

"SITAR, SURBAHAR + BEEN"  
**INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC:**  
**RUDRA VEENA (BEEN)/SURBAHAR/SITAR**  
*INDIAN MUSIC STUDY GROUP*

**Tape Program:**

1. **USTAD ASAD ALI KHAN — RUDRA VEENA (BEEN):  
RAGA ASAVARI**

Asad Ali Khan lives in Delhi, where he has become known as India's greatest living exponent of the ancient instrument called Rudra Veena or, more simply, the Been. He plays the instrument in the traditional upright posture, unlike Z.M. Dagar, who modified his instrument and holds it a little more like a sitar. Asad Ali Khan is an uncompromising performer, one who thinks nothing of sustaining an alap for two hours. His performances are rare events, and his playing is greatly admired. His playing style is known as the Khandarbani style, which refers to one of the traditional models of Dhrupad performance; he is the only performer of this style on the Rudra veena today.

Originally from Rajasthan, Asad Ali Khan was born in 1937 into a family of court musicians associated with the princely states of Alwar and Jaipur. His father, Ustad Sadiq Ali Khan, was an important artist at the court of Rampur. Since the demise of courtly patronage specialists in the Dhrupad/Dhamar vocal and instrumental styles have been forced to go outside the narrow circle of cognoscenti to develop new audiences for their music; Asad Ali Khan has concertized extensively in the West, and in 1977 was given the award of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, which formalized his position as a top-ranking artist in India.



Here he is heard in excerpts from an alap/jor/jhala sequence in the morning raga Asavari, then in a dhrupad-style composition in the same raga. The dignified air of the music is enhanced by the deep and resonant tones of his instrument; this is truly a music in which time is irrelevant! When the composition starts, the pakhawaj (played by Balakrishna Sharma) enters and rhythmic improvisation in the dhrupad style begins.

2. USTAD Z. M. DAGAR — RUDRA VEENA (BEEN):  
RAGA CHANDRA KAUNS.

Zia Moihuddin Dagar is the only beenkar (been player) in the famous Dagar family of dhrupad musicians (although his son is also a skilled musician, he has only recently begun to perform). The Dagar name itself refers to a style of Dhrupad singing, the Dagarbani style, which specializes in alap and gamak. Here he plays the rare evening raga Chandra-kauns.



This raga is a member of the "family" of melodies with the name "\_\_\_\_ kauns;" perhaps the most important being Malkauns, a profound raga of the deep night. Ustad Dagar's approach is slow and meditative; referring to his massive and ponderous music, he once commented to his students that "God has made me an elephant, not a deer!" We hear excerpts from the alap, and a gat accompanied on pakhawaj by the Bombay-based Arjun Shejwal.

Zia Moihuddin Dagar is the son of Ziauddin Khan Dagar, and the grandson of Zakiruddin Khan Dagar, who was a court musician of the princely state of Udaipur. The Dagar Brothers (both elder and younger) are the grandsons of Zakiruddin Khan Dagar's brother Allabande Khan Dagar; the family traces its musical lineage back through nineteen (!) generations. Z.M. Dagar was born in Udaipur, Rajasthan, in 1929 — he died in late 1990, having performed and taught for years in India, Europe and the United States. It is to him that many of the best contemporary students of Dhrupad owe allegiance; he was deeply devoted to the form and worked ceaselessly to increase its popularity.

3. CHANDRASHEKHAR NARINGREKAR — SURBAHAR:  
RAGA MALKAUNS

The Surbahar is a sort of double-bass version of the sitar, but it is often played in a dhrupad-derived style. Pt. Chandrashekar Naringrekar (familiarily called "Chandu," which makes it easier) is one of the best contemporary performers on this instrument — he plays in the style of his teacher, Zia Mohiuddin Dagar, and thus presents the dhrupad-oriented been performing style on this more modern instrument. Again, we hear excerpts from the alap/jor/jhala sequence, and the opening parts of a gat in the twelve-beat rhythm called chautaal, played on the pakhawaj by Arjun Shejwal. Incidentally, Naringrekar is a devoted jazz fan with a large record collection and a keen ear for subtleties of performance.

PANDIT  
CHANDRASHEKHAR  
NARINGREKAR



3 — CBS Swarashree Cassettes, No. CSN 001

4. USTAD IMDAD KHAN —  
SURBAHAR: RAGA JAUNPURI



Imdad Khan, as can be heard from the recording, is not a contemporary player. He is the grandfather of the distinguished sitarist Vilayat Khan, and of Imrat Khan, the foremost surbahar player of today. Imdad Khan was largely responsible for making the surbahar a respected instrument; some claim he invented it, but this assertion (like so many others) is

vigorously disputed. This recording of the early morning raga Jaunpuri must have been made in the 30's. Despite the extreme surface noise of the ancient disc, we still get a sense of the power and dignity of Imdad Khan's playing. In his style, vocally-derived melodic curves and bends are very prominent; this is even more the case with Imrat and Vilayat Khan.

