

RAVI SHANKAR

Pandit Shyam Shankar, Ravi Shankar's father, was a Bengali Brahmin of many talents. As a youth in Benares, he had studied Sanskrit and philosophy and learned to sing in a classical style; he could chant the ancient Hindu hymns, or *vedas*, and was also fluent in English—India having long ago been subsumed within the British Empire. He was a lawyer by training. For several years he was employed as *diwan*, or chief minister, at the court of the Maharaja of Jhalawar in southern Rajasthan, one of the many semiautonomous princely states within the British-Indian Raj. This position afforded him the opportunity to travel frequently to London (where, among other things, he purchased books for the royal library) and to expose his growing family to the good life and fine arts of the maharaja's palace.

Born on 17 April 1920, Ravindra Shankar was the fifth and youngest son of Shyam and his wife Hemangini Devi, who descended from a Bengali *zamindari* family. Ravi Shankar was twenty years younger than his oldest brother, Uday. By the time Ravi was born, Shyam Shankar had resigned his post in Jhalawar and left India for London, where he embarked upon a new life with an English wife. He practiced law and eventually became an amateur impresario, introducing Indian dance and music to Britain. Uday Shankar joined him there and studied painting at the Royal College of Art. But the rest of the family stayed behind, living in a rented house in Benares and making ends meet by drawing on the father's pension from the maharaja. Although Ravi was to see his father periodically over the years, he never came to know him well. He remembers him as "a strange person who never took much care of any of us."

On the face of it, the maharaja's pension was generous, but by the time the money made its way down a chain of princely officials and clerks and actually reached the family in Benares, it had dwindled considerably. Hemangini Devi was therefore forced to supplement the royal pension by pawning jewelry and fancy clothes that had been given to her by the maharaja's wife—something she did secretly, at night, to hide her shame. Ravi Shankar remembers that on such occasions "she would weep quietly." Thus, she managed to send her older sons to college and to educate and nurture young Ravi, to whom she sang lullabies and classical songs in a "soft, melodious voice."

Benares, or Varanasi, is one of India's oldest cities and certainly its holiest. Pilgrims flock to its sacred shrines and festivals from the far corners of the subcontinent. As a boy, Ravi Shankar relished the vibrant and music-rich religious life all around him. Temple bells resounded throughout the city and he remembers waking up early in the morning "to the chant of the Pujaris, the priests of the temple of Lord Vishwanath (Shiva)." During the procession to the temple of Durga, which he joined annually with his brothers, devotees from all over India sang together in several languages at once. At such times, he says, "I could feel all around me the vibrations of intense religious love and devotion."

There was music in the home as well. Shankar's brother Rajendra, who was involved in a small chamber orchestra, kept some instruments in the house and taught Ravi to sing songs by the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore. Ravi also imitated the Bengali songs he listened to on the family gramophone and learned to accompany himself on the harmonium. He lost himself in stories and acted them out by himself, taking each part in turn. Such were his pleasures in a childhood marked by the absence of playmates and overshadowed by his mother's sadness, a sadness that grew deeper when Bhupendra, the brother closest in age to him, fell ill and died suddenly when Ravi was eight.

For some years, Ravi Shankar was tutored privately at home, after which, for two years, he attended the Bengali Tola High School, where students studied English, Hindi, and Bengali. This was the full extent of his formal education in India, which was cut short in 1930 when the family was swept into a bold new enterprise led by Uday, who had returned from Europe the year before.

Uday Shankar had gone to England to study painting. He completed his degree and showed some promise, but he was sidetracked by dance. In the mid-1920s, his father enlisted his help in staging an Indian ballet in London. Unlike Ravi, Uday had grown up at the Jhalawar court where he had often witnessed both folk and classical dancing. Although untrained, he took naturally to the medium and danced so impressively in his father's show that Anna Pavlova, the premier ballerina of the day, asked him to help her stage two modern ballets based on Indian themes. This drew him further into the world of dance and music and, by 1929, he had decided to assemble a troupe of artists to introduce authentic Indian performances to the West. With financial backing from a Swiss friend and patron of the arts, Alice Boner, Uday roamed India for nearly a year, studying dance, collecting musical instruments, and recruiting performers for his new company, including the famous *sarod* player, Timir Baran. By year's end he had enlisted "a beautiful cousin" and her father, as well as his brothers Rajendra and Debendra and, to supervise the household abroad, his mother, too. Young Ravi naturally tagged along and was soon en route to Paris.

The family crossed India by train and stopped in Bombay, Ravi's first modern city with tramways, movies, and people wearing Western clothes. A rough sea passage brought them eventually to Venice ("a floating heaven," remembers Shankar), from where they took the train to Paris. Alice Boner had rented a large house near the Bois de Boulogne and the Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dancers and Musicians was soon awhirl with activity. One large room was devoted to rehearsals, which began in the morning and went on the day long. Another contained beautiful costumes sent from India. (Later, members of the troupe made their own costumes and head-dresses using "hundreds of yards of silks and brocades.") Uday's collection of drums and stringed instruments lay about the house. Living in Paris among his family and the other musicians and dancers, Ravi Shankar felt as though he was "in a magic land," all the more so for the snow falling on the bistro-lined boulevards just outside, and the smartly dressed, perfume-scented French women, so exotic, so "like angels."

As an artist, Uday Shankar was both a purist and an innovator. He insisted upon using only Asian instruments in his shows, for example, but he liked to weave together authentic elements of Indian music and dance in untraditional combinations to create new and provocative effects. He succeeded brilliantly. After witnessing one of his programs in 1932, the French critic René Daumal wrote: "The beauty of these musicians and dancers, of their instruments . . . at times I still believe that I dreamed it, as one dreams of a very ancient country, of men more wise and beautiful, of a golden age." Uday charged the whole enterprise with his own energy and genius and Ravi Shankar remembers him, in these early days in Paris, as "like a god."

For a year or two, Shankar attended the Ecole San Josef, a French Catholic school some forty minutes' walk away. Here the French language came easily to him but the other little boys were such brutes that he was relieved, later, to be permitted to receive instruction at home. The troupe itself now became his true and all-embracing family, all the more so after his mother returned permanently to India in 1932.

