

## **FOLK ARTS RAJASTHAN**

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### **WITH HEART AND HOPE**

As Director of FAR I speak today for the children of Music Merasi & Merasi School, Director Dr. Sarwar Khan of Lok Kala Sagar Sansthan/Merasi School, and for all who now hold dreams of a better today in India by offering deep thanks to all of you for your long lasting support.

In November in India, I read C. Gilon's words in AT A GLANCE; "by 36 weeks, an unborn baby is capable of memorizing pieces of music that it hears frequently, often to the extent that it can recollect the music at birth." Each evening at 6 PM, in Jaisalmer, India nearly forty children race into Lok Kala Sagar Sansthan (LKSS) for the one and a half hours of *Music Merasi*. Elfen at 2 is the youngest and the oldest student is Ackaram at age 13. Every evening heralds the Merasi declaration, "Music is our Blood" as simple truth. Children with keen interest and impressive skills reach for multiple instruments as 37 generations before them have done.

The Times of India recently asked readers "Did you know there are more than 2700 different languages spoken in the world with more than 7000 dialects?" Music is the one universal language. How fortunate we are that the power of music allows us to share our common humanity. FAR continues to work with the Merasi to preserve their unique endangered musical cultural heritage and move towards a new reality where their art lives free, and as a marginalized community their basic rights are not trampled.

In Rajasthan there is no quick fix to the conditions of this marginalization. Master drummer and honorary doctorate recipient Sarwar Khan continues his five year struggle with the officials of Jaisalmer to obtain the guide license the Supreme Court in Jodhpur awarded him years ago. Without it he cannot move freely with international visitors. In spite of huge successes in America, our dream of cultural exchange in Merasi home territory continues to meet an intense barrier of discrimination.

#### ***FAR Volunteers are all Heart:***

"I've recently been honored with one week of the hospitality of the Merasi of Jaisalmer. I was very pleased to see many of the musicians from the first and second "Hearts With Hope" tours and to meet their wives and children. I now understand why many of them were homesick for Jaisalmer. The Thar Desert appears timeless; camels are a common sight and women still carry water from a well. In reality, change is happening quickly. The women worry about food, shelter, health and raising their families, while the children ask me (in English!) if I know "Hannah Montana".

Students at the Merasi School and Music Merasi have been working hard. Many now read, many now write, all play music. What is unique is the ability to embrace the best of ancient tradition and of modern life. To educate the children in their traditional musical heritage and educate them to live in today's world is simple, yet powerful. In the words of *Dr. Sarwar Khan: "one hand on the pen, one hand on the drum"*.

Mustak is the nine-year -old son of Murid Khan (Murid was the elder man of the first tour who played the gourd instrument he made himself). Mustak is already a good musician. While he was being recorded singing "Maki" for the Musical Narrative Project his mother called. Karen Lukas had to set down a new rule: "turn your cell phones off"! when recording out in the desert." -*Barbara Watson, Hong Kong, 2008*

"I interned in New York with Karen, prior to my trip to India. This allowed me to understand the Merasi world on a basic level. Upon arriving I was overwhelmed. Yet every day I awoke facing a larger sun, a more challenging list of activities, and continuous moments when my heart smiled. To be part of FAR, is to be involved with a colorful culture of outstanding musicians, and warm, self-less, deserving people. I am thankful to have been given the opportunity to capture the emotion and daily living of this breathtaking community in my photographs (featured on FAR's website)."  
-*Emily Abramson, New York, 2008*

#### **FAR Action with Results:**

***Our Hearts With Hope 2 Tour*** – During 2 months, 22 schools, 5 colleges, 2 museums, and the Kennedy center celebrated the Merasi legacy. Thousands of students and marvelous folks rose to their feet. Our audiences enthusiastically purchased items, empowering the women's fair trade project. Volunteers supported each step of every day.

***Educational Landscape at Merasi School-*** 38 kids sweep into 3 classrooms 6 days a week. Our priority is to offer children a safe space where they gain trust, learn the basics, and grow, giving their families hopes of a brighter future.

Caitie Whelan Co-Founder of Merasi School was one keynote speaker at a social entrepreneurship conference at Brown University. Combining mighty forces with Caitie in Merasi School and web development is Pamela Pelazzari at [www.merasischool.org](http://www.merasischool.org)

***Women's Voices-*** LKSS hosted the first annual Merasi Women's community meeting. The Women's Hall, newly built on the top floor of LKSS with a grant from The Capital Group, was the ideal location for the meeting. Medical needs, family size, hunger, domestic violence, and education were discussed. Scholarship students Asha, Kashmira and Sitara skillfully translated the women's stories. Kashmira looking at the new hall proudly declared: "It is like a palace. A beautiful palace. Our palace."

#### **From India a New Year beginning:**

Dr. Stephen Huyler's book [Daughters of India](#) featuring Merasi Indra Banu received rave reviews in the India Times and in the Business Standard Review.

A CEO in Delhi has made a generous donation allowing us to buy instruments, hire new music teachers, and map bigger visions. We invite all of you to visit the Merasi and LKSS in the golden city of Jaisalmer and the Thar Desert beyond.

**Loyal donors and new friends, Thank you for your trust.** We extend BIG Thanks for again opening up your hearts and pockets with your tax-deductible checks to Folk Arts Rajasthan or your online donations. -*Karen Lukas, Executive Director*

*"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything."*- Plato