

# CONCEPT : MADRIGAL

shankar :  
dazzling display  
of virtuosity

The man is neither imposing nor particularly striking yet his very presence radiates an aura which commands a sense of reverence. It may be his contemplative air or the manner in which he holds his head slightly tilted when he speaks, searching about him with warm and gentle eyes. His height is hardly more than five feet and sitting alone on the side of his bed, feet dangling towards the floor, he hardly looks the way his fans know him to be.

The delicious odor of Darbar Agarbatti fills the room, assailing the nostrils with each waft of air from the fan. It is a strangely exotic incense and yet it seems to contain all of the aromas of flowers with which one from this part of the world is familiar.

Ravi Shankar without his sitar, far removed from the concert stage is a completely human individual in stark contrast to the incredible musician with which the young people are acquainted.

These were my first impressions of the man when I participated in one of two private interviews with him. He is physically a small man yet one detects a slight portliness which enhances his obviously prosperous existence. He is also a very humble man, as I shall show in excerpts from both interviews to be printed at a later date.

The concert in the Jubilee Auditorium on Wednesday, February 14 did not draw near to the capacity crowd that it should have, yet those who were in attendance were sent through such incredible flights of musical fancy as to boggle the mind.

This is no time for me to be critical—as a matter of fact, I cannot be, the performance so totally swept me away into a world with which I had very little experience. This review shall be exactly that—a summary of the concert with some elementary reference to that technical wizardry which is Indian music.

Most ably assisted by Alla Rakha on tabla and Nodu Mullick on tamboura, Shankar opened his program with an Evening Raga, Sudh Kalyan. The first section or alap delineated the mood which was essentially placid but pervaded with a sense of longing. Attempting to fix the notes of the raga on the minds of the listeners, Shankar improvised a mournful soliloquy

in free time, out of which grew a simple yet compelling melody recreating the atmosphere set in the initial exposition. The second movement was a gat, replacing the more common jor. The jor traditionally is an improvisation which introduces the percussion and gradually accelerates the tempo into the third and final movement. The gat in this instance is a movement which resembles the rondo of western music in its structure—a recurring theme is contrasted with variations and counterthemes. The rhythmical cycle used in this movement was jhaptal, divided into four groups of 2 - 3 - 2 - 3 beats. The tabla provided polyrhythmical accompaniment to the sitar and tamboura and gradually sped up to lead into the jhala, a prestissimo section in which a deft rhythmical pattern was woven around the raga theme by the higher drone strings on the sitar. The rhythm was in ructal (3-2-2). Both tabla and sitar were in superb rapport throughout this movement.

Following this came a Late-Evening Raga called Jhinjhoti. The alap opened in much the same way as that of Sudh Kalyan except that it went almost immediately into the jor. This raga was much more subtle in mood than the first, evoking a feeling of the serenity and quietude which are characteristic of the late evening. The plaintive wails uttered on the sitar seemed to suggest a dreamlike state. The improvisations in the jor were very free, much in the manner of our classical fantasias. Themes were neither varied nor recurring in this section. The jhala transported the listeners to various peaks of musical and rhythmic frenzy.

After an interval which seemed to pass by all too slowly, the second part of the program opened much more informally with a demonstration on the tabla. Shankar referred to how in Indian music "anything that can be played can be spoken. All sounds make with the hands have corresponding speech syllables." Both he and Alla Rakha then proceeded to demonstrate to a totally enraptured audience the truths of those very same words. Shankar uttered various syllabic sounds foreign to our ears, while Rakha proceeded to imitate them on his tablas. Long protracted phrases revealed all too clearly the intensive training which eastern musicians must go

through in terms of rhythmic discipline and memorization. Alla Rakha then performed a tabla solo in jhaptal. Once in a while he included vocal syllabication which only vaguely imitates the sound of the sol-fege so familiar to western musicians.

Raga Mal Kauns (Night Raga) was the title of Shankar's diversion into the realms of the true traditional Indian classical music. Most of the music which is performed in his country is improvised. The raga for example, is only a set pattern of notes, much like our scale but differing in very subtle ways. Western music, for example, divides the octave into twelve semi-tones which allow for a total of twenty-four major and minor keys. Indian music divides the same octave into sixty-six intervals called srutis. Twenty-two of them are used by convention in the formation of the raga. Seven make up the scale used as the basis for improvisation and thematic development and both the ascending and descending forms of the same scale are different. In developing the raga, the musician is affected by many factors including structural patterns, the emotions which he feels at any given moment as well as the actual scalic pattern which he selects. Ultimately, it is the method utilized in putting

all of these factors together as well as playing certain of the notes of the scale in relief that creates the desired emotional atmosphere and delegates to each raga its own individual character and hypnotic power. Traditional classical music involves the introduction of ancient or folk music into the overall structure of the raga as the basic thematic materials. These are not improvised upon but rather are improvised around. Shankar used sixteenth century melodies in Mal Kauns. It was the only time during the whole concert that the sitar performed actual instrumental music. The style of all the ragas preceding and following this one was essential vocal (i.e. it could just as easily have been sung).

