

Lincoln Center's  
**white light festival**

T E N T H   A N N I V E R S A R Y

October 19–November 24, 2019

**Wednesday–Saturday, November 6–9, 2019 at 7:30 pm**

*Post-performance talk with Roysten Abel and John Schaefer on Friday, November 8*

## The Manganiyar Seduction

Roysten Abel, *Concept and Director*

Deu Khan, *Conductor*

*With Manganiyar musicians*

*This program is approximately 75 minutes long and will be performed without intermission.*

*Please join us for a White Light Lounge following the performance on Friday, November 8.*

*Please make certain all your electronic devices are switched off.*

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**This performance is made possible in part by the Josie Robertson Fund for Lincoln Center.**

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Rose Theater

Jazz at Lincoln Center's Frederick P. Rose Hall

## White Light Festival

The White Light Festival 2019 is made possible by The Shubert Foundation, The Katzenberger Foundation, Inc., Mitsubishi Corporation (Americas), Mitsui & Co. (U.S.A.), Inc., Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater, Culture Ireland, The Joelson Foundation, Sumitomo Corporation of Americas, The Harkness Foundation for Dance, J.C.C. Fund, Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New York, Great Performers Circle, Lincoln Center Patrons and Lincoln Center Members

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### UPCOMING WHITE LIGHT FESTIVAL EVENTS:

*November 7–23 at the Gerald W. Lynch Theater at John Jay College*

**DruidShakespeare: Richard III**

Directed by **Garry Hynes**

Produced by **Druid**

Starring **Aaron Monaghan** as Richard III

*Pre-performance talk with Garry Hynes and Robert Marx on Sunday, November 10 at 1:45 pm at the John Jay College Lecture Hall L.63*

*Thursday, November 14 at 7:30 pm in the David Rubenstein Atrium*

**Attacca Quartet**

**Caroline Shaw**, voice

ALL-CAROLINE SHAW PROGRAM

Entr'acte; Valencia; Plan and Elevation; Songs for Strings and Voice

*Sunday, November 17 at 3:00 pm in David Geffen Hall*

**Tristan and Isolde, Act II**

**National Symphony Orchestra**

**Gianandrea Noseda**, conductor

**Christine Goerke**, Isolde

**Stephen Gould**, Tristan

WAGNER: Tristan und Isolde, Act II (concert performance)

*Pre-concert lecture by Cori Ellison at 1:45 pm in the Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse*

For tickets, call (212) 721-6500 or visit [WhiteLightFestival.org](http://WhiteLightFestival.org). Call the Lincoln Center Info Request Line at (212) 875-5766 to learn about program cancellations or to request a White Light Festival brochure.

**Visit [WhiteLightFestival.org](http://WhiteLightFestival.org) for full festival listings.**

Join the conversation: [#WhiteLightFestival](https://twitter.com/WhiteLightFestival)

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*We would like to remind you that the sound of coughing and rustling paper might distract the performers and your fellow audience members.*

*In consideration of the performing artists and members of the audience, those who must leave before the end of the performance are asked to do so between pieces. The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not allowed in the building.*

# Director's Note

By Roysten Abel

The year—2006, June. The place—Segovia, Spain. I was travelling with a play, which I had directed, called *Jiyo*, which included out-of-work street performers (magicians, jugglers, puppeteers, impersonators, snake charmers, musicians) and one contemporary actress. The musicians travelling with the play were two Manganiyars, Mame Khan and Deu Khan.

June in Spain was fabulous. We spent most of our time outdoors, either in parks or in the green spaces next to the historic Roman aquaduct in Segovia. We started having music sessions with the Manganiyars in these outdoor spaces, which then became even more intoxicating—or at least the Manganiyars could sense the intoxication in me.

I cannot recall a night, or shall I say day, when I got to sleep before five in the morning. Once deep into my sleep I could hear the Manganiyars in my dreams, only to realize that they were outside my room waking me up with their lovely music at nine o'clock. The day began on this wonderful note. The Manganiyars would then follow me and play music in all the places I went, most times overlooking the decorum of that space. They would later follow me to my room, and once I was tucked in my bed at five in the morning, they would sing me to sleep, making sure that my day ended on a good note as well. This continued for a fortnight, and I could sense a strange physiological change in my system, but could not put a finger on it.

I had to leave for Bonn midway through the month since I had another play happening there. When my friends met me in Bonn, they thought I was on acid. Such was the impact these two Manganiyars had on me. I started to miss them, and so I would call them from Germany and ask them to sing for me over the phone. I realized then that I was totally seduced.

