

WIGMORE



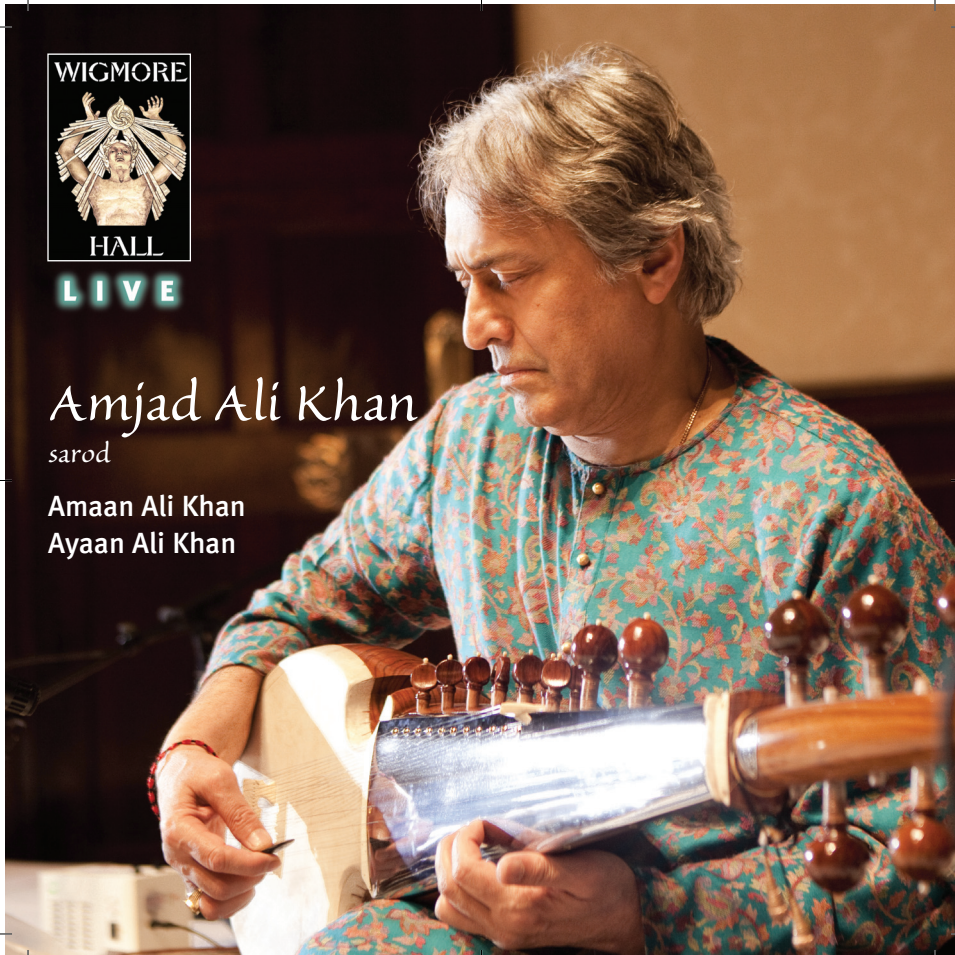
HALL

LIVE

# Amjad Ali Khan

sarod

Amaan Ali Khan  
Ayaan Ali Khan





left to right AMAAN ALI KHAN, AMJAD ALI KHAN, AYAAN ALI KHAN

## Amjad Ali Khan at Wigmore Hall

Walking straight-backed onto the famous Wigmore Hall stage, Amjad Ali Khan receives a standing ovation before he plays a note. The renowned sarod player has been a regular visitor to London for nigh on three decades; he's said that Britain's capital holds a very special place in his heart. This concert, the first since his triumphant debut performance at Wigmore Hall in 2008, sees a rapt audience in saris and suits greet him with the respect afforded the truly gifted.

In India, where his ancestors are said to have invented the sarod, Amjad Ali Khan is revered as a virtuoso of almost heavenly proportions. But while largely responsible for positioning the sarod as one of his country's most popular classical instruments, the New Delhi-based Khan has never courted Western pop success; in Europe and America he is celebrated nonetheless for his accessible, exciting style. Newcomers to his oeuvre routinely fall in love with North Indian classical music within moments of hearing him play.

