

# LIVING LEGENDS

## undeniable fact!

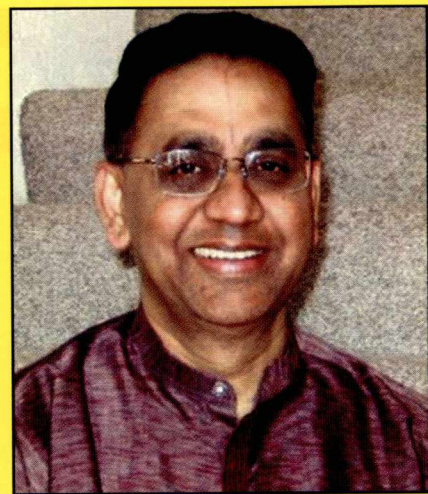
Despite the seeming contradiction, the title is an undeniable fact! We, the music fans, are fortunate to live in this era and here in San Diego for we have the unique opportunity to celebrate the colorful achievements of the four legends who are being honored, in person, thanks to the Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego. These four venerable musicians come from four different regions of India and have for years been recognized as global phenomena.

Although they come from conservative yet diverse backgrounds, they share a great tradition. While two of them have mesmerized the music world with their enchanting musical

instruments, two others have captured the hearts and souls of the music community through their rich and versatile vocal skills. All four have put their remarkable skills to extraordinary humanitarian cause. There can be a long list of common themes that can fill this article, but it is time we saluted these musicians individually for their respective, unparalleled contribution to the world of music and the music of the world.

Robindro Shaunkor Chowdhury before becoming Bharat Ratna Ravi Shankar started touring the world in 1930 as an Indian dancer and musician when he was hardly ten years of age. In those formative years of globetrotting, not only did Ravi

Shankar learn French and Jazz, but also cinema which was just then becoming popular, globally. His music teacher, the legend Baba Allaudin Khan, insisted that young Ravi should abandon all other pursuits and passions and return to India if he wished to become a serious musician. It



was this recommendation that laid the foundation for Ravi Shankar's rapid ascent into becoming, in Hans Neuhoff's words, "the best known contemporary Indian musician." " In quick succession, Ravi Shankar became Pandit Ravi Shankar and Maestro Ravi Shankar, the legendary sitarist and composer. More than seventy five years of musical penance has kept him at the pinnacle as India's most esteemed musical ambassador and a singular phenomenon in the classical music worlds of East and West.

As a performer, composer, teacher, and writer, he has done more for Indian music than any other musician. He is well known for his pioneering work in bringing Indian music to the West. He did this only after long years of dedicated learning under his illustrious guru, Baba Allaudin Khan, and after establishing a name for himself in India.

Always ahead of his time, Ravi Shankar ventured into fields unexplored by other leading Indian musicians. He has written three concertos for sitar and orchestra and a symphony. He has also authored violin-sitar compositions for Yehudi Menuhin and himself, written music for a number of well-known musicians including flute virtuoso Jean Pierre Rampal, master