Surrounded constantly by music and dance, Ravi naturally yearned to join in. He practiced on the sitar, the *esraj*, and the *tabla* and learned to imitate some of the orchestra's tunes. The musicians complimented and encouraged him, but none had time to teach him properly. He also began dancing. When alone, Ravi indulged his love for fantasy. He was soon able to read French comic books, detective stories, and the occasional novel. But he preferred to read about India. He read voluminously in the classics, absorbing through Bengali translations the great Hindu epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. "Within these epics," he later wrote, "lay the whole world—all the drama, romance, humor, pathos, the science fiction and the scientific theory, all the beauty of the mortal and the grandeur of

the divine.” He delighted in the works of modern Bengali writers too and, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, began reading the poems, stories, and essays of Rabindranath Tagore—the only Indian he acknowledges to have surpassed his own brother Uday in creative genius. Whenever he could, he pored over Uday’s collection of books on cave and temple art. Through reading, he says, “I fell in love with India and its past.”

After leaving the Ecole, Shankar became an active member of the company, joining in the instrumental accompaniment of the dancers on the sitar and *esraj* and performing the role of Monkey God and other small parts as a member of the dance ensemble. He was now free to travel with the troupe and, in late 1932, embarked with the Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dancers and Musicians on its debut tour of the United States. Shankar still remembers the thrill of arriving in New York aboard a ship and seeing the Statue of Liberty and the city’s famous skyline emerge through the morning fog. The famous impresario Solomon Hurok had arranged Uday’s tour. The company performed on Broadway and stayed at the deluxe St. Moritz hotel. Fanfare and publicity greeted them everywhere. “My brother became so famous,” says Shankar who, at twelve, was completely starstruck.

During the next several years, Ravi Shankar was more or less constantly on tour with the company. “We traveled all over Europe,” he recalls, “to Yugoslavia, Romania, Albania, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Many times Germany, Scandinavia, England. Everywhere.” Trips to North America became increasingly more elaborate as Ravi and the troupe crisscrossed the land aboard comfortable trains with Pullman cars and stout-voiced black porters, performing in twenty-five or thirty cities each time. Young Ravi was astonished that even second-class hotels in the United States had private bathrooms, a luxury unheard of in France. In Hollywood, the company socialized with movie stars and, on one occasion, the famous actress Marie Dressler asked Uday and the other brothers if she could adopt the winsome youth, Ravi. Their refusal, he says, crushed him at the time; a life in Hollywood seemed quite glorious to him. But New York made the more lasting impression. There he took every opportunity to slip out and watch movies and vaudeville shows and to visit Harlem where Cab Calloway, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington were in their prime. Here began his lifelong love for jazz.

While in Paris during the same years, Ravi Shankar also acquired a firsthand education in the best of Western classical music. He and his brothers saw Arturo Toscanini conduct; they attended concerts by Ignacy Paderewski, Pablo Casals, and the rival violin maestros Jascha Heifetz and Fritz Kreisler. At the same time, the Shankar household and studio became the center of a lively arts-centered social life. Uday Shankar’s patron, Alice Boner, was rich and “had fantastic friends,” recalls Ravi. He remembers having met

Cole Porter, Gertrude Stein, and Henry Miller there. More important were the musicians who took an interest in Indian music and occasionally visited Uday's salon, such as the classical guitar master Andrés Segovia, a neighbor in the sixteenth arrondissement, and the violinist Georges Enesco, the mentor of Yehudi Menuhin, a child prodigy, and later Ravi's great friend and musical collaborator. Ravi noted that whereas Western artists were fascinated with Indian dance, they tended to find Indian classical music perplexing and monotonous, a judgment that "hurt and infuriated" him. "Indian music was so rich and varied and deep," he remarked some years later. "These people hadn't penetrated even the outer skin."

At sixteen, Ravi Shankar was choreographing his own solo dances and winning critical acclaim. He relished the celebrity and the good life of Paris and the road. He became quite sociable and developed a reputation as a dandy, wearing beautifully tailored Bond Street suits. An extraordinary life for a teenager! At the same time, his awareness of India was becoming deeper and, gradually, so was his search for a special role in life for himself.

As he entered adolescence, Ravi's intense reading about India veered toward the religious and the occult. He immersed himself in the lives of Hindu saints and fantasized about becoming a famous yogi, as well as a political leader (to free India from Britain) and a great musical artist. He found mentors within the troupe, including the lead musicians whose virtuosity dazzled him and who advanced his command of the sitar, *sarod*, and other instruments, and most of all his brother Uday, who taught him "to love India more than anything."

Ravi's links to India were kept fresh through periodic visits home, during which he saw his mother and performed with Uday's company across the subcontinent. During one such trip, Ravi and his brothers made a pilgrimage to Shanti Niketan, the arts *ashram* founded by Rabindranath Tagore. To Shankar, the prolific, multitalented Tagore was the complete artist, elegant in every aspect of life including his physical appearance and clothing. It was Tagore's habit to sit conspicuously on stage when one of his ballets was being performed. Shankar witnessed such a performance and remembers being transfixed by the tall, white-haired Tagore during the entire show. Shankar approached the great man for a blessing and Tagore told him, "Be great like your father and brother."

During the same tour of India in 1935, Uday Shankar recruited one of India's premier musicians to return to Europe as a soloist with the company. Ustad Allauddin Khan was a renowned maestro of the *sarod*, or Indian lute. In the small princely state of Maihar, he tutored the maharaja and led the local orchestra; he also instructed students in several Indian instruments, as he was reputed to have mastered them all. As Ravi and the rest of Uday Shankar's group were about to board ship for Europe, Shankar's mother took the fifteen-year-old's hand and placed it in the hand of the esteemed mu-

sician, saying, "I don't know if I'll ever see my child again, so please take him and consider him as your child."

A short time before, word had arrived from London of the death of Shyam Shankar. And, as it happened, this sad quay-side parting was to be Ravi's last moment together with his mother, who died in India two years later. Thus began the formative relationship between Ravi Shankar and Allaiddin Khan, his true guru in music and the man he calls Baba, or father.

Allaiddin Khan toured with the company for nearly a year, during which time Ravi Shankar guided him through the cities of Europe, interpreted for him, and even arranged for his meals. (The ascetic and devout Khan, a Muslim who lived among Hindus, ate neither pork nor beef.) Having left his own young son behind in India, Khan did indeed treat Ravi Shankar as his own; although the irascible Khan was famous for his temper tantrums, Shankar remembers that "most of the time, he was very gentle with me." Their companionship revolved naturally around music and Ravi coaxed Khan to teach him the basics of the sitar. Whereas before Shankar had learned to play musical pieces by imitating other musicians, with Allaiddin Khan he began to study music seriously, learning scales, exercises, and fixed compositions. Something new stirred within him. Looking back at this experience, he later wrote, "I felt that I was coming close to music and that this music is what I was meant to devote my life to." Allaiddin Khan encouraged him to plunge deeper but, observing Shankar's merry life as a dance performer and young man-about-town, he had doubts. He scolded the boy for frittering away his talents chasing too many dreams at once and told him, "Take only one thing and master it!"

