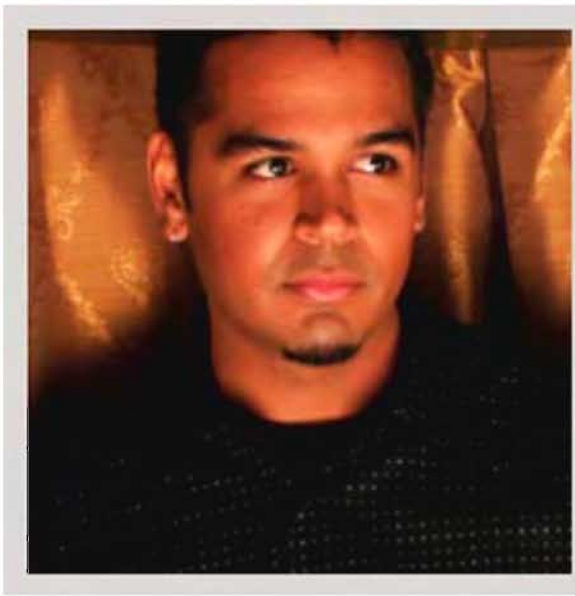


Want a Baraat Band? Call Sunny

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"Aaj mere yaar ki shadi hain..."

A bridegroom atop his horse resplendent in his ceremonial attire, the baraat or the groom's entourage swaying to the popular Bollywood tunes played by the accompanying liveried baraat band. Come wedding season and a baraat is a common scene on any street in India. But in New York? Well, Sunny Jain and his Red Baraat Marching Band have made even that a possibility.

Sunny, a New York based drummer and composer is considered to be a leading voice for Indo- Jazz. With three critically acclaimed CD releases (another 20 as a sideman), multiple tours throughout the world, and innumerable media accolades and having performed at the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize Concert in Oslo this Rochester raised young man is an Indian-American trailblazer.

His love for rhythms started at the tender age of four listening to the Jain Bhajans that his mother played. "It was simply rhythm that intrigued me more than anything else. I was always concentrating on the rhythms of the tabla or dholki when my Mom was playing Jain bhajans and remember air drumming to Top 40 music that my elder siblings were listening to. When I was in 5th grade (10 years old), my school offered instrument study in drums and immediately I went for it."

However, he decided to pursue drums as a profession only when he was in high school. "I was around 17 when I decided that I wanted to be a musician/drummer for the rest of my life. It was those last couple of years of high school that I realized that I wanted to continue my musical studies on a professional level." Interestingly, unlike most desi parents the Jains were supportive of their sons' passion. "My parents used to come to all my concerts when growing up and never once told me to stop practicing," says Sunny. Their support did not end there. In fact, his parents not only encouraged him but were instrumental in dispelling any self-doubt. Once at home during a summer break and wallowing in self-doubt Sunny questioned his chances of success, Sunny's father asked him not to mull over the whether he could "make-it" being a musician and instead be proactive.

"My father told me that I had to stop pondering all these unanswerable questions and instead be proactive. He told me sometimes thinking and analyzing a situation too much is more detrimental than just doing the work that is laid out for an individual to accomplish."

Though Sunny has studied with jazz greats like Kenny Barron, Ted Dunbar, Larry Ridley, Bobby Thomas and Akira Tana, and Tabla maestro Pandit Samir Chatterjee he believes he would not be where he is today but for his school drum instructor Rich Thompson. "He (Rich Thompson) started me on the drums in 5th grade and I was lucky to have him not only as a private teacher, but also as my school drum instructor and jazz ensemble director up through high school. I had a very active and rewarding musical experience that I owe mostly to Rich. He loved music and teaching and it clearly came across in how much he mentored me."

And Rich's mentoring have put him in high-demand as the regular drummer for the famed Sufi-rock band, Junoon, Hayes Greenfield's Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz, Steve Blanco Trio and Samita Sinha's KAASH. He has also performed with several world-renowned artists such as Kiran Ahluwalia, Joey Baron, Kenny Barron, Ron Blake, Seamus Blake, Marc Cary, Samir Chatterjee, Gerald Cleaver, Kermit Driscoll, Ted Dunbar, Kyle Eastwood, Terreon Gully, Roy Hargrove, Norah Jones, Lonnie Plaxico, Dewey Redman, Jon Regen, Robyn Schulkowsky, Martha Wainwright, and Kenny Wollesen.

Though he had heard the Dhol a number of times, Sunny first came face to face with this quintessential Punjabi drums only as late as 1997 and started playing it just 6 years back. "I had always heard it in songs, but didn't realize what instrument I was hearing until I was at Bina Music in New Delhi and saw this gigantic barrel-shaped drum. After eventually buying one and bringing it back to New York City, I started practicing regularly on it and just fell in love with the sound and the power of it," says Sunny.

However, Sunny hit upon the idea of starting a Baraat band just a couple of years back when he got his friends together to play at his own wedding. "Most the weddings I had been to only had just a Dholi or a DJ blasting speakers out of their van. However, every time I would attend a wedding back in India, there would be a couple of Dholis and a marching band. So I figured let's do something along these lines for my wedding and really start off the day with a bang!" declares Sunny. And like his jazz the band has gone on to be quite a success.

However, like all true artists, its not fame or money that is the lure. It is the love of the art that is the biggest draw. "I've always been an artist and not just a musician who plays any music to make money. I do things that I love and the only reason I do the Baraat Marching Band is because I love playing Dhol and I love seeing people smile and dance as we play."