

Wednesdays@7

# Kartik Seshadri

with Arup Chattopadhyay, tabla



March 9, 2011, 7 pm  
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall  
UC San Diego Department of Music



Kartik Seshadri  
Sitar  
*with*  
*Arup Chattopadhyay, Tabla*

*Mr. Seshadri will announce  
the selections (ragas) from the stage*

*“Breathtaking!”  
Los Angeles Times*

*“Breathtakingly complex improvisations”  
Songlines Magazine*

## NOTES ON INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

by Kartik Seshadri

Indian classical music known as *Raga Sangeeth*, is an improvised art form based on the concepts of *Raga* and *Tala*. The historical origins of this spiritual musical tradition date back to the sacred Hindu scriptures known as *Veda(s)*, which were the early precursors to the system of music that developed gradually. *Raga(s)* are the tonal idiom for improvisation and these precise melodic forms while essentially modal in structure, acquire their distinct musical identities from a complex range of factors: the Indian tonal system of perceiving the octave as 22 microtonal divisions (*Sruti*); the subtle nuances, inflections, and ornamentations associated with each *Raga*; and the particular emphasis of certain notes (*Vadi, Samavadi*) within the specific ascending and descending (*Arohana and Avarohana*) movement of each *Raga*. While all *Raga(s)* are specific to the time of the day (morning, evening or night) some *Raga(s)* are performed only during certain seasons, festivals or special occasions. The melodic and rhythmic aspect of our tradition is completely consistent with our aesthetic and philosophical idea that each *Raga* expresses a single dominant mood (*Rasa*). The nine *Rasa(s)* associated with our music are: *Shringara* (sensuous or erotic), *Hasya* (humorous), *Karuna* (pathos), *Rudra* (anger), *Veera* (heroic), *Bhayanaka* (fearful), *Vibhatsa* (disgust), *Adbhuta* (wonderment) and *Shanta* (tranquility).

The second aspect of improvisation in Indian classical music pertains to the concept of rhythm known as *Tala*. A *Tala* is conceptualized in cycles of beats ranging anywhere from a three beat cycle to a 108 beat cycle. There are other complex cycles in fractional beats such as  $4\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $6\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $11\frac{1}{2}$  to mention a few, that make for complicated improvisations. An accomplished musician of Indian classical music has to develop complete mastery and facility over both *Raga* and *Tala* to acquire the total freedom of improvisation within the complex constraints that *Raga* and *Tala* impose on the performer. Indian classical music is predominantly steeped in melody and rhythm as opposed to the ideas of contrast manifested in harmony, counterpoint and modulation which shape traditions such as European art music or Jazz. The challenge of our music lies in the musician's ability to shape and develop an entire musical edifice of a *Raga* and to express its fullest depth and excitement. This is acquired through many years of *Talim* (training) with a master musician (*Guru*).

A typical performance of instrumental Indian classical music begins with *Alap*, *Jor* and *Jhala* rendered on the solo instrument such as *Sitar*, *Sarod*, etc. While the *Alap* is a slow, spiritual, non-

metric rendition of the *Raga*, the following sections *Jor* and *Jhala* are somewhat free and bound to a more defined pulse. The *Gat* (theme) follows the previous sections and it is in this section that the concept of *Tala* is introduced and the accompanying percussion instrument (such as *Tabla* or *Pakhawaj*) joins the main instrument.

**Sitar:** The *Sitar* is one of the most popular stringed instruments of northern and eastern India and has gained much attention in the West during the last few decades. The instrument usually consists of 20 strings of which seven strings constitute as the main playing strings. There are 13 sympathetic strings that respond in sympathy to the main strings. The instrument also has a track of twenty metal frets that are movable and can be tuned to the specific tonality of each raga. The main facet of the instrument is that the strings can be pulled or stretched over the metal frets to obtain gliding and melismatic effects much in keeping with the ideal of Indian music to emulate the human voice.

**Tabla:** The *Tabla* is a two piece drum referred to as *Tabla* for the right-handed drum and *Bayan* for the left-handed drum. The *Tabla* (right-hand) is a pitch specific drum tuned to the main tonic note of the performer. The *Bayan* is a bass drum which can produce a variety of sounds by exerting pressure on the skin of the instrument. The instrument is tuned with a metal hammer.

**Tambura:** This background instrument also referred to as *Tanpura* is used to lend a drone or continuo effect for the performer and listener alike. The instrument usually consists of 4 to 5 strings and is tuned to the main notes of the *Raga*.

**KARTIK SESHADRI** is a world-renowned force in the field of Indian Classical Music. As a sitarist, he attracted widespread attention when he began performing full-length solos at the age of 6 in India. The sitar prodigy has blossomed in to an “amazingly accomplished” musical powerhouse noted for his music’s expressive beauty, rich tonal sensibility, and rhythmic intricacy, praised the Washington Post. The prestigious British magazine Songlines declared, Seshadri “stands out amongst sitarists for his clarity and intricate rhythmic sensibility.” The publication selected the sitar guru’s 2004 *Raga: Rasa – That Which Colors the Mind* album for its World Music Top 10 list and cited his 2006 Illuminations record as “sitar at its lyrical best.”

A multifarious confluence of musical influences, **Seshadri** has trained and toured worldwide with Grammy-winning composer and sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar and is considered as his foremost protege. In 2005 (and for the upcoming 2010 season), Seshadri collaborated with prominent composer Philip Glass and the Brazilian instrumental group UAKTI on the critically acclaimed Orion project. Seshadri performs extensively in his homeland and around the world, including the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, Australia, Mexico and the Middle East. He has played at prestigious venues and events ranging from Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, the Melbourne International Arts Festival in Australia, the Brighton Festival in U.K., the Ravinia Festival, the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City to the Dover Lane, ITC, Gunidas and Saptak Sammelans in India to name but a few.

**Mr. Seshadri** is also a distinguished composer and educator of Indian Classical Music. While his *Quartet for a Raga* was premiered under the auspices of the Contemporary Music Forum in Washington D.C., his latest *Concerto #1 for Sitar and Chamber Orchestra* received its world premier last October in San Diego.

As an educator **Seshadri** heads one of the largest programs of Indian Classical Music in the USA at the University of California, San Diego. He has been invited as a distinguished guest faculty member at various conservatories and universities around the world: the Banff Center in Canada, Stanford University to the Yehudi Menuhin School of Music in Bath, U.K. In 2009 Seshadri launched extemp . . . his academy for Indian Classical music.

**ARUP CHATTOPADHYAY** is recognized today as one of the outstanding and most sought after tabla artists of the younger generation. As a premier disciple of the world renowned maestro Pandit Shankar Ghosh of the Farukabadh gharana (style) of tabla, Arup has established himself both as an accompanist and soloist.

Arup started his initial training in tabla at the age of six from his father, the eminent tabla player, Shri Pankaj Chatterjee and later came under the tutelage of Pandit Shankar Ghosh with whom he continues to train. An affiliated tabla artist with the All India Radio and Doordarshan Television, Arup records and performs frequently for the Indian broadcasting network. He regularly accompanies some of the leading musicians of India such as Pandit Ravi Shankar, Rajan and Sajan Mishra, Pandit V.G. Jog, Ashish Khan, Manas Chakravarty, Arun Bhadhuri, Ajay Chakravarty, and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt. Arup has toured the U. K. representing highly acclaimed performances and demonstrations with Deepak Choudhury. Most recently, he has toured extensively with sitarist Kartik Seshadri in performances throughout the United States and Canada.

