



## **Tradition: Pashtun Music**

The Pashtun (PASH-toon) people are an ethnic group from the region that covers both northwestern Pakistan and southern Afghanistan. There are about 15 million Pashtuns who belong to over 350 tribal groups. In the past, many Pashtuns moved around with their animals instead of living in one place. But now, many live in big cities like Karachi and Peshawar in Pakistan, and Kabul in Afghanistan. Because there are so many Pashtuns from different tribes, there are many kinds of music that are important to their culture.

In the Pakistani city of Peshawar (Peh-SHAA-waar), Pashtun music is characterized by the rubab (ruu-BOB) played to the beat of hand drums and songs about nature, love or politics. The rubab is a stringed instrument carved from a single piece of wood that has been played in the region for over 1,000 years! It is so beloved to the Pashtun people that they call it the “lion of instruments.”

Starting in the 1970s, there were many wars in the region, making it hard for musicians to perform. Some richer Pashtuns even looked down on traditional music and instruments, thinking they were only for poorer people. Khumariyaan rubab player Farhan Bogra remembered a time when he gave a rubab to a friend and “his father broke it, gave him a guitar instead and said that the rubab is the sound of the lower-class...”

What happens to a culture when it can't share its music? The band Khumariyaan (KU-maar-ee-yaan) formed during this difficult time. They wanted to help the Pashtun people feel proud of their music and culture again. Since they started, Peshawar has become safer for musicians to perform, but the effects of the past still linger. Khumariyaan is working hard to bring back this music and share it to the world!

## **Artist: Khumariyaan**

Khumariyaan (KU-maar-ee-yaan), meaning "people in a state of bliss," is on a mission to excite Pashtun's about their own musical traditions by creating a new sound that combines music that is both ancient and very modern.

The band's founder, Farhan Bogra, didn't start playing Pashtun music until he was an adult. After meeting an elder musician, Bogra set out to learn the history of this music, eventually learning to play the rubab and other traditional string instruments. He later gathered a group of like-minded musicians who were interested in using these traditional instruments to create a modern folk-rock band.

When Farhan Bogra decided to create a Pashtun folk-rock band there were very few bands in the region, let alone ones that featured the rubab!! He wanted to create a BIG rock sound that could excite crowds and attract younger audiences. Khumariyaan officially formed in 2009, with Bogra on rubab and other traditional stringed instruments joined by some of his best musical friends. They became a sensation right away, especially with young audiences. In a Khumariyaan live performance you will often see guitarist Sparlay Rawail set down his instrument to dance. He is soon joined by his bandmates in a traditional circle dance that builds in tempo and energy known as the centuries old **Attan** dance. When talking about the deep importance of dance to Pashtun culture, guitarist Sparlay Rawali explains: “They say the ultimate form of torture [for a dancer] is to tie him to a tree and play music around him.”

Khumariyaan’s music often consists of traditional Pashtun songs and melodies, re-worked for their unique style. They recently added singer Obaid Khan, a powerful vocalist who sings in multiple languages, which is helpful in a country where nearly 80 languages are spoken.

### **Place: Peshawar, Pakistan**

Peshawar is located in northwest Pakistan, near the Afghanistan border. Peshawar is very old, with a history that goes back over 2,000 years! It was an important stop on the **Silk Road**, a trade route connecting the Indian and Pakistan to Asia and Europe.

If you visit Peshawar, be ready for hot and dry weather, with temperatures sometimes reaching 110 degrees for weeks! The Pashtun people are known for being great hosts. They follow a tradition called **melmestia**, which means that they are required to welcome guests and provide food, shelter, and protection to guests, even if they are outlaws (which we are sure you are not!) or have different views than their own. You’ll find community centers all around Peshawar called hujras (hoo-jra), where people can eat and socialize. Wealthier families often build their own hujras. These gathering places are important to Pashtun culture and show how friendly and welcoming the Pashtun people are.

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