

By Anwer Mooraj

Low Notes on a High Level

Dr Bee Seavers, the leading western exponent of the santoor, and the first foreigner to be decorated with the prestigious Roshan Ara Begum Award, gave a scintillating

Seavers is no stranger to these shores. In 1994, music enthusiasts heard him at the PACC as he introduced his instrument for the first time. Essentially a dulcimer from which music is produced by

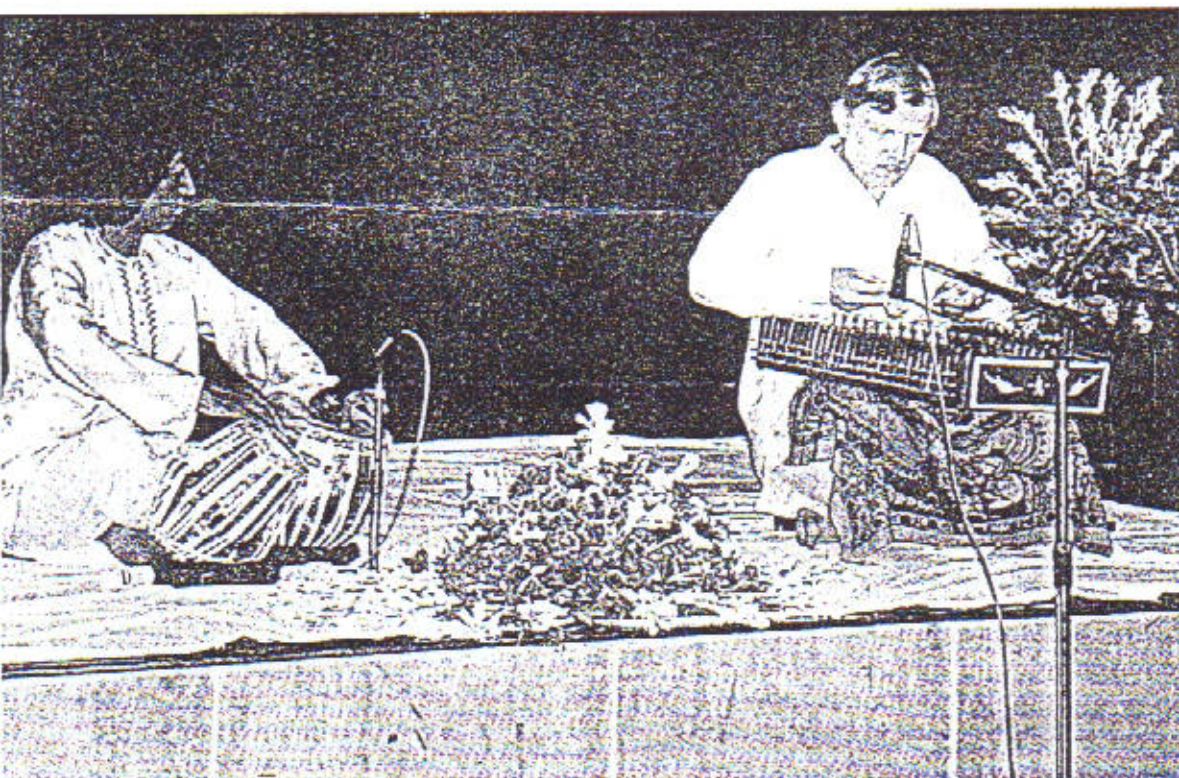
instruments used there. Often, during classical performances in India, it is not uncommon to come across two sets of drums that are struck at different speeds, producing polyrhythms which

sound highly unusual to the western ear.

The principal feature of Indian music is its linearity or one-line movement. That is what is meant by saying that the music of India is melodic as opposed to harmonic. Since melody is a movement of one-at-a-time, the progression of sound patterns along the stream of time becomes significant. And it is such a process which gives us tunes and

rhythms. Through the ages, these tunes and rhythms have acquired grammatical formalisation becoming *ragas* and *talas*.

The *raga* is based on the primitive melodies of various tribes and folk cultures of India. Similarly, the *tala*, too, has attained its sophisticated form from indigenous ancient rhythms. A *raga* is basically an incipient melodic idea. It has to be elaborated in bringing out its aesthetic potentialities — a



performance on the evening of May 7 at the Pakistan American Cultural Center (PACC). He was accompanied on the tabla by Shabir Hussain. Organised by Dirk Angelroth, director of the Goethe Institut in Karachi, it was an elegantly planned and tasteful programme. And the absolute stillness of the audience throughout the evening was testimony to the talent of the two distinguished performers.

striking the many strings on the board with two soft hammers, the santoor is capable of producing the most muted metallic tones as well as an opulent wash of string sound.

Half-German and half-American, Seavers started his musical career as a jazz musician. But once he went to India, he was bowled over by the mystique of the *ragas* with their rhythmic buoyancy and inflections in the melody line. He was also fascinated by the range of