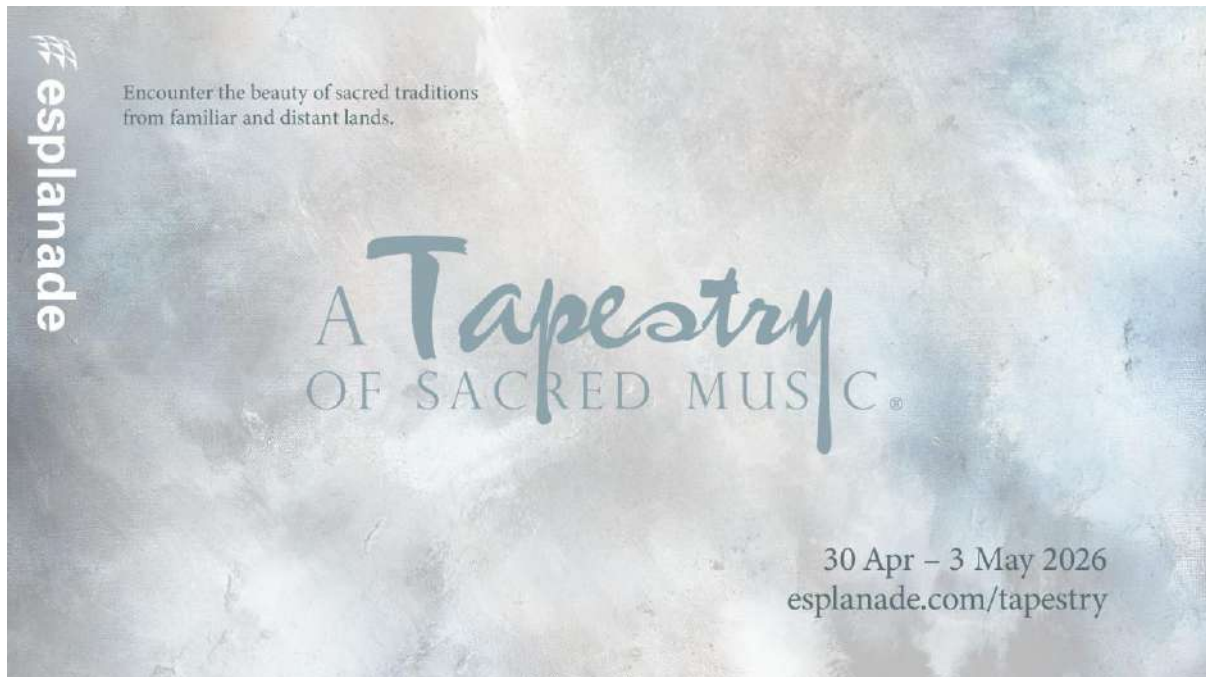


Esplanade Presents

A Tapestry of Sacred Music 2026

30 Apr – 3 May 2026

www.esplanade.com/tapestry



Dear friends from the media,

A Tapestry of Sacred Music is a unique festival presented by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, which brings you the rich colours and sounds of religious communities from within Singapore and around the world. Happening from 30 Apr – 3 May 2026, the 17th edition of the festival takes you from mosques to temples, village grounds to cathedrals, sharing cherished devotional artforms from communities of all kinds. Above all, the festival exists to share a deeper message.

The world today can be one that focuses on the divisive, especially as we get caught in the crossfire of earthly powers grappling for influence and dominion. This may happen not only through open armed conflict, but crafted messages and curated images that subversively encourage a view to dehumanise the other. None of this is new, but it has been amplified to an unprecedented degree by technology and our hyperconnectivity.

A Tapestry of Sacred Music seeks to remind us that there is far more that unites us as humans than divides us. As you move from space to space, you may encounter a song, a chant, or a refrain that moves you, or sets your skin tingling in awe. Even if you might not understand the words or share the same beliefs, the connection created through art is palpable at a human level—an affirmation that we as humans, all share the same emotions, hopes, anxieties and desires.

The variety of sacred performances presented this year represent diverse histories and geographies. Experience the ecstatic exaltation of Pakistani *qawwali* performed by **Rizwan and Muazzam Ali Khan**—inheritors of a 700-year-old musical lineage—as if in a Sufi shrine. Witness the frenetic masquerade dances of **Gambian Kumpo**, believed to be a spiritual village guardian, garbed in a heavy coat of dried palm leaves. Imbibe in the atmosphere of ***Kurokawa noh***, performed in the depths of winter as a ritual for the gods of Kasuga shrine. Harken the soaring harmonies of **Corsican brothers** as they belt their hymns heavenwards. Be awashed by waves of powerful voice as a **Papuan choir** sings of prophets and apostles. Dance to the joyful bounce of **Isaan ceremonial music** for the dispelling of illnesses.

We wish you many discoveries and personal insights as you encounter different communities and their cultural treasures, and hope you will leave with a renewed spirit of kinship that unites us all.

Tan XiangHui

Senior Producer

The Esplanade Co Ltd

About Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Esplanade is Singapore’s national performing arts centre. It hosts a year-round line-up of about 4,000 live performances and activities presented by Esplanade, its partners and hirers. As an arts centre for everyone, Esplanade also creates opportunities for seniors, youth, children and underserved communities to experience the arts. More than 70% of the shows that take place each year at the centre are free for all to enjoy.

Esplanade also brings the arts virtually to audiences in Singapore and beyond, through its diverse range of digital programmes on [Esplanade Offstage](#), an all-access backstage pass to the performing arts and guide to Singapore and Asian arts and culture, with videos, podcasts, articles, quizzes and resources.

The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. Esplanade supports the creation of artistic content by commissioning and producing new Singapore and Asian work for the international stage. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is operated by The Esplanade Co Ltd (TECL), which is a not-for-profit organisation, a registered Charity and an Institution of a Public Character. TECL received the Charity Governance Award – Special Commendation for Clarity of Strategy in 2016 and 2022, the Charity Transparency Award from 2016 – 2023, and the Charity Transparency Dedication Award in 2024. Esplanade is Singapore’s first Dementia-Friendly Arts Venue and a certified Dementia Go-To Point, as well as a guide/assistance dog friendly centre.

TECL receives funding support from Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Community Programmes are supported by Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.

Visit [Esplanade.com](https://www.esplanade.com) for more information

~ End ~

Issued by *The Esplanade Co Ltd*.

For more information, please contact:

Koh Sian Eng
Senior Manager, Communications
The Esplanade Co Ltd
Email: ksianeng@esplanade.com

Jasmine Cheong
Assistant Manager, Arts Marketing
The Esplanade Co Ltd
Email: cheongjasmine@esplanade.com

Annexe

Esplanade Presents

A Tapestry of Sacred Music 2026

30 Apr – 3 May 2026

www.esplanade.com/tapestry

About the festival

A Tapestry of Sacred Music was launched by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay in 2009. The festival offers the rare opportunity for everyone to encounter the beauty of these varied cultural expressions practised by communities all over the world, in a secular setting. Over the years, we have presented more than 36 religious denominations, as well as the sacred art forms of 56 different communities, creating a rich tapestry of some of humanity's most affecting and powerful musical expressions.

Since 2017, we have gone a step further and made this festival a completely free one for all to enjoy, so that there are no barriers to this aural and visual celebration. Admission is free for all, with registration required for selected programmes starting 16 Apr, 10am. Ticket registration is exclusive to *Esplanade&Me* members. Sign up for free at esplanade.com/membership.

Esplanade is a charity and not-for-profit organisation. Help keep this festival free by making a contribution at donation boxes placed around Esplanade, or donate online at Esplanade.com/Donate.

An Evening of Qawwali: At the Feet of the Beloved

Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali (Pakistan)

30 Apr 2026, Thu, 7.45pm

Esplanade Concert Hall

1 May 2026, Fri, 10pm

Esplanade Concourse



Heirs to the 700-year-old tradition—and nephews of the legendary Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan—Rizwan and Muazzam Mujahid Ali Khan invite you into the world of the Sufi mystics, whose music is meant not just to be heard, but to be felt. Their performances are journeys of the heart, carrying audiences from quiet reflection to rapture. With harmoniums, handclaps, and voices rising in hypnotic cadence, they weave music that awakens the soul.

Prepare not only to witness, but to be swept into a pure devotional spirit that speaks of love, faith, and the divine pulse that connects us all.

The Sufis of India and Pakistan and their songs of devotion

Sufism was born in 8th century Persia as a mystical expression of early Islam. Its adherents believed that love was a projection of the essence of God to the universe, and they sought to focus on man's innate potential to have an embodied and personal experience of divine love. For this reason, Sufi music and dance do more than express Sufi beliefs but are ways truth and divine love can be felt viscerally. And instead of being something devotees watch passively, Sufi music and dance are communal experiences that the everyone would participate in as fully as the musicians do.

As Sufism spread from Persia, the musical expressions evolved in the lands where the Sufi mystics brought their beliefs. The musical form that has taken root in Pakistan and

north India is *qawwali*, whose creation is often attributed to the 13th century Sufi saint Amir Khusrau. He fused the musical elements of Persian, Indian, Turkish and Arabic traditions, which morphed over centuries into its current form. Poems of ancient Sufi mystics still make up the bulk of the *qawwali* repertoire and are sung in Urdu, Hindi, Farsi and Arabic. Its performance has since thrived and is sung regularly in a religious context at the shrines of Sufi saints such as Data Dabar in Lahore and Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah in Delhi.

Qawwali and its torchbearers

A typical *qawwali* performance is an interactive, fully engaging experience for both audience and musician, and may be described in this way:

A *qawwal*—an ensemble of performers including lead singers, chorus singers, drummers, harmonium players—sits on the floor at the Sufi shrine. The performance begins with a line of melody and the singing of a poetic couplet. The *qawwal* assesses the audience for response. Building on the introduction, they launch into the main body of the *qawwali*, introducing rhythm at a moderate tempo. Gradually, the rhythm quickens, and the vocals, handclapping and instrumentation intensify. The *qawwal* remains observant, sensitive to audience reactions. Here and there, they see faces glowing with rapture. A powerful line may prompt audience members on their feet in dance, inspiring them to repeat it with renewed vigour, improvising with virtuosity until both the audience and performers are lifted to joyous heights.

Qawwali is not only associated with religious occasions, but have become a part of popular music. It was introduced to the West through early world music festivals like WOMAD, where, for the first time, international audiences could encounter the powerful singing of *qawwali* legend Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and his contemporaries.

When Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan passed away in 1997, he left a musical vacuum that his two teenage nephews later stepped in to fill. Despite their youth, they were determined that their group, Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali, would continue their uncle's pioneering efforts to transcend cultural, language and religious barriers, and to bring the vibrant *qawwali* vocal music of the Sufi mystics to the world.