This advice struck home, although for the precocious teenager it was hard to accept, especially after Allaiddin Khan returned to India. Ravi Shankar was receiving rave reviews for his dancing and he relished traveling with his brother: "really, the best of life." At the same time, he yearned to resume his studies with Khan, who urged him to abandon Europe and become his disciple in Maihar. The two corresponded secretly, since Uday was adamant that Ravi pursue dancing, not instrumental music. Moreover, Uday now had a new dream that involved Ravi and the other brothers.

As war loomed in Europe toward the end of the 1930s, Uday shifted his attention homeward, where he envisioned a revolutionary new institute for Indian arts. To be located in the Himalayas, this "American-style" cultural center, replete with classrooms, studios, dormitories, and performance halls, would become the creative center for perpetuating and enhancing the traditional arts of all India. In 1938, Uday and his companions settled their affairs in Paris and returned to India. That May, Ravi Shankar took the opportunity, long delayed, to undergo the sacred thread ceremony initiating him formally into Brahminism. The rites were performed in Nasrathpur, a village

near Benares where his mother had built a house before she died and where his maternal uncle still lived. His head was shaved and for a few weeks he lived as a monk, eating only special foods and abstaining from all material things. Soon after, he boarded the south-west-bound train for Maihar.

In Maihar, which was little more than a village, the eighteen-year-old Shankar faced a life of discipline and simplicity. As a student of Allaiddin Khan's, Ravi was obliged to comport himself in the traditional manner of a novice, submitting completely to the discipline of his master and to long hours of daily instruction and solitary practice. His hair was cut short, his fancy city clothes exchanged for the simple garments of a student. He lived in a house adjacent to Khan's and occasionally took meals with the family, drawing close to Khan's natural children, Ali Akbar Khan and Annapurna—both of whom were also Khan's musical disciples. For a time, Ravi received an allowance from Uday, but when he made it clear that he intended to remain with his guru indefinitely and not, as Uday hoped, join in the new cultural center, the two brothers fell out and Uday withdrew his support. Thereafter, Ravi supported himself modestly through small loans and, after a year or so, by providing musical accompaniment for his guru in festivals and concerts.

Although at heart a humble and gentle man, Khan was a notoriously stern and mercurial teacher who sometimes beat his students. Ravi, however, remembers proudly that "Babā never once struck me." But young Shankar had been so doted on and spoiled during his years in Paris that on the one occasion when Khan did raise his voice at him—"You are weak like a little girl," he said, commenting on his inability to play a certain exercise—Ravi packed his things and prepared to leave. A teary reconciliation soon followed and afterwards, Shankar writes, "whenever he [Khan] felt angry because of something I had done, he would go and beat someone else."

As Allaiddin Khan had already discerned, Ravi Shankar possessed a musical intellect of rare strength and potential. But he was, up to this point, more a clever dabbler than an accomplished musician. He lacked substance and, most of all, physical command of an instrument. Although Shankar had longed to study the *sarod*, Khan's own forte, Khan steered him to the sitar, a stringed instrument fashioned from teakwood and gourds. Capable of a kaleidoscopic range of tones and colorations, the sitar possesses six or seven main strings that rest on a track of twenty metal frets; beneath them lie thirteen sympathetic resonating strings. The player uses a wire plectrum to pluck the top strings and only occasionally strums the lower ones, whose main function is to resonate sympathetically with the others. As each composition, or *raga*, may be tuned to a different scale, the sitar must be adjusted accordingly and often retuned while playing. Shankar now learned that, on the sitar, there was a world of difference between clever dabbling and mastery.

In their daily sessions together, at first rather short, Allauddin Khan guided Ravi along the painstaking path to mastery. Each day he would introduce a new exercise or composition, which Shankar would then attempt to learn in long hours of solitary practice, beginning each day at just after four in the morning. There were no musical texts to speak of. Khan introduced each new piece on the *sarod* or sang it out for his student, who imitated it on the sitar and learned it by heart. In time, Shankar advanced from beginners' exercises to complex compositions and eventually to a full repertoire of *ragas*. As he did so, his daily sessions with his guru became longer until, after a few years, teacher and pupil sometimes spent several hours a day playing together, often with Ali Akbar Khan and Annapurna joining in on the *sarod* and *surbahar*.

The system of music that Ravi Shankar was slowly learning was an ancient one, with roots nearly two thousand years old. The melodic form known as the *raga* emerged amid the great florescence of India's Hindu civilization and reflects its great spirituality and love for unending variations and subtleties. *Ragas* are based on seventy-two different scales and, through the infinite possibilities of improvisation, can convey virtually any mood or passion, hour or season. Even so, they possess a precise, scientific structure defined by ascending and descending movements within a single octave or even five or six notes; improvisation, however imaginative, must never violate these limits. Demonstrating the infinite musical possibilities of a *raga's* finite design is the true measure of artistry among India's musicians. ("It is like being bound in, . . . but free like a bird at the same time," Shankar later reflected. "It is a tremendous ecstasy.") There are thousands of individual *ragas* and new ones are constantly being created. No musician can know them all. It is a primary task of the guru to pass on to his protégés as many *ragas* as possible, one reason that apprenticeships are so lengthy and, indeed, never truly end.

The relationship between a disciple and his guru therefore becomes intensely personal. In Ravi Shankar's case, this was doubly true because of Allauddin Khan's promise to Ravi's mother. In 1941, Shankar took yet another step in becoming part of Khan's family. In May of that year, he married Annapurna and moved in with his guru as son-in-law. He was twenty-one, she sixteen. The marriage was somewhat unusual in that Ravi Shankar was a Hindu Brahmin, Annapurna a Muslim. (Khan insisted that his daughter convert to Hinduism prior to the marriage.) Their son Shubho (Shubendra) was born in Maihar the following March.

Ravi Shankar spent some seven years altogether in Maihar under the direct instruction of Allauddin Khan. At the same time, however, and especially in the early 1940s, he was already establishing his reputation as a performer. Aside from accompanying Baba in concert, he increasingly appeared in his own right. With Ali Akbar

Khan, he performed at Uday's cultural center in Almora (in the Himalayan foothills northeast of Delhi) and once more toured with Uday's dancers. Most importantly, Khan arranged for him to perform regular recitals on All-India Radio, whose studios were in Lucknow. The city was hundreds of miles away; he would visit periodically and record several separate programs in the space of a single day.

In 1944, Shankar suffered a serious bout of rheumatic fever and went to Bombay to recuperate. Ready now to strike out on his own, he chose this moment to take formal leave of Allauddin Khan, who granted his permission. The bond between master and disciple was not severed, however; for years afterwards Ravi Shankar returned to Maihar for periods of a month or two to resume his studies. And although his marriage to Annapurna Devi ended unhappily some years later, his bond with Khan was a lifelong one.

