Khan masterfully performs Indian Classical music

By Adam Lindsay
April 14, 1994.

At Saturday, a nearly packed Kresge Auditorium was treated to a rare appearance by the master of the sarod, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. In his first Boston appearance in six years, the world-famous master and teacher gave over 1,000 attendees a concert to be remembered for a long time.

Indian Classical music is much more rooted in the passage of time than is any music of the Western tradition. Although artists like Wagner and Tangerine Dream have done much to stretch and alter the passage of musical time, no efforts compare to that which is basic in the Indian tradition. The pieces (ragas) themselves are identified by the time of day (morning or dawn, twilight) at which they may be played. The performance of the raga, certainly those played on Sunday night, reflects a gradual unfolding of musical gestures increasing in complexity and excitement to a thrilling climax. Ustad Khan clearly demonstrated his virtuosic mastery of time, as well as the sarod.

The concert began 20 minutes late, to accommodate the large crowd, with an introduction by MIT Lecturer George Ruckert, who has studied with Ustad Khan. The first raga to be performed was rag Malhur-malhad (which may be translated as "garden of sweets"), an evening raga of Ustad Khan's own composition. Ruckert then took his place behind the master on one of the two small covered drum instruments. One would be hard-pressed to mark the start of the music; it grew gradually, from the careful tuning of the twenty-three-stringed sarod, as if Ustad Khan was tapping into a music that had always existed.

The alap, or introduction, of the first piece slowly presented the modal basis of improvisation for the raga. Through this exposition the power of the instrument, the Moksha, was revealed. The mode was full of chromatic alterations, which suggested an almost sacred quality within the meditative phrase. After a strummed section, the alap turned to the jor, which took on a more active tone — a clear increase in intensity. Intensity became frenzy, as Ustad Khan and the audience with his energy to bring it out.

The second part, or gar, of the first piece opened with the same slow, mysterious quality. The performance was not all ordinated. However, it was paced so perfectly that the climax could not have happened at any other time. Thus the sarod master also demonstrated his mastery of time, intensity, and pacing.

This grander structure reflected a steady increase in intensity. A rhythmic climax was reached after Chaudhuri knocked aside one of the microphones. Smiling and unembarrassed, he proceeded with a series of dynamic hits which were met with applause from the audience and an appreciative smile and glance from Ustad Khan. The end section was spurted on by a whispered notice from a sarod player that the end of the hour was approaching. Thus

The evening ended with a fourth standing ovation (the others being at both of Ustad Khan's entrances and at intermission) as the audience was led in the singing of "Happy Birthday" to Khan (a more affectionate name for Ustad Khan), whose 73rd birthday passed last Thursday. It was a strange, but fitting, celebration of the passage of time to an ageless master of time and music. Likewise, it was a joyous and respectful ending to an evening of music in which all who participated, including those who listened, were brought together in Khan's virtuosic artistic vision.

George Ruckert contributed to the reporting of this story.

PREGNANCY HELP
169 Washington Street
Brighton, MA 02135
617-782-5151

Let us help you make a decision
you can live with.

ARE YOU PREGNANT?
ARE YOU CONSIDERING ABORTION?
PLEASE CALL
PREGNANCY HELP
617-782-5151

GREENTECHNOLOGY:
WHAT? HOW? WHY?

* International Shipping
* Moving & Storage
* Licensed & Insured