In South Asia today, *qawwali* is widely recorded, performed and loved as musical entertainment in Pakistani films and in Bollywood soundtracks, with its traditional poetic lyrics of devotional, spiritual love re-interpreted as lyrics of secular love and its mystical imagery used for dramatic effect. Nevertheless, the core of its practice still remains at the shrines of Sufi saints, as a means to connect to the divine. Its treasure trove of philosophy, poetry and music continues to touch all who encounter it.

(2hrs, no intermission – Esplanade Concert Hall)

Admission age: 6 and above.

(1hr 30mins, no intermission – Esplanade Concourse)

Free admission, registration is required.

Ritual Noh of Kurokawa – Hagoromo

Kurokawa Noh Preservation Society (Japan)

1 May 2026, Fri, 8.45pm

Esplanade Concert Hall



Step into the concert hall and be mesmerised as masked performers revive the ancient tale of *Hagoromo (The Feathered Robe)* to entertain their god, their movements guided by the haunting cadence of *noh* music as they conjure celestial maidens. Listen closely and be drawn in by the plaintive notes of the Japanese flute mingling with the deep thrum of drums, the strange guttural calls of the performers, and the rhythmic stomping of feet. Let every gesture and sound pull you deeper—into an unbroken tradition rooted in this Yamagata community.

What is *noh*

Mention the word *noh* and one thinks immediately of the highly refined classical art form: the wooden pine backdrop, the musicians accompanying the slow, controlled movement and chanting of the *noh* master.

The origins of *noh* date back to the 8th century, when court music and dance, along with acrobatics, magic tricks and instrumental music were introduced to Japan from China. Over the next few hundred years, its ancestral form spread both as entertainment offered at shrine and temples festivals and as folk rituals offered to the gods. By the 15th century, Zeami Motokiyo had refined and perfected his practices of *noh* for the aristocracy and samurai class, *Noh* evolved into a highly stylised classical art.

A unique *noh* tradition that retains the ancient styles

On the northwest coast of Japan, the city of Tsuruoka has preserved the sacred roots of *noh* and its archaic elements. Here, styles and traditions endure that have long vanished from the modern forms of the five major *noh* schools. This is *Kurokawa noh*, a form of

ritual theatre for the guardian deity of Kasuga shrine. Unlike classical *noh*, which is practiced and performed only by trained professionals, all members of the community are involved in some way or another.

Within this small village, where nearly every man takes part in performance, farmers, craftsmen, and other village-folk become musicians or actors for the night, embodying deities, demons, spirits, goblins, and female characters. The community maintains a vast repertoire of more than 540 *noh* pieces and 50 *kyōgen* (comedic) plays, along with 230 masks and 400 costumes.

The Ogisai festival, a night of ritual theatre

While the city lies deep in snow, the entire community—divided into two rival *noh* groups called Shimoza and Kamiza—makes preparations for the annual Ogisai festival. Held on the first two days of February as a pre-spring prayer for the coming season's crops, preparations start as early as December, and include self-purification rituals, rope-making, tofu-grilling, mochi-pounding, and the construction of *noh* stages in the homes of two chosen families, one from each group.

The festival begins with a procession of the *Ogi-sama* (an object symbolising the shrine's deity) to the two homes. In each, a child starts the *noh* performance by stomping repeatedly on the floor to awaken the earth god and bring blessings to the fields. The stage performances start around six in the evening, illuminated by flickering candlelight. A ritual to welcome the gods to the stage opens the programme, followed by five plays exploring the themes of God, Warrior, Woman, Madness, and Demons. Just before daybreak the entire programme concludes. Both processions then leave the chosen families' homes for the shrine, where *noh* is performed again, this time in the deity's original dwelling place.

This tradition has endured for over 500 years, sustained by the friendly rivalry between the Shimoza and the Kamiza. The two groups learn from one another while striving to out-perform the other, ensuring that the skill and excellence of *Kurokawa noh* continue to be passed on through generations.

Come experience the lit atmosphere of *Kurokawa noh* up close, and witness this living heritage—Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan by the Kamiza—at *A Tapestry of Sacred Music*.

Ritual Noh of Kurokawa – Hagoromo is co-produced by Japan Foundation and Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 6 and above.

Free admission, registration is required.

Peroveta – Prophet Songs

Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors (Papua New Guinea)

2 May 2026, Sat, 6pm

Esplanade Concert Hall

3 May 2026, Sun, 9pm

Esplanade Concourse



From the shores of Papua New Guinea comes a choral language shaped by community and devotion. In this rare performance, the Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors breathe life into *peroveta*, the sacred “prophet songs” where voices rise and fall like a gentle surf, carrying within their movement prophets, apostles, and the radiant legacy of Papuan faith and history.

Follow the tide of voices as 16 women and 9 men weave music together in delicate harmony, presenting an ancient song and dance in the Kapari dialect of the Keakalo language, as well as an *ute*, a lyrical lament in the Vulaa/Hula tongue.

Papuan prophet songs: faith and transformation on the coastal shores

“Announce the Good news: the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ to Papua New Guinea. Hoist the flag high / Like a light shining all over the region.”

—Lyrics from *Sivarai Namō Eme Ginidae*

The women begin the melody, their voices bright and unwavering. The men follow, sometimes echoing, at other times in counterpoint, their voices blending in exquisite harmony. Sung in the Motu language, these songs weave bible stories with history, retelling how missionaries brought light and good news to the Papuan coastal shores.

For centuries, the coastal Motu people built their dwellings of thatched roofs and plank floors on stilts at the water’s edge, making their living as fishermen and traders along the Papuan southeastern coast. Each year, they launched elaborate trading expeditions in large boats, propelled by crab-claw-shaped sails woven from coconut fibre, while

holding traditional dances to honour their ancestral spirits. That began to change with the arrival of the British in 1873. The London Missionary Society sent Polynesian teachers from various Pacific islands, followed by British missionaries, to spread Christianity along these coasts.

These missionaries regarded the traditional dance ceremonies as morally objectionable practices of licentiousness and sought to replace them with bible songs. A melody would first be taught to new converts in their Polynesian mother tongue, later adapting the original lyrics into the Motu language. Over time, they came to be known as *peroveta anedia*, or “Prophet Songs.”

At a time when the Motuans had no written language, the repetition of the earliest *peroveta* became a way to remember and recount stories from the bible. As the Motuans familiarised themselves with both the musical form and the Bible, they began composing their own *peroveta*, weaving scripture, missionary histories, and even local motifs into their songs, and passing them down the generations through oral tradition.

A living oral tradition

The singing of *peroveta* is a joyful and communal practice, binding the people to one another and their origins. With over 95% of Papua New Guinea now identifying as Christian, this tradition has become historically and religiously embedded in the community. Yet, as the younger generation embraces modern forms of church music, the practice of *peroveta* is slowly waning. Some groups have taken up the responsibility of guarding and continuing the tradition.

Come witness the soaring and interweaving parts of *peroveta* by Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors.

About Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors

The Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors was formed in 2025 in Papua New Guinea (PNG) by Deveni Temu and Marion Gilmour, husband-and-wife coordinators of the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra, Australia.

Comprising 16 women and 9 men from the Kapari and Viriolo villages, the group’s mission is to strengthen cultural connections between the Canberra-based diaspora and their home communities in Papua New Guinea.

In addition to performing *peroveta*, they also present *sene*—traditional village folk songs and dances from pre-contact times (before European contact)—preserving the island’s rich musical heritage.

(45mins, no intermission – Esplanade Concert Hall)

Admission age: 6 and above.

(30mins, no intermission – Esplanade Concourse)

Free admission, registration is required.

The Sacred Voices of Corsica

Spartimu (France)

2 May 2026, Sat, 10.15pm

Esplanade Concourse

3 May 2026, Sun, 6.30pm

Esplanade Concert Hall



Across the rugged mountains and remote villages of Corsica, the *Île de Beauté* (the island of beauty), voices rise in raw harmony—ancient, resonant, and alive. Spartimu, one of the most celebrated vocal ensembles on the island, brings forth the sacred tradition of *cantu in paghjella*. Shaped by faith, geography, and centuries of oral transmission, their unaccompanied harmonies move beyond performance to create an authentic sound that reflects their idyllic life.

Join them in this rare invocation of place and spirit, where every tone carries the breath of spirituality and the wild grace of the Mediterranean. In Spartimu's hands, Corsica's ancient polyphony becomes both living memory and luminous offering.

Experience the power of collective singing with Spartimu in *Workshop: Introduction to Corsican Polyphonic Singing*. Then, join the Corsican brothers and Deveni Temu of Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors, as they share their devotional songs and island traditions in *Exchange: Cantu in Paghjella meets Peroveta*.

The tradition of *cantu in paghjella*

Nicknamed *Île de Beauté* for its rugged, picturesque scenery, the French island of Corsica lies in the Mediterranean Sea, a melting pot of languages and culture. Situated closer to Italy than to France, yet isolated from the mainland, the island developed a distinctive identity shaped by Latin, Italian, and French influences.

Its rugged mountains and remote villages, connected more by shepherd's trails than roads, fostered a culture rich in both isolation and individuality. In olden days, semi-nomadic herders traversed the island carrying news, stories, and songs from village to village. When Christian and Latin plainsong were brought to Corsica from monasteries in the surrounding lands, Corsicans infused it with their own melismatic lines, ornamentation, and local pastoral laments. Each village developed its own variant of the song styles, preserved by Catholic lay brotherhoods who performed for mass, processions, funerals and feast days. Over centuries, the music blended and evolved, passed down through oral tradition, and came to be known as *cantu in paghjella*, or *paghjella* for short.

The term *paghjella* means “a pair”, in reference to the couplet of eight syllables that make up each line of poetry, though it has come to represent the practice of singing in three distinct parts: the singer with the melodic line (*segonda*) always begins the song first, followed by the bass providing a bass line (*bassu*), with finally the top (*terza*) line embellishing the melody in counterpoint with the *segonda* to provide an additional layer of harmony. At once ancient and immediate, these harmonies echo the rhythms of Corsican life: pastoral, spiritual, and deeply communal.

Paghjella songs are most commonly heard in churches during mass, but are also sung in festive or social occasions and performed at village squares and bars. Texts, often in Corsican, Sardinian, Latin or Greek, contain themes that resonate strongly with the islanders: of love, exile, identity, and politics. Napoleon Bonaparte was also a subject of some songs, having been born in the west-coast town of Ajaccio, the capital of Corsica.

