

FOLK ARTS RAJASTHAN

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WITH HEART AND HOPE

Dear Friends,

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It is with total joy that I write this letter to tell you about the wonder, beauty, and fulfillment of the Hearts with Hope Tour! An idea that began percolating as a fantasy in the cold winter months of 2004 has taken us to 53 venues in 60 days. We kicked off with a program weekend at the Smithsonian, followed by a packed performance at the Papp Theater, and 15,000 kindergarteners through high schoolers erupting in enthusiasm at our 31 academic presentations. But, perhaps the greatest part of all has been the tremendous respect and compassion with which the troupe Rangeela has been received. This form of empowerment has imbued the eight participating performers with an invaluable sense of self worth, generating a confidence that is rippling out to their families, villages, and greater communities. Upon their return to Rajasthan, it took Sarwar, Rasul, Satchu, Anwar, Karim, Murid, Satar, and Pinkudi a few days to readjust to life without pizza, running water, and American systems of organization. They proudly returned to their families and clans, relaying experiences that will be immortalized in song and story for generations.

The troupe traveled to America to share 37 generations of impassioned musical tradition from Folk Arts Rajasthan's Indian sister organization, Lok Kala Sagar Sansthan. For us, the blend of their sheer magnetism and the audience's eager receptiveness formed a patch of ordinary holiness in the arc of a normal day. Challenges rise as we live our belief in social equality that defies generations of hierarchical systems. We are confident that if we continue to speak the truth and perform from our hearts, dignity will become an everyday reality for the Merasi (musician) community of Rajasthan.

As with all big dreams that twist and turn their way into fruition, we would be nowhere without the belief, push, and heart of our extraordinary collection of FAR friends around the globe. We are humbled and inspired by the effort that all put into the fulfillment of our Hearts with Hope Tour; you lessened the load, lifted the spirit, and spread swells of much-needed compassion out into this world.

This is just the beginning of FAR/LKSS's international outreach. We continue to be champions of gender equal education, social rights, and financial equity using the vitality of the arts. Looking ahead to the future, we are discussing a second tour, development of the women's fair trade project, expansion of our literacy initiatives in Rajasthan, and the growth of www.folkartsrajasthan.org. Please join us in our undertakings: express your ideas about the tour and share any documentation you have, volunteer your time, or contribute to our projects.

We invite all of you to visit us in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan and hear the music in the desert environment that inspired these rhythms. In the words of troupe leader Sarwar Khan, "Please thank everyone for their kindness. In two months, the artists received more dignity and respect than they have had in their entire lives. I appreciate so deeply."

From our warmest hearts, with our greatest hopes,

Karen Lukas, Director
Folk Arts Rajasthan