

## Ustad Bismillah Khan Shehnai Maestro (1916 - 2006)



Certain instruments become indelibly linked with particular performers. In the Hindustani realm, the santoor is closely associated with Shivkumar Sharma and the rudra vina with Zia Mohiuddin Khan, but historically, perhaps the closest and most intimate association has been with Bismillah Khan and the shehnai. The shehnai is perhaps the most popular of all instruments in Indian music because it sounds extremely sweet. This small instrument, hardly two feet long, produces mesmerizing notes that hypnotize listeners.

The spring breeze of 1916, the holy waters of the Ganges, the wee hours of March 21 waited with open arms, to welcome another member to the house of Rasool Bux Khan, the *shehnai-nawaz* of the King's court in Bhojpur, Dumraon of Bihar – Bismillah Khan. The father of the child, Paigambar Bux and the elder Rasool Bux Khan were getting ready to go to the Prince's palace to play the morning tunes. They had to wait to welcome the newborn. An elated Rasool Bux Khan, on hearing the news, remembered God and uttered "Bismillah". Thus the newborn was named Bismillah Khan. Although, the child's parents called him Qamruddin to rhyme with their first born, Shamshuddin.

At the age of three, Bismillah went to his maternal uncle's house in Benaras to celebrate Eid. His uncles were traditional shehnai players like his father and forefathers. Bismillah watched his *Chhote Mamu* (maternal uncle) Ali Bux Khan play the shehnai and would nod to his tunes. Mamu was astonished to see this innate musical sense in Bismillah and knew that here was another great shehnai player in the making.

Bismillah grew up at his uncle's place and became more and more fond of the shehnai. The whole house was immersed in the tune and rhythm of music. His elder maternal uncle Vilayat Hussain also played the shehnai. Ali Bux, later became his teacher.

At the age of 14, Bismillah accompanied his Ustad to the Allahabad Music Conference. This was his first opportunity to reproduce the composition of 'bandash' and his skill was greatly appreciated. At the end of his recital, the great Ustad Faiyaz Khan patted the young boy's back and said, "Work hard and you shall make it". With the opening of the All India Radio in Lucknow in 1938 came Bismillah's big break. He soon became an often-heard Shehnai player on radio.

When India gained Independence on August 15, 1947, Bismillah became the first Indian to greet the nation with his shehnai. He played to an audience, which included Mahatma Gandhi and Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, who later gave his famous 'Tryst with Destiny' speech. His recital had almost become a cultural part of the Independence Day Celebrations telecast on Doordarshan every year on August 15th. After the Prime Minister's speech from Lal Qila (Red Fort) in Old Delhi, Doordarshan would broadcast live performance by the Shehnai maestro. And this tradition had been going on since the days of Pandit Nehru.

*Contd.*

## Cultural Calendar for September

- September 8** Film: Yaadein  
Language: Hindi  
Directed by: Subhash Ghai  
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- September 12** Film: Aashiq  
Language: Hindi  
Directed by: Indra Kumar  
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- September 14** Bharatha Natyam Recital by the students of the Indian Cultural Centre trained by Ms. Subashini Pathmanathan  
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- September 15 – 20** Performances by Kathak troupe from Kathak Kendra, New Delhi, sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi  
15th – 17th – Performances at the Salgado Auditorium, Anuradhapura  
19th - Performance at the Kularatne Hall, Ananda College, Colombo
- (For further details please contact the Indian Cultural Centre on tel no. 2500014)
- September 20** Kathak dance recital by Kathak troupe from Kathak Kendra, New Delhi  
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30p.m.
- September 22** Folk dances of India and creative dances by Ms. Anjali Mishra  
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30p.m.
- September 25** Lecture by Shri Shyam Benegal, noted film-maker from India
- (For further details please contact the Indian Cultural Centre on tel no. 2500014)
- September 27** Hindustani vocal music recital by Pt.Sarathi Chatterjee from India  
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30p.m.

(Admission to all programmes is free on first come first served basis except the shows from 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>)

He has played in Afghanistan, Europe, Iran, Iraq, Canada, West Africa, USA, USSR, Japan, Hong Kong and almost every capital city across the world. Wherever he has gone, he has received thundering applause from his inspired and touched audiences.

Ustad Khan has honorary doctorates from the Banaras Hindu University and Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. He was the third classical musician to be awarded the Bharat Ratna (in 2001), the highest civilian honour in India. He also had the distinction of being one of the few people to be awarded all the top four civilian awards.

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ICCR

September 2006



Dance Pose-Raja Ravi Varma

## Indian Cultural Centre

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## In Retrospect .....

7<sup>th</sup> July

**Kathak dance & Vocal music recital  
by Ms. Niroshini Sherene Perera &  
Mr. Asith Attapattu**



Ms. Niroshini Sherene Perera & Mr. Asith Attapattu, students of Bhatkhande Music Institute deemed University, Lucknow presented a Kathak dance and Hindustani vocal music recital at the Centre on 7<sup>th</sup> July. The evening commenced with the vocal music recital by Mr. Asith in which he sang rag



'Puriya Dhanasrhi' – an evening raga in 'Vilambit Ek taal' and Madhyalaya Teen taal and continued with 'Tappa' in rag 'Yaman and concluded with a short 'Thumri'. Niroshini commenced her performance by explaining various parts of Kathak dance along with tabla and concluded with a classical performance. The evening was very well appreciated by the audience.