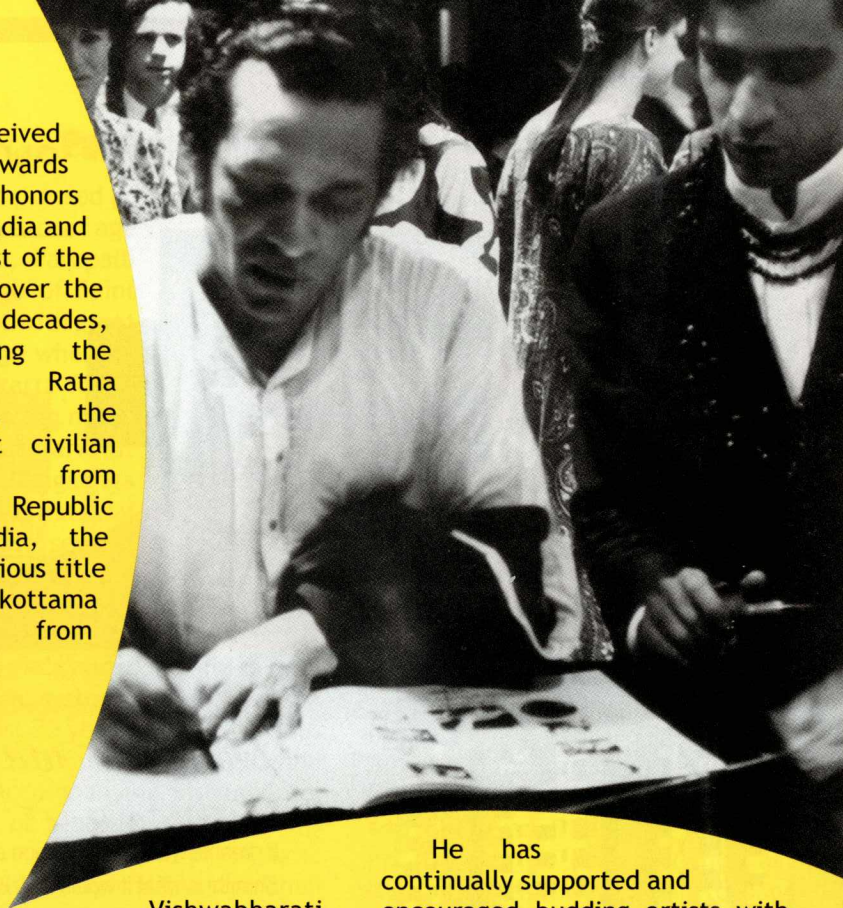
of the Shakuhachi and Musumi Miyashita - Koto virtuoso, Hosan Yamamoto, Maestro Rostropovich and his daughter Anoushka. He has also collaborated with Phillip Glass (Passages) He also composed music for the two record albums that George Harrison produced and participated in: Shankar Family & Friends and Festival of India. . He has also composed for ballets as well as for films in India, Canada, Europe and the United States. Some of the films that he composed music for include Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy, Ralph Nelson's Charly, Attenborough's Gandhi, and BBC's Alice in Wonderland. More than a decade before this became fashionable, Ravi Shankar's 1987 recording of "Tana Mana," brought his music into the "New age" with its unique method of combining traditional instruments with electronic music. Coinciding with the awakening of the younger generation in the mid 60's, Ravi Shankar gave two memorable concerts one at the Monterey Pop Festival and other at the Woodstock Festival. His participation in these events helped bring greater awareness and interest in Indian classical music among a western audience. In 1971, deeply disturbed by the plight of more than eight million refugees from Bangla Desh, Ravi Shankar took the initiative to help through his music and global brotherhood. He arranged two celebrated concerts with help from George Harrison. This historical concert not only showed the world that music has the power to motivate people to contribute generously to charity, but it also helped inspire many others to offer similar charity musical concerts around the world. By demonstrating this, the legend, Ravi Shankar, paved the way for other musicians to play a pivotal role in the raising of funds for humanitarian causes.

Ravi Shankar, the performer, the composer, and the great teacher,

has received many awards and honors from India and the rest of the world over the last six decades, including the Bharat Ratna (1999), the highest civilian award from the Republic of India, the prestigious title of Desikottama (1981) from

Vishwabharati, Shantiniketan, the Music Council UNESCO award (1958), the Magsaysay Award from Manila (1992), Mahatma Gandhi Award (1992), three Grammy's, the Silver Bear (1966) from Berlin, the Fukuoka Grand Prize (1991) from Japan, Praemium Imperiale (1997) from Japan Arts, the Polar Music Prize (1998), the Crystal Award (1995) from Davos, Switzerland, as well as the title 'Global Ambassador' to name a few. Awards and honors have been continually pouring in on Panditji, as he is affectionately known; at 91, he is still a favorite of global organizations and governments for consideration for the award of prestigious titles. He has received over seventeen honorary doctorates and this number is continuing to grow as more universities are eager to recognize him and confer him with this special honor.

Despite being the recipient of numerous accolades, Panditji has through the years demonstrated his ability to handle fame and responsibility with grace and poise.



He has continually supported and encouraged budding artists with great love and care. His dedication to music has obliged him to share his immense musical gift with others and as such he has several disciples, many of whom are now well known concert artists and composers. The love and respect he commands from his disciples and fans from both India and the West is unique in the annals of the history of music. Perhaps the best way in which one can articulate the greatness of this musical genius is by sharing some of the tributes that were paid to him by some of his most illustrious students. His disciple Yehudi Menuhin comment, "Ravi Shankar has brought me a precious gift and through him I have added a new dimension to my experience of music. To me, his genius and his humanity can only be compared to that of Mozart" is a clear expression of the reverence he had for him. His other, equally well-known student, George Harrison powerfully summarized his assessment of his guru in just eight words, "Ravi Shankar is the Godfather of World Music."

