

ALPANA SENGUPTA



KATHAK

Alpana Sengupta

ALPANA SENGUPTA is the foremost exponent in this country of the Kathak style of Indian classical dance.

She was born in Bengal but lived most of her life in Orrissa before coming to England in 1974, where she has continued to give concerts and classes.

Having trained for many years, she gained 'Nritya Prabhakar' and 'Nritya Visharad' qualifications from Allahabad and Bombay. For a time she studied with Shri Firtu Maharajji of Raygarha.

Kathak is one of the most exhilarating of Indian dance styles and Alpana is noted for her vigorous and energetic performances of the rhythmic aspect of the dance as well as her witty and delicate interpretations of the stories from Hindu mythology.

Her style is based mainly on the Lucknow and Jaipur schools of Kathak.





Photos by Alan Cunliffe

Kathak

The word Kathak means story-teller. It probably originated from a form of song known as a Katha. This was an ancient style of telling stories from Hindu mythology, mainly the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, which involved intoning the words in a similar way that Western psalms are recited. They were accompanied by movements and gestures which gradually acquired a definite form.

This kind of acting is more properly called Natya. Natya can be expressed by movements of the body, by words or voice sounds, or by the wearing of appropriate costumes. When the movements of the body and limbs are performed to a rhythmic pattern; this is known as Nritya. When Natya and Nritya are performed simultaneously, then it is called Nritya. Kathak involves all three: Natya, Nritya and Nritya.

By the 2nd century A.D. dance and music had become a highly developed and intricate science, used both as a form of theatre and as a means of devotion.

According to legend the creation of both is attributed to Lord Shiva. In his aspect of Shiva-Nataraj he is the cosmic dancer symbolising the eternal movement of the Universe. As he dances he represents the victory of Knowledge over Ignorance.

From as early as the 8th century, North India came into contact with the world of Islam, first from Arabs followed in the year 1000 by Muslims from Afghanistan. In the 12th century, Mohammed of Ghor founded the Sultanate of Delhi setting up a new anti-Buddhist anti-Hindu, anti-culture regime.

It was because of this that many Hindu musicians, dancers and priests retreated to the South, where, under the patronage of the Maharajas, the arts, language and religion were able to continue in their purity.

When the Mughals became the new rulers of India in the 16th century, Hindu dancers were forced to perform in their courts and were regarded virtually the same as jugglers, jesters and acrobats. A favourite sport was to force dancers to perform whilst balancing objects such as bowls on their heads and arms. All religious connotations were banned – dance was to be a spectacle of pure entertainment only.

This degeneration of dance continued until its revival during the reign of Akbar the Great. By the end of the 18th century a revitalised form of Kathak dance emerged. The costume remained essentially Persian, Hindu themes such as the exploits of Lord Krishna had been re-introduced, hand gestures had become less subtle and simplified, the body was erect, the back and legs kept straight. Above all was the development of the intricate and often amazingly fast footwork performed in strict rhythmic patterns, which is now the main feature of Kathak.

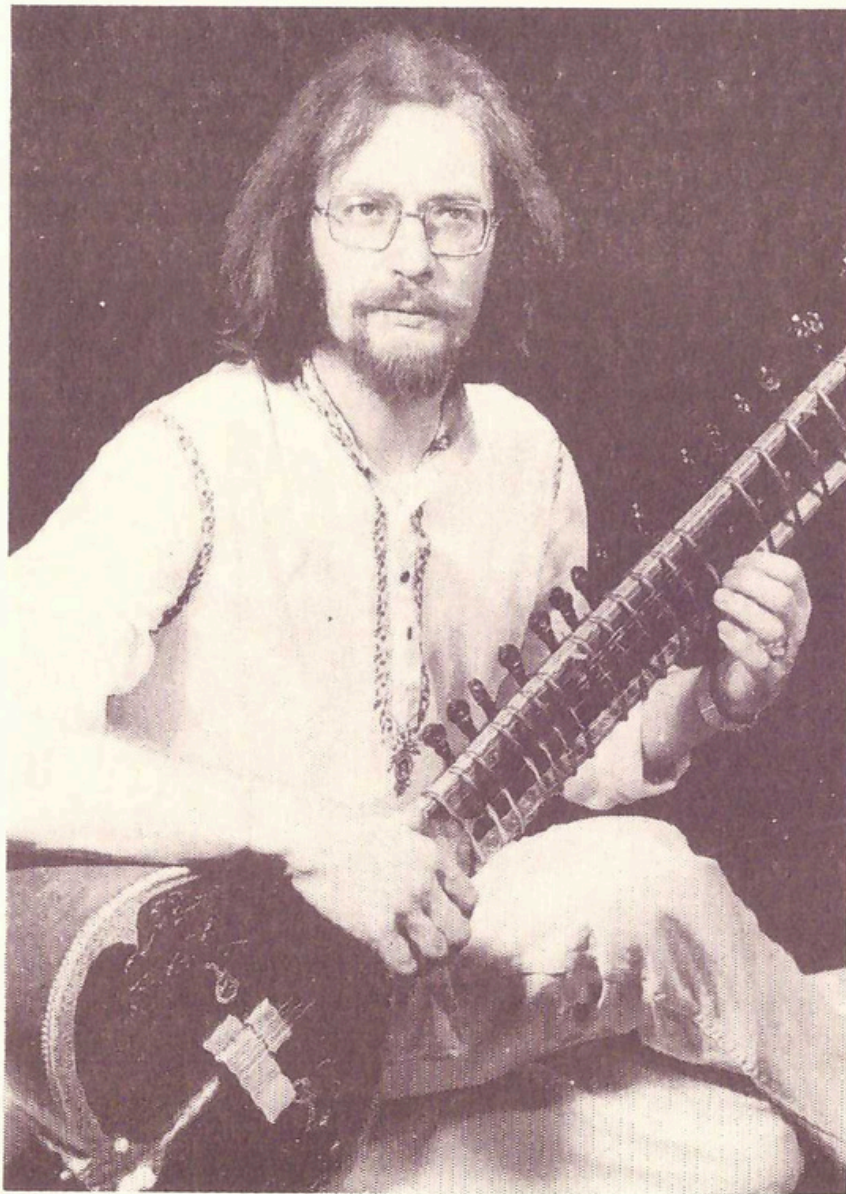
Mick Taylor

MICK TAYLOR has been playing sitar since 1969 and has achieved through regular and dedicated practice, a high standard of performance in the 'gayaki' (vocal) style.

He also has an extensive knowledge of the theory of North Indian classical music.

Recently he has had the opportunity to develop his technique under the guidance of Ustad Imdad Hussain.

He regularly gives recitals throughout the country, both as accompanist to his wife, Kathak dancer Alpana Sengupta, and as soloist.



Photos by Abrah Shah

Markandey Mishra

MARKANDEY MISHRA is one of the most versatile drummers of India. He represents the Benares style of tabla playing learnt from his guru Pandit Mahadev Prasad Mishra.

He was for a time a member of the Song and Drama Division of the Government of India, Delhi and also taught at Benares Hindu University.

He is experienced in all aspects of percussion giving brilliant performances as an accompanist for Kathak, vocal and instrumental music as well as soloist.

He has accompanied many top artists including Ustad Imrat Khan and Ustad Ghulam Mustapha Khan on European and American tours.

