

Mp3 Nikhil Banerjee - Purabi Kalyan 1982

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Live sitar concert with tabla; North Indian classical music 6 MP3 Songs CLASSICAL: New Age, WORLD: Asian Details: Raga CD-207: 2cd set. Nikhil Banerjee sitar Swapan Chaudhuri tabla Rag Purabi Kalyanalap, jor, gat in tintal: 100 minutes Introduction by George Ruckert: We are in Wheeler Auditorium at the University of California, Berkeley, in the autumn of 1982. The hall is fullsitar master Nikhil Banerjee has a number of students in the San Francisco Bay area, and he has taught and played here regularly since 1967. I am announcing the program this evening, and I ask Mr. Banerjee (as he always liked to be addressed) what he wishes me to say. Simply introduce the artists by name. Nothing else, he replies. In many cases Indian artists prefer to tell the audience themselves about the rag to be played, or say a few words, so I find nothing unusual about the request. My opening remarks are therefore very short: I say the artists names and walk off the stage. They tune their instruments for a while, and the alap (introduction) begins without a word of further introduction. I dont recognize the rag. For many students of this music, not knowing the name of the rag becomes a challenge to identify it, and perhaps Mr. Banerjee is having fun with us. The rag seems to have the notes and features of the popular rag, Puriya Kalyan, but has in addition the slight use of the natural fourth degree (shuddh ma). The alap unfolds in the style characteristic of Mr. Banerjees playing: an unhurried, careful exposition of the rag phrase by phrase with long sustained tones. His sitar is adjusted especially for this style of development, and the important feature of a sitars timbrethe buzzing sound called the jawariis closed. That is, the buzz is kept to a minimum so that the sustain of the notes is more pronounced. This sweet sustain sacrifices the sparkle in the attack of the tone which characterizes the sound of other sitarists, notably that of Pandit Ravi Shankar. After a full treatment of the low to high registers in the alap proper, which has no rhythmic pulse, the jor begins. In this particular performance this section begins in a medium tempo, the note motion is faster, and there is a greater exploration of the range of the rag in each phrase. As in the alap, the jor descends to the lowest notes of the sitars register after a short while, which causes the sympathetic strings on the instrument to ring out in cascades of sound. The gat begins, wherein Swapan Chaudhuri, the renowned tabla player, enters. The gat is a fixed composition in meter, in this case the sixteen-beat

rhythmic cycle known as tinal. The shape of this composition, with its somewhat unusual repeated notes in the opening ascending phrase, suggests the contour of some other tal than the familiar tinal, whose four-four beat patterns often have a more conventional rhythmic symmetry. Swapan Chaudhuri's feeling for the development of the rag and the instrumentalist are always outstanding, and never more so than here, as he tailors the tempo and intensity of his own inventions to Mr. Banerjee. These two musicians from Calcutta played often together and are here in a satisfying harmony with each other. The gat meanders slowly with sweet, arrhythmic vistars (developmental expansions of the rag), until Mr. Banerjee follows one of the tabla solos with a brilliant gamak tan (fast run with shakes). We are then in a section of the rags performance in which this master always has full sway. It is due to his particular gift and intense practice that the tans are fresh, incredibly accurate, and sparkling with invention. Frequently they end with a clever or suspenseful tihai short phrase repeated three times which leads miraculously to the downbeat of the rhythmic cycle. The gat doubles in tempo to fast tinal, and after some passages in tora style (plucked patterns with the right hand), the rapid tans reappear and ascend to the highest register of the sitar. These high notes are difficult to play on a sitar, for there are no frets to guide the player: every note must be articulated by pulling the string sideways. Then begins the final movement, known as the jhalla (sparkling). Typical of the playing style of this master, this movement begins slowly, and gathers momentum steadily to a thrilling climax with a final tihai. The audience has been held spellbound, and they respond with a loud ovation. This was an extraordinary display of musical depth and virtuosity. In the tiny dressing room, Mr. Banerjee tries to acknowledge the enthusiastic praises and displays of reverent affection. Old students, reviewers, friends, and people he has not seen for a while shower him with happy greetings. How wonderful to hear you again, Mr. Banerjee... Nikhilda, that was awesome... Are you in town for long this time, Mr. Baner... Mr. Banerjee, this is my wife, Am... Panditji, what rag was... Mr. Banerjee, I want you to meet my friend, Nicholas Alexander... Mr. Banerjee, will it be possible while you are in town to... And on and on, throughout the short intermission. Some less well-wishing people have come directly to me, the announcer. They seem somewhat less than charitable: Why have you not announced the name of the rag? It is somewhat rude to leave us all guessing, you know. It is only proper for you as emcee to include telling us something of the performance, certainly the name of the rag. Otherwise, there should have been a program... In truth, I was burning to know the name of the rag myself. Just before walking on stage for the second half of the program, I said to Mr. Banerjee that some

people wished to know the name of the rag in the first half. He paused. A twinkle came to his eye. Tell them...tell them it was...Nicholas Alexander. Swapan Chaudhuri burst out laughing. Mr. Banerjee continued after a pause: Why do they need to know? This rag is quite rare, and they will not know it, anyhow. Sometimes the naming of the rag can spoil the magic. The people start to think this and that, and they don't hear the beauty right in front of them. He paused again, thinking. He sighed. You may say that I have played Purabi Kalyan. Mr. Banerjee, we will ever miss you. George Ruckert Producers Note: A Nikhil Banerjee concert was a rare and eagerly awaited event, and I was fortunate enough to be in California at the time of the concert reproduced here. It was the dawn of the Walkman era, when everyone could have a pocketable tape recorder, and in view of the dearth of available recordings of any kind, let alone concerts, I was not about to let this one get away. Using a good deck, separate microphone and sitting near a PA speaker, I got a serviceable audience recording, the kind that makes a fan really happy, but well below the standard of a studio recording. Fortunately for posterity, the sound person at the concert, my friend Bill Lewis, was able to hook up his Nagra, but the first few minutes of the master tape did not survive to the present time. A performance of a raga, or any section thereof can be of any duration; Mr. Banerjee might well have begun where the master tape now begins, had his mood been different much of the material is repeated. In some of Mr. Banerjee's Indian discography, bleeding chunks (excerpts) are presented. But I know that for my own personal collection I would want the complete performance, and that is how it is presented here. The audience recording is used to cover the missing beginning of the master tape. People may want to hear only the crystal-clear master, so track access has been provided. John Wilton Booklet includes a transcript of a 2-hour interview with Mr. Banerjee by Ira Landgarten, co-producer of this CD set.

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