

[Paul Horn](#)

Category : [March 1991](#)

Published by Anonymous on Mar. 01, 1991

Paul Horn

Master Musician With a Mystical Vision

Plasha, Michael Sound is the living force of God. It is everywhere and in everything. It exists in the gurgling of water, the howling of wind and the crackling of fire.

Even space constantly reverberates with sound. Sound can soothe us like ocean waves, agitate us like a jack-hammer or uplift us like a chorale or a bhajan. Sound can affect and alter our moods so completely that it is no wonder the ancient sages found it to be the simplest and most powerful means of turning the mind toward truth.

The formless principle of God takes form through the power of sound. The Vedas say, "God originally manifested as sound." The Upanishads tell us that from the primordial mantram Om the first vibration came and the entire universe was born. The Spanda Shastra says, "Sound is the vibration out of the void."

But how is this power manifested in music? And what is the relationship between this power and a musician's aspirations? Is a musician channeling Divinity or projecting ego? I've been asking these questions and many more for a long time. To find some answers, I've begun to interview some of the most accomplished musicians from the West and the East. The manner in which the primordial sound is expressed through each one of them is different, but underneath I have discovered a common love for Hindu culture. The wisdom of this ancient knowledge has influenced all of them. Some have Gurus or a chosen deity, some don't. Most meditate.

As I listen to the music of Paul Horn, Ravi Shankar, Bob and Steve Kindler, G.S. Sachdev, Patrick Bernhardt, Shankar and others, it is apparent to me that the

attributes most often associated with the spiritual life - peace, bliss, creativity - are present in their music. Most of these musicians have transformed their lives through the wisdom revealed in Hindu culture and now see the world in the light of their own experience of that wisdom. As a result, their music has also transformed.

This series of interviews and profiles begins with Paul Horn. It will also include a select discography of each featured musician as well as reviews of related recordings. The interviews cover a broad range of topics and some of their comments may be controversial, consoling or inspiring. They all appreciated the opportunity to speak about their spiritual lives.

A classically trained flutist whose mother was Irving Berlin's pianist, Paul Horn was one of the most commercially successful jazz musicians in America by 1966. He had played with Chico Hamilton, served as a busy studio musician in Los Angeles, coached Tony Curtis for musician roles in *Some like it Hot* and *Wild and Wonderful*, and appeared himself in *The Rat* and *The Sweet Smell of Success*. He was the key subject of a film documentary, led his own quintets and won two Grammy Awards for his *Jazz Suite on the Mass Texts*.

However, he became increasingly dissatisfied with the Hollywood lifestyle as he was experiencing it. He realized that material wealth and job success were not providing him with inner peace and contentment. He was in a state of "confusion, frustration and chaos" when Ravi Shankar visited Los Angeles in 1965. Horn introduced Shankar to some of the most prominent L.A. musicians, and Shankar chose Horn to play flute on his *Portrait of a Genius* album. This meeting had a profound effect on Paul Horn's life, both musically and spiritually. He soon began to study Indian music with one of Ravi Shankar's pupils, Harihar Rao, and in 1966 was initiated into meditation by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Horn has been a teacher of Transcendental Meditation (TM) for twenty-two years.

This new approach to music led to his popular and critically acclaimed "Inside solo series" that began with *Inside the Taj Mahal* in 1969. Twenty years later, he returned to the Taj Mahal to record *Volume II*. In 1968 he also recorded Indian classical music with students of Ravi Shankar on *Paul Horn in India* and devotees of Maharishi on *Paul Horn in Kashmir*. He also recently published *Inside Paul Horn: The Spiritual Odyssey of a Universal Traveler*, (Harper Collins: \$19.95, hardcover). In it, he reveals how meditation changed his life, a theme we explore in this interview.

Hinduism Today: How is music a reflection or expression of your spiritual practice?

Paul Horn: All artists, regardless of their methods, are expressing what they know about life. Their craft is a tool for expressing spirituality. Spirituality is their philosophy of life and the way they live their life. All of this comes through their music in an abstract way. The music is a reflection of the artist.

HT: Can you please share with us how your spiritual philosophy developed over the past thirty years, and what impact different cultures have had on you?

PH: My whole spiritual path started with an initiation into meditation in 1966. The technique was Transcendental Meditation (TM). The founder was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. I spent four months with him in his ashram in the Himalayas in 1967. Then I went back in 1968 for a couple of months. That is the point in my life when everything changed, because my perspective changed.

