

Sunny Jain's
*Wild Wild
East*

Thursday, March 12
Luth Concert Hall
Prior Presents 2025–26

DEPARTMENT OF
Music

PRIOR
Performing Arts Center

Welcome


Dear Friends,

At the College of the Holy Cross, our Jesuit mission calls us to explore the world with intellectual curiosity, cultural openness, and a deep commitment to understanding the human experience. The Prior Performing Arts Center seeks artists whose work reflects those values—artists who challenge us to listen more closely, think more broadly, and connect more deeply with one another.

Tonight's performance by Sunny Jain embodies that spirit. In *Wild Wild East*, Jain reimagines the mythology of the American frontier through the lens of immigration and cultural identity. Blending Punjabi rhythms, jazz improvisation, psychedelic guitar, and cinematic Western influences, the music creates a vibrant sonic landscape that reflects the layered realities of contemporary American life.

Through this powerful fusion of traditions, *Wild Wild East* celebrates the courage of those who cross borders—geographic, cultural, and artistic—in pursuit of possibility.

May your world vision expand through that pursuit,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey de Caen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeffrey de Caen
Nancy Savage Skinner '79 Director
Prior Performing Arts Center

Program

Sunny Jain's *Wild Wild East*

Sunny Jain: drumset, dhol drum

Ben Parag: vocals

Stephanie Tateiwa: alto saxophone, flute

Grey McMurray: guitar

Almog Sharvit: bass

Program Notes

Behind its idealism, the American myth of westward expansion has always been an irony-caked parable about what happens when you try to escape the known for the pursuit of new beginnings. The traits we think we've spotted in the cowboy — bravery, boldness, a willingness to sacrifice the known for the sake of the better — have always been suspect. But the courage to leave behind a homeland and head west, to boldly step into a new place and declare it home, to survey the scene and try to find your place in it? That's still around. "The idea of the American cowboy is this romanticized idea that's just false," Sunny Jain says plainly. "The immigrant is the current-day cowboy or cowgirl."

This dynamic — of interrogating American myths to make them fit the reality of our world, of both questioning and rhapsodizing the notion of identity in a contingent world — is at the heart of *Wild Wild East*, the new album from the Brooklyn-based bandleader, composer, dhol player, and drummer. It's also at the heart of his story — as the son of immigrants from India, as a kid from Rochester raised on the Cure and prog rock, as a fluid jazz drummer on his own and as a party-starter with Red Baraat, as an American of color. Accordingly, his view is broad enough to take in shuddering walls of post-rock guitar, howling tenor sax, the persistent thump of Indian brass band music, rhythms from Punjab and southern Pakistan, film soundtracks from around the world, and swaggering West Coast rap.

But like Jain himself, *Wild Wild East* can't be reduced to a cosmopolitan series of signifiers taking their turn in the spotlight. The ease with which Jain braids his sound highlights the interconnectedness of global styles — and that sense of connection goes beyond the music itself, as Jain leads his group across genre borders he knows are arbitrary.

Wild Wild East first started to take shape following the 2016 election. "It felt like the Wild West," Jain says of the times, though they played out in the theoretically civilized confines of Washington, D.C., and New York City — the East Coast. Around the same time, he found himself performing at the cultural festival park Global Village in Dubai, where countries from around the world are represented by architectural installations. "The only [place] there that was being represented by a human being was the Americas, and the Americas were represented by this cowboy — a white male cowboy with a hat, beard, gun in the holster."

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The cowboy's boldness, bravery, and radical independence? It looks different when you're not the one holding the gun. "The idea was to address the cowboy mentality that we people of color — whether you're red, brown, or black — face," Jain says. "The cowboy is this sheriff that you witness throughout American history, from the Wild West to the cops today, but if I were the native, if I were the African American, it's like, 'This cowboy is coming to shoot me down.' This is not romantic to me at all."

