

East marries West

SHUBHENDRA RAO & SASKIA RAO DE HAAS



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EAST MARRIES WEST

Back in the sixties, two virtuosos, **Ravi Shankar** and **Yehudi Menuhin** brought the music of the East and West together with their historic collaboration titled 'East meets West'. Five decades later, Shankar's protégée, **Shubendra Rao** and brilliant Cellist **Saskia Rao-de Haas**, prove that the music of East and West no longer just meets but are ready for an abiding relationship through their path breaking music **East Marries West**.

A leading magazine writes about Shubendra Rao, "Here is not just a master at the sitar, but a thinking musician taking his instrument beyond convention. He has become a musical bridge to many cultures." Saskia Rao - de Haas is a pioneer in the world of music for introducing her Indian cello to North Indian classical music. Speaking about Saskia, her Guru Flute maestro Hariprasad Chaurasia said in an interview on the news channel Headlines Today: "She has been taught by God and everyone should listen to her music." "She is Indian, because of her music".



This celebrated husband-wife duo play traditional Indian Classical Music and also compose music that is both *avant garde* and traditional at once. Gateway Magazine, India describes their duet as '**taking Indian Music into a brave new era**'.

Their music is World Music in the true sense of the word. Indian and Western Classical Music traditions, folk traditions from different regions of the world and the exciting and unique world of rhythms are the inspiration for their compositions. The duo's effortless musical communication and improvisation is an emotional and joyful experience for their listeners.

Audiences and critics are captivated not only by the brilliance of both individual musicians but also by the energy and freshness that the couple bring to their concerts. As the Dutch consul-general in Mumbai, India said after their concert, "Mark Twain has been proved wrong today. The twain of East and West will indeed meet when it is music played by these two dynamic and wonderful musicians".

CONCERTS

Audiences from different backgrounds have enjoyed their music, be it in Classical concert halls (Indian and Western), Jazz and World Music festivals, open-air theatres or traditional Indian music festivals.

Internationally, Shubhendra and Saskia have performed at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, The National Arts Festival in South Africa, Esplanade in Singapore, Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, Rietberg Museum in Zurich, Switzerland, Musee Guimet in Paris, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan in London, Clonmel festival in Ireland, the Western Front for New Music in Vancouver BC. In North America, they have been invited to perform and give lecture-demonstrations at prestigious universities such as Carleton College, John Hopkins University, University of California in Sacramento to name a few.

In India, they are featured in most of the prestigious music festivals such as the Doverland Music conference in Kolkata, Legends of India in Delhi, Vasanta Habba in Bangalore (to an audience exceeding 30,000 people), Mysore Dusshera Festival, Delhi Arts International Festival, Saptak festival in Ahmedabad amongst others.

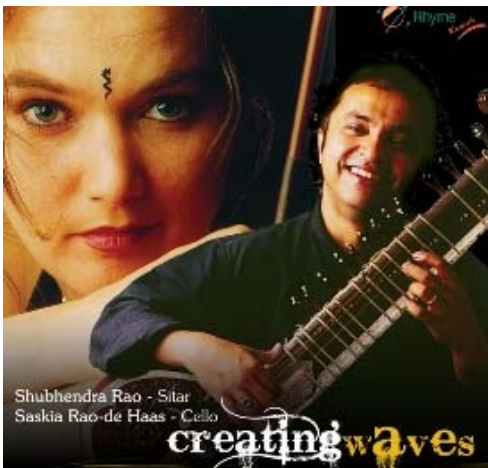


As a Duet, their concert tours have taken them to concert halls, festivals and Universities across the U.S.A, Canada, South Africa, U.K., Ireland, Turkey, France, Portugal, Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Germany, Singapore and India.

