

SARANGI

Giving voice to the soul



As the curtain rises for a concert performance in the Indian classical music tradition, seasoned listeners in the audience are likely to pass a quick glance towards the rear end of the raised platform, where the singer's accompanists will be seated. If that far corner of the stage, a little way from the central mike, is occupied by an accompanying musician holding a *sarangi*, then the artist is considered to be of proven ability. Indeed the hallmark of a good concert is the presence of the sarangi player as the chief accompanist. His bowed sounds imitate the passages of the singer almost simultaneously and as tunefully as possible, so that singer and player merge their sounds into a melodious unison. In between intervals in the singing, the sarangi player also pitches in with solo stretches of music, repeating the passages that the singer has been

performing, and which he has been performing, and which he has been committing to memory during the course of the performance on stage. At other times, when the singer is giving a full throated rendition of an intricate passage, the sarangi player knows how to downplay his sounds and remain an understated backdrop, while the singer holds audiences mesmerized.

Such dexterous calculation of sounds is what has given the *sarangi* its name. Translated literally, the word *sarangi* means the sounds of a hundred colours. With an amazing palette of musical tones the instrument can be coaxed to produce a hundred different emotional nuances, and while the vocalist voices the phrases of a lyric, the sarangi is believed to create just the same effect, with the help of its five main strings. A bowed cordophonic instrument, the sarangi has a short truncated body usually made of hardwood like *tun*, better known as Indian cedar. The sound board of the instrument is covered with a taut stretch of goatskin and the three main strings are made of animal gut. They are passed through a bridge made of ivory or bone and shaped like the back of a mini elephant. The bowing is carried on with a help of a solid rosewood or ebony bow that feels heavier than the bow of a violin, giving the effect of solidity and grandeur by its very make up.



At first glance the instrument appears to proffer a tempting invitation to the viewer to take up the bow and simply draw out a long and straight note. But there lies the catch. The sound that such amateurish excitement will emit will be a guttural groan instead of a musical note. This is because along with the bowing, the fretless finger board of the main body requires to be stopped with the cuticles of the left hand at definite points, to emit the notes of the musical scale. The rubbing of the cuticle and the drawing of the bow magically alerts the sympathetic strings at its side and a deep toned musical aura is created through this mechanism. When a master musician draws out the notes in this fashion, his keen ears keep a look out for the slightest sound variations and he fine tunes his instrument with the help of adjustments made to the bridge placing.

Perhaps it is this deceptive simplicity which gave the instrument such a boost of popularity during the 19th century, a century which is justifiably rated as the golden period of the Indian Renaissance. Royal patronage poured in bounteously as sarangi players were engaged to accompany dancing troupes and the professional songstresses at the courts of kings and landed gentry. As the evening turned to dusk, and the chandeliered halls flickered with the light from a hundred candles and earthenware lamps, the sarangi players donned silken kurtas, sprinkled ittar essence on their wrists, donned elaborate sliver and gold trimmed turbans on their heads and took their places on the side of the stage, within hearing reach of the singer or dancer. Then as the singer sang out the pangs of unrequited love, the mournful sounds of tragedy, the liveliness of spring in the air or just the thrill of a

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Cultural Calendar for April

- April 4** Sargam – An introduction to Hindustani classical music, a 5 part lecture series in English – 4th lecture
by renowned vocalist and musician Dr. Dayaratna Ranatunga
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.
- April 5** Sargam – An introduction to Hindustani classical music, a 5 part lecture series in English – 5th lecture
by renowned vocalist and musician Dr. Dayaratna Ranatunga
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.
- April 10** Film: Khel (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Yousuf Khan
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- April 17** Film: Indian
Language: Tamil
Directed by: Shankar
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- April 21** Film: Filhaal
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Meghna Gulzar
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- April 25** Carnatic flute recital
by Mr. Nikhil Narayan, disciple of Carnatic flute maestro Sangeetha Kalanidhi Padmashri Dr. N. Ramani
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- April 28** Hindustani vocal music recital
Mr. R.M.P.Chandika, Visiting lecturer, University of the Visual and Performing Arts

(Admission to all programmes is free on first come first served basis)

fast rhythm, the sarangi countered each of these flashes of feeling though a dexterous handling of its gut and brass strings. Before long, court painters began to preserve the image of the sarangi player for posterity in a corner of their miniature paintings and no live performance or artistic depiction of music was completed without this indubitable presence.

