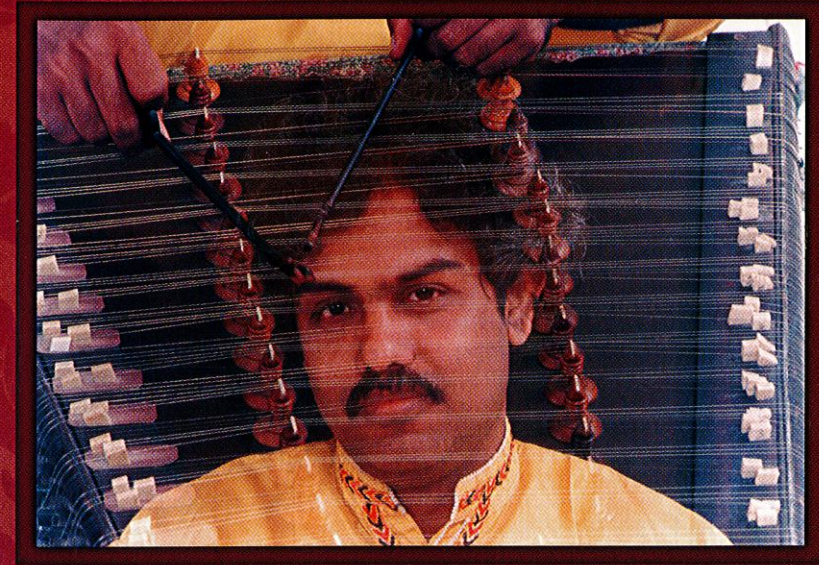


SARGAM

santur, shenai & tabla



Tarun Bhattacharya

THE MUSIC

1. Rag Ahir Bhairav (17:19)

Ahir Bhairav is a very popular *raga*, traditionally rendered “when the first red streaks of dawn inflame the eastern sky.” The parent *rag*, Bhairav, is the most important of the early morning ragas, and it has many related ragas in its family. The Ahir element of this piece is a folk melody derived originally from a pastoral air of the Ahirs, a cowherd caste of the Hindus in North India. The scale for pure Bhairav is S r G m P d N S. In Ahir Bhairav, the lower notes of Bhairav are retained, but in the upper register, the pitches are quite different. The notes of Ahir Bhairav are: Sa re Ga ma Pa Dha ni Sa, with the dha and the ni differing.

The recording opens with a short *alap* (an unaccompanied non-rhythmic introduction) in which the main melodic features of the rag are presented by both instruments. This is quickly followed by a fixed theme in a rhythmic cycle of *medium ektal*, a twelve-beat rhythm cycle. Here the theme itself takes two cycles of the tala to complete, and has a wonderful lilt of rhythmic threes to it. This theme returns again and again as the refrain from which the two soloists anchor their variations. When the second theme is introduced, the rhythmic feeling changes abruptly to fours, and the mood becomes more excited. The tala is *medium tintal*, a very common rhythmic structure of sixteen beats. The soloists trade *tans*, or fast melodic runs. In the latter stages of one tan, Tarun trades short melodic sequences with Daya, and the exchange takes on a traditional feeling of one of Allauddin Khan’s “question and answer” styles. The tempo accelerates, and the soloists dazzle with their speed and grace before ending the piece with a *tihai*, or three-part finale.

2. Dhun–Rag Khammaj (8:14)

The second piece is a *dhun*, or folk-melody, in the scale of Rag Khammaj (a scale which can use both forms of the seventh degree). Because it follows certain contours of rag Khammaj while ignoring others, it can be said to be in Misra (mixed) Khammaj. The soloists use many borrowed tones in their playing of variations, which

is one of the charms of this style. The lilt of the drums has the characteristic ambiguity of being in both fast and slow six beats at the same time (*dadra tal*) - the phrasing of the melody is slow, but the beat pattern is fast. The players fade the theme at the end.

