collective of dedicated musicians who have worked together for the past 12 years developing a unique and innovative east/west crossover approach. Our creative focus blends Indian ragas and rhythms with western classical counterpoint and harmony, while capturing a sense of the free spirited improvisational work of a dynamic jazz ensemble. Arohi features a culturally diverse ensemble of multi-dimensional artists, including leading classical musicians from India and extraordinary jazz/classical/world crossover musicians from the US.

The full Arohi ensemble features four American musicians and two musicians from India incorporating *sitar*, *sarod*, *tabla*, *bansuri* (Indian flute), western flute, saxophone, cello & drum set. Embracing Indian *raga* music and the western art forms of classical chamber music and jazz.

Arohi¹ perform a compelling tapestry of syncretic '*ragajazz chamber music*'², bridging creative expressions of composition and improvisation between east and west.

With extensive professional experience these artists communicate the love and language of music to diverse audiences of all ages. They have pushed the envelope of their traditions by expanding the technical capacities and redesigning and modifying their own musical instruments. Members of Arohi have been steeped in the rich tradition of Indian music from many of the greatest representatives of the classical art form, including three disciples of the legendary "*godfather of world music*", Pandit Ravi Shankar, the greatest ambassador of Indian music to the world. Collectively, as artists, they have performed individually in hundreds of major concert halls around the world. They represent the vanguard of the ongoing evolution of highly innovative American creative ingenuity, having been recognized globally with diverse accolades in the press and through their numerous awards, including four Grammy Awards between them.

Arohi Ensemble features sitarist Paul Livingstone, a seasoned musician deeply involved in Indian and Western music for nearly 30 years. He has toured, performing and teaching around the US, Latin America, Europe and Asia, including over 12 cities around India. Venezuelan-American multi-dimensional flautist, Pedro Eustache, is a global music phenomenon who performs on a variety of flutes and reeds from around the world. One of the leading *sarod* players of India, Partho Sarothy has participated in every major music festival around India and have toured extensively around the world as well as Abhijit Banerjee, who leads the rhythmic dimension of Arohi as one of the most virtuosic *tabla* players of his generation. Dynamic cellist, Peter Jacobson, and the highly innovative drummer, Dave Lewis, fill out the American side of the ensemble.

Technical personnel

To present the highest standard of 21st century multi-media performance, Arohi will be joined by two technical support team members. Wing Ko and Mitch Steele bring decades of expertise in production and documentary filmmaking skills to the project including audio mixing, HD videography and creative visuals/collage projection. Their participation will be essential in harnessing the power of technology into high-production value for the live presentation as well as providing the highest quality documentation for future cross-cultural endeavors.

¹ Arohi means an 'ascending melody', a technical musical term within traditional raga music of North India.

² 'RagaJazz Chamber music' is our definition of our sound, which employs instruments, forms and concepts of Indian classical ragas, rhythms, classical western heterophony and the creative freedom of jazz.