Jain has made a career of bringing musical forms into conversation with one another. His solo jazz albums percolate with Indian rhythms pounded out on a trap kit, and the thump of Red Baraat makes dancing partners out of bhangra and psychedelic rock. *Wild Wild East* casts its nets just as wide, but what it hauls in can't be defined by any single point. This isn't a jazz record, though it's impossible to imagine without jazz; nor is it a South Asian party record, though Jain's persistent dhol playing is impossible to resist. He brings us out to the wide-open spaces of the American West, a different kind of Indian engaging with the tired old cowboy. The cresting hum of Morricone can still be heard, but Jain also reminds us that R.D. Burman's Bollywood compositions were born in the same kind of heat. Just when the music seems as though it's about to take root, he rolls in another element, and we're forced to reconsider our surroundings — surf guitar gallops along with the dhol in "Aye Mere Dil Aur Chal," a serene bansuri flute solo is goosed out of its meditation by springing sarod in "Blackwell." "Brooklyn Dhamal" begins with anthemic, Sufi riff before it's overtaken by an apocalyptic wall of guitar, then resolves into a unified stomp. These songs suggest a migration of sound from east to west that can't be contained, only — thrillingly — accepted.

In other words, *Wild Wild East* recognizes a world that's always changing: Today's cowboy or cowgirl learns how to adapt to their conditions. They see that they're just as conditional as everything around them. And that realization complicates things when you're used to thinking of yourself in a certain way. "I think what shines through doing this album is the coming forward of the multiple identities of an immigrant — in my case being Indian American — not just this longing for South Asia and India, but the fact that I am American and there's many complex interactions within all that," Jain says.

So it seems fitting that Sunny Jain's *Wild Wild East* is raucous, powerful, gorgeous, jubilant, dissonant. It's defined by its restlessness, daring enough to encompass many different identities. It's an album built of a truly American spirit, singing in a new voice: I am large, I contain multitudes.



Sunny Jain's *Wild Wild East* | Photo by Bob Boilen

Biographies

The career of **Sunny Jain** is a celebration of cultural diaspora: deep-rooted tradition that ripples outward, changing – and being changed by – the cultures that it touches. He is a composer, drummer, dhol player and thought leader.

Most recently, Jain played dhol with Ed Sheeran in his Netflix show “One Shot” and co-wrote and recorded the song “Ai Miei Amici” with Italian Superstar, Jovanotti. You might have also seen him acting as “Mr. Tambourine Man” in the Oscar nominated “A Complete Unknown,” starring Timothée Chalamet.

Jain was a 2023-24 Visiting Scholar and Artist-in-Residence at Wesleyan University, where he spent time developing his first musical theatrical show, *Love Force*. Drawing on Jain's autobiography to create an immersive performance inspired by the concept *satyāgraha* (insistence of truth), the show reflects on the multiple identities so many immigrant families confront in the process of staying connected to the past and imagining new futures. Development of the show began in 2021, following a MAP Fund award and then in 2022, Jain was awarded a New York State Council on the Arts grant and a Joe's Pub *New Voices* commission for continued support of *Love Force*. *Love Force* will have its world premiere January 9th, 2026 at Symphony Space, NYC as part of Under The Radar Festival and will be touring 2026-27.

Jain was also announced as a 2025 commissioned artist by Soho Repertory Theater, a cultural pillar of NYC, notable for producing avant-garde plays by contemporary writers.