I returned to India filled with inspiration. I needed to translate this seduction of the spirit to a more physical realm. I recalled how their music pulled me in slowly, in spite of the natural resistance to a new culture, by titillating my spirit. At some point it forced me to let go, and thereby experience something beyond me or their singing: a third realm. As a theater director, this is what I had always wanted the audience to experience. It happened to me over two weeks, and now I had to recreate this grand experience in an evening.

My first challenge was the physical space. My experience with the Manganiyars was like a mad rollercoaster ride almost bordering on the burlesque inside my head, heart, and body, and for some strange reason, the red-light district kept coming to mind. It could have had to do with the seduction or the burlesque. The windows of Amsterdam's red-light district suddenly came alive, allowing interpretations like that of a jewel case, where these musicians became jewels to me. The idea became like the windows in Indian palaces where women are allowed

audiences for certain ceremonies or processions, and end up at the receiving end of voyeurism.

Now that I had arrived at the physical space, the possibility of transferring that magical fortnight into a performance stood before me like the wide deserts of the Thar. I went to Jaisalmer and auditioned a thousand musicians, from whom I selected 45. The Manganiyars were not accustomed to a system of rehearsals, and through them I was trying to translate an experience that was not even clear to me into a piece of theater.

Since I was not a music director and they were not from "theater," all we could do was be open and let the ephemeral take form. I had arrived at the fact that the narrative was not linear but instead a staggered spiral. I did not want to use any jargon to communicate this to them, and did not have a vocabulary for them that would help us instantly achieve this spiral. So we got into the process of understanding each other, thereby trusting each other and our own selves to arrive at *The Manganiyar Seduction* over a period of three years. I thought the seduction was just a one-time thing, but with the Manganiyars, even after hearing them a thousand times, they still keep seducing me.

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# Notes on the Music

By Siddhartha Mitter

In rural India, like elsewhere, performing folk music has long been a professional specialty with a clear economic and social function. For centuries, the Manganiyar caste of the Rajasthan desert has been in charge of celebrating, through music and song, the history, achievements, and private lives of the region's Rajput merchant class. With specific Manganiyar and Rajput families often tied together for generations in this relationship of patronage, Manganiyars would perform in the intimacy of merchant homes or at weddings and other celebrations. Adding new songs created for the occasion to a repertoire that goes back centuries, they conveyed and expanded a rich oral history.

Although most Manganiyars are villagers, Jaisalmer, the main town of India's far western desert, is the hub of their region and a place where many have settled. Founded in the 12th century, it was a wealthy trading center, a necessary stop for caravans crossing the Thar desert between Rajasthan and the Indus Valley. When the British partitioned India in 1947, giving birth to the separate and antagonistic countries of India and Pakistan, the desert trade dwindled, ending completely after the war of 1971. Jaisalmer became a backwater. When it began to grow again, it was around a completely different industry: tourism. With its fortress, old town, stunning landscapes, and desert frontier mystique, it is now a prized destination for both Indian and foreign visitors.

The time after Partition was difficult for the Manganiyars. Their livelihood depleted, and with it, their ability to transmit skills like manufacturing their instruments, the stringed kamaicha and sarangi and traditional percussion. In the early 1960s, this situation came to the attention of Komal Kothari, an important folklorist who devoted his life to studying, preserving, and disseminating Rajasthani folkways. Kothari made the first recordings of Manganiyar music and organized the first Manganiyar stage performance, in Delhi in 1963. It was the start of a reinvention of how the Manganiyars perform: no longer in the homes of patrons—although some of this practice survives—but in concert troupes, for audiences in India and worldwide. *The Manganiyar Seduction*, a theatrical project conceived by Roysten Abel—who, coming from an entirely different part of India (Kerala), fell in love with Manganiyar music as an outsider—is part of this modern remaking.

Manganiyar music is at once systematic, thanks to the community's historical specialization and its steadfast refusal to intermarry or teach outsiders, and profoundly hybrid. Although the kamaicha is typically Manganiyar, the overall instrumentation shares much with other folk traditions—particularly that of the Langa, who come from the same region—and with Hindustani (North Indian) classical music. Ethnomusicologist Shalini Ayyagari, who has studied Manganiyar music in detail, explains that although it is built on a system of ragas, it employs them in different ways than does khayal, the prevalent Hindustani vocal genre. Both types of performance begin without rhythmic accompaniment, use improvisation and composition, and explore the raga through melodic patterns. But a Manganiyar song relies

more on poetic texts, and moves “out of raga” after its introduction. Manganiyar music, Ayyagari has found, also draws on Sindhi surs, a system of musical modes “associated with place-based imagery and invocations of nature”—which comes from Sindh, in modern-day Pakistan but just across the desert.

