Music Reviews
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Hinduism Today's Hawaiian headquarters enjoys classical Indian music all day long via our 7-disc CD changer routed through all buildings. The discs on this page-just a few of our favorites-span a broad range of instrumental and vocal styles. Try something new, or buy them all. If you are just entering the world of Indian classical, here's your starter kit. [NOTE: prices shown do not include shipping. Call the numbers listed to determine shipping costs for your area, to get prices for cassettes and to order a catalog.]

Singing to the Gods

Bhaktimala Shiva, volume 1, Vocal by Rajan and Sajan Mishra; and Shruti Sadolikar, 59 minutes. us$14.99. Music Today, Living Media India Ltd., 404 Park Avenue South, New York 100016, USA. See Morning Ragas (above) for more information.

Music Today's Bhaktimala series is a Godsend. Each disc is a classic. Here, the Mishra brothers cast their spell with help from ethereal instrumental accompaniment-they're magical! Shruti, with deep devotion, enchantingly transports one beyond the workaday-world.

Volume 2: Vocal by Veena Sahasrabuddhe and Umakant and Ramakant Gundecha, 61 minutes. us$14.99.

This disc unites bonafide bhakti with powerful percussion. Veena's vocal

wizardry dazzles, then soothes you with sweet assuasive assurance. The Gundecha brothers lift you, trancelike, with their alap, then launch into dynamic drupad. Both discs present unparalled devotional music. Still, the shortcoming of Music Today's discs-the minimal information provided-is again noticed. Accompanists like flutists and drummers are conspicuously ommitted.

The Dance of Siva, Tamil songs to Siva sung by Sudha Ragunathan with 28-piece "Indian orchestra." 72 minutes. us$25.00*. Produced by Amutham Inc. Available from the San Marga Iraivan Temple, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746, USA. Phone: 808-822-0080, Fax: 808-822-4351. *Entire proceeds benefit the San Marga Iraivan Sivalingam temple now being built in Hawaii.

This disc was inspired by God Siva and is dedicated to Him. It is a special release meant to help build Hawaii's San Marga Iraivan (Siva) temple. Sudha's pure and powerful voice is set like a jewel amidst a large, high-energy ensemble as she offers these rare and profound songs to Nataraja, the dancing Siva. The liner book is complete with transliterations, raga and song descriptions and an introduction to Siva Himself.

Sri Ganeshaya Namaha, S. Janaki, Balamuralikrishna, R. Chandrika, Kuthanur Mohan and more. 59 minutes. us$14.99. Asia One Stop, 3 Lincoln highway #307, Edison, New Jersey 08820, USA. Phone: 908-862-6094. Fax: 2903. Free catalog (US): 1-800-Pallavi.

This is a priceless disc of inspired renditions of classic carnatic songs to Lord Ganesha. It is a rare treasure to find such a collection of fine artists singing blissfully to our beloved Lord Ganesha. A variety of styles are presented, from Balamuralikrishna's smooth renderings to the lively lilt of B.V. Raman, K. Mohan and others. The performances are moving, traditional and tender-a must for any Hindu home.

A Hindu Ceremony at Minaksi Sundareswara Temple, 70 minutes. us$16.98. JVC World Sounds, Victor Entertainment, Inc., 26-18 Jingumae 4-Chome, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150, Japan. Phone: 03-3746-5697. Fax: 5741. In US only call toll-free: 1-800-JVC-1386.

JVC has captured one morning at the ancient Minakshi temple of Madurai. Each morning, this ceremony unfurls within its vast precincts. The sound is alive with the natural reverberation of the temple's mandapams and pillars. Mostly Tamil Devarams to Siva with Sanskrit chants at the end (including Purusha Suktam), this disc brings the holy aura of Minakshi temple into your home.

Classic Jugalbandi: Old and New

Jugalbandi is a duet performance-a sort of sonic symbiosis. Each player inspires and enhances the other to create a mutual musical moment which often surpasses a solo performance. One of the most popular instrumental combinations is bamboo flute and santoor. Here we present two classic recordings, one "old" (1974) with veteran musicians (left) and one "new" (1993) with masterful young artists (right). Both deserve a place in your library.

Yugal Bundi

Shivkumar Sharma, santoor; Hariprasad Chaurasia, flute; Kashinath Mishra, tabla.

