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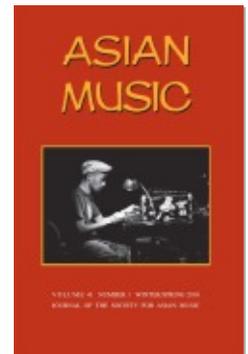
*Khayal Darpan: An Indian Filmmaker Journeys through
Classical Music in Pakistan* (review)

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Video Recording Review

Khayal Darpan: An Indian Filmmaker Journeys through Classical Music in Pakistan. Directed by Yousef Saeed, EKTARA (NTSC/PAL DVD9), 2006. 105 minutes in color, Urdu/Hindi with English subtitles. www.ektara.org.

Stimulating, candid, and informative, this video takes us into musical universes related to but different in interesting ways from those known in India and introduces us to an important segment of the music history of South Asia. Saeed, from Delhi, shot this video in Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore. At first it's the wonder that was classical music in pre-partition Lahore, and marvelous it must have been. Critics and musicians, videoed in their studies or crumbling studios, describe music performances at soirees, weddings, shrines, and radio festivals. We see a bit of black and white footage of Raushan Ara Begum and hear other famous singers as we see their old photos. Those well received in Lahore were or became widely acclaimed. At this time *dhrupad* was nearly gone, but *khayal* was apparently at its height. Several interlocutors comment on technical musical matters such as differences in *gharana* styles. Segue into a discussion of reasons for the decline of classical music. One asserts that it was the movement away from memorable lyrical phrases. Partition expanded the musical scene and changed classical music in Lahore with the arrival of Muslim musicians from as many as ten *gharanas* in India, but the political leaders of the new nation did not favor music and did not want music to be a part of the national identity, states one of the commentators. (The strange but non-obscuring electronic noise in the background of interviews with several commentators is the main technical flaw of the video.) Royal patronage fell away and nothing replaced it. Song texts and *rāga* names were changed to remove Hindu deity names and references. (Later we also see the ongoing effects of Muslim ideologues on the music and musicians.) The practice of music itself, sometimes associated with the red-light district, was attacked and then defended in print. Here and there throughout the video while we hear classical singing we view interesting and charming still photos of nature, culture, and people taken by Andreas Matt.

The war with India in 1965 and the secession of Bangladesh diverted attention, and along with the deaths of many great singers, accelerated the decline of classical music. The revival of *ghazal* and *qawwali*, thought by some to be more directly related to the culture, pushed classical music further into the

background, but some singers of those genres incorporated classical rāgas and techniques. We see ecstatic men moving to music in a dark hall and are told that each shrine in Sindh has distinctive music today.

But the musical interest of at least some of the youth turned Westward, due in part to MTV. The scene shifts to the oasislike National College of Arts in Lahore and the broader contemporary scene. Young men are playing rock music on guitars and sitars, but singing in Urdu. “We don’t have a competitive (musical) product to sell the next generation,” says the forceful Raza Kazim, but it appears that one might be evolving. (Kazim also makes the provocative comment that before HMV started its recording company in Dum Dum circa 1900, “. . . there was no concept of solo. There was no such thing as solo instrumental music.”) But other commentators look for the positive in the contemporary mix of Western pop and classical music. We see a bit of a classical concert performance by the vocalist Naseeruddin Sami in Karachi, apropos of what is not clear, along with a glimpse of a gifted boy, Sijjal Ali, singing in a class with Fateh Ali Khan.

The video frequently refers to India. Kazim (whose development of a kind of *vina* receives a bit too much play relative to its importance in Pakistani music) gets in some digs at the music policies of the government of India, but a portion of the video emphasizes India-Pakistan unity. We see still photos of Indian and Pakistani soldiers holding their flags together. Badruzzaman talks of his visits to perform in India. And there is an overlong sequence in which an interview with Aliya Rashid alternates with singing of what is apparently Indian film music by nonprofessional singers in Karachi at their association’s meeting. Aliya Rashid is a young, nonvegetarian blind woman who left Lahore to study classical singing with the Jain, vegetarian Gundecha Brothers in India in whose home she stayed.

It wouldn’t be fair to complain about the brevity of classical performance segments in an introductory/survey video like this. I hope that the filmmaker has some complete performance pieces on tape that we can look forward to seeing. This video is recommended to anyone interested in “Hindustani” classical music or Pakistani culture.

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