4 — 78 Rpm Disc, privately retaped, no information available

5. **IMRAT KHAN — SURBAHAR: RAGA YAMAN**

Imrat Khan is best known as a surbahar player, although he often performs on the sitar as well. Here he presents an alap in the popular evening raga Yaman. Imrat Khan's style of playing is strongly based in vocal music, and the meends and gamaks of the khyal form can be clearly heard even on this ponderous instrument. Imrat Khan is also a good singer, and sometimes enlivens his concerts by singing the vocal form of an instrumental gat. Unlike those surbahar players who have trained in a dhrupad-based tradition, Imrat Khan will only render alap, and never presents gats or compositions with the pakhawaj. If he plays with the tabla, he will use the sitar.



5 — Harmonia Mundi lp 151-99805/06

6. **VILAYAT KHAN — SITAR & IMRAT KHAN — SURBAHAR: RAGA CHANDANI KEDAR**

7. **VILAYAT KHAN — SITAR: RAGA BAGESHREE**

Vilayat Khan's playing is described as "gayaki," or "vocal style." The influence of khyal vocal tradition can be clearly heard in his recordings, where bends, fluid phrasing, dynamic shifts and extraordinary lyricism combine to create an instantly recognizable quality. The oldest living member of a distinguished musical family, Vilayat Khan is a compelling performer with an intractable and arbitrary nature; his feuds with audiences and critics are often a source of excited gossip in India.



First we hear Vilayat in duet with Imrat, performing an unusual raga, Chandani Kedar. This is one of the few times that Imrat is heard playing surbahar with tabla. The two have a telepathic duet style; this lp, "A Night at the Taj," is very popular.

The second excerpt shows Vilayat Khan in concert. This section of jhala, recorded in Calcutta in 1984, gives us a sense of Vilayat's tremendously powerful and evocative playing; he moves the audience to gasps of amazement and delight very frequently. With a wide emotional and dynamic range, and exquisite intonation, Vilayat Khan is one of the great performers of world musical tradition.

6 — HMV lp, number unknown "A Night at the Taj"

7 — Concert, Kalamandir Hall, Calcutta, 8/24/84



8. PANDIT MANILAL NAG —  
RAGA BASANT MUKHARI

The Calcutta-based Manilal Nag learned with his father, Pandit Gokul Nag, a younger contemporary of Ustad Allaudin Khan (guru of Ravi Shankar). It is said that Gokul Nag wanted to send his son to learn with Allaudin, who praised the father's style and refused to accept him as a student. This recording of the lyrical morning raga Basant Mukhari was made relatively early in Manilal Nag's career. With clear stroking patterns of the plectrum (called *mizrab*) and a thoughtful, intelligent conception, it's immediately clear that Manilal Nag is a major player. Only recently have recordings of this widely respected but under-recorded artist been available in the US.

8 — All India Radio recording, no information available.

9. PANDIT RAVI SHANKAR —SITAR:  
RAGA SIMHENDRA MADHYAMAM



Ravi Shankar is probably the only artist mentioned anywhere on these pages not to need an introduction. The younger brother of the renowned choreographer Uday Shankar, he learned music from Ustad Allaudin Khan (father of Ali Akbar Khan). His style on the sitar is notable for its crisp and complex rhythmic approach, which uses many intricate plectrum strokes. He is a skilled composer, and his presentations of Hindustani music give a "composed" feeling, of orderly and systematic elaboration. Here he plays

raga *Simhendra Madhyamam*, originally from the music of South India (adaptation of South Indian ragas is not uncommon in Hindustani music) — first with a short *alap*, then a *gat* in the ten-beat *jhaptaal*.

9 — World-Pacific LP WPS-21438 "Three Ragas"

10. SMT. KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTY: RAGA MISRA PAHADI



Ms. Chakravarty is one of the few professional female sitarists in India; others (mostly senior to her) include Joya Biswas and Sharmistha Sen Ghosh. Chakravarty is a disciple of Ravi Shankar, and his style is evident in her approach, which is nonetheless an original one.

In addition to the standard classical repertoire, many sitarists like to perform adaptations of folk songs. These pieces, known as *dhuns*, are frequently used as closing items at concerts. The term "misra" applied to a raga, means that melodic lines from other ragas can be woven into the melodic fabric — this is a common practice in *dhuns*, *thumris* and other light classical varieties. Here Krishna Chakravarty plays a lyrical and exquisite *dhun* in the popular raga *Misra Pahadi* (named after the Pahadi hill tribespeople).