21<sup>st</sup> July

**Carnatic flute recital  
by Mr. Nikhil Narayan**



Mr. Nikhil Narayan, disciple of Carnatic flute maestro Sangeeth Kalanidhi Padmashri Dr. N. Ramani presented a flute recital at the Centre. He commenced the recital with a song "Mahaganapathi" in ragam Natai and continued with "Akilandeshwari", "Mamava

Meenakshi", "Rama Ni Samanamevaru", "Krishna Nee Beganay" and concluded with a "Thillana". The performance was very well appreciated by the music lovers gathered at the Centre

28<sup>th</sup> July

**Bharatha Natyam recital  
by Ms. Suriyakala Jeevananthan along  
with Ms. Geethanjali Thurairajah, Ms.  
Lakshmi Sharma, Narmadha & Mr.  
Vijendran Veerasingham**



Ms. Suriyakala Jeevananthan along with Ms. Geethanjali Thurairajah, Ms. Lakshmi Sharma & Mr. Vijendran Veerasingham present a Bharatha Natyam recital at the Centre. The performance commenced with "Ganapathi Suthi" by Vijendran and continued with "Alarippu" by Lakshmi, "Kali Gowtham" by Geethanjali, "Varnam" by

Suriyakala, "Keerthanam" by Narmadha, "Patham" by Geethanjali, "Ashtapathi" by Lakshmi, "Jawali" by Suriyakala, "Keerthanam" by Vijendran and concluded with "Thillana" by all the dancers.

## LIBRARY Recent Library Accessions

### In the minds of the Maestros

Kumar, Surendra  
Nairobi : Camerapix Publishers,2006  
151p.  
002511700.54  
KUM

### Oriental Scenery : two hundred years Of India's artistic and architectural Heritage

New Delhi : Timeless Books,1998  
224p.  
002516  
722.54  
ORI

### Inherited Spaces : Inhabited Places [World Heritage sites in India]

New Delhi : MEA,2005  
298p.  
002512  
954.01  
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### India : Moods and Memories

New Delhi : Living Media,2006  
381p.  
002514  
954.4  
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### Hindu : Joy of Life

Banerjee, U.K  
New Delhi : Niyogi,2006  
183p.  
002520  
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### India : A Dynamic Democracy

New Delhi : MEA,2006  
80p.  
002513  
954  
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### India : Timeless Splendour

New Delhi : Media Transasia,2006  
191p.  
002511  
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### Tirumala Tirupati : Legends and beyond...

Reddy, T Sarita  
Hyderabad : Visual Quest,2006  
193p.  
002519  
398.2  
RED

## NEW COURSES

### BHARATHA NATYAM

Course commenced : 1<sup>st</sup> June 2006  
Class days : Tuesday & Friday / Wednesday & Saturday  
Age limit : Over 6 years  
Course fee Registration fee : Rs.250/= Monthly fee Rs.500/=  
Registration : Commenced from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006

### KATHAK

Course commenced : 1<sup>st</sup> June 2006  
Class days : Monday & Thursday  
Age limit : Over 6 years  
Course fee Registration fee : Rs.250/= Monthly fee Rs.500/=  
Registration : Commenced from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006

**Vacancies exist!**

## Films in September

### Yaadein

Language: Hindi  
Directed by: Subhash Ghai  
Starring : Hirthik Roshan, Kareena Kapoor,  
Jacki Sheroff



### Aashiq

Language: Hindi  
Directed by: Indra Kumar  
Starring : Bobby Deol, Karishma Kapoor,  
Rahul Dev, Anupam Kher



## Ustad Bismillah Khan . Contd.

Ustad had his brief association with movies. He played the shehnai for Dr. Rajkumar's role of Appanna in the movie Sanaadi Appanna. He acted in Jalsaghar, a movie by Satyajit Ray and provided shehnai in Goonj Uthi Shehnai. The film was a hit, one of Bismillah's composition, "Dil ka khilona hai toot gaya." turned out to be a nation wide chartbuster! Noted director Goutam Ghose directed Sange Meel Se Mulaqat, a documentary on life of Ustad himself. He also played for Hindi movie Swades for the song Ye Jo Des hai Tera and an instrumental version of the same song.

Despite his fame, Khan's lifestyle retained its old world Benares charm. His chief mode of transport was the cycle rickshaw. A man of tenderness, he believed in remaining private, and that musicians are supposed to be heard and not seen.

His concept of music was very beautiful and his vision superb. He once said, "Even if the world ends, music will still survive" and he often said, "Music has no caste".

Shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan died on August 21<sup>st</sup> 2006 at the age of 91. He is survived by five sons, three daughters and a large number of grand children . Bismillah Khan had one last dream – to perform at the India Gate. Sadly, that wish remains unfulfilled.

*"All my songs are to the devotion of Thee,  
All my tunes are the shadowy images of Thee,  
My dreams are visited by celestial fairies of music;  
In my sleep I keep fluting shehnais to welcome Thee."*

A legendary shehnai maestro, a man of tenderness, a man of few words, A pious musician, a simpleton, a down to earth human ,he is a legend. Ustad Bismillah Khan will remain remembered as one of the finest musicians in post-independent Indian Classical music.

Source: Web