



Kolkata based **Carsten Wicke** is regarded today as one of the world's most outstanding Rudra Veena maestros, whose music is carrying the almost lost sound of the Rudra Veena from the thousands-of-years old tradition into the present.

Born in Germany Carsten learned Violin and singing as a child. His journey into Indian music started in the 1990ties while studying India's most popular percussion instrument with the international renowned Tabla Maestro Pandit Anindo Chatterjee. Being fascinated by the old classical Dhruwad music Carsten meets India's legendary Rudra Veena Master Ustad Asad Ali Khan whose musical family tradition goes back over many generations, including outstanding Beenkars (Veena players) like Sadiq Ali Khan, Musharraf Khan and Rajab Ali Khan. Ustad Asad Ali Khan accepted him as one of his few Veena disciples and taught him traditional Rudra Veena in Khandarbani Style. While studying the vocal tradition of the Dagarbani Dhruwad with Ashish Sankrityayan, the current director and teacher at the Dhruwad Kendra in Bhopal, Carsten completed the musical versatility of his Veena playing.

Carstens presentation of the old classical Raga music unites in an unparalleled way the meditative depth in the Alap (introduction) - the unparalleled fortitude of the Dagarbani Dhruwad - with the dynamic interpretation of the faster performance stages (Jor, Jhala) - a distinguished characteristic of the Khandarbani style. While combining subtle melodic variations with complex rhythmical finger stroke techniques his exceptional playing style creates a unique listening experience that is appreciated by Indian music lovers as well as by the international audience.

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The Rudra Veena, according to mythology, was created by Lord Shiva, while he was contemplating on the perfect beauty of his wife Parvati. The oldest preserve portrayal in temple architecture from around the 5th century A.D. shows a simple, one stringed instrument consisting of a bamboo cane with a gourd as resonance body.

Her association with Lord Shiva (one of his alternative names is Rudra) made the Veena a popular instrument of the Yogis und Ascetics. For them playing of the Veena united ritual and meditation. It is said, that the music of the Veena possesses the power to purify the mind of the musician and the listeners alike and those uplift there consciousness into the transcendent spiritual plans.

Around the 16th century the Rudra Veena had developed her actual shape with frets and two symmetric resonance bodies. At this time it evolved into one of the most important melody instruments of the aristocratic court music and became later the main solo instrument of the primary vocal Dhrupad music style. With the rise of the Khyal, the modern classical music style of North India, and the therewith aligned evolution of newer instruments like Sitar and Sarod the Veena lost its importance from the 19th century onwards.

Even the Veena is still worshiped as mother of all Indian string instruments, one can find her today only rarely on the musical platforms. With her extreme subtle playing techniques and aesthetic which require lifelong devotion and self-discipline for mastering the instrument, she has become an ambassador of the past times. Still, as alternatives to the restless time sentiment of the present age, the Rudra Veena and her music are nowadays rediscovered by a growing international audience. Independently from the great history of the instrument also today's listeners enjoy the unique experience the Veena has to reveal - an unparalleled musical journey between silence and ecstasy.

Dhrupad



The Dhrupad, which is played on the Rudra Veena, is North India's oldest still practiced classical music tradition. From its origin in the chants of Vedic hymns, through devotional temple songs, it evolved under the patronage of Moslem and Hindu courts into an art form, with its own complex aesthetic and grammar.

As general accepted in Indian music philosophy, especially in the Dhrupad tradition the human voice is acknowledged as the most original and important instrument. The aesthetic of the instrumental music is therefore closely oriented on the vocal music form. The resonance and overtone rich sound makes the Rudra Veena an ideal instrument for the interpretation of a Raga in the Dhrupad style, which is primarily characterized by emphasizing the microtonal flow of sound and melody.

Ragas are melody models, which are time and again newly improvised within their outline rules. Each of them possess it's very own recurrent moods and character. The Raga performance on the Rudra Veena follows a structure which developed itself over the centuries. In the introducing part (Alap) the defining notes in their specific microtonal intonation (Shruti) and characteristic melody phrases are gradually presented in slow tempo. In the following sections (Jor, Jhala) the musician plays with increasing tempo more complex melodic structures which have a perceptible underlying rhythmical pulsation. In the concluding composition (Bandish, Gat), which is set in a rhythmical time cycle (Tala), the Veena is accompanied by a percussion instrument, the Pakhawaj. While playing together or taking turns with virtuoso soli the musicians create a lively dialog by improvising melody and rhythm.

The Tanpura, a lute instrument constantly played in the background, creates a overtone-rich bourdon on which the Raga improvisation of the Veena can unfold.