10 — Fortuna CD 17046

## 11. DEBU CHAUDHURI: RAGA DESH



### Devabrata ("Debu")

Chaudhuri is a popular and influential performer, currently based in Delhi. A disciple of the late Ustad Mushtaq Ali Khan, who played in the style of the "Jaipur Senia" tradition, Chaudhuri was born in 1937. He began learning the sitar at the age of 8, and is presently the Dean of the Music and Arts Faculty of Delhi University. His style of playing is delicate and very lyrical; there is never a harsh or jarring plectrum

stroke, and even the moments of rapid-fire virtuosity have an understated quality. One other feature of interest: sitars played by instrumentalists in the Jaipur Senia tradition have only 17 frets (other traditions have 21). This means that more of the pitches used on the instrument have to be obtained by deflecting the strings, rather than by simple fretting.

Here Debou Chaudhuri plays the tender and romantic raga Desh, accompanied by one of Delhi's finest tabla players, Shafaat Ahmed Khan. We can hear Chaudhuri's rhythmic skill as he mixes a wide variety of beat patterns along with the tabla.

11 — India Archive Music CD 1002

## 12. BUDDHADITYA MUKHERJEE: RAGA MARWA



Buddhaditya Mukherjee was born in 1955, and began learning the sitar from his father, Pt. Bimalendu Mukherjee, at the age of five. A child prodigy, he has matured very rapidly and is now one of India's finest musicians, long past the "fastest sitar in the east" phase. Although he plays somewhat in the style of the Imdad Khan tradition, his approach is very distinctive and highly recognizable. According to biographical notes, Buddhaditya spends many hours each day alternating between practicing and careful, critical listening to his own recordings — noting flaws and then correcting them. Not a singer, his concept has been profoundly shaped by vocalists, especially (so he says) the virtuoso singer Bade Ghulam Ali Khan.

This recording was made at a concert in Pune in 1986. Accompanied by Nayan Ghosh on the tabla, Buddhaditya Mukherjee plays with speed and eloquence, transcending technique in the service of a tremendous expressive concept.

12 — Private Concert, Pune India, Summer 1986

7. NIKHIL BANERJEE — SITAR: RAGA  
BHIMPALASI



Nikhil Banerjee died in 1985 after many years as a highly loved and respected artist. His playing combined a sense of vocal lyricism with rhythmic clarity and grace; many listeners feel he struck a happy medium between the instrumental and vocal conceptions of sitar performance. He favored relatively straightforward plectrum combinations, and a softer, rounder tone (in contrast to the assertive attack favored by Ravi Shankar). Banerjee came originally from Calcutta; his first lessons were with his father, then another Bengali artist, Kishar Roy Chaudhury, with sarodiya Ali Akbar Khan, and with Ali Akbar's reclusive sister, Annapurna Devi (a legendary teacher who gave up public performance when she married Ravi Shankar decades ago). His playing shows many similarities to that of Ravi Shankar, but has a gentle elegance which marks it as unique.

This recording of the afternoon raga Bhimpalasi presents excerpts from the alap, from the slow gat (in 7-beat rupak taal) and the fast gat in 16-beat teental. This CD was made from a tape recorded in Europe in 1970, with the late Kanai Dutta on tabla.

