



(LYRCD 7376)

SITAR AND SURBARHAR  
Indian Music for Meditation and Love  
Ustad Imrat Khan, Sitar and Surbahar  
Shafaat Miadaad Khan, Tabla

In this, his first recording made in the United State, Imrat Khan demonstrates his consummate mastery of two instruments, the sitar and the surbahar, the bass sitar, which he introduced to the American concert stage in 1975.

Both the sitar and surbahar have developed from the oldest stringed instrument of India, the bin or rudra vina, which consists of two large gourds of equal size joined symmetrically by a round wooden neck. The bin is characterized by its deep, rich voice.

The sitar hardly needs introduction to western audiences, but it is worth noting in connection with this recording that there are two basic styles of stringing the instrument to approximate the sound of the bin. In the second style, popularized by Imrat Khan's family, there are only six main strings with a range of three octaves, on the grounds that the deep tones of the surbahar recreate more effectively the bin's lower register.

The Surbahar was invented by Imrat Khan's great-grandfather, Ustad Sahebdad Khan. The instrument was in danger of disappearing after the death of Enayet Khan, Imrat's father; but thanks to the efforts of Imrat himself, the instrument has regained its place as one of the most important instruments of North Indian art music.

The surbahar is, in effect, a bass sitar, with a practical range of over four octaves. It has a wider neck, thicker strings, and a gourd larger and flatter than that of the sitar. Like the sitar, the

surbahar has sympathetic strings, usually eleven to thirteen in number, that gives added resonance to each tone and help create the characteristic sound of the instrument. Another shared characteristic of the two instruments is the technique of “bending” a tone by deflecting one of the playing strings across a fret. In this manner, pitch on the sitar can be raised in a smooth glissando by four to five tones, while a pitch on the surbahar can be raised by a full seven tones.

The deep, powerful sound of the surbahar makes the instrument particularly appropriate for meditative, devotional music. Imrat Khan will often perform the slower opening exposition of a rag on the surbahar, changing to the sitar for the section with rhythmic accompaniment in the same or related rag. Together the two instruments cover an ambitus of five or six octaves, giving the performer, quite literally, a wide range for self-expression.

Imrat Khan is accompanied by his son, Shafaat Miadaad Khan, on the on the tabla in the later portion of the recording. The tabla is actually a pair of drums: a wooden drum (usually played by the right hand) which is tuned to the basic note of the rag; and a rounded, metal-bodied drum whose lower pitch can be varied by pressure from the heel of the performer’s left hand.

Unlike most Indian musicians, Imrat Khan chooses not to use the tanpura, or drone instrument, so that he may allow himself more dramatic exploration of varied dynamics.

#### THE PERFORMANCES

Imrat Khan’s family has pioneered and perfected gayaki ang, the “vocal” style of instrumental performance. Performers in this style try to overcome the sharp, rigid attack imposed by the up-and-down movement of the plectrum, and imitate instead the lyrical, smoothly flowing patterns of the voice. On the surbahar, Khansageb takes his inspiration from dhrupad, the oldest and most profound form of classical vocal music in North India. On the sitar, his model is khyal a more exuberant and romantic – but equally artistic – style of singing.

#### THE TRACKS

##### Rag Jog (24:10)

Meditative in character, Rag Jog is meant to be performed in the evening. It is distinguished by its use of both a major and a minor third:

basic ascent: sag a ma pa nb sa (1 3 5 b 7 8)

basic descent: sa nb pa ma ga ma gab sa (8 b 7 5 3 4 b3 1)

The tension between the natural and flatted ga provides a striking dramatic effect.

Rag Jog is presented here on the surbahar in an alap (an unmeasured exposition) and jor (also unmeasured, but with a slow rhythmic pulse). The rich, authoritative voice of the surbahar is apparent in all its depth, as Khansaheb unfolds a slow, meditative development through the alap and into the jor, which fades out at the end of Rag Jog. Khansaheb says he would like the sound to “continue in the listener’s mind.” He describes the feeling of playing the rag as that of “sailing on a boat you can’t speed up.” In one sense, Jog is “like the ocean, only water and sky, drifting towards a destination.” In another sense, it is “like a mountain, so grand and powerful, yet so peaceful.”

##### Rag Saraswati (22:15)

Rag Sarawati should also be performed in the evening, but with a more romantic spirit.

basic ascent: sa re ma# pa dha nb sa (1 2 #3 5 7b 8)

basic descent: san b dha pa ma# re sa (8 b7 6 5 #4 2 1)

The basic modal structure is very unusual in Hindustani music though it occurs in Carnatic (South Indian) music as tag vachaspat. The ga (3) is entirely omitted.

Rag Sarawati is performed here in a brief alap followed by vilambit gat (slow composition) set in a tinal, a rhythmic cycle of sixteen beats. That gat provides material for improvisation, alternating with extended variations on the sitar, and provides a metric point of reference for the complex cross rhythms of the tabla solos. Khansaheb's superb facility with gamaks (heavy ornamental oscillations) is amply demonstrated, as is the sprightliness and energy of his variations. This performance also involves a masterful use of varied dynamics, including at two points the softening of the tabla's voice into virtual silence. Khansaheb concludes the gat with a gradual deceleration of the basic composition, an unusual, but tasteful way of ending the piece when limitations of time do not permit him to continue into a drut gat (fast composition).

#### THE ARTISTS

Imrat Khan, born in 1936, continues a lineage of eminent ustads (master musicians): Enayet Khan (his father), Im ad Khan (paternal grandfather), and Sahebdeed Khan (paternal great-grandfather), all preeminent performers on the sitar and surbahar. Because his father died when Imrat was very young, other members of his family undertook the boy's musical training. He learned singing from his mother, Bashiran Begum, maternal uncle, Zindah Hassan Khan, and maternal grandfather, Bandah Hassan Khan. Imrat's elder brother, the renowned Vilayet Khan, taught him the sitar, and his father, Vahid Khan, taught him the surbahar. In his early years, Imrat showed a pronounced gift for the surbahar, and today, as this recording clearly shows, he has no equal on the instrument.

Shafaat Miadaad Khan, the youngest of Imrat's four sons, chose to concentrate upon the tabla after an initial study of the sitar and surbahar. This choice added a new dimension to the family's traditional instrumental specializations. He has received his training in tabla from the eminent Ustad Ibrahim Khan, and has achieved a remarkable degree of virtuosity at the age of just 17. In this, his recording debut, he demonstrates a fine sensitivity as accompanist to his father.

Notes by Brian Silver Schuyler

The artists are grateful for the cooperation of Cliff Preiss and the staff of WKCR-FM in New York, where these recordings were made.

#### CREDITS

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Cover photograph of an outer structure of the Tag Mahal, Courtesy of the Government of India Tourist Office, New York City, and special thanks to their very helpful staff.



**Lyrichord Discs Inc.**

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station  
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291  
email: [nick@lyrichord.com](mailto:nick@lyrichord.com) Web: [www.lyrichord.com](http://www.lyrichord.com)

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