On February 21, 2020, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings released Jain's first album in over a decade, entitled *Wild Wild East*. Songlines (UK) listed the it among their top 10 global music albums of the year, and Jain was featured on NPR's *All Things Considered* with Ari Shapiro. His 5 piece band (drums, vocals, sax, guitar, bass) delivered a fiery NPR Tiny Desk Concert in 2024. They toured North America appearing at the iconic Monterey Jazz Festival, Calgary Jazz Festival, Victoria Jazz Festival, The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, National Museum of Asian Art, and the historic Harlem Stage in NYC. In 2022, the band made a milestone tour to Pakistan headlining Music Mela in Islamabad, the Lahore Jazz Festival and performing with master Sufi dhol drummers Nasir Sain Wajdani and Sain Tanveer. Just months prior, the group performed on the National Mall in Washington D.C. for the renowned Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

In 2022, Jain also joined Planet Drum for their first show in 15 years, playing alongside drumming legends Mickey Hart (The Grateful Dead), Zakir Hussain, and Giovanni Hidalgo. He also joined Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding, The Musical*, as music producer.

In 2021 during the pandemic, Jain released *Phoenix Rise*, a collaborative effort featuring over 50 artists such as Grammy winners Arooj Aftab, Michael League (Snarky Puppy), Adrian Quesada (Black Pumas), and Endea Owens (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert). Accompanying the full digital album is a 72-page physical book that combines music, art, photography and planet-based recipes, all in the name of social justice. As executive producer and music producer, Jain partnered with Center for Constitutional Rights to fundraise and advocate for the work they do.

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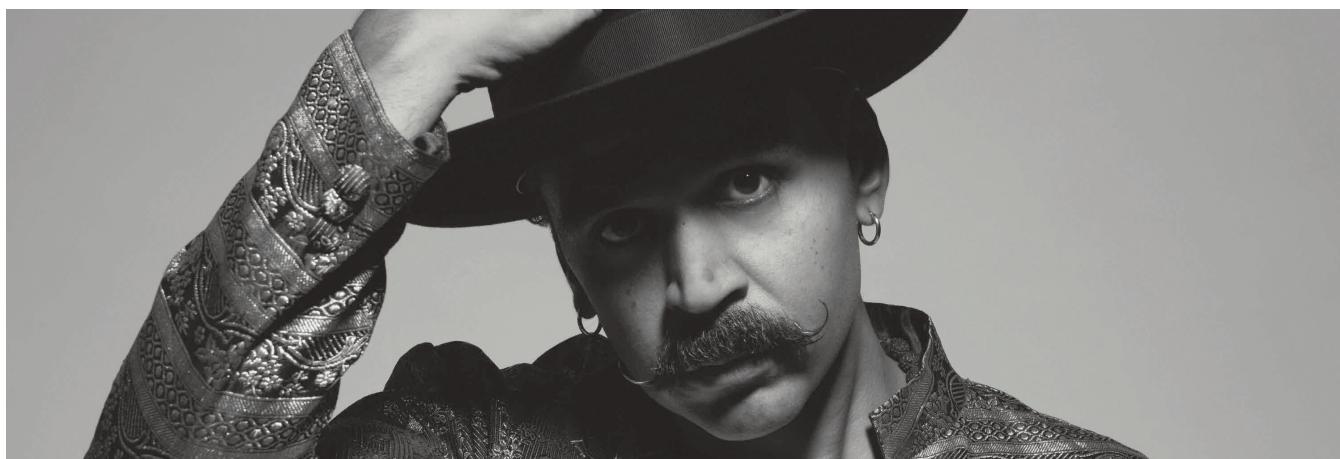
In 2018, Jain became musical director for the OBIE award-winning theatrical show, *The Jungle*. That same year, he also musical directed the massive celebration for Lincoln Center's 60th Anniversary. In 2014, NPR commissioned Jain to premiere a piece for "Make Music New York" day. Jain's "100+ BPM" convened more than 350 musicians on the steps of the Brooklyn Public Library, including drum lines from the New York Jets, New York Knicks and Brooklyn Nets.

