

# JAFFA ROAD BAND BIOS

Award-winning roots music from the global crossroads

[jaffaroad.com](http://jaffaroad.com)

**Aaron Lightstone**  
bandleader, producer,  
oud, guitar & synthesizers



Aaron is a multi-instrumentalist, producer, composer, bandleader, music therapist, and educator. His production credits include Jaffa Road's previous releases, the Canadian Folk Music Award-nominated album *Under The Canopy* by The Huppah Project, and the song "The Crown Sleeps" which was featured in the Oscar-nominated film *The Breadwinner* and which won Best Song at the 2018 Canadian Screen Awards. He recently co-composed and co-produced a collection of six intercultural relaxation CDs for the Room 217 Foundation, with Jaffa Road bandmate Justin Gray.

Aaron studied Classical guitar with Terry McKenna and improvisation with Dr. Colin Lee at Wilfrid Laurier University, where he earned a master's degree in 2004 and occasionally teaches music therapy courses. His long-standing interest in the music of many different cultures led him to study Sephardic and Arabic music as well as oud performance practice and repertoire with master musicians such as Hazzan Aaron Bensousan, Dr. George Sawa, Dr. A.J. Racy, and Simon Shaheen. In the early 2000s he studied sitar and classical Indian music with Anwar Khurshid. Aaron's interest in and commitment to the revitalization, renewal, and reimagining of 21st century Jewish art & culture continues to inspire and guide Jaffa Road.

In 1998, Aaron was the Ethnomusicologist in Residence at the St. Lucia School of Music where he published a study of traditional Creole folk songs, and played guitar with local reggae bands. In 2004 he wrote a groundbreaking Master's thesis on the use of improvised Hip-Hop and the therapeutic impacts of using hip-hop aesthetics and production in music therapy sessions. His research has since been published in the first academic music therapy textbook to deal with rap and hip-hop in a serious manner. Aaron has performed and recorded with Eccodek, Ventanas, Aviva Chernick, Mark Weinstock, Noam Katz, and many others.

**Justin Gray**  
co-producer, bass  
& bass veena



Justin is a highly in-demand bass player, known for both his rock-solid grooves and sensitive playing. Over the course of his career, Justin has performed with a wide range of internationally renowned artists, including; Dave Liebman, Dave Douglas, Mike Stem, Ingrid Jensen, Seamus Blake, Dan Weiss, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Greg Osby, Tony Mallaby, Josh Groban, Jackie Richardson, and David Mott. As a producer and engineer, Justin has been nominated for a Juno award, two Canadian Folk Music Awards, and a Canadian Screen Award.

In 2010, Justin invented and co-created the bass *veena*, an instrument designed for Indian classical and Indo-jazz music performance. Justin is now emerging as the first artist to perform on this instrument worldwide. Justin has received grants from the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, and Shastri Foundation to pursue recordings, original composition, and formal studies in Indian classical music.

Justin is a Professor of Audio Production and Post Production at Sheridan College, Professor of Music at Humber College, and a Phd candidate in ethnomusicology at York University. He has received a number of awards and distinctions, including: 2015 for Toronto Arts Foundation Emerging Jazz Artist Award, 2015 Shanti Chakravorty Award, 2014 Juno Nomination (with Monsoon), 2014 Nirvan Bhavan Scholarship, Moe Koffman Music Award, and 2004 Garfield Weston Merrit Award Foundation National Scholarship. Justin is endorsed by: Godfrey Guitars, Mark Bass Amplifiers, D'Addario Canada, Radial Engineering, Lava Cables and Source Audio Pedals.

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Tamar Ilana  
lead vocals



Tamar is a singer whose voice is as fierce and powerful as it is delicate and ornamental. She is a natural performer and her electric and emotionally intense stage presence has been praised by audiences around the world.

She has mastery of a diversity of Mediterranean musical forms. She was almost born singing, as when not attending school Tamar spent her childhood travelling Europe, Morocco and Israel with her ethnomusicologist mother Dr. Judith Cohen, learning musical traditions spanning two continents while becoming fluent in French, Spanish and Portuguese. At the age of five, Tamar began performing Sephardic, Balkan and Medieval music in multiple languages.

