

New York Music Daily

Global Music With a New York Edge

Ravi Shankar: Eternally Vital in His Tenth Decade

by delarue

For fans of Indian music – and psychedelic sounds in general – there’s a fascinating and rather heartwarming new Ravi Shankar (<http://www.ravishankar.com>) DVD, Tenth Decade, just out from East Meets West Musi (<http://www.eastmeetswestmusic.com>)c. A live concert recording from October, 2011 at California Center for the Arts in Escondido, it captures the timeless avatar of the sitar at the top of his game, undiminished by the ages. 45 years after his legendary performance at the Monterey Folk Festival, Shankar amazingly still has his chops, and his genre-smashing vision. As you would expect, the rest of the ensemble elevate their game to match the master. Sitarist Parimal Sadaphal (<http://www.parimalsadaphal.com>) serves as sort of the rhythm guitarist in this band, frequently interchanging elegantly with Shankar alongside Ravichandra Kulu (<http://www.fluteravi.com>)r on flute and kanjira, Barry Phillips (<http://www.barryphillipsmusic.com>) and Kenji Ota (who also plays swamandal zither) on tampura lutes, and Samir Chatterjee (<http://www.tabla.org/samir-chatterjee-bio&feature=plcp>) and Tanmoy Bose (<http://www.tanmoybose.com>) on tablas. There’s tantalizing footage from the DVD streaming here (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVqvd6mhat8>).

They open the concert with a nocturnal raga, working their way dreamily but purposefully as the piece coalesces out of the ether, Shankar judiciously developing subtle thematic variations as he shifts to the upper registers over the tablas’ steady sway. The practically 23-minute Khamaj begins with the theme that George Harrison may have appropriated for Within You, Without You, Shankar’s resonant bent-note legato picking up and then ebbing, the rhythm cleverly hinting at a gallop and finally kicking in with Shankar’s fast flurries. The tablas scamper, there’s a trick ending, the sitars trade eights...and then it’s done. The crowd goes wild.

Then there’s a long drum interlude that frankly adds nothing to the concert (other than giving the string players a breather, maybe) followed by a relaxed piece for twin lutes over a drone. The full ensemble closes with the majestic, magisterial Raga Mala, Shankar’s understated joie de vivre anchoring this slowly crescendoing masterpiece as the group rises and then falls back behind him. They finally end it with a jaunty dance, flute joining with the sitars as it bounces its way out.

Simply to make it through 84 minutes of music at 91 years old is a feat; that Shankar plays as transcendently and with as much of a biting edge as he does is another story entirely. Director Alan Kozlowski has a long affiliation with Shankar, having produced two previous documentaries, one a collaboration with George Harrison. In the classic music doc style, he lets the music do the talking, focuses on interplay and individual contributions and doesn't get in the way. For those who don't need the visuals, there's also a stand-alone soundtrack available.

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