



Neelamjit Dhillon Quartet

KOMAGATA MARU

Komagata Maru is a 60-minute performance of original music, contextualized by projected archival photographs, reflecting on the Komagata Maru Incident of 1914, in which 376 potential immigrants from India were turned away from Canada.

Komagata Maru brings together four of Canada's most dynamic musicians to tell a century-old tale of Canada's dark past. Using a unique musical language that combines classical Indian and jazz forms, a story emerges of xenophobia and social injustice uncharacteristic of the Canadian cultural mosaic. The project uses this unique musical landscape to expose the racism in this story and unveil some of the more sinister aspects of human nature. Exploring this part of our history gives us a sense of where we are today and helps us to shape our future.

In the summer of 1914, a ship called the Komagata Maru travelled from Hong Kong to Vancouver in opposition to the racist 'Bill of Direct Passage' law preventing them from immigrating to Canada. The 376 passengers on board sat aboard the ship as it was anchored in Vancouver Harbour for two months while the Indian community and immigration officials fought over the passengers' admission into the country. The law was ultimately upheld in the courts and the ship was turned away, dooming the passengers to meet with a grim fate at the hands of British troops in India.

The performance of this 60-minute work speaks to where we have come from as Canadians, where we are and where we hope to go. Canadians have come a long way and strive towards societal ideals of equality and justice. We pride ourselves on an inclusive society but the reality is that many people in our social fabric are still marginalized. Telling this story through music and visuals – projecting archival photographs (venue permitting) – will provide a multi-dimensional insight into our history. The photos will also give to people who might not often normally come to an instrumental show a way to give context to the original music being presented.



Passengers on the Komagata Maru

THE MUSIC

The music of Komagata Maru combines the various elements of Neelamjit Dhillon's unique musical heritage in order to tell this complex story. Each composition delves into an aspect of the journey and examines not only the mind-set of the people involved from a psychological perspective but also examines the social and political narrative. Compositionally, elements of classical North Indian music are combined with jazz and creative improvisation to create a dialogue of equal footing amongst these genres. One of the techniques employed is Neelamjit's unique *raag* harmonization approach, which takes the melodic information within a *raag* (North Indian melodic form) and uses it to create a unique harmonic palette from which to draw. This vision is only possible from a musician who has a deep and full understanding of both traditions as Neelamjit does. Following are descriptions of the tracks on the EP; a full-length CD will be released in the summer of 2014.

- Crossing the Pacific** This composition examines the outlook of the passengers as they begin their journey from Hong Kong and set out across the Pacific in the hope of a new life in Canada. The composition is filled with hope and optimism and is set within the melodic framework of Raag Yemen, which depicts a romance of travel and the solemn devotion to the trip. The journey was difficult and full of hardships, reflected by the piece being set in the North Indian rhythmic cycle called Pancham Sawari of 15 beats and by the ensemble figures that employ complex overlapping rhythmic structures known as *thihai*.
- Shore Committee** As the Komagata Maru sat in Vancouver Harbour, a committee formed on shore with the purpose of advocating for the ship and its passengers. The committee dealt with numerous obstacles including multiple deceptions from the government and navigating legal obstructions. They provided food and provisions for the ship and raised more than \$15,000 from the community during a time when most were making about a dollar a day. The piece makes use of a conversational form from North India called *sawal-jawab* between the drums and the tabla. The repetitious melody played by the bass is called a *lehra*, meaning wave, which keeps the outline of 16 beats called Teen Taal. Despite valiant efforts, ultimately the shore committee was unsuccessful in helping the passengers immigrate.
- J Edward Bird** J. Edward Bird was the only lawyer willing to take the case of the Komagata Maru before the government and was ultimately unsuccessful in overturning the law used to prevent the passengers from setting foot in Canada. Bird had argued a case the year previous and had been successful in suspending the law, allowing 39 people from India to immigrate. During the Komagata Maru case, Bird was not even allowed to meet his clients until the very end. He was sent death threats and ultimately left Vancouver before the end of the trial for his own safety. The composition examines different facets and dimensions of a single melody, which is representative of the beauty of Bird's purpose and the sadness of his defeat.
- In the Harbour** As the passengers were confined on board in Vancouver Harbour for two months, their supplies diminished and they were driven to the brink of dying from starvation and thirst. Their hopes faded as they realized that the possibility of being sent back to India was slowly becoming a reality. This haunting traditional melody was embellished using Neelamjit's unique *raag* harmonization technique, which utilizes only notes from the *raag* to form chordal structures that bring out the beautiful characteristics of the underlying melodic structure. The melodic material used is called Raag Bhairav, which is extremely solemn and illustrates the peacefulness of a strong will.
- Budge Budge** After two months at sea crossing back to India from Canada, the ship was diverted from its destination of Calcutta and guided by a British ship to a town seventeen miles away called Budge Budge. The government believed the passengers would only add to the anti-British sentiment sweeping India as the passengers were British subjects, after all, and were turned away from the British territory of Canada. At Budge Budge the British officers went to arrest passengers they saw as seditious and a riot ensued. A few passengers managed to escape but nearly two dozen suffered bullet wounds, twenty-two were killed and the remaining passengers were arrested. One of the motivations of docking in Calcutta, besides tending to businesses and homes, was so that they could return the Sikh Holy Scripture from the ship to a *gurdwara* (house of worship). The melody played by the saxophone and bass is an adaptation of a hymn sung when transporting the Holy Scripture and the piano and drums depict the riot and resulting attack.

