

László Hortobágyi
Letter to Pt. Suresh Chandwankar
(Founder-Honorary Secretary of Mumbai-based SIRC and
a member of the Department of Condensed Matter Physics at the
Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai)
connection with the death of Pt. Ravi Shankar:
rethinking on a phenomenon
(2012)

Dear Sureshji Pandit

Still less is a Genius.

I would like to congratulate your *Necrolog*.

Although it is not fair held in many cases *Pt. Ravi Shankar's* reputation on World Wide (because He comes from a *Brahmin* family of *Benares* with great *karma*-possibilities) compared against a number of lesser-known genius, like *Pt. Nikhil Banerji*, *Satish Kumar*, *Gulam Hussain Khan*, *Balarám Pathak*, *Budhaditya Mukherji*, etc.etc., not mention so many *Karnatak* Indian Master Giants unknown in the West too, but He was absolutly one of the greatest and latest Classical Masters.

I think His story is a gem of our culture and of the false consciousness of human collectivities, one of the possible millions. *Ravindra Shankar* was born in *Benares*, 1920, in a *brahmin* family, thus, in a high position and having great chances. In the 30ies, as a dancer being member in his brother *Uday Shankar's* troupe, he regularly managed to visit Europe. This meeting took place in the spirit of romantic ethos of the “art”, that wouldn't even show a sign of change in our days, the *Schubert*-like pathos and the false romantic of the suffering artist, that completely prevented him, the extra-European man coming from the cretin and indifferent world of the English colonial culture of that time, from finding the only possible linkage between the European and Indian music in respect of the *Gregorian* vocal practice, the instrumental styles of the *Middle Ages* and the standard language of *Baroque* improvisation.

Thus, it becomes understandable the unmusical and boresome character of *Pt. Ravi Shankar's* subsequent so-called Romantic orchestral compositions, that was recorded featuring *Y. Menuhin, P. Rampal*, then snobbish *Ph. Glass*. Huge mistake and musical kitsch collection.

All high-cultures of the music history has developed their own sophisticated musical instruments, therefore it is obvious that the *Sitar*, for example, isn't suitable for rock-jazz or orchestral music and therefore it is obvious that the tuneless and agrestic-brutal, macho *saxophone* or the *wagnerian* orchestra isn't suitable for the performance of the classical Indian music which (inter alia) based on the sophisticated 22 intervals-*shruti* system.

Many people are angry his Western worship (me too) : his excuse of I attach two pages from his *Raga-mala*, I hope strongly that they are well represented his original but hidden habit.

pranam from Hungisthan

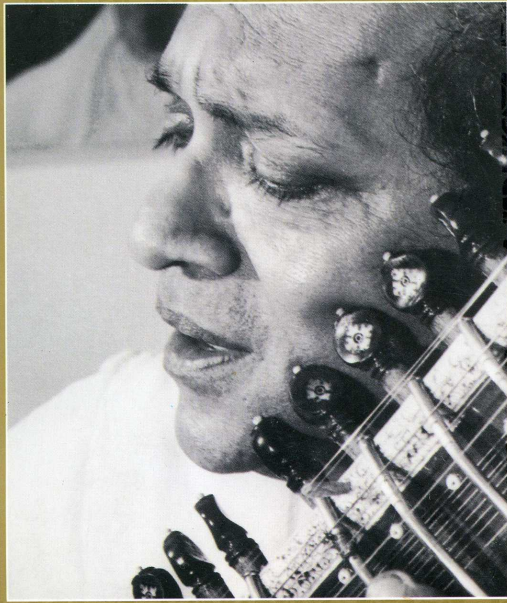
Laszlo

(László Hortobágyi 2012, www.guo.hu and corresponding member of "Puppies & Kittens of Budavár" website)

RAVI SHANKAR & RAGA MALA

RAVI SHANKAR

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



RAGA MALA



Edited and Introduced by
GEORGE HARRISON



62 p. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED PRINTED IN ITALY
COPYRIGHT © 1997 RAVI SHANKAR: MAIN TEXT PLUS PHOTOGRAPHS AND
DOCUMENTS FROM RAVI SHANKAR'S PRIVATE COLLECTION. COPYRIGHT ©
1997 GEORGE HARRISON: ANNOTATION, TEXT, PHOTOGRAPHS AND
DOCUMENTS FROM GEORGE HARRISON'S PRIVATE COLLECTION.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN 1997 IN A LIMITED, SIGNED AND
NUMBERED EDITION BY GENESIS PUBLICATIONS LTD. 2 JENNER ROAD,
GUILDFORD, SURREY, GU1 3PL, ENGLAND MANAGING EDITOR: OLIVER
CRASKE DESIGN AND ART DIRECTION BY FIONA ANDREANELLI, DAN
EINZIG AND DAVID COSTA AT WHEREFORE ART?

