

drums. The advantage of these selections, aside from their value in establishing Flaco's roots, is that his flamboyant and mercurial playing style is thrown into sharp relief by the starkness of these musical surroundings. The arrangements are deliberately spare and minimal, a functional beat and bass line, over which Flaco darts and weaves like the cartoon Roadrunner over a desert terrain, punctuating the romantic lyrics with a wide variety of arpeggios, jazz chords, unexpected swells, and soaring lyrical melodies.

The bulk of the material on this CD is comprised of *rancheras* and *corridos*, both with square, "oompah" -like feels. The one *bolero* on the album, "Sin Fe," provides a welcome contrast. The peppy, workmanlike style serves as a deadpan layer for an astonishing variety of lyrics. The same basic tempo and chord progression can be used for songs of political commentary ("El Padre de Un Soldado," a Vietnam-era protest song), rakish humor ("El Troquero"), romantic yearning ("No Me Digas Que Te Vas"), and, occasionally, astonishing anger and vindictiveness ("Hasta la Tuma," in which an unfaithful lover is threatened with eternal misfortune for her infidelity). The lyric, sung in fine close harmony by Jimenez and Toby Torres – with occasional cameos by the label-owner, Jose Morante – are rendered earnestly and with restraint; the effect can be powerful and occasionally disconcerting. They also serve to demonstrate the musical power of the Spanish language, in which almost any sentiment can be made to sound poetic. Before now, this reviewer would never have suspected that a line which literally translates as "I am an experienced carpenter and musician" could be fit into a dance tune. Now I know better.

As a package, this collection has problems. As mentioned, the liner notes have not been updated since the original release 17 years ago – thus no information is given on the additional ten tracks. Even taken as they are, the notes are more about gush and hype than about actual information ("he looks like Clark Gable, and he can play the buttons off a diatonic accordion."). More importantly, no chronology to the recordings is given, although original serial numbers are provided, therefore making it difficult to get any sense of Flaco's progression as an artist. In a style as homogeneous as this one, all new musical elements stand out: his wonderful negotiation of chromatic terrain in the introduction to "De Rodillas Quisiera Mirarte," for example, or his sudden use of high, quasiblue notes in "La Primer Noche de Mayo" and "Cuando Mas Tranquila." One would like to know whether these represent innovations or are simply things Flaco happened to do that particular day. The other musicians – drums and bass – are not listed, although in some cases this is probably for the best. Despite these shortfalls, this is a fine collection, not just for the purpose of hearing what "Flaco sounded like playing for *Tejanos*," as Mr. Goodwin puts it, but in its own right.
Reviewed by Evan Ziporyn.

Vintage Music from India – Early Twentieth-Century Classical & Light-Classical Music, Rounder CD 1083.

Light-classical artists from North India in recordings from 1905-1930: Gauhar Jan, Janki Bai, Malka Jan, Master Labhu, Mohammad Hussein, and others; North Indian Khyaliyas Narayanrao Vyas and Vishnupant Pagnis; South Indian Artists: Venu (playing vina) V. Kandaswamy (nagaswaram), Nagaraja Rao (flute), and Miss Rosa (light-classical vocal).

From the early days of the phonograph, the British Gramophone Company of India (later a part of EMI) was active, marketing some 4000 titles by 1910. These 78-rpm

recordings must have had a restricted circulation, for the amount of people who could have afforded a phonograph in these early days was surely limited. The great classical traditions in this music, especially in the Northern, or Hindustani style, are not suitable for a three or four-minute rendition, since a balanced unfolding of most ragas takes its time. Confronted with this time-limitation, most classical artists refused to be recorded. Even when radio came along in the 1920s and artists were given one-hour time slots, there was a reluctance among the classical performers to try to adapt. The famous vocalist, Ustad Wahhid Khan, being finally cajoled into singing on the radio, only managed to expose and develop the raga *Darbari Kanra* up to the fifth degree of its scale (pancham) when his hour was up. Little wonder that the medium of recording was better adapted to record the light-classical song literature – and little wonder that many classical artists regarded this also as proof that the medium was only suitable for a lower level of music.

But in the vision of the vital musical world provided by this wonderful recording, it would be difficult to relegate these artists to a lower level in any sense of the term. Even allowing for the reproduction quality, assumably remastered from the old discs themselves, the music itself shines through. Indeed, we are listening to several of the great names in early twentieth-century Indian semi-classical music: Gauhar Jan, Janki Bai, and Malka Jan, among others. These were singers of great fame and reputation, and were superstars of their world. They had been termed *tawaiifs* or *baijis* (awkward words to translate: “prostitute” is too street-hard; even “courtesan” has too frivolous a quality), a unique product of an ancient style of courtesan life which flourished alongside lavish courts of the predominantly Urdu-speaking kings of the nineteenth century, and later also in the cities. Their clientele was drawn from the wealthiest segments of society. A young man of background and promise was expected to learn culture and polish in their houses, where music, dance, and poetry were cultivated. Of course, his training would not stop there. An indignant middle-class morality soon put an end to this world of the senses – naturally the British soldiers and gentry were not attending these houses for their cultural offerings. Many of these courtesans became very wealthy themselves, and the more successful of them would hire the very best teachers of music and dance to enrich their own reputation, skill, and knowledge. The recording industry helped the artistic excellence of this mini-society emerge with dignity and find wider, newer, and appreciative audiences.

