

1-2015

# Asian Studies News: A Newsletter of the Asian Studies Program of Saint Joseph's University, Fall 2014

Saint Joseph's University

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## Citation

Saint Joseph's University, "Asian Studies News: A Newsletter of the Asian Studies Program of Saint Joseph's University, Fall 2014" (2015). *Asian Studies Program Newsletters*. Paper 2.  
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## An Evening of Classical Indian Music



Kiranavali Vidyasankar

While many people in the West today know that India has an ancient and highly developed tradition of classical music, far fewer are aware of the diversity of that tradition, and even fewer perhaps have had the opportunity to experience an authentic classical Indian musical performance first hand. The Saint Joseph's community had just such an opportunity on October 27 when the acclaimed Carnatic music performer Kiranavali Vidyasankar performed in the Chapter of Saint Joseph's.

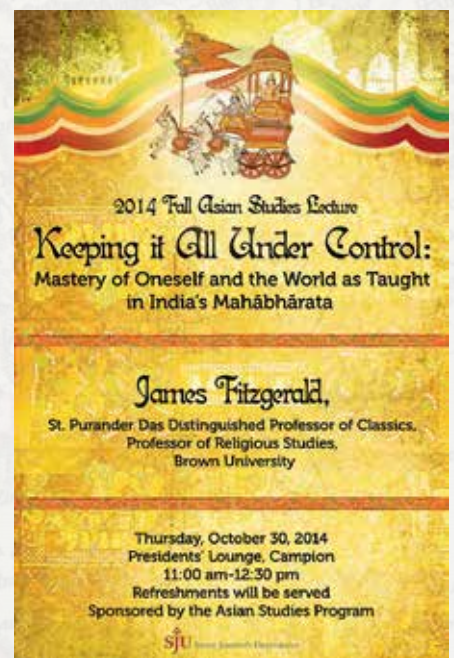
Smt. Kiranavali Vidyasankar comes from a long line of outstanding Indian musicians and was something of a child prodigy, being able to recognize the classical Indian musical form of the *raga* at age two! She made her debut as a vocalist when she was just eleven years old, and has continued to perform ever since, in India and in the United States, both as a vocalist and as an instrumentalist. She is also a gifted teacher, with nearly twenty years of experience, and writes widely on Carnatic music.

Carnatic music is one of the two major traditions of Indian classical music. The other, Hindustani, is rooted in the culture of North India and has been influenced by Persian, Arabic and Turkic musical traditions. Carnatic by contrast is rooted in the classical Dravidian culture of South India and has been closely associated historically with the Hindu devotional traditions of the South. This was reflected in a number of the songs performed during the concert, several of which had religious themes, such as the invocation of the Goddess Sarasvatī which opened the concert.

Smt. Kiranavali performed five compositions, introducing each of them with an explanation of the intricacies of the classical style and thereby deepening the audience's appreciation of the music. She

was accompanied by Smt. Sandhya Anand on violin and by Sri T. S. Nandakumar on percussion. The concert was organized by Dr. Divya Balasubramaniam, assistant professor of Economics and was sponsored by the Asian Studies Program.

## FALL ASIAN STUDIES LECTURE Yoga in the Indian Epic



Who would guess that a two thousand year old epic poem describing a cataclysmic war would contain some of the earliest teachings on the subject of yoga? Today we tend to think of yoga as a popular form of exercise, and perhaps a practice that is in some vague sense "spiritual." However we certainly don't connect it such things as ancient Indian war chariots used in epic battles. But as students learned in

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# A Taste of India

## Mercedes Yanora '14 Studies Telugu in Hyderabad

From June to August, 2014 Mercedes Yanora, who graduated in May, participated in the American Institute of Indian Studies Summer Language Program in Hyderabad, India, where she studied Telugu, the third most widely spoken Indian language, after Hindi and Bengali. Mercedes was the winner of the first prize in the first Asian Studies Essay Competition in 2012-2013, with a paper on temple and mosque desecration in India in the twentieth century. She is now continuing her study of India at the University of Pennsylvania. At the invitation of Dr. Amber Abbas, her teacher at Saint Joseph's and assistant professor in the Department of History, Mercedes provided the following account of her experiences in Hyderabad.