DIRECT ANY ENQUIRIES TO WELCOME RAIN PUBLISHERS LLC 532
LAGUARDIA PLACE, BOX 473 NEW YORK, NY 10012

ISBN: 1-56649-104-5

FIRST EDITION: SEPTEMBER 1999

By the time of this first return trip to India, Ravi was becoming increasingly drawn to music. Already an admirer of the troupe's *sitar*-player, *Vishnudas Shirali*, and sarod-player, *Timir Baran*, when Ravi heard the latter's nephew *Bhombol* (real name *Amiya Kanti Bhattacharya*) playing sitar in Calcutta he felt inspired to become a student of the young man's own *guru*, the celebrated *Enayat Khan*.

Ravi arranged that when the troupe returned to India the following year, 1934, he too would become a *shishya* (disciple) of *Enayat Khan*. However, the night before the formal *ganda* ceremony he had an attack of *typhoid* and was taken to hospital. He was forced to abandon the ceremony, which seemed to be a clear sign he was meant to have another *guru*. Destiny is a concept of paramount importance for an Indian musician

*

199 - 200 pp.

However, there were two performances on the final evening that upset me very much. I had heard plenty about *Jimi Hendrix*, and the moment his name was announced there was crazy applause. When he came on, at first I

couldn't hear him at all because the girls in the audience were shrieking so loudly. A fabulous performer on guitar, he could have been a solo guitarist throughout a long career. I was really enjoying his tremendous power and virtuosity, but after the second or third song he began all the antics for which he became famous. First he was almost making love to his guitar with obscene movements, and that upset me a little because in our culture we have such a feeling of respect for the instrument. We treat it as something sacred. Worse was to come: towards the end, like a ritual, he poured some petrol on the guitar and set fire to it. It seemed a sacrilegious act, and I was so angry that I felt like getting up and going away.

Later on came *The Who*. I had no idea who The Who were, and I didn't find their sound any different from those of many other rock groups. I was exhausted by then and planning to sneak away afterwards, but because of what happened next I almost ran from there! If Jimi Hendrix's antics were too much for me, this was even worse. Towards the end, as part of their act, The Who started meticulously banging, breaking and shattering their instruments on the stage. That was the limit! I couldn't take it any more, and left with disturbing sensations in my mouth, ears and heart - although I still have some wonderful memories of some of the earlier performers.

There were a few other groups I listened to at *Monterey* who belonged to the different American school of hard rock, including *Jefferson Airplane* and *The Grateful Dead*. Out of all the American groups *The Grateful Dead* were the ones that lasted, still commanding respect in the Nineties. I met *Jerry Garcia* at Monterey, and *Mickey Hart* has long been an enthusiast of Indian music. (It was a joy to see Mickey at my October 1995 concert in San Francisco, which took place at the *Masonic Auditorium*. At the invitation of *Zakir Hussain*, who was accompanying me on tabla, Mickey had brought his own sound equipment and he was in charge of the sound engineering for the whole performance.) But at Monterey the *Grateful Dead's* sound was too loud for me, hurting my ears with the pounding rhythm - although the young audience seemed to go crazy about these hard-rock groups, and never stopped shrieking!