13 — Raga Records CD No. 211



A. Basic Playing Position



B. Alternate Position: Right Knee Raised



C. Main Gourd Rests on Right Foot



D. Sitar Face Perpendicular to Floor



E. Position of Right Thumb



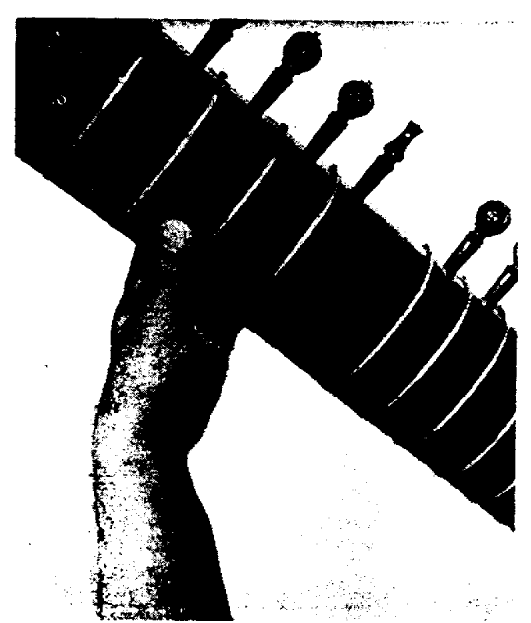
F. Right Thumb Always Stays in Position



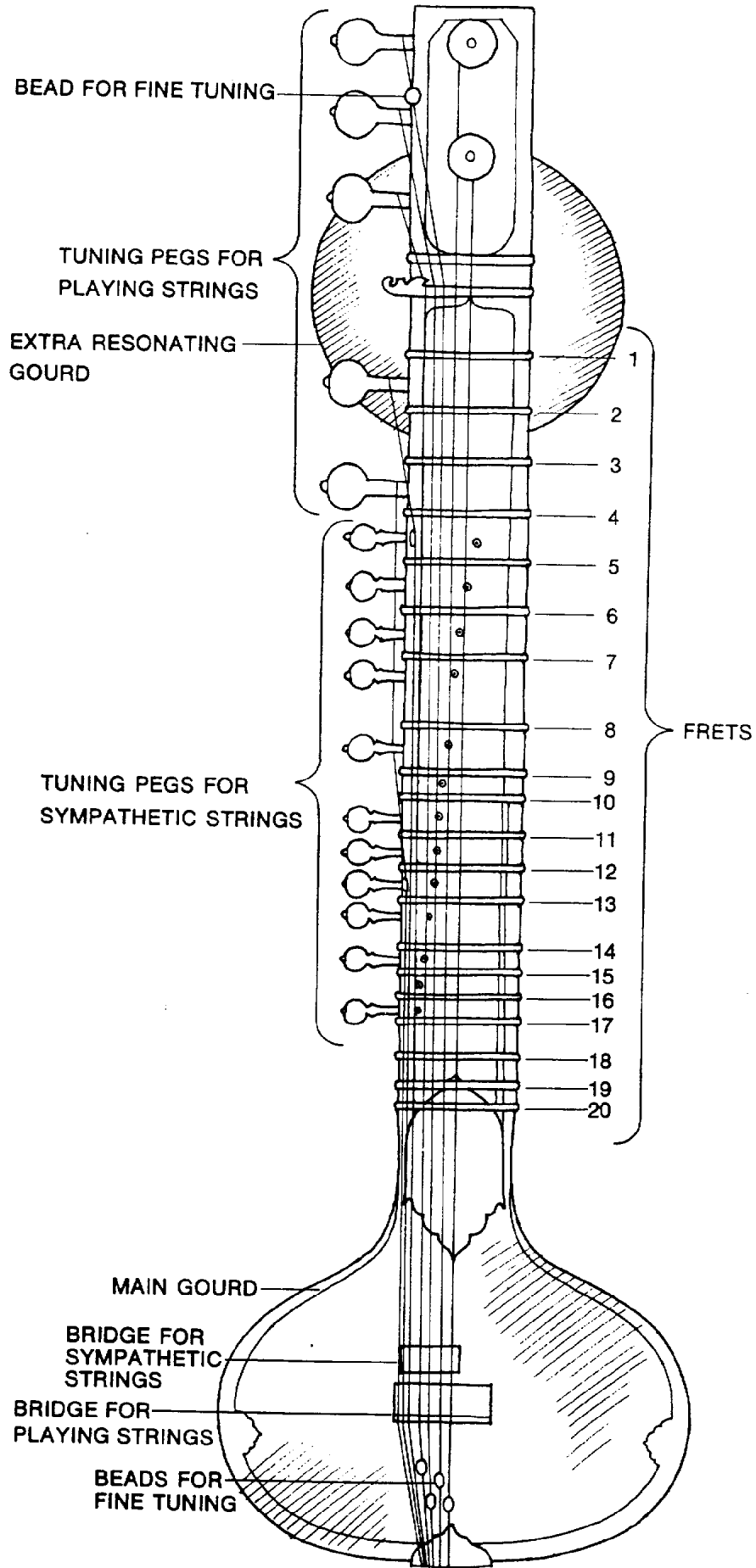
G. Mizrab Worn on Right Index Finger



H. Fingers Press Behind Fret



I. Position of Left Thumb



The veena, together with its inseparable percussion partner, the tabla, is by common consent, the most ancient and honoured of all Indian string instruments. According to many musicologists and musical historians these two veenas not only form the background of our classical music, but also provide the very basis of evolution of other instruments, which were originally attributed to have numbered 400. Ironically, the voice of the veena, which has soothed the longest evolutionary history, is heard the least in our musical circles. It simply does not command mass appeal. In this age of speed and hurry—of mass

to the human voice. Another reason for my choice of the veena is the intuitive need to save it from oblivion. Who are the contemporary veena players outside your family? What are the veena relationships in your former, offers the quintessence of the best virtues of the *dhruwad* genre, pioneered and popularized through the centuries by maestros of the eminence of Bards, Ali Khan, Zakiruddin Khan and Ziauddin Khan, who was his father. Of late, the Ustad has been spending a good deal of time teaching his students at the sakrum-likas institutions which he has set up at Palampur, Raiged, Maharashtra. A family

Not at all. As I have mentioned

# IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE

## MUSIC/MOHAN NADKARNI

Virtuoso Zia Mohiuddin Dagar has devoted his life to keeping alive the ancient instrumental tradition. It is, therefore, only fitting that the Ustad has had conferred on him the prestigious Kalidas Samman for Indian music. Instituted by the Madhya Pradesh government, to be awarded this week, it is the highest recognition in the classical arena.

Mohan Nadkarni interviews Dagar, one of the two surviving exponents of the *rudra veena* in the country.

man—he is happily married to a Hindu wife, formerly Premila Narsingkar, and has a talented teenage son. He has his permanent residence at Chembur in Bombay.