But this indispensable status was not to live on beyond the century. The Victorian era frowned upon the instrument, for associative reasons. As moral attitudes became straitlaced and nautch girls and professional songstresses were considered morally improper, the sarangi which was their principal accompaniment began to decline. The tradition of bowing on the sarangi began to feel the strain of a restricted patronage. Technical advancement coupled with the arrival of the harmonium as an accompanying instrument with vocal recitals slowly edged out the sarangi into a rarity. The instrument had few learners among the younger generations subsequently. The technique of bowing, with the palm held facing outward, being difficult to master, had been taught to the younger sons and nephews in musician families. Sarangi players, now reduced to near penury, hesitated to introduce their sons to their age old art, thereby silencing the sounds to a mere muffle in several sarangi households.

At the same time, the concert variety of the sarangi had affloresced into a number of folk forms and these nurtured and embellished folk singing troupes with gusto.

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ICC

April 2006



Paresh Maity, Carnival, Water colour on paper, 50x76cms. 2000

Indian Cultural Centre

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In Retrospect

8th February

Gok Kalawa – The art of using tender coconut leaves for decoration
A demonstration by Mr. A.Chandradasa



Mr. A.Chandradasa gave a demonstration of the art of using tender coconut leaves at the Centre on 8th February which lasted for half an hour. He explained in detail how various types of decorations can be created using tender coconut leaves and also how without using any artificial colours but by using only different shades of leaves to create different images.

14th February

Launch of the book “New compositions for North Indian classical music”
written by Mr. Anil Mihiripenne



Kalabhooshanam Anil Mihiripenne, launched his latest book entitled “New instrumental compositions for North Indian classical music” under the aegis of India-Sri Lanka Foundation at the Centre. The book launch commenced with speeches in Sinhala and in English about the author and the book by Dr. Praneeth Abeysundara & Ms. Rosemary Rajapakse. The

Chief Guest Mr. A.Manickam, Deputy High Commissioner also addressed the gathering. Several other dignitaries also addressed the gathering. Book launch was followed by instrumental recitals by the students of Mr.Anil Mihiripenne & by himself. The book launch concluded with a reception.

22nd February

Violin recital by Ruwin Rangeeth Dias



Mr. Ruwin Rangeeth Dias, Assistant lecturer at the Kelaniya University along with his friends Mr. Chandralal Amarakoon on tabla & Mr. Sujith Priyadarshana on sarod presented an evening of captivating violin recital at the Centre on 22nd February. Ruwin

obtained his M.Music degree at the Banaras Hindu University & Sangeet Nipun at the Bhathkhanda Sangeet Vidyapith, Lucknow, India.

Ruwin opened the programme with raag “Darbari Khanada” in Vilambit , Madhya Ek taal and Druth Theen taal continued with raag “Bhairagi Bhairav” set to Rupak taal and concluded with a duet on violin and sarod, a bhajan on raag “Khamaj”.The performance was greatly appreciated by the audience gathered at the Centre comprised of students, musicians and music lovers.

24th February

Bharatha Natyam recital by Thivya Sivanesan



Ms. Thivya Sivanesan, an upcoming and talented Bharatha Natyam dancer presented a Bharatha Natyam recital at the Centre on 24th February. Thivya received her training in Bharatha Natyam under C.V.Chandrashekar in India.

The first performance for the evening was “Pushpanjali” and invocatory item and continued with “Shanmuga Kawthuvam, “Varnam”, “Keerthanam” dance for a song in praise of Lord Nadarajah , God of dancing, “Padam”, “Maadu Meikum Kanna”, “Thillana” and concluded with “Mangalam”. The performance was greatly appreciated.

