

***Music Knows No Borders at VPAC (The Soraya)
Intimate Onstage Sessions***

**International Sensation The Sachal Ensemble
Kicks off Onstage Jazz Performances at VPAC (The Soraya)
For Los Angeles Debut with *Song of Lahore***

Tuesday, November 14 at 8:00pm

(Los Angeles, CA October 23, 2017) This season, VPAC (The Soraya) introduces a new experience for L.A.'s live music lovers as the 1,700 seat theatre is transformed into an intimate onstage New York-style jazz club for a series of global and chamber music performances.

The Onstage Sessions: Jazz series will be unveiled when Pakistan's groundbreaking East-meets-West classical/jazz collective The Sachal Ensemble performs *Song of Lahore* for one-night only, Tuesday, November 14 at 8pm. This evening follows the Ensemble's [recent performance](#) at the United Nations in celebration of Pakistan's 70th year of independence. This Los Angeles debut is presented as part of VPAC's *Music Knows No Borders* series.

The 10-piece group, touring the United States for the first time this fall, combines conventional Western instruments (such as piano, bass, drums) with traditional Pakistani ones, such as *tabla*, *dholak* (a two-headed hand drum) and *sarangi*, a bowed string instrument. Its repertoire on this tour will mix traditional Sufi music, ragas and beloved Pakistani film songs (such as "Ranjha Ranjha," from the movie *Raavan*) with uniquely South Asian spins on Western classics, including The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby," R.E.M.'s "Everybody Hurts," Michel Legrand's "The Windmills of Your Mind," and, of course, their highly distinctive take on Dave Brubeck's hit "[Take Five](#)," a video that became a YouTube hit with over 1 million views.

The international sensation led to, among other things, an invitation in 2013 for the Sachal Ensemble to collaborate with trumpeter and composer Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. The musicians' extraordinary journey from Lahore to Lincoln Center was captured in *Song of Lahore*, a documentary film by two-time Academy Award-winning director Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy and Andy Schocken.

Thor Steingraber, VPAC Executive Director said, "Recently honored by the United Nations with a performance in the General Assembly Hall, the Sachal Ensemble has become a worldwide symbol for perseverance. These musicians from Lahore, Pakistan continued playing together throughout the political unrest that outlawed secular music in their homeland. The ensemble's unique blend of American Jazz played on Pakistani instruments posed particular risk. The Sachal Ensemble's performance at The Soraya marks their second visit to the United States, the first being a performance at Lincoln Center with Wynton Marsalis."

Tickets for The Sachal Ensemble, priced from \$28-\$65, are now available at ValleyPerformingArtsCenter.org or by calling (818) 677-3000. Valley Performing Arts Center is located on the campus of California State University, Northridge (CSUN), 18111 Nordhoff Street Northridge, CA 91330-8448, at the corner of Nordhoff and Lindley.

About The Sachal Ensemble

A jazz song from the late-50s, an Oxford-educated financial advisor and a group of once-celebrated but unemployed musicians -- some of whom no longer even owned an instrument -- are not the standard ingredients from which global hits are made.

But then, the story of the Sachal Ensemble of Lahore, Pakistan, is not a standard one.

A U.S. album release soon followed on Universal Music Classics, also titled *Song of Lahore*, (May 20, 2016) produced by Grammy Award-winner Eli Wolf and featuring the Sachal Ensemble collaborating with a diverse group of artists including Wynton Marsalis, Meryl Streep, Jim James of My Morning Jacket, Nels Cline of Wilco, Madeleine Peyroux and Sean Lennon.

A recent Pakistan-only release, titled *Jazz and All That*, includes the ensemble's striking versions of Brubeck's "Blue Rondo A La Turk," and songs such as Stevie Wonder's "You've Got It Bad Girl", Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Wave" and Henry Mancini's "The Pink Panther."

The Sachal Ensemble was created by Izzat Majeed, a Pakistani investor and hedge fund manager turned philanthropist and music producer. Born in Lahore in 1950, it was Majeed's singular dream to revive the soundtrack of his childhood. His hometown, the second largest city in Pakistan, was once a cultural and artistic center on the Indian subcontinent. In the 1960s and '70s, Lahore was at a peak as the home of "Lollywood," the Pakistani equivalent of India's Bollywood. Films featured between 10 to 15 songs and the industry employed a substantial number of musicians, composers and arrangers. Music was essential to the life of the city.

Izzat's father, Abdul Majeed, was the chairman of the film producers association of Pakistan and a music lover who would take his son to hear all the touring American jazz musicians passing through Lahore. That's how an 8-year-old Majeed got to hear pianist Dave Brubeck at a hall near his family home. Brubeck was still a year away from recording "Take Five," which would become the biggest selling jazz single ever. For the young Izzat, the concert had a profound impact.

"That's where I got hooked on jazz," says Majeed.

But following a military coup in July 1977, General [Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq](#) became president and his dictatorship set out to "cleanse" Pakistan's cultural landscape. Most non-religious music was declared sinful and the film industry, weighed down by religious bans, collapsed. In Lahore, even virtuoso musicians had to become taxi drivers or shopkeepers just to keep food on the table.

