

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 27 July 2024  
3.00pm

## Guitar to Sarod

Amjad Ali Khan sarod  
Amaan Ali Bangash sarod  
Ayaan Ali Bangash sarod  
Sean Shibe guitar  
Anubrata Chatterjee tabla

Amjad Ali Khan (b.1945)

Golden Afternoon (Raga Yaman) *arranged by Kyle Paul*

Gentle Sunset (Raga Marwa) *arranged by Kyle Paul*

Folk music from Bengal and Assam

Romancing Earth (Raga Pilu) *arranged by Kyle Paul*



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We are so thrilled to perform with maestro Sean Shibe, one of the most versatile guitarists performing today whose innovation and approach to his instrument have been so brilliant and boundary-breaking.

I cannot remember a particular day on which I was initiated into the world of music. It was a part of me from as early as I can remember. Indeed, I cannot think of a moment when music has been separated from my life. My father, the legendary sarod maestro Haafiz Ali Khan, lived for music. Today, a wise man does not allow his son to become a classical musician, because of the uncertainty and insecurity of the livelihood. That is why in the past only sufi saints and faqirs could dedicate their lives to music or to God. For my father, though, there was no question of a life outside music. Life itself was Music and Music was Life. And so I came to inherit from him the legacy of five generations of musicians as naturally as a bird taking to the air. Music is the greatest wealth that I inherited from my forefathers; one that I am constantly sharing with my disciples. For me, there are only two types of music. One is pure sound (which is the purest form); the other is based on the literature, text, lyrics, story, etc. There is an old saying, 'language creates barriers'. Through the pure sound of instruments or the voice one cannot lie or abuse a person. Music has to be felt and experienced. I personally admire and respect the beautiful poetry or the messages of the great Saints. But I live in the world of sound. It is only through sound that I feel the presence of (God) the Supreme Being.

I treat every raga like a living entity. A mere scale is not a raga. A scale is more like a skeleton. Even though the literal meaning of a raga is improvisation within a set framework of ascending and descending notes, I feel a raga has to be invoked. Compositions, on the other hand, were created to preserve a raga. Since my childhood, I always wanted my instrument, the sarod, to be able to express the entire range of human emotions; to sing, shout, whisper and cry. All the emotions! It has been a long journey so far and by the benevolence of the heavens, the sarod has become far more expressive than it was many years ago.

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The sarod and guitar are both leading plucked stringed instruments of their respective traditions. The sarod does not have frets, and this enables it better to replicate the essential slides and other embellishments demanded of raga performance. Thus it requires a guitarist of the calibre of Sean Shibe to interact with no fewer than three sarod masters. In the words of Amjad Ali Khan himself, 'each of the artists brings the spirit of sharing the great unique treasures of their own artistic traditions, as well as finding common ground in ragas and medieval modes. The idea is to achieve a cross-fertilization at both the cellular and cosmic levels of two classical music traditions, which are often held to be radically different.' Yet if we focus only on the music, or even the instruments, we can miss the essential point: this is a meeting of living musicians across cultures and it is as feeling human beings that we can understand and appreciate each other and

thereby heal this divided world, and what better way is there to achieve this ideal than through the joy and spiritual nourishment that music brings.

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### Golden Afternoon

This piece is based on the same notes as the European Lydian or F-mode (natural notes, with a sharp fourth) and emphasises the third and leading note. The guitar joins in the dialogue, coaxing some characteristically Indian slides from the instrument, and later leads to the faster, rhythmical section. The composition is set to a brisk tempo *Teental* (16 beats). The constraint of the repeating 16-beat cycle enables the artists to play in unison, as well as continuing to improvise individually. Near the end an unexpected touch reminds us that Western music uses harmony, as well as hinting at the medieval practice of organum.

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### Gentle Sunset

*Gentle Sunset* stands in a 16-beat meter set in raga Marwa, a hexatonic (6-tone) raga which omits the fifth note, the *pa* of the scale. Marwa is often associated with romantic love and the gentleness of dusk. The exposition or *alap* opens with a partial sweep through the notes of the raga, lending the first phrases an almost atonal atmosphere 'almost from another planet', reminiscent of the Second Viennese School of early 20th Century European music. This ushers in the sarod making its own traversal of the raga, often passing introspectively through multiple notes after striking only the first in each group. The guitar and sarod take turns, as they often do, in a multi-strophic exploration of the tones of the raga, the guitar parsing the scalar aspects and the sarod lingering to introspect on the divine nature of the individual notes. Finally they transition into the body of the composition and the melodic heart of the piece is suddenly revealed to be a concentrated gem of coiled rhythm and power, a gem which also finds expression (albeit in a different raga, Megh) in the second movement of Amjad Ali Khan's *Samaagam*, his powerfully lyrical concerto for sarod and orchestra.

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### Folk Music from Bengal and Assam

Composed by Amjad Ali Khan

In *Raga Bhatiyali*, folk music of Bengal, we hear the famous song 'Ekla Chalo Re' composed in 1905 by Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore. The text exhorts the listener to continue their journey, despite being abandoned by others. Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by this song, citing it as one of his favourites. Rabindranath Tagore was a prolific personality: he was a poet, writer, composer, philosopher, social reformer, painter and much more. Assam is a rich state and encompasses different types of folk music. The festival of

Bihu is the heart and soul of Assamese culture. Amjad Ali Khan's wife Subhalakshmi also comes from Assam.

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### **Romancing Earth**

*Raga Pilu* is a popular raga, often described as 'light classical' mainly because it is thought to contain many folksongs and there is more freedom within it than is the case with most other ragas. (The lilting *tala* that accompanies the folk-like *gat* melody later is also typical of the light classical style.) The basic scale of *Pilu* emphasises the flat third and leading note, which give the raga a wistful mood, both to Indian and Western ears, though the mood can change to joy, devotion and happiness, as other notes, especially the natural third, are woven into Amjad Ali Khan's markedly vocal melody that shares much with the Indian classics and latter-day Bollywood.

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### **About the Sarod**

Although we automatically assume Indian music and its instruments to be ancient, the Sarod is one example of an instrument that evolved from other structurally similar Indian and Afghan lutes around the middle of the 19th Century. The Sarod as we know it today traces its genealogy and origin back to the rabab of yore. All music evolves because of certain factors which make it sociological reality rather than simply an aesthetic function. So it was with the rabab, the folk instrument of ancient Afghanistan, Persia and several other

countries, each with a variation giving it an identity of its own. The Pathan Bangash family of Central Asia pioneered the task and contributed to the evolution of the present day Sarod. It was the quest of Ghulam Bandegi Khan Bangash for something more that resulted in the modification of the rabab with certain additions – the new element of melody being the most significant change (largely made possible with a metal chest on the finger board along with metal strings instead of gut). And it was this concept of melody which gave the instrument its name 'sarod', being literally a derivation from *sarod* meaning 'melody' in Persian. These innovations won Ghulam Bandegi Khan Bangash great acclaim and were further perfected by his son Ghulam Ali Khan Bangash. These were all our forefathers! Having said all this, you eventually are what your music is. Your legacy should show in your work, not on facts and history alone!

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### **About the Tabla**

The Tabla consists of two single-headed, barrel-shaped small drums of slightly different sizes and shapes: *baya* and *daya* for left and right drums, respectively. Tabla is a traditional percussion instrument of North Indian heritage, and is a significant and important part of North Indian classical music. It is an instrument that can be played individually in solo performance and can also accompany different genres of music.

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