COMPOSITIONS

Combining artistic depth and technical virtuosity, Saskia and Shubhendra create their own compositions, which test the boundaries of the rich texture of the classical Indian idiom and incorporate European and Indian folk skeins. From a popular Greek or Turkish folk melody to their spontaneous expression of anguish to the New York bombings on 9/11 this prodigiously talented couple compose music of wide-ranging emotional content. They have been commissioned to compose music for festivals, various films, ballets and theatre plays in North America, Europe and India

Creating Waves clearly demonstrates their pioneering approach to Indian classical music and shows the technical brilliance and musical sensitivity of both musicians. All the ragas belong to major scales, starting from the serene notes of Bhoopali and concluding in the excitement of Mishra Khamaj...a raga-mala where one raga flows into another, creating unity. It culminates the realization that music and nature are the gifts of the same Creative force.



“Very unique and brilliant...the rendering is so touching and masterful...bringing forth a delightful medley of ragas...”

- Amazon.com

An Ode to India's Independence Day: In August 2008, India's premier Television Network, ND TV commissioned Shubhendra and Saskia to compose and perform a musical tribute to celebrate India's 61st Independence Day.

This celebration of joy had more than 90.000 hits on MSN India in just three days.

Ferrer's Kafi pays homage to Father Vicente Ferrer, a great Spanish Humanitarian who made India his home

Shubhendra and Saskia composed a beautiful piece commissioned by the Spanish embassy in Delhi and performed this in the presence of the Vice President of Spain. The composition dwells on the similarities found within the North Indian Raga Kafi and a patriotic song of Catalonia, thus honouring Ferrer's land of birth and land of choice.

Yathra (Journey) evokes an abstract expression of the cycle of one day, metaphorically tracing a human being's journey from the dawn of birth to the twilight of life. It is a visual meditation of the human experience, deeply exploring the spiritual and emotional passage of a soul through the many phases of life-birth, youth, love, loss, redemption, and death, completing the cycle with re-birth.

A collaborative work with Ragamala Music and Dance Theatre, composers Shubhendra Rao on Sitar and Saskia Rao on her Indian Cello convey the fullness of an entire orchestra---a sound as evocative and rich as life's journey.



...a work of outstanding originality... Being and becoming meet in sound and gesture...

- Edinburgh Festival

Yathra is a quietly, moving, beautifully oblique piece, one that any audience can grasp intuitively...

- Minneapolis/St. Paul Magazine

TEACHING

The Rao's attach great importance to spreading awareness about Indian Classical Music within India and in other countries. They travel to different universities, schools and festivals to create awareness through concert series, lecture demonstrations, workshops and Master classes. They teach across communities, age groups and levels of expertise.

The teaching programs they offer are as follows:

- ❖ Indian Music workshop for beginners, intermediate and advanced students
- ❖ Indian Music appreciation through lectures and lecture demonstrations.
- ❖ Master-classes
- ❖ Improvisation: Indian concepts that can be applied on other music systems; or students of improvised music. Emphasis is given to how the students can benefit from knowledge of these concepts performing their own music
- ❖ Sitar lessons for all levels of expertise: private and group lessons
- ❖ Cello lessons in Indian music. Saskia teaches students in private lessons, group lessons and workshop settings.
- ❖ Bowed string players other than cello who have expertise in technique on their instrument

They have conducted lecture-demonstrations at leading universities and conservatories like Yale-, Duke-, Louis & Clark and Delhi University, Peabody conservatory, Universities of Sacramento, Minneapolis, Amsterdam and Leiden, at the Conservatory of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and at the New Directions Cello festival in USA, at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan in London,



In India, Shubhendra and Saskia are members of the outreach program SPICMACAY and travel all over the country to create awareness of the Classical Music of India among the youth. Not only to all the Metro's but also to the remote towns to encourage the cultural life in these areas.