Amjad Ali Khan's two sons, Amaan Ali Khan and Ayaan Ali Khan, join in the applause as they sit cross-legged on a small raised platform, Amaan in a yellow tunic, Ayaan in a purple tunic, their sarods resting in their laps. To their left, dressed all in white, acclaimed tabla player Satyajit Talwalkar bows low over his hand drums at the entrance of the maestro. Amjad Ali Khan – distinguished, silver-haired, wearing blue and gold – receives the adulation with a smile then settles into the space between his sons. Taking up

his sarod, whose unfretted steel fingerboard is adorned with a single tassel, he begins the first of three Ragas (rhythmic cycles): Raga Shyam Shree, an evening Raga for solo sarod that he first created in the 1970s.

'I treat every Raga like a living entity', he has said. 'Even though the literal meaning of a Raga is improvisation within a set framework of ascending and descending notes, I feel a Raga has to be invoked.'

The clear, ringing sound of this most lovely of stringed instruments sweeps around the auditorium, caressing ears and awakening senses. Smaller than the sitar, looking like a cross between a guitar and a banjo, the 25-string sarod has a lithe, lean muscularity and a lyricism that – especially under Khan's plectrum – verges on the sublime. Right from the sarod's invention in the sixteenth century listeners have found a spiritual element in its balance of rhythm and melody, in its haunting overtones, powerful patterns and decorative filigree. Indian classical music is regarded as a reflection of the divine spirit – and the sarod-playing of Amjad Ali Khan is as spiritual as it gets.

'Since childhood I always wanted my instrument to be able to express the entire range of human emotions ... to sing, shout, whisper and cry', the great Indian musician has said. 'It has been a long journey and by the benevolence of the heavens, my sarod has become far more expressive than it was.'



SATYAJIT TALWALKAR tabla

Nowhere more expressive, perhaps, than when accompanied by his thirty-something sons – both celebrated players in their own right – here at Wigmore Hall. Their very presence underlines the fact that this sarod-playing triumvirate hail from a long line of hereditary musicians, a line that stretches back six generations to Amjad Ali Khan's great-great-great grandfather Mohammed Hashmi Khan Bangash, who in the mid-1700s brought his Afghan rabab lute to the court of the Maharajah of Rewa in Madhya Pradesh – the Indian state where the Khan Bangash family continue to live and play.

The staccato rabab was modified into the more lyrical sarod (a name derived from the Persian word for melody) by Mohammed Hashmi Khan Bangash's grandson, Gulam Ali Khan Bangash. The latter became a court musician in the Khan's home city of Gwalior and with his grandson Hafiz Ali Khan received tuition from the descendants and followers of Miyan Tansen (c1520–1590), one of the seminal figures in Indian music and a court musician to the great Moghul emperor Akbar. A holy tamarind tree by Tansen's tomb is alleged to grant musical powers; the Khan's family home in Gwalior, now a musical centre, seems like proof of their devotion.

Combining the family's own school of sarod-playing (the Bangash gharana) with the tradition of instrumental music from Tansen (the Senia gharana), as taught to him by his father Haafiz Khan, Amjad Ali Khan made his debut performance at the age of eight. Years spent perfecting his craft – performing everywhere from New York's Carnegie Hall to, indeed, London's Wigmore Hall, and receiving India's esteemed civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan, along the way – has resulted in a prowess that is currently unequalled. Now aged 65, Amjad Ali Khan is at the height of his inventive powers – which are captured beautifully here.

*Raga Shyam Shree* unfolds slowly, like a flower. Once Khan has established the initial pattern – the blossoms, if you like – the music spirals out in ever-expanding circles from a central core. An electronic drone emulates that of the tanpura lute, offering accompaniment

alongside the tabla of the Mumbai-based Talwalkar, who keeps up a percussive rhythm with his fingers, palms and the heels of his hands, complementing the melody all the while. Eyes shut, Amjad Ali Khan loses himself in the Raga, pushing against the boundaries of a framework that allows for endless variation, improvising a few contemplative passages there, a few rapid-fire flurries here, stunning all with an instrument whose sound is often compared to that of the human voice.

