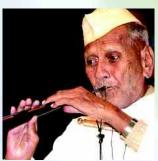
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Ustad Bismillah Khan Shehnai Maestro (1916 - 2006)



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 Salgadu 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 $16^{th} - 20^{st}$)

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.



September 2006



Dance Pose-Raja Ravi Varma

Indian Cultural Centre

133, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 4, Sri Lanka Telephone: 2500014, Fax: 2598674 E-mail: icc@sltnet.lk ICCR Website: www.iccrindia.org



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Hindu: Joy of Life

New Delhi: Niyogi,2006

India: A Dynamic Democracy

India: Timeless Splendour

New Delhi: Media Transasia,2006

New Delhi : MEA,2006

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In Retrospect

¹ July

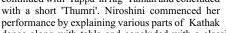
Kathak dance & Vocal music recital by Ms. Niroshini Sherene Perera & Mr. Asith Attapattu

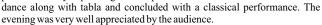


Ms. Niroshini Sherene Perera & Mr. Asith Attapattu, students of Bhatkhande Music Institute deemed University, Lucknow presented a Kathak dance and Hindustani vocal music recital at the Centre on 7th July. The evening commenced with the vocal music recital by Mr. Asith in which he sang rag

'Puriya Dhanasrhi' - an evening raga in 'Vilambit Ek taal' and

Madhyalaya Teen taal and continued with 'Tappa' in rag 'Yaman and concluded





21st 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 conluded with a "Thillana". The performance was very well appreciated by the music lovers gathered at the Centre



Bharatha Natyam recital by Ms. Suriyakala Jeevananthan along with Ms. Geethanjali Thurairajah, Ms. Lakshmi Sharma, Narmadha & Mr. Viiendran 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 Laksmi, "Kali Gowthwam" 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.

****************************** **Recent Library Accessions**

In the minds of the Maestros Kumar, Surendra

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Tuesday & Friday / Wednesday & Class days

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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 21st 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