

# Maestro plays traditional tabla

By Arthur Dudley

PRINCETONIAN STAFF WRITER

The instrument is simple — a large drum and a small drum, played with the fingers and palm. But Zakir Hussain plays the traditional Indian instrument, the tabla, with such subtlety that there seems to be more to it.

Nearly 300 community members attended his recital Thursday afternoon to hear the man internationally renowned for his fusion of classical Indian and Western music.

Hussain will be a visiting faculty member in the music department next semester, teaching a course titled "Introduction to the Music of India," which he designed with mathematics professor and tabla enthusiast Manjul Bhargava.

The appointment is funded by the Council of the Humanities.

Hussain began to study tabla seriously at age seven with his father, and the two began touring together when Zakir

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## Hussain discusses tabla history

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was 12. His father, Alla Rakha, was widely considered one of the greatest tabla players of all time. He died in 2000.

Hussain came to America for the first time in 1970 and studied music at the University of Washington at Seattle. He began to experiment, blending Indian classical music with various Western styles.

He has since played with pop musicians like Tito Puente and Van Morrison, jazz musicians and the Hong Kong and New Orleans symphonies. He has also composed music for film and played drums for Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now."

Yet because of a promise he made to his father, who disapproved of his involvement with Western music, Hussain devotes much of his time to pure Indian classical music.

His recital Thursday — one

of his many appearances at the University since 1974 — began with five minutes of virtuosity demonstrating the instrument's range. He then introduced himself: "My name is Zakir Hussain and I play this instrument."

To an over-capacity audience, he explained the history of the tabla. The modern instrument is about 200 years old, though the musical tradition stretches back thousands of years. The instrument is a miniature version of large military drums used in ancient India.

Unlike other drums, like bongos or congas, the tabla is played with a delicate touch.

"It's like a piano," Hussain said. "One finger is one hand" because of the range of sounds that can be made.

Audience members laughed at his portrayal of tabla playing as a conversation, but his lovers' quarrel in rhythm met with approval.

Hussain said he is excited

to work with his colleagues in the music department, especially those involved in electronic music.

"Princeton is a respected education center and I'm looking at this not as something to do and teach, but as a learning opportunity for me," he said.

He hopes to "drop anchor" at Princeton and take some time off from his grueling concert schedule, which typically includes 150 concerts a year.

"I want to assemble and analyze what I've already got," Hussain said. "I haven't had the time to sit down and reflect."

As a traditional artist, Hussain said he is not bothered by tabla's profusion in Western pop culture, but "excited" about it.

"In the last 30 years, tabla has become one of the premier music and art forms of this world — so many genres have adopted it, like hip-hop, jazz and electronic music," he said. "It's high time it was brought out in more detail."