

Indian Masters Perform

Two legends of Indian music Zakir Hussain, percussion, and Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, santoor, will perform as Maestros in Concert at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 21, in Yardley Hall of the Carlsen Center, Johnson County Community College. The concert will feature the traditional repertoire of North Indian drumming as well as excursions into jazz, fusion and electronic music.

Hussain is a classical tabla virtuoso of the first order, bringing his instrument to a global audience. The tabla (Sanskrit for drum) is a popular Indian percussion instrument – a pair of hand drums of contrasting sizes and timbres.

The favorite accompanist for most of the great classical musicians and dancers of India, Hussain has been one of the first Indian musicians to collaborate with the West – compositions for the opening music for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, YoYo Ma's Silk Road Project, the San Francisco Jazz Festival, the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre and multiple film scores.

He has had recordings and performances with artists as diverse as George Harrison, Joe Henderson, Van Morrison, the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart and legendary drummer Billy Cobham, among many others. Born in 1951, Hussain is the recipient of countless honors. He was the youngest percussionist to be awarded the Padma Shri, an honor from the Indian government, and was chosen by his country in 2007 to compose an anthem celebrating India's 60th year of independence.

Sharma's instrument is the santoor, a hammered dulcimer important to North Indian classical music. Born in 1938 in Jammu, Kashmir, Sharma studied vocals, tabla and the santoor — a 72-stringed lute covering three octaves. The strings are not plucked. Rather they are played by striking them with two mallet walnuts. Originally a folk instrument from the Kashmir Valley, Sharma raised the santoor to the status of a classic instrument and made it indispensable to Indian film music.

Both Hussain and Sharma were child prodigies. Hussain, the foremost disciple of his father the legendary Ustad Allarakha, began his professional career at age 12 and toured internationally with great success by the age of 18. Sharma, the son of Pandit Uma Dutt Sharma, a prominent Indian classical musician, performed on the classical stage at age 17. The two recorded the album Santoor featuring the two artists in live performance.