I only cried once during the American Institute of Indian Studies' Telugu summer language program in Hyderabad. It wasn't the out of this world traffic, the incessant beeping of cars, the car fumes, the smell of garbage, the goat that lived outside my window, the daily power outages, the house-shaking Bonalu Festival drums, the suffocating crowds at Charminar, and the grating sound of men clearing their throats that brought me to tears. Why did I cry?



(from left) Krissy, Vimala, Gautham, Mercedes, and Kranti

Food. Just food. So simple, but so critical to the traveler. One thing I learned this summer was that I have the taste buds of a blue-blooded American: I lusted after French fries, cheeseburgers, and pizza—all inaccessible without a two hour commute. Within two days of my stay, I realized that I abhorred around 98.79% of Indian food. Had I made the wrong decision in going? What I learned: Indians are very hospitable and accommodating. My caring host mother always cooked food that was agreeable to my American stomach. Every single day I ate Maggi (India's version of ramen noodles), bread, oatmeal, and hardboiled eggs—talk about variety... for a while I questioned whether or not I would ever return to India.

But with the help of my hosts, staying nourished wasn't the only hurdle that I overcame while in India. Despite all the challenges, the relationships that I formed with my host family, teacher, program administrator, classmate, and neighbors,

eclipsed any doubts concerning my return to India.

Three transformative moments, among many, really changed my outlook on India. One weekend Krissy (classmate), Vimala (teacher), Kranti (program administrator), Gautham (friend), and I all traveled to Warangal. Warangal, the former medieval capital of the Kakatiya Dynasty, is a small city boasting many temples and beautifully preserved ruins. On our way to Warangal, we stopped and hiked a looming hill complete with an old fortress overlooking the jagged rock formations of Telangana. We looked around in awe as we passed through old arches strewn with foliage and live monkeys. I discovered a lotus filled pond cut into the side of the mountain that really touched us all. The silence wasn't awkward, but peaceful as we all sat around the pond's edges and contemplated the beauty of the sacred flower.

Two weekends later, Krissy and I joined Vimala's family for a trip to



Mercedes and classmate Krissy

Vimala's village. One day we boated along the Krishna River and climbed a steep mountain, a mountain once home to tigers. Sweat trickled down my body, the sun scorched my face, and the rocks cut into my flip-flops, but I enjoyed every second of that climb. This strenuous climb forged a bond not only between Vimala's family and me, but between me and the land, India.

Throughout the summer I often counted down the weeks until my return to America. When August 15<sup>th</sup> (India's Independence Day as well as the day of my departure) finally arrived, however, I was

overcome with sadness. I will never forget my final good byes. Distant music wafted through the air and Indian flags fluttered in the wind as I got into the taxi that would take me to the airport. When I got into the taxi I saw that my host mother had tears in her eyes as she and Krissy stood by the gate. At the taxi pulled away, the neighborhood kids ran alongside the taxi and hit the windows while waving goodbye and shouting how much they would miss me. I felt so loved at that moment, and I look forward to experiencing that love again when I return to India.

the course of this year's Fall Asian Studies Lecture, one of the earliest meanings of the Sanskrit word "yoga" was to "yoke" or "harness" horses to a war chariot in preparation for battle. Furthermore the war chariot became an important symbol in early descriptions of yoga as a spiritual discipline, bringing in martial imagery that many today find surprising.

Dr. James L. Fitzgerald, St. Purander Das Distinguished Professor of Classics and Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University, took this little known early history of yoga as his theme when he spoke on October 30<sup>th</sup> in the Presidents' Lounge. His lecture was entitled "Keeping it All Under Control: Mastery of Oneself and the World as Taught in India's Mahābhārata." It turns out that the Mahābhārata, the massive national epic of India, contains far more than scenes of battle. Among other things, it includes the Bhagavad Gita, one of the world's spiritual classics, and some of the earliest surviving discussions of the practice of yoga. As Fitzgerald explained, however, while no longer literally harnessing horses to chariots, yoga continued to be understood as a form of "harnessing," gaining control over the body and its faculties, leading of mastery not only of one's body and mind, but of the very elements of the cosmos. Yogis, in this early conception, attained powers not unlike those of the gods themselves, the original "power yoga," one might say, but with far higher stakes than the popular modern day variety.

Fitzgerald's lecture was punctuated with dramatic accounts of such attainments, taken from his translation of the lengthy section of the epic known as Mokṣadharmā, which provides a window into some of ancient India's earliest speculations on religion and philosophy. Fitzgerald is currently completing the second of two lengthy volumes containing his translation of this section, which are part of a new, complete, multi-volume English translation of the Mahābhārata being published by the University of Chicago Press. Fitzgerald is general editor of the project.