How ancient is your musical lineage?

Here is the genealogical chart. It indicates the various branches of the Dagar family tree. Our ancestry traced to Baba Gopal Das alias Imam Khan, who flourished during the reign of Mohammed Shah Ranghile, the Moghul emperor of Delhi. At what age were you initiated into music and by whom? I was only seven when my father, Ziauddin Khan Dagar, began teaching me the basics of the traditional music of North India. The training was in both vocal and instrumental music. Even while I learnt to sing *dhruwad*, I was also acquainted with the style of playing instruments like the veena, the surbhar, the star, the surbhar and the sarod.

Who are the other veena players in the Dagar family? None. That was why I took to veena playing. Besides, I feel that the voice of the veena sounds very close



also questioned, I would like to know about them in detail.

If only those who question my claim to come and see me, I would gladly demonstrate abhorfully for almost two decades and more, in an effort towards improving the quality of the sound of the veena—that is, the *rudra veena*—and to make it more versatile. As you know, the traditional veena comprises frets firmly embedded in wax, and therefore, difficult to shift according to the requirements of the performer. To overcome this limitation, I devised a new method of tying the frets as and when necessary. I have also increased the width of the strings, known as *Kharis*, on my instrument, can now yield five to six notes in a single legato. I have also introduced thicker strings balancing the sounds with a strong hollow wooden stem in place of the traditional bamboo.

And finally, the smaller gourd has been replaced by bigger ones to make for more profound resonance. Isn't this all innovation?

In your ragas repertoire mostly limited, as is asserted by some?

Not at all. I have inherited a vast repertoire of traditional melodies, well-known as also less known. Even so, I am sure you will understand and appreciate the fact that each artist has his own choice of favourite melodies and he is often seen to render them, mainly because they suit his temperament. Few, indeed, may be the musicians who have ever cared to go beyond their favourite repertoire of 25 to 30 ragas for concert presentation during their lifetime. There are some all-time greats among them and you can also identify them!

You are one of the few traditional stalwarts to go abroad regularly and veena is getting more popular in the West in contrast to what one finds at home?

Yes, I have been visiting Europe, America and Canada every year since 1968 on teaching assignments. On an average, the duration of each visit is nine months. I give performances in several major cities of these countries.

Certainly—and something much more. Believe me, a reverse and a

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Although I have been the first musician to take the North Indian veena abroad, the credit for popularising the ancient *paranpara*, both vocal and instrumental, must go to my beloved cousin, the late Nasir Mohiuddin Khan Dagar and his younger brother, Nasir Anisuddin Khan Dagar, as also Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan. These masters—In their individual way, prepared the ground for people like us and made my task much easier.

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Indian settlers approach Indian music purely from the entertainment point of view. By contrast, you will find Indians and their families packing programmes like cabaret shows in American cities!

How big is your *shiksha* peers? So far, I have thoroughly grounded five foreign students. Most of them have been basically Western musicians, who have not only taken to veena-playing as their full-time profession but are also engaged in performing and teaching the style. And they are doing their job with a missionary spirit.

Take the case of my American disciple from Chicago, Nancy Lash. She was a professional cellist of 15 years' standing. She was determined to play the veena style of her instructor and has now come over to India to continue her pursuit.

How do you survey the contemporary music scene? A radical change has come over the music scene. It is a value rechange with regard to musical creation, understanding and appreciation. The prospect is not rosy. But I take it as a passing phase. I am hopeful.

# Ud. Asad Ali Khan—The Total Surrender

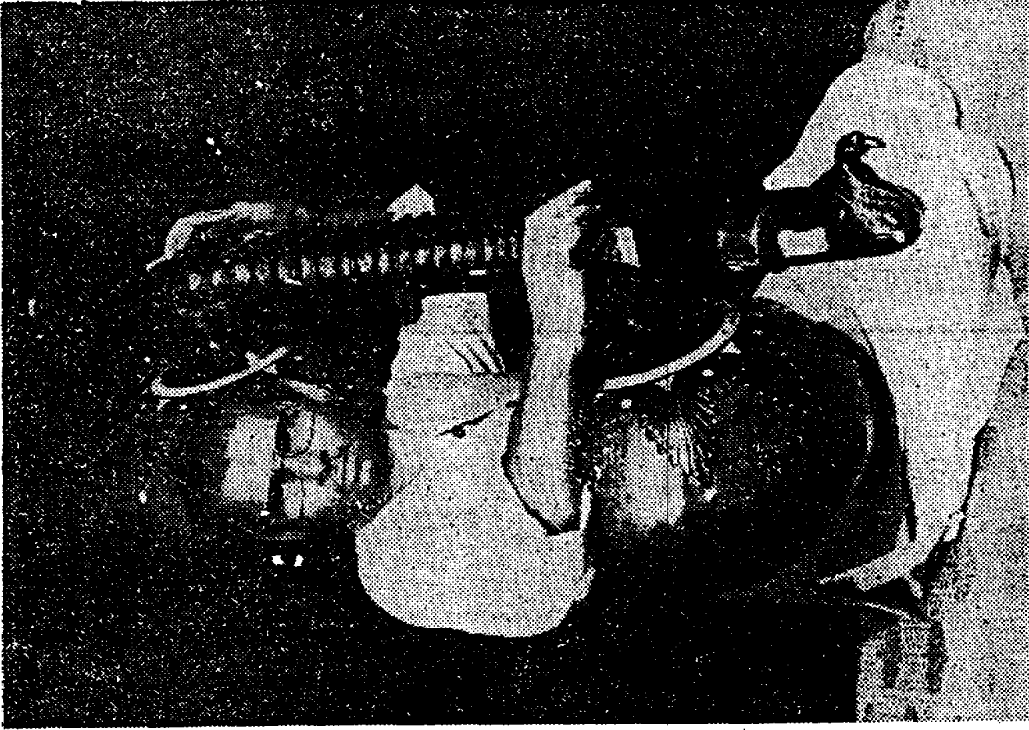
Ustad Asad Ali Khan represents the *benkar* gharana of Jaipur. His family traces back seven generations to the 18th century, and his ancestors were musicians in the princely court of Jaipur.