The concert ended all in a fiery frenzy with another Evening Raga, Manj Khamaj, which was performed in Tunli (a semi-classical, romantic, lyrical style). It too utilized folk melodies and the like, but the basic theme always returned into the total structure. The raga contained two gats and concluded with the traditional exchange of dialogue between the sitar and the tabla; an improvisation of such incredible magnitude and precision as to leave the audience breathless. Those who were fortunate enough to attend left the hall having just been given a spiritual

revelation—a happening to end all others.

The music of Ravi Shankar in live concert brings to mind only the most superlative descriptions of the emotions felt by everyone there. One would wish that he could have played on for several more hours. Consummate artistry. Truly overwhelming.

Jerry Ozipko

## R.A.T.T.

This weekend - February 23rd and 24th - Dave Wright is going to play some music for everybody. Dave's music is happy type music to improve your state of well being. Most of his material is original.

Dave has played every Coffee House in the city, has cut an album, and has plans for another. He also recorded the sound track for Film West's LAMENT FOR WOODY which has enjoyed some success in this country.

The performer starts at 9:00 p.m. and there is fine chili for eating or what ever else you might like to do with it.

Admissions are 75 cents in advance at the SUB Information Desk or \$1.00 at the door.

Its cheaper than a movie and you can talk in the middle.

## the polish mime?

## ballet?

## theatre!

Walter Plinge

The Polish Mime Ballet Theater was in town last Tuesday night. What they were offering was a hybrid form of theatre. Henry Tomaszewski's troupe has drawn its inspiration from a diversity of forms which have been combined to provide an unique experience in the theater. The most evident influence was the use of mime as the primary mode for presenting the tales that they had to tell. It was not mime as we usually think of it but the silent eloquence of pantomime remained undiminished. The performers were all skilled in the art of the dance and with the aid of music they attempted to weave their magic by partly dancing and partly miming their presentations. Their intention was to provide a theatrical experience using the arts of mime and the dance as their means of expression.

Their reception at the Jubilee was only lukewarm despite their innovative and intense efforts. This, one suspects, was partly caused by the absence of programmes. Although the programme was announced over the P.A. system it was impossible to check out one's impressions against the troupe's intentions. This was a minor irritation that seemed to disgruntle some patrons who were confused by what they saw. It may be that they were simply annoyed that they could not be sure that they were understanding what they were watching.

The evening's performance consisted of three presentations, each of which was stylistically unique. The first, The Kimono, was done in a manner reminiscent of the Japanese Kabuki theatre. The story

involved a kimono of magical powers which brought ruin to a young woman and a tailor's apprentice. The tailor's apprentice incurred the wrath of a proud warrior when he used the kimono to seduce the warrior's wife. The wife's reputation ruined the warrior sought the apprentice and apprehending him, killed him. The tale had the exquisite simplicity of a Zen parable but inevitably the parable's seeming reluctance to give up its kernel of meaning produced some confusion. This was not helped by the fact that some time was needed by the audience to adapt to the conventions which the company employed. Although the production was technically proficient it was more of a warm-up for the audience than an auspicious opening for the company.

The company's second offering, Labyrinth, met with a more favourable response. The manner of presentation was orientated towards modern dance. Based on their contemplations on eternity in a geometrical universe the expression of their response was introspective in nature. The geometric boundaries of our universe define limitations to our investigations of questions such as how far is up or how long is forever. Trapped in a formula that might be defined as a chain of being the dancers attempts on breaking through to freedom rippled through the company, passing from one dancer to the next, producing permutations as evident in each individual response. The dance was cyclical in format, returning the dancers to their original predicament after their frustrated explorations. In this

number the company showed their art to greater advantage than in the first number and redeemed themselves amongst some of the audience.

The Departure of Faust was the main piece of the evening and the easiest to comprehend. It was centred on the old story of Faust's deal with Mephistopheles. Faust sells his soul to the devil in return for all knowledge for a period of twenty-four years. This interpretation dealt mainly with two episodes: the seduction of the innocent, Margaret, and the Walpurgisnacht bacchanalia when Faust conjurs up Helen of Troy. At the conclusion there is a Dionysian rebirth and new life and innocence is sent forth into the world. This time everyone was in fine form, particularly and understandably, the lead characters. Staged on a set which consisted mostly of large blocks and some props there was a heavy emphasis on costume pieces. Particularly effective was their use of long flaring lengths

of cloth. On this occasion, the troupe demonstrated most successfully their skill gained from long experimentation with the basic elements of the theatre. The basic and overwhelming emphasis of their art is placed on the body both as a vibrant, three-dimensional work of art and as a medium of communication with an inexhaustible repertoire of expression. The applause seemed to indicate that they had truly begun to make themselves understood. Further demonstration might have made it possible for them to emerge totally triumphant. Hopefully on another occasion, they will have their chance.

Letters to the Gateway on any topic are welcome, but they must be signed. Pseudonyms may be used for good cause. Keep letters short (about 200 words) unless you wish to make a complex argument. Letters should not exceed 800 words.

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