# Saint Joseph's Initiates China Summer Academy

In July a group of high school students from Changsha Foreign Language School in Hunan, China, were on campus to participate in Saint Joseph's first China Summer Academy. The program was conceived by Dr. Juan Julie Yu, who has taught Chinese at Saint Joseph's since 2010. The Summer Academy is designed to introduce Chinese

destinations as Independence Hall and the Reading Terminal Market.

English language instruction is at the core of the Academy and the language program was designed by Dr. Jennifer Ewald, director of Saint Joseph's TESOL program (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Dr. Ewald was assisted by her own students



high school students to college life in America. As growing numbers of Chinese students enroll in American universities, there is a growing need to prepare them for the challenges they will encounter in the classroom and on campus. Dr. Yu was motivated to create the program in part by her own experience. "As a graduate student in America, I found that adapting to the education system in the United States was a challenge, since it is very different from what I had been used to in China. In retrospect, I wish I had been better prepared for this transition." The Summer Academy is designed to provide students with this preparation. The students receive a well rounded experience of college life and exposure to American culture, with immersive English language classes, explanations of the college admission process, lectures on the differences between Chinese and American pedagogy, introductions to campus life and field trips to such essential Philadelphia

in the TESOL program, Dana Mingione, Julia Burke and Allison Hinkel. Asian Studies students Christopher Maloney, Ryan Smith, Neanta Parnell and Nazel Malhani also assisted, along with Chinese graduate students Chao Chen, Luyang Wang and Reka Yang.

Dr. Yu was also assisted by Dr. Cary Anderson, Vice President of Student Life and Associate Provost, and by Dr. David Carpenter, Director of the Asian Studies Program.

The students were accompanied by a number of their teachers in China, including Dong Bei Wang, Vice Principal of the Changsha Foreign Language School, who acknowledged the value of the program. "Today's world is increasingly integrated, and communications and cultural exchanges are becoming a bridge between different countries and languages," Wang said. "Saint Joseph's University has engaged our students in American culture, in learning and in growing."



## New Asian Film Series

The Asian Studies Program introduced a new Asian Film Series in September, showing films from Japan, China and Bangladesh. On the third Tuesday evening of each month throughout the Fall semester students could come to the Forum Theater in Campion, enjoy a free pizza dinner and then watch an Asian film, introduced by one of the members of the Asian Studies Program. In September students viewed Hayao Miyazaki's popular *Spirited Away*, introduced by Dr. David Carpenter of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. In October Dr. James Carter of the Department of History introduced Zhang Yimou's *Hero*, highlighting some intriguing alternative interpretations of the film. In November Dr. Amber Abbas, also of the Department of History, introduced Tareque Masud's *The Clay Bird*, set in the former East Pakistan, helping students appreciate the film's historical and cultural context.

"An excellent way for our students to get a taste of Asian history and culture is to give them an opportunity to spend an evening once a month viewing quality films from Asian directors," noted Dr. Carpenter. The series will continue in the Spring. Students and faculty alike are welcome to request their favorite films.

# CHINA TOWN HALL

## Local Connections, National Reflections

### President Jimmy Carter Featured in 2014 China Town

As in years past this Fall Saint Joseph's University again hosted an annual China Town Hall, sponsored by the National Committee on United States-China Relations and organized locally by Dr. James Carter of the Department of History. Since 1966 the Committee has worked to foster improved understanding of the Sino-American relationship, and has targeted such issues as climate change, energy security, poverty, public health, and world peace, as well as a number of bilateral issues crucial to the health of relations between the United States and China. For the past four years Dr. Carter, who works with the National Committee is its "Public Intellectuals" program, has managed to secure Saint Joseph's as one of the Town Hall's four Pennsylvania sites (the other sites this year being Bucknell University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Pittsburgh). Saint Joseph's President Kevin Gillespie Amanda Thomas, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, were on hand to welcome guests before Dr. Carter introduced the evening's program.