3. Rag Bachaspati (19:37)

Ravi Shankar is well-known for his delight in and borrowings from the ragas of South India, which have a separate melodic system than those of the North. Raga Bachaspati (Vachaspati, another name for Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods) is a raga of South Indian origin which Ravi Shankar has incorporated into his own repertoire, and has passed on to these two disciples. The scale is tonally unusual which accounts for the unique “color” of this rag: S R G M P D n S.

The fixed composition is in *medium fast tintal* (sixteen beats). The soloists trade short variations, and play a pre-composed high part (*antara*) together. After a few tans are traded back and forth, they engage in a question-and-answer section which telescopes back to the theme with phrases which decrease in length. The tempo accelerates. Daya plays an exciting tan with repeated notes (pa) as its basis, and Tarun answers with a staccato section in which he dampens the strings as he plays them. This leads into a question-answer section with tabla which the shenai shadows at its close. The musicians again increase the tempo, and end with a pre-composed cadence in three parts (*tihai*), played in unison.

4. Dhun–Sindhi Bhairavi (6:35)

The final selection is another dhun, this time in the raga Sindhi Bhairavi, rendered in the six-beat cycle, *dadra tal*. It is traditional to end a program with this rag, since the richness of the emotional content is considered too full to be followed with anything else. Many borrowed tones are used in playing this scale, which is the same as the Phrygian mode of Western music: S r g m P d n S

As in the earlier dhun on this recording, the musicians play in an unhurried, tranquil style, without the mathematics and pyrotechnics of the classical forms.

— George Ruckert, MIT

THE SHENAI AND THE SANTUR

A mere fifty years ago, this recording would not have been possible. The instruments were available, and there was a high level of virtuosity among musicians, but the skills necessary to play these instruments in the styles presented on this recording were generally unknown. For centuries the shenai and santur were considered suitable only for folk music, and the technique and understanding necessary to render the classical music of raga and tala would have been beyond the reach of most. In addition, the combination of these two instruments in duet would have been practically inconceivable in traditional music settings.

Double reed instruments have been heard all over the world for thousands of years. The shenai (or shahnai) of North India is a very old sound on the subcontinent, as is its cousin, the nagaswaram of the South. The loud auspicious voice of these wind instruments has been heard in many festive and solemn ensembles, from neighborhood temples to the royal courts of the mighty emperors. Today

the sound of the shenai is essential to consecrate all the major pujas, or religious festivals, as well as playing a key role in wedding processions and parties, where it is often blared from street-corners through sound systems.

As a classical instrument, played much more delicately with careful nuances and ornaments, it has now become highly respected. The renowned maestro, Bismillah Khan of Benares, proved that the shenai, with all its awesome power, can also be played with great refinement. It was he who showed in concerts and recordings that the shenai could successfully articulate the subtle contours of ragas and talas (melodies and rhythms), and fluidly adapt to the difficult classical vocal and instrumental styles. Many younger players, such as Daya Shankar, have followed his lead.

The hammered dulcimer is an instrument also found today throughout most of the world.

It probably originated in Africa, but in the Middle East, it evolved into the instrument we are familiar with today. Modern instruments of this type are the hammered santir of the Persian cultures, and the plucked qanun of the Middle East. In the Far East, its popular cousins are known as yang chin (China) and yangum (Korea).

The santur thus descended from ancient trade routes into India from Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the Punjab. Scholars point out that similar zithers are described in very old Indian treatises as Kattyayana or Shatatantri vinas - lutes having one hundred strings - but it is difficult to trace the threads in the genealogy from those ancient times.

Today the instrument is found throughout India, especially in the Northwest, and up until

modern times has been associated with folk music. Recent modern virtuosos such as Shivkumar Sharma and Tarun Bhattacharya have received

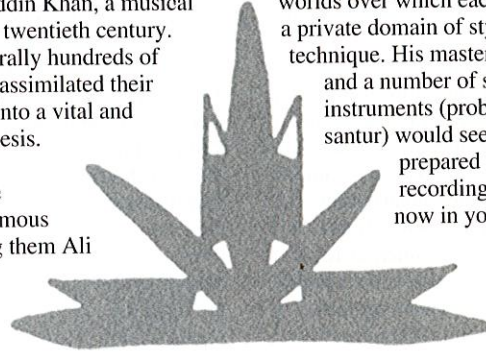
extensive training in the classical traditions, and have now elevated this instrument to a new status.

