

CONCERTINO IMMAGINARIO 02, 01-2023: SARANGI 1

Dedicated to great Indian Musicians, late tabla player Prakash Maharaj (with whom I have honour to play in mid nineties) and sarangi players, Pandit Ram Narayan who inspired me and Nabeel Khan, whose videos gave me some basic ideas how to try to play this marvelous Indian instrument.¹

1.PRAKASH and VIKASH MAHARAJ: Raga “THE HEART OF PURAB”

2.ANONIMOUS SEPHARDIM, SARAJEVO: Song “NOCHES, NOCHES, BUENAS NOCHES” (“NIGHT, NIGHT, GOOD NIGHT”)

3.ANONIMOUS SEPHARDIM, SARAJEVO: CAMINI POR ALTAS TORRES,

4.ANONIMOUS SEPHARDIM, TURKEY: Song “DE EDAD DE KINZAY ANYOZ”

Duration: 22:14

IGOR POMYKALO, SARANGI, INDIA

TABLA and TANPURA: RHYTHM APP, PSS Labs, India, Version 4.55

¹ For my „justification“ of playing Sephardic music on an Indian Instrument see in „My Sarangi Story“.

MY SARANGI STORY ...

It's hard to say since when my interest in classical Indian music dates back, maybe it came through rock music that discovered the sitar especially in the UK in the late Sixties and seventies, after it was already done for our western "serious" music by Sir Yehudi Menuhin?

The fact is that in the mid-70s in the middle of Zagreb, in the then Centre for Culture and Information (where I often attended lectures and jazz presentations of my colleague and friend, the late Miro Križić) I attended a concert by Ravi Shankar and his ensemble. I think the ensemble consisted of sitar, tabla and tanpura and I remember being very impressed with this concert.

Shortly afterwards, in 1978/79, I was staying in Paris on the first of two scholarships, buying a Ram Narayan MC cassette in the FNAC store and through it for the first time I came into contact with the magical sounds of sarangi ... At one point passing by Bd. Montparnasse, I saw a sarangi in the window of an oriental shop and I would have bought it for sure if it had been possible for me from a French (relatively stingy) scholarship and if its body had not been cracked ...

After a number of years, in the mid-90s, I had an exceptional and memorable opportunity to play and record several compositions with Indian virtuosos, brothers Prakash and Vikash Maharaj, for the CD Variety of dear colleague and friend, Austrian guitarist Walter Valdinho Langer.

The idea of procuring and attempting to play sarangi has always remained present somewhere, but for some reason I believed that this would be very expensive and complicated.

And then, at the beginning of this year (2021), I stumbled upon the Tabla Talks channel on YouTube from Indian musician Kuljit Bhamra and there found out that the price of the instrument would be within the possible range, contacted him and got a recommendation for two Indian specialised stores and from one of them eventually ordered Sarangi. In the meantime, while waiting, I combed YT and the web and gathered all possible important information and started (as usual ...) learning to play it without an instrument ...

After minor vicissitudes/ problems (because of Brexit ...) early in April the sarangi finally arrived! I devoutly unpacked it and first watched it with admiration and love for a while ... Then I took it in my hands and tried somehow to play the raga "The Heart of Purab", a song by the afore mentioned Maharaj brothers and it started! I even have a very short video from that first attempt.

At first, I worked with a series of YT videos of Indian sarangi virtuoso and singer Nabeel Khan and then, after it really started, it occurred to me that it could be a good idea to go back to my favourite repertoire of Sephardic romances - mostly from Sarajevo.

In the last 30 years this repertoire inspired me a lot over and over again, on a variety of instruments and in a variety of styles. It helps very much that I know this repertoire by heart and could play it almost "sleeping" or drunk which greatly facilitates the performance and transposition, as well as ornamentation and improvisation on various instruments.

One will rightly ask what has the Sephardim music have to with India? Well, at a time when, after the Reconquista, Jews were forced to leave their Spanish homeland, beside various Muslim countries (including Turkish Bosnia) a number of Sephardim emigrated to southern India. Naturally, their old Spanish lyrics were probably sung there with more or less influence of (Southern) Indian music while my interpretation is some strange kind of fusion of ancient Spanish lyrics (with some Greek, Turkish or Slavic words), melodic and rhythmic elements of the Balkan countries and Turkey - melted with those unique North Indian sound that sarangi surely imposes...

After exactly three months, 9.7. this year, I held a mini concert for our Austrian friends and after that decided to start recording the EP CD. At the end of August, it was finished it and by the end of September I made the mix and master. At the end, instead of the EP, it turned out to be an almost normal CD, lasting 46 minutes.