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# Amjad Ali Khan and sons

## Selected Reviews

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### Wigmore Hall Residency: 'Samaagam' with Refugee Orchestra Project

London, January 2023

“Ecstatic playing in an east-meets-west celebration...In the presence of the Indian high commissioner a large crowd heard a wonderfully invigorating evening of Indian classical music centred on the great sarod master Amjad Ali Khan...Here he was the soloist in his own concerto, for sarod and a small orchestra of western instruments...As the 30-minute piece progressed... I became gripped by the increasingly ecstatic playing — not just by the soloist but by the instrumentalists around him, mostly imitating his mercurial ragas in wild octaves.

The Refugee Orchestra Project...performed with tremendous spirit. So did Khan’s “warm-up” act: his two sarod-playing sons, Amaan and Ayaan. Along with the cellist Jiaxin Lloyd Webber they delivered Khan’s hauntingly ethereal 2016 piece *Singing Angels*. Before that, however, the brothers teamed up with the mesmerising tabla player Anubrata Chatterjee in an improvisation on the raga *Desh*. Sibling rivalry clearly need not involve fighting and torn necklaces. Here it manifested itself much more fruitfully in a contest of virtuosity that was breathtaking in its speed and audacity.”

– **Richard Morrison, *The Times*** \*\*\*\*

### Wigmore Hall Residency: 'Sarod to Guitar' with Sean Shibe

London, January 2023

“The meld between cultures was perfect. Shibe is best known for his showy pyrotechnics, but here he had the humility to listen before adding his voice to the other players’. West and East mingled on equal terms.”

– **Michael Church, *iNews*** \*\*\*\*

### Wigmore Hall Residency: 'Soul Strings' with Jennifer Pike

London, January 2023

“On stage were the brothers Amaan and Ayaan Ali Bangash, two great performers on the sarod...on their right perched on a chair was violinist Jennifer Pike, who won the BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2002 and has since blossomed into a soloist of searching musical intelligence — as was evidenced by this concert, in which she played alongside the three Indian musicians.

To prepare the ground for this meeting of two playing styles, Pike gave a pleasingly light, effortless performance of the opening *Preludio* from Bach’s 3rd Partita. She then absented herself from the stage, to allow the three Indian musicians to perform folk melodies from Bengal and Assam, as well as a song by the Nobel Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore. This allowed us to savour the essentially vocal aesthetic shaping those rich twanging notes. The melodic line would aspire upward to a note via a slide, or sink down with graceful melancholy, the tuning wavering expressively — all so different to the cool, clear Western way of shaping a tune.

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When Pike joined them to perform two compositions by the brothers' father and "guru" Amjad Ali Khan, perhaps the best-known sarod player alive, we heard that contrast projected with startling clarity. This isn't to say Pike hasn't immersed herself deeply in their style, and doesn't capture the wayward, spontaneously unfolding nature of Indian melodies. But there was something about her sweetly focussed vibrato and cleanly articulated notes that was miles away from the ecstatic flights of the two brothers. In its modest graceful way Pike's contribution felt touchingly sincere, and it certainly brought a genuinely singing, sustained quality to the evening." – **Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph***

"Mixing different styles is now a standard musical game, as players borrow alien techniques to freshen up their own. But blending entire classical traditions is an altogether more demanding proposition...Initially Pike [performed] a delicately inflected account of the prelude from Bach's third Partita. Then it was Amaan and Ayaan's turn, aided by a tabla player, to do theirs in the form of a composition that started gently, and worked its way up to a fine frenzy. Then, gingerly at first, the four musicians went into what you might call a bi-cultural jam session. There was a certain amount of echoing, as melodies were exchanged between plucked and bowed strings." – **Michael Church, *iNews* \*\*\*\*\***

### Morning Ragas at the BBC Proms

Royal Albert Hall, London, August 2022

"This Prom was magic. In an unbroken 90-minute recital, Amjad Ali Khan and his sons Amaan and Ayaan – each armed with a sarod lute, and backed by percussion from tabla and mridangam players – turned the hall into an enchanted space.