Ustad Asad Ali's great-grandfather, Rajab Ali Khan of Jaipur, his grandfather, Ustad Musharrif Khan, and father, Ustad Sadiq Ali Khan, were famous been players and were court musicians at Alwar in the early decades of this century and it was there that Asad Ali Khan began his intensive 15 year training with his father. Ustad Ali Khan is an exponent of *Khandarvani*, one of the four ancient styles of Indian music. *Khandarvani* derives its name from *Khand*, an old weapon of Rajasthan which was known for its precision, force and sharpness.

Today very few musicians practice the *been* as its technique is extremely exacting. Its mastery requires continuous *riyaz* (practice) from childhood, and tremendous self-discipline. Not only has Ustad Asad Ali Khan struggled to keep alive *Dhrupad* but also an instrument which is 5,000 years old.

In this passage, Ustad Asad Ali Khan recalls and recounts the rigorous and disciplined training that he had to go through to get where he is today.

Ever since I was a little child of five, I had been oriented towards becoming a professional musician. It was quite like the training of a soldier who is geared to face the battlefield and the enemy even in the worst of circumstances—all for the sake of his country. Similarly, to mould a youngster to a true musician, and a learned person is a rigorous task. In my case when I was just a child of five, I was separated from my mother and for all practical purposes it was my



father, Ustad Sadiq Ali Khan who brought me up.

Training in music, for a long time, meant just listening to my father singing all night. There was no question of knowledge of ragas, but the effect this exercise had on developing my ears was tremendous. Beside the

learnt as a matter of course and came to us naturally, without any conscious effort from our side. Gradually, these same exercises were repeated on the instruments — the *sitar* first and then the *veena*. About five years were spent mastering a basic *sargam*.

But the real change came about when one actually started enjoying this music. It soon became an obsession. That was when all the fun started. The hours of training seemed worthwhile.

The total submission that was expected from the shagird towards his guru, even if he might be the own father, was something expected without even a mention. I remember filling the 'chailum' for my father's *hookah* exactly the way he liked it, even if it was three at night and he was busy in conversation with his friends. We were often told the story of the Maharaja of Jaipur who was a student of my grandfather, Ud. Rajab Ali Khan, who taught him at midnight every day as that was the time when both were free from their affairs. My grandfather's *hookah* was filled every night by a faithful servant. One day my grandfather fell asleep and when he woke up found that his *hookah* had been filled exactly the way he liked it. On calling the servant, he was informed by the Maharaja who was sitting next to him that the servant was not there. The Maharaja had, in fact, filled it and was extremely honoured that he could serve his guru in such a way

This was the background and the entire atmosphere that we found ourselves in. It cannot be described in words. It was always a situation of getting more deeply involved with the music either through our own practice or the then healthy habit of listening to the other stalwarts and even spending time with them at their *riyaz*. This prac-

tice which is almost extinct now for various absurd reasons, was then a regular feature which was encouraged by all the renowned gurus. Unfortunately, we musicians today are getting more and more confined within our own petty selves. We tend to forget that the beautiful *Bihaag* that is sung today is the result of years of dedication and thinking, not in watertight compartments, but rather through mutual sharing.

Further change occurred in the whole system of teaching and learning — a lot has changed since the time when I was a student. I remember doing *riyaz* for six hours at a stretch. After a couple of hours, when one had barely warmed up, our fingers were dipped in cold water and we were expected to produce the same *taan* right after that. I remember doing my *riyaz* in one corner of the room while my father would be doing a number of other things — entertaining, eating, sleeping — at the same time. But one wrong note and I was reprimanded immediately, which, at that time, seemed the worst possible thing that could have happened — such was the fear. But then the love was also so great that each could not live without the other.