LIBRARY

Recent Library Accessions

Jacob and Dulce: Sketches from Indo-Portugese Life

Costa da F. J.
New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2004, 196p.
002438
F JAC

Economic Reform and Global Change

Patel I.G.
New Delhi: MacMillan India Ltd, 1998, 328p.
002436
330.1 PAT

Education for Creative Living:

Ideas and proposals of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi
Bethel D.M. ed.
New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2001, 260p.
002437
970.1 EDU

Legacy Of The Buddha

Sharma S.
Mumbai: Eshwar, 2001, 309p.
002443
294.3 SHA

Lionsong: Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict

Bandara S.M.
Colombo: Author,2002, 735p.
002444
323.11 MAD

Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century

Garver J.W.
New Delhi: OUP, 2001, 447p.
002439
327 PRO

Three Statesmen Gokhale, Gandhi and Nehru

Nanda B.R.
New Delhi: OUP, 2004, 312p.
002442
923 THR

The Mulk Raj Anand Omnibus

Cowasjee S.
New Delhi: Penguin Group, 2004, 698p.
002440
F ANA

The Future of India: Politics Economics and Governance

Jalan B.
New Delhi: Penguin Group, 2005, 212p.
002441
080 FUT

Films in April

Khel (with English subtitles)

Language: Hindi
Directed by: Yousuf Khan
Starring : Celina Jaitaly, Sunny Deol, Sunil Shetty & Ajay Jadeja

Indian (with English subtitles)

Language: Taiml
Directed by: Shankar
Starring : Kamalhasan, Manisha Koirala, Urmila Suganya, Gaoundmani & Senthil

Filhaal

Language: Hindi
Directed by: Meghna Gulzar
Starring : Raj Aryan, Shushmita Sen & Tabbu



NEW COURSES

HINDUSTANI VOCAL MUSIC

Course begins	:	1 st April 2006
Class day	:	Tuesday & Friday
Age limit	:	Over 10 years
Course fee	:	Registration fee Rs.250/=
		Monthly fee Rs.300/=
Registration	:	Commenced from 1 st March 2006

CARNATIC VOCAL MUSIC

Course begins	:	1 st March 2006
Class day	:	Saturday
Age limit	:	Over 6 years
Course fee	:	Registration fee Rs.250/=
		Monthly fee Rs.300/=
Registration	:	Commenced from 1 st February 2006

Vacancies exist

TABLA

Course begins	:	1 st March 2006
Class day	:	Saturday
Age limit	:	Over 7 years
Course fee	:	Registration fee Rs.250/=
		Monthly fee Rs.300/=
Registration	:	Commenced from 1 st March 2006

Vacancies exist

SARANGI.. Contd.

Regional varieties like the Sindhi sarangi and the Gujarat sarangi embellished the singing of ditties in the deserts of Rajasthan. The Pulluvans of Kerala used an indigenous modification a part of their rituals related to snake catching. In the North eastern state of Manipur, the pena was created with a bamboo fingerboard and a bunch of hair for the bow strings. The Ravanahatha became a stylish instrument at village sing-songs during festivals in Gujarat...

Despite all this bifurcation and demarcation, the sarangi refused to be muted. The versatility of this instrument suddenly came to light when the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi, was no more. As the national radio, the All India Radio, made the tragic announcement nationwide, listeners were calmed and composed to brace the dire facts with the plaintive notes of the sarangi being played in the background. The somber mood seemed to gel with the gentle notes drawn from the sarangi and the instrument was given a new lease of life as a very Indian way of giving voice to one's innermost feelings. Thereafter, the sarangi has been given a fresh lease of life. The old, musty goatskins are once again stretched taut; the masters are back at the concert platform and the reach of this versatile accompanist is once again an unmistakable second coming of sarangi sounds.

Subhra Majumdar, *India Perspectives*