Called the "Hendrix of dhol" by Manchester Salon (UK), Jain is most known for founding the pioneering band Red Baraat, a frenzied fusion of bhangra, hip-hop, jazz, rock, and sheer, unbridled energy. NPR called them "the best party band in years" and their 2017 NPR Tiny Desk concert was touted as the 8th best of all time by New York Magazine. Red Baraat has toured the globe the past 16 years with stops at Bonnaroo, Austin City Limits, Bumbershoot, New Orleans Jazz Fest, Peter Gabriel's WOMAD festivals (Australia, New Zealand, Spain, UK), Dubai World Expo 2021, just to name a few. Along the way they sold out rooms as diverse as the Luxembourg Philharmonic and the New York City's legendary rock club Bowery Ballroom, and performed at the request of The White House (Obama), TED, London Olympic Games, David Byrne and Padma Lakshmi's Blossom Ball. They have released 7 albums with numerous accolades from major media outlets and ranked in top 10 lists on Billboard, Apple Music and World Music Charts Europe.

In 2015, Jain had the honor of serving on a panel for a White House Asian American and Pacific Islander event, in which discussions centered on the intersection of art, culture and funding. He has been called upon to deliver talks, join panels and/or lead musical workshops at Harvard University, Yale University, New York University, Wesleyan University and numerous performing arts institutions around the world. Jain is also the author of 2 instructional drum books for Alfred Publishing: *Drums Atlas: INDIA* and *The Total Jazz Drummer*.

In 2005, Jain founded the boutique artist-booking agency, Jainsounds, to offer high-quality live music for events and functions for the South Asian-American community. His company created the first baraat brass band in the States, an 18th century Indian wedding tradition, as well as the unique Bollywood Jazz Ensemble.

Jain's story has been a part of 3 museum exhibitions: Museum of City of New York, Wing Luke Museum in Seattle, and The Go-Go Museum in DC.



Sunny Jain | Photo by Ebru Yildiz

Biographies

Ben Parag is an Indian-American vocalist recognized for his versatile, globally informed sound. He began singing at a young age, building a strong musical foundation that continues to inform his work today. His style moves fluidly across genres, integrating Indian and contemporary influences with precision and restraint. At 18, he gained national attention as a contestant on the Indian television singing show "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" and later became a finalist on the inaugural season of TV show "Dil Hai Hindustani." His performances were noted for their range and adaptability, earning him recognition among a new generation of cross-cultural artists. Ben has since collaborated with musicians across international markets, continuing to expand his artistic scope while maintaining a clear and focused vocal identity. His work reflects a contemporary approach to South Asian music within a broader global landscape.

Stephanie Tateiwa is a New York-based saxophonist, woodwind doubler, educator, and composer. She has toured extensively throughout the United States and Canada as a member of ensembles including the World Famous Glenn Miller Orchestra and the DIVA Jazz Orchestra, among others. She holds bachelor's degrees in Jazz Saxophone and Music Education from the Eastman School of Music. A recipient of honors including the Jazz Education Network's Sisters in Jazz competition winner, she serves on the faculty of Jazz at Lincoln Center's Jazz Academy and as graduate adjunct faculty at New York University.

Guitarist and singer **Grey McMurray** has been called "simultaneously chilling and moving" (The Deli Magazine), "sublimely odd" (New York Magazine), and "the world's least obtrusive guitarist" (The Guardian). He has performed/recorded with artists including Gil-Scott Heron, Meshell Ndegeocello, Tyondai Braxton, Alarm Will Sound, Du Yun, Skuli Sverrisson, Beth Orton, Colin Stetson, Sam Amidon, Ali Sethi, John Cale and Laraaji among others. He released his solo debut, *Stay Up*, on Shahzad Ismaily's Figureeight Records in September 2019. The new collaborative quartet of Grey, Melvin Gibbs, Greg Fox and Sasha Frere-Jones, *Body Meeta*, released their "transient oasis, heady but cautiously optimistic" (Robert Christgau) debut in December 2021 and their follow-up, *Prayer In Dub*, on Hausu Mountain in 2024. Grey will have a track featured on the upcoming 2026 *Across The Horizon Vol. 2* compilation on Northern Spy Records. 2026 will also see the debut release of the collaborative trio of Grey, saxophonist Caroline Davis and drummer Qasim Naqvi on Red Hook Records. He hopes everyday to provoke joyful tears in strangers' eyes.

