



# THE ST. OLAF COLLEGE SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD 2024

TUESDAY / APRIL 16 / 7:30 P.M.  
BUNTROCK COMMONS BALLROOMS / *Reception to follow*

## THE ST. OLAF SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD

In alignment with St. Olaf College's efforts toward diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism, the Faculty Life Committee announces the first annual Social Justice Award (SJA) for faculty. This award recognizes the hard work of faculty members in bringing needed change to the College and demonstrates St. Olaf's commitment to developing a more inclusive environment that will better foster a sense of belonging in our campus community.



**Creating Community through Sound: An Invitation  
to Pursue Social Justice Work Here and Now**

**REHANNA KESHGI**

Assistant Professor of Music - Ethnomusicology; Gamelan

## REHANNA KHESHGI

Assistant Professor of Music - Ethnomusicology; Gamelan

Born in Chicago with Indian Muslim and Jewish-American paternal grandparents and a long line of Swiss-German Mennonites on her mother's side, Rehanna Kleshgi explored music as a means of connection between her diverse roots from an early age. With her parents' encouragement and a long list of close mentors, Rehanna studied piano, art song, opera, musical theater, and Hindustani classical singing, before arriving at her disciplinary home, ethnomusicology.

Kleshgi followed her mother, cousins, and other extended family members to Goshen College where she intended to double major in Music and Social Work. Trips to El Salvador with her high school church youth group had opened her eyes to mutually beneficial methods of engagement that push back against a unidirectional charity mindset. She observed how the organizers consulted with local village leaders to pursue community development on their terms, sparking Kleshgi's interest in grassroots organizing and community work. While Kleshgi ultimately decided to focus on music performance, the experiences in the social work program as well as studying abroad in Cote D'Ivoire deeply informed her approach to understanding songs as vehicles of history, identity, and community building.

After graduating from Goshen, Kleshgi traveled to India on a Fulbright scholarship to pursue a performance-based research project on Hindustani classical music, and met her extended relatives for the first time. During that year she was invited to perform a collaborative show at the opening of a cafe in New Delhi and became good friends with the other musician, a singer from the northeastern Indian state of Assam called Angaraag "Papon" Mahanta. This musical friendship started Kleshgi down a path of performance and research that culminated in a MMus from SOAS, University of London, a PhD in Ethnomusicology from the University of Chicago, and a series of publications exploring performances of gender and sexuality through Bihu, the springtime Assamese New Year's festival. In 2015, as Kleshgi completed ethnographic fieldwork in Assam, she joined Papon as co-vocalist for a two-month Bihu Festival tour and met the love of her life, Jeenti Dutta, who was lead guitarist of Papon's band. Kleshgi and Dutta were married in Assam during Kleshgi's second Fulbright grant period as a postdoctoral scholar in 2017, before Kleshgi joined St. Olaf as the first tenure track Ethnomusicologist.

