



International
Presentations of
Music & Dance

THE UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Ali Akbar Khan

Sarod

SWAPAN CHAUDHURI, *Tabla*

THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 10, 1983, AT 8:00
POWER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

A Program of North Indian Classical Music

Any performance of North Indian classical music depends considerably on the mood and inspiration of the artists and their rapport with the audience. Therefore, tonight's selection of *ragas* and *talas* will be chosen according to the mood of the evening and announced just prior to the performance. In the case of a musician such as Ali Akbar Khan, there is a great range of moods; moods from solemn and sad, to romantic and restless are said to be embodied like personalities in the more than 75,000 *ragas* in the classical literature.

Ragas are the traditional melodic forms which include a fixed series of notes in ascending and descending order. Generally, the soloist begins to render a raga with *alap*, the invocational solo without drum accompaniment. The *alap* has no rhythm at first, and when the slow rhythm is introduced, it is without fixed meter. The tempo gradually increases to the concluding section called *jhala*. It is in this *alap* where the artist reveals his maturity and vision, for the music unfolds in sequences which demand complete concentration, as well as the experience of handling abstract melodic ideas.

When the tabla enters, *tala*, the rhythmic cycle begins. The *tala* is also selected by the solo artist according to the feeling of the raga and its mood. As often as not, the accompanying tablaist 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. He then works out variations of his own invention based on the *tala*. Several themes and *talas* may be used, and the tempo again accelerates to *jhala* speeds.

*The Persian House of Imports, Ann Arbor, has graciously provided
the rug which covers the platform in this evening's performance.*

The Instruments

The classical music of North India as heard today is the result of a many centuries-long evolution. From the earliest times, music in India has been recognized as an instrument of healing and the means of reaching ever deepening meditative states. Generations of sages, scientists, and musicians have devoted their lives to the study of both melody and rhythm, and the result of their labors is the modern system of Raga (melody) and Tala (rhythm).

The Sarod: (pronounced suh-road) — Few instruments in the world can match the sarod for its versatility in expressing both the delicate emotional shadings of Raga and the complexities of Indian rhythms. The body of a sarod is carved from a single piece of teakwood. It has two sound boxes, one which is covered with parchment skin and one which is situated beneath the metal fingerboard. The middle or index fingernails of the left hand are used to produce an effect similar to that of a slide guitar, but far richer and more sensitive, due to fifteen sympathetic strings which are tuned chromatically or to the notes of the raga or scale, enriching the melody with vibrant overtones.

The Tabla: (pronounced tub-bluh) — The tabla is probably the most advanced and difficult percussion instrument in the world. It offers unequaled accuracy of pitch and a full spectrum of tonal colorings, while covering any mathematically precise cycle of time with rhythmic variations. The tabla consists of two drums: the larger brass drum which creates a range of sounds from a thundering boom to a wistful sigh, and the treble drum which is usually tuned to the tonic note of a melody and can be played at tremendous speeds, creating a variation of high crystal clear notes. As in the instrumental and vocal music, hundreds of compositions must be mastered before one is capable of utilizing its potential freedom in compositional improvisation.

About the Artists

Ali Akbar Khan's family traces its gharana (ancestral tradition) to Mian Tansen, a musical genius and court musician of the 16th century. Ali Akbar Khan's father, the late Dr. Allauddin Khan (1862-1972), came to be acknowledged as the greatest figure in North Indian music in this century. In India, he is regarded as a "rishi" or saint, and he gave new life to the classical instrumental music of India.

Ali Akbar is one of many celebrated musicians tutored by his father. Born in 1922, this season celebrating his 60th birthday, he began his studies at the age of three learning vocal music, and shortly after began his studies on drums. At the same time, his father trained him on all kinds of other instruments, but then decided that Ali Akbar must concentrate on the sarod. For twenty years his father spent fifteen hours a day teaching him — his total practice time was eighteen hours each day. Ali Akbar gave his first public performance at the age of fourteen, and in his early twenties became the court musician of the Maharaja of Jodhpur.

Khansahib (as he is properly called) first visited the United States in 1955 at the special request of Yehudi Menuhin, and performed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. That same year he made the first Western LP recording of Indian classical music and gave the first television performance of Indian music on Alistair Cooke's "Omnibus" show. Since then he has toured extensively in Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

As a composer, Khansahib has composed music for eighteen films, including Satyajit Ray's "Devi" and the award-winning film of Tagore's "Hungry Stones," and for the ballet and theatre. He has furthered the knowledge of Indian classical music by founding the Ali Akbar College of Music in Calcutta in 1956 and the Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael, California, in 1967, where he continues to teach.

The artist has been presented with many awards, including the President of India Award (in 1963 and again in 1966), the rarely-given award of the Government of India, "Padma Bhushan" or "lotus-adorned master," and several honorary degrees. But his father never let him rest on his laurels; instead, he laughed at them as worldly vanities. Suddenly one day, the old patriarch told his son that he was very proud of him, "so much pleased with your work in music that, as your guru and father, I am giving you a title — 'Swara Samrat' (Emperor of Melody)." This title Khansahib regards as his highest honor . . . "I am proud only of this one."

Swapan Choudhuri, one of the most popular young tabla players in India now, was born in 1947 in Calcutta and began studying tabla at the age of five. He won his first award three years later, followed by several other awards and trophies. Swapan completed the Master of Music examination of the Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad, while at the same time earning a bachelor's degree in economics from Jadavpur University in Calcutta. His spectacular success as a soloist is equaled by his performance as an accompanist. Highly sought after for his accompanying skills, he has played and recorded with India's greatest singers and instrumentalists, among them Ali Akbar Khan, Ravi Shankar, and many others, both in India and the Western World. He has toured Europe and Japan, and 1981 brought his debut to American audiences. Swapan is presently the resident tabla instructor at the Ali Akbar College in San Rafael.