

## **FOLK ARTS RAJASTHAN**

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**WITH HEART AND HOPE  
WINTER 2009-2010**

**Loyal Donors, Old And New Friends, *Without You!* None Of This Is Possible. Thanks.**

### **FAR Volunteers Are All Heart**

We celebrate all the visitors and volunteers who engaged and assisted the Merasi Community this year. The Merasi women, men and children find your stories and ideas as unique and eye opening as you do theirs. Each visitor to the Thar Desert helps the Merasi strengthen their support system with new perspectives.

### **With Deep Gratitude To A Broad Band Of Volunteers And Visitors**

The US FAR Intern team of Emily Abramson, Ariti Lal, Michael Nebab, Jake Moore, & Shweta Suratkar, powered daily events and with editor Greg Whitmore created the film; [Voice of the Desert: MERASI MURLI](#). Recording engineer & musician Tom Mindte of Patuxent Recording mastered his Merasi material along with the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus recording to help us produce our new CD [Keeper of the Stories](#) featuring photographs by Nils P. Schlebusch.

John Gurrin; a professor at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, joined the Merasi in Jaisalmer to document the Merasi legacy for the Musical Narrative Project archives.

Ariti Lal reports on the preservation of Merasi music:

“I came to Folk Arts Rajasthan as a media intern (from the New School in New York City) to archive video footage of the Merasi. As I became familiar with the Merasi and their cause, I was asked to help collate footage on the murli, a wind instrument that faced possible extinction. It was challenging to find footage that not only taught the making of the murli, but how to do justice to these artists. I became immersed into the Merasi, through watching video footage. I found it difficult to focus solely on the murli because there are multiple facets to the Merasi. The Merasi in my eyes are the prime example of true artists; individuals who will endure and face any adversity in order to preserve their musical legacy. I am just happy to help the Merasi preserve an instrument that is a vital part of their musical heritage.”

### **Director Karen Lukas On The Ground In Rajasthan**

The annual site visit to the Merasi in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan held old challenges, witnessed new achievements and the presence of thoughtful engaged volunteers and visitors. Having Dr. Bob with us for one week was a dream come true. I continue to be wildly inspired by the power of the unique musical legacy of the Merasi, and dismayed by the incredible India that perpetuates caste-based violations of human rights daily.

My childhood friend; Duckie-as we all call her, made her third visit from Hong Kong to Lok Kala Sagar Sansthan to attend the Women’s Voices Meeting. She continues to weave her delightful net of laughter and intrigue with the items she introduces to Merasi School. I chuckle at the image of Rojeela and Akram eating their food with chopsticks rather than their hands.

### **FAR Action With Results**

Intern Emily Abramson successfully launched Merasi Health; developed with her mentors Kryn Olson, science co-ordinator & early-education teacher from Long Island, and Merasi School co-director Pamela Pelizzari from Brown University. Emily's words below are an example of dedication and respect:

“Returning to Jaisalmer to be with the Merasi again lifted my heart. My excitement snowballed every day until arriving. This year I worked on creating a simple curriculum to address basic medical needs in the community and provide new information to the Merasi children. I researched and took classes to compile a five-week program, addressing each of the three classes in Merasi School. Teaching left my mind spinning each day, but it never failed to make me happy. To see and hear the children absorbing information was my reward. To watch them washing their hands, covering their mouths when they coughed, eagerly waiting to be called on, and proudly standing up to name the parts of the Respiratory System, demonstrated they were growing and learning. I was very proud to introduce my father, Dr. Robert Abramson, and my mother, artist Shari Abramson, to the Merasi. Sharing this part of my life with them is one of the happiest memories in my 20 years.”

### **Women's Voices**

Lok Kala Sagar Sansthan opened its women's hall for the second Women's Voices meeting. We increased attendance to 58 women and reached out to villages around Jaisalmer. With the adept help of the Scholarship students Asha, Kashmira, and Sitara translating, taking attendance, and asking questions, the meeting touched on new and old issues. The involvement of village women proved that the ideas are stretching outwards.

### **In Merasi School And Music Merasi Class**

Children feel safe, are eager to learn English, Math, and Science, and love their school with its fresh coat of paint, new library room, and small sink. Murli master Murid Khan, who passed away last spring, left a gift. His eldest son, Gumsa Khan, arrived at LKSS, proceeded to practice, improve his murli playing daily, and has begun teaching at Music Merasi. He understands the importance of endangered instruments and is working to keep the murli alive. We have acquired 15 authentic murlis for Merasi use. To explain Music Merasi classes in words, takes away much from actually attending a class. The children are electric with passion and talent. From the second they charge in, they are creating music. Their growth from having more instruments on site this year is unmistakable. During our site visit tour training began. Each student would stand up proudly, say their name, the instrument they play, and declare they are Merasi. Without question, watching the empowerment this generated inspires future efforts.

**Each Time You Want To Help The Merasi You Can-** with a click of the mouse on [www.folkartsrajasthan.org](http://www.folkartsrajasthan.org) and [www.merasischool.org](http://www.merasischool.org) or pen a tax-deductible check to: Folk Arts Rajasthan at 314 East 84<sup>th</sup> St. #11 New York, New York 10028.

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FAR aims to continue to preserve and expose this endangered legacy with current plans for a weeklong Celebrate India collaboration at the American Embassy School based in Delhi. Looking FARward to our next International Tour, expanding the student's educational horizons, the Merasi School library and purchasing a rickshaw to increase the student body are 2010 goals.

Traditional Merasi Folk Music offers a rich and enchanting experience. Each sound touches our hearts because it is alive with the warmth of the artists' souls and the history of 37 generations. Coupled with the marginalization of illiteracy, poverty, and the relentless injustices of caste hierarchy the path ahead is clear.

**ONE DAY!** Members of the Merasi community will have the freedom to define the scope of their lives, their futures, and be able to strive to achieve their full potential.

**We welcome in 2010**

**With "One hand on the Pen, One hand on the Drum" Sarwar Khan**



**Happy New Year 2010 with thanks from Merasi School & Music Merasi students**

If you would like to receive our news by e-mail only, please let us know at [info@folkartsrajasthan.org](mailto:info@folkartsrajasthan.org)