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'Strings for Peace'



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