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The Music of North India: Rajeev Taranath

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The University of Richmond
Department of Music

Presents

The Music of North India

Rajeev Taranath

Thursday, October 21, 2010
7:30 p.m.

Perkinson Recital Hall
RAJEEV TARANATH is one of the world's leading exponents of the sarod. His performances are noted for masterful, nuanced classicism matched with passion and emotional depth. Distinguished as a sarodist by the discipline with which he develops the melodic patterns of a raga and a texturally rich tone, his performances reveal the tremendous scope of the tradition.

A top disciple of the late legendary Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Taranath is the recipient of many honors including India's highest government award in the arts for outstanding achievement in Hindustani instrumental music. He was a visiting artist at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles from 1995 to 2005.

Taranath has received critical acclaim for high caliber musicianship, with stellar reviews in the Indian and international press with performances for prestigious music conferences and cultural institutions. He frequently performs and teaches internationally. www.rajeevtaranath.com

"luminous...the great beauty and sophistication of Indian classical music became clear." —Don Heckman, The Los Angeles Times, 1998

"Rajeev Taranath's sarod improvisations mixed the spiritual and the spirited...the raga began with introspective meditation and proceeded into an exuberant rhythmic celebration."


"Rajeev Taranath, illustrious disciple of the renowned maestro, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, has evolved a style characterised by the quintessential features of his gharana — depth and profundity in the exploration of raga and the dexterous weaving of sparkling permutations in layakari. The artiste's musical expression is distinguished by an innate sense of dignity..."

—The Hindu, India, January 20, 2006

"Taranath's sarod pulls heart strings...the audience was moved by the strength and emotional intensity of the music."

—Express, New Delhi, 2001

THE MUSIC OF NORTH INDIA
An evening raga

Rajeev Taranath, sarod

Accompanied by Samir Chatterjee, tabla

Alap (invocational portion of the raga development without drum accompaniment)

Slow and fast Gat with tabla drum accompaniment by Samir Chatterjee

This evening's selection of ragas and talas will be chosen at the time of performance by Rajeev Taranath, from the repertoire of ragas he has mastered over decades.

Please silence cell phones, digital watches, and paging devices before the concert. No unauthorized recording or photography.
Samir Chatterjee is a virtuoso Tabla player of India. Traveling around the world throughout the year, he performs in numerous festivals as soloist and accompanying other outstanding musicians from both Indian and western musical traditions. Samir performed at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo, Norway on December 10, 2007. Both his compositions and writings are widely acclaimed.

Chatterjee began his studies early with Pandit Bankim Ghosh, Pt. Balaram Mukherjee, Pt. Rathin Dhar, and Mohammad Salim. His later formation as a musician occurred under the guidance of Pt. Amalesh Chatterjee (since 1966) and Pt. Shyamal Bose (since 1984). All of Samir’s teachers have been from the Farrukhabad Gharana (school) of Tabla-playing, which he now represents. He is an A-rated artist of national radio and television of India. He can be heard on numerous recordings featuring as soloist, accompanying many of India’s greatest musicians and in collaboration with western musicians of outstanding caliber. In concert Samir has accompanied many of India’s greatest musicians.

Mr. Chatterjee lives in the New York-New Jersey area, where he has become a catalyst in the fusion of Indian and Western music. He has performed with Pauline Oliveros, William Parker, Branford Marsalis, Ravi Coltrane, Dave Douglas, Myra Melford, Steve Gorn, Glen Velez, Boby Sanabria, Ben Verdery, Dance Theater of Harlem, Boston Philharmonic, Ethos Percussion group, Da Capo Chamber Orchestra, Boston Musica Viva, and other jazz, classical and avant-garde musicians and ensembles. A member of jazz trio SYNC with Ned Rothenberg and Jerome Harris, quintet Inner Diaspora together with Mark Feldman and Eric Friedlander, he also collaborates with Sufi-Rock singer Salman Ahmad of Junoon. Samir is also the composer and director of Nacho Nacho - Gypsy Storyteller, Chhand-Anand, World Percussion Ensemble, and Dawn to Dusk and Beyond. He performs with Sanjay Mishra on his CD “Blue Incantation,” with Jerry Garcia featured as guest artist.

He has been teaching for the last 30 years, and many of his students are established performers. The Founder-Director of Chhandayan, this organization is dedicated to promoting and preserving Indian music and culture. A contributor to several newspapers and periodicals, he is also the author of a comprehensive 654-page book entitled A Study of Tabla and a guide book to Indian music titled Music of India. Samir is on the faculty at Yale University, Manhattan School of Music, University of Pittsburgh, New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music, and University of Bridgeport in CT. He also won a gold medal for his proficiency in a musical examination (equivalent to B.Mus.). He holds a master’s degree in both English and History.

