



Photos by GREGORY SHAVER *Journal Times*

Paul Singh performs with Funkadesi, a world music ensemble, at the Chicago performance club HotHouse. He is also an ophthalmologist at the Eye Centers of Racine and Kenosha.

The Doctor is On

Ophthalmologist/musician Paul Singh does his best for his patients and his audience

BY LEE B. ROBERTS
Journal Times

The photographer and I arrived at the HotHouse at 10 p.m. We went to the Chicago performance club to hear a group called Funkadesi, a 10-piece world music ensemble that integrates East Indian music with reggae, funk and Afro-Caribbean grooves. They were performing a tsunami-relief benefit concert that night and were due to go on at 10:30 p.m.

When the man taking our tickets asked us why we came all the way from Racine to cover this band, I told him that the keyboard player is an eye doctor in our town.

"Well, I think you are going to see a different side of him tonight!" he said.

He was right.

Here in Racine, people are used to seeing Dr. Inder Paul Singh, an ophthalmologist, in a lab coat and tie with medical charts and instruments in hand. At the Hot House, however, it was Singh's musical side that shone as he played, sang and led the audience through some dance moves. That side of the 32-year-old Singh may surprise some of his patients at first. Yet it was music that helped Singh be able to practice medicine today, he said.

"My music gave me a positive outlet from my studies while in medical school," he said. "It gave me a chance to channel my energy in another way."

Singh, who was born and raised in Racine, joined his father, Dr. Kanwar Singh, at the Eye Centers of Racine and Kenosha in September. After graduating from The Prairie School in 1990, he attended Washington University in St. Louis and the Chicago Medical School. He did his ophthalmology residency at Cook County Hospital and then completed a fellowship at Duke University, where he studied glaucoma, his



People dance to the music of Funkadesi at HotHouse in Chicago.

subspecialty.

The younger Singh says he followed in his parents' medical footsteps (his mother, Satnam, is a physician in family practice) by choice, rather than by their prompting. They told him he could do anything he wanted, and he chose to study medicine because of the opportunities it provides to help others.

"I enjoy being with people and talking with people. And, as an ophthalmologist, there is so much you can do to help patients," Singh said.

Ophthalmology bridges the gap between primary care and subspecialties, he explained.

"You do general eye exams, but you also do surgical procedures for things like cataracts and

glaucoma. I like being able to help people improve or restore their quality of life."

Singh said he hopes his music also has a similar effect.

"Whether I'm on stage or performing surgery, my goal is the same — to help people live a better life."

Singh's musical interests were also inspired by his parents. Kanwar Singh played in a band while in medical school in India, his son said. And Paul Singh has fond memories of growing up in a house filled with music.

"When we heard the Beatles and Elvis playing on Saturday morning, we knew it was time to get busy cleaning up the house," he said.

At The Prairie School, he learned to play guitar and keyboards and took part in school musicals. In college he began experimenting with writing music.

"I have loved music all along," he said. "And I love the whole creative process — the chance to actually make the music, as well as play it."

He joined Funkadesi about seven years ago, after a friend took him to hear the group play its first concert in Evanston, Ill. Singh said he fell in love not only with the music, but the diversity of the band, which includes musicians with Jamaican, Indian, Puerto Rican and African-American heritage, as well as a variety of social and economic backgrounds.

"Afterward, I went up to them and told them if they ever needed a keyboard player to give me a call. I figured I'd never hear from them. But that weekend, Rahul Sharma (the bass player) called

► More on SINGH, Page 2C

2C *The Journal Times* Saturday, February 5, 2005

SINGH / Ophthalmologist

From Page 1C

me and invited me to their next rehearsal to try out. And the rest, as they say, is history."

Along with his medicine and music, Singh manages to find time to be a new father. He and his wife, Umang, are the parents of 4-month-old Niharika, whose name means "unlimited possibilities." They currently live in Lake Forest, Ill., but are planning to move to the Racine/Kenosha area in the next

few years.

Meanwhile, Singh will continue to commute to his office at the Eye Center during the week, and play with Funkadesi throughout the Chicago area. The group, which has also performed in New York, San Francisco, Denver and Toronto, will play at Chicago's Hope Fest, a benefit for the homeless, on Feb. 12. For more information, visit the Web at <http://www.funkadesi.com> and <http://hothouse.net>