In between, Amjad Ali Khan files his fingernails – essential maintenance, given that his style of playing involves stopping the sarod strings with the nails on his left hand – as Talwalkar tunes his tabla using the wooden blocks known as ghatta. The second Raga, *Raga Pila*, is lighter, dreamier, than its predecessor; commonly played at any time of the day, this Raga is used to express joy, devotion, happiness and love. Amjad Ali Khan begins by outlining the melody over the drone, bestowing each melodic phrase with its own dynamic character. His sons play powerfully, precisely, enjoying the accelerating unison passages with their father and with each other.

'Too many people look for shortcuts in life', says Amjad Ali Khan, in his mellifluous voice, afterwards. 'My hope is that youngsters coming to classical music realise it is a long journey which needs patience, peace and serenity.' He proceeds to introduce his sons, beginning with Amaan –

older than Ayaan by two years – before declaring that he has dropped the Raga originally listed in favour of *Raga Kirwani* (an early night/late evening Raga) because, well, he feels like it. 'Since we don't have a written score [what is played] has something to do with the accommodation of moods and emotions of an artist on that day', he writes in the programme, forewarning us.

An E harmonic Raga in the South Indian carnatic style – one of the oldest systems of music in the world – *Raga Kirwani* is the perfect Raga with which to illustrate the adeptness of all four artists onstage. Without any rehearsal, largely unaware of what the other is going to do and yet having to perform like a rehearsed orchestra, each artist embraces the roles of performer, composer and conductor alike. All do so elegantly, breathtakingly, with Amaan and Ayaan mirroring their father's phrases, laughing in delight at each other's virtuosity, creating a sort of three-man symphony. Talwalkar joins in the call-and-response as Amjad Ali Khan's phrases become increasingly complex. It all ends in dazzling musical fireworks – and another standing ovation.

Amjad Ali Khan smiles, nods and stands to bow. Then to thunderous applause, his shawl over his left shoulder, his sarod in his right hand, he goes out the way he came in.

Notes by Jane Cornwell © 2011

## Amjad Ali Khan

In a career spanning over 50 years, Amjad Ali Khan has single-handedly elevated the sarod to one of the most popular instruments in the Northern Indian tradition. Taught by his father, the legendary Haafiz Ali Khan, he is the sixth in an uninterrupted lineage of music masters known as the Senia Bangash School.

Amjad Ali Khan has to his credit the creation of many new Ragas which earned him unanimous praise for successfully striking the delicate balance between innovation and respect of a timeless tradition. His Concerto for sarod and orchestra, *Samaagam*, the result of an extraordinary collaboration with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, is the latest embodiment of his unique ability to give new form to the purity and discipline of the Indian classical music tradition.

## Amaan Ali Khan & Ayaan Ali Khan

Amaan and Ayaan Ali Khan represent the seventh generation of a musical lineage known as the Senia Bangash School. Accompanying their father, Amjad Ali Khan, to various music festivals in India and abroad, they have carved out niches for themselves. Awards and accolades came their way early in life yet both Amaan and Ayaan steadfastly pursued their family's inheritance and legacy. They have performed widely in the most prestigious venues in Europe and the USA, as well

Amjad Ali Khan appears regularly in the world's most prestigious halls, including Vienna's Konzerthaus, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, London's Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Barbican Hall and Royal Albert Hall, the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, New York's Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and Town Hall, Washington's Kennedy Center, Chicago's Symphony Center, Tokyo's Suntory Hall, and the Sydney Opera House.

Amjad Ali Khan's extensive discography, available on World Village, Real World, Navras, Radio-France OCORA, Chandha Dhara (Germany), HMV India, CBS and Hindustan Records, has attracted some of the most prestigious awards from the international music press.

as touring Australia. Both Amaan and Ayaan have recorded solo CDs, and have also collaborated with among others cellist Matthew Barley, in performance and workshops with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, and percussionist Evelyn Glennie; they have appeared at numerous world music festivals, and performed numerous times for Prince Charles. They have co-authored two books.



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**Amjad Ali Khan** *sarod*  
**Ayaan Ali Khan, Amaan Ali Khan** *sarod*  
**Satyajit Talwalkar** *tabla*

Recorded live at Wigmore Hall, London, on 8 April 2010

## Indian Classical Ragas

- |    |                         |       |
|----|-------------------------|-------|
| 01 | <b>Raga Shyam Shree</b> | 20.59 |
| 02 | <b>Raga Pilu</b>        | 15.31 |
| 03 | <b>Raga Kirwani</b>     | 25.53 |

Total time: 62.26