



## Explore the legacy of women in Sufi music and art in new Royal College of Music (RCM) Museum exhibition

Opening on 18 June, *Awaken: Sufi Music & Women of South Asia* delves into the role of women in music, poetry, Mughal miniatures and films associated with Sufism.

The exhibition brings to life the often-overlooked stories of women's roles in the male-dominated musical landscape of Sufism. Illuminating their invaluable contributions through a display of items drawn from collections across the world, the exhibition reveals some of the voices, performances and instruments of Sufi women in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh from the Mughal period to present-day London.

Attia Shiraz, Lead Curator of the exhibition, often travelled to Pakistan when growing up where she experienced the world of Sufi music which has since fascinated her. She comments: '*Awaken: Sufi Music & Women of South Asia*, unfolds a conversation about how women embody Sufi devotional music and rituals. Lived experiences of Sufi rituals, poetry, the ecstatic atmosphere and fascinating history of shrines, and women in music have all inspired this exhibition. It highlights women's presence in music influenced by Sufism, and includes South Asia's shared cultural history and diversity through women's voices and music that go beyond the region's borders. It seeks to awaken these connections through music.'

Visitors can delve into the stories of women such as 16th-century Mughal princess Zeb-un-Nissa and her contribution of Sufi poetry, while Sufi saint Bulleh Shah's poetry is showcased through Mughal miniatures by Fatima Zahra Hassan. The exhibition also highlights Parvathy Baul, a modern-day practitioner, performer and teacher of the Baul tradition, in a collection of contemporary photographs sharing depictions of female musical artists who have gained recognition in a male-dominated music industry. Meanwhile the legacy of Gauhar Jan, one of the first successful women's voices of India recorded by the Gramophone Company, is brought to life through rare photographs and early phonograph records.

Professor Gabriele Rossi Rognoni, Curator of the Royal College of Music Museum, commented: 'The exhibitions organised at the Royal College of Music Museum are a compelling testament to the unifying power of music, across people, traditions and histories. Collaborating with Attia Shiraz has opened a wealth of new connections with a thriving music culture and community and we are honoured to tell these stories in our latest exhibition.'

Accompanying the exhibition will be a programme of events generously supported by The Cockayne Foundation. These include relaxed openings, poetry and music performances, a documentary screening, curator-led talks, and a Mughal Miniature soundscape workshop for children and families.

*Awaken: Sufi Music & Women of South Asia* runs from 18 June to 20 October 2024. Entry is free and can be [booked online](#) or on the door. The RCM Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday and also hosts a series of intimate concerts featuring RCM musicians performing amongst the artefacts on [Friday lunchtimes](#).

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### **About the Royal College of Music**

Founded in 1882, the Royal College of Music (RCM) is a world leading music conservatoire with a prestigious history and contemporary outlook. More than 900 undergraduate and postgraduate students come from over 50 countries and are taught in a dynamic environment, leaving the RCM to become the outstanding performers, conductors, and composers of the future. In 2024 the Royal College of Music was ranked the Global No. 1 institution for Performing Arts for the third year running and earned the inaugural top spot for Music in the QS World University Rankings by Subject.

The Royal College of Music has trained some of the most important figures in British and international music including composers and performers such as Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Leopold Stokowski, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Neville Marriner, Dame Joan Sutherland, Sir Thomas Allen, Dame Sarah Connolly, Tarik O'Regan, Lord Lloyd Webber, Sir James Galway, Anna Meredith MBE, Louise Alder and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

Regular visitors to the RCM include Sir Thomas Allen, Sir Antonio Pappano, Alina Ibragimova and Lang Lang. Our recent honorary doctorates include Sir Antonio Pappano, Jonas Kaufmann, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Bryn Terfel, Steve Reich and Maxim Vengerov (Polonsky Visiting Professor of Violin).