Although this is a Canadian story, it does speak directly to the South Asian community, and this event would be a way to interface with an audience that is generally absent from jazz festivals. The passengers of the Komagata Maru were from different parts of India and were of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu faiths. This event being presented would show this community that they are represented within jazz and creative music and would create a bridge for festivals to come. As Neelamjit speaks both Punjabi and Hindi, he can directly outreach to the South Asian community using radio, television and print.

Addressing our past makes us reflect on our current place in society and consider our future. 'Unwanted' immigrants still come to our shores and xenophobic attitudes persist. The Canadian government has still not officially apologized for the Komagata Maru incident and this performance would serve as an atonement gesture on this significant 100th anniversary. Immigrants come to Canada with the hope of a better life within a society that values freedom and equality. Music can be a vehicle for social betterment and the Neelamjit Dhillon Quartet aims to provide that experience.

THE MUSICIANS

Komagata Maru brings together four of Canada's top artists in jazz and creative music. They represent various regions of the country and their breadth and depth of talents bring many voices and perspectives to the telling of the Komagata Maru story. All the musicians have known each other for over ten years and although they have all played together in various contexts, they have never played in this unique configuration. This dynamic group breathes new life into Canada's past and brings this important story into the present.



Vancouver-born performer-composer Neelamjit Dhillon is equally well versed in both Eastern and Western traditions having studied jazz in North Vancouver, and tabla in Mumbai; he is currently pursuing his doctorate in music in Los Angeles. This firm rooting in two distinct styles gives Neelamjit a unique perspective into the universality of music. He has performed nationally at many prestigious festivals all across Canada, from Vancouver to Guelph and Montreal, and has performed internationally in the USA, Brazil, India, and in Somalia. Neelamjit studies tabla with the world-renowned maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain and has performed with some of India's finest. He has performed in various jazz and creative contexts with musicians such as Ron Samworth, Gordon Grdina, Jessie Zubot, Eyving Kang, Vinny Golia and Art Lande.



A graduate of Boston's prestigious Berklee College of Music, Vancouver native Chris Gestrin is high in demand on the Canadian music scene. A versatile keyboardist, composer, producer and engineer, Chris has worked with a wide range of artists including Randy Bachman, Michael Blake, Kelly Joe Phelps, Zubot and Dawson, Kenny Wheeler, Dave Douglas, Ben Monder, Lee Townsend, Metalwood, the Hard Rubber Orchestra, François Houle, and Denzal Sinclair. Chris has been apart of nine projects that have won Juno awards and was nominated for 'Musician of the Year' in the Western Canadian Music Awards. His original music has been featured in numerous television shows and his recording *Stillpoint*, on the Songlines label, was listed as one of the best albums of 2003 in *Downbeat* magazine.