The Sarod is a stringed instrument thought to have originated in northern India in the 16th century. Like its relative, the lute, it has a hollow body carved out of a single piece of wood, usually teak. The belly of the sarod is covered in goatskin. The fingerboard is a smooth, fretless steel plate that provides minimal friction to the sliding fingers and allows for uninterrupted long glides over the tonal spaces. The 25 metal strings have different purposes: some are used to carry the melody, some provide emphasis and rhythm, others provide resonance. The sarod has an immense tonal range and can express sharply contrasting moods.

The Tabla is a set of two drums. The smaller, right-hand drum, the dayan, is usually made of rosewood and is played with the fingers and palm of the right hand. The larger, left-hand base drum, the bayan, is now usually made of metal and is played with the fingers, palms and wrist. Between the straps and the drum bodies are pieces of wood with which the tension can be altered to control the tuning. The tabla is the traditional accompaniment to the main instrumentalist or vocalist in a classical recital. Sensitive musical interaction between the two artists is often a concert highlight.

Improvisation in North Indian Classical Music

North Indian music is an oral/aural tradition. Unlike Western classical music, which is often taught and can be understood through sheet music and sight-reading, Indian music is taught without reference to books, scores or written notation. While a system of notation for North Indian classical music was developed in the 20th century, it is generally only for reference and to remember the thematic compositions or songs (gats or bandishes) of the raga. The use of microtones and subtle ornamentation are integral and require a trained ear. In this sense, notation would not fully convey the complexity of the music. There are, however, names for musical notes (a solfège counterpart) and for strokes on instruments used in the learning process.

Study with a master teacher involves a student’s gradual internalization of the possible movements and feelings characteristic of each raga. This is complemented by years of rigorous technical training and the cultivation of performance skills. The musician slowly crafts the ability to simultaneously summon ideas within the established rules of a raga and to execute them imaginatively within the classical form. Therefore, although performance is considered improvised, the musician constantly draws on the experience of the many years of learning and absorbing the musical ideas of any given raga. Master musicians add new dimensions to these movements and ideas by following musical hints lying deep within, and sometimes just beyond, the already uncovered ideas, thereby presenting new perspectives. Performances are thus never written and can never be rendered the same way twice.
THE CLASSICAL MUSIC OF NORTH INDIA
(also referred to as Hindustani Classical Music)

The Music

This music tradition is embraced by a large part of the northern sub-continent of South Asia and has been heard for centuries in the regions we now know as the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. In the last fifty years, historic events have made India the country where this music has been best preserved and sustained. It continues, even as it struggles with increasingly fast-paced modernizing world pressures, to cultivate and project its great performers and upcoming talents. The term Hindustani does not have a direct connection to the religion of Hinduism. The music had been performed in courts until the early 1920s, and although some of the lyrics of its songs may reference religious themes, it is essentially a secular art form. Its approach can be introspective in parts, and a spiritual connection is often cited by musicians themselves. The field has included musicians of all the major religions. It has often been stated that the tradition itself is an amalgam of cultural influences, with the theoretical underpinnings of the music based in Hindu systems and much of the developed aesthetics coming from Persian and Arabic musical influences beginning in the 1500s.

Basic Principles

Hindustani classical music is a highly developed musical language which expresses itself through melodic development inherent in note or tone rows called raga. A musician can elaborate and improvise only within each raga’s accepted rules of movement. Inherent within each raga are characteristic phrases and emotional nuances. Ragas typically share a correspondence with a time of day or night, season, or occasion. In performance, the artist’s expansion and embellishment draws out the possibilities inherent in the melodic embryo. The Indian musician thus creates afresh with each rendering of the same raga, and no two versions will be exactly alike. There is no harmony in this music, so all musical meaning rests with the interrelation of the notes in each particular raga. The octave is divided into the same number of semi-tones as the Western chromatic scale, but the intervals are not tempered. Furthermore, most musicians deviate from these intervals in certain ragas by sharpening or flattening specified notes micro tonally. Microtonal inflections on certain predetermined notes are used as a means of emotional expression.