Called "irrepressibly mischievous and highly skilled" (The Big Takeover), **Almog Sharvit** is a bassist and composer who is never content to stay too long in one mode. In New York, he has established himself as a creative force: his debut album *Get Up or Cry* has been called a "startlingly imaginative record" and "a masterpiece of syncopated sound" (Bass Magazine, Goldmine Magazine). In addition to his own project, Almog can be heard playing with his collective trio KADAWA, Sunny Jain's *Wild Wild East*, Forager, Ashni, Neta Elkayam, Ambrose Getz, NY Andalus Ensemble, The NYChillharmonic, Ella Mar and many more.

The Prior Performing Arts Center

An uncommon commons for transformative experiences with the arts

Prior Presents

The keystone of the Prior Performing Arts Center’s public-facing programming, Prior Presents merges thrilling live events by visiting artists with robust educational and outreach activities. Defined by exceptional artistic quality, interdisciplinary impulses, and the potential to spark both wonder and reflection, this annual series celebrates artistic risk-taking and the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the globe. Short- and long-term visiting artist residencies include performances, artist talks, installations, workshops, and experiential learning opportunities for Holy Cross students and the greater Worcester community.

The internationally acclaimed artists of current and previous seasons embody our vision for artist residencies at The Prior Performing Arts Center. Their performances and lectures offer an exhilarating complement to the creativity and innovation of emerging student artists and Holy Cross faculty and staff also featured in our season this year.



1) Rhiannon Giddens in concert | Spring 2024; 2) Compagnie Hervé Koubi | Spring 2024

Stay in touch!



Scan to sign up for our email list and stay up to date with announcements and upcoming events from The Prior Performing Arts Center.

Upcoming Prior Presents Events



SW!NG OUT

Acclaimed choreographer Caleb Teicher brings the best of the swing dance world to The Prior. With live music by the Eyal Vilner Big Band, SW!NG OUT features exciting Lindy Hop choreography and improvisation. Each performance concludes with an on-stage jam session, inviting audiences to join in the fun!

Mar 19 @ 7:30 p.m. | Tickets \$35 | \$45 | \$55



yMusic

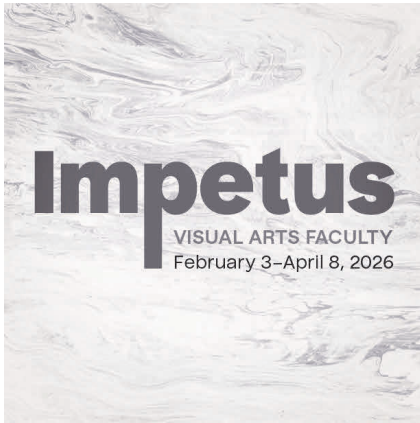
yMusic is a genre-leading American chamber ensemble renowned for its innovative and collaborative spirit. Praised by NPR Music as "deeply, profoundly skilled," yMusic has been tapped to lend their orchestral sound and instantly-recognizable style to recordings and concert projects by a dizzying array of popular artists from John Legend to Paul Simon.

Mar 29 @ 6 p.m. | Tickets \$35 | \$45 | \$55



Scan to purchase tickets and learn more about our schedule of upcoming presentations.

Currently at the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery



Impetus: Visual Arts Faculty 2026

The faculty of the Studio Art program at Holy Cross are fundamental to the student creative experience. In addition to teaching and mentoring, these faculty members maintain a vibrant studio practice outside of the classroom and conduct scholarly research in areas ranging from the environment, feminism, the spectacle of religion, the body, memory and consumerism. Featuring work by Rachelle Beaudoin, John Carney, Marcus Clarke, Hilary Doyle, Colleen Fitzgerald, Matthew Gamber, Anna McNear, Victor Pacheco, Cristi Rinklin, and Leslie Schomp.