I think I owe my success and knowledge all to my ancestors who made very clear some fundamental rules. I was constantly told that if I played the *veena* I would be the only one but if I should choose to play the *sitar* I must be the best. The three prerequisites for this were patience, dedication and self-discipline. I was taught to be obstinate enough to make people listen to my *Darbari* and still more obstinate to make people enjoy it in my style.

If today people claim that *Dhrupad* is the 'real thing', all I can say is that we knew this right from the beginning. **Sabina Selga**

Some of the audience at Ustad Vilayat Khan's performance at UCLA is made up of Indian businessmen and their *sari*-draped wives. Then there are the Real World aficionados and of course those furry extravelers to India who try to recapture their subcontinent experience by donning the *kurta* pajamas and saris they bought in 1972 and sitting through 3½ hours of *sitar* recital. Vilayat patiently postpones the beginning of the concert for 15 minutes so that those arriving late can take their seats.

The raga soon begins, bringing the audience to that crossroads in the mind where a choice is made between sleep and meditation. Many people are coerced by sleep. Others go along as if they were rafting down a river. There are moments of quietude where everyone floats gently, at other times, the rapids demand full attention. Vilayat's very mystical, highly technical *sitar* is capable of many transformations in mood, from whirlwind monsoon rushes of ecstasy to somber twangs like the first raindrops of a storm reverberating off a leaf.

Vilayat pauses, slightly piqued, when the audience applauds in the middle of the raga. (Applause does not translate well culturally. Ravi Shankar was taken aback in the 1960s when young hippies applauded wildly after he finished tuning his instrument.) He soon continues for three hours of striking, petting and pinching the *sitar*, rolling beautiful ragas from it. At the end of the concert, the performers and audience feel drained, yet at ease.

**U**stad Vilayat Khan (Ustad means maestro) is a wiry man in his 60s with thick, winglike silver sideburns gently folding over the front of his ears. He wears a delicately embroidered silk *kurta* pajama. While we talk he pulls out a tidy metal box pervaded with *pan*, an Indian concoction of betel nut, lime paste, tobacco and various complicated goo wrapped up in a leaf. Pausing, he introduces the bundle to the inside of his cheek.

A conversation with Vilayat is much like listening to his *sitar* playing. It isn't a dialogue so much as a transcendental lecture interjected with the other person's comments and questions, which slide gently off him as if he were Teflon-coated. Questions are a catalyst for what he *knows* should be told. He tells parablelike stories of his life in the short, incomplete sentences that come from a greater comfort with Hindi than English and decades of up to 14 hours a day with his instrument. I walked away with the feeling that something very valuable and heartfelt had been said, yet if I tried to explain it to someone else, I'd be at a loss for words.



# USTAD VILAYAT KHAN

## Colors of the Mind

BY JEREMY BACHMANN



"What do you think about when you play?," I ask. "Colors, time, seasons, patterns, clouds, the movement of the body," he responds, "what it becomes when you are walking on the ground. How you feel when you are rolling in the clouds. Tall, big grass standing up . . . underground . . . underwater—focus—a pattern will become hazy, but then I am focusing and making detail in it. So many things come in the mind."

The words are quite mystical but Vilayat is actually a technician—a sitar engineer. He is famous for his great technical skill with the instrument. He plays classical music but his improvisations and playfulness make his classical more like jazz or flamenco than the formality of Western classical traditions.

When discussing Western music, he clearly feels more comfortable with the association with Isaac Stern than John Coltrane. He sees the distinction in classical music as "researched" music, music that requires an understanding of its boundaries—what came before, what others can do and have done—before the artist can establish a standing.

Yet if the music is so technical, do audience members need ethnomusicology degrees to appreciate it? After all, Indian music has a reputation for complicated mysticism, elegance and learnedness that precedes it in the listener's mind. The sitar master thinks that the researched qualities will be appreciated even if the listener doesn't intellectually understand the form. "If the music has been done with a very aesthetical presentation, in a very appropriate way to reach from the instrument to the mind and heart, there is no question of whether the audience understands or not."

"A very good painting, a very good food, a very aesthetic color, when you see it, it does not matter if you understand. Two very beautiful, nice people are traveling together—they have never seen each other before, they don't know each other's language even—but through their expressions, they understand everything. They can pass a few hours together or a day or two together, and by design they will understand each other."

Vilayat was born into a musical family. His family can trace their lineage back six or seven generations to the Moghul courts and ultimately to Tansen, the court musician of the emperor Akbar. His great-grandfather is said to have "invented" or given final form to the *surbahar* (bass sitar). His grandfather, Imdad Khan, and father, Enayat Khan, were both famous musicians.

