

Fes Festival Nights in the Medina ~ Part One

The first Nights in the Medina took place on a balmy evening in Fez and was judged an overall success. This more attention had been paid to signage and it was pleasing to see that the locals had given the streets a good sweeping. As local, Samira (20), told *The View from Fez*, "This is our city, we love to share it and want it to be best".

First time visitors to Fez can often be daunted by the prospect of finding their way in the Medina, but help v hand with security, police and army, stationed along candle-lit routes to the venues.

Confusion between Dar Mokri and Palais Mokri was a trap for some, but of more concern was the incorrect the programme for one of the concerts. Although the French Institute had done what they could to alert per time of the piano concert, a large number of people missed the event. That aside - it was a great first night in Medina.

Pandit Shyam Sundar Goswami - Northern India

Khyal Song

Pandit Shyam Sundar Goswami – chant

Samir Kumar Karmakar – flute

Prodyut Kumar Mukherjee – tabla

Bandana Jalais - tampura

The Raga or The Measurement of Time

“This is my first time in Morocco and I am honoured to be here. I will sing some ragas and I would like you to listen – you are my friends, my fathers, you are welcome. Namaste.”

With this humble introduction, we embarked on tonight’s journey to Northern India, led by Pandit Shyam Sundar Goswami the *khyal*.



The music began with slow and hypnotic sounds that lulled the listener into a meditative state, setting in motion a subtle d of the crowd as the rhythm of the tabla picked up and the music cast it’s spell.

To the right of Goswami sat Bandana Jalais, perfectly still and Buddha like, eyes closed, the only sign of her playing being movement of the fingers of her right hand delicately plucking the four strings of the tampura.



As the music picked up, she remained a still point in contrast to the increasingly energetic movements of Prodyut Kumar on the tabla, Samir Kumar Karmakar on a wooden flute and Goswami.

His voice soared and dipped from mournful to ecstatic, from pleading to praising, his performance expressive not only through singing but with his face and hands. He gestured by turns – hand on heart, palms together in prayer, arms outstretched to heavens, to the audience, to his musicians, bringing all the elements together, his head nodding and shaking as he drew out vibrating in both body and sound.





The ragas were long pieces of music, both about 20 minutes each, which allowed the listener to become swept up in both the soundscape and the imagination. It was not necessary to understand the words to feel the deep spiritual meaning and be transported by the music which was both ancient and timeless.



Explanation:

The raga (derived from the Sanskrit root meaning ranj 'which affects or colours the spirit and provides pleasure), in the Vedas as well as in the minds of the ancients, is the embodiment of a time both cosmic and divine that determines the laws of natural seasons and times of day. Each note torn from silence carries the resonance of the universe. Music, born from Shiva himself, is a mirror of nature and life in all its forms, by turns passionate and dark.

About the raga, Pandit Shyam Sundar Goswami customarily explains this to his students: "Take a rossogolla – the favourite dessert – a sweetened white ball drenched in syrup. If the ball and syrup is separated, the rossogolla loses its charm, its true identity; to be a perfect rossogolla the ball and syrup should be together, dipped into each other, soaking each other; the raga must not be split – the melody, the tones, the vistar make a whole, all blended like rossogolla in its own juice. "

Text and photographs: Vanessa Bonnin

The Lyannaj Bélé Ensemble of Martinique - France
A tribute to Aimé Césaire