They played four instrumental suites, to which their listeners responded with delight. Every suite – known as a raga – has its own character, its own place in the month, and the right time of day for its performance.

It will also have its own history: the raga Miyan ki Todi, which Amjad played, was created by a musician named Miyan Tansen, who was a star performer in the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar in the 16th century.

All four ragas on this occasion were morning ones, and all exuded a lovely sense of contemplation. Father and sons are all virtuosi, but Amjad carried special authority in the slow deliberation with which he laid out the musical territory through which he would lead us.

In one sense, this music falls comfortably on Western ears, since the sarod's scale is not very different from the European do-re-mi scale. But the flattening of two or three notes gives it a wonderful feel, and the harmonics – those overtones which sing quietly in the air above the main notes – strengthen that impression. One could see how integral the audience is to a raga performance, as spectators in the stalls counted time with their fingers, and shouted out their pleasure at particularly lovely turns of phrase. And one could appreciate the natural shape of the form, with a slow beginning, and a gradual increase in tempo and intensity towards the end." – **Michael Church, *iNews* \*\*\*\*\***

"A gorgeous start to the day...full of melody, slowly drawing you in so that the smallest gestures have a dramatic effect...spectacular." – **Simon Broughton, *The Evening Standard* \*\*\*\*\***

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#### Strings for Peace

Zoho Records, May 2020

"A remarkable spiritual and emotional journey...Sharing the great unique treasures of their own artistic traditions...Combining the guitar and sarod results in an extraordinary blend." – **Rolling Stone Magazine**

"A spectacular collaboration exploring North Indian classical music ... at once calming and exciting, brilliant...like so many beautiful sunrises...Fantastic fidelity... Strings for Peace draws you into its hourlong journey with virtuosity at every turn." –**Audiophile Review**

"Sophisticated and lively ... hypnotic and exciting." – **MusicWeb International**

"Romancing Earth' with Amjad on sarod is gloriously stately... This is a groundbreaking record" – **Songlines Magazine**

"Magnificent Sarod and Guitar Interchange. Strings for Peace is a fabulous set of four ragas composed by Indian sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan for guitarist Sharon Isbin ... Beautiful, evocative pieces showcase the marvelous interplay between the sarod and the classical guitar." – **World Music Central**

#### Royal Festival Hall

London, 31 April 2019

"Sustained brilliance and punctuated by rare moments of thrilling intensity...Khan's talent seems to be shared between his sons, one adopting his speed, the other his delicacy. The elder of the two, Amaan Ali Bangash, strums his instrument fast and rattles out repetitive phrases like a machine gun; the younger son, Ayaan Ali Bangash, delivers a series of sighing riffs and pitch-bending curlicues. One of the highlights of the show comes at the end, when all three sarod players play together, accompanied by the two percussionists (including the remarkable tabla player Vijay Ghate). They trade phrases like blues musicians, one playing an eight-beat riff, the others replicating it note-for-note, with increasing intensity and featuring furious percussion accompaniment from Ghate and mridangam virtuoso Sridar Parthasarathy. It's an ending that truly hits the audience for six." – **John Lewis, The Guardian \*\*\*\*\***

#### WOMAdelaide Festival

March 2019

"Quiet moments that shone with subtle intensity... the shimmer of Amjad Ali Khan's sarod set against the quivering strings of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra." – **Jessica Nicholas, Canberra Times**

"The huge centre stage was filled to capacity as the Sarod trio were joined by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra to present the stunning and acclaimed concerto for Sarod, Samaagam.

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The violins of the orchestra droned softly as the three Sarod maestros took turns taking short, brittle solos as the tabla measured time. It felt like a journey through a desert as the bright attack of the Sarod cut through the shifting landscape drawn by the orchestra, as the insistent tabla marked our journey's steps.