Detailed lesson plans are available on demand

AUDIENCE RESPONSE

"I hope everyone in this world could listen to your beautiful music"

Portland, USA

"Absolutely marvellous. You will be always be welcome to Paris and we will be there listening to you"

Paris, France

"Listening to you, I have just discovered a perfect fusion between tradition and modernity. It was a perfect evening for me"

Paris, France

"Wonderful concert---thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and feel gifted to have had your presence---you have such incredible artistry and spirit to share with this world"

Shubhendra Rao

Vancouver BC, Canada

"Frankly, I am not that "Classical" kind but your Duet performance makes me change my opinion---really CLASSIC!!!! My wife and I were spellbound!!!! What I also enjoyed a lot was facial expressions and coordination between you all 3 artists. You made us proud, you made India proud... We are proud of you."

Mumbai, India

"It was fantastic, to say the least. I never believed that one could give an art form such an appeal before I saw you perform. I totally loved your performance and have become a fan for life"

Bangalore, India

"Magnificent performance. You cannot believe what joy I had from all the compositions you played" New Delhi, India after their concert at the festival," Legends of India"

Thanks for your fantastic contribution towards the success of the 2005 Festival. How pleasant to work with true professionals!

Grahamstown, South Africa, festival director

FROM THE PRESS

Shubhendra and Saskia have featured globally in over 500 newspapers and magazines. They have been interviewed, been featured in documentaries and had their music broadcasted on more than 100 TV and Radio programs (CNN, Star TV, NOS, NCRV, Doordarshan etc.). They have written articles on Indian music in several magazines and books. In Peter Lavezzoli's new book, 'the Dawn of Indian music in the West' a chapter was dedicated to their path breaking work in Indian music.

"...piece-de-resistance of the festival....watched by an audience of over 10,000 people.....co-ordination between the 2 artistes was impeccable.."

Star of Mysore, Mysore

"...String magic puts audience in a trance...immersed in a musical journey too exquisite to put down in words...the intoxication of the music kept the audience riveted to their seats..."

Times of India, Hyderabad

"----the time they finished, they got a spontaneous standing ovation... such was the stirring performance that many in the audience were moved to tears----

News time

"---a calming duet specially composed against the backdrop of the American crisis. The American President needs to hear this one".

India Today

Sitar-Cello Duet mesmerizes...

Rashtriya Sahara, Lucknow

'The duo makes music that has the audience wowing and the critics raving...

Hindustan Times, New Delhi

The evening was nothing less than poetry of music....

Times of India, Bangalore

This *jugalbandi* would be taking Indian Music into a brave new era

Gateway, India

About SHUBHENDRA RAO

"With a fine command over technique and innovative creativity, Shubhendra Rao evokes the various facets of the music and its moods, rendering a wholesome perspective and maturity far belying his years." Hindustan Times

Ace composer and performer, Shubhendra Rao is ranked amongst the key soloists of India. Distinguished as a musical bridge to many cultures, he creates an experience for his audience that "is not aimed at titillating the senses, but to seize the soul" (The Hindu, New Delhi). A protégé of world-renowned Sitar maestro, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Shubhendra has established himself not only as a master of his instrument but also as a thinking musician, constantly endeavouring to carry his instrument beyond conventional boundaries. Both as a performer and a composer, critics and connoisseurs view Shubhendra Rao as a worthy successor to Guru's tradition.

Shubhendra has performed at major music festivals and concert halls like *Sydney Opera House* in Australia, *Broadway* and *Carnegie Hall* in New York, *WOMAD festival* in Guernsey, UK, *National Arts Festival* in South Africa, *Theatre de le Ville* in Paris and *Doverlane Music Conference* in India. His international tours have taken him to the USA, Australia, New Zealand Canada, South Africa, most European countries, Mexico and Asian countries. His CDs that have been released by leading music companies all over the world have received rave reviews from the press.

Shubhendra had his first lesson from the Maestro at the age of 3. He is one of the last musicians to have learnt his art in the true "Guru-Shishya Parampara", living with and learning from his master for over 10yrs. Through years of rigorous training and practise, Shubhendra received a firm foundation from where he could explore the world of music and build his own musical persona. An important part of his learning was assisting his Guru in solo concerts and orchestras like *Live in Kremlin* and *Ghanashyam* in the UK and India and many other creative projects.