Bringing ancient art to the modern stage

Deeply rooted in the vocal traditions of their native Corsica, Spartimu is a vocal ensemble that brings the ancient art of *cantu in paghjella* to the modern stage. Their powerful, unaccompanied harmonies have resonated in prestigious venues across Europe, the Caucasus, Australia, and the United States. Beyond preserving tradition, Spartimu is celebrated for its artistic encounters, blending Corsican sounds with diverse international repertoires. Their work has been documented by the US Library of Congress and featured in Ridley Scott's *Napoleon*. Their performances offer deeply emotional and immersive experiences that capture the raw spirit of the Mediterranean.

About Spartimu

Spartimu is an internationally acclaimed Corsican vocal ensemble dedicated to preserving and sharing *cantu in paghjella*, Corsica's UNESCO-listed traditional polyphony. Known for their haunting harmonies and improvisational vocal dialogue, the group performs entirely a cappella, sustaining a centuries-old oral tradition. Beyond preservation, Spartimu engages in artistic collaborations across cultures, bringing Mediterranean vocal heritage to global audiences.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 6 and above.

Free admission, registration is required.

Sacred Organ Works with Pieter van Dijk

(The Netherlands)

3 May 2026, Sun, 2.30pm

Esplanade Concert Hall



Not many sounds summon the sacred quite like the organ, with its resonant tones and powerful range that moves from meditative to majestic. It has, for centuries, inspired worshippers to the heights of religious fervour, awakening reverence and reflection in equal measure. Join Pieter van Dijk for an afternoon where contemplation meets grandeur.

From the Lutheran devotion of Bruhns and Bach, to the expressive possibilities of Mendelssohn and Franck, and the haunting, emotional harmonies of Reger, travel back to the Baroque and Romantic periods of the 17th–19th century—a time when composers sought to unite faith and artistic vision.

This programme closes with Bach's iconic *Toccatà in D minor, BWV 565*, a work whose intensity and timeless grandeur continue to capture the human desire to reach closer toward heaven.

Programme

Nicolaus Bruhns (1665-1697)

Prelude in E-Minor

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Partita sopra Sei gegrüsset, Jesu gütig BWV 678. 23

Choral with 11 Variations

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)

Sonate III in A-Major Opus 65 nr 3. 11

Con moto maestoso-Andante

César Auguste Franck (1822-1890)
from Trois Pièces:
Cantabile in B-Major 7

Max Reger (1873-1916)
From 30 kleine Choralvorspiele Opus 135a
Aus tiefer Noth, schrei ich zu dir

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Toccatà in D-Minor BWV 565 9

About the organ

With one of the largest solo repertoires of any musical instrument, the organ has traditionally accompanied voices in praise of God, drawing from a rich body of music inspired by or written for the Christian church. In its earliest Grecian form dating back to 300 BC, it began as a water-powered instrument that channelled air through pipes. Over the centuries, its design evolved in size and complexity, influenced by its status as a musical symbol among the wealthy and powerful Greeks and Romans, among other factors. Notably, the court of Byzantine Emperor Constantine V gifted an organ to France in 757 AD, leading to the instrument's growth in popularity among churches of Western Europe.

By the 15th century, innovations such as pedals, ebony keys, and new components were introduced, allowing for the performance of polyphonic choral pieces that were popular at the time. Tones that emulated other orchestral instruments and emphasised bass became possible, while the stacking of multiple keyboards enabled the organist to reach and play them all. Builders created instruments that leveraged on the acoustic properties within grand cathedrals. Aesthetically, pipe organs grew more elaborate and richly adorned, and by the 20th century, the organ's full power was evident.

With so much of its repertoire composed to inspire meditation or communicate grandeur and power, the sound of a pipe organ is best described as majestic, moving, and profound—music that is inspired by and aspires to reach the heights of religious fervour. As such, it has long been acknowledged for its ability to deepen worshippers' sense of connection with God.

About Pieter van Dijk

Pieter van Dijk (b. 1958) studied organ with Bert Matter, as well as piano and church music at the Conservatory in Arnhem, later continuing his studies under Gustav Leonhardt, Marie-Claire Alain, and Jan Raas. He won international organ competitions in Deventer (1979) and Innsbruck (1986).

Until 2025, he served as Professor of Organ at both the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg and the Conservatorium van Amsterdam. As organist of the Grote Sint-Laurenskerk in Alkmaar, he is responsible for two historic instruments: the Van

Hagerbeer/Schnitger organ and the Van Covelens organ (1511), and was appointed City Organist in 2004.

Van Dijk has released several acclaimed recordings on the Alkmaar instruments. His DVD *Alkmaar – The Organs of the Laurenskerk* received the German Record Critics' Prize in 2013, and between 2017 and 2023, he completed a 21-CD recording of the complete organ works of J. S. Bach.

In 2021, he was awarded the Victorie Oeuvre Prize for his contribution to organ culture in Alkmaar. His concert career has taken him across Europe, Japan, and the United States. Van Dijk also serves as Artistic Director of the Organ Festival Holland, has published writings on Sweelinck, Bach, Weckmann, and Straube/Reger, and has also served as jury member at several international organ competitions.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 6 and above.

Free admission, registration is required.

Talk: Unveiling Heritage – The Timeless Art of Carpet Weaving in the Subcontinent

Lotto Carpets Gallery

1 May 2026, Fri, 2pm

Esplanade Concert Hall Main Foyer



Enter a world where threads weave stories of empires, cultures, and traditions. *Talk: Unveiling Heritage – The Timeless Art of Carpet Weaving in the Subcontinent* is a 90-minute journey through the captivating history of carpet weaving in the Indian subcontinent, shaped by Islamic artistry and cultural influences.

Trace its origins to the imperial courts of the Mughal era, where Emperor Akbar's patronage elevated carpet weaving into a refined art form. Introduced by Persian artisans who brought their expertise to India, the craft evolved through the blending of local motifs with Islamic designs, giving birth to its distinctive aesthetic. The intricate designs, floral patterns, and symbolic motifs that adorned Mughal carpets reflected both the empire's opulence and its harmonious fusion of cultures.

As the tradition spread, regional variations emerged in Kashmir, Agra, and Bhadohi, each distinguished by its own style and craftsmanship. Carpets came to embody layered meanings, woven into Islamic worship, royal courts, and everyday life, symbolising wealth, status, and artistic expression.

Whether encountering these textiles for the first time or returning with seasoned eyes, gain a deeper appreciation of carpets not merely as ornament, but as living imprints of faith, artistry, and the cultural threads that bind the region's history.

Lotto Carpets Gallery

Imran Abid Mir is a sixth-generation carpet merchant with over 20 years of experience in the handmade carpet industry. Based in Singapore, Imran has built a reputation for his

expertise in antique textiles and handmade carpet art. With a deep understanding of the cultural and historical significance of these pieces, Imran has curated an impressive collection of rare and exquisite carpets.

He has worked with discerning collectors, interior designers, and institutions, providing valuable guidance on the acquisition, conservation, and appreciation of handmade carpets. Imran's passion for preserving the art of traditional carpet weaving has led him to share his knowledge through public lectures and workshops, inspiring a new generation of carpet enthusiasts.

(1hr 30mins, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Exchange: Cantu in Paghjella meets Peroveta

Spartimu and Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors (France, Papua New Guinea)

1 May 2026, Fri, 3pm

Esplanade Recital Studio



Hailing from islands separated by vast oceans, *cantu in paghjella* and *peroveta* are distinct choral traditions central to worship in Corsica and Papua New Guinea, respectively. In this lecture-demonstration, the Corsican brothers and the Kapari Viriolo Cultural Ambassadors engage in conversation, sharing their devotional songs and island traditions.

Audiences are invited to listen, learn, and ask questions as these two island ensembles explore faith and tradition through music.

About Spartimu

Spartimu is an internationally acclaimed Corsican vocal ensemble dedicated to preserving and sharing *cantu in paghjella*, Corsica's UNESCO-listed traditional polyphony. Known for their haunting harmonies and improvisational vocal dialogue, the group performs entirely a cappella, sustaining a centuries-old oral tradition. Beyond preservation, Spartimu engages in artistic collaborations across cultures, bringing Mediterranean vocal heritage to global audiences.

About Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors

The Kapari Viriolo Village Cultural Ambassadors was formed in 2025 in Papua New Guinea (PNG) by Deveni Temu and Marion Gilmour, husband-and-wife coordinators of the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra, Australia.

Comprising 16 women and 9 men from the Kapari and Viriolo villages, the group's mission is to strengthen cultural connections between the Canberra-based diaspora and their home communities in Papua New Guinea.

In addition to performing *peroveta*, they also present *sene*—traditional village folk songs and dances from pre-contact times (before European contact)—preserving the island’s rich musical heritage.

About Deveni Temu

Deveni Temu is the coordinator and founder of the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra, dedicated to preserving and showcasing the pre-contact songs, chants, and dances of the Kapari and Viriolo villages in Papua New Guinea’s (PNG) Central Province. Born and raised in these villages, Deveni has spent decades documenting the oral traditions of his people, whose songs were never written down.

Since 1999, Deveni has led the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra, teaching members—many long settled in Australia—the complex call-and-response structures, gendered parts, and harmonies of ancient *peroveta*. To ensure their accuracy, he spends countless hours transcribing lyrics from rare recordings and living memory, reviving melodies long forgotten even in PNG.

Deveni’s work links community and scholarship. He has collaborated with the British Library and the University of Sydney’s PARADISEC to identify and decipher through old recordings, the lyrics of Vulaa/Hula songs and chants once sung by his people.

In December 2025, Deveni founded The Kapari Viriolo Cultural Ambassadors, comprising 25 members from both villages. Their mission is to revive these folk songs and dances, as well as the traditional *peroveta* and Vulaa/Hula language songs. Through his leadership, Deveni continues to play a crucial role in fostering community connection, bridging gaps between migrants and the cultural and educational institutions that support the preservation of this unique heritage.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Free admission, registration is required.

Talk: Introduction to Kurokawa Noh

Kurokawa Noh Preservation Society (Japan)

1 May 2026, Fri, 4pm
Esplanade Black Room



Step into a world where theatre is not merely performed—but offered to the gods. *Kurokawa noh* stands apart from courtly tradition, rooted in the landscape of snow-covered rice fields and mountains, guided by centuries of ritual duty.

This introductory talk unveils the art of a folk ritual theatre preserved in Yamagata in rural northern Japan.

Come discover the folk practices of the village, uncover a history of rivalling factions, as well as learn observe up-close, the interesting details that set this style of *noh* apart from other lineages of Japanese theatre.

Watch ancient myths come to life in *Ritual Noh of Kurokawa – Hagaromo* and *Ritual Noh of Kurokawa – Shojo*, co-produced by Japan Foundation and Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

What makes it different from other *noh* traditions?

