

Sitar



SIST100

The Western Hemisphere came into contact with the Indian Sitar via the Beatles, especially guitarist George Harrison. He later became a student of famous sitarist Ravi Shankar. The Rolling Stones, too, helped the Sitar to become popular, so this classical Indian instrument has a fixed place among the Western stringed instruments. The Indian Sitar originates from the Veena, which does not enjoy the same popularity as its successor. Those who know Indian classical music know that the Sitar is one of the instruments most played, along with the Tabla, Tambura and Flute. The Sitar is the melody instrument, while Tabla and Tambura serve as indispensable accompanists. In India usually one does not play Sitar alone. This is more popular in the West where the Sitar contributed to the development of new music styles.

The typical outer characteristic of the Sitar is the large round resonating pumpkin body, with the long neck where there are several frets and strings. According to the construction 6 or 7 main strings pass over the curved and movable frets while 11 to 13 resonating strings run underneath. Out of the main strings 3 provide the drones, or accompanying tones, called Chikari. The melody is mostly played on the first string.

The instrument sometimes is supplied with a second resonator, the Tumba, which is placed at the upper end of the neck. Many factors influence the sound quality of the Sitar, for example the form and placing of the bridges. The instrument maker needs a lot of skill and experience in order to construct them properly. It is a fact that for years Ravi Shankar toured the West in the company of his Sitar maker, who alone could guarantee the perfect condition of his instrument.

The way of playing the Sitar is complicated and closely linked with the traditional Indian musical system. Many years of patient practice are needed to achieve mastery of this instrument. But those who listen to its sound are fascinated by its subtle beauty and the richness of rhythms and expression.