

# arts and entertainment

## Classical Indian sitar music fascinates UNL audience

By Mary Jane Winquest

More than 700 people crowded into the Nebraska Union Ballroom Friday night intent on an unusual musical experience in the form of Indian sitarist Nikhil Banerjee.

"This is the only country in the world where there is so much interest in Indian music, any music. There is a lot of cultural integration here," Banerjee said after the concert.

The overflow crowd that sat around the stage in front and stood in back seemed to attest to his statement. Not only did most stay to the completion of the two and one-half hour improvised concert, but the audience's enthusiasm was demonstrated by several spontaneous rounds of applause during the performance.

Although entertaining, Indian classical music is probably most fascinating because of its marked departure from western musical form and philosophy.

### Tonal sound

Unlike western music, Indian music produces tones from many sounds, and is kept in time through cycles rather than beats. There are also certain pivotal tones around which the piece revolves. Unlike our twelve-tone scale, Indian music utilizes 22 microtones.

Rather than a preset program, the raga, or melodic theme where certain notes dominate, is subject to improvisation according to the performers mood.

"You just sit and concentrate and let the raga develop," Banerjee said.

Although the raga has a definite descending and ascending fixed structure, the note sequence is not fixed. Its progression rests solely with the artist.

"There is improvisation done, but under very strict rules and discipline," Banerjee explained.

"Like each person has a different personality, approach to life, each raga has a different mood," he added. "The development of the mood and structure of the raga is foremost," according to Banerjee.

He said the whole piece continues from the mood set at the beginning. Banerjee announced before the concert that the first piece depicted serenity and loneliness.

### Self realization

"The classical raga is used for self realization, not to entertain people. Indian music has some connections with Indian culture," Banerjee said.

"As we are part of that supreme soul, the ultimate aim is to meet the supreme truth. This is the basis of Indian music," he added.

All artistic endeavors should lift man up from materialism toward the origins of creation, he said, adding that this emotion in western music dying.

"Roots should be toward the spiritual world. If there is not that touch then the effort (musical) is useless. Through notes you express emotion, this emotion is dying," he said.

The improvisational characteristic of Indian classical music was also an intriguing ingredient in Friday's concert. Sitting with legs crossed on a raised platform Banerjee and Anindo Chaterjee, the tabla player

(two hand drums), improvised for one hour and a half, combining two types of pieces, the Alap and Gat.

Banerjee's fingers raced up and down the sitar's seven strings only to be out-matched by his counterpart's rapid, almost unseeable finger movements on the tabla.

The raga is always developed in the alap, or first portion of a concert. Banerjee said it would have taken him a minimum of two and one-half hours to develop all of the alap's 18 different segments.

Banerjee described the alap as a "cry for the supreme soul." The concluding portion of the concert was the most rhythmic, traditionally called a thumri.

During the concert when building toward a climax Banerjee and Chaterjee seemed to be communicating through nods. The tabla playing would become louder and more intense as the accents between the tabla and sitar become one. It was these dramatic moments that continually elicited the crowd response.

### Two minds together

Banerjee described the communication as "two minds working together".

"While you are developing the note structures the other mind is counting the beats," he said. "When he improvises, I keep the beat, when I improvise he keeps the beat," Banerjee explained.

"And sometimes we try to trick each other," he added.

Chaterjee said he has practiced with Banerjee since his childhood but has been performing with him for the last five years.

"He is like my teacher," Chaterjee said of Banerjee. Chaterjee also attributed his fame as a solo tabla player to his association with Banerjee.

The two Indian artists were also assisted Friday night by Tambura player Tom Tidball of Lincoln.

"I'm very pleased the crowd like my tabla," Chaterjee said.

Banerjee was also pleased with the enthusiastic reception and noted that interest in Indian music has increased during the eleven years he has performed in the United States.

### Playing for 40 years

Banerjee, who lives in Calcutta but teaches summer school in Berkeley, Calif., has been playing the sitar for 40 years.

"When I come to this country I feel free and very nice," Banerjee said.

He said the 20 tour stops to come in Europe will find a more formal, stiff audience than those in the United States. But before Europe, Banerjee and Chaterjee will perform in Chicago and Boston.