**Muralikrishna**, before becoming popular as **Padmavibhushan Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna**, impressed great musicians as

early as in 1938, with his first concert at eight years of age when he became Balamuralikrishna. His guru, Parupalli Ramakrishna Pantulu, hailing from the lineage of Saint Tyagaraja, shaped young Balamurali to reach out with great confidence. Balamurali was just 15 years of age when he mastered the 72 major scales known as Melakarta Ragas in the Carnatic Music system and started composing music in them. In 1952, his major work Janaka Raga Manjari was published. During the same year, he recorded Raagaanga Raveli, the first nine-volume audio series with a national recording company. He later went on to release several hundred cassettes and disks in the decades to come.



the great saints Sri Annamacharya and Sri Bhadrachala Ramadasa, for popularizing some of the rarely sung compositions of Saint Tyagaraja, and for his unparalleled contributions to the world of musicology, the world of celluloid has watched him with respect and has continued to acknowledge the contributions he has made to the industry since 1957. Balamuralikrishna has

worn several hats, as an actor, a singer of haunting melodies in four languages and as a venerable music director of movie milestones such as HamsaGeethe, Adi Shankaracharya, and Bhagavad Gita. This facet of his musical life projected him as the only Carnatic musician to bag three national awards, as the best playback singer, as the best music composer, and as the best music director.

Decades of extraordinary musical journey and extensive globetrotting have brought him laurels in the form of awards and accolades from around the globe. He was conferred Sangita Kalanidhi, the highest recognition for a Carnatic musician in 1978. He is the only Carnatic musician to have won Chevalier des Arts ET Lettres (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) from the Government of France. The Republic of India conferred Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award. Prestigious universities have granted him honorary doctorates and reputable organizations and governments have showered scores of awards and titles including the Sangeet Natak Academi Award. At 81, he is still a performer who ignites fervor in the minds of millions of music fans. No wonder, Balamurali is yet another legend who would be difficult to clone.

The young Balamurali was not content being a vocalist, so he soon started proving his versatility by playing viola and violin and several percussion instruments popular in Carnatic music system both as a soloist and as a sideman. It is believed that over the last 70 years of his illustrious musical career, he has performed more than 25,000 concerts worldwide both as a vocalist and as a soloist or as an accompanying instrumental artist. If mesmerizing voice and unique style of rendition were/are his prime assets, he earned his extraordinary place in the world of Carnatic music for a host of other talents. He is a poet composer with more than 400 compositions to his credit in several languages. His compositions appeal to the commoner for the devotion and attract and challenge the connoisseur and cognizant because of their intricacy and grammar. His complex tillaanaas are the delight of not only his ordinary fans but also of popular musicians young and old on concert platforms. His prowess as a musicologist and as the creator of new Ragas was initially frowned upon as 'Raga invention' which was once regarded as sacrilege by the orthodox. It took several years of scholarly interpretation and accreditation to acknowledge that such experimentation and boundless creativity were attempted over the centuries by musical geniuses who nurtured and fostered this ancient and profound music system. Balamurali's quest for new frontiers enabled him to produce some unique ragas such as Mahati and Lavangi, which have not only become universally popular but have also gained the grudging approval of critics as worthy inventions.

His thirst for musical collaboration and national integration made him probably the first to start Jugalbandi types of concerts with eminent artists from the Hindusthani music system. He was not only comfortable performing vocal duets with Pandit Bhimsen Joshi or with Kishori Amonkar, but he was also equally at ease performing with the flute virtuoso Hariprasad Chaurasia. His ability to recognize talent and his humility to share the honors with younger artists in jugalbandi have placed him on top of the charts. We would be witnessing one such phenomenon on this occasion when Balamuraligaruru will be sharing the platform with the Chitraveena maestro Ravikiran.

Languages have posed no constraint for him. He has composed and sung in a dozen languages and has also attempted French and Jazz fusion. He was featured as a soloist with an award winning British choir and was also invited to record Rabindranath Tagore's Rabindra Sangeet in Bengali so that it could be preserved for posterity. While the Carnatic music world salutes him for his monumental efforts in popularizing the compositions of

**Padmabhushan Rudrapatna Krishnashastri Srikantan**, a doyen of Carnatic music, is one of the puritans known for his undiluted classicism.



