



Chris Seepersaud and his wife will present workshops.  
CHRIS SEEPERSAUD

# Cultural conduit

Sitar player spreads spiritual energy at Northside MusicFest

**Amanda Sieradzki** Council on Culture & Arts

Professional guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Chris “Seep” Seepersaud is a firm believer in teaching inclusively in music education. As a public school teacher, he established a multi-cultural curriculum, but wanted to reach a larger community. With this goal in mind, he founded Seepersaud Studios in 2009 with his wife, Therese, to open up the world through music. • “I made the studio to make the musical learning journey more comfortable, more powerful and more palatable for every individual,” says Seepersaud. “The recording studio becomes secondary to one-on-one music lessons that are multicultural and based on popular, spiritual and world music. To me, Stevie Wonder is just as prolific as Beethoven.”

See SEEPERSAUD, Page 4C

# Seepersaud

Continued from Page 1C

Classes at the studio allow him to share his unique musical point of view and particularly his passion and expertise in Indian classical music. The studio is home to more than 40 students, including established and touring musicians like Rachel Hillman, Lili Forbes, and Jacob Grimes.

Seepersaud and his wife will present workshops on both Indian music and jazz vocals at the upcoming Northside Stage MusicFest on July 18.

"Northside Stage is amazing and is putting forth an effort to include different cultures in this event," says Seepersaud. "At this venue, they're going to have Indian, jazz, bluegrass and world music. That's the full spread of Tallahassee right there."

Seepersaud's parents immigrated to the U.S. from British Guyana. By age 5, he was squirreling away their cassette tapes of 1960s Indian film music to bring to show-and-tell at daycare. Though he started on piano, guitar and sitar were where he found his groove.

He says it was the late Michael Bugter-van Loon, an FSU musician, that gave him his first guitar lesson. Seepersaud immediately connected with the guitar's strings and the fingertip sensa-

## If you go

**What:** Northside Stage MusicFest

**When:** noon-9 p.m. on Saturday, July 18

**Where:** Northside Community Center, 8005 Oak Grove Road

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more information, visit <http://northsidestage.com/musicfest>.

tion. He released his first jazz EP at 14 years old and remembers playing fast and loud for impromptu rap battles in his garage.

"I tell my students to put their eyeballs in their fingertips when they play," says Seepersaud. "From the guitar, I used to imagine I was playing the sarode or sitar or saxophone."

He remains appreciative of current mentors and gurus Gayatri Melkote and Prabha Bhaskar, both Tallahassee musicians with expertise in Indian classical music. He's also been able to play with several Grammy-nominated artists including George Porter, Jr. and Brian Stoltz of the Funky Meters, Le'Andria Johnson, and Aston Barrett.

Seepersaud continuously works to perfect "ragas," a melodic form that he likens to a "psycho-acoustic hypothesis."

Each form has a history hundreds of

years old and is passed down from guru to teacher. He has spent the better part of a decade learning the Mawra and Sohini ragas. One of his teachers compares this exploration to reading a map, eventually getting closer to the final location, walking through the door and entering the trance-like state that many musicians experience when they access melodic depths.

"There are so many types of ragas, and like flowers, there are so many different colors, sizes, species and then they crossbreed," says Seepersaud. "India has so many kinds of music within it that I really think of it like a treasure trove. It's very scientific but very soulful, and the music becomes much more powerful when you do it."

Preparing each instrument takes as much time and methodical practice as playing the instrument itself. Before classes, Seepersaud will hit the tabla drums' goat-skin covering with a hammer to knock them into pitch. The 21 strings of the sitar and nearly 30 on the sarode must all be tightened or loosened based on specific intervals that create a symmetrical scale.

Seepersaud is proud of one of his younger students who has learned to tune his own sitar, even after popping three strings in the process. The 6-year-old player practiced these skills throughout quarantine as the studio continues to offer small, private and vir-

tual lessons.

"We love the ah-ha moments where the student has empowered themselves and they can now solve the problem," says Seepersaud.

For the Northside Stage MusicFest, he and Therese will share tips on vocal production for jazz vocals. Seepersaud will also share the beauty and craft of Indian music by demonstrating through vocals, tabla and sitar.

The event will feature small group workshops, improv, group lessons and jam sessions that are offered in-person and virtually. Registration is required for all attendance, and a mask policy will be enforced. Seepersaud is looking forward to sharing and playing off the energy of the small groups of participants, as well as through the livestream.

"No matter what instrument I'm playing they're all spiritual to me, they're all conduits," explains Seepersaud. "Music is loaded with culture and humanity. It's a conduit of energy, thoughts, communication, language. You can really learn a lot about people through music, and music is the only way we're going to learn about one another."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*