A surprising feature of the women singers was their power. We might expect to hear a chamber-like delicacy to their voices, imagining their soft-spoken roles in chambers modulated only by the rustle of silk. These women sing with a supple strength and volume which commands attention and respect. If they do not sing with the breathy coyness of a modern chanteuse with her microphone, or even the little-girl purity of the renowned film-singer Lata Mangeshkar, they nevertheless have a sensual color and expressive yearning to their voices – even though the song-style often requires them to remain in the upper registers for an entire song.

Janki Bai sings in a light classical ghazal style with much filigree ornament and considerable dexterity in her melodic runs. A *thumri* by Malka Jan and another by the male vocalist Narayanrao Vyas are more purely “musical” in their developments than the older *thumri* style which often used a text in an expressively dramatic style (*bol banao*). In these recordings we hear a sure-handed command of pitch in the wealth and flow of many quick-ornaments.

The selections by the fabulous Gauhar Jan include a *kadra* and a *khyal*. “Hers were among the six hundred records which were the foundation for our new enter-

prise," remembered recording executive F.W. Gaisberg of his experiences in Calcutta in the early 1900s. "Every time she came to record she amazed us by appearing in a new gown each one more elaborate than the last. She never wore the same jewels twice. Strikingly effective were her delicate black gauze draperies [saris] embroidered with real gold lace, arranged so as to present a tempting view of bare leg and naked navel".¹ The classical *khyal* style perhaps was not her great strength, but this one in *raga Bhupali* reveals that she had a significant musical mind which knew about development and balance as well as sensual charm.

One part of the classical spectrum which could be effectively modified for 78-rpm presentation was the *chhota khyal*, the medium to fast tempo section of this genre's raga performance. Narayanrao Vyas sings a *Khyal* or *raga Malkauns* which shows hidden imagination and virtuosity in handling the fast melodic runs (tans).

The South Indian recordings include two selections of *Saraswati vina* (plucked lute) by an instrumentalist identified as "venu." This word means "small bamboo flute," which is confusing: one does not expect a *vina* performance by a person named "flute." The performance is also ambiguous: the *kriti* selection sounds almost like a loose interpretation of a North Indian instrumental movement known as *jhala*, and the drum sounds more like a North Indian drum than the barrel-shaped *mridangam* of the South. Another selection by this artist renders a mixture of ragas known as a *malika*, or "garland," without rhythmic accompaniment. Selections of the two wind instruments, the double reed *nagaswaram* and the bamboo flute (*venu*) are quite charming, and Nagaraja Rao shows that the bamboo flute was played on the virtuoso level early on in the Carnatic tradition before it was respected as a classical instrument in Hindustani music.

Note must be made of the excellent liner notes, and the choice of the selections by Peter Manuel. Writing about ghazal and thumri were Mr. Manuel's original metier, and he has consistently researched and opened his expertise in the field of lighter music. Now, with the success of his books, *Popular Music of the Non-Western World* and the more recent *Cassette Culture*, he has established himself as one of the most knowledgeable authorities in this little-documented world. He is to be thanked and congratulated for bringing this small but powerful vision of early Indian recordings to fruition. *Reviewed by George Ruckert.*

Endnote:

1. Bor, J. My Name is Gauhar Jan. *Journal of the International Society of Traditional Arts Research (ISTAR)*. 1984;2(April-June):4-6.

Reviewers

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Corrections and Clarifications

Sergei Rachmaninoff – The Complete Recordings

A couple of editorial errors crept into my Sound Recording Review of RCA Victor's *Sergei Rachmaninoff – The Complete Recordings*, (*ARSC Journal*. 1993;24[1]:71-76), which I'd like to correct at this time. The first sentence should read: "Nearly fifty years after his death..." The last sentence in the first paragraph should read: "Rachmaninoff was certainly *not* Bach's equal as a composer (he has much company)..." etc.

There are also some errors in the footnote references. In the text, references 1 and 2 are correct, but 3, 4, 6 and 7 should be 1, and 5 should be 3. Finally, the Russian Gypsy singer referred to on the last page of the review is Nadejda Plevitskaya.

Since that review was written, I have obtained a used copy of the RCA Victor LP *The Great Rachmaninof* referred to in the text. This LP was not a Victrola re-issue, as I had stated, but was a Red Seal LP issued in 1962 as LM-2587. *The Great Rachmaninoff* does, indeed, contain an alternate take of the *Bach Prelude in E Major*.

Three takes were made in Hollywood in 1942, on February 25, 26 and 27, the last of which was approved for release by Rachmaninoff. Although the date listed on LM-2587 is February 27, 1942, and the jacket notes make no mention of the inclusion of an unissued recording, this performance is different from the published version. Careful listening reveals that even Rachmaninoff was unable to achieve a technically faultless performance of this difficult transcription, and in these two takes, very minor errors occur in different places. There are subtle musical differences, as well. The question which remains concerns the date of this alternate recording. One would logically assume that the LP contains the 1935 take marked "hold" by Rachmaninoff. However, the recorded sound more closely resembles the acoustically dry character of the 1942 Hollywood sessions.

ARSC member Joe Salerno has helped solve this puzzle. He has supplied me with a cassette copy of the 1935 alternate take, as released on a private LP entitled *Rachmaninoff Rarities*, MJA Records 1966-2. This take is different from the other two, being slower in tempo and more reverberant in recorded sound than the 1942 Hollywood recordings. The alternate take on RCA Victor's LM-2587 must, therefore,