The Manganiyars are a Muslim community, and their Rajput patrons were Hindu; this, combined with the fact that the Manganiyars likely converted from Hinduism centuries ago, ensures that their music is syncretistic, with some texts devoted to Sufi saints and others to Lord Krishna and additional Hindu figures. The shared emphasis is on the mystical and ecstatic over the specifics of either faith. But because the Manganiyars are also oral historians, like West African griots or European troubadours, their material is secular as well, even situational, responding through compositions or improvisations to the place, the audience, and the moment. By performing for wealthy, worldly merchants and at the Jaisalmer royal court, and later, for radio and national audiences in modern India, the Manganiyars have had access to a wealth of outside material to weave into their own music. “Manganiyar musicians are ingenious cultural politicians,” Ayyagari writes. “They are skilled at adapting and converting foreign elements into their own repertory, as evidenced by their contemporary incorporation of Hindi film music, international popular music, and other Rajasthani communities’ music into their own.”

The efforts of Kothari and other cultural activists brought new life to Manganiyar music at a time when it risked waning away entirely. But the shift from the old role as a caste of traditional musicians to the new system of traveling companies has brought deep change. In particular, it creates an economic separation between the small number of musicians who take part in these performances and the rest of the community. In addition, the music, while still true to its roots and traditions, has changed in subtle ways, as Kothari (who died in 2004) observed in a conversation with author Rustom Bharucha. “We have lost many nuances from the texts of the songs,” Kothari said, noting that the dramatic improvisation passages are more accessible to outside audiences than are some of the lyrical subtleties.

Still, the emergence of Manganiyar music as an exciting and prized asset in global performance must count as a success for Indian cultural policy and the researchers and activists who spurred it. It makes possible bold cross-genre innovations like *The Manganiyar Seduction*, and opens doors to Manganiyar artists in a time of economic and cultural flux, when no part of Indian society is standing still. It’s an example, as well, for those involved in—or who want to support—the myriad other local folk traditions throughout India, many of which still elude the national or global spotlight, and some of which are at risk of disappearing.

*Siddhartha Mitter is an independent journalist based in New York City.*

# Breath

By Kabir

Are you looking for me? I am in the next seat.  
My shoulder is against yours.  
You will not find me in stupas, not in Indian shrine rooms, nor  
in synagogues, nor in cathedrals:  
not in masses, nor kirtans, not in legs winding around your  
own neck, nor in eating nothing but vegetables.  
When you really look for me, you will see me instantly—  
you will find me in the tiniest house of time.  
Kabir says: Student, tell me, what is God?  
He is the breath inside the breath.

—*Translated by Robert Bly*

*For poetry comments and suggestions,  
please write to [programming@LincolnCenter.org](mailto:programming@LincolnCenter.org).*

# Meet the Artists



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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## **Roysten Abel** (*Concept and Director*)

Roysten Abel was born in Kerala, South India, and left college to pursue theater. He joined the National School of Drama in Delhi, graduating in 1994, and went to the U.K. on scholarship to experience the theater scene. In the process, he spent time with various theater companies, including the Royal Shakespeare Company. He then returned to India in 1995 and founded the Indian Shakespeare Company, and in 1999, devised and directed *Othello: a Play in Black and White*, his first original work. *Othello* went on to win the Scotsman Fringe First award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and has since toured extensively around the world.

After gaining recognition for his work with street performers that included magicians, jugglers, snake charmers, acrobats, and musicians, Mr. Abel was invited to conceive and direct a play on the Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini in Rimini, Fellini's hometown. In 2002, Mr. Abel returned to India and created a play called *The Spirit of Anne Frank*. Mr. Abel's widely traveled works include *The Manganiyar Seduction*; *A Hundred Charmers*, featuring snake charmers; *The Kitchen*, with the Mizhav drummers and contemporary actors; and his latest production, *The Manganiyar Classroom*, with the Manganiyar children. His productions have been staged in leading international venues including Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, the Barbican, and Esplanade, to name a few. Mr. Abel is currently working on a feature film based on *The Manganiyar Classroom*, as well as working to build an alternate school of musical education for the Manganiyar children.



## Deu Khan (Conductor)



Deu Khan was born in a small village called Keraliya in Jaisalmer, India. At a very young age, his parents recognized his interest in music. He was then sent to another small village, Hamira, to live with his maternal uncle, Sakar Khan, who is a grand master of music within the Manganiyar community. Mr. Khan learned to play the kartal in this environment of musicians, and after a few years became a respected musician within the community. He met Roysten Abel in 2003 when he took part in *Jiyo*, Abel's

theater production. The pair continued to collaborate over the next two years, and Mr. Khan introduced Abel to the Manganiyar community. Abel then created *The Manganiyar Seduction* and trained Mr. Khan to conduct the production.

