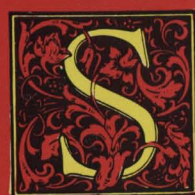


STEREO

MFS 489

MONITOR PRESENTS INDIA'S GREAT



HAMIM



AHMED

THREE RAGAS: BAGESHWARI / NAT-BHAIREV / KHAMAJ

SHAMIM AHMED

SITAR

ZAKIR HUSSAIN

TABLA

AMANAT

TANPURA

monitor
MUSIC OF THE WORLD

*"I dedicate
this record to
my guru,
Ravi Shankar."*

Shamim Ahmed



DESIGN: EDWARD BUXBAUM

Monitor Presents India's Great **SHAMIM AHMED**

Stereo: MFS 489

Three Ragas: Bageshwari • Nat-Bhairav • Khamaj

SHAMIM AHMED, Sitar

ZAKIR HUSSAIN, Tabla

AMANAT, Tanpura

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To appreciate Indian classical music, it is necessary to understand a little about its techniques and its tradition. Whether vocal or instrumental, it has a definite pattern. Melodic in form, it is based on scales or *ragas* on which a musician improvises. The music on this record is Hindustani or North Indian music.

In this school, there are some seventy-two pure *ragas* and innumerable combinations can be formed from these. A master like Ravi Shankar, who is well-known to music-lovers in the United States, can even compose new *ragas*. What would be of tremendous interest to Western audiences is that each of the *ragas* conveys a definite mood—joy, eroticism, yearning, sadness, hope—these and many more are conveyed by weaving a fabric of notes; their finest nuances are exploited to give the *raga* its form. Each *raga* is also sung or played at a specific time of the day or night for heightened effect. Indeed, so deep-rooted is this element of time in Indian music that even the most untutored housewife, knowing little of the theory of classical music, sings devotional or folk songs, passed down through generations, in suitable *ragas*.

The exposition of each *raga* also follows a definite order. There is, in the first instance, the *alaap*. This is the quintessence of the *raga*. With the drums silent, the player proceeds to form as many original and new "patterns" of the notes as he can create within the framework of the *raga*. One of the techniques employed by Indian musicians is to ascend the notes of the scale in stages, embroidering and elaborating first upon two notes, then three, until in a thrilling climax, the highest note is touched and the whole beauty of the *raga* laid bare before an enthralled audience.

It is important to note that each "pattern" that the player creates, is wholly his own—no other musician, without conscious and concerted effort can reproduce exactly the same music in exactly the same manner. Indeed, it is hardly possible for the artist himself to recreate the music or mood of the moment. The experience of creating Indian music, therefore, is highly personal and unique.

The next phase of the performance is the *jod*. Although still without accompaniment, the player quickens the tempo and begins to suggest a rhythm that spirals excitingly. The hitherto untrammelled melody now becomes subject to a definite pulse. In striking contrast to the *alaap*, *jod* is confined to a beat.

Jod is the logical precedent to the phase that follows: *jhala*. In this, the player uses mainly the first and the last strings of the sitar to create definite rhythmic patterns. The artist creates his own rhythm, plucking the strings with a certain amount of emotional fervor. With the *taraphs* or 'sympathetic' strings beginning to reverberate, tonal completeness is achieved. At last, it is a rich, sonorous melody, touching, as it were, the very core of one's heart. Starting with the sheer abandon of the *alaap*, going on to the controlled movement of the *jod* and then the *jhala*, the music develops from a lilting melody to a climactic crescendo.

Finally the player comes to the *gat*, where the tabla begins to emphasize the rhythm and a new interest is created in the exposition of the *raga*. Audience participation becomes more pronounced, encouraging the soloist and the tabla-player to weave ever more intricate patterns within the framework of the *taal* and the *raga*. *Gat* is a composition around which the musician builds the whole structure of the *raga*. This composition is either written or orally handed down from teacher to disciple and is the only precomposed part of the performance. To give a personal touch to such a composition needs inspiration of the highest order. The musician has to feel at home with many time measures—called *taals*—that Indian musical compositions are set to. The most commonly used is the Teen Taal, a 16-beat measure divided into four equal parts. Some

of the other prominent measures are Jhaptaal, a 10-beat measure (2/3/2/3), Ektaal, which consists of 12-beats (2/2/2/2/2/2) and the uneven Rupak, which has seven beats, divided into three, two and two. While appreciating sitar music, the listener perceives time and again that the player uses a somewhat special technique. He plays a "phrase" of notes three times (syncopating or going against the strong beat) before arriving, in perfect synchronisation with the *tabla*, on the sum or the first beat of the *taal*. This technique is called a *tihai*. The *tihai* is formed with mathematical precision and the virtuoso may, in order to intensify the excitement, play the *tihai* in extended phrases, spanning the rhythms of the *tabla*, so that when the *tabla* and sitar eventually combine, there is a feeling of exultation.

In this recording, Shamim Ahmed presents three *ragas*—Bageshwari, Nat-Bhairav and Khamaj. Of these, Bageshwari is presented in the order described above: first the *alaap*, then the *jod*, then *jhala* and finally the *gat* in medium and fast tempo. All these are necessarily compressed into twenty minutes. The remaining two, Nat-Bhairav and Khamaj, are presented in shorter pieces of ten minutes each.