Bombay offered many outlets for a talented young artist and Shankar was soon caught up in a busy life of performing and composing. With some musicians and dancers from Uday's cultural center, which closed in 1944, he joined a left-wing arts organization called the Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA). As musical director, he took charge of the organization's stage productions, in particular an ambitious ballet titled *India Immortal*. In an old mansion on the outskirts of the city, he trained a company of young men and women from all over the country, a "cultural squad" who were "working, learning, practicing all together, even taking meals in a common dining hall, squatting on the floor Indian style."

Thriving in this creative atmosphere, Shankar composed the music for the new ballet, which strove to capture in dance the entire sweep of Indian history. Shankar had been inventing his own songs since childhood and had admired the composing skills of Timir Baran and V. Shirali of Uday's company in Europe and of his guru Allauddin Khan, who had created hundreds of new pieces in the classical style for his band in Maihar. Given free rein, he delighted in this new creative outlet. "I was very inspired," he wrote later, "and the music just flowed out of me."

When the ballet was finished, Shankar was commissioned to compose the music for two films, *Dharta ke Lal* (Children of the Earth) and *Neecha Nagar* (The City Below). Although neither was a commercial success, in them Shankar experimented with a new type of film score. Up until then, Indian movies were generally accompanied by a sequence of songs. Shankar innovated by carefully synchronizing his music with the dramatic action and moods of the story and by relying solely on Indian instruments and motifs—techniques he would later perfect in collaborations with director Satyajit Ray.

Aside from composing and scoring films, Shankar was busy performing. The Bombay region was rich in music aficionados, many of whom joined together to form "music circles" in order to sponsor performances by their favorite artists. With memberships from two to

four hundred, these groups, says Shankar, were “the crème de la crème . . . all connoisseurs” who knew music well. He was soon a favorite of the Bombay circles and had engagements about twice a week. Although they could not pay musicians particularly well, Shankar remembers the joy of performing for these passionate, knowing audiences—often in recitals five, six, seven hours long. In music festivals and concert tours, he performed for much larger crowds. In this way, Shankar sustained his skills as a performer in a strictly classical style even as, at the same time, he was experimenting with new musical forms as a composer of ballets and movie scores.

By the summer of 1946, Shankar’s ties to the IPTA had become uncomfortable. Never very politicized himself, he had joined the organization for its creative opportunities and with the assurance that he could devote himself strictly to music. For a time, the relationship was happy and fruitful. But the IPTA’s links to the Indian communist party soon spelled trouble as, increasingly, the “cultural squads” were enlisted to promote the party’s dogma and to dramatize current events in a propagandistic fashion. As politics smothered art in the IPTA’s agenda, Shankar decided to leave.

Soon afterward, he was recruited by yet another politically connected arts group. The Indian National Theatre was affiliated with the Congress Party, the dominant party in the country. It provided funds, musicians, and dancers for the production of a revised version of *India Immortal*, this one based on a book by Congress Party leader Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru called *The Discovery of India*. Shankar and a team made up of former IPTA members and his brothers Debendra and Rajendra readied the production for its successful premier in Delhi at the Nehru-inspired Asia Relations Conference of 1947. In the midst of this, Shankar formed a personal friendship with Pandit Nehru, a great admirer and promoter of Indian arts, and his daughter Indira. Afterwards, when Shankar and the others split from the Indian National Theatre to form India Renaissance Artists, a private company, Nehru gave his blessing to a new and more elaborate version of *Discovery of India*, which made a grand month-long tour of Calcutta and Bombay. But a bitter financial dispute erupted between the three Shankar brothers and two other partners. It became ugly, spilling into the press and the courts and causing much “unfortunate publicity.” India Renaissance Artists was disbanded.

Some thirty-five performers who had left secure jobs to join the Shankar enterprise were now out of work. Many of them lived in Shankar’s own house; for a time, he became their sole provider. Yet concert dates were few and far between. This sudden reversal of fortunes threw Shankar into deep despair. He contemplated suicide and planned an elaborate, gruesome death by throwing himself beneath a train. He attributes his survival and recovery to the intervention of Tat Baba, a great yogi who appeared unannounced at his door the very day of his planned suicide. Although the two had never

met before, Tat Baba cautioned him, “Don’t do anything foolish. Be manly and have patience.” That evening Shankar played the sitar for Tat Baba and, in subsequent meetings, Shankar adopted Tat Baba as his spiritual guru. His life improved. “Most important,” he says, “I felt a new, special strength, a surge of power.”

By the end of 1948, Shankar had received an offer to join All-India Radio, the government radio network whose broadcasts were heard not only throughout India but in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast and East Asia. As musical director of the External Services Division, he was to assist in planning the music for the network’s foreign broadcasts and also serve as composer-conductor for its in-house orchestra. After three years, Shankar switched to All-India Radio’s Home Services Division and organized a larger ensemble called the Vadya Vrinda (National Orchestra), to which he added Western instruments including the clarinet and the violin and other strings. Shankar’s five and a half years with All-India Radio provided him an unrivaled opportunity to experiment widely in composing hundreds of new works of a distinctly Indian character—orchestral pieces, musical dramas, and incidental music for radio plays. He orchestrated traditional *ragas* in new ways, “choreographing” improvisations and using unconventional instrumental combinations “to take full advantage of the quality, color, tone, and range of each instrument” and mixing ensemble playing with solos. He composed lively, romantic pieces based on traditional *ragas* and new orchestral compositions based on historical themes, such as the life of the Buddha, and regional folk music—a great popular success. Looking back on these years with All-India Radio, Shankar says, “It was like a renaissance in boosting classical music.”

When the government of India organized a delegation of artists to represent India in a cultural exchange with the Soviet Union in 1954, Ravi Shankar was an obvious choice. For two months, he and the other delegation members toured Russia, performing and being performed to. This was Shankar’s first trip to the Soviet Union and he was especially thrilled to attend the Bolshoi Ballet, where he saw classics such as *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Giselle*. About the same time, Shankar prepared the score for Satyajit Ray’s first movie, *Pather Panchali*. And in 1957, his score for the movie *Kabuli Wala* won a special prize at the Berlin Film Festival.