67 minutes. us$14.95. Ravi Shankar Music Circle (RSMC). Available from Shrimati's, 2011 University Avenue, Berkeley, California 94704, USA. Phone: 510-548-6220, fax: 510-548-1838.

RSMC is a company of Pandit Ravi Shankar's which produced an excellent series of CDs and cassettes many years ago. Yugal Bandi is representative of the care and love put into these recordings. Here, Sharma and Chaurasia unite perfectly on ragas Jhinjhoti and Mishra Pilloo, while a solo Chaurasia gently guides us through a Bengali folk tune. One never tires of this disc. The moods are soft, soothing and spiritual. Though a relatively old recording, the sounds are full and clear.

Essence of Jugalbandi: A Rare Recital on Flute and Santoor, Ronu Majumdar,

flute; Tarun Bhattacharya, santoor; Abhijit Banerjee, tabla. 67 minutes us$14.99. Ragas: Hamsadhwani, Charukeshi, Madhuvanti, Saath-saath and two Dhuns. OMI Music Inc., 71 Rosedale Avenue #A-10, Brampton, Ontario L6X 1K4, Canada. Phone: 905-457-7853, Fax: 905-454-0199.

Secure your speakers! The performances on this disc are energetic and upbeat. These exciting and adept young musicians have managed a unique achievment of playing the traditional ragas with a distinctly modern flair, yet still maintaining a classical core. Their inspired enthusiasm leaps off the disc through superb recording quality. If you ever thought Indian classical was "old-fashioned," listen to this.

From the North

Hari Rang Raati, Shobha Gurtu, vocal with traditional ensemble. 66 minutes us$14.99. OMI Music Inc., 71 Rosedale Avenue, #A-10, Brampton, Ontario, L6X 1K4, Canada. Phone: 905-457-7853, Fax: 905-454-0199.

Gurtu treats these bhajans with pure devotion and dedication. With help from Srinivas Khale's ingenious scoring, her inspired singing has given an entirely new dimension to these songs by Mirabai, Narayan Agarwal, Dulari and Kabir. The music slowly reaches out, envelopes and soothes you, then Gurtu's strong yet soft voice lifts you beyond worldly thoughts into the realm of bhakti. Elegant interludes of flute, santoor, sarangi and drums make this a rich audio experience.

Morning Ragas: Volume Four, Mallikarjun Mansur, vocal; Shahid Parvez, sitar; Padma Talwalkar, vocal. 60 minutes. us$14.99. Living Media Ltd., 404 Park Avenue South, New York 100016, USA. Phone: 212-481-0040. Fax: 212-779-8206. India: F-14/15 Connaught Place, New Delhi 110001. Phone: 91-11-331-3076.

This CD is part of Music Today's unique and treasured Ragas from Dawn to Midnight series-all high quality productions. Here, Shahid shines and Padma is perfect, but Mansur's exposition of raga Bilawal is extraordinary. Deeply inspired, his mature voice resonates a mood of joyful prayer, effortlessly. I put on this disc thinking I would "scan" it for a minute or two. But Mansur captured me and I soared

with his aria for half-an-hour. The one criticism to make of Music Today's discs is the scarce information in their liner booklets. Compared to companies with lesser resources, Music Today seems almost negligent in this area. For example, Mansur is accompanied by a gifted male vocalist, but he is not mentioned anywhere on the disc, though his contribution is brilliant. Even the words to the songs were missing.

Debashis Bhattacharya, guitar; Samir Chatterjee, tabla. 75 minutes. us$15.99. India Archive Music, LTD., 2124 Broadway, Suite 343, New York, New York 10023, USA. Phone/fax: 212-740-1508.

Take a Western classical guitar, remold it, Indian style, and play with a technique first developed for the historic vichitra vina, and you have a new sound in the raga palette-Indian classical guitar. Bhattacharya makes it unquestionably Indian and clearly classical. He demonstrates technical mastery and a sensitive musical sagacity-proving himself proficient at a young age. The sounds are sweet and introspective. Excellent recording, instrument tone and mix.

Buddhadev Das Gupta, sarod; Samar Saha, tabla. 74 minutes. us$15.99. India Archive Music, LTD., 2124 Broadway, Suite 343, New York, New York 10023, USA. Phone/fax: 212-740-1508.

This is classic sarod. As is typical of India Archive recordings, the tone and mix are superb. Das Gupta's polished and tasteful synthesis of old and new has earned him a significant niche in modern Indian music, and Saha has gained considerable recognition as a soloist and accompanist. Together, they make magic, devotedly weaving the mood of Jhinjhoti-a joyful, sweet raga.