The Classical Recital

Generally, a traditional instrumental performance of Hindustani music begins with the alaap, a non-rhythmic exploration of the chosen raga without drum accompaniment, and is often thought of as a type of invocation. After this slow, introspective beginning, the musician moves on to the jor. In this part, a pulse enters, and innumerable variations on the raga’s basic theme are elaborated. At this point the artist may conclude the solo introduction to the raga, or continue by gradually increasing the tempo and going on to a third section called jhala, which uses fast rhythmic patterns. It is in this entire solo section (alaap, jor, jhala) that the artist reveals his or her maturity and vision, for the music unfolds in sequences that demand a cohesive sense of development and the experience of handling abstract melodic ideas.

The alaap, jor and jhala evolve into the gat, the fixed melodic composition of the raga. The tabla player enters here, introducing the tala, a rhythmic cycle with a fixed number of beats, usually anywhere from six to sixteen beats. It is characterized by a heavily accented first beat, called the sum, which is used as the climax or “summation” of the performers’ improvisations. The gat can be in any tala—slow, medium, or fast tempo.

Frequently, the accompanying tabla player is not even told which tala is to be played and must pick up the meter and cycle from the first hearing of the theme. Often, two gats are played in a performance of a raga, one slow and one fast.

—Program Notes by Rajeev Taranath
THE 2010-2011 DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC CONCERT SERIES
FREE— in Camp Concert Hall, unless otherwise noted
*designates tickets required (Modlin Box Office, 289-8980)

FALL 2010

Sunday, Sept. 19—3:00p
Perkinson Recital Hall
Donald George, tenor
Lucy Mauro, piano

Monday, Sept. 20—7:30p
Emily Riggs, soprano
David Ballena, piano

Friday, Sept. 24—7:30p
FAMILY WEEKEND CONCERT
Jazz, Orchestra, Band, Choirs

Wednesday, Oct. 13—7:30p *
TimbaSon, with Mike Davison and guests

Thursday, Oct. 21—7:30p
Perkinson Recital Hall
MUSIC OF NORTH INDIA—Rajeev Taranath, sarod

Friday, Oct. 22—7:30p *
RICHMOND SYMPHONY
Steven Smith, Director
Joanne Kong, harpsichord & piano

Sunday, Oct. 24—3:00p
SCHOLA CANTORUM & REUNION CHOIR
WOMEN'S CHORALE

Friday, Oct. 29—7:30p
DAVID ESLECK TRIO

Thursday, Nov. 4—6 times vary
3P ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sunday, Nov. 14—7:30p
UNIVERSITY WIND ENSEMBLE

Wednesday, Nov. 17—7:30p *
CUBAN SPECTACULAR
UR JAZZ ENSEMBLE & area musicians

Sunday, Nov. 21—3:00p
WORLD MUSIC CONCERT—UR Taiko Ensemble

Monday, Nov. 22—7:30p
UR JAZZ ENSEMBLE & JAZZ COMBO
With guest Justo Almario, sax & clarinet

Monday, Nov. 29—7:30p
UR CHAMBER ENSEMBLES CONCERT

Wednesday, Dec. 1—7:30p
UR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Featuring student winners of 2010 Concerto/Vocal Competition

Sunday, Dec. 5—5:00 and 8:00p
Cannon Memorial Chapel
37th ANNUAL CANDLELIGHT FESTIVAL OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

SPRING 2011

Wednesday, Jan. 26—7:30p *
CHAMBER MUSIC OF ARNOLD SCHOENBERG
ensemble-in-residence eighth blackbird and UofR Music faculty

Sunday, Feb. 6—3:00p
RICHARD BECKER, piano

Wednesday, Feb. 23—7:30p
THOMAS MASTROIANNI, piano

Saturday, Feb. 26—3:00p *
THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY
NEUMANN LECTURE ON MUSIC—Panel Discussion with Lei Liang, Shanghai Quartet, and Wu Man

Sunday, March 27—3:00p
RICHARD BECKER, piano
DORIS WYLEE-BECKER, piano

Monday, April 4—7:30p *
JEPSON LEADERSHIP FORUM
Chen Yi, composer

Wednesday, April 6—7:30p
UR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Friday, April 8—7:30p *
SCHOLA CANTORUM, WOMEN'S CHORALE, EIGHTH BLACKBIRD, with composer Chen Yi

Sunday, April 10—all day, across campus
GLOBAL SOUNDS FESTIVAL

Monday, April 11—7:30p
UR JAZZ ENSEMBLE & COMBO

Wednesday, April 13—7:30p
UR WIND ENSEMBLE

Wednesday, April 20—7:30p
UR CHAMBER ENSEMBLES