

Jazz Yatra 78

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"Western musicians have been increasingly drawn to the music of India in the past decade. One of the reasons, I am sure, is the harmonic exhaustion of western music, leading perceptive explorers to seek creative refreshment in the melodic riches of Indian music and the infinite resources of the Indian scalar or modal system," wrote Henry Pleasants, music critic and author. When Jazz-India started planning an ambitious international festival two years in advance, they were aware of the special position India held in the jazz world and Henry Pleasants' words were not forgotten. It was felt that even though substantial financial support would not be forthcoming, it would just be possible to pull off the venture on the assured, enthusiastic and moral support of practically the entire international jazz community.

Jazz reached a peak in harmonic complexities under the powerful influence of Charlie Parker and was perhaps carried to unimagined heights by John Coltrane. In the mid and late fifties jazz and Indian music had only





this in common: both allowed musicians to simultaneously create and perform. The jazz world, at that stage, had no special interest in India and to organise a festival at that time would have possibly been infructuous if not disastrous. When Coltrane found himself at a harmonic dead-end he spearheaded a new movement which derived inspiration from the culture of India—both musical and spiritual. From that time the movement spread swiftly and deep to the point where a music of "Afro-American" (a term that implicitly includes "European") origin developed into a new world language: Indo-Afro-American music!

Nineteen groups from eleven countries gave twenty-five concerts in seven days. Nearly one hundred musicians arrived in Bombay with basically two feelings: love for India—for its music and culture, and a feeling of apprehension—how would the audience react to their young art form? At the amphitheatric Rang Bhavan the visitors heard the answer in unequivocal terms. This was a reaction not born of politeness, but rather of spontaneous feeling and appreciation.

← *Sadao Watanabe*
(Picture by J. P. Malkani)

Clark Terry
(Picture by N. G. Sharma)



Many were heard to say that the festival proved rock and pop to be insipid—a music without spice. Others said that they had not realised that jazz had so much to offer, and that after exposure at the Yatra they considered what they had heard to be the new "classical" music of the West.

Many factors combined to make the festival a resounding success, well beyond the expectations of those who organised it and those who participated. A major factor was the quality of sound amplification provided by Dynacord (West Germany) free of cost. The Rang Bhavan stage was extended to bring the musicians and audiences physically closer. In jazz a rapport helps. The witty, informal, but enlightening comments by M.C., Willis Conover assisted greatly. Nature smiled: cool evenings and starlit clear skies. But, most of all, and as was to be expected, it was the musician.

For the foreign musicians, journalists and enthusiasts another high-level mark was the series of eight concerts of classical Indian music and dance: as in the concerts at Rang Bhavan the Indian audiences became aware of Sonny Rollins' giant stature, so also the morning concerts demonstrated to our guests why some Indian musicians are called Ustad-s, Pandit-s or Vidvan-s. Ian Carr, leader of Nucleus, for example, was moved to tears by

Ram Narain with Albert Manglesdorff

[Picture by N. G. Sharma]

Don Ellis →

[Picture by Ranjit Ahuja]





the phenomenal and soulful rendition of the nadaswaram by Sheikh Chinna Maulana Saheb. Palghat Raghu and his Tala Vadya Kacheri left the jazz musicians wonderstruck: they could scarcely believe what they heard by way of mastery over rhythms. Other artistes featured were the Kathak dancer Roshan Kumari, Ustad Vilayat Khan, Pandit Ram Narain, Hariprasad Chaurasia, the Dagar Brothers, Shivkumar Sharma and Zakir Hussain.

Most of the jazz musicians purchased a number of musical instruments and LP records and later some of the groups travelled to other parts of India and concerts were staged in New Delhi, Calcutta, Pune, Madras and Goa; the response was enthusiastic everywhere.

The patrons of JazzYatra '78 were Sonny Rollins, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Yehudi Menuhin and Dr. Narayana Menon. It was inaugurated by the Union Minister of Education, Social Welfare and Culture, Dr. P. C. Chunder. The Ambassador of U.S.A., Mr. Robert Goheen, and of Poland, Mr. Czapala, visited Bombay specially to attend it. Most of the English language newspapers and magazines of India covered the Yatra, often with in-depth reporting and generous use of photographs. Many newspapers abroad, including the New York Times, and magazines have given it extensive coverage. The Japanese magazine "Mainichi Graphic" provided a 35-page colour spread. Polish and Italian film/TV teams and the Doordarshan team were busy throughout the festival. Doordarshan has compiled 16 half-hour programmes which are being shown over all stations around the country bringing jazz to over ten million viewers.

Jazz's birthplace was represented by tenor saxophonist nonpareil Sonny Rollins, a man deeply involved in Indian spirituality. Don Ellis and his quintet flew in from Hollywood. Trumpeter/composer Ellis has studied Indian rhythms and has published a book on Hindustani rhythms for western musicians. The U.S. Government sponsored the visit of master of the trumpet Clark Terry along with the great blues singer Joe Williams. Also from America came India's contribution to the jazz scene: Asha Puthli. The British Council contributed two of the Island's most modern jazz groups: Nucleus (jazz-rock quintet) and the Stan Tracey quartet. Contrary to general misconceptions that jazz is not encouraged in the East European countries, the Polish Ministry of Culture sponsored three of its best bands: eighteen musicians including their greatest, Zbigniew Namyslowski. From West Germany came two brilliant soloists: Albert Mangelsdorff (trombone) and Alexander Von Schlippenbach (piano) as well as another jazz-rock sextet led by Volker Kriegel. Scandinavia had three groups to offer: Norwegian singer Karin Krog, who expanded her group with singer Anima Roy, C. Naringrekar (sitar), Arjun Shejwal (pakhawaj) for an interesting experiment; the Danes put together an all-star quintet with John Tchicai specially for this tour; from Sweden came Rena Rama, a quartet. An almost unknown trio from Europe, Pan-Ra, quickly established a reputation for themselves. From Japan was the incomparable Sadao Watanabe and from down-under, the Australian Music Council sponsored the Galapagus Duck. India submitted its own talented all-star group co-led by Braz Gonsalves and Louis Banks. Rudy Cotton, the Indian saxophonist, performed the musical inauguration of JazzYatra '78.

What is perhaps not known is that every musician played at the festival gratis: Jazz-India did not pay any fees to anybody. Transportation and board and lodge aside, nothing was asked for. Can there be more proof of the love and esteem that the musicians had for India? An interesting situation was the JazzYatra big band: an orchestra of sixteen persons drawn from the visitors: under the leadership of Clark Terry sixteen men played as one—for the first and only time in their lives!

JazzYatra '78 must be regarded as somewhat epochal. It was truly a yatra: the West hailed the East and the East reciprocated; where journeymen met and exchanged views. Certainly it made us aware that great musical events are happening in the world outside and a lack of cultural cross-pollination must inevitably lead to cultural suffocation. Jazz has chosen to draw on our roots; we should do everything to encourage this dialogue.
