

[Rural Ragas Sound a Revival](#)

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MUSIC

Rural Ragas Sound a Revival

New recordings give village music spry spirit

Joyful simplicity, quiet solitude, natural majesty. These impressions of India's idyllic countryside coalesce vibrant and lasting memories in the minds of those who had their beginnings there. The music springing forth from these lands is plainly termed "folk music." But this phrase does not evoke the sophistication and depth of the recordings now being made by India's youthful maestros. They are breathing life into new sounds on compact disc, turning village melodies into modern masterpieces.

For santoor (Indian hammered dulcimer) wizard Bhajan Sopori, childhood memories fueled a digital "symphony." Kashmir (53 minutes, Multisync Trends, Inc., New Jersey, US\$7.50) is by far the most successful contemporary Indian music recording to date. Sopori's santoor rides upon an ethereal bed of traditional Indian instruments, blended seamlessly with electronic synthesizers and rhythm. Others who have attempted such a synthesis have only adulterated the music--neither being wholly Indian, nor musical.

Sopori keeps the music simple, but also elegant and energetic.

No doubt, his years of experience and extensive Indian and Western classical training imbued his sensitivity. But Sopori attributes the inspiration elsewhere, "The present symphony is a product of my memories of Kashmir. It corresponds to the seven colors of the rainbow I saw over the silver mountain range as a child. It expresses the various moods of this land, which are reflected in the musical compositions of this paradise on earth." Kashmir heralds what modern Indian instrumental music may become.

Somewhat less venturesome were the coterie who created *Song of Nature* (71 minutes, OMI Music, Ontario, \$15.00). Their use of electronics is barely noticeable. But this is no fault. The exquisite character of this recording is the unique and perfect union of these four musicians and their distinctive instruments--Ronu Majumdar, bamboo flute; Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Indian guitar; Tarun Bhattacharya, santoor and Sabir Khan, tabla. The crystalline recording conveys each nuance of the musicians, who "Seek to understand and interpret the various moods and rhythms of nature in its kaleidoscopic glory." They have triumphed--naturally.

Admittedly, V.S. Giretheren cannot compete with the marketing and production of the companies just mentioned. He is, according to him, "just a simple Satya Sai Baba devotee." But his offering to his guru, *Feel the Divine* (71 minutes, Saisaa, Switzerland), has much to commend. Fourteen energetic instrumental bhajans burst forth from this disc. Electronics are used prudently, and Western idioms only become obtrusive on a few tracks. This is a must-have for Hindus, and a should-have for others. It is a buoyant finale to our journey through worshipful music made modern.

MULTISYNC TRENDS, INC., 540 GOTHAM PARKWAY, CARLSTADT, NEW JERSEY 07072 USA * OMI MUSIC INC., UNIT A-10 71 ROSEDALE AVENUE, BRAMPTON, ONTARIO L6X 1K4 CANADA *SAISAA, V.S. GIRETHEREN, OBERBURG STRASSE 39, CH-3400 BURGDORF, SWITZERLAND

Sidebar: Melodious Mantras

The Upanishads are often referred to as the "Song of the Self." While they have been chanted countless ways, have you ever actually heard them sung? We have not. The Tirumantiram, on the other hand, is an ancient Tamil scripture no less profound and illuminative than the Upanishads. Now, Tirumantiram (67 minutes, Indu Musik, Chennai, [Madras] has what the Upanishads do not--Seerkali Govindarajan's lyrical digital rendering. It's not rap--it's rhapsodic.

This Tirumantiram is a rerelease of a previous analog recording sung by the late Govindarajan and accompanied by the archetypal Tamil devotional orchestra. The quality of the recording and mix are not up to modern standards, but singer and poetic sacred verses prevail.

The Tirumantiram, "Holy Incantation," is the Nandinatha Sampradaya's oldest Tamil scripture, written ca 200 bce by Rishi Tirumular. It is the earliest Tirumurai, and a vast storehouse of yogic and tantric knowledge. It contains the mystical essence of raja and siddha yoga, and the fundamental doctrines of the 28 Saiva Siddhanta Agamas. It has been published in many books, but this CD is the only place we know of for you to hear it. But beware, it's all in Tamil!

The second track is another treasure from the Tirumurai,

slightly more tuneful than the Tirumantiram. It is Saint Sambandar's Kolarupathikam, Tamil songs on the effects of planets, stars, disease and other seeming adversities. Each verse ends with, "All bring good luck to Siva's devotees!"

INDU ELECTRONICS, MADRAS; PRINCE'S MUSIC SERVICE; SINGAPORE AND P&C SHANKAR AND CO., 231 NORTHHOLT ROAD, SOUTH HARROW, ENGLAND.