

## **Traditional Sikh Music (*Shabad keertan parampara*)**

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Sikh music began in the 16th century as the musical expression of divine poetry (*shabad*) conceived by the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak. Following him, all the Sikh Gurus articulated their spiritual enlightenment, *shabad*, through music. Thus, Sikh music is inherently spiritual in nature. Its very purpose is the realization of the Divine.

Sikh music in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was comprised of the then-prevalent classical and folk music styles, accompanied by stringed and percussion instruments. The classical style was the devotional *dhrupad* style, a somber, deeply meditational style in which the text was of prime significance and the music played a supporting, albeit important role in the quest for Divine Essence. Folk music encompassed songs that marked various aspects of life – *ghoriaan* were sung at marriage, *alaahniaan* at death, and *vaars* to glorify brave warriors. The Sikh Gurus sang many *shabads* in these folk styles.

Traditional Sikh music flourished into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, preserved through the generations via oral tradition. Sikh musicians were highly accomplished in the traditional classical and folk styles.

Major changes occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The classical style was largely replaced by contemporary popular genres often based on Indian film music. Within the remaining classical tradition, the devotional *dhrupad* style was overtaken by the *darbaari khayaal* style, developed in the Indian Mughal courts to entertain royal patrons.

Significant efforts are now under way to revive the rich Sikh music tradition initiated and developed by the Sikh Gurus. Various terms used to refer to this tradition include *Shabad keertan parampara*, *Gurbaani sangeet parampara* and *Gurmat sangeet*.