Well-known as an enthusiastic collaborator, Shubhendra distinguishes himself by working with musicians across cultures. His composition, "Nautch" was featured on Broadway, New York at the New Victory Theatre for a production of the leading dance company, Ragamala Music and Dance Theatre, Minneapolis. His composition, "From Temple to Theatre" for the same company received praise for its originality. His innovative work with Jazz Guitarist Freddie Bryant, with Chinese Pipa master, Ms. Gao Hong has been received with great gusto everywhere they have performed. He has had the honour of composing for and working with other great musicians like legendary Japanese singer Ryoko Moriyama, Jazz Flautist James Newton.

In November 2007, he was awarded the "Youth Icon for Classical Music" by the popular Zee Television Network.

About SASKIA RAO DE HAAS

'On January 24, 2003, the Doverlane Music conference, one of the most prestigious annual festivals in North Indian Music, presented a female Western musician playing a western instrument for the first time in its 51-year old history....Saskia Rao-de Haas' alap exposition was revelatory, with the faster tempo the icing on the cake.' Excerpts from the book, "The Dawn of Indian Music in the West" by Peter Lavezolli.

Saskia Rao - de Haas is a brilliant cellist and composer from the Netherlands.

She has brought a new instrument, her **Indian cello** to North Indian classical music and created a unique playing style. Saskia is the first female Non-Indian artist to have performed at the prestigious Doverlane Music conference in Kolkata, India and performs at the most prominent Music Festivals and Concert halls the world over. Critics and audiences alike have praised her for artistic depth and technical virtuosity. Speaking about Saskia, Flute maestro Hariprasad Chaurasia recently said in a TV interview: "She has been taught by God and everyone should listen to her music".

Saskia has performed all over India in prestigious festivals for Indian classical music such as the Legends of India in New Delhi, Vasanta habbha in Bangalore, the Maihar festival, Haridas sangeet samelan in Lucknow and many others. She has toured extensively through North America, Europe and Asia. She is a celebrated composer, bridging the Western and Indian Classical music traditions. Her recent path-breaking composition was the introduction of Indian Music in the Western string quartet. Apart from Indian music, she is a gifted Western classical cellist, plays folk music from Eastern Europe and is an accomplished composer. She also created music for dance, film and theatre. Her varied experiences include collaborations with South Indian musicians, Jazz musicians, Klezmer, Flamenco and other European folk musicians.

Saskia was initiated to the cello at the age of eight by the late cello virtuoso Tibor de Machula. She studied cello at the conservatory of Rotterdam specializing in Indian classical music under Koustav Ray and Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia, while finishing her Master's in Ethnomusicology from the University of Amsterdam. During her subsequent visits to India she also studied under eminent artistes such as Dr Sumati Mutatkar, Pt DK Datar, Pt Deepak Chowdhury and Shubhendra Rao. With no precedent to follow, Saskia has worked with singular dedication to adapt the cello to Indian classical music.

She has modified her cello to suit the requirements of Indian music, based on a comparative study of Indian string instruments and western baroque instruments. Her Indian cello is smaller in size than its western counterpart and has 1 additional playing string and 10 sympathetic strings to give the cello a new dimension. Her unique playing style enables her to bring out the subtleties and the embellishments characteristic of north Indian classical music. She has invented new techniques for the cello that allow her to nurture its inherent closeness to the human voice and explore unrestrained all its possibilities.

Saskia has conducted workshops and lecture-demonstrations at universities, conservatories and festivals in Europe, India and North America. She is currently doing a PhD at the University of Leiden and conservatory of The Hague by invitation to describe the Indian Cello and its role in Indian Classical Music. She has published in many musicological magazines. These rich experiences have won her a unique place in the field of world music.

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