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artist: Hariprasad Chaurasia album: <i>Maestro Of The Indian Flute</i> label: beatScience/Saregama distr: rough trade (D) hoanzl (A) RecRec (CH) release: 05/05/2006	
EAN: 4260044590271	beas 010 LC 11784

A Composer and Flute Player between Classic and Bollywood

Hariprasad Chaurasia is, without doubt, the foremost exponent of the Indian bamboo flute. With an almost absurd degree of skill and artistry, he has helped move this deceptively simple - yet universally popular - instrument from its folk origins right into the mainstream. Unafraid to innovate yet completely at home in the traditions he is, most deservedly, a Maestro, and these 2CDs explain why.

Selected from the most vital periods of his career to date, these carefully re-mastered recordings include some of his most well-loved performances alongside some of his rarest jewels showing his classic and modern and even experimental side. Recorded for India's oldest record company they appeal to both the casual listener and aficionado alike.

With a history that goes back to 1901 and the bustling streets of Calcutta, Saregama India Ltd., is the oldest record company on the sub-continent of India. To date it has recorded and released every major Indian artist.

Today beatscience (a sublabel of peacelounge rec / local media) is unlocking Saregama's vaults to present some of the jewels of the crown in a new series of 2CD sets entitled: "Introducing The Masters". Each release balances the classic with the rare and is designed to appeal to both the casual listener and aficionado alike. The booklets include notes in English and French.

In the early 1970s in London, places where you could learn how to play the North Indian bamboo flute – the bansuri – were thin on the ground. But, climbing the stairs to a bhavan off New Oxford Street, I sat at the foot of a sitar player whose name, I am ashamed to say, I can no longer remember. Also there was a startlingly good bansuri player from, if my untrustworthy memory is correct, New Zealand. While trying to figure how the man from New Zealand seemed to have mastered an Indian instrument in London when I'd only just discovered it, I decided three things - it was difficult, I couldn't do it but it could be done.

Why couldn't I do it? I was a more than proficient flautist who, at that time, was earning my living performing and recording, and I'd come to Indian music via a deep and abiding love of Jazz. At that time, it seemed, Jazz was without rules. You blew and you blew. Sure, you had technique and you had a crucial relationship with your fellow musicians, but essentially you blew from within yourself.

The idea of tapping that same source and then focussing, channelling ... allowing yourself to be channelled ... through a pre-determined set of rules as seemed to be the way of Indian music? No, that was not my thing. What a pity. Because the two musicians on my chosen instrument and with whom I most identified, could themselves be viewed as rebels. The first was Pannalal Ghosh and by the time I heard him he was already dead. Born July 31st, 1911 in what is now Bangladesh he'd died, aged only 49, in 1960. Although from a musical family, the 20s and 30s in India were energetic times and Pannalal's first gainful employment was not as a musician, but as a boxer.

The legends that surround him include undertaking surgery to cut the webbing between his fingers so that he could reach the holes on his extra-large flute. True? It's doubtful. Probably he just practised a lot. What's beyond doubt is that, with the help of the new recording medium and a political self-awareness, he took an instrument previously considered as 'folk', into the classical mainstream. In that he was the first. But it was Hariprasad Chaurasia who, with elegance and artistry, took it further.

There are a few coincidences. In 1947, the year of India's liberation, Pannalal was finally accepted as a student of Ustad Allaudin Khan, the legendary teacher of, among others, Ravi Shankar. Hariprasad later received tuition from, among others, the reclusive Shrimati Annapurna Devi, daughter of the same Allaudin Khan.

Whilst Pannalal earned money as a boxer, Hariprasad's father was a wrestler and wanted his son to be the same. But Hariprasad had other ideas. In Varanasi he studied vocal under Pandit Raja Ram but switched to flute after hearing a performance by Pandit Bholanath. A position with AIR (All India Radio) plugged him into the mainstream and then in 1967 he was part of a recording which defined an era and changed peoples lives.

CD1: Innovations

1. Raga Pahadi 6:44
from: 'Call Of The Valley'
(P) 1967 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia
Santoor: Shivkumar Sharma
Guitar: Brijbhushan Kabra
Tabla: Manikrao Papatkar
Tanpura: unidentified

'Call Of The Valley' was initially derided by the guardians of style as 'light classical' - which indeed it is. But what style, what light! With producer G.N. Joshi, a programme of music was conceived which reflected the day in a life of a Kashmiri shepherd. Unconventional, it used musicians and instruments from outside the mainstream. Today it has become the mainstream, a benchmark recording against which others are measured.