The concerto is quite a restrained piece but soon gave way to brighter colours as the orchestra lifted and fell like waves or the fluttering of flags in the wind, the conductor carefully watching the trio of Sarod players as they improvised freely amongst the themes offered by reed and horn, string and bow." – **Barry Lenny, *Broadway World***

## Selected praise for Amjad Ali Khan

"One of the delights of Indian classical music is that it can be such an easy-going affair... [Amjad Ali Khan is] rightly regarded [as] the finest living exponent of the sarod... It was a masterful set." – **Robin Denselow, *The Guardian***

"[Amjad Ali Khan] gave each melodic phrase an individual character with an expert use of dynamics. And in the improvisations, he was creating his own original shapes. He placed important notes between beats; he used trembling-pitch ornamentation, but not too much; his phrases began mildly, became distended, and dove into silence... Once you hear his sons, you fully appreciate Mr. Khan's power. His sons are both excellent musicians, who play with power and precision and can light up an audience with fast passages." – ***New York Times***

"[Amjad Ali Khan] is at the height of his inventive powers and currently unequalled..." – ***BBC Music Magazine***

"It was like watching an Indian classical answer to Eric Clapton and Ginger Baker crashing through their favourite Robert Johnson covers at the Cream revival earlier this month. Amjad Ali Khan may be a master of the sarod rather than the guitar, but once he had built up to the crescendo of his solo set - improvising furiously around the melody line with repeated, rapid-fire playing and then letting his equally frantic tabla player take over - it was easy to see why great Indian music can be as exciting as classic blues and rock." – ***The Guardian***

"Amjad Ali Khan's playing here is outstanding..." - ***Gramophone***

"In the Art of Sarod playing echoes the human voice... Amjad Ali Khan's were the right hands to be doing these things..." – ***The New York Times***

"In the case of a musician like Amjad Ali Khan, who has arrived at the top grade of artistry, the years to come, theoretically speaking, ought to be ones that will take him to unscaled heights. At fifty, he reigns supreme in the field of Sarod..." – ***The Telegraph***

"Amjad Ali Khan, One of the great names in Indian Classical music, reached a wide audience as a star of the last year's Indian prom." – ***BBC Music Magazine***

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"The 65-year-old sarod virtuoso is a superstar in India, revered for his expressive, vocalized playing on that lute-like instrument... **Amjad Ali Khan's** playing explained why everyone was there: not just to study the exotic harmonies and complex rhythms of an ancient musical tradition, but to experience string music that spoke directly to the heart.... In his hands, the sarod's 25 strings produced a rich palette of overtones, further mimicking the complex tone colors and expressive range of the human voice... **Amaan Ali Khan** and **Ayaan Ali Khan** are the seventh generation of sarod virtuosos from this remarkable family, and they are already putting their own stamp on the instrument."

– **Chris Waddington, *The Times Picayune***

"**Amjad Ali Khan**, who, for many, is god-like in his dramatic powers on the Sarod, delivered his music with the emotional voltage of the blues, and a flexible instrument line that was almost vocal in its expressiveness."

– ***The Edinburgh Herald***

"**Amjad Ali Khan** is the master of the Sarod. Smaller than a sitar, it has 19 strings. Accompanied by his two sons, **Amaan Ali Bangash** and **Ayaan Ali Bangash**, on similar instruments, they created a 57-string three-man symphony orchestra." – ***The Times***

"Imagine a violin virtuoso like Itzhak Perlman also being a direct descendant of Stradivarius, and you can come close to the stature of Indian Sarod master **Amjad Ali Khan**. Khan is a spiritual, expressive musician, a technically brilliant and inventive player..." – ***The Inquirer***

"**Amjad Ali Khan** casts a kind of charm on audiences, sending out ripples of excitement" – ***New York Times***

"**Amjad Ali Khan** [...] a renowned Sarod player" – ***National Geographic***