

[Savoring the Sacred Sounds of the Ganges](#)

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MUSIC

Savoring the Sacred Sounds of the Ganges

Music and chants from the Himalayas to Calcutta

Bhavani Param, Concord, California

What most of the world knows as Indian music is generally confined to the classical Hindustani and Carnatic styles. But anyone who has walked down an Indian street knows that the country resounds with exquisite music, especially at religious sites. Ganga, The Music of the Ganges (US\$34.97, 182 min., Virgin Classics) brings this hidden world of Hindu music dramatically into your home. The traditional musical practices and rituals on Ganga are of the peoples who have settled along the sacred river universally known to Indians as the Holy Mother, Ganga. The vibrant sounds on this remarkable three-CD tribute to Ganga instantly evoke colorful visual images, along with stirring a spirit of devotion. One willingly and eagerly ventures on a high-fidelity journey down the sacred river.

This excellent recording and obvious labor of love took several years to complete. It contains a

color-coded map showing the regions covered in each CD as well as an excellent booklet describing in careful detail each musical offering. The holy river commences on the snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas, slowly winds through the vast plains, until at last, after more than sixteen hundred miles--and sixty million notes--it merges in the Gulf of Bengal.

Ganga begins with the natural sounds of distant thunder and the Gomukh waterfall at the Ganga's source. Then we hear the arresting sounds of conch, bells and drums from Gangotri, the temple dedicated to the river Ganges and the first along Her course. Next we listen to sadhus chant ancient mantras to Siva, who, according to legend, let the Ganga cascade through His long matted locks. The CDs flow on with vocal and instrumental offerings from musicians of little-known status, who nonetheless carol with devotion, passion and grandeur.

Ganga was envisioned and realized by Xavier Bellenger, a trained ethnologist, musician and multi-media author who has traveled the world

recording and promoting regional musical traditions. He is a pioneer in location digital audio recording, employing the most advanced recording and post-production techniques for his works. For this alone, Bellanger should be lauded. It is a rare joy to be able to listen closely to the depth of these aural snapshots without straining or paining. Attempts by others to present India's "rural sounds" served only to perpetuate the stigma of primitivism which these musicians had, due to the inferior sound quality. With Bellanger's recordings, we lose ourselves in the songs and sounds. The clarity of subtle background sounds creates an eerie effect of realism. While immersed in the Thumri of Chhannu Lal Mishra in Banaras, we hear temple bells echoing from across the river...or are they outside our window? In Dev Prayag a voice calls out, and we look to see who is coming--Ganga is that realistic.

Bellanger worked in collaboration with the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. The entire collection of his recordings, only a portion of which are heard on the CDs, is indexed and archived at the Akademi.

www.virginclassics.com; www.amazon.com