Unlike the refined, classical aesthetic of *noh* as seen on urban stages, *Kurokawa noh* lives and breathes within the rhythms of village life. Its performers are not professionals, but farmers, craftsmen, and townspeople who take on sacred responsibility, inheriting their roles across generations. Designated as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan, each performance is done as a communal offering to the deities, blurring the boundaries between performer and worshipper.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Free admission, registration is required.

Talk: The Legacy of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

Rashid Din (Pakistan, United Kingdom)

1 May 2026, Fri, 5pm

Esplanade Recital Studio



There are voices that echo across generations, and then there is Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. More than a singer, he was a phenomenon whose art didn't merely cross borders—it dissolved them. Join us for a talk that traces the journey of a voice born of devotion, shaped by centuries of Sufi tradition, and carried to stages around the world.

This talk by his longtime manager, Rashid Din, invites you to feel the pulse of *qawwali* as it evolved through one extraordinary artist. Come listen, reflect, and gain rare insights into the legacy of a master whose unmistakable voice and innovation bridged sacred lineage and modern sound—leaving an indelible mark and shaping the *qawwali* that resonates with audiences around the world today.

A qawwali icon whose voice carried the divine flame

Rooted in the centuries-old Sufi *qawwali* tradition of Pakistan, Nusrat redefined devotional music for the modern era. With his soaring vocals, electrifying improvisations, and spiritual intensity, he carried sacred poetry from Sufi shrines to the world's most prestigious stages, introducing global audiences to the power and ecstasy of the music form.

In this compelling session, we explore how one artist transformed a deeply traditional form into a global force. Nusrat revolutionised *qawwali* by innovating boldly while remaining anchored in lineage, stretching vocal technique, structure, and duration in ways that felt both radical and reverent.

Decades after his passing, his recordings continue to inspire artists, producers and seekers alike, reaffirming the timeless relevance of his art. This session weaves stories,

musical excerpts, and cultural insight to offer an accessible introduction for newcomers and a deeper reflection for longtime listeners.

More than a biography, it is an invitation to understand how devotion became sound, and how one extraordinary voice reshaped the global musical landscape.

About Rashid Din

Rashid Din is best known as the longtime manager and international representative of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, one of the most influential voices in *qawwali* and devotional music.

During the late 1980s and 1990s when Nusrat's global presence surged, Rashid Din helped navigate the complexities of international touring circuits, world music festivals, and recording deals. His work contributed to positioning Nusrat not only as a spiritual performer but also as a global cultural icon.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Free, registration is required.

Pipe Organ Tour

Dr Evelyn Lim

2 May 2026, Sat, 1.30pm, 2.30pm & 3.30pm

Esplanade Concert Hall

(Meet at Concert Hall entrance, 15mins before start time.)



Join us for an exclusive backstage tour to see Singapore's largest pipe organ up close. Towering three storeys high in the Esplanade Concert Hall, this magnificent Klais organ boasts 4,740 pipes and weighs around 25 tonnes—about the same as five elephants! Don't miss your chance to explore the intricate pipes and mechanisms of this magnificent instrument. Discover how it creates a stunning range of sounds, from a delicate whistle to a powerful growl.

[Find out more about Esplanade's pipe organ >](#)

(30mins per session)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Advisory: Please dress comfortably for the tour.

Free admission, registration is required.

Workshop: Introduction to Corsican Polyphonic Singing

Spartimu (France)

2 May 2026, Sat, 3pm

Esplanade Recital Studio



This workshop offers an introduction to the tradition of Corsican polyphonic singing, led by members of Spartimu. Known for its close harmonies and distinctive vocal sound, Corsican polyphony brings together several vocal lines that rely on careful listening and blend between singers.

Participants will explore some of the characteristics of the style and experience singing together in this unique vocal tradition. This workshop is open to participants of all backgrounds and singing experience.

Complete this experience with *The Sacred Voices of Corsica*, as Spartimu perform their intricate harmonies in their finest form.

About Spartimu

Spartimu is an internationally acclaimed Corsican vocal ensemble dedicated to preserving and sharing *cantu in paghjella*, Corsica's UNESCO-listed traditional polyphony. Known for their haunting harmonies and improvisational vocal dialogue, the group performs entirely a cappella, sustaining a centuries-old oral tradition. Beyond preservation, Spartimu engages in artistic collaborations across cultures, bringing Mediterranean vocal heritage to global audiences.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Free, registration is required.

Workshop: Music of Manipur

Laihui Ensemble (India)

2 May 2026, Sat, 4pm

Esplanade Black Room



Join us on a journey through the sacred soundscape of Manipur, where song and heritage converge in longstanding traditions shaped by devotion and memory.

This brief workshop introduces participants to the rich and diverse musical cultures of Manipur, a region known for its devotional arts and ritual performance traditions, including the mythological songs of the Meitei people. Central to the session are select traditional instruments whose tonal language forms the basis of ritual observance, alongside simple songs that will acquaint you with Manipuri melodies.

Don't miss *Mythology in Song: Legends of the Meitei People*, a companion presentation devoted to the sacred narratives embedded in Meitei devotional practice.

About Laihui Ensemble

Established in 1985, Laihui (Centre for Research on Traditional and Indigenous Arts) is dedicated to preserving and promoting Manipuri folk culture globally. Under the guidance of Honorary Artistic Director Oja Mayanglambam Mangangsana, and Senior Artiste Mangka, Laihui Ensemble nurtures generations of performers, including acclaimed child artistes. From offering foundational traditional Pena music training to showcasing Manipuri heritage across more than ten countries, the centre remains a vital force in revitalizing indigenous arts.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Free, registration is required.

Talk: Masquerade Ceremonies of The Gambia

Berending Kumpo Association (The Gambia)

2 May 2026, Sat, 5pm

Esplanade Recital Studio



This talk introduces the masquerade dances central to the Jola communities of West Africa, such as the Kumpo, and the vital role each plays in the cultural and spiritual life in the community.

Through this session, audiences gain a deeper understanding of the symbolism, rituals, and traditions that surround Jola masquerades, and how these practices sustain Jola identity, moral teaching, and cohesion within the community.

Come witness the acrobatic feats and mysteries of the Kumpo and other Jola masquerades in *Kumpo: Spirit Protector and other Masquerade Dances*, and catch the spirited exchange between Kumpo percussionists, Berending Kumpo Association, and Singapore's Lila Dums in *Kumpo Meets Lila Drums*.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Free, registration is required.

Exchange: From Imperial Courts to Padi Fields – Reed-Pipes of Asia

Chamni Sripraram, Wimonrat Suwamat and Kevin Cheng (Thailand, Singapore)

3 May 2026, Sun, 5pm

Esplanade Recital Studio



Photo Credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Explore the parallel histories of the *khaen* (แคน) and the *sheng* (笙). In this exchange, we investigate the cultural significance and roles of these ancient free-reed instruments, offering a side-by-side analysis of their evolution across Asia.

For over 3,000 years, the *sheng* has sounded through China’s court rituals, opera, and folk traditions. Resembling a bundle of tubes, it produces a bright pure tone, and is capable of playing multiple notes at once. Modern Chinese orchestras now incorporate the instrument as melodic leads and harmonic accompaniment. Further south in Laos and Thailand, the *khaen*—a visually similar reed-pipe—plays a different role: it accompanies *mor lam*, a sung storytelling tradition, and also plays a role in ritual ceremonies. In contemporary Thai music, the *khaen* thrives in pop and world music while continuing to celebrate the vibrant cultural identity of the Isaan region

Discover the characteristics that define these traditional instruments, and learn how their technical similarities and distinct social roles continue to shape music in their respective communities.

Hear the bright tonal qualities of the *khaen* in *Mor Lam Phii Fa: Ceremonies of the Spirit Healers*, a vibrant folk ritual that dispels illness through song and dance.

KhaenScape

KhaenScape is an ensemble born of dynamic international collaboration, uniting artists from Northern Illinois University (NIU) and Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts, Thailand.

This special gathering was created for Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay’s *A Tapestry of Sacred Music* to celebrate the spiritual and healing traditions of Isaan performance culture.

The partnership was formed through artistic exchange during the COVID-19 pandemic, when musicians from Thailand and the United States began sharing knowledge virtually. NIU is one of three universities in the United States offering Thai music courses, with Isaan music recognised both academically and in performance practice as a distinctive field of study.

A significant catalyst in this collaboration was renowned female *khaen* artist and YouTuber Wimonrat, who was invited to teach *khaen* performance techniques to NIU students. From that initial exchange, the partnership expanded into ongoing cross-cultural lessons, research dialogues, and co-performances presented in Thailand and internationally.

Rooted in the sacred healing tradition of *mor lam phii fa*, the ensemble presents authentic ritual repertoire while also exploring contemporary interpretations. Beyond traditional performance, members of the collaboration have formed the contemporary ensemble NURR, active in the Chicagoland area, blending the *khaen* with electronic and new media technologies.

Through preservation and innovation, KhaenScape seeks to ensure that the *khaen*, the iconic bamboo instrument of Isaan culture, continues to resonate with new generations worldwide.

Kevin Cheng

Kevin Cheng is currently a Sheng musician with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO). A First Class Honours graduate of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), his artistry was shaped under the tutelage of renowned masters including Cheng Tak-wai, Loo Sze-wang, Hu Tianquan, and Weng Zhenfa.

Originally from Hong Kong, Kevin’s career is marked by a series of prestigious accolades and high-profile solo appearances. A particular highlight of his performing career was his featured solo recital at the 51st Hong Kong Arts Festival (2023). Notable performances include the world premieres of Phang Kok Jun’s *Finger Dance*, *Canton Ballad* and *5D!*, and his performance of Tang Lok-yin’s Sheng concerto *Volcanicity* with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (2023). His repertoire also includes by the premiere of Ng Cheuk-yin’s *The Seventh Month* as a soloist with both the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (2016) and the HKAPA Chinese Orchestra (2018). Other significant appearances include Kwan Nai-chung’s *Peacock* and Keith Hon’s *Groovy II* with the HKAPA Symphony Orchestra (2011 & 2014), and Qian Zhaoxi’s *Tianshan Rhapsody* with the Hong Kong Youth Chinese Orchestra (2011).

His recital credits span major venues such as the Hong Kong City Hall, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Yale-NUS College. He has also been a featured guest on

international platforms such as the Setouchi International Arts Festival and the Singapore International Festival of Arts.

Beyond the stage, Kevin is a pivotal pedagogue within the arts scene. He currently directs the Chinese Orchestras at Anglo-Chinese School (Barker Road), Fuhua Secondary School, Catholic High School (Primary), and Rosyth School. Under his baton, these ensembles have consistently attained the Distinction award at the Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) Arts Presentation, shaping the future of the Chinese orchestral movement in Singapore. Furthermore, his Sheng students have achieved sustained success in the local circuit, frequently clinching top prizes and championships at the Singapore Chinese Music Competition (SCMC), cementing his reputation as a premier educator in the field.

