



Raga Unveiled : Reviews

We are just delighted by the enthusiastic response to Raga Unveiled. As they become available we will share reviews here on our website. If you would like to bring a review to our attention, please write to info@ragaunveiled.com

India Currents, Priya Das. July 31, 2009.

Raga Unveiled, a movie on the history and essence of Hindustani classical music is a perfect storm of filmmaking, narration, editing, music, and the key element—a singular, unselfish passion for the art. Set to debut in California this month, the documentary made its Indian debut in February and was screened in Connecticut in spring.

The film's story unfolds through interviews, jam sessions, and concert footage, and includes some old archived gems. Watching this movie is like spending an evening with maestros Ali Akbar Khan, Zakir Hussain, Amjad Ali Khan, Shiv Kumar Sharma, Vijay Kichlu, Bhimsen Joshi, and Ravi Shankar, among others, in one go.

In a systematic demystification of Hindustani music using the raga as the driving force, Raga Unveiled is a documentary that splashes the mind with musical color or rang, the Sanskrit word from which the word Raga is derived. "I felt Hindustani music was appreciated only superficially, so decided to introduce listeners to the deeper nuances," says filmmaker **Gita Desai**.

The greatest attribute in performing a raga is that it is all improvisation; a spontaneous rendering of a melody. When artists improvise, they are in effect gradually awakening streams of consciousness within themselves, and vicariously, in us. Desai guides us to this realization through many roads. For instance, there is a highly captivating nine-minute segment that gives us a "live" view into how a performance comes together - six musicians including Pandit Vijay Kichlu [voca], Debashish Bhattacharya [slide guitar], and Debojyoti Bose [sarod] jam on camera, unfolding Raga Todi as a live and spontaneous collaboration.

Raga Unveiled is as much a journey through music-making as it is a journey of music realization by its viewers. Even as we're getting familiar with the artists, the narration familiarizes us with the nuances of Hindustani music appreciation, such as keeping an ear out for the sum, the first beat of a rhythm cycle.

The artists harness the notes and take them down explorative paths; the more the musicians, the more the paths. The mystery of the performance is revealed every once in a while when they all meet at the sum. This is a heady and suspenseful experience to be able to intuitively meet at the sum without missing a beat or the losing oneself on the sometimes slippery slopes of the raga.

Raga Unveiled nudges us awake to the beauty of the sum, and continues on to illuminate every aspect of Hindustani music: the science behind the raga "sound", the mathematics supporting the various ragas, the guru shishya [student] tradition, "moods" of ragas, rhythms, various substyles within Hindustani classical, instruments that form the fulcrum of this music, and even the industry that creates the instruments. Liberal use of rare black-and-white film footage of masters such as Allaudin Khan, Allarakha Khan, and Ahmad Jan Tirakhawa gracefully adds a third dimension, that of timelessness to this movie and the music tradition it talks about.

The most to benefit by watching Raga Unveiled are the ones among us who are as yet uninitiated - the prejudicial among us, who haven't been able to relate to serious looking artists performing with eyes closed and arms flailing. The most to enjoy the movie will be the avid listeners among us. **Gita Desai**, a self-proclaimed professional listener and housewife-turned-filmmaker, has made the movie from her perspective. It is a vista of honest reactions to music deeply felt by her, and will echo parallel notes in all listeners.

Yoga + Joyful Living Magazine. Review by Rolf Sovik. August 2009.

President of Himalayan Institute.

This four-hour documentary is not only a terrific introduction to North Indian classical music, but a treasury of interviews with many of India's greatest living musicians and music scholars. Each of its twelve sections sheds light on an important element of musical composition and performance - beginning with the deeply moving philosophy that underlies Indian music. You'll explore the notes [the svaras] of the scale, the evocative ragas that evolve from them, the intricate rhythms that so intimately accompany the ragas, and the nature of improvisation as an art form. Each DVD also offers a stirring -if all too brief - selection of extraordinary musical performances. Raga Unveiled is a delightful survey of one of the world's most ancient living art forms.

Review by Shri Pradeep Joshi.

Director of Sangeet Dhwani.

