

# An accomplished musical tribute to a genius

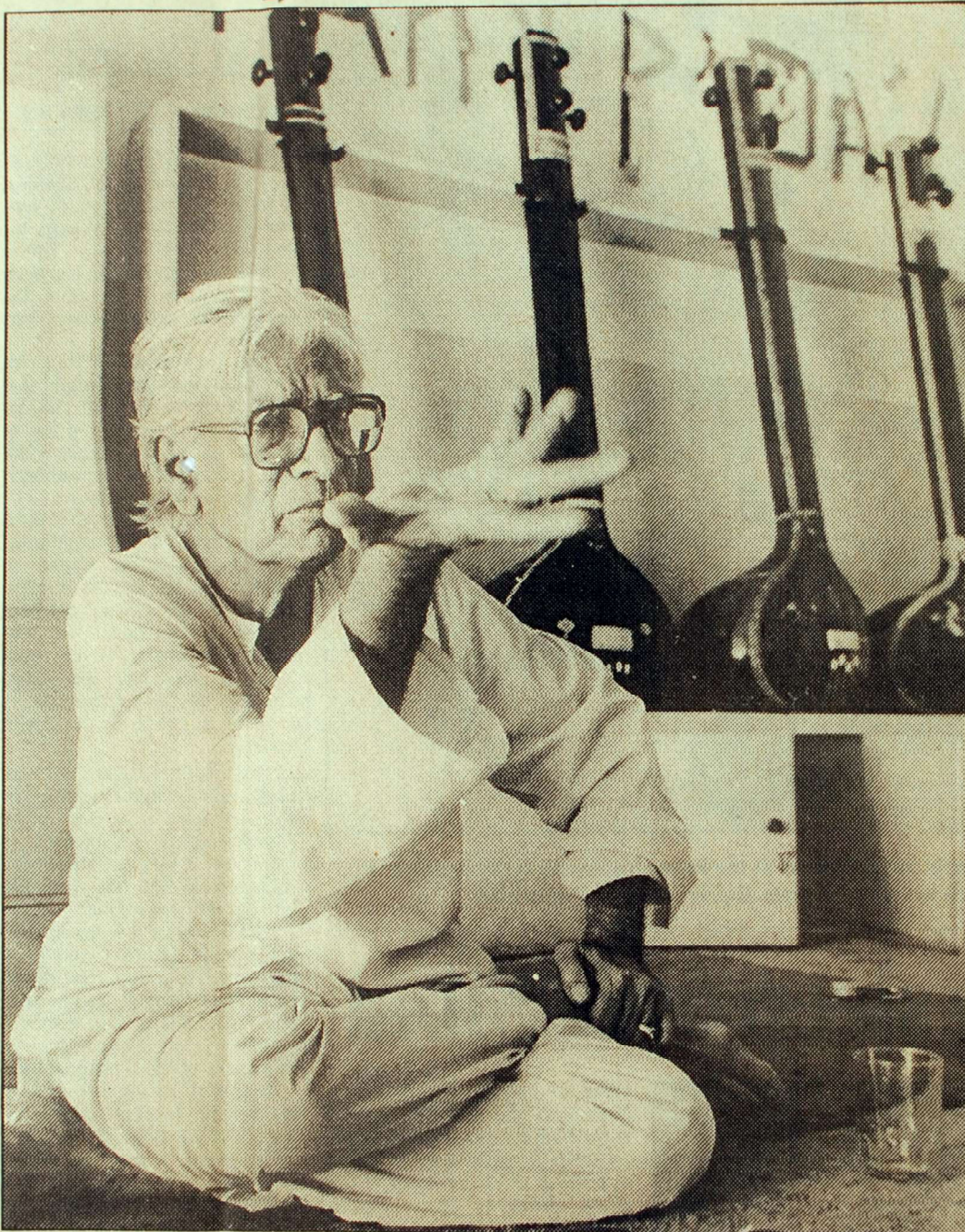
## Music

EVENING. The mood of *Marwa*. As the lights gradually fade out on the day,

the tastefully lit up dais slowly comes alive. The stage is once again set for the annual Shriram Shankarlal Music Festival – on till Sunday – at the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra lawns. This time the four-day festival is dedicated to Pandit Amarnath, who passed away last month and one of whose recordings of later years when he was long past his prime fills the atmosphere.