During a private recital at the home of Dr. Narayana Menon in 1952, Shankar played for a small gathering including Yehudi Menuhin, the famous Western violinist. Shankar was familiar with Menuhin from his days in Paris, when the child prodigy’s teacher, Georges Enesco, was a frequent visitor in the Shankar household. Menuhin had now come to India for a series of concerts. That evening at Dr. Menon’s, he experienced Indian music for the first time. Shankar was greatly taken with Menuhin’s sincere and emotional reaction to his playing and to Indian music generally. As Shankar

became his mentor, the two men struck up a friendship that resulted later in several innovative musical collaborations. In the meantime, Menuhin helped to revitalize interest in Indian music in the West and, in 1955, arranged for Shankar to be invited to play at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Although the engagement did not push through—at Shankar's suggestion, Ali Akbar Khan and Chatur Lal, a young *tabla* player, appeared in his place—it precipitated by just one year Shankar's actual return to the West and the beginning of a new stage in his career as an international artist.

Shankar had never forgotten the derogatory opinions about Indian music he heard as a boy in Paris. He was certain that, if properly introduced, Westerners and other international listeners could come to appreciate Indian classical music, just as Yehudi Menuhin had done. In Delhi, Shankar participated regularly in parties and cultural evenings among members of the international diplomatic corps. Many of these individuals had lived in India for a few years. But where Indian music was concerned, Shankar says, they "didn't know what to listen to or have a proper taste for it." Shankar occasionally performed at parties hosted by Louis De San, a wealthy *bon vivant* and patron of the arts who served as minister at the Belgian Embassy. At De San's invitation one evening, Shankar introduced his program with a short lesson about the rudiments of the music he would perform, demonstrating each feature as he went along: these are the *ragas* based on seventy-two scales; these are the *talas* or rhythmic cycles; these are the musical forms. This experiment was a great success. Afterwards, several of the diplomats present decided to meet regularly at each other's houses for recitals and talks by Shankar about Indian music. These evenings soon became popular events attended by fifty or sixty people. As Shankar later wrote, "the enthusiasm of these small audiences of Westerners encouraged me in my plans to go to the West with my music and try to promote a better understanding between the two musical heritages."

Ravi Shankar's years with All-India Radio brought him to a new pinnacle of national fame. Flying hither and yon in old Dakota airplanes, he performed in all the major music conferences throughout India, often in duet with his brother-in-law and great *sarod* player Ali Akbar Khan. In Delhi and other cities, he played for mass audiences in giant music festivals spanning several days. His music accompanied the best new films. And on Saturday mornings and evenings, in concerts broadcast nationwide, he played the sitar for, literally, millions of listeners.

In 1956, Ravi Shankar decided to leave All-India Radio and strike out on his own. Through John Coast, an agent in England, he arranged for a few concerts in London and other British cities. Friends on the continent organized engagements in Germany and France. Yehudi Menuhin also assisted. In the end, the tour encompassed dozens of cities in Europe as well as several American cities, in-

cluding New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco—his first visit to the United States in twenty years. Many concerts in Europe were organized by Indian students living abroad and, in some places, overseas Indians made up a good portion of the audience. But in many others, the audiences were made up largely of Western patrons.

Accompanying Shankar on this, his first international tour as a solo artist, were the *tabla* player Chatur Lal and Nodu (N. C.) Mullick, a *tamboura* player and the master craftsman who constructed Shankar's sitars. (While the four-string *tamboura* "drones" in the background, the *tabla*, a two-headed drum, complements the *raga* with intricate rhythms.) Ravi and the two musicians traveled simply, lodging in small hotels and managing frugally. Although the tour passed through numerous cities, revenues were modest. Many of the concerts were held in small auditoriums and, as Shankar sadly noted, "the halls were seldom full." And although audiences in Germany were warm and appreciative, Shankar faced a cold reception in his beloved Paris. He felt humiliated at times, as though he had regressed to the hard days of struggle at the outset of his career. Yet the tour was a critical success. After an initial New York recital held at the Young Men's Hebrew Association, for example, a second one was arranged at the much larger Town Hall. In the end, Shankar was buoyed by the experience, realizing that he was succeeding in building a new audience for Indian music among Western listeners.

A large measure of Ravi Shankar's success in this and later international tours surely lay in his brilliant mastery of the sitar. But showmanship was also important, a legacy of Shankar's years of apprenticeship with Uday. His concerts began with the burning of incense and a period of elaborate tuning that cast an exotic spell over the audience even before the formal recital began. While performing, Shankar sat elegantly upon a beautiful carpet, expertly lighted. His motions and facial expressions were at once sincere and theatrical, comporting with the mood of the *raga* he was playing—sad, spiritual, brooding, joyous. Building upon his experience among the diplomats in Delhi, Shankar now routinely incorporated short, witty commentaries into his concerts. He was also careful, when playing abroad, to avoid what his audiences might find "heavy and difficult." He selected *ragas* whose scales and tones would be least jarring to Western ears and began each concert with short, light pieces—in contrast to the Indian practice of elaborating a *raga* at length at the beginning of a concert. With these astute accommodations, Shankar became a lone pioneer in interpreting Indian music for international audiences.

Shankar and his fellow players returned to Europe for an expanded tour in 1957. Meanwhile, he had decided to make his base in Delhi, a good location from which to arrange concerts throughout India and to organize his increasingly peripatetic creative life. In 1958, he

performed for a gala UNESCO concert in Paris, along with Yehudi Menuhin and David Oistrakh, and joined a six-week tour of Japan with a delegation of Indian musicians and dancers. In Delhi, he conceived and executed a stage extravaganza portraying “the entire panorama of Hindustani music.” Titled *Melody and Rhythm*, the production embraced both classical and folk traditions and featured a choir singing in six distinctive forms and styles. The full company comprised nearly one hundred musicians and dancers. After witnessing the show, Prime Minister Nehru himself bound up to the stage to embrace Ravi Shankar and congratulate the performers.

For the next several years, Shankar spent many months annually touring abroad but remained rooted in Delhi. In 1957, he wrote his first movie score for a Western film. This was a Canadian fantasy called *The Chairy Tale*, for which he won a special award at the Venice Film Festival. A few years later, he produced another score for *The Flute and the Bow*, a Swedish film. In India, Shankar continued his work with Satyajit Ray, completing the scores for the final two installments of the great film director’s Apu Trilogy, *Aparajito* and *The World of Apu*. And in the early 1960s, he composed two remarkable ballet scores based on the works of Rabindranath Tagore, *Samanya Kshati* (1961) and *Chandalika* (1962), the first of which was choreographed by his brother Uday. In 1962, Shankar was presented the Presidential Award, India’s highest prize for the arts. “It was a great period,” he remembers, “I was performing a lot in India, doing music for the movies and ballet, and traveling all the time.”

