

Pundit Abhay Rustum Sopori **Santoor Maestro & Composer**

Eminent Santoor Maestro and Music Composer Pundit Abhay Rustum Sopori is a distinguished musician of India. He stands as the custodian of the fabled 300-year-old Sopori - Sufiana Gharana of Kashmir, the exclusive Santoor family of India, carrying forward a legacy rooted in Shaivite-Sufi musical tradition. He learnt from his grandfather late Pundit Shamboo Nath Sopori ji, the great master musician hailed as the 'Father of Classical Music' in Jammu and Kashmir, and from his father Pandit Bhajan Sopori ji, the Great Saint musician, legendary Santoor virtuoso and composer, known as the 'Saint of Santoor' & the 'King of Strings' who created the Sopori Baaj (style), the unique and formal system of playing Classical Santoor.

Throughout his career, Pundit. Abhay Sopori has garnered an array of accolades, including the Top Grade Artist of India Award and Top Grade Composer Award by Govt. of India, United Nations accredited Mahatma Gandhi Global Peace Award, National Atal Award presented at the Parliament of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan National Award, State Icon Title by Election Commission of India, J&K Government Award – the highest civilian award of India, Govt. of India's Sangeet Natak Academy's first Yuva Puraskar, Bharat Shiromani Award, etc. among numerous others.

An innovator and creator, Pt. Abhay Sopori constantly explores the Santoor's potential, pushing its boundaries. His contribution extends beyond performances and compositions; he played a pivotal role in introducing cultural policies in Jammu and Kashmir, integrating music as a formal subject in academic institutions, fostering a cultural renaissance, and nurturing thousands of budding musicians.

He has more than 60 notable releases to his credit and has composed music for many national and international award winning films including 'Mahatma', a film by Government of India, presented at the United Nations marking the first International Non-violence Day in 2007. He is the only musician of India to compose and conduct Folk music orchestras. His impact transcends borders - Abhay's compositions were performed by the German Bavarian State Orchestra under the baton of legendary maestro Zubin Mehta, marking a historic milestone for Kashmiri music. He has a unique honour to co-conduct along with maestro Mehta. Notably, he has served as a visiting faculty at esteemed

universities like the University of Massachusetts, USA, and CCOM, China.

He has also composed new ragas which have been widely acclaimed by the music connoisseurs and critics like Raga Nirmalkauns – a tribute to Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi ji, Raga MahaKali, Raga Sharda, Raga Bhagwati and Raga Bhajaneshwari, a tribute to Pt. Bhajan Sopori ji.

Beyond his musical prowess, Abhay's philanthropic initiatives have raised millions for various causes, from aiding in catastrophes like the Kashmir earthquake and J&K floods. He is known for fostering a new generation of music connoisseurs and artists. His relentless dedication to music, cultural preservation, and philanthropy solidifies his place not just as a preeminent musician but as a cultural ambassador shaping the future of Indian classical music.

Pt. Abhay Rustum Sopori is being accompanied by Sh. Chanchal Singh on Tabla.