## Manganiyar Musicians

The Manganiyars are a caste of Muslim musicians who traditionally performed for the kings of Rajasthan in India. Over the years, their support has shifted from kings to other wealthy patrons. Their repertoire ranges from ballads about kings to Sufi songs written by various mystics. They also have songs for occasions such as births, marriages, and feasts. Even though they are classified as folk musicians, their traditional music is classical and clearly indicates the roots of classical music in India. The rawness of the folk juxtaposed with the complexities of classical music is what makes their music so special. They live in the deserts of Rajasthan and are a Muslim community that also worships Hindu deities.

## Musicians of *The Manganiyar Seduction*

### Vocals

Barkat Khan  
Barkat Khan  
Bhage Khan  
Bhutta Khan  
Dada Khan  
Deu Ram  
Dine Khan  
Mula Khan  
Roje Khan  
Sawai Khan  
Talab Khan  
Badhe Khan  
Hakim Khan  
Roshan Khan  
Safi Khan

### Kamaicha

Dare Khan  
Roshan Khan  
Ghamshey Khan  
Kode Khan  
Rafik Khan  
Rasul Khan

### Dholak

Dayam Khan  
Gaji Khan  
Latif Khan  
Tarif Khan

### Murli

Chhuge Khan  
Achar Khan  
Manganar

### Kartal

Amin Khan  
Karim Khan  
Roje Khan  
Shafki Khan  
Deu Khan

### Sarang

Samsu Khan  
Habib Khan Langa

### Bhapang and Morchang

Khete Kha

### Dhol

Babu Khan  
Khete Khan  
Swaroop Khan  
Joga Khan

### Veena

Bhage Khan  
Deu Ram

### Chip

Sattar Khan

### Flute

Habib Khan Langa

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## **John Schaefer** (*Post-Performance Talk Moderator*)

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John Schaefer is the host of WNYC's innovative music/talk show *Soundcheck*, which features live performances and interviews with a variety of guests. He has also hosted and produced WNYC's radio series *New Sounds* since 1982 and the *New Sounds Live* concert series since 1986. He has written extensively about music, including the books *New Sounds: A Listener's Guide to New Music* and *The Cambridge Companion to Singing: World Music*, as well as the TV program *Bravo Profile: Bobby McFerrin*. He has served as contributing editor for *Spin* and *Ear* magazines, and his liner notes appear on more than 100 recordings, ranging from *The Music of Cambodia* to recordings by Yo-Yo Ma and Terry Riley. In 2003, Mr. Schaefer was honored with the American Music Center's prestigious Letter of Distinction, and in 2006, *New York* magazine included him in its "Influentials" issue. He began blogging for WNYC when accompanying the New York Philharmonic on its historic trip to North Korea in 2008, and he continues to blog at [soundcheck.org](http://soundcheck.org). He is a regular contributor to the World Science Festival and Lincoln Center's White Light Festival; he has also written about horse racing (*Bloodlines: A Horse Racing Anthology*) and was a regular panelist on the BBC's soccer-based program *Sports World*.

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## **White Light Festival**

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*I could compare my music to white light, which contains all colors. Only a prism can divide the colors and make them appear; this prism could be the spirit of the listener.*—Arvo Pärt. Celebrating its tenth anniversary, the White Light Festival is Lincoln Center's annual exploration of music and art's power to reveal the many dimensions of our interior lives. International in scope, the multidisciplinary festival offers a broad spectrum of the world's leading instrumentalists, vocalists, ensembles, choreographers, dance companies, and directors complemented by conversations with artists and scholars and post-performance White Light Lounges.

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## **Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.**

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Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (LCPA) serves three primary roles: presenter of artistic programming, national leader in arts and education and community engagement, and manager of the Lincoln Center campus. A presenter of thousands of free and ticketed events, performances, tours, and educational activities annually, LCPA offers a variety of festivals and programs, including American Songbook, Avery Fisher Career Grants and Artist program, David Rubenstein Atrium programming, Great Performers, Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Awards, Lincoln Center Out of Doors, Lincoln Center Vera List Art Project, LC Kids, Midsummer Night Swing, Mostly Mozart Festival, White Light Festival, the Emmy Award-winning *Live From Lincoln Center*, which airs nationally on PBS, and Lincoln Center Education, which is celebrating more than four decades enriching the lives of students, educators, and lifelong learners. As manager of the Lincoln Center campus, LCPA provides support and services for the Lincoln Center complex and the 11 resident organizations: The Chamber Music Society

of Lincoln Center, Film at Lincoln Center, Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Juilliard School, Lincoln Center Theater, The Metropolitan Opera, New York City Ballet, New York Philharmonic, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, School of American Ballet, and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

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*The Manganiyar Seduction* was originally produced by Can & Abel Theaters.

*The Manganiyar Seduction's* representation:

Eye for Talent

[www.eyefortalent.com](http://www.eyefortalent.com)