Kevin's commitment to music education is further reflected in his roles as the Vice Chairman of the Singapore Chinese Music Federation Youth Chapter, Teacher-Artist of the Singapore National Youth Chinese Orchestra, and Instructor of Resonance – Sheng Ensemble. He has conducted numerous lectures and workshops at institutions such as Yale-NUS College and the HKAPA.

Complementing his performance and teaching endeavours, Kevin is a prolific arranger with commissions from the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, Ding Yi Music Company, and The Purple Symphony, among others. He is currently studying composition under the tutelage of Law Wai-lun.

(1hr, no intermission)

Admission age: 10 and above.

Free, registration is required.

Festival Opening: Dance of the Spirit Protector

Berending Kumpo Association (The Gambia)

30 Apr 2026, Thu, 7.15pm

Esplanade Courtyard



Mark your calendar and come face to face with the Kumpo, the spinning masked guardian of West Africa who whirls into existence, radiant in raffia, rhythm, and flame. A *Tapestry of Sacred Music* opens with this captivating performance by Berending Kumpo Association, a vibrant celebration that welcomes audiences into a shared experience of movement, unity, and community, pulsing with life and blessings.

If you're hungry to see more of the Kumpo, don't miss its other appearances throughout the weekend. The spirit protector returns in *Kumpo: Spirit Protector and other Masquerade Dances*, *Kumpo Meets Lila Drums*, and *Talk: Masquerade Ceremonies of The Gambia*—spellbinding stage performances, and an illuminating talk that promise to draw you deeper into its rhythmic thrall.

The Dance of Protection

Under the blazing sun, the figure of straw leaps around for hours, accompanied by singing, drumming and the sound of metal bells. Using the stick attached to the top of its head as a pivot, it performs dizzying rapid spins. It approaches the fire, as if to set itself alight, yet it never burns. This is the Kumpo, an ancestral spirit that appears to dance on its own, believed to connect the world of the living and the spirit realm.

In a lively procession, the Kumpo spins and moves energetically through the space while interacting with the crowd, symbolising spiritual presence, protection and celebration. A vital emblem of community life, it encourages participation, unity, and the joy of collective presence.

Jola Beliefs

In the small villages of southern Senegal and The Gambia, the Jola people have cultivated a way of life centered on natural medicine, rice cultivation, and farming. They believe in a supreme being called Ata Emit, who resides in the sky and governs the weather and the seasons. Like other African indigenous religions, their spiritual practice includes shrines and sacred places, as well as charms and amulets believed to possess supernatural protective powers that bring luck, ward off evil or influence spirits.

Ceremonies, initiation rites and festivals are community-wide events where the Jola gather in song and dance, essential elements of celebration and belonging. The Kumpo is one of several masquerades that make appearances at these festivals.

The Sacred Guardian

The Kumpo is dressed by an elder of the community in a full-body suit woven from beige-coloured African Raffia palm leaves held together by ropes made from the bark of the baobab tree. A wooden stick, made from the Kalindak tree, is then lodged into a hat, transforming the dancer into a vessel for the spirit.

Once in its regalia, the Kumpo is no longer seen as human but as a spirit—a guardian bound to the divine creator and forest ancestors. As spirit protector of the village, it promotes unity among the people. Whirling around to high-energy drumming, clapping, and singing, it bestows blessings upon individuals and the community, receiving veneration and adoration from the people in return. When the dance ends, the Kumpo usually delivers messages to the village through an interpreter before leaving. The contents which vary from domestic instructions for farmers, discipline warnings to members of the community, announcements of marriages, and dates of future festivals.

Come witness the acrobatic feats and mysteries of the Kumpo and other Jola masquerades.

(30mins, no intermission)

Sikh Kirtans

Gurmat Sangeet Academy at the Sikh Centre

30 Apr 2026, Thu, 7.45pm & 9.15pm

DBS Foundation Outdoor Theatre at Esplanade



Allow the sacred verses of Sikh saints to bathe you in divine love, as their ancient words rise in devotion and draw you inward through *kirtan*—the singing of hymns in praise of God. Gurmat Sangeet Academy presents two stirring performances rooted in this timeless tradition.

Hymns of Humanity, 7.45pm

Young voices from the Gurmat Sangeet Academy share a message of universal equality through the sacred hymns of diverse saints like Bhagat Kabir Ji and Bhagat Ravidas Ji.

Musical Landscape of Gurbani, 9.15pm

This performance explores the vast musical landscape of Gurbani, journeying from the discipline of Classical Raags and Tarana to the spirited storytelling of Folk and Dhadi Vaar styles.

Kirtan, the voice of the soul

“Whosoever listens to kirtan or sings kirtan of Hari shall be free of all ills.”
– *Guru Granth Shahib*

In Sikh tradition, no ceremony, occasion or event is complete without the singing of *kirtan*—a devotional hymn in praise of God. A cherished form of congregational prayer, it has, according to scripture, the ability to cleanse the mind of impurities, both physical and sensual; liberate one from the burdens of time and death; dispel disease, sorrow and suffering; and usher in peace and bliss.

Understanding the Sikh religion

In Punjabi, the word “sikh” means “disciple”, and central to the faith is the relationship between the Sikh and his master, who guides him through the teachings and writings of the 10 Gurus. Sikhism is rooted in the principles of oneness and love, encouraging a life of servitude and spirituality. It is believed that to lead a good life, one must work diligently, live honestly, treat everyone equally, serve others, be generous to the less fortunate, and keep God close to the heart and mind at all times.

Hymns of Praise

Music is a central part of worship, with the religion’s 16th century founders being skilled poets, composers and musicians. Foremost among them was Guru Nanak, who expressed his teachings and revelations through poetry, which he sang alongside his companion Bhai Mardana, a bard who played the *rabab*—a plucked string instrument.

Over time, Guru Nanak's hymns, along with those of his nine successors, were compiled into what is now known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. Within this revered text, the hymns of the Gurus are organised under 31 *raags* or *ragas*—modes characterised by a specific series of notes and path melodies. Each *raga* has a name, an associated time of day or year when it is best performed, and evokes specific emotions.

In the hands of his spiritual successors and devout Sikhs, this musical tradition has flourished as a powerful means of spiritual elevation. New *ragas*, styles and musical instruments have emerged, perpetuating the legacy of creativity and devotion. Today, the singing and contemplation of these hymns resonate day and night at Sikh temples all over the world.

(30mins, no intermission – 7.45pm)

(45mins, no intermission – 9.15pm)

Songs of Pilgrimage: the *Llibre Vermell* of Montserrat

Cappella Martialis

30 Apr 2026, Thu, 8pm

1 May 2026, Fri, 6pm

3 May 2026, Sun, 7.30pm

Esplanade Concourse



Let the sacred sound of medieval pilgrimage draw near, carrying festivity in its step and reverence in its song. Come share in a celebration that bridges the spiritual and the human, reviving the harmony that once resounded through Montserrat’s monastery walls.

Amid the dark, candlelit nights of 14th-century Montserrat, voices sing in reverence—and in rhythm—guided by the *Llibre Vermell* (“The Red Book”), named for its crimson binding. Created not from the royal courts but for restless pilgrim hearts, the devotional songbook offered weary travellers visiting the Santa Maria de Montserrat Monastery in Spain a way to unite prayer with song. Its collection of pious and festive songs brought life to the otherwise solemn devotional landscape of the Middle Ages.

An unusual codex of 10 anonymous hymns and folksongs, the vivid melodies recorded within the pages of the ancient manuscript open a window onto a world that carried both the weight of spiritual practice and the warmth of community. Each note invites listeners to trace the rhythm of medieval devotion, where prayer became song and worship turned to dance.

Today, the same radiance lives on in performance. In this meeting of faith and festivity, share in a celebration that bridges the sacred and the human, reviving the harmony that once filled Montserrat’s monastery walls. Let the ancient music breathe anew, and discover how the spirit moves through song.

The music, the mountain, the manuscript

In an age when secular holidays did not exist and the only public holidays were holy days, the concept of travel for leisure was virtually unknown. Apart from business, the only real travel was religious—pilgrimage—and the pilgrimage industry was massive.

Pilgrims then, just like tourists today, needed food, drink, baths, souvenir shops, medical services, and so on. Not everyone who went on pilgrimage was purely devout, and these mixed motives are reflected in a special manuscript housed in the Monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat (of the “serrated mountain”) just outside Barcelona in Catalonia, Spain. The monastery remains a major place of pilgrimage, as the shrine of the miracle-working image of the Virgin of Montserrat

Put together in the 1300s, the anonymous compiler of the *Llibre Vermell* explains its purpose:

“Because the pilgrims wish to sing and dance while they keep their watch at night in the church of the Blessed Mary of Montserrat, and also in the light of day; and in the church no songs should be sung unless they are chaste and pious, for that reason these songs that appear here have been written. And these should be used modestly, and take care that no one who keeps watch in prayer and contemplation is disturbed.”

In other words, bored pilgrims in the 1300s were blasting away the medieval equivalent of bawdy pop songs in the wee hours of the night in the church, and this collection was intended to set a holier tone. The 10 surviving works, in Latin, Catalan, and Occitan, are all anonymous, compiled for pilgrims to sing and dance as they kept night vigils before the Black Virgin. Ranging from monophonic chant to polyphony, they have the characteristics of both folk song and hymn. Their simplicity, catchy melodies, and dance rhythms have ensured their enduring popularity in performance and recording.

(45mins, no intermission)

Echoes of Guinea

Kelvin Kew and Djembe Singapore Club

30 Apr 2026, Thu, 8.30pm
Esplanade Courtyard

3 May 2026, Sun, 6pm
DBS Foundation Outdoor Theatre at Esplanade



From the throbbing pulse of West Africa rise the all-consuming rhythms of the djembe, summoning its raw and ancient ancestral energy. Led by Kelvin Kew and his ensemble, Djembe Singapore Club, this performance channels the ancient voices of Mandinka tradition to stir both body and soul. Be part of this gathering shaped by technical mastery, cultural authenticity, and infectious energy, where beats speak in ancestral tongues and the djembe breathes life into an unforgettable communal experience.

In this celebration of Mandé heritage, feel the drums as they echo the continuity of a spiritual lineage—a deep resonance that calls hearts to prayer and bodies to motion, binding communities in rhythm, memory, and faith.