For all his remarkable success in finance -- he was an advisor to Saudi Arabia's oil ministry, a banker and the founder of a billion dollar hedge fund -- Majeed's real passions "have always been and will always be about art and music," he asserts. And so, he set out to do something about it.

"These great musicians -- from both folk and classical schools -- were left hungry and jobless," said Majeed in a recent interview. "We were losing our instruments, losing our musicians, losing our culture -- something had to be done about it."

Long a patron of the arts and a lover of poetry (he is a published poet himself), Majeed founded Sachal Studios, named after the Sufi poet Saeen Sachal Sarmast, in 2003, on Waris Road, once the center of Lahore's film studios. He then sought out the city's great musicians, many of whom had put away their instruments. In fact, Majeed had to buy instruments for several players.

"Some people might look at me as some sort of savior of our musical traditions, whereas the actual fact is that Sachal Studios saved my life," Majeed notes. He assumed that, after retirement, he would spend the rest of his life making music. But that was not in the stars. Not only did he suffer huge losses in the financial crisis of 2008 but his marriage fell apart. Now happily remarried and settled in Lahore, he recalls how difficult that period was. "But every time I felt as if I was dying inside, the music would revive me. I threw myself into the pursuit of making music - Sachal Studios saved me. All I can say is that, having lost almost everything, I have never been happier than I am right now."

Initially, Majeed and the Sachal Ensemble focused on the region's classical and folk music. But then, he started to dream about the possibility of jazz being played on local instruments, and once he introduced the sounds and concepts of jazz, the musicians "took to it very naturally." As they searched for a broader audience and looked outside Pakistan, they began to explore cross-cultural versions of Western jazz standards, pop and film classics.

Improbably, Sachal Ensemble had a breakthrough when a video of their interpretation of Brubeck's Paul Desmond classic "Take Five" went viral. Brubeck, who died in December, 2012, actually got a chance to listen to it, calling it "the most interesting recording of it I have ever heard."

It's only fitting that the song that opened a world of music for Majeed has now opened the world to the Sachal Ensemble.

About *Onstage Sessions: Jazz at The Soraya*

This season, The Soraya introduces a new experience for live music lovers by transforming the theatre's stage into a New York-style jazz club that puts audience members right in the middle of the action. Concert-goers can enjoy a drink at a prime table, or wander through the crowd to mingle with friends as they enjoy jazz's most fearless artists in an intimate experience, combining proximity with high octane performances.

Music Knows No Borders Series

A musical melting pot comes to the Valley Performing Arts Center (The Soraya) this season, in more than 20 different performances. Curated by Thor Steingraber, The Soraya's Executive Director, the *Music Knows No Borders* events are inventive and bold, infectious and pulsating; putting a positive spin on current geopolitical themes such as migration, race, and religion. The digital age inspires musicians from every corner of the globe, delivering an endless expanse of musical styles, and inspiring innovation and fusion. More than ever before, global artists command a platform to spread their message of cultural unity and social activism. "At The Soraya we give voice to the musical diasporas," said Steingraber. "We are committed to a simple idea—the concert hall is an inviting and inclusive place. The communal joy of music and dance is immediate, intergenerational, and accessible. After all, ears know no borders. Hands clap and feet stomp regardless of nation-of-origin, religion, or cultural background."

About Valley Performing Arts Center (The Soraya)

The Soraya opened its 2017-2018 season on September 16 with a performance of *AMADEUS Live* (Milos Foreman's 1984 Academy Award-winning Best Picture with live orchestra) with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and members of the LA Opera Chorus. The evening honored the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Foundation in recognition of the family's recent \$17 million gift that will rename VPAC as the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Performing Arts Center, known as The Soraya. The gift is one of the largest in the history of the California State University and the system's largest single gift to support the arts; gift to support the programming and operations of the award-winning Valley Performing Arts Center – which has become one of the cultural jewels of the region in the six years since it opened.

The 2017-18 Soraya season signals a new era for the premier event venue. Under the leadership of Executive Director Thor Steingraber, the renamed Younes and Soraya Nazarian Performing Arts Center expands its programming and outstanding multidisciplinary performances. The mission of The Soraya is to present a wide variety of performances that not only includes new and original work from the Los Angeles region but also work from around the world that appeal to all of LA's rich and diverse communities.

Located on the campus of California State University, Northridge, The Soraya's season offers a vibrant performance program of nearly 50 classical and popular music, dance, theater, family and international events that will serve to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley, and further establish itself as one of the top arts companies in Southern California. The award-winning, 1,700-seat theatre was designed by HGA Architects and Engineers and was recently cited by the Los Angeles Times as "a growing hub for live music, dance, drama and other cultural events."

Calendar Listing for The Sachal Jazz Ensemble

Date: Tuesday, November 14 at 8:00pm

Venue: Valley Performing Arts Center
18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

Tickets: **Prices:** Starting at \$28. Prices subject to change.
By Phone: (818) 677-3000
Online: ValleyPerformingArtsCenter.org

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