

A Program Note:

Indian Classical music is the name now given to the highly developed traditional music of India, based on Raga. Vocal music is the heart of this tradition.

Branan Silvius's core musical genre is known as *dhrupad*, the oldest tradition of Classical Hindustani vocal music. Essentially sacred music turned court music, Dhrupad aims to bring the listener to a place of inner peace and spaciousness, through the pristine power of its sound. A customary performance of dhrupad is in two main parts.

The first is the *alap*, an extended melodic improvisation wherein the raga is conjured in high definition. Singing against the harmonic cascade of the tampura, the singer improvises firstly in un-metered rhythm, starting on the tonic note (*sharaj*) and working up gradually to the higher octave. Although there are no lyrics at this point, certain syllables, derived from mantras, are employed. Then a pulse is introduced and the singer 'weaves' the notes in rhythmic patterns of glissandi, tracing a similar contour from low to high register. At some point the tempo doubles and the singer focuses on dynamic passages, deploying a distinctive vocal oscillation called *gamak*.

The second part of the raga journey introduces the elements of *tala* (time cycle) and poetic verse. A textual composition, or song, is sung in the raga to the accompaniment of a drum (*pakhawaj* or *tabla*) in one of many talas. Many of the compositions that Branán sings are very old, dating back to the court of Akbar and beyond, and some bear the signature line of great bards, such as Kabir, Nanak, Tansen and Swami Haridas.

After singing the composition, the singer begins to improvise within the delineated field of raga, tala and verse. The lyrics are deconstructed into increasingly complex and exciting combinations that dialogue with the rhythmic accompaniment. From the prayerful to the ecstatic, from absorption to engagement, the dhrupad journey takes the listener through the many landscapes of life and creation.