

Maker Of Divine Melody

THE very first time I heard Ustad Faiyaz Khan, I experienced a medley of emotions which it would be impossible to describe.

They were so varied, so swiftly changing from the pleasant to the painful, so deep and yet so conflicting that it was difficult to connect them with my normal personality.

His music moved me to unknown depths by its magnificence, its vastness of range, its epic quality. It opened entirely new and unknown avenues of my experience. It pleased and yet terrified me. It made me cry out with pain. It was like a sea, now calm and without a ripple, now rising in fury and enveloping everything in its mighty waves. It was sweet and tender like a mother crooning her baby to sleep and it was destructive on a cosmic scale like Shiva destroying the universe.

Leonine Dignity

I may be fearfully wrong in my interpretation but such was the effect his music had on me. I went to every conference, obtained invitations to every private gathering that lay within my reach and enriched and tormented my soul with his art. His music left me in a state of such utter bewilderment that my friends remarked on the peculiar expression on my face. I became curiously sensitized to his presence so that on two occasions I told my friends that he was outside although we had been sitting listening to bad music in a carefully closed hall.

I have seen faces which were beautiful or ugly or merely commonplace, which radiated goodness or strength or brilliance of intellect, which had evil written in every line or which proclaimed long and terrible suffering, but I had never seen a face which reflected a personality so consumed with the power of its own genius—a personality holding its volcanic emotions under an iron control.

He is leonine in his fierce dignity. The awe, almost the fear in which his disciples and even close contemporaries hold him, his peculiar power of dominating without effort the most flippant and unmusical audiences numbering in thousands, his long and undisputed sway over the world of serious music for years, were factors which had made him a superman in my eyes.

We Become His Hosts

In this background of awe and reverence, consider my nervousness when once I and my brother were asked by one of the organizers of a Music Conference to put him up at my house as fitting arrangements for the great Ustad could not be made anywhere else in the town. Before we could stammer out our hesitation, the thing had been settled and we were conducted to the car outside the pandal in which Khan Sahab was waiting. He was wearing the familiar black Sherwani and the Irani cap which suits him so well. For additional warmth he was wearing over his Sherwani a Kashmiri dressing gown.

We were introduced as his prospective hosts. He acknowledged my salute with a nod and extended a large hand for my brother to shake and then leant back in the car with an air of great resignation. When we arrived at my house he descended with slow deliberation and surveyed my house with mild interest. It is large and rambling and old-fashioned—a hybrid of the old and new in architecture. "It is a good house, very picturesque," he remarked and relapsed into silence.

We felt awkward and ill at ease as it was clear that he had no small talk, no social commonplaces to keep the conversation going. "I am very glad to have come here. I have a horror of hotels," he said at last. "It is a great honour," I managed to mumble. "It is only great bother for you," he said and smiled. I was so tongue-tied, I made some excuse and went off to look for breakfast. The simple breakfast

Faiyaz Khan—As A Maestro And A Man

By Miss ZAHRA MAHMOOD

of eggs, bread and butter pleased him. He eats astonishingly little—the yellow of two eggs, the softer part of two small slices of bread and a little butter dissolved in hot tea. Then a few half cupfuls of tea.

A Hint To Hostesses

He has no consciousness of the passage of time. A meal is announced, he says he is coming. Half an hour passes, the dinner gets cold, the fat congeals in the gravy and he does not rise. The dinner is sent to be heated again. "Where is the dinner?" he asks when he comes at last. Every one smiles. "It has grown cold. It has been sent to be heated," says some one. "Oh! I am late. I am sorry. You see I am an old man now" he says and smiles.

This happens very frequently. The hint will come handy for prospective hostesses. Our first day's lunch was in the best traditions of Muslim cooking, rich, heavy, fragrant, laden with pepper and spice. The table was a blaze of colours with beet-root and green peas and the yellow and Mahogany colours of our meat dishes. I was quite proud of my cooking. Although the Ustad's companions were eating with relish, the great man himself sat nibbling at the Chapatis and the peas and perspiring profusely although it was the end of November.

"You are hardly eating anything, sir," I managed to object sorely disappointed at his lack of appetite. "You don't like the food perhaps," I added bent on extorting praise. "God be praised," he said. "The food is marvellous. I like it and how beautifully you have decorated the table. What wondrous colours!" and he surveyed the table from end to end. One of his disciples explained to me that he ate very simple food, with little fat, entirely without any spice, preferably vegetables. I had made a complete fool of myself. Happily there was some bread and butter and a few eggs handy and we managed with them.

From that day a revolution in cooking took place in my house and our whole family went without fats and pepper and spices for as long as he stayed.

Stream Of Admirers

After his first sitting at the conference he asked us about our impressions. I murmured my compliments but complained that bass notes which were the soul of his music were hardly audible to us as we sat at a distance from him. The next four sittings were therefore entirely ours. He took pains to see that we sat where we wouldn't miss a single precious note in his divine performances.

A stream of visitors kept coming to our house—old disciples separated from the great teacher for years. They came and cried and touched his feet and told of their troubles. There came students in search of autographs, musicians, government officials, university teachers, poets, girl students and lady teachers from the local colleges all trying to pay their homage to the greatest genius in music that the country has produced within living memory. These visitors were kindred spirits and it was wonderful to feel that there was in the country at least one artist who had been able to evoke feelings of such affection and gratitude from his public.

A Sanyasi's Tribute

Among the visitors came a holy man—a Sanyasi from Bengal with the sacred stick in his hand which he could not put on the ground. He was a pale, emaciated man with damaged eyes and had walked five miles on his bare feet from his monastery to meet the chanter.

The Ustad was resting after a strenuous performance, so I asked him to wait. I was agreeably surprised when he spoke in faultless English. "I am mad after him," he began. "I myself used to sing but gave it up when I heard him. His music made another man of me. I collected some money by begging and bought a gramophone and all his records. A Rajah from Bengal gave me a record of 'Darbari', specially sung by Khan Sahab for him. My madness increased and I went to Baroda once to see him but he was out. So I bought a photograph of him. He is a veritable God in music. His music is TRUTH, the thing beyond this world. Pardon me, but you do not understand his music as we do. We alone understand it," and he looked at me apologetically with his weak watery eyes.

There was also a humble school teacher who had threatened to resign his job if the principal didn't give him leave to attend the mid-day sittings of the Ustad. A Cambridge graduate and university teacher brought pure ghee fearing lest the doubtful

ghee at my place should harm the artist's throat.

Cataract Of Melody

He was acclimatized to my house in two days' time and after this we basked in the sunshine of his genius to our heart's content. One morning as he was going out to sing at a large gathering I asked one of his disciples to request him to sing the raga known as 'Khat' and at any rate not to sing Jaunpuri which he sings very often.

To my intense disappointment he began Jaunpuri and ended on it. When he came back he saw me sitting in the drawing room perhaps looking snubbed. "You asked for 'Khat'," he said, "but people wanted Jaunpuri. It is a sweet raga and they like it. I will sing 'Khat' for you now." He sat down on the sofa and looked about for some accompaniment. There was none. He therefore sang alone.

What a cataract of melody he let fall from his throat. He sang the famous song of Baijoo Bawra, "Vidya Dhar, Guni Jan." His voice rose in all its splendour making the old walls of my house vibrate with its power. He sang it with such passion, such utter abandon and such tenderness that the tears stood in the eyes of many of us. Then followed another song in the same raga, then another and yet another and another in quick succession. I was amazed at his gigantic memory which retained in all their freshness dozens of songs in an obscure raga like 'Khat.'

A Family Member

Thereafter it became the custom to talk of music and song in his presence till he was moved to singing and all the kingdoms of the world could not have given us the joy which these few hours did.

He became greatly attached to the small coterie of his admirers which stayed at my place and hovered around him all the time that he was awake. He took an interest in everything that was ours, our sowings for the season, the health of my mother, the family photographs.

I, my elder sister and my two sisters-in-law did all the cooking for him ourselves. All the musical criticism was therefore done in the kitchen where the men often joined us. Once we sat taking out the green peas from their pods for the day's cooking. Among those who helped us were my brother, a lawyer, a high ex-government officer, very distinguished now, a talented journalist and a prince from an Oudh estate, who had come specially to hear the Khan Sahab.

As we sat talking feverishly, discussing and quarrelling, who do we see entering the smoke-filled and dirty

kitchen but the Khan Sahab! Instantaneously we fell silent laughing. He stood over us all smiling like an indulgent patriarch. Then one of us got a chair for him and he sat down watching us happily. "Green peas! Do boil me a handful with a little ginger. I love them." There he sat eating the peas and breathing in the smoke as if he had lived with us all his life.