The cyclical and improvisational char-

acteristics of Indian music is not only foreign to American audiences. After the concert an Indian woman who had just moved to Lincoln said, "Its the sound, rhythm that appeals to us. We don't know too much about the technical aspects either."

But most were pleased with the evening's music, as demonstrated by a lot of tapping fingers and toes.

### Indian atmosphere

The white native Indian dress of the performers, Banerjee's colored vest, and burning incense seemed to add to the audience's enrapturement.

"But the outside things are not very important," Banerjee said of the incense. He said what comes from within is the importance.

It is this spiritual quality of Indian classical music that makes it so fascinating, so intriguing to American audiences. The purity of an artist searching for spiritual roots is certainly an uncommon but refreshing change from our daily musical thoroughfare.

Friday's free concert was sponsored by the Asian Studies Committee, The University Research Council of UNL, the Nebraska Arts Council, the Universal Arts and Education Association, the University of Nebraska School of Music and Marc Gold Concert Management of New York.



Photo by Mark Billingsley

Anindo Chaterjee, Tom Tidball and Nikhil Banerjee performed Classical Indian sitar music Friday in the Nebraska Union.

## Latest Yes album may renew critical faith in band's ability

By Jeff Taebel

During the early seventies, Yes became popular as a result of its creativity and sophistication. They were able to combine unique lyrics, vocals and grandiose musical themes with a degree of virtuosity paralleled by very few rock performers.

However, Yes had the misfortune of recording one of the best continuous-theme LP's in the history of rock, *Close To The Edge*, too early in its career.

After *Close To The Edge*, Yes experienced the same dilemma faced by Pete Townshend and The Who after the success of *Tommy*: how do you follow an enormously successful concept album?

Unfortunately, when a band releases a record that sets new standards in a musical field, its subsequent work is critically judged by those standards as well, creating a paradoxical system that is more rewarding to an artist that has a merely consistent career than to one that shows occasional

flashes of brilliance.

While Yes's recent albums have been well executed, none of them seem to have been inspired by the same spirit of creative

### album review

intensity that propelled *Close To The Edge*.

#### Greener pastures

Yes also suffered from the temporary departure of keyboard/synthesizer wizard, Rick Wakeman, who left the fold for a while to seek out the green pastures of a solo career.

In Wakeman's absence, many fans turned to fusion music or one of many Yes imitators, such as Starcastle, which sprang up at the peak of Yes's popularity.

Fortunately, for everyone concerned, Yes's latest release, *Tomerato*, is certainly

one of its best works to date and should win it renewed respect from critics and early fans alike.

Wakeman seems to be comfortable playing with Yes again and his keyboard work, if not as flashy, is more tasteful than it ever has been.

Jon Anderson's vocals haven't changed much over the years and he turns in a stellar performance throughout *Tomerato*. Anderson's high-pitched crooning can sound cloying and abrasive when he's working with sub-par material, but this problem does not arise on *Tomerato*. Anderson's melodies are lively and intriguing and his voice kicks the band into overdrive as well as any of the instrumentalists.

#### Explosive playing

Often underrated as a guitarist, Steve Howe fills the band's sound out with some of his most explosive playing ever. Howe strikes a perfect balance between raw-edged and precision playing, making his work always interesting to listen to.

Wakeman, Anderson and Howe are supported in fine fashion by the powerful rhythm section of Chris Squire and Allan White, on bass and drums, respectively.

*Tomerato* is highlighted by "Release, Release," which closes side one. This song proves that Yes can play gut-wrenching rock 'n' roll when they want to.

"Release, Release" moves along at breakneck speed and features some scintillating runs by Howe and Wakeman. Anderson sings some fiery multi-tracked vocals to top the song off, making the ensemble sound rather like Crosby, Stills and Nash run amuck.

Other high points of *Tomerato* include "Arriving UFO" and a captivating slow number called "Onward," both on side two.

*Tomerato* seems to be an indication that the members of Yes are getting back to the basics of what made them a great band in the past and will carry them to new heights in the future.