Bageshwari: this *raga*, with the scale:

is played in the hours just preceding midnight. In keeping with the mood of these hours, it is a sensuous, romantic *raga* expressing a yearning for things to come. It is the moment before spring bursts forth, the moment before the torrent or ecstasy envelops all.

The *gat* is played in Teen Taal (4/4/4/4). While adhering basically to the *Taal*, Ahmed and Hussain both "wander" around in the measure, varying the emphasis on beats, and joining to create complicated rhythmic interplay for instance, by making the *Taal* sound like 3/3/3/3/4, or like hundreds of new *taals*, so long as the basic 16 beat measure is intact.

Nat-Bhairav is a mixture of two *ragas*, Nat and Bhairav. Scale:

Of the two, Nat is somber and ponderous while Bhairav, which is played early in the morning, strikes a note of hope, of expectancy. It may be described as the herald of dawn and signifies the peace which pervades the universe when the night is not yet dead and the new day not quite born.

Despite this, Nat-Bhairav, as a combination, has undertones of pathos, relieved in Ahmed's rendering by the use of the rather lively Rupak *taal* of seven beats (3/2/2) which lends it a lilt, a leaping rhythm.

Khamaj is a light-hearted melody used as the basis for romantic songs. The scale is:

In Ahmed's hands, Khamaj is a gay, flitting and youthful melody. It is obvious that Ahmed thoroughly enjoys playing this and other lighthearted *ragas*. His improvisations are spontaneous and remarkable for the joy that he evinces while creating music. His presentation is also exceptional for the almost perfect unison he achieves with Zakir Hussain's rollickingly merry Teen Taal.

THE INSTRUMENTS

The *Sitar*, as it is today, was fashioned some seven hundred years ago. It has six or seven main strings, and nineteen

'sympathetic' or resonating strings. The body of the instrument is carved out of teak wood and two dried gourds, one large and one small, affixed at either end, amplify the sound. The *Sitar* has twenty movable frets so that the instrument can be returned for each melodic form or *raga* by increasing or decreasing the spaces between the frets.

The plectrum, worn on the index finger of the right hand, is used to pluck the main strings. A skilled player will produce micro tones, and even the most sensitive nuances and slides (which in Indian music are called *meends*) by pulling the main string to the side. This string is so flexible, that four to five notes can be produced by pulling it. The *Sitar's* most fascinating feature is the extraordinary range of sounds that can be created from it—from deep guttural reverberations to the most piercing high notes.

The *Tabla* is a two-piece drum. The right hand piece is known as the *Tabla* or *Danyan* and the left hand one is known as *Dagga* or *Banyan*. It is an instrument derived from the *Pakhawaj*, an old Indian drum which is placed horizontally and played at both ends.

The *Tabla*, as any other drum, in Indian music is not an instrument used purely for keeping the beat. Creating a rhythmic counterpoint of stunning complexity the player 'accompanies' an instrumentalist, and the *taal* played binds his music, but side by side, he is weaving his own patterns of rhythm, creating his own music. In other words it may be said that the *Sitar* and the *Tabla* are contrapuntal.

The *Tanpura* (or *Tomboura*) has four strings but no frets. It is used exclusively for accompaniment, to help the instrumentalist or singer to keep in tune. It keeps a steady drone throughout the performance or concert. The *Tanpura* is played by Amanat in this recording.

SHAMIM AHMED

The key words of Shamim Ahmed's music are unquestionably *Sadhana* and *Tapascharya*, both words—from Sanskrit—meaning wholehearted dedication of physical and spiritual energy to the achievement of perfection.

As a result of arduous and long daily practice sessions, Shamim Ahmed, at 29 is one of the brightest stars rising on the horizon of Indian classical music. The young musician was born in a family, where for generations, men have devoted their lives to music. The family is called Agra Gharana and is one of the most prominent in the world of Indian classical music. Ahmed's father, Gulam Rasool Khan, taught music for 35 years and initiated his son into the art of vocal music, even as a child. However, Ahmed's singing career was cut short by a severe attack of typhoid and he turned his talent to the *Sitar*. Since 1955, Ahmed has been a disciple of Ravi Shankar and feels that he owes his success to the master. Indeed, this, his first recording to be released in the United States, in his words is "dedicated to my Guru".

ZAKIR HUSSAIN

At sixteen, Zakir Hussain has the distinction of having played the *Tabla* in all the larger cities of India. Son of Alla Rakha, who has been termed "the world's greatest drummer" by critics and who is well-known in the United States, Zakir was literally born to the *Tabla*. Asked when he actually started playing it, Zakir jokes: "My mother tells me that I drummed my fingers on the milk-bottle as a baby!"

Zakir Hussain, with his deft touch and his completely relaxed manner of *tabla* playing, already shows definite signs of becoming a great name in the world of Indian music. He too dedicates this, his first ever recording, to his Guru and father: Alla Rakha.

Notes by VIMLA PATIL

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