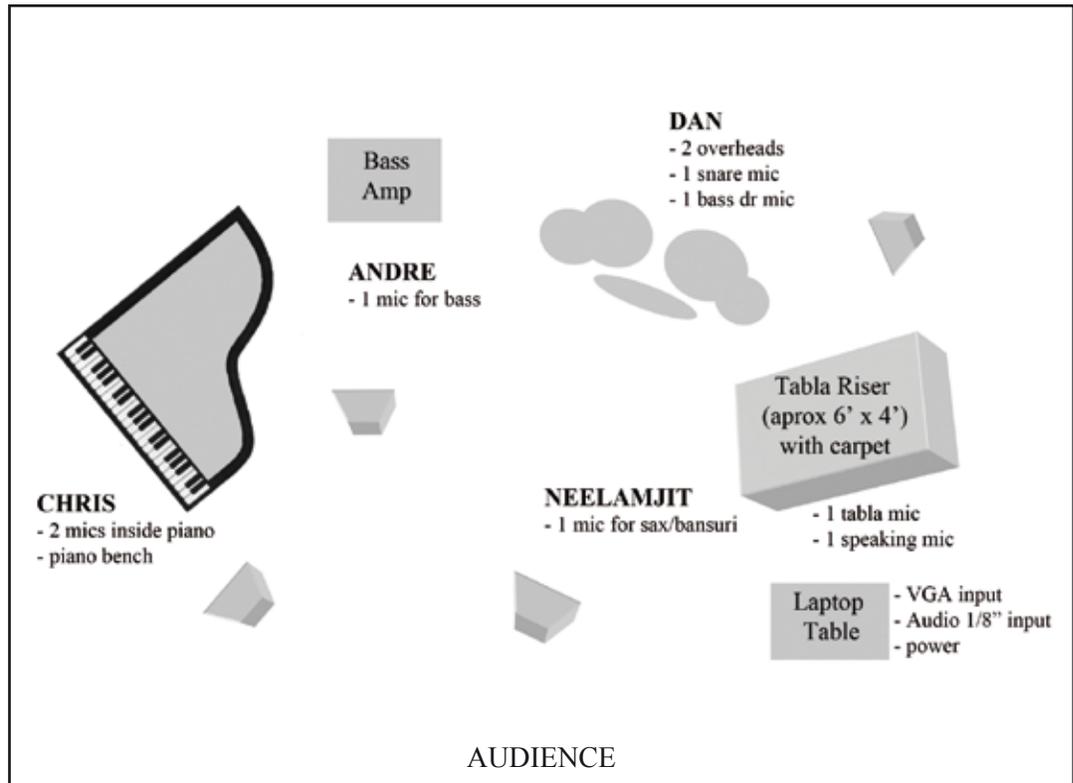


Québec City-born bassist André Lachance moved to Vancouver in 1990. He quickly established himself on the music scene as a much sought-after double-bass player. Over the years, he has been a member of the Brad Turner Quartet, the Peggy Lee Band, the Kate Hammett-Vaughan Quintet, the Ian McDougall Quartet/Sextet, the Hard Rubber Orchestra, Stillpoint, the Guillaume Bouchard Quartet and many more with whom he has done extensive recording as well as touring all over North America, Portugal, the Netherlands, Ireland and England. He has collaborated on a wide variety of projects in jazz, improvised music, new music, funk, pop and with dance and theatre companies. He has shared the stage with, among others, Joe Lovano, Lee Konitz, Benny Golson, Kenny Wheeler, Clark Terry and Dave Douglas.



Born in Calgary, Dan Gaucher has quickly made a career for himself as a professional drummer performing with various internationally renowned jazz, rock, folk and experimental groups and performing along side the likes of Dave Douglas, François Houle, Brad Turner, Ingrid Jensen, Mike Murley, Mats Gustafsson and Fredrik Ljungkvist. Dan has toured extensively at more than 25 major festivals nationally and internationally in locals such as Toronto, Victoriaville, Los Angeles, New York, Spain, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Dan leads his own group, Stop Time, and performs in many of Canada's top ensembles such as the October Trio and Fond of Tigers (2011 Juno award winners). Dan has recently returned to Vancouver from Toronto, where he completed his Masters Degree at the University of Toronto.

STAGE PLOT



Additional requirements not shown above

- Boom stands
 - 2 short (bass drum and bass amp)
 - 8 tall (2 piano, 3 drums, 1 tabla, 1 speaking mic, 1 sax/bansuri)
- 4 black music stands
 - with stand lights and music clips
- Piano bench
- Double bass
 - professionally set up
 - adjustable bridge if possible
 - gut strings are preferred but Obbligatos or Evah Pirazzi strings are also acceptable
 - Realist pickup or Full Circle pickup installed

- Bass Amplifier
 - Acoustic Image, Gallien Kruger 700RB, Ampeg or MarkBass amps are acceptable.
 - Send to PA: Use XLR out of the amp or microphone on a stand or both.
- Amplification Preferences:
 - Some reverb for sax/bansuri mic (bansuri is a bamboo flute)
- Projector and Projection Surface

These are the requirements for outdoor and large theater spaces. For smaller indoor venues, fewer microphones may be needed.

Although the show is set for 60 minutes it can tolerate an intermission or be shortened without compromising the artistic statement.



For booking and other inquires contact:
Diane Kadota Artist Management at info@dkam.com
410 – 111 West Hastings, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6B 1H4

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www.neelamjit.com
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