Shankar returned to the United States in 1961. In 1963, he performed three recitals at the Edinburgh Festival that were greatly admired. Another tour of North America followed in 1964 and in 1965 he was engaged to teach Indian music at the University of California. His recordings were circulating among music aficionados around the world—World Pacific Records had produced ten Shankar recordings by 1967—and among his listeners were key players in contemporary jazz and pop music circles, including jazzmen Bud Shank and Latief Yusel and George Harrison of the Beatles. Harrison was so taken with Shankar’s playing that he purchased a sitar of his own and found a teacher in England; in 1965 he incorporated the sitar “sound” into a Beatles song, “Norwegian Wood.”

A large and diverse public now clamored to attend Shankar’s performances, which filled the largest concert halls of Europe and the United States. In 1966, he performed with Menuhin at England’s Bath Festival and, in December of that year, his three consecutive performances at New York’s Philharmonic Hall were sold out. Critics, too, were taking note. After hearing Shankar perform in London’s Royal Festival Hall in June 1966, Charles Fox of the *Guardian* wrote, “One was left marveling at the way Shankar can move between gaiety—even wittiness—and serenity, letting a note sway as naturally as a leaf in the wind.” A critic in New York wrote, “He is in as high

a virtuoso class as anything this century has heard from Horowitz, Heifetz, Casals or Menuhin.”

The following year, Ravi Shankar’s first collaborative sound recording with Yehudi Menuhin appeared, titled *West Meets East*. In it, Menuhin played a solo for violin composed in *raga* style by Shankar and the two men played Shankar’s duet for violin and sitar. In the fall of 1967, Shankar accepted an appointment as visiting professor at City College of New York, where nearly three hundred students attended his classes—only sixty-four of whom were registered for credit. And in December, he and Menuhin played a famous duet in celebration of United Nations Human Rights Day. During the same busy year, Ravi Shankar opened a branch of his Bombay-based music academy in Los Angeles, where he took up residence more or less full-time as his concertizing and composing occurred increasingly in the international arena.

Shankar was aware that many young Americans, desirous of learning Indian music but ignorant of its true wellsprings and character, were making aimless pilgrimages to India in search of instruction and ending up frustrated and with only superficial knowledge and skills. His Kinnara School of Indian Music and Culture in California was designed to introduce Western students to the rudiments of Indian music and to provide instruction in the sitar, *sarod*, flute, *tabla*, and voice. Students were expected to behave toward their teachers in a traditionally deferential manner. They were not permitted to smoke or wear shoes inside the building. And, like their counterparts in India, they sat on the floor. It was Shankar’s hope that, after such an introduction, the more talented students could move on to advanced study in India. The school began modestly but soon had to expand into a new building to meet the growing demand.

In the midst of these multifarious endeavors, Shankar promised to write the music for a new Hollywood movie called *Charly*. Ralph Nelson, the film’s producer, has left a revealing portrait of Shankar at work. The score was scheduled to be recorded in February 1968. When the appointed day arrived, writes Nelson, “We were ready to go to work. Or so I thought. We had assembled the top soloists of Hollywood in their respective fields. Ravi Shankar appeared on the scheduled day *without* the usual annotated score. Ravi circulated among the musicians, talking, gesturing, determining offbeat rhythms, seeking unusual musical patterns, testing each musician for his improvisational abilities. We had a total of thirty musical cues, and at the end of the first three hours we had achieved but one. Shankar was oblivious of the frantic behind-the-scenes moves to get more scoring time, to reserve the studio, to extend the musicians’ services. But through all these frantic doings Ravi moved serenely, challenging the musicians to find new sounds, not written but hidden within their reeds, their valves, their percussions. At the end of the first day we had recorded six cues. “I suppose we violated every

tenet of traditional scoring. But the results were unique, and Ravi Shankar finished on time, a trifle disappointed in me that I had ever doubted that he would.”

George Harrison’s 1965 experiment in “Norwegian Wood” had ignited an intense interest in Indian sounds among pop musicians. Other groups such as the Rolling Stones, the Byrds, and the Doors followed the Beatles’ example and incorporated sitar passages into their rock music. Some took Indianized names, such as the Gurus and the Ragamuffins. As Ravi Shankar ruefully observed, much of the new cachet of Indian music was purely superficial. With the exception of George Harrison, who actually studied with Shankar for seven weeks in 1966 and whose interest in Indian music was genuine, the vast majority of the new “rock sitarists” were merely fooling around with the instrument, playing it like a guitar. Shankar equated this to “learning the Chinese alphabet in order to write English poems.” He was even more disdainful, indeed he was furious, at the conflation of “*raga* rock” and the nascent drug culture among Western youth. “Our music is very pure,” he once said, “I don’t like someone to sit glassy-eyed at my concert, listening through a haze of his own world.” Tirelessly, he explained that intoxication of any kind was completely contrary to the spirit of Indian classical music and that, for players, purity of body and mind was an essential element of artistry—a lesson from the ascetic Allauddin Khan that he had taken to heart.

Nevertheless, Shankar did not turn his back on this phenomenon. Rather, he attempted to exploit his own celebrity to introduce elements of pure Indian music to the popular scene. He embraced George Harrison’s serious quest to learn the sitar; and he willingly appeared as a featured performer in the most famous mass rock concerts of the times.

Shankar had already confronted young audiences in England and North America; he frankly disliked the casual and even disorderly behavior of the youth during his recitals—talking, smoking cigarettes (or marijuana), drinking, boys “hugging their girlfriends.” He was notorious for stopping in the middle of his performances to lecture and scold the audience for its poor behavior. (He had done the same in India long before his debut as a celebrity in the West.) Rock concerts, he knew, were something altogether wilder, with everyone “stoned and the girls shrieking and no one listening to the music.” He recalls that, at first, he was angry with his agent for booking him at Monterey, California, site of the monumental 1968 rock festival that defined the pop scene of the times and featured artists such as Janis Joplin, The Grateful Dead, and Jimmy Hendrix. Fearing the worst, he insisted on performing apart from the rock stars. This resulted in his memorable afternoon recital at Monterey, which meshed so well with the “peace and love” zeitgeist of California’s bohemian youth, who called themselves flower children. Respond-

ing to the happy, mellow crowd, Shankar suddenly found himself “in such a good mood. It was fantastic.”

That same year, Shankar completed his second *West Meets East* album with Yehudi Menuhin. The American *Billboard* magazine named him Musician of the Year. He had achieved international celebrity.

Shankar relished his acceptance in the West, and his fame too. His brother Uday had once been India’s great international persona and Shankar never ceased thinking of him as a guru. But Uday’s star had somehow dimmed in the years since Paris and the halcyon days of world-touring in the 1930s. Nothing he did afterwards quite matched the brilliance of those years and Ravi Shankar watched sadly as Uday faded to a shadow of his former self. (After a long illness, Uday Shankar died in 1977.) It was Ravi’s star that now shown brightly.