On the weekend of August 22nd-23rd, the Sunnyvale community thoroughly enjoyed a truly unique and inspirational film that illuminates the essence of Indian classical music. Raga Unveiled, a documentary, received tremendous praise from viewers who had not just one, but two chances to see the film at the Performing Arts Theatre. The 200-seat theatre was full for each screening, and each viewer was mesmerized by the wealth of information, the insights of the interviewees and the dazzling visual displays and cinematography. While many people have been exposed to Indian music, Raga Unveiled is the first work to provide a comprehensive overview of the history and essence of this profound art form. After each screening, the producer/director of the film, **Gita Desai**, answered questions from the audience about the filmmaking process.

Sangeet Dhwani, an outstanding organization selflessly promoting Indian classical music in the Bay area, expertly organized and executed this wonderful event. Please visit the website [www.sangeetdhwani.org] and support the efforts of this terrific organization.

Peter Trivelas and Lynn Kaplan. March 15, 2009.

Freelance Television Producers.

The raison d'être of this production is the music. Divine and transporting, the performances of Raga reveal the profundity of the Veda for all to experience first hand. Such a rare treat ! Along with the music, the rest of the film describes in fascinating detail the parts of the whole that come together as Raga. Ms. Desai clearly did her research. She beautifully describes the instruments, the roots, the philosophy and the structure of ancient Vedic tradition which is the basis of not only Raga but of life in general. Set against the backdrop of colorful India, this film is a feast for both eyes and ears.

Larry Payne Ph.D. March 15, 2009.

Founding President.

International Association of Yoga Therapists.

Raga Unveiled is a unique and timeless masterpiece. Gita Desai has produced the ultimate, contemporary, guide to India's rich and unparalleled relationship between sound and the deepest levels of the soul.

Hindustan Times Live, Kolkata. February 19, 2009.

IN RECENT times, there has not been a documentary film that has tackled such an exhaustive and intricate subject like the history [of] Hindustani music and its exponents.

KOLKATA LIVE

Hindustan Times Live, Kolkata, Thursday, February 19, 2009

RAGA UNVEILED WATCH THE BEST OF THE CLASSICAL MAESTROS ON SCREEN

Reel journey to trace Hindustani music

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, February 18

IN RECENT times, there has not been a documentary film that has tackled such an exhaustive and intricate subject like the history Hindustani classical music and its exponents.

Shown to niche audience at the Rabindranath Tagore Centre of the ICCR here on Tuesday evening, the over four-hour long DVD - *Raga Unveiled* - will soon be available to city music lovers.

Tracing the history of the origin of the Hindustani classical music in north India and its intricate web of notes, melody, tempo, rhythm, moods and emotion, improvisation, *guru-shishya parampara*, composition

styles and instruments, the DVD is a prized possession for not only the beginners taking interest in this rich heritage of the country but also for masters in this field.

"It took me four years and several journeys to the West and East to produce and direct this documentary that is so close to my heart. I am grateful to Pandit Vijay Kichlu for his support," said US-based director of *Raga Unveiled* Gita Desai, who along with her husband and producer Mukesh Desai, has been promoting Hindustani classical music in the West for the last 30 years.

Apart from the mind-blowing visuals and clippings of musical archive films, the documentary has a commentator narrating

the history of the Hindustani classical music since the Vedic Age to present times, interspersed with comments from vocal and instrumental maestros, musicologists and scholars.

"In this film, Gita Desai has dealt with a complicated subject in a most simple manner. The ragas, taal, lay, sur, tihai, dhrupad and khayal and so many other things have been explained simply," said the programme director of Weavers Studio Centre for Arts Nandita Dasgupta that organised the first show here.

Indeed, the documentary is a majestic journey from the older dhrupad style of repertoire to the present khayal singing. The

major heavy and light classical genres have been highlighted in this documentary and explained by the rendition of the maestros of the gharanas.

It is a treat watching instrumentalists Alauddin Khan, Ahmedjan Thirakwa, Ravi Shankar, Alla Rakha, Ali Akbar Khan, Bismillah Khan, Hafiz Ali Khan, Amjad Ali Khan, Shiv Kumar Sharma, Zakir Hussain and Swapan Chaudhuri and vocalists such as Bhimsen Joshi, Abdul Rashid Khan, Shubha Mudgal and Vijay Kichlu embellishing the documentary with their performances.

Perhaps, the most unique aspect of this documentary is the rare films clipping that are

shown to depict the journey of the north Indian Hindustani classical music.