Every art form has a spectrum of Styles. In literature there are some works that enlighten or delight you when you read them; and there are others that are more realistic, make you appreciate the trials of life. There are suspense and 'whodunit' mysteries, which lead on to horror stories and then those sickening ones punctuated by gory details of inhuman creatures with raw flesh, blood and all the secretions of the body flowing freely. There can be romantic and erotic writings that are so beautiful, counted among the highest literature - and then there can be sheer pornography, perversion and sex-and-horror stories all mixed in with disgusting details. In the same way I believe that in music you find all the different layers of feeling. In India these are vital elements of our music - we call them rasas. With many groups, such as *The Beatles*, I never had any disturbing feelings about rock music, but gradually what I was to hear later was different. The loud and pounding sound of hard rock, acid rock and punk rock, with the ear-splitting amplification of shrieking voices and the metallic steel sound, created a feeling of violence. The kids would get into a violent sexual frenzy, with musicians and listeners both high on drugs. I expected that 'this too shall pass', since everything seems to come and go in pop music (as in life), but I am appalled that this has not been the case. Even some of the MTV programmes magnify devilish, violent feelings, not only through the music but also through what you see. 200 p.

*

2016 p.

When I play in one of my own sitar concertos with an orchestra, I feel enclosed within my own prison. It's all fixed: I have to enter at a certain point and, after my improvisation, play the cue and make eye contact with the conductor for the orchestra to come back in at the right moment. Whatever I improvise is not scored, but it is within some limitations, some time value.

My biggest problem comes when I hear the slightest error, a wrong intonation or a wrong note, or a rhythmic mistake by even one single individual, especially when I'm playing a cross-combination piece. I get so disturbed that I forget my own part and make a mess of it!

Many Western musicians also have problems. For instance, when they try to play the meend it sounds so out of tune, because they touch all the microtones in between notes; and that's not how we do it. Our meend takes years to master; it is not merely a glissando or a slur. Rhythmically also there are problems, because of the complex Indian cycles of sevens, elevens and other odd talas. The younger musicians tend to be much better at grasping it because they are orientated to jazz, pop and modern music.

I am very fortunate in that, without having learnt Western music technically, I am able to appreciate it - whether it is classical, jazz, country-and-western, folk, or modern pop and rock. During my childhood spent touring the world, I was surrounded by all sorts of music, particularly classical; I had the opportunities to hear the great instrumentalists, vocalists and conductors of that time. As a child you absorb things automatically, so my ears became attuned to such a variety of music.

It should, however, be stressed that my formal knowledge of Western classical music is quite limited. I did start to learn it in Paris in my youth, but did not keep it up for long. I can read Western notation only in slower passages, and cannot write it - when I am composing for Western musicians an assistant helps me to do this.

My tastes are mostly for pre-twentieth century music. I have always been very fond of baroque music, especially the music of Bach, which is much easier for an Indian listener to appreciate, because he finds attractive melodies in it. Mozart is another great favourite of mine, for the same reason. I do generally prefer pieces with solo instruments; I have no trouble in appreciating symphonic music, but it is not always that it affects me emotionally. Beethoven's sonatas and a few of his symphonic pieces touch my heart deeply, and Tchaikovsky is extremely melodic. When it comes to opera, there is so much to admire in Mozart's Magic Flute, Don Giovanni and Marriage of Figaro, Bizet's Carmen, and a few lighter operas and operettas, but still have problems with long Wagnerian epics.

Within the classical framework, I find it difficult to appreciate fully more

recent music, beginning from Schoenberg and atonal music, through avant-garde, musique concrete and electronic music. Strangely enough I have great trouble with anything discordant. In Darmstadt, Germany, there is a regular festival of modern music featuring pieces by all the famous modern composers, and I have twice been invited to give sitar recitals there. If I arrive at such a venue one day before my performance, I always make a point of listening to what is going on. On those two occasions in Darmstadt, and least two other times since, I have noticed that I develop a peculiar problem. It is mystifying how it happens, but I find that when I start hearing those strange sounds or discordant combinations, within a few minutes I feel stomach cramp, and from stomach cramp I develop a terrible headache nausea. At first I thought these physical effects were coincidental, that suffering was due to some bad food I must have eaten; but it has happened again and again, right up to this day! I feel ashamed of myself, because thousands of people rave about this music. Though I am sure most of them are sincere in their appreciation, one has to wonder whether some are behaving in a trendy manner, motivated by snobbery. Sometimes I intellectually appreciate the intelligent combinations used, yet the whole gamut of this modern music, I am embarrassed to admit, is a physical problem to me. I have to try harder, maybe!