Vilayat began studying under his father at the age of 4 or 5. His father was his guru, a role that goes beyond teacher and mentor, even the familial, to spiritual guide. Vilayat remembers the thread-tying ceremony in which his father accepted him as a disciple. "It is a very beautiful thing, making guru and *shish* (student), tying the thread to the wrist. It has a very big significance. 'I am tying you with a rope.' "

The death of his father during his childhood left a deep impression, one that he still carries on stage. "My father—I still see him—I saw him as a tiger. On stage, he commanded, demanded. However I act on stage today, I am the dust off his feet." Left without his guru in body, Vilayat's musical education became the responsibility of his entire family, including his mother, maternal grandfather and maternal uncle—who were all vocalists—and his paternal uncle, who taught him sitar and *surbahar*.

Yet the most prominent person in Vilayat's talk of mentors is tabla master Hamajan Khan Thirikwa, who first performed with the sitarist in 1936 at a national music festival in Bengal. The interaction backstage 8-year-old Vilayat, his father and elder Thirikwa stuck with him his whole life. "As soon as it was announced that Thirikwa Khan, this great master, was to go on stage, he turned to me with his cane. 'I am going to play with this boy!,'" Vilayat remembers. When his father tried to stop him, the old man said, "Let me go, I will save him." Vilayat's playing was too fragile for such a large crowd but Thirikwa guided the child through the music as they played together.

Thirty years later at a music festival in Jullundur, Punjab, Thirikwa played with Vilayat again. Before they went on stage, the elder reminded the student that their roles had reversed. Now Thirikwa was the fragile one and Vilayat was young and nimble. "He was probably 90 years old. I just bent down and touched his feet—this is a student's duty. I said: 'Just remember that it was because of you that I came on the stage. Today I am also on the stage because of you. You must save me again.' And it happened—three or four hours we played." Vilayat played many complex pieces, "but whatever I did, he followed."

The old tabla master helped thrust Vilayat into the music world. "It was 60-70% his credit, the way he took me on stage and brought me out."

Vilayat made his first recordings on 78-rpm records when he was 8; almost immediately the comparisons with his famous father began. "It pierced me," he recalls, frustrated. "'He's a marvelous boy,' they would cry. 'But, Enayat Khan he is not.' I was maybe 14 years old. I was merely following my father. All I could see was him, nothing more."

Lineage is important in India because styles of playing are passed on and developed from guru to student for generations. Unlike in America, traditions are usually not reinvented within each succeeding generation. The arts are much the same as they were 500 years ago in India. In this sense, Vilayat is both a maverick and a conformist. "I learned from the experience and knowledge of my father and family. I learned not to mind too closely the style I come from, but to bring out my individuality. You have to bring out your character, something new, something unique. Then you will not only sell, but if you are very good

you will become history also." His history is something Khansahib has both acknowledged and put behind him. In deference to his roots, he has performed a piece of music his way in concert, then followed with the way his father and grandfather used to play.

The instruments and raga are traditional but Vilayat mixes the elements, tunings and forms enough to be shocking (to those who can be shocked by these kinds of things). "Every genius has his own law. It may not be Indian music, but it is my Indian music. When I was young, people said I was wrong, that I played discord. If I am playing right, people will take it. If I am playing nonsense, people will not take it."

Most famous for implementing the much-copied vocal style (*gayaki ang*) of sitar playing, Vilayat can sing phrases, then replicate them on his instrument. He recalls how he started as a child. "My uncle, Zinda Khan, was singing at the time. He had me follow him on the sitar. After some time, I found myself copying his vocals on the sitar." Musicians playing another instrument, the *sarangi*, had been imitating the human voice for centuries but it was unheard of for the sitar. This innovation has made him one of the most important, popular and widely imitated of North Indian musicians.

His popularity in India has taken on mythic proportions, like the stories of India's cultural leaders often do. In Calcutta, after the partition of India in 1947, a concert ended at two in the morning to riots in the streets. Vilayat played all night, keeping the audience in the hall until the riots subsided. Another time in Bombay his concert sold out and thousands of people stood outside the hall listening to the loudspeakers that organizers had placed outside. In 1964 and 1968, he refused the two highest awards for artistic achievement in India because he felt the committee was inept at judging artistic creativity. In 1986, however, he proudly accepted the Bharat Sitar Samrat (Emperor of Sitar) award conferred on him by his peers in the Indian Classical Artists Association.

Vilayat has taken his music all over the world. He has performed at Buckingham Palace for Queen Elizabeth II. He has toured extensively since the 1950s, visiting the former Soviet Union, Africa, Japan, Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Any kind of recognition Vilayat has had in the United States, however, has come late in his career. He did not visit until 1978, only then as part of a grand-scale promotion for Indian tourism. He has been living in Baltimore for more than a year working on a series of recordings for India Archive Music, and his *Raga Bhairavi* is one of the new label's initial releases. Although he enjoys his recent high profile in the States, he does not expect a spurt in popularity any time soon. "Classical music—whether Western or Indian or any form—this will always have a concentrated audience." ♦