West African belief and the cosmic rhythm in music and storytelling

In West Africa thought, the universe itself is rhythmic. The cycle of stars, the ebb and flow of tides, the pulsing of blood, and even the vibration of atoms are part of a cosmic rhythm that holds the world together. It is believed that all of life's rhythms can be conveyed through music and storytelling. When the drums speak and the griots sing, they carry the hopes, wisdom, folklore, superstitions, and healing of the community. And all those who are present join in this celebration of life.

There is a spiritual dimension to the way words and rhythms are brought to life in West African music and storytelling. Since the days of the Mali Empire (13th–16th century), the Mandinka people have passed down their history and spirituality through these traditions, transforming royal court customs into folk heritage that continues to shape their identity today.

The Mandinka

One of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, the Mandinka are descendants of the Mali Empire, a society rooted in animist beliefs that flourished for centuries up until the rise of the Transatlantic slave trade. After the empire's fall, many migrated down the Niger River to look for agricultural land. Following a series of Islamic holy wars in the 19th century, most Mandinka converted to Islam, weaving its teachings into their folk beliefs.

Today, the Mandinka are scattered across the West African nations, in Guinea, The Gambia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. Most live in traditional rural villages, where much of life's learning is down through songs, proverbs, and stories.

The way the music speaks

For the Mandinka, music is both language and life. Ritual and ceremony mark every milestone, such as birth, death, marriage, and harvest. Community and kinship are important values, and the cycle of life is meant to be celebrated. In honouring these moments, music, dance, and singing bring people together.

Aside from the music of the griots, drums hold a sacred place in the spiritual and ritualistic culture of the Mandinka. The djembe, a single-headed goblet drum carved from the Lenge tree and covered with goat skin, lies at the heart of these ceremonies and is said to possess a spirit of its own. It does not simply make sound; it tells stories, offers prayers, celebrates, and heals.

One of the most versatile percussion instruments on the planet, the djembe can produce a wide range of pitches through the striking or slapping of the membrane. The best drummers can make it speak, and for every occasion and activity, there is an accompanying rhythm that carries symbolic meaning.

The Mandinka call them *foli*, each of which carries symbolic meaning: *dimba*, for example, is a rhythm played for older women; *feré* is for friendship; *jambadon*, for coming-of-age circumcision ceremonies; *karoninka* for weddings and infant-naming ceremonies; *madiba* for wrestling; and countless others that mark the cycle of life.

A skilled djembe player knows not only the rhythms themselves but also the perfect moments for them rise, shift, or fade with the song and dance. Amid these drumbeats and movements, performer and audience become one, and the ancient heartbeat of the Mandinka lives on.

About Kelvin Kew

A direct disciple of the late legendary Mamady Keïta, Kelvin Kew is one of the world's foremost authorities on traditional West African djembe education. He has dedicated

over two decades to mastering, preserving, and sharing the art of djembe playing. Kelvin's artistic works can also be found on Spotify, his YouTube Partner recognised channel, and the Djembe Flow app available on all app stores.

(30mins, no intermission – Esplanade Courtyard)

(45mins, no intermission – DBS Foundation Outdoor Theatre at Esplanade)

Ritual Noh of Kurokawa – Shojo

Kurokawa Noh Preservation Society (Japan)

30 Apr 2026, Thu, 10.15pm

Esplanade Concourse



Step into the candlelit hush and be mesmerised as masked performers revive the ancient tale of *Shojo* (*The Sake Sprite*), a festive yet reverent offering about an alcohol-loving sea spirit who rewards a wine-seller with boundless sake. Listen closely and be drawn in by the plaintive notes of the Japanese flute mingling with the deep thrum of drums, the otherworldly guttural calls of the performers, and the rhythmic stomping of feet. Let every gesture and sound pull you deeper—into an unbroken tradition rooted in this Yamagata community.

What is noh

Mention the word *noh* and one thinks immediately of the highly refined classical art form: the wooden pine backdrop, the musicians accompanying the slow, controlled movement and chanting of the *noh* master.

The origins of *noh* date back to the 8th century, when court music and dance, along with acrobatics, magic tricks and instrumental music were introduced to Japan from China. Over the next few hundred years, its ancestral form spread both as entertainment offered at shrine and temples festivals and as folk rituals offered to the gods. By the 15th century, Zeami Motokiyo had refined and perfected his practices of *noh* for the aristocracy and samurai class, *Noh* evolved into a highly stylised classical art.

A unique noh tradition that retains the ancient styles

On the northwest coast of Japan, the city of Tsuruoka has preserved the sacred roots of *noh* and its archaic elements. Here, styles and traditions endure that have long vanished from the modern forms of the five major *noh* schools. This is *Kurokawa noh*, a form of ritual theatre for the guardian deity of Kasuga shrine. Unlike classical *noh*, which is

practiced and performed only by trained professionals, all members of the community are involved in some way or another.

Within this small village, where nearly every man takes part in performance, farmers, craftsmen, and other village-folk become musicians or actors for the night, embodying deities, demons, spirits, goblins, and female characters. The community maintains a vast repertoire of more than 540 *noh* pieces and 50 *kyōgen* (comedic) plays, along with 230 masks and 400 costumes.

The Ogisai festival, a night of ritual theatre

While the city lies deep in snow, the entire community—divided into two rival *noh* groups called Shimoza and Kamiza—makes preparations for the annual Ogisai festival. Held on the first two days of February as a pre-spring prayer for the coming season's crops, preparations start as early as December, and include self-purification rituals, rope-making, tofu-grilling, mochi-pounding, and the construction of *noh* stages in the homes of two chosen families, one from each group.

The festival begins with a procession of the *Ogi-sama* (an object symbolising the shrine's deity) to the two homes. In each, a child starts the *noh* performance by stomping repeatedly on the floor to awaken the earth god and bring blessings to the fields. The stage performances start around six in the evening, illuminated by flickering candlelight. A ritual to welcome the gods to the stage opens the programme, followed by five plays exploring the themes of God, Warrior, Woman, Madness, and Demons. Just before daybreak the entire programme concludes. Both processions then leave the chosen families' homes for the shrine, where *noh* is performed again, this time in the deity's original dwelling place.

This tradition has endured for over 500 years, sustained by the friendly rivalry between the Shimoza and the Kamiza. The two groups learn from one another while striving to outperform the other, ensuring that the skill and excellence of *Kurokawa noh* continue to be passed on through generations.

Come experience the candlelit atmosphere of *Kurokawa noh* up close, and witness this living heritage—Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan by the Kamiza—at *A Tapestry of Sacred Music*.

Ritual Noh of Kurokawa – Shojo is co-produced by Japan Foundation and Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

(1hr 15mins, no intermission)

The Art of Chant: Voices of the Vedas

Sathya Sai Centre for Educare

1 May 2026, Fri, 4pm
Esplanade Concourse



The Art of Chant: Voices of the Vedas presents a moment for reverence, reflection, and quiet renewal. Led by the Sathya Sai Centre for Educare, this gathering of voices presenting a selection of Vedic chants—an invitation to all to listen deeply and attune to the uplifting vibrations carried through the sacred hymns.

Continue your contemplative journey with a simple meal at *Community Canteen: South Indian Vegetarian*, where food and fellowship embody the spirit of humility, generosity, and community that lies at the heart of many South Indian religious traditions.

The heart of Vedic chanting

The Vedas are ancient Sanskrit scriptures whose name comes from the root “*vid*”, meaning “to know.” They are revered as sacred knowledge, guiding people toward a deeper understanding of life and our connection with the universal creative energy.

In the teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the Vedas hold a universal message for all: to practise truth, follow righteousness, live in peace, fill the heart with love, and uphold nonviolence in daily life. He emphasised the elevating power of Vedic chanting, explaining that even listening with sincerity can calm and inspire the mind, much like a soothing lullaby comforts a child.

Guided by his teachings, the Sathya Sai Centre for Educare continues the spiritual tradition, dedicated to living and sharing these universal human values: truth (*sathya*), righteousness (*dharma*), peace (*shanti*), selfless love (*prema*), and nonviolence (*ahimsa*).

The Art of Chant: Voices of the Vedas continues this sacred lineage, an offering not of performance, but of prayer in sound. Each chant becomes an opening for quiet reflection, restoring peace and understanding in those who listen with an open heart.

(30mins, no intermission)

Community Canteen

1 May 2026, Fri, 4.30pm

2 May 2026, Sat, 4.30pm

3 May 2026, Sun, 4.30pm

Esplanade Concert Hall Main Foyer



Across faiths, meals offered within sacred spaces have always done more than fill the stomach—they carry blessings, gratitude, and the taste of communal tradition. Come break bread with us in this sharing of devotional food, where flavour meets faith, and generosity is offered with every plate. Savour the foods that nourish pilgrims, monks, and devotees alike.

1 May: South Indian Temple Vegetarian

In many South Indian temples, food plays an important spiritual role. Dishes prepared in temple kitchens are first offered to the deity as *naivedyam* (a ritual food offering made to the divine as an act of devotion and gratitude). Once the offering is made, the food is shared as *prasadam* (food that has been blessed).

These preparations are traditionally simple, vegetarian, and rooted in centuries-old culinary practices that emphasise purity, balance, and nourishment. More than just a meal, temple food reflects the spirit of humility, generosity, and community that lies at the heart of many South Indian religious traditions.

Before this, start your exploration into South Indian temple practices with *The Art of Chant: Voices of the Vedas*, where the blessings you receive come as moments of peace and sustenance for the soul.

2 May: Sikh Langgar

Langgar, a communal kitchen, typically found in a *gurdwara* (place of worship), serves free meals to all visitors, regardless of background. This practice, which began in the 13th century, is rooted in Sikh teachings of equality and selfless service, symbolising the importance of sharing and caring for one another. The food served during *langgar* is usually vegetarian, featuring dishes such as lentil soups, *dal* and *chapati*.

Before this *langgar* experience, where tea and light refreshments will be served, immerse yourself in the soulful hymns at *The Art of Chant: Shabad Chowki Parampara* at the concourse, we warmly welcome you to join us for the *langgar* experience happening right after where tea and light refreshments will be served.

3 May: Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian

In Chinese Buddhist tradition, free vegetarian food are a common feature of charity (*dana*). The meals are offered to the public to foster merit and compassion, as well as relief to the poor. The food is often simple, with soy and gluten forming protein sources, and reflective of the mainstream tastes of the local Chinese communities.

Take pause and spend the afternoon with gentle intention. Before this humble meal, listen to the meditative beauty of *The Art of Chant: Chinese Buddhist Sutras* and let your day unfold in mindfulness.