Coming from a generation of great musicians, Srikantan was trained in the old gurukula tradition by his father, Krishna Shastri, and brother, Venkata Shastri, whose ancestry could be traced to the lineage of Saint Tyagaraja. His gurus were great Sanskrit scholars, poets, and Harikatha exponents all of whom influenced young Srikantan to imbibe the various aspects of aesthetics and classicism of Carnatic music and to hand down unadulterated classicism to generations of musicians and students to follow over the last 70 years. He served for decades in the prestigious national radio, All India Radio, the only popular medium for propagation of

Indian music, before television took the center stage. This was the golden period when he interacted to great benefit with the Who is Who of Carnatic music. There is not yet a senior or popular instrumental Carnatic musician who has not played sideman to Srikantan. Srikantan Sir, as he is popularly referred to, has been a recipient of numerous awards and titles including Music Academy's prestigious Sangeeta Kalanidhi, the Sangeet Nataka Academy award, and the Kanakapurandara award from the Government of Karnataka, and the Republic of India's high civilian award, Padmabhushan. He also holds an honorary doctorate from a renowned Indian university.

Going strong as a performer at 91, he is still admired by three generations of musicians and music fans for his Sahitya suddham (compositional purity), Shruti suddham (pitch perfection) and Swara suddham (fidelity to the notes). He is indeed a legend noted for his classicism.

**Padmasri N Ramani**, popularly known as 'Flute Ramani' is synonymous with the magical bamboo for more than 60 years. The Carnatic flute, an 8-hole bamboo flute which is the South Indian equivalent of Ba(n)suri, was rarely used in concerts until about 120 years ago. While pioneers Sharaba Shastri and his disciple Palladam Sanjeeva Rao set standards for the handling of this unique variation of flute, the self-taught legend Mahalingam ("Mali") set the style and new standards. Ramani not only carried on the legacy of his guru "Mali" but also improvised the playing techniques which came to be known as 'Ramani's school or techniques.' Ramani's gayaki style has won universal appeal as it creates the effect of listening to a vocal rendition of a melody or a lyric.



The young Ramani started his concert career when he was seven, but he got his first real break in 1945 when he was hardly eleven years of age. It happened when he was invited to give a 'flute concert' in the All India Radio, a significant recognition in that era. Great musicians started watching him keenly, and soon well known accompanists willingly agreed to play along or be his accompanying artists. By the time he turned twenty, Ramani had already begun to gain national recognition for his exceptional musical prowess. The legendary maestro, Ravi Shankar, was so fascinated with Ramani's style of playing that he invited him to perform with him in one of his concert tours in the US. Not only did Ravi Shankar suggest, but he also presided on the historic first jugalbandhi concert of Ramani in 1970 with Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia. This followed the momentous Carnatic jugalbandhi between the Guru 'Mali' and Ramani in 1974. Over the last 40 years, Ramani has performed more than a hundred jugalbandhis with great musicians such as Kumar

Gandharva and Ustad Vilayat Khan. The majority of his jugalbandhis, about 40%, were with Hariprasad Chaurasia. Some of the jugalbandhis were with renowned musicians from the western world system.

A globe trotter since 1962, Ramani has toured the globe about 30 times enthralled millions of music lovers all over the world. He is a great teacher and has several students from all over the world, some of whom are already torch bearers of the Ramani legacy. He has always shown great willingness to offer fund raisers and charity performances worldwide, to help organizations that are devoted to assisting orphans, cancer victims, and the handicapped.

Titles, honors and awards have followed him ever since he was 10 years old. He received Sangita Kalanidhi, the highest recognition for a Carnatic musician in 1997. He also received the Padmasri, a ranking civilian award from the Republic of India. Prestigious universities have recognized him with honorary doctorates while reputable cultural and religious organizations and governments have showered him with scores of awards and titles including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and the National Artist Award from the All India Radio during the year it celebrated its golden jubilee.

Seventy years of magical bamboo, millions of fans and universal acclaim have hardly sunk into the child-like maestro. Noted for his humility and soft spoken nature, Ramani delights in performing with his son, grandsons, and disciples on the same platform. At times, he even presents a five-some flute concert. He is certainly another delightful legend who can never be separated from his magical flute.