Open now through Apr 8

Cantor Window Exhibition

Visit *Mind Touch Touch Touch* (2025, digital print of charcoal drawing), a mural by Christine Sun Kim in the Window Exhibition at the Cantor Art Gallery!

Repetition and iteration define Christine Sun Kim's work, which distinctly incorporates the visual representation of sign language. This mural was made exclusively for the Cantor's front window and comes from a body of work that combines text and graphic representations of signs in American Sign Language (ASL). Here, Kim depicts the arc of the hand movement in the sign *obsess*, which is a compound formed by the signs for *mind* and *touch*.

On display through Apr 8

Upcoming Events from the Arts Ecosystem at Holy Cross

Faculty Recital: *Rhythms of Spring*

DEPARTMENTS OF MUSIC AND THEATRE & DANCE. Faculty pianists Sonya Ovrutsky Fensome, Matthew Jaskot and Ulysses Loken join forces with The Diamonds, a faculty dance group led by Jimena Bermejo, to present an invigorating program of music for two pianos and dance.

Mar 21 @ 7 p.m.

Curiouser and Curiouser

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE. In *Curiouser and Curiouser*, inspired by *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll, creator and director Lynn Kremer collaborates with Balinese artists for an evening that is sure to charm audiences of all ages.

Apr 16-26



Scan to purchase tickets and learn more about our schedule of upcoming presentations.

Prior Performing Arts Center Staff

Jeffrey de Caen, *Nancy Savage Skinner '79* Director

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Morgan Fitzpatrick, Office Coordinator

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Matthew Freije, Pro Audio/Video Supervisor
Charlie Glaudini, Pro Audio/Video Technician
Christine Goguen, Costume Shop Manager
Stephen McGonagle, Technical Director
Judi Olson, Costume Shop Assistant
Mason Parece, Production Technician
Betsy Pierce, Assistant Technical Director

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Ethan Bates, Arts Marketing & Communications Manager
Evan Crocker, Event & Front of House Manager
Morgan Fitzpatrick, Office Coordinator

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Students play a crucial role in the operation of the Prior Performing Arts Center, working as Production Assistants, Front of House Assistants, and more: Adele Feldberg, Alyshia Solomon, Andrea Gomez, Angela Almanza, Anna Rowley, Brigit O'Connell, Camila Müller-Juez, Elise O'Neill, Emily Fox, Emma Buchanan, Frank Amuso, Gabriellie De Gouveia, Gracie Lopez, Jamie Schmid, Jazmin Lopez, Kiera Ryan, Laurel Deneen, Maya Pinto, Morgan Kane, Nadia Frempong, Natalia Salinas, Rose Knoll, Sophia Rowley, Adelaide Abstoss, Alejandro Irizarry, Alexa Rodriguez Villatoro, Atiya Woolman, Billy Suter, Brandon Curtis, Daniel Hickey, Eliza Simpson, Emelia Jones, Emily Karlson, Emma Butler, Fiona Nelson, Gail Durkin, Gracyn Epstein, Irene Mandile, Jake Sidell, Joshua Love, Julia Divine, Katelyn Murphy, Lee (Leah) Varela, Lily Jaramillo, Luis Ramirez, Margaret DeWald, Maxim Tereshchenko, Melina Valencia, Meredith Brady, Meredith Shaw, Natalie Gasowski, Nevaeh Fleming, Osmaly Bonilla, Paige Thomson, Phoebe Wong, Piper Guiney, Savannah Rhodes, Scarlett Dawson, Sebastian Torres, Sofia Corvo, Solar (Ciara) Bello, Sophia Tran, Sophia Suffoletto, Sophie Sundaram, Vivian Higgins, Xiaoyi Wang, Yasmin Fernandez

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