(1hr)

Kumpo: Spirit Protector and other Masquerade Dances

Berending Kumpo Association (The Gambia)

1 May 2026, Fri, 7pm & 9pm

2 May 2026, Sat, 7.10pm & 9.20pm

3 May 2026, Sun, 6.50pm

Esplanade Forecourt Garden



In the lands of Jola communities across The Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau, the dance of their whirling guardian summons ancestral strength through rhythm, flame, and raffia. In this performance, feel the surge of spirit and sound, where the Kumpo's boundless kinetic energy drowns out disorder and restores the harmony that binds Jola hearts together.

To the people, the Kumpo is not merely a performer but a protector, a sacred spirit within their tradition of mystical masquerade dances. To touch this guardian is taboo; to behold its blazing movements is to move in tandem—to trace the living thread between the ancestors and their descendants.

Join us at *Kumpo Meets Lila Drums* and *Talk: Masquerade Ceremonies of The Gambia* for more spellbinding stage performance, and an illuminating talk that promise to draw you deeper into its rhythmic thrall.

The Dance of Protection

Under the blazing sun, the figure of straw leaps around for hours, accompanied by singing, drumming and the sound of metal bells. Using the stick attached to the top of its head as a pivot, it performs dizzying rapid spins. It approaches the fire, as if to set itself alight, yet it never burns. This is the Kumpo, an ancestral spirit that appears to dance on its own, believed to connect the world of the living and the spirit realm.

In a lively procession, the Kumpo spins and moves energetically through the space while interacting with the crowd, symbolising spiritual presence, protection and celebration. A vital emblem of community life, it encourages participation, unity, and the joy of collective presence.

Jola Beliefs

In the small villages of southern Senegal and The Gambia, the Jola people have cultivated a way of life centered on natural medicine, rice cultivation, and farming. They believe in a supreme being called Ata Emit, who resides in the sky and governs the weather and the seasons. Like other African indigenous religions, their spiritual practice includes shrines and sacred places, as well as charms and amulets believed to possess supernatural protective powers that bring luck, ward off evil or influence spirits.

Ceremonies, initiation rites and festivals are community-wide events where the Jola gather in song and dance, essential elements of celebration and belonging. The Kumpo is one of several masquerades that make appearances at these festivals.

The Sacred Guardian

The Kumpo is dressed by an elder of the community in a full-body suit woven from beige-coloured African Raffia palm leaves held together by ropes made from the bark of the baobab tree. A wooden stick, made from the Kalindak tree, is then lodged into a hat, transforming the dancer into a vessel for the spirit.

Once in its regalia, the Kumpo is no longer seen as human but as a spirit — a guardian bound to the divine creator and forest ancestors. As spirit protector of the village, it promotes unity among the people. Whirling around to high-energy drumming, clapping, and singing, it bestows blessings upon individuals and the community, receiving veneration and adoration from the people in return. When the dance ends, the Kumpo usually delivers messages to the village through an interpreter before leaving. The contents which vary from domestic instructions for farmers, discipline warnings to members of the community, announcements of marriages, and dates of future festivals.

Come witness the acrobatic feats and mysteries of the Kumpo and other Jola masquerades.

(40mins, no intermission)

Mythology in Song: Legends of the Meitei People

Laihui Ensemble (India)

1 May 2026, Fri, 8pm & 9.30pm

DBS Foundation Outdoor Theatre at Esplanade

2 May 2026, Sat, 8pm & 9pm

Esplanade Concourse



In Meitei ritual tradition, priestesses known as Maibis shape the air with their chants, their gestures tracing the very source of creation—the world, for a moment, feels newly made. Amid their graceful movements, the *pena*'s soulful hum quivers in the background as the drums resound, guiding the Maibis as they rouse ancient myths from slumber. Immerse yourself in the lores of creation and the epic tales of civilisation as the Laihui Ensemble brings forth the songs and dances of these Manipuri priestesses.

Weaving Meitei chant, dance, and ritual in honour of their goddesses, the Lairemma, *Mythology in Song: Legends of the Meitei People* is an invocation of the divine—a timeless celebration of faith and creation.

Don't miss *Workshop: Music of Manipur*, a companion interactive workshop that traces the sacred musical traditions of the region.

Mythology in song

The fragrance of orange marigolds and white jasmine fills the air as the sound of drums and the soulful strains of the *pena* fiddle begin to stir. Graceful and dignified, the female priestesses—known as the Maibis—dressed entirely in white with gold trimmings dance and sing to the music. Spectators give their undivided attention to the Maibis, who act as mediums linking the natural and the supernatural.

The lead Maibi orchestrates and presides over the entire ceremony, guiding the attendees in singing chants that recount the lore of creation through movement and song. Accompanying the ceremony is a musician playing the *pena*, a stringed instrument crafted from bamboo and the shell of a coconut or gourd a national symbol of the Manipuri people.

The landscape of Manipur and the Meitei people

Nestled in the easternmost corner of India, Manipur is a land of blue hills surrounding an oval-shaped valley, lush greenery, and floating islands. Bordered by Myanmar and other Indian states, the region is a rich melting pot of nature and culture, inhabited by thirty-three recognised tribes, each with its own tradition, dialect, and belief system. Their histories are marked by deep mythological stories that have been passed down orally through generations.

At the heart of this land live the Meitei people, the largest ethnic group in the valley. Even though most have adopted Hinduism, they retain elements of their indigenous culture and ancient faiths, practicing both Hindu and Meitei traditions.

Meiteism is a polytheistic religion, with roots predating the adoption of Hinduism as the dominant religion in the region. The Meitei believe that deities—collectively known as Lai—are the embodiment of elemental forces such as water, fire, earth and wind; and are enshrined in sacred groves. The Lai are also intricately woven into their oral narratives, legends and folktales.

The divine beings of Meiteism

Numerous ancient Meitei religious texts and folklore recount the presence of hundreds of divine beings in the pantheon, many of them are goddesses, regarded as manifestations of the supreme mother goddess, Leimarel Sidabi, who embodies fertility, protection, and the nurturing force of the earth. Accordingly, women play a dominant role in Meitei rituals; it is believed that only female Maibis can be possessed by the Lai and deliver prophecies.

Join the Laihui Ensemble as they present Lairemma, songs and dances in praise of the various Manipuri goddesses, recounting epic stories of creation and civilisation.

About Laihui Ensemble

Established in 1985, Laihui (Centre for Research on Traditional and Indigenous Arts) is dedicated to preserving and promoting Manipuri folk culture globally. Under the guidance of Honorary Artistic Director Oja Mayanglambam Mangangsana, and Senior Artiste Mangka, Laihui Ensemble nurtures generations of performers, including acclaimed child artistes. From offering foundational traditional Pena music training to showcasing Manipuri heritage across more than ten countries, the centre remains a vital force in revitalizing indigenous arts.

(30mins, no intermission)

Mor Lam Phii Fa: Ceremonies of the Spirit Healers

KhaenScape (Thailand)

1 May 2026, Fri, 8.45pm

2 May 2026, Sat, 8.15pm

3 May 2026, Sun, 7pm

Esplanade Courtyard



Across the Isaan region of Thailand and in Laos, healing doesn't come in the form of medicine, but through music, movement, and communion. *Mor lam phii fa* is a folk ritual that dispels illness through song and dance—in the presence of ancestral and sky spirits, and among kin. As the ceremony unfolds, what starts out as solemn and foreboding shifts into joyful revelry. Catch this entrancing performance as it draws you into the heartbeat of a community in motion, where one's well-being is inseparable from the collective whole and the natural world.

When the spirits are the cure

Imagine being so sick that no doctor can help you. Your body weakens, your spirit is broken, and every remedy seems to fail. In Northeast Thailand and Laos, people don't suffer alone—they turn to the *phii fa*. These are not mere ghosts, but the primordial creator spirits or heavenly beings believed to have built the world and bestowed upon humans both medicine and healing powers.

When illness strikes without reason, believed to be caused by restless spirits, the patient waits by an altar laden with offerings while healers and their apprentices make preparations. Around them, the community gathers in solidarity. Then, as the appointed hour arrives, the medium calls forth the *phii fa*, and the ritual begins.

Healing and spiritual power in Isaan tradition

Mor lam phii fa is a ritualistic healing ceremony practised by the Isaan people. Though predominantly Buddhist, their beliefs are deeply syncretic, incorporating elements of animism into their traditions. As farmers whose lives are tied to the land, they believe

that spirits inhabit the natural world—and that misfortune, illness, and bad weather arise when this harmony is disrupted. When bad weather affects the crops, the whole community suffers. To restore the balance, the people rally together as a community, partaking in rituals to appease the spirits. These rituals, adopted by the locals throughout the region over generations, are deeply embedded in their way of life.

Music and dance as medicine

In *mor lam phii fa*, music becomes a sacred space for these supernatural ceremonies. Led by mediums, most of whom are women, healing takes place through dance and the songs of the *khaen*, a bamboo mouth organ that calls forth the spirits.

As the *khaen* plays, the healer joins in song, praising and calling upon the supreme deity Phii Fa Phaya Thaen to descend upon the medium.

The ritual unfolds through a progression of dances: one to diagnose the patient's symptoms, another to divine its cause—whether a malevolent spirit has inflicted harm or a spirit has been offended—followed by a dance to summon the patient's guardian spirit, then a healing dance. Throughout the ceremony, the community participates actively. Two dances conclude the ceremony: one to instruct proper conduct, and finally, a joyful farewell to send the deity back to heaven.

Ceremony as renewal

After each harvest season, a grand *mor lam phii fa* ceremony is held. During this time, offerings are more extravagant, preparations more extensive, and the entire community gathers to cook and feed guests attending the event. Patients, now healed and filled with gratitude, join in to pray for the protection of the people and livestock, and for continued fertility of their land.

About KhaenScape

KhaenScape is an ensemble born of dynamic international collaboration, uniting artists from Northern Illinois University (NIU) and Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts, Thailand. This special gathering was created for Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay's *A Tapestry of Sacred Music* to celebrate the spiritual and healing traditions of Isaan performance culture.

The partnership was formed through artistic exchange during the COVID-19 pandemic, when musicians from Thailand and the United States began sharing knowledge virtually. NIU is one of three universities in the United States offering Thai music courses, with Isaan music recognised both academically and in performance practice as a distinctive field of study.

A significant catalyst in this collaboration was renowned female *khaen* artist and YouTuber Wimonrat, who was invited to teach *khaen* performance techniques to NIU students. From that initial exchange, the partnership expanded into ongoing cross-cultural lessons, research dialogues, and co-performances presented in Thailand and internationally.

Rooted in the sacred healing tradition of *mor lam phii fa*, the ensemble presents authentic ritual repertoire while also exploring contemporary interpretations. Beyond traditional performance, members of the collaboration have formed the contemporary ensemble NURR, active in the Chicagoland area, blending the *khaen* with electronic and new media technologies.