2. Anand: based on Raga Bhairavi 8:18
from: 'Sounds Of Silence'
(P) 1993 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia
Guitars: Sunil Kaushik
Tabla: Shubhankar Banerjee
Tanpura: Debopriya Chatterjee, Suchismita Chatterjee

Hariprasad has always been prepared to look beyond the boundaries of classical convention. But that must not be confused with a lack of discipline. Here he gives a beautifully restrained yet perfectly paced performance with understated guitar and bass accompaniment.

3. Exuberance: based on Raga Shivranjani 17:49
from: 'Premyog'
(P) 1995 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia
Guitar: Jayantilal Gosher
Tabla: Vijay Ghate
Tanpura: Debopriya Chatterjee

The bansuri is a deceptively simple instrument. A hollow tube of bamboo, blocked at one end and with one hole to blow across and produce a note by setting the

column of air inside vibrating, another six holes for the fingers to leave open or cover thereby adjusting the length of the air column and changing the note. Indian music is famed for its notes: subtle microtonal shifts that can change the whole character of piece and the skill required to control such a sensitive instrument is immense.

4. Raga Jhinjhoti 21:03

from: 'Jugalbandi'

(P) 1975 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia

Santoor: Shivkumar Sharma

Tabla: Kashinath Mishra

Tanpura: Smt. Anuradha Chaurasia

An even more improbable instrument to effect microtonal subtleties is the fixed-string hammer dulcimer from Kashmir, the santoor. Here, in the hands of Hariprasad's long-time colleague, Shivkumar Sharma, it shimmers as the two friends jointly explore the nuances of their chosen raga. Over the years they have recorded and played together many times, yet there's never any sense that they might exhaust the twists and turns of their musical conversations.

5. Dhun Sindhi Bhairavin 11:04

from: 'Flute (Ahir Lalit)'

(P) 1980 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia

Guitar: Sunil Kaushik

Tabla: Zakir Hussain

Tanpura: unidentified

With a guitar accompaniment to help provide a harmonic motif, and with the remarkable Zakir Hussain on tablas, Hariprasad Chaurasia performs this achingly beautiful dhun (light air).

CD2: Traditions

1. Raga Bageshwari 10:45

(in Ektaal)

from: 'Down Melody Lane'

(P) 1973 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia

Tabla: Kashinath Mishra
Tanpura and zither: unidentified

I make no excuses for selecting the next three from one recording session. Dating back to 1973 they were originally released under the title 'Down Melody Lane' and, although perhaps not the most unusual phrase, there's a pleasing coincidence in that it's also the title of G.N. Joshi's 1984 memoirs, the man who could be said to have kick-started Hariprasad's career with the release of 'Call Of The Valley'.

2. Raga Mishra Pilu 9:33
(in Addha taal)
from: 'Down Melody Lane'
(P) 1973 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia
Tabla: Kashinath Mishra
Tanpura and zither: unidentified

Aged 35 (he was born in Allahabad, July 1st, 1938) when this was recorded it sometimes seems to me that he's rarely sounded better. There's a confidence yet urgency to his playing that never fails to seduce.

3. Raga Gujri Todi 20:43
(Vilambit in Matta taal, Drut in Tritaal)
from: 'Down Melody Lane'
(P) 1973 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia
Tabla: Kashinath Mishra
Tanpura and zither: unidentified

I find this most marked in his masterful performance of Raga Gujri Todi; a raga full of pathos and reputed to have been composed by a 16th century Rajput queen, Mriganayani.

4. Raga Latangi 29:42
(Vilambit in Ektaal, Madhyalaya in Teentaal)
from: 'Flute (Jaijaiwinti)'
(P) 1994 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia
Tabla: Shubhankar Banerjee
Tanpura: Debopriya Chatterjee, Suchismita Chatterjee

Twenty-one years and many recordings later, Hariprasad has lost none of his enthusiasm for the purely classical as this exquisitely delicate and deft performance from 1994 reveals.

5. Dhun 'Vaishnava Jan To Tene Kahiye' 5:39

edit from: 'Flute (Indira Kalyan)'

(P) 1984 The Gramophone Company Of India Ltd.

Flute: Hariprasad Chaurasia

Tabla: Shafaat Ahmed Khan

2nd flute: unidentified

Tanpura: unidentified

With one lead and one supporting flute, this dhun is based on Mahatma Gandhi's favourite bhajan (devotional song):-

'One who is a Vaishnav (worshipper of Vishnu)

Knows the pain of others ...'