Imagine watching Allaiddin Khan teaching Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan, or the Ustad telling finer notes of the art to Annapurna Devi. Or say *wah* seeing the nimble fingers of Ahmedjan Thirakwa and Alla Rakha on their tablas.

The film also has clippings of Alla Rakha accompanying Ravi Shankar at a concert in USA. You can also watch Hafiz Ali Khan performing with Amjad Ali Khan or the 98-year-old Abdul Rashid Khan effortlessly churning out a classical number in his school and many such exceptional moments.

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Gisela Litchgarn, Farmington, CT. March 19, 2009.

For those like us, who love India, its ancient culture, its depth of understanding human nature, its beauty and wisdom, *Raga Unveiled* is a most welcome film! While the West has much to offer the East, the same is true in reverse. How much the East has to offer the West is well illustrated in this colorful, subtle and beautiful presentation! The concept that we learn best when we look up to a master who in turn has looked up to his/her master etc. ad infinitum, is one of the basic principles of the East that has yet to get acknowledged fully, understood and appreciated in the West. For this great humility [a rare commodity not easily acquired] is required in continuity of this great oral tradition that goes back thousands of years! It seems to us where that unusual combination of humble admiration and regard, loving surrender, discipline and respect [even loving service] for the guru exists, the mind gets emptied, as it were, of irrelevant and self-absorbed clutter and thus leaves room for maximum learning! This sophisticated film, analyzing the many components of a raga and its evolution, illustrates these principles in depth, while leaving room for simplicity, beauty and the capacity for single-mindedness and enjoyment seen in the musicians as well as the audience - in the process creating something greater that raises the mind to a higher plane!

"Sound" is the beginning of music and in India Sound and "Om" and mantra and music are all interlinked and related to

God Realization. In fact many, if not all activities, tend to strive toward that universal goal: God! So ragas and music are just one more way to achieve it! Discernment is required when choosing a guru or master, as he must be worthy of that upward regard. India, being the land of masters and gurus, has mastered the art of maximum learning, whether it be mastering the body and mind as in yoga, or in sound as in raga! The complexity of the raga is broken down to the level where it is easily [or more easily] understood. This is a fine artistic achievement well worth seeing as well as experiencing!

Nutan Mehta, Avon, CT. March 19, 2009.

Gita,

Pratima and I truly enjoyed the Hartford, CT premier of "Raga Unveiled". While the abridged version was certainly enjoyable, I must say that the full four hour version that I saw in the comfort of my home was enrapturing. My interest and attention were heightened and maintained through out the viewing.

As I mused on all that I saw, the word "Unveiled" in the title seemed so very apropos. Indian classical music, despite existing for centuries has always seemed a misty figure behind a sheer veil. I have always sensed its beauty and marveled that something so beautiful is sculpted by using merely a handful of musical notes. Here lies one of the most majestic confluence of mathematics and music. Few notes permuted and combined into almost infinite variations of musical gems. The more one hears, the more the mystery deepens.

One reaches a point where listening to a composition is not enough. A desire to comprehend the various constructs; the building blocks to analyze various configurations, to classify, categorize and grasp its depth becomes overarching. Scholars and students have pursued a quest for knowledge and understanding theoretically and empirically for generations. Although their endeavors deserve a great round of applause and our gratitude, I feel that the lay people with interest in this field had still been left behind because the knowledge was so mired in secrecy [veil] and jargon that only the musical elite could comprehend. So "Raga Unveiled" is undoubtedly providing a great service to lay people. It certainly unveiled not only the misty figure that I mentioned but also many more statues and icons that were awaiting their day in the sun. This documentary has the power, both in terms of content and coverage, to be an excellent educational tool with capacity to span the cultural divide between East and West. I do not doubt that viewers of this documentary will have their interest peaked and their spirits uplifted. You have given Indian parents abroad an excellent tool to bring their children closer to Indian Classical music. I have a strong feeling that many will thank "Raga Unveiled" for inspiring them to make this art form an integral part of their lives.

As you know, I am an ardent listener of Indian Classical Music since childhood. I always have cherished its beauty, esthetics and spirituality. To know that "Raga Unveiled" is now available to many more people to enjoy and understand the beauty of Indian Classical music is a heart-warming feeling for me.

Congratulations to you and Mukesh for undertaking this adventure and more importantly, sharing it with others.

Wishing you all the success,

Nutanbhai