It's not that the final goal of life became clear to me. I just realized that I had lost touch with a lot of things when my destination was worldly success. What began to take shape in me was an awareness that I am a part of everything. I began to perceive unity rather than diversity. I could see that the same force that keeps me alive keeps everyone else alive. Meditation helped me to feel connected, instead of separated. This perception obviously began to take over in my music. It's abstract because it can't be explained in words like I'm trying to do now. My music became quieter and more introspective. And I found that even back in 1967 and 1968 there was an audience for it. Inside the Taj Mahal sold very well. Even to this day, 22 years later, it's still selling.

This music produces physiological and spiritual benefits. You feel calm, centered. That state translates into better health on all levels. So, New Age Music is healing music.

HT: You have been called the father of New Age Music. Are you comfortable about that?

PH: Why not? I'm old enough to be a father or a grandfather for that matter.

HT: What about commercialization? Almost anyone with a keyboard and a synthesizer can devise something and call it New Age Music.

PH: When any style of music becomes popular, it can get diluted and convoluted. The listener has to be discriminating. Unfortunately, some people will judge a whole category by a single poor recording. But there is good and bad music in all styles jazz, classical, rock - although in classical it is less likely, because musicians must have a lot of training before they can even perform.

The major record labels started to jump on the [New Age] bandwagon to make some money, but they didn't have the background to do it well. So a lot of New Age music turned out boring and shouldn't have even been recorded.

HT: How does one judge musical quality?

PH: You certainly don't have to be a musician to make an evaluation. Most people from India really understand their music. Again, they may not have the technical knowledge to explain or play it, but because they are exposed to it and because they love it, they know when the artists are really doing it and when they are not. New Age music gets confusing because it is many things. Some of it is meditative, but not all of it. "World music" might be a better name for it, because a lot of it combines the music of different cultures.

HT: What was it like for you to play in the Taj Mahal, and how did your experience of it differ in 1968 and 1989?

PH: The first time was spontaneous. There was no intent to release the tape as a recording. I was there with Maharishi and friends, and one of them had a tape recorder. I had visited the Taj Mahal and knew there was a rich echo. I thought it would be nice to play the flute there and get a memento of it on tape.

We managed to get it in. The guard hesitated at first, but he liked the sound of the flute. He said we could stay on after it was officially closed to tourists. So there was hardly anyone there except for me, two friends and a couple of guards. It was a very relaxed and informal time. About a year later the tape was actually released as a record.

When I came back in 1989, a lot had changed. Obviously, I had changed. It's hard to put into words how exactly. I did play different instruments this time. The first time was just flute. It was also more difficult to record the second time. I couldn't just walk in. There was a lot of fear of vandalism and terrorism. So there were military and police. I had to get special permission from the Prime Minister himself.

HT: I know that you did a recording with Baba Muktananda back in 1982 at his ashram in Ganeshpuri. What was it like to be with him, and have you met Gurumayi?

PH: I only met Baba one time in 1982 in Bombay at a conference. He invited some people to come to his ashram in Ganeshpuri. So I went and spent a week. During that time, I was asked to give a concert. Baba came and the whole ashram too - maybe a thousand people. It turned into a special occasion.

Baba gave me a beautiful shawl. Which he put around my shoulders. I still have it to this day. He wanted to play my flute, so I adjusted it for him so he could get a sound out of it. Everybody got a kick out of that. Baba was a very powerful Guru. Gurumayi was known as Malti at that time. She was his translator. Recently, I went to a program at her Oakland ashram, and she looked very beautiful. She was speaking with confidence, and her presence was just like Baba's.

HT: Could you tell us about TM's "Gandharva-Veda" music?

PH: Maharishi is one of the people responsible for bringing about a revival of interest in Gandharva music. It is a traditional Indian music based on spiritual knowledge. The purpose of it is to uplift mankind. It is also based on the knowledge that certain sounds are related to specific times of the day. So they play ragas

(scales) in sync with daily cycle. The Gandharva music of Maharishi features good Indian musicians playing a variety of instruments.

HT: There are many spiritual paths to choose from. Do you feel a beginner should shop around first?

PH: There will always be some spiritual seekers who are always seeking. Some people can get stuck in just seeking and never finding. A person should seek until he or she finds something that gives results.

I also think it is important to learn from a master, whether it is music or meditation, because it is easier to learn from someone who people think they can do it on their own, but I don't believe it works that way.

HT: What is music's greatest contribution?

PH: Music is a very powerful tool to unite and heal people. To bring about what has been dreamed of since the beginning of time-Peace on earth. Yet (the music) means nothing unless the musician is spiritually attuned and understands how to surrender to inner power.

Article copyright Himalayan Academy.