

MINER, ALLYN. *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Performing Arts Series Volume VII. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1997. 265 pages. Map, figures, plates, bibliography, index. Cloth Rs. 325; ISBN 81-208-1299-9. Paper Rs. 195; ISBN 81-208-1493-2.

This volume, originally published by Florian Noetzel Verlag in Wilhemshaven, was issued in an Indian printing in 1997 as the seventh volume of a "Performing Arts Series" edited by Farley P. Richmond. As the back cover informs the reader, Miner received a Ph.D. in 1982 from the Department of Musicology of Banaras Hindu University, where, under the guidance of Prem Lata Sharma, she wrote the dissertation that became the basis of this book.

Little written information is available on the pre-twentieth-century history of the sitar and sarod. The same can, of course, be said with equal fairness about many other Asian musical traditions. Part of the reason for this lack is that, as Miner aptly states, "[a]ccounts of early players and their music lie hidden in the oral histories of professional family lines, and in 19th century books, largely inaccessible even to serious students." Other reasons, equally important, are that not all ethnomusicologists are equipped with the requisite linguistic skills to handle archaic, sometimes badly preserved, records. Moreover, many scholars simply do not have enough money to finance the long stays abroad that are usually required for archival work. Much of the blame must also fall on the training of Western scholars, many of whom rely largely on the ahistorical methods of traditional ethnomusicology (hunting and gathering, transcription, analysis). As a result, until the last decade or two, many studies of non-Western music have tended to highlight the synchronic level, offering perhaps a page or two of history as general background, but soon fleeing to the seemingly safer ground of the present day. Native scholars, on the other hand, have predictably behaved more like Western musicologists who study Western music, spending most of their time and energy struggling with frustratingly fragmentary records of national or local traditions. Such work has often led to indispensable, pioneering musicological studies, but ones that are often written in a manner accessible only to the specialist (and, of course, usually not written in English). The gap

between the interests and methods of the native researcher and his foreign counterpart is not easily bridged.

Miner's book thus represents a welcome and much needed addition to the gradually increasing literature on non-Western music histories. Her study points to what will certainly be the future of Asian musicology: a judicious combination of library and archival work in India and elsewhere, interviews with living masters of the traditions she studies, and a healthy dose of performance practice expertise based on the actual playing of the instruments in question. Most importantly, Miner does not simply repeat the statements of her informants (both written and oral), but judges the plausibility of statements critically.

Miner opens her study with an extended discussion of the physical history of the sitar (the term first appears in writing only in 1739). She questions various legends of origins, testing the evidence for Central or West Asian influence, for Sanskrit origins, and for the role of Amir Khusrau (two different identities are possible: one Khusrau was born 1253, the other in the eighteenth century), often claimed to be the inventor of the instrument. By the 1830s the sitar, played with a plectrum, was widely known as an instrument for both solo performance and dance accompaniment. As it continued to gain in popularity, it took on various shapes and sizes, and a greater number and tuning of strings (including drone strings). To complement her discussion of the sitar, Miner also provides information on related nineteenth-century instruments, such as the *surbahār*, the *tāūs*, and the *isrāj*.

The last section of the first part of this study details the history of the *rabāb* (a plucked, fretless lute, unlike the bowed spike lute of the same name found throughout Asia), and the sarod. The latter, mentioned in Indian records from around 1830, is quite similar to the Afghani instrument by the same name, and can also be found in Pakistan and Kashmir. During the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, it underwent great change in the number of strings, tunings, and sympathetic or drone strings.

The second part of Miner's study turns its focus to the socio-historical context, the courts and cities where the developments discussed in Part One took place. Eighteenth-century Mughal Delhi began with the reign of the notorious Aurangzeb (1659–1707) whose ever-increasing religious fervor led him to enact fundamentalist, antimusical policies. His successors, especially Muhammad Shah, however, were more in favor of music and dance, allowing Delhi to become an important musical center that produced composers such as Na'mat Khan and others. Delhi musical culture fell on difficult times from the late eighteenth century, when British colonialism cast its long shadow over the cultural landscape. In other cities, such as Lucknow, however, new trends in sitar playing emerged from the midst of much political intrigue and tumult, vividly described by Miner. *Rabāb*-playing composers of *druphad*, such as the three brothers Basat Khan, Pyar Khan, and Ja'far Khan, taught their new disciples the sitar, the most popular instrument of the time. New styles and forms of music were created when composers in Lucknow and elsewhere judiciously combined tradition with innovation. After the Indian army revolt of 1857–1858, Delhi, the center of British influence and rule, underwent much transformation. The British had little taste for Indian music; many musicians fled to Alwar, Jaipur, Rampur, Lucknow, and elsewhere. Both court and commoner culture at such regional centers was thereby infused with new musical life. Miner provides much detail on who was active and what was happening in various cities throughout India during the late nineteenth century.

The third and final part of this volume presents a discussion of the music itself. Since no sound recordings of the period are available, Miner reproduces and interprets notations from nineteenth-century books, keeping in mind present-day orally-transmitted performance practice. Technical terms of performance practice are considered, and variation in historical usage explained. Since Miner unfortunately includes neither an audio source (CD or tape) of

contemporary renditions of what she transcribes, nor Western notation, this section will be fully meaningful only to those who already possess considerable knowledge of traditional sitar and sarod notation and playing techniques.

The book closes with an extensive bibliography and a welcome index. Further enhancing this study's value are no fewer than eighty-one reproductions of hard-to-find illustrations and photographs. In short, this study is highly recommended for anybody with an interest not just in sitar and sarod music as it sounds today, but in how and why it came to sound the way it does. Miner's discussion of the actual music—*ālāp*, *jod*, *jhālā*, *bol*, *gat*, *todā*—and much else will appeal only to the specialist or the practicing sitar player, but her synthesis of a huge number of important sources, and her well-organized and readable writing serves to endow all lovers of Indian music with an opportunity to add a new level of depth to their experience of these traditions.

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