



live! live! live! live! live! live!

A TRIBUTE TO USTAD ALLA RAKHA

Queen Elizabeth Hall, London

Every so often you attend a concert so extraordinary you hardly dare to believe. This was one. A.R. Qureshi of Bombay's cusp of Partition-era film industry, later reborn as the paramount Hindustani rhythmist Alla Rakha died in February 2000. Over the intervening years the Allarakha Foundation has kept the torch burning. The mood of the Tributes has changed, moving from the emotional to the celebratory. Sultan Khan's Rajasthani *sarangi* and vocal lullaby was a high point in 2001 seared into concert-goers' memories. This whole concert though ranks as one of the greatest Indian music concerts of my life in music.

Age has caught up with the most senior *bansuri* (bamboo flute) maestro of our times. Hariprasad Chaurasia can no longer sit cross-legged on the podium. A section of the podium had been removed to allow him to sit as on a chair whilst playing. But when his hands caressed his bansuri, about as long as his arm in length, you could see him filling with energy. It reminded me of the wizened little man at the Nehru Centre in London who was talking softly and gently smiling in the wings transformed into the supercharged Alla Rakha as soon as his feet touched the podium. The centrepiece of Chaurasia's performance was his new raga composition called *Brindavni Malhar* – from Brindava, a place associated with the bansuri-playing Lord Krishna. Assisted by Sunil Avachat on bansuri, Alla Rakha's son Zakir Hussain Qureshi on tabla (often feather-light in touch) and Gilda Sebastian on tanpura, Chaurasia's rainy season raga had a mellow *dhun*-like feeling to it with – perception is everything – evocations of bird-call and the pitter-patter of monsoon rain.

The tabla pyrotechnics of Zakir Hussain had been the focal point of the first half's declaration of guru and pedigree known as a *peshkar*. His playing attested to why he is revered as his father's son. Fida Hussain accom-

panied on harmonium, with Surjeet Singh playing *lehara* on sarangi to Hussain's spell-binding stories in rhythm. He interposed spoken insights that illuminated his Punjabi style of tabla playing and tabla compositions. The honour of opening the Tribute fell to the trio of Kishon Khan (piano), Patrick Zambonin (six-string electric bass) and Oreste Noda (congas and percussion). Combining Bangladeshi, Baul, Cuban and jazz elements, I shall follow their progress avidly. Perfect is an awfully big word, but this was a perfect Tribute to Alla Rakha.

Ken Hunt

MOSTAR WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL

Mostar, the capital of Herzegovina, is home to a fascinating mix of cultures and faiths, reflecting its special position bridging the Orient and the Occident. Built along the banks of the dazzling emerald Neretva River, the stunning mountain scenery provides a perfect backdrop to the city, where tourists and locals mill about, beauty and devastation sit side by side, and ancient and modern co-exist quite happily. So what better way to celebrate Mostar's unique identity than to stage a world music festival under the iconic Stari Most (Old Bridge).

Inspired by the energy of the small-scale festivals he'd witnessed in other European cities, record producer and Snail Records Director Dragi Sestic set about realising his vision of bringing together Mostar's diverse community through a festival of world music. Setting up an independently run festival outside the political influence of the capital was no easy task, but with the dedication and tenacious efforts of Aleksandra Savic (Director of World Music Centar Mostar), and help from Mostar percussionist Baya Corlija and others from the Sarajevo-based organisation Muzicari Bez Granica (Musicians Without Borders), the long-planned project finally came to life for three nights during the first week of September.

Sadly, despite all the months of hard work, the weather gods had other plans for the outdoor festival, a violent storm forcing the organisers to abandon the stage under the bridge at the last moment and source an alternative venue indoors. Help came from the Dom Herceg Stjepan Kosaca theatre on the Croat side of town enabling the festival to stage what was, by all accounts, a very enjoyable opening night with Macedonian Gypsy queen Esma Redzepova and the new line-up of Bosnia & Herzegovina's world music stars, Mostar Sevdah Reunion with Ljiljana Buttler, showcasing music from their forthcoming *Café Sevdah* project. The opening night was broadcast by BiH channel TV Pink and also beamed out to many more viewers across the satellite network.

I arrived on the second day of the festival to witness Bosnian rock chick Irina Kapetanovic deliver a short set of traditional *sevdah* songs, Serbian band Biber and previous Audience Award winners at the Radio 3 AFWM, Terrafolk. Biber were a real discovery and played an impressively varied set ranging from traditional acoustic material with the compelling voice of Ivana Tasic, bass *tanbur* and tambourine to rockier numbers with bagpipes, drum kit and guitars. Later, Terrafolk's on-stage antics proved a hit with the crowd and complemented their frenetic musical virtuosity. For me, however, the Martin Lubenov Orkestar stole the show on the following night: with several personnel changes since the Barbican gig earlier this year and minus the brass section, they performed a broad repertoire of Balkan Roma music incorporating influences from far and wide. Martin's deft and playful accordion work kept the audience eager for more while new Gypsy singer Petar Yankov left a lasting impression with his soulful performance.

Having made a name for itself on national TV and radio, and gone some way towards uniting its citizens, Mostar World Music Festival has the potential, with a bit of better luck on the weather front, to grow into a very special event in future years. Watch this space: www.worldmusic.ba

Sofi Mogensen

At Mostar World Music Festival, Biber's Milos Nikolic and Ivana Tasic