Still, Uday’s original vision remained with Ravi—to arouse in world audiences an appreciation for Indian performing arts. Like his brother, Ravi was an innovator who experimented with new musical forms and new combinations of instruments, stretching the possibilities of several genres of Indian music. But he remained committed, as Uday had been, to authenticity—authenticity in the sense that his music flowed from within the fundamental structures of the Indian tradition. He went to great lengths to explain to Western musicians that the improvisation so integral to the *raga* tradition was not the same as jazz, although it seemed so, superficially. Ravi Shankar loved jazz and respected jazz musicians, many of whom followed his music, frequented his concerts, and befriended him. But the Indian *raga*, he repeatedly insisted, was classical music in the same sense that works by Bach and Beethoven were classical. And although he experimented widely in his own light compositions, in performance Shankar remained a strict interpreter of the classic tradition—improvising *within* the bounds of the *raga*.

One who truly appreciated this was violinist Yehudi Menuhin, who championed Indian music in the West and who thoroughly recognized the genius of the tradition and its finest interpreters. “To be present,” he wrote, “at a chamber music recital by Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan, each goading the other to new heights of invention, is an experience more magical than almost any in the world. One is in the presence of creation.”

By 1968, Shankar could justly claim that, through his efforts, many Westerners could identify and appreciate Indian music when they heard it. In concert, he continued to give his short commentaries on what he was playing. But he now made fewer and fewer concessions to his listeners. “The job of educating audiences,” he said, “is almost over. I don’t have to worry about understanding and acceptance. Now I can play as I please.”

Perhaps one reason that Western audiences enjoyed Shankar concerts so much, aside from the music and theatricality, was the obvious pleasure and, indeed, rapture that Shankar displayed while performing on the sitar. He once suggested that playing *ragas* on the sitar was like making love. This set off a furor in India but he said it was simply true: "When I am playing, it is the height of ecstasy for me, all those thrills." On another occasion, he said: "When I play . . . I really lose a lot of contact with the outside world. . . . I try to feel things within me. . . . It is that feeling of extreme sadness . . . the very sad longing to be with something that I have not been able to attain. And that is what I try to do in my musical notes. I try to get nearer and nearer, and when I feel nearer . . . I feel a certain peace."

Shankar rode the wave of popular celebrity for the next several years. His stature in the pop world brought him both fame and notoriety and he eventually tired of it. What had seemed unspoiled and innocent at Monterey, despite the presence of drugs, had gone completely out of control by 1969 when, with George Harrison, Ravi Shankar performed at Woodstock, New York, in the largest rock festival ever: "half a million people . . . doing their thing, doing everything, in fact. The music was like a background." Rain inundated the outdoor concert site and Shankar watched with disgust as the Woodstock pilgrims wallowed in the mud like water buffaloes. "I knew that that was the end," he says. "And it was *really* the end of anything big like that."

Despite this debacle, Shankar continued occasionally to collaborate with George Harrison. At the massive Concert for Bangladesh, held in New York's Madison Square Garden in August 1971, he joined Harrison, Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, and other international rock stars to raise millions of dollars for the flood- and war-stricken country that was home to many Bengalis, including the family of Allauddin Khan. Shankar was joined in the concert by Ali Akbar Khan, Kamala Chakravarty, and Alla Rakha. After Harrison's introduction (in which he said, "Their music is more serious than ours."), the Indian performers were greeted by a tumultuous ovation. Shankar then pressed the tips of his fingers together before his face and said, "This is not a program as usual. It has a message. We would like to play for you a piece in which we try to express the agony and the anguish, the hope and the joy of Bangla Desh."

A few years later, Shankar and Harrison mounted a touring show together in which Shankar and a dozen or so Indian musicians performed the first half, Harrison the second. Although the tour was successful financially, Shankar concluded that "the mixture didn't work." Most of the crowds came to hear Harrison's music, he knew. "They had to tolerate mine. It was not their cup of tea," he says. "But those who came for me were also dissatisfied, because they did not get enough of me." (The tour was also disappointing because Harrison, who was hoarse throughout, insisted on singing new songs

instead of the old favorites the crowds longed to hear.) The integration of Indian music and pop music could only go so far and this tour seemed to display its limits. Moreover, by this time, fashions in Western popular music had shifted again. The new sound was louder, coarser. Ravi Shankar's heady ride on the rock-world rollercoaster was over. But even as multitudes of listeners drifted away, others remained. "And those who stayed," he now says, "are still there."

Of course, Shankar's pop celebrity had never been more than a passing distraction. Even in the midst of it, he had continued to pursue the serious work of a serious musician. In 1970, for example, the London Philharmonic Orchestra commissioned him to compose a *Concerto for Sitar and Orchestra*. He was the first Indian composer to receive such a commission. In 1971, the orchestra performed the *Concerto* under the direction of André Previn.

Shankar lived in Hollywood for several years, moving from one rented place to another and finally buying a house of his own. His marriage to Annapurna had long ago come asunder, although she had not yet granted him a divorce. His companion during the Hollywood years was Kamala Chakravarty, an Indian divorcée and *tamboura* player who often accompanied him in concert. In the early 1970s, Shankar abandoned California for New York, which for a time became the base for his peripatetic existence, although he also maintained a residence in London. For several years he floated restlessly around the world, constantly on tour and, until the early 1980s, he says, producing "nothing really noteworthy." (An exception was his third *West Meets East* album of 1976, featuring both Yehudi Menuhin and Jean Pierre Rampal.) His private life was again in flux. Kamala Chakravarty returned to India and, in New York, Shankar established a relationship with an American woman with whom he had a daughter in 1979. "I was constantly in different houses, with different people," he recalls of the time.

During the same years, Shankar began to spend more time in India. He had become dissatisfied with his Kinnara schools and eventually closed them. He concluded that he was not suited to this sort of teaching. What he now yearned increasingly to do was teach in the old style. Beginning in 1973, a year after the death of Allauddin Khan (who claimed more than one hundred years), Ravi established a household in Benares suitable for organizing master classes. He spent several months there every winter organizing an annual music festival and instructing his students and protégés. A few of these still came to him from abroad—from Sweden, the United States, France—and a handful were relative beginners, but most were already established Indian musicians who collected in Benares for several weeks each year to polish their technique and repertoire in Shankar's master classes.