Shruti Sadolikar, vocal; Anand Krishna Kunte, sarangi; Anindo Chatterjee, tabla. 74 minutes. us$14.99. Nimbus Records, P.O. Box 7746, Charlottesville, Virginia 22906, USA. Fax: 804-985-3953.

This recording is gentle, poised and peaceful. Shruti's distinctly contemplative and devotional voice draws the listener within to tranquil space. Nimbus' unique

recording technique is "One mic, one take." This gives complete freedom to the artist and effectively captures an intimate live performance, albeit, with a simple mix. Here Shruti soulfully sings Kayals to Sri Krishna and the beloved Thumri Baju Band Khul Khul Jan.

From the South

Carnatic Flute, K.S. Gopalakrishnan; 74 minutes. us$20.00. Wergo, Germany. Available from Harmonia Mundi Inc., 2037 Granville Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90025, USA. Phone: 310-478-1311, ext. 119. Fax: 310-996-1389.

Don't miss out on the subtle and stirring sounds of carnatic bamboo flute! Sri Gopalakrishnan gently weaves these traditional ragas with precision, joy and ease. While maintaining the high technical and improvisational standards of the carnatic style, his tones never become harsh or mechanical. With this disc he has rendered a service to carnatic music lovers, and all flute aficionados. Ram Katha Sudha is entrancing. An excellent liner booklet is included in English and German.

A Rare Blend of Raga and Sahitya, Bombay S. Jayashri, vocal. 63 minutes. us$14.99. OMI Music Inc., 71 Rosedale Avenue, #A-10, Brampton, Ontario, L6X 1K4, Canada. Phone: 905-457-7853, Fax: 905-454-0199.

OMI does it again! An immaculate recording showcases Jayashri's confident and radiant voice as she dances through these energetic compositions from Tulasivanam, Thyagaraja, Papanasam Shivan and others. The sounds are crisp, clear and full of life. OMI sets high standards for their quality, information-packed liner booklets, as well crystalline recording and performace. There's now no excuse for a foul mood. Just take one track, and smile!

Vadya Lahari: South Indian Instrumental Ensemble, A. Kanyakumari et al. 58 minutes. US$15.98.

Music of the World, P.O. Box 3620, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27515, USA. Phone: 919-932-9600.

This is the most recent innovation by A. Kanyakumari (violin) and represents an ingenious carnatic experiment. She has juxtaposed the introspective timbre of the vina with the ecstatic roar of the nadaswaram. The combination of mrdangam with tavil is terrific. (Their solo duet at the end of Ram Katha Sudharasa is spellbinding.) To have such a diverse group play and sound so perfectly as one certainly was a difficult, one-of-a-kind achievement. The musicians, producer and engineers are to be commended.

Carnatic Classical Thillanas, Dr. M. Balamuralikrisha, vocal, composer. 46 minutes. us$14.99. OMI Music Inc., 71 Rosedale Avenue #A-10, Brampton, Ontario L6X 1K4, Canada. Phone: 905-457-7853, Fax: 905-454-0199.

This disc entralls the listener-as expected, since Balamuralikrishna is one who never disappoints. His deep, resonant voice can traverse a wide range with felicity and amazes one with his sheer versatility. The musical form, called thillana, is known for its scintillating and sprightly lilt. They are typically dance pieces featuring drum syllables as text. Balamurali has composed these and presents them as only he can. With that warm Balamurali elan, he delights in playing with the raga and tala as he sings, delighting the listener as well. The mix is relatively simple and on a sensitive Hi-Fi system the echo on the voice may seem a little strong.

Young Star of Gottuvadyam, N. Ravikiran. 60 minutes. us$13.95. Chhanda Dhara, Germany. Available from Shrimati's, 2011 University Avenue, Berkeley, California 94704, USA. Phone: 510-548-6220. Fax: 510-548-1838.

Ravikiran is a shining star and this disc sparkles with his light. The gottuvadyam is, simply stated, a vina played with a slide. It has a stunning sound, partly due to the many sympathetic strings running parallel and below the main strings. This disc is superbly recorded and these strings resonate a rich bed of sweet harmonics upon which the musicians deftly perform. Trichur Mohan on mrdangam and T. Subashchandran on ghatam expertly add the intricate rhythms. Discover the rare sounds.