Original Composer

One day he asked me to sing having come to know that I had learnt a little. I was frightened out of my wits but it is the convention to obey and I sang a Khayal of Jaunpuri. Before I had finished, he took it up himself and what jewel-like elaborations he added to my simple rendering. To my utter surprise I found that my capacity to learn increased tenfold as if by a miracle. In those few moments I learnt more about the teaching of music than I had done in all my life. How he filled the simple sketch of a song with colour and meaning and life.

With great exactitude I and one of his senior pupils repeated the notes but the meaning, the passion, the significance eluded us. That is precisely the quality which distinguishes his music from that of other musicians who are otherwise first class professional artists. Again the usually held idea about the lack of emotional content in our music he insists upon every note being alive and full of feeling, yet retaining its classical integrity.

It is not generally known that Ustad Faiyaz Khan is a very great composer. His Khayals have all the beauty, the classic grace, the technical excellence, the originality, the unmistakable stamp of genius which distinguish the compositions of his ancestors Adarang and Sadarang. Who does not know the famous song in Jaijaiwanti—"More Mandar ab lon nahin aye" or in Puria "Main kar ayi piya sang rang ralian" or that gem in Gara Karhara—"tan man dhan sah waroon."

He has hundreds of such compositions to his credit and it is a pity that they have not been collected in script.

Best Days Of Our Life

Undoubtedly the few days that he lived amongst us were spiritually the fullest and the best days in our lives—something to talk about to our children when we grow old and decrepit.

The day he was going was a sad day for all of us. A crowd had gathered at my house to bid him good-speed. He was lavish with rewards to servants and other attendants and remembered the tiniest of children who even once fetched a pan for him.

When leaving the house he raised his hands towards the heavens and blessed us all. "You are all wonderful. Let me have a good look at you before I go" and he saw us all carefully as if to note down our faces for remembrance.

Then he went. His eyes were moist as he entered the car.

"RED BALL EXPRESS"

The "Red Ball Express" is one of the most vital arteries across France carrying the life stream of supplies to American troops at the front.

Approximately 9,000 American trucks and thousands of American drivers are racing day and night over special one-way express highways that stretch from the beaches of Normandy to Paris and beyond—carrying food, ammunition and gasoline to nourish the men and equipment in the battle lines.

At night the Red Ball convoys drone ahead with headlights blazing, for speed is essential and the German air force is negligible. Every few hundred yards along the route there are signs in English and French which announce: "Red Ball convoys only. All others keep off."

The remarkable arrangement of truck routes that compose this Red Ball circulatory system is roughly a giant loop that feeds traffic of loaded trucks on one route and sends the empty ones back along another one-way highway. Every truck that speeds over this highway network is labelled "priority" with a bright red disk on its front and rear.

Approximately 25,000 soldiers, drivers and mechanics ride the route, carrying 700,000 gallons of gasoline a day to the armies on the front. So far the Express has moved freight equivalent in distance to taking one ton around the world 700 times.

There are two drivers assigned to every truck, and they "keep her rolling" 20 hours a day. The "Red Ball Line" provides a bivouac area halfway along the road where drivers are changed. While new men keep the trucks rolling, the drivers who have just been relieved can bathe, eat and catch up on sleep. Then they meet the convoy at the other side of the loop at the halfway point of the round trip and another change of drivers is made.

In case of a breakdown, there is no

First Centenarian M. P.

Westham Member's Ambition

Will Thorne is 87 and his ambition is to be the first centenarian M. P., writes a "News Chronicle" reporter. "There are only 13 years to go and no reason why I should not make it. I'm perfectly healthy and very careful about crossing a road," he remarked recently in his home among his constituents in Westham, where he celebrated his birthday with a bottle of lemonade.

He refers to himself as Little Willie. His wife speaks of him as the "world's best husband."

He drew from his waistcoat pocket an old policeman's whistle and regarded it lovingly. "Party meetings in the House would always be late if Little Willie didn't blow his whistle every Wednesday morning, as the Big Ben strikes 10, to call Sir Arthur Greenwood to work," he said. That whistle has a history of its own. Twice it was blown in the House, last time in the midst of a speech.

Mr. Thorne's prescription for a long and happy life is: Don't drink, don't knock about, don't talk back to your wife, don't worry and take a hot basin of bread and milk for breakfast.

Will Thorne is happiest when he is in his parlour surrounded by his "presents". These range from a bell from one of the trade unions to an ancient wood carving from the U. S. S. He thinks he has more presents than anybody in the House.

halt in the rapid flow of supplies. The driver pulls out of line and repairs his truck while others roll on. If he is unable to repair it, a "Red Ball" ordnance crew either makes the repairs or assigns a new truck.—U. S. O. W. I.