

Traditional Pakistani Music and Dance

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Region: Pakistan

Genres: Qawwali, Bhangra, Sufi, Folk

Notable Artists: Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Abida Parveen

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Pakistani music and dance are an integral part of the country's cultural identity. With roots in Sufi mysticism, tribal celebrations, and Mughal court traditions, these art forms reflect the diversity of Pakistan's regions and history. Whether performed in festivals, weddings, or shrines, traditional music and dance remain deeply embedded in daily life and national heritage.

Classical and Folk Music

Classical music in Pakistan is based on the South Asian raga system, with artists like Roshan Ara Begum and Ustad Salamat Ali Khan contributing to its legacy. Folk music, on the other hand, varies by region — Punjab has soulful tunes with instruments like the dhol and algoza, while Sindhi music often includes the yaktaro and borindo. Balochi and Pashto folk music features string instruments like the dambura.

Qawwali and Sufi Music

Qawwali is a devotional Sufi genre that aims to elevate the soul through poetry and rhythm. It is performed at shrines and spiritual gatherings. **Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan** brought global recognition to this genre, blending traditional vocals with contemporary arrangements. **Abida Parveen** is another legendary figure in Sufi music known for her powerful renditions of mystical poetry.

Popular Regional Dances

Pakistani dance is mostly folk-based and linked to local traditions:

- **Bhangra and Giddha:** Energetic Punjabi dances performed during harvest and celebrations.
- **Attan:** A circular tribal dance of Pashtuns, performed with rhythmic intensity.
- **Jhumar:** A slower, graceful Punjabi dance popular in southern Punjab.
- **Ho Jamalo:** A lively Sindhi dance performed in groups with hand movements and footwork.

Musical Instruments

Traditional instruments are central to Pakistani music:

- **Dhol:** A large double-headed drum used in dances like Bhangra and Attan.
- **Rubab:** A string instrument popular in Pashto music.
- **Sitar and Sarangi:** Classical string instruments used in ghazals and raga-based music.
- **Tabla and Harmonium:** Essential for Qawwali and ghazal performances.

Festivals and Cultural Shows

Traditional music and dance are showcased at national festivals such as Lok Virsa, Basant, and Urs celebrations. Local performers, school children, and professional artists display folk dances, Qawwali, and regional music, strengthening cultural ties and promoting unity.

Modern Influence

Contemporary platforms like Coke Studio have revived traditional music by fusing classical and folk styles with modern genres. Artists like Atif Aslam, Ali Zafar, and the band Junoon have contributed to this fusion, expanding the global appeal of Pakistani music.

A Living Rhythm of Heritage

Pakistani music and dance form a vibrant cultural thread that unites diverse communities across the nation. From the soul-stirring tunes of Sufi qawwals to the energetic beats of regional folk dances, these art forms echo the country's rich history and evolving identity. They are more than entertainment—they are vehicles of emotion, resistance, celebration, and devotion. As Pakistan continues to modernize, its music and dance remain a living, breathing reflection of its spirit—timeless yet ever-changing.

"Where words fail, music speaks — and in Pakistan, it dances too."