Through preservation and innovation, KhaenScape seeks to ensure that the *khaen*, the iconic bamboo instrument of Isaan culture, continues to resonate with new generations worldwide.

(45mins, no intermission)

The Art of Chant: Shabad Chowki Parampara

Gurmat Sangeet Academy at the Sikh Centre

2 May 2026, Sat, 4pm
Esplanade Concourse



Experience the meditative flow of *shabad chowki parampara*, a centuries-old tradition of structured hymn-singing that bridges authentic heritage with the evolving expressions of *kirtan*.

Continue your contemplative journey with a simple meal at *Community Canteen: Sikh Langgar*, where communal dining honours the Sikh principles of compassion, humility, and equality.

Kirtan, the voice of the soul

“Whosoever listens to kirtan or sings kirtan of Hari shall be free of all ills.”
– *Guru Granth Shahib*

In Sikh tradition, no ceremony, occasion or event is complete without the singing of *kirtan*—a devotional hymn in praise of God. A cherished form of congregational prayer, it has, according to scripture, the ability to cleanse the mind of impurities, both physical and sensual; liberate one from the burdens of time and death; dispel disease, sorrow and suffering; and usher in peace and bliss.

Understanding the Sikh religion

In Punjabi, the word “sikh” means “disciple”, and central to the faith is the relationship between the Sikh and his master, who guides him through the teachings and writings of the 10 Gurus. Sikhism is rooted in the principles of oneness and love, encouraging a life of servitude and spirituality. It is believed that to lead a good life, one must work diligently, live honestly, treat everyone equally, serve others, be generous to the less fortunate, and keep God close to the heart and mind at all times.

Hymns of Praise

Music is a central part of worship, with the religion's 16th century founders being skilled poets, composers and musicians. Foremost among them was Guru Nanak, who expressed his teachings and revelations through poetry, which he sang alongside his companion Bhai Mardana, a bard who played the *rabab*—a plucked string instrument.

Over time, Guru Nanak's hymns, along with those of his nine successors, were compiled into what is now known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. Within this revered text, the hymns of the Gurus are organised under 31 *raags* or *ragas*—modes characterised by a specific series of notes and path melodies. Each *raga* has a name, an associated time of day or year when it is best performed, and evokes specific emotions.

In the hands of his spiritual successors and devout Sikhs, this musical tradition has flourished as a powerful means of spiritual elevation. New *ragas*, styles and musical instruments have emerged, perpetuating the legacy of creativity and devotion. Today, the singing and contemplation of these hymns resonate day and night at Sikh temples all over the world.

(30mins, no intermission)

Zafin: Dance and Devotion

Samrah Club

2 May 2026, Sat, 7.45pm & 9.15pm

DBS Foundation Outdoor Theatre at Esplanade



Experience the divine rhythm of Yemen’s Hadhramaut region brought to life through *zafin*, a dance where the body and faith find form in motion. In the joyous interplay of footwork, music, and verse, devotion takes flight, binding grace, gratitude, and community.

Dance as devotion: Zafin and the spirit of Hadhramaut

The Hadhramaut region of southern Yemen is a landscape of dramatic deserts and deep valleys. Its people, known as the Hadhrami Arabs, were blessed with access to the Arabian Sea and imbued with a strong spirit of enterprise, becoming accomplished seafarers. Consequently, most Arab families who settled in Singapore and Southeast Asia between the 1700s and 1900s are part of the Hadhrami diaspora.

Despite being separated by thousands of miles of ocean, this diaspora has preserved Yemeni performance traditions—one of the most iconic and expressive being the *zafin*. Developed within deeply Islamic social environments, this communal dance brings together physical expressions of joy and celebration with skill and refinement in movement, accompanied by sung poetry praising God, the Prophet, and other spiritual and moral ideals.

In Hadhrami celebratory gatherings, men dressed in white *thobe* tunics gather around a carpet. A seasoned vocalist begins with an opening prayer, followed by salutations to the Prophet. An *oud* player then outlines the melody before the ensemble builds momentum with small hand drums known as *marwas*. One group of players maintains the main beats, while another strikes during the silences in between, interlocking their rhythms with precision to create a driving, compelling pulse. Echoing the deftness of the drummers,

dancers on the central carpet perform intricate, weaving footwork, moving past one another with agility and flair.

This link between devotion, music, and movement has associations with Sufism, where the divine may be experienced through the body. While *zafin* is not a formal ritual, its repetitive rhythms and movements can evoke in dancers a sense of connection with God. Remembrance and contemplation of spirituality are also embedded in the emotional and lyrical content of the music. For the diaspora, however, its performance serves an additional purpose—as a means of sustaining cultural identity and communal memory in lands far from their ancestral home.

(30mins, no intermission)

The Art of Chant: Chinese Buddhist Sutras

Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery and Buddhist College of Singapore

3 May 2026, Sun, 4pm

Esplanade Concourse



As Buddhist monks take their places in their pre-dawn stillness, their chants resound through prayer halls, bringing stillness to all hearts, with texts reflecting on the nature of emptiness, liberation from suffering and worldly attachments. Join Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery in *The Art of Chant: Chinese Buddhist Sutras* and witness the cadence of Han Buddhist rituals come alive in sacred recitation.

Continue your contemplative journey with a simple meal at *Community Canteen: Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian*, where nourishment and generosity reflect the tradition's mindful compassion.

Buddhism's path to the East

The transmission of Buddhism along the silk road to China began in the 1st century CE during the Han Dynasty. Travelling missionaries from India spread the teachings eastward to Luoyang, where they gained favour among royalty and elites. Though its influence rose and waned under subsequent dynastic rulers, Buddhism eventually took root to become the oldest foreign religion adopted by the Chinese people, evolving over time in form and practice to become what is known as Han, or Chinese, Buddhism.

As with many other branches of Buddhism, ceremonies and rituals are a part of the spiritual practice. Every monk and nun begins the day with a communal pre-dawn ceremony called the *zao ke* (morning devotion), paying homage to the Buddha, and reaffirming their commitment to the religious teachings. Believing in rebirth and karmic cause and effect, other rituals like the *yogacara ulka-mukha* are associated with breaking from the cycles of suffering for all beings.

A rich diversity of chanting further blossomed from the classical or *zheng ban* style, most closely associated with the major temples and orthodox monastics. Regional styles evolved to incorporate different melodic ornamentation, where influences from the spoken inflections of local dialects came into play. Their chanting of sutras sometimes blend colourful folk influences and surprising musical ideas from the secular world. Instrumentation varies with the provenance of each tradition, from the austere beating of the *mu yu* (wooden fish/prayer block), to grander expressions of ceremony featuring drums and metal chimes.

Regardless of ceremonial variations, Buddhist liturgical music continues to adapt and cater to respective devotee communities, providing comfort, whether through the familiarity of tradition, the messages of compassion, or the fostering of peace with the impermanence of life.

About Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery and Buddhist College of Singapore

Founded in 1921, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery is Singapore's largest Mahayana Buddhist monastery and a serene sanctuary for the study and practice of the Dharma. The monastery is home to the Buddhist College of Singapore, which provides higher education for Sangha members and prepares students for leadership roles, academic research, and management duties within the global Buddhist community. Through daily practice and Dharma education, the monastery and the college together uphold the solemn traditions of Buddhist ritual chanting, ensuring the enduring presence of the Dharma and the transmission of its sacred sound.

(30mins, no intermission)

The Art of Chant: Quranic Recitation

Ustaz Muhammad Sadid Abdul Latif

3 May 2026, Sun, 5.30pm

Esplanade Concourse



Witness the harmony of sound and spirit, where scripture becomes living revelation through oral traditions faithfully preserved for over 14 centuries. Here, the Quran lives not on the page but in resonance, and where you get close to the intimate, exalted expressions of the human voice as it channels the divine.

In this masterful demonstration of *tajwid* (the knowledge and application of the rules of recitation) and *maqam* (the tonal modes that infuse emotional depth), Ustaz Muhammad Sadid Abdul Latif reveals the sublime beauty of this sacred art form.

The sacred art of Quranic recitation

Central to Islamic worship and devotion is the memorisation and recitation of the Quran, done through melodic reading of the text. More than mere singing, there exist codified systems by which pronunciation and rhythmic cadence of every syllable are governed.

Seven recognised lineages or recitation styles, known as *qira'at*, trace their origins to prominent reciter-scholars of the 2nd and 3rd centuries after the revelation of the Quran. These reciter-scholars came from the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, Damascus in Syria, as well as Kufa and Basra in modern-day Iraq. Each of the seven lineages reflects the dialect variations that existed among Arabic speakers of the time.

Musical nodes of emotion

In addition to the rules that ensure fidelity of recitation, emotion and beauty are woven into the vocal delivery of the sacred texts, through the usage of different musical modes known as *maqam*. These nodes, heard throughout Middle Eastern music, gives the music

of the region its distinctive character. In Quranic recitation, however, the use of *maqamis* more specific, guided by spiritual intent. Each mode is chosen to evoke particular states of emotion such as introspection, humility, steadfastness, or compassion, selected to align with the emotional content of the text.

Mastery of recitation for transcendence

Religious scholars formalised the rules of recitation under the discipline of *tajwid*, standardising intonation, phonetics and punctuation. As Islam spread to more non-Arabic speakers, these rules became increasingly important as clear guidelines for preserving the recitation of Quranic texts the way that the Prophet Muhammad was said to have pronounced it.

Mastery of *tajwid* is expected of at least one member in every Islamic community, though it remains a personal obligation for all believers to practise it. Beyond its rules and obligation, the recitation of the Quran is an art of spiritual refinement—a discipline that, in its aesthetics, cultivates a profound sense of spirituality and transcendence.

(45mins, no intermission)

Kumpo Meets Lila Drums

Berending Kumpo Association, Kelvin Kew and Djembe Singapore Club (The Gambia, Singapore)

3 May 2026, Sun, 8.15pm

DBS Foundation Outdoor Theatre at Esplanade



Lila Drums joins the Berending Kumpo Association from The Gambia for a vibrant cross-cultural collaboration that brings together powerful traditions of rhythm and ceremonial dance. The Kumpo, a sacred masked figure of the Jola people of West Africa, traditionally appears during important communal gatherings and celebrations. Clad in a striking costume made of palm leaves, the Kumpo is accompanied by energetic drumming as it spins and moves dynamically through the space, symbolising spiritual presence and protection within the community.

In this special performance, the lively percussion of Lila Drums meets the ceremonial movement and rhythms of the Kumpo troupe. Together, the artists create a dynamic exchange of sound and movement, where pulsating drum rhythms and ritual dance come together in a spirited celebration of tradition, community and shared cultural expression.

(30mins, no intermission)