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Holding the dhol (drum), Sunny Jain, founder of Red Baraat, jumps during a concert. (Courtesy of Red Baraat/Sachyn Mital)



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In 1997, Panjabi MC, a British rapper of Indian descent, released a popular song fusing Punjabi-Indian music (bhangra) and the "Knight Rider" theme song. Five years later, Jay-Z collaborated with Panjabi MC for an English remix of this hit bhangra song, translated as "Beware of the Boys."

Through this fusion, the Western world began to appreciate the spirit and rhythm of this regional Indian music.

Panjabi MC's fusion helped pave the way for the intricate and unique intermingling of bhangra, jazz, funk and soul music represented in Sunny Jain's Brooklyn-based band, Red Baraat. The group consists of Indian, Black and white musicians, and the richness in the band's music stems from the diversity and collaboration among its members.

Jain founded Red Baraat in 2008, incorporating a marriage of Punjabi instruments like the bhangra drum (*dhol*) along with brass instruments like horns and the sousaphone. The band's name incorporates *baraat*, the Hindi word for an Indian wedding procession led by a brass band, and the color red, symbolic in Indian weddings. There are nine members.

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In March 2017, Red Baraat was featured on NPR's Tiny Desk concert series following Holi, a Hindu celebration known to many around the world as the "festival of colors." The celebration, meant to signify the triumph of good over evil, represents the start of spring and features the throwing of various colored powders into the air. Holi celebrations occur all around the world every year. In their Tiny Desk Concert, the musicians pay tribute to Holi, wearing white jumpers with various colors splattered over them.

I first experienced Red Baraat's music in Lafayette, Louisiana, in spring 2011. In the audience, I was the only Indian American in a large sea of white people. The large outdoor space, famous for hosting local Cajun music legends like BeauSoleil, became filled with the beat of the *dhol* and, almost immediately, hundreds of people joined in the merriment. They jumped in place and lifted their hands in the air, even

amid intermittent Punjabi lyrics.

Red Baraat offers a sound that incorporates the richness of Punjabi traditional music and American jazz, and embraces each culture's unique richness. The band creates a multicultural melody that fosters inclusiveness. Their music, then and now, inspires me as a Catholic.

And, thanks to the Trump era, Red Baraat's music is now more political.

In 2018, the group released "Sound the People," an album infused with a social justice-centered call to action. The album features Pakistani singer Ali Sethi, poetry from activist Suheir Hammad and rap from Heems (Himanshu Kumar Suri) of Brooklyn's Das Racist.

Heems raps on the album's title song, with lyrics that decry colonialism and the "erasure" by the British of "connections with the [Indian] culture" and Donald Trump's border policy causing families to cry "let me in." The song "Sound the People" is a perfect protest anthem in the fight against white supremacy and racial injustice: "Together we stand … remember we're brown."

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A post shared by RED BARAAT (@redbaraat)

Ten years after I first saw Red Baraat in concert, their music — amid so much polarization in our church and country — can help to inspire and unite Catholics. Their music, joyous and rich, can teach us new ways to worship and praise God. The group also provides a model for what a truly universal and multiethnic church can be.

Pope Francis calls us to approach one another with a sense of awe and recognize the holiness and value in the different faith traditions, cultures and languages all around us. He teaches us that encountering other cultures involves "encouraging, fostering and reinforcing a richness which already exists."

While Catholics celebrate Palm Sunday, millions of Hindus all around the world will celebrate Holi. Red Baraat's music can inspire Catholics to think more deeply about the Divine, especially this Lenten season, and how it intersects with different faith traditions. Their music helps me to imagine Scripture outside of whiteness. I apply their music to the Book of Revelations. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." I imagine Christ as our bridegroom in a *baraat*, led by a diverse brass band. I imagine him surrounded by all of us, a diverse and rich mankind all a part of one body.

Their music allows me to envision a free, more heavenly world, one where all our unique, multicultural voices are heard.

This Easter, let us heed Francis' call for accompaniment and a culture of encounter and incorporate the richness of Red Baraat into our celebrations and homes.

Compilation of highlights by Red Baraat, from performances at Bonnaroo, Peter Gabriel’s WOMAD Festivals (in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand and Spain), Austin City Limits, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, Luxembourg Philharmonic, New York City's Bowery Ballroom and the Vienna Concert House, with links to additional videos, posted on Sunny Jain/Red Baraat's YouTube channel Dec. 31, 2018