The pairing of these two instruments seems very natural on this recording. One might conclude that their roots in folk music would yoke them naturally, yet their playing traditions are absolutely different. The shenai is loud and is played outdoors, whereas the santur has a soft, acoustic sound suitable for indoors. The shenai plays long extended tones; the santur's quiet resonance disappears quickly after each strike of the hammer. A shenai player must work very hard with his mouth and fingers to play quick melodic runs with clear articulation, whereas the santur player can perform intricately-figured octaves with ease. The santur's pitches are fixed after being re-tuned for each raga, creating step-like divisions between the notes; the shenai player can smoothly glide from note-to-note, touching on subtle microtones.

When these two young masters play together, the music "unfolds" with dramatic synchronicity. When one player develops the raga in the idiomatic



style of his instrument, it does not detract from the other's concentration. The meeting ground of these two young musicians is not so much in their instruments as in their understanding of the classical traditions, refined under the tutelage of their teacher (guru), the illustrious sitarist, Ravi Shankar. It is significant that Ravi Shankar was a student of Allauddin Khan, a musical titan of the early twentieth century. Khan played literally hundreds of instruments and assimilated their disparate styles into a vital and innovative synthesis. This new style characterizes the playing of his famous disciples, among them Ali



Credits:

Recordings produced by Badal Roy and Bob Haddad. Recorded in Calcutta, India, in 1993. Digital editing and mastering by Bob Haddad and Randy Friel in Chapel Hill, NC. Graphic design by Williamson-Green Designs. Art Director: Martha Lorantos. Photos of Tarun Bhattacharya by Studio Orient, Calcutta. Other photos courtesy of the musicians. Liner notes by George Ruckert. Special thanks to Badal, Geeta and Bapi Roy Chowdhury. Printed in Canada.

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Akbar Khan, Ravi Shankar, Annapurna-devi, Nikhil Banerjee, and Pannallal Ghosh - musicians who have spread the banner of Indian music all over the globe as well as expanded its palate in the eclectic style of their teacher. In his own era, Allauddin Khan was unique, for no other musician in memory had ever melded the individual musical worlds over which each instrument held a private domain of style and technique. His mastery of the shenai and a number of stringed instruments (probably even the santur) would seem to have prepared the way for a recording such as the one now in your hands.

THE ARTISTS

Tarun Bhattacharya - santur
Daya Shankar - shenai
Shashank Bakshi - tabla
Mou Bhattacharya - tamboura

Tarun Bhattacharya is one of India's finest performers on the santur. As a child he began training on the instrument with his father, Sri Robi Bhattacharya, and also with Sri Dulal Roy. Since 1982, Tarun has been under the tutelage of the renowned sitar maestro Ravi Shankar.

Tarun regularly performs in concert and at music festivals in Europe, North America, the Far East and, of course, throughout India. He is a regular performer on All India Radio, and has recorded with Indian, European and American record labels.



Daya Shankar is a distinguished performer on the shenai. He received initial training on the instrument at a very early age from his father, Pandit Anantalal. He later studied with Pandit Ravi Shankar.

Daya Shankar is a regular performer on All India Radio and Indian television, and is well respected by music professionals and the general listening public.

Shashank Bakshi (tabla) was born into a musical family and studied tabla at an early age with the late Pandit Shanta Prasad. He has accompanied many well known artists in India and abroad, appears on Indian radio and TV, and has made several commercial recordings.

Mou Bhattacharya performs on tamboura for this recording.

Alain SWIETLIK
Fév. 96 - Éd..