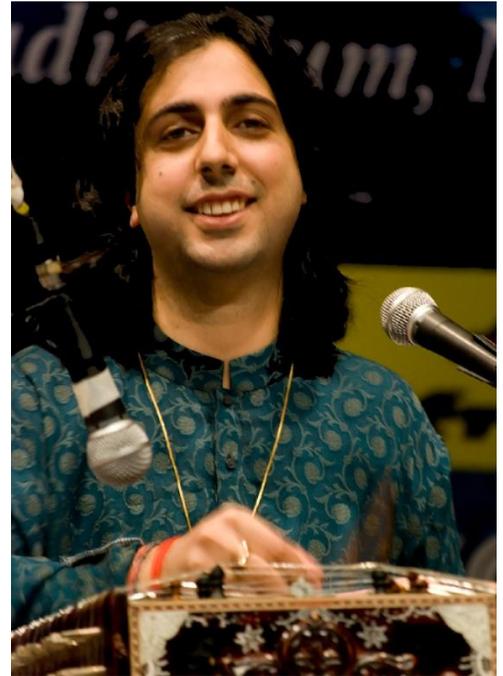


# Abhay Rustum Sopori

*'Santoor Maestro & Music Composer'*

Versatile is one word that describes Abhay Rustum Sopori, for he is the youngest Santoor maestro, youngest classical musician to compose and conduct orchestras and folk ensembles, and has also been the youngest recipient of all the awards that he has received including the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi's first 'Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar', 2006 and 'J&K State Award' (the highest Civilian Award of the State of Jammu & Kashmir, 2011) in recognition of his outstanding contribution and achievements in the field of music. He has also been honoured with the prestigious 'Kashmir Kirti Samman', 2012, 'KECSS Award', 2011, 'Glory of India Award', 2010, 'Best Citizens of India Award', 2010, 'Sangeet Shree Award', 2010, 'Bharat Shiromani Award', 2009, 'Ma Sharika Samman', 2009, 'National Dogri Award', 2008, 'Sangeet Bhushan Award', 2007, 'Excellence Award', 2007, 'Young India Award', 2006, 'Juenjo Korean International Heritage Award', 2005, 'Kalawant Samman', 2004, etc.



Abhay has participated in various prestigious festivals across the world and has more than 30 notable albums and releases to his credit. EMI, the world's leading music label, has released various albums with him which include Dancing Dewdrops (India), The Urban Grooves - Kashmir (India), Tum Jo Mile (India), Voyage au coeur de l'Inde - Journey to the heart of India (France), etc. He also has the credit of releasing the first International albums of J&K like Aalav, Shehjaar, Runjhun, etc.



Abhay has composed music for the International Award winning film 'Ziyarat' (California, USA), National Award winning film 'BUB' and 'Mahatma', a film by Government of India on Mahatma Gandhi, presented at the 'United Nations' marking the first International Non-violence Day. He also composed the song "Aao Kadam Badhayain" for raising relief funds for the Kashmir earthquake victims. The song featured some of the most renowned and legendary classical musicians of India and went on to become the greatest musical hit of Jammu and Kashmir. He has also served as the youngest Visiting Faculty at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst, USA). Abhay also happens to be the only Indian Classical musician to be ever invited at the prestigious International conference TEDx.

A graduate in Management and Computers with Masters in Music, Abhay was born in Srinagar and inherited a profound sense of music from his fabled *Sufiana Gharana* of Kashmir -



the exclusive traditional Santoor family - with its roots spanning over nine generations over more than 300 years. Abhay learnt music under the traditional *Guru-Shishya Parampara* from his grandfather Pandit Shamboo Nath Sopori, hailed as the 'Father of Music' in Jammu and Kashmir, and from his father Pandit Bhajan Sopori, the legendary Santoor maestro and music composer.

A gifted and prodigious musician, Abhay continues to innovate and experiment with the Santoor further extending its dimension. In keeping with his lineage he

has established the concept of '*Gayan-Vadan Baaj*' in the Indian classical system and introduced the '*Open String Concept*' on the Santoor together with the '*Enhanced Sustain Technique*'. He has also invented, designed and introduced a new 30-stringed instrument 'Sur Santoor'. Abhay has revived the old *Sufiana Tarana* compositions of his predecessors and adopted them in the Indian Classical scenario and also composed and introduced new *Khayal* compositions based on Sufi Saints of Kashmir. He has also composed and introduced a new Raga named 'Nirmalkaunce'.

Some of hallmarks of Abhay's performances are mellifluous playing, lightning tempo, clarity and accuracy of *Raga* exposition and adoption of the *Sopori Baaj* (style) the unique format of Santoor playing created by Pandit Bhajan Sopori. The *Sopori Baaj* incorporates the essential technical nuances of both the *Gayaki* (vocal) and *Tantrakari* (instrumental) *Angs* (aspects) such as '*Meend*', '*Gamak*', '*Glides*', '*Taan*', '*Bol*', '*Chhand*' and '*Laya*' patterns, which are absolutely essential for the correct rendering of *Raga-Sangeet* in the true Indian Classical tradition. Performing with the accompaniment of the *Pakhawaj* is also a special characteristic of his *Baaj*. Another remarkable and unique quality of his presentation is that he sings the composition along with its instrumental rendering reviving the traditional Santoor playing.

Abhay has carried forward the great legacy of his family in propagating and promoting the Indian culture globally. He has the credit for creating a Cultural Revolution in the Jammu and Kashmir State bringing the youth together through music. His efforts and initiatives have been path-breaking creating a new generation of music connoisseurs and bringing more recognition to the art and culture of the country. He has not only established himself as one of the most prominent musicians of the present generation but simultaneously promoted numerous upcoming and talented musicians of the country.