Benares remained Shankar's base in India until 1981, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi invited him to become art director for

the Asian Games of 1982, to be hosted by India in Delhi. Mrs. Gandhi provided a house for Shankar in the capital, while he designed the “look” and the “sound” of the entire event, from the opening to the closing ceremonies. Shankar composed the theme music for the Games (“Su Swagatam”) and transformed the spectacle into an exuberant celebration of India. This great public success occurred amid a new period of prolific creativity. His second concerto for sitar and orchestra, *Raga Mala*, had been performed by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Zubin Mehta just the year before, the same year that he had composed the score for Richard Attenborough’s epic film, *Gandhi*, which garnered an Academy Award nomination in 1982 for best original score. The theme music for the film was based on a *raga* Shankar had written as a tribute to the great leader after his assassination in 1948.

Following these triumphs, Shankar remained in Delhi and, in 1983, he organized a festival in honor of his brother. The Uday Utsav, or Uday Shankar Festival, lasted four days and was inaugurated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. From all over India, famous dancers and choreographers gathered, many of them Uday’s relatives as well as his former students and collaborators. Ravi Shankar mounted an exhibition of photographs, press clippings, costumes, and artifacts and arranged for a showing of Uday’s film, *Kalpana*. The finale was a musical tribute written by Ravi and performed by nearly a hundred singers and musicians.

Honors flowed in. As early as 1962, Ravi Shankar had received India’s Presidential Award for his contributions to India’s music and culture, an award he was to receive four more times. Others followed in the 1960s and 1970s, including honorary degrees from the University of California (1968) and Colgate University (1970) in North America, as well as from Indian universities such as Khairagarh Music University, Rabindra Bharati University (1973) and Benares Hindu University (1980). In 1981, he won India’s highest civilian award, the Padma Vibhushan. He was also given the prestigious Desikottam award by Indira Gandhi. France named him Commandeur de l’Orde des Arts et des Lettres in 1985 and, the following year, Ravi Shankar was nominated as a member of the Upper House (Rajya Sabha) of the Indian Parliament. Honorary degree followed honorary degree, distinction followed distinction—making Shankar India’s most publicly honored artist. The Fukuoka Asian Cultural Grand Prize of 1991 captured the essence of his unique life’s work, honoring his “outstanding contribution to the cultivation and advancement of Asian culture to the world.”

In this sweet period of public recognition and praise, Shankar finally settled his private life. In the late 1970s, while in London, he had met Sukanya Rajan. Their friendship flowered and, in 1981, Sukanya bore Shankar a daughter whom they named Anoushka. After 1986, when Annapurna finally granted Shankar an official di-

voiced, he and Sukanya were free to marry. They did so in 1989. Ravi's relationship and eventual marriage to Sukanya brought a new level of order to his wandering existence. Under her direction, Shankar's large household in Delhi, which he was accustomed to sharing with half a dozen or more students and a similar number of servants, became a proper family residence. The flat in London was closed and, in 1992, the couple established their main residence near San Diego in California, a state Shankar had loved from the first time he saw it in the 1930s. Sukanya also brought order to Shankar's vexed financial life. ("Thank God," he says. "I think I have earned millions but never, you know, thought of saving. I don't know where it went every year. I have always been bad with money.")

With domestic order came yet a new phase of creativity. For the grand finale of a year long Festival of India in the Soviet Union, Shankar composed *Swar Milan*, seven integrated orchestral pieces to be performed together by one hundred forty musicians and singers. In July 1988, he and a company of Indian musicians—many of them his disciples—performed the new work in the Kremlin in concert with the Chamber Orchestra of Moscow Philharmonie, the Government Chorus of the USSR, and the Russian Folk Ensemble. Although modern in construction and in the combination of Russian and Indian instruments and vocal elements, the entire work is based on Indian *ragas* and flows from the Hindu scriptures upon which the *raga* tradition is built. An example is the ancient mantra at the heart of the second movement that reflects one of Ravi Shankar's own enduring passions: "May there be peace on earth-water-sky-trees-air-mind-body and everything throughout the universe."

When Shankar was invited to compose a new ballet for the Birmingham Touring Opera Company in 1989, he took the opportunity to address another of his personal concerns. For years he had been alarmed at the rise of the drug culture in the West, which had so ironically accompanied his own rise to stardom in the pop world. By the 1980s, the scourge of New York and London had also become the scourge of India. He speaks passionately about the problem: "It has become rampant among the young people, not only the well-to-do kids but kids from the streets. They are in rags." In *Ghana Shyam*, his new ballet, a talented dancer named Ghana Shyam is lured into the world of hashish and marijuana by traveling *saddhus* and is gradually driven to degradation and crime by his addiction. He ruins both his own life and that of his wife. Like so much of Shankar's creative work, the story came to him, he says, "like a flash." In 1989, the ballet was a great hit in London and Delhi.

Shortly thereafter, Shankar collaborated in new compositions with the American modernist composer Philip Glass, which resulted in the unique 1990 recording titled *Passages*. In it, Shankar performs with his son Shubho.

Today, living quietly in California with Sukanya and Anoushka, Ravi Shankar has put the hectic past behind him. Years of travel and the aches and pains of performing (“an occupational hazard,” he says) have slowed him down. He has survived a heart attack and, in 1992, the death of his fifty-year-old son Shubho. These days, he harnesses his energy for the occasional concert and continues to mentor exceptional young players, one or two of whom sometimes reside in his California household and a few more in Delhi. (Like Baba, he says, “I always have five or six living with me. I feed them. I give them all their expenses. I give them a stipend.”) His present joy is teaching his pretty and talented daughter Anoushka the sitar. He talks of a great benefit Concert for Peace, inspired in part by appalling new upheavals in Eastern Europe and in India itself. (Shankar performed this concert in London’s Royal Albert Hall in 1993.)

India, of course, is much on his mind. The rise of sectarian violence in recent years—of Hindus against Muslims against Christians—offends his memories of communal peace. India today, he says, is out of tune. (But then, even his pastoral California retreat is no Utopia. “If nothing else,” he reflects, “the earthquake.”) However, India’s arts and civilization still thrill him. In his view, no modern society displays such artistic richness and vitality. This is possible because, despite multiple traditions, a common current of mythology and Sanskrit-based philosophy and literature binds most Indians together “even if the languages are different, the dress is different, the food is different.” Shankar’s travels in China, Egypt, and Greece have impressed him with the uniqueness of India’s cultural continuity; in each place there appears to be no direct connection between the ancient civilization and contemporary life. “Egypt,” he says, “what a great civilization! But what about today?”

In India, he observes proudly, it is different. Despite the inroads of Western culture among the country’s urbanites, India’s great civilization is still asserting itself—in art, in dance, in literature, in music, in the *raga*. “It is a living tradition.”

September 1992

Manila

J.R.R.

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