Her study of flamenco dance began at the age of eight, and she has been immersed in the world of flamenco ever since. In 2007 she began studying flamenco singing and realized it was the outlet she had been searching for all of her life. After graduating from the University of Toronto she moved to Seville, Spain to study cante full-time. She returned to Seville in 2013 with the assistance of a Chalmers Professional Development Grant.

In 2011, Tamar founded the pan-Mediterranean folk music group Ventanas. The expression of her lifetime of culturally diverse musical experience, Ventanas weaves together upbeat Bulgarian dance tunes, Greek, Turkish and Sephardic & Arabic love songs and heart-wrenching flamenco music and dance pieces. Both Ventanas recordings have earned multiple nominations at the Canadian Folk Music Awards.

Sundar Viswanathan  
saxophones, bansuri & vocals



Sundar is an award-winning jazz and world music artist, and one of Canada's most diversely talented artists. A highly respected international musical ambassador and educator, Sundar is equally comfortable within jazz and world music as a saxophonist, flutist, bansurist, composer, and vocalist. His work on standard compositions and original material has been heard on stages from Tokyo's Shinjuku Pit to the Netherlands' North Sea Jazz Festival; from San Francisco's Yoshi's, to The Blue Note in New York City and the Awesome Africa Festival in South Africa. He can be heard on over 20 recordings as a leader or sideman, including his own ensembles Avataar Collective and Sundar's Induswest Project.

Within and outside his studies, Sundar developed his unique musical personality over several years, performing and/or recording with jazz and world music greats that include Wynton Marsalis, Dave Douglas, Rez Abbasi, Charles Tolliver, Frank Foster, Andrew Hill, Lee Konitz, Joe Lovano, Kiran Ahluwalia, Billy Hart, GURU, Yair Dalal, Kenny Werner, Don Thompson, Dave Holland, Kenny Wheeler, Vijay Iyer, Marcus Roberts, Chris Potter, John Hicks, Marcus Belgrave, Jim McNeely, Ensemble Uniqua and many others. Within the academic world, Sundar's teachers/mentors have included Joe Lovano, George Garzone, Cecil McBee, John McNeil, Phil Woods, Janet Lawson, Frank Foster, Barry Harris, David Baker, Pat LaBarbera and others. Sundar lived and gigged in New York for several years as he completed a PhD at New York University in jazz, classical and world music performance and composition. Sundar is currently an Associate Professor of Jazz performance at York University in Toronto.

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**Rakesh Tewari**  
drums & percussion



Rakesh is widely sought after for his strong groove and sensitive musicality. With deep and diverse musical roots, Rakesh records and performs within a multitude of musical genres & settings and has been playing professionally in Canada and abroad for almost three decades.

Rakesh has studied drums set, frame drum, & tabla with highly regarded music masters from a variety of musical traditions. Some of his diverse collaborations include work with Madagascar Slim; Digging Roots; Kinnie Starr; Alejandra Ribera; Luanda Jones; Aviva Chernick & Maryam Hassan Tollar; Treasa Lavasseur; Harry Manx; Cultural Icon; Asani; Tanya Tagaq; Plex; Ndidu Onukwulu; d'bi young; LAL; African Guitar Summit; The Toronto Tabla Ensemble & M-Do; Donald Quan; Ian de Souza; Daniela Nardi; Gary Kiyoshi Nagata; Shelly Berger; Rick Lazar & Samba Squad; Mel M'Rabet; Rita DiGhent; Andrea Koziol; Dave Clark's Woodchoppers; and Gord Downie & Coke Machine Glow.

## SPECIAL GUESTS ON UNTIL WHEN

**Shawn Rompre**  
electronics & effects



**Joel Visentin**  
keyboards



**David Wall**  
vocalist



**Ed Hanley**  
tabla



**Aviva Chernick**  
vocalist