This year the National Committee partnered with The Carter Center to present an interview with former President Jimmy Carter, presented live via webcast to all of the 74 participating venues across the United States. Here at Saint Joseph's the webcast was presented in the Wolfington Teletorium in Mandeville. Students from around the country, including some from Saint Joseph's, were able to submit questions to President Carter live as he spoke, and hear his answers moments later,



a level of interactivity that brought some extra excitement to the occasion. Carter, who turned 90 on October 1, spoke and fielded questions flawlessly for a full hour, sharing his views on a range of contemporary issues. It was an amazing performance.

After the webcast of the conversation with President Carter the local Saint Joseph's audience was addressed by Dr. Tansen Sen, Associate Professor of History at Baruch College of the City University of New York, who spoke on "The structural problems in contemporary India-China Relations." Following his formal remarks Dr. Sen, accompanied by Dr. Carter, himself a specialist in the history of modern China, took questions from the audience, bringing the very engaging program to a close.

## Japanese Beyond the Classroom

This Fall Saint Joseph's students in second and third year Japanese were given the opportunity to experience Japanese culture outside the formal classroom setting. In November Ms. Nanako Hoch, who teaches the second year class, and Ms. Yuka Usami Casey, who teaches the third year, invited their students to enjoy traditional Japanese cuisine at a local Japanese restaurant. Then in December they arranged another cultural activity, this time on campus. They held an "open class" to which anyone with an interest in Japanese culture was invited. About 20 students participated along with a number of faculty, and learned about Japanese culture, experienced a tea ceremony, practiced calligraphy and enjoyed a variety of Japanese foods.

Casey and Hoch began by explaining the cultural backgrounds of the tea ceremony and calligraphy in Japan. Then half of the classroom was converted into a small Japanese tea room and everyone sat on *Tatami* flowers (reed mats) and enjoyed the beauty of the tea ceremony. They sampled some Japanese *macha* (green tea) and *daifuku* (sweet rice cake with red bean paste). The other half of the room was taken up with a long table for practicing calligraphy. Students from the third year class helped other students write *kanji* (Chinese characters) so that everyone could try their hand and take



their art work home. There was also a short fashion show, with several of the students learning how to wear a *kimono*. At the end, everyone enjoyed Japanese foods such as sushi and snacks.

Dr. Kazuya Fukuoka, of the Department of Politics, who was present and who helped with the event, commented on the importance of these events: "Our hope is to expose SJU students to authentic Japanese cultural experiences. We try to have cultural events like this every semester!"

These two events were particularly timely for three of the students, John Contosta, '15, Pasquale Cipollone, '15, and Brenna Ritzert '17, who will all be spending Spring semester at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan. Cipollone, noting the better than expected turnout for the open class, expressed his appreciation for the work that Ms. Hoch and Ms. Casey have put into the program, and expressed the wish that he might find some way to continue to make a contribution to it while in Japan.

## China Summer Program 2014

Last summer Saint Joseph's students once again were to be found walking through the Forbidden City in Beijing, and along the Great Wall, as part of Saint Joseph's China Summer Program. "The weather in Beijing was absolutely perfect," noted Dr. David Carpenter, Director of the Asian Studies Program, who accompanied the students along with Dr. Ruben Mendoza, Department of Decision and System Sciences. "On the afternoon we spent at the Great Wall the sky was bright blue with white clouds and the view was stunning. Definitely one of the high points of the trip." After visiting Beijing the group took the "bullet train" (actually the Gaosu Tielu or "High Speed Rail") to Nanjing, where they stayed on the campus of Nanjing University and attended classes in the mornings and explored the city during the afternoons and evenings. A weekend was spent in Shanghai before heading south to Guilin and Yangshuo, to go rafting and biking among the scenic mountains that make this part of China justly famous for its natural beauty. "Going on this program was one of the best decisions I've made since coming to SJU," commented Erin Caffrey, '15. "The combination of learning about China in the classroom and then traveling and seeing what we were learning made both the classroom experience and the travel experience much more memorable. It was an amazing opportunity and I would do it again in a heartbeat!"



Jonathan Carlucci, Kristin Skeuse and Katherine Worthington on the Great Wall

## China 2015

Applications for the 2015 China Summer Program are still being accepted, with a deadline of February 1. Dr. James Carter, Department of History, will be teaching HIS 358, Contemporary China, and Dr. Lucy Ford, Department of Management, will be teaching MHC221/655, Workforce Diversity. For more information contact Lindsey Martin, Center for International Programs, [lmartin@sju.edu](mailto:lmartin@sju.edu).



Nisha Orren in Yangshuo





# Asian Studies Program

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