Again fade-out....Then the announcer gets on with her job. She calls upon music critic Raghava Menon, the Capital's best-known musical impresario and the founder of the Kendra Sumitra Charatram to speak on the departed genius. A solemn Menon says an epoch came to an end with the passing away of Pandit Amarnath. He says he has had to suffer the end of many epochs in his life, with the deaths of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Pandit Kumar Gandharva, Pandit Omkarnath Thakur, and others. He says it is the end of an epoch when a person who influenced the lives of many people passes away. And he prattles on....

Nothing on Panditji's music, incidentally. And Sumitra Charatram, who comes next, says it is difficult to say whether the void left by Pandit Amarnath's demise will ever be filled. But adds that there is no need to say anything about Panditji, since everybody is aware of his contribution to music and also because Raghava Menon had said everything in any case. Thus enlightened, the audience



■ The late Pandit Amarnath was perhaps the finest mind that applied itself to Hindustani classical music in recent memory. The most accomplished among Ustad Amir Khan's disciples. A great performer during his heyday in the 1960s. A great guru who could articulate his concepts like few others. And a brilliant composer.

The story of Pandit Amarnath's (left) musical quest is one of an awesome musical instinct allowed to bloom but briefly. Or, to put it differently, of a rare musical mind inexplicably prevented from giving a matching vocal expression to all his creative urges. For, he somehow never sounded the same again, after that heady spell of a few years when his music was truly nothing short of greatness, especially in the *aalap* portion.

As a composer, his music for *Garam Coat* alone is testimony enough to his genius. But he was a compulsive composer who created as they came to him. He has to his credit hundreds of original *khayal* compositions – some of which were also borrowed by his guru – besides his work in films, teleserials and teleplays.

He also wrote the acclaimed dictionary of terms and terminology – *Living Idioms in Hindustani Music*. His biography of Ustad Amir Khan and another one titled, *Conversations with Pandit Amarnath* are also expected to be published shortly.

Pandit Amarnath passed away last month in Delhi. The ongoing Shriram Shankarlal Music Festival 1996 is dedicated to him.

quietly waits for the music to take over.

Quite fittingly, the festival begins with one of the late Pandit Amarnath's disciples. It is the Delhi-based vocalist *Shanti Sharma* – follower of the highly introspective *gayaki* of Ustad Amir Khan – who is increasingly being recognised as one of the most promising vocalists in the country. She begins with *Marwa*.

*Piya more gaye anat des....* is followed by Khan Saheb's favourite composition in the *drut* portion, *Guru bin gyan....* But clearly, even though she is fairly accomplished in *drut*, the artiste has a temperament for the difficult-to-sustain *aalap ang*. Which is obviously a plus, for this *gayaki* is nothing if not amply rewarding in the *aalap* portion. A *tarana* in the haunting evening melody completes the course. Shanti Sharma then sings two of her guru's compositions, in *Shyam Kalyan*. And lastly, a couple of compositions in *Shankara*.

An accomplished artiste with a sound *taaleem* and a meaningfully musical recital. Only her music could do with a lot more force for a greater impact. But even as of now, she is sure to figure among the top bracket of artistes in the not-too-distant future.

Flutist *Ronu Majumdar*, the next artiste, takes his time to settle down with his three flutes of varying sizes. He plays *Jog*, followed by a *thumri* in *Mishra Khamaj*. With a deft Vikram Ghosh on the tabla, the interest of the audience is suitably sustained. But after a fulfilling vocal recital, the exercise in instrumental jugglery is less than pleasing.

■ Ashish Sharma