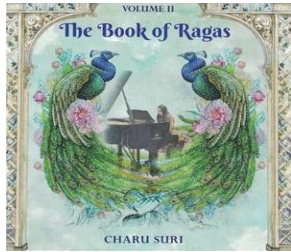


Charu Suri

The Book of Ragas Vol. II



Did you ever wonder what the music would sound like when Indian ragas and jazz were mixed with incredible craftsmanship and stylistic piano playing? Wonder no more, because composer **Charu Suri** has done just that. Her album **The Book of Ragas Vol. II** is four genre-defying works that satisfy the jazz lover in all of us, yet have the addition of a special blend of musical masala that spices the mix beautifully.

When listening to *The Book of Ragas* I had to keep in mind that the western modal system and the Indian *thaat* which allows notes to be utilized as needed are not the same. Yet, Suri has managed to blend the two into a very pleasing as well as entertaining collection.

The first tune is **Raga Jaunpuri**. Suri's intro creeps in like a burglar who stays the night. The tune is bright, a little funky, and completely captivating. Even if you don't know a single word of Sufi, you can sway and bob with this fanciful tune. The vocal tone to my western ear on this one by singer **Umer Piracha** is pleading as are many eastern lyrics. The words say,

"My soul is entangled with the indifferent one

Lord of all things visible and invisible".

The classical raga **Asavari** has the composer lapsing into wondrous riffs of cascading notes surrounded by murmuring voices and complex intonations. The tune has a vibraphone accompaniment sequestered in the main theme by **Jesse Gerbasi**, but the solid piano lead outshines it throughout the performance. **Sankarabaranam** builds on what I at first thought was a classical minuet, but then seemed to cross into a contemporary instrumental fantasy. Regardless of the subgenre, the music is intricately pleasing. Suri's finely-calibrated technique adds an unexpected side of blues. The history to this raga made my head spin, but I felt the music represented a certain warmth, such as one finds on a summer afternoon with blue skies above and a day that is sure to delight the senses.

The last track is called **Aaj Rang Hai**. It is a Sufi Islamic devotional. This is the odd one on the recording for its overall slow tempo and fervent sensitivity. Piracha's vocal starts out like a ballad, but then the tempo increases and the music turns into an upbeat tune with a lover's plea.

"Aa bhi ja Aa bhi ja aye subha aa bhi ja, raat to kar alvida dilruba aa bhi ja".

"Come, morning, come. Come my beloved and say goodbye to the night".

Charu Suri has the distinction of being one of the few female jazz composers from India. From hearing her work, it is obvious that she can juggle different modal systems with aplomb and create music that can please a large audience. Include me in on that. For the record I checked *The Book of Ragas* as in Volume I. It had eight tracks and some of them were quite jazzy. I was just as enchanted with the music. *The Book of Ragas Vol. II* is Highly Listenable.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews