

## Opera ... of love and destiny

**O**n the occasion of Alain Danielou's centenary celebrations which culminated in October 2007, the Alain Danielou Foundation, with branches in Rome, Berlin and Paris, presented a series of concerts and exhibitions in different Italian cities related to the life and work of the great musicologist and scholar. One of the major events of the series was the presentation of seven songs by Rabindranath Tagore translated into Western musical notations for voice and piano by Danielou, at Tagore's request. Danielou was a great friend and admirer of Tagore.

The performance, conceived as an opera for voice, dance, music and recitation with the participation of Ileana Citaristi, dancer and choreographer, Saswat Joshi, Odissi dancer, Surendra Maharana, percussionist, Francesca Cassio, dhrupad singer, Ugo Bonessi, pianist and composer and Claudio Di Palma, stage actor, and with direction by Nadia Baldi, was staged in Zagarolo, the village adopted by Danielou as his Italian retreat, in Rome (Teatro Palladium), and Bergamo (Teatro Donizzetti) on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> of October and 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2007 respectively.

The stage adaptation of these songs intended to create a synthesis between the original land of the poet, the fertile and culturally rich India and the western sensibility and deep expertise of Danielou, a great scholar and interpreter of this culture. A homage to these two great artists could not but reflect their pluralistic and universal approach and comprehend forms of expressions both visual and musical.

*Opera of love and destiny* was a unique venture in many ways. First of all, the selected songs had never been presented on stage before because they were protected under copyright by Santiniketan, the institution founded by Tagore, and could enter the public domain only 16 years after his death. It was an unusual presentation with the piano and the pakhawaj accompanying the English version of the poems (translated from the Bengali by Danielou) sung by the vocalist and recited in Italian by the actor. The dance interludes which occurred in between, had the musical score specially composed by Oriya composer Laxmikanta Palit. The public seemed to relish these alternating ways of dramatisation.

The seven songs chosen among the thirteen transcribed in Western notations by Danielou included *He nuton* (The poet's birthday) in raga Bhairavi, *Jodi prem* (If your heart) in raga Shahana, *Gram chhara* (The dusty road) in raga Bilawal, *Gogon gogon* (Wandering from sky to sky) in raga Kafi, *Himshaye unmotto Prithvi* (The earth is drunken mad) in raga Desh, *Koro bayu boy bege* (The west wind is blowing fast) in raga Yaman, and *Somukhe santi*

Alain Danielou



SAMUDRI ARCHIVES

### The Music Academy and The Dance

Sadir had been brought to glory by its hereditary custodians, namely its preceptors and practitioners belonging to the devadasi community. In the late 1920s, a campaign to abolish the devadasi system had reached fever-pitch. Proposed legislation for abolishing the system and redeeming its victims threatened to snuff the lights out of the Sadir.

At this stage, the newly established Music Academy of Madras and E. Krishna Iyer stepped into the battle to help save the dance in distress and assist its transfiguration into "Bharatanatyam". Significantly, the Academy staged dances by outstanding devadasi performers to establish the beauty of the art in the public's mind. (from *Sruti* 27/28)

*parabaru* (Before me is spread the ocean of peace) in raga Behag.

Alain Danielou was a pioneer in building an understanding of Indian culture in general and music in particular in the Western world. In the early thirties he was among the first westerners to study not only Indian music, but also Sanskrit, dance, literature and religion, in particular Saivism. French by birth, he spent more than thirty years in India and was close to eminent personalities such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, and Rukmini Devi. He translated the *Kama Sutra* into English and a collection of more than a thousand Sanskrit manuscripts which he donated to the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. An eminent dancer, musician and scholar, he was responsible for presenting eminent Indian musicians and dancers to Western audiences for the first time. Through the International Institute of Comparative Studies in Music founded by him in Berlin in 1963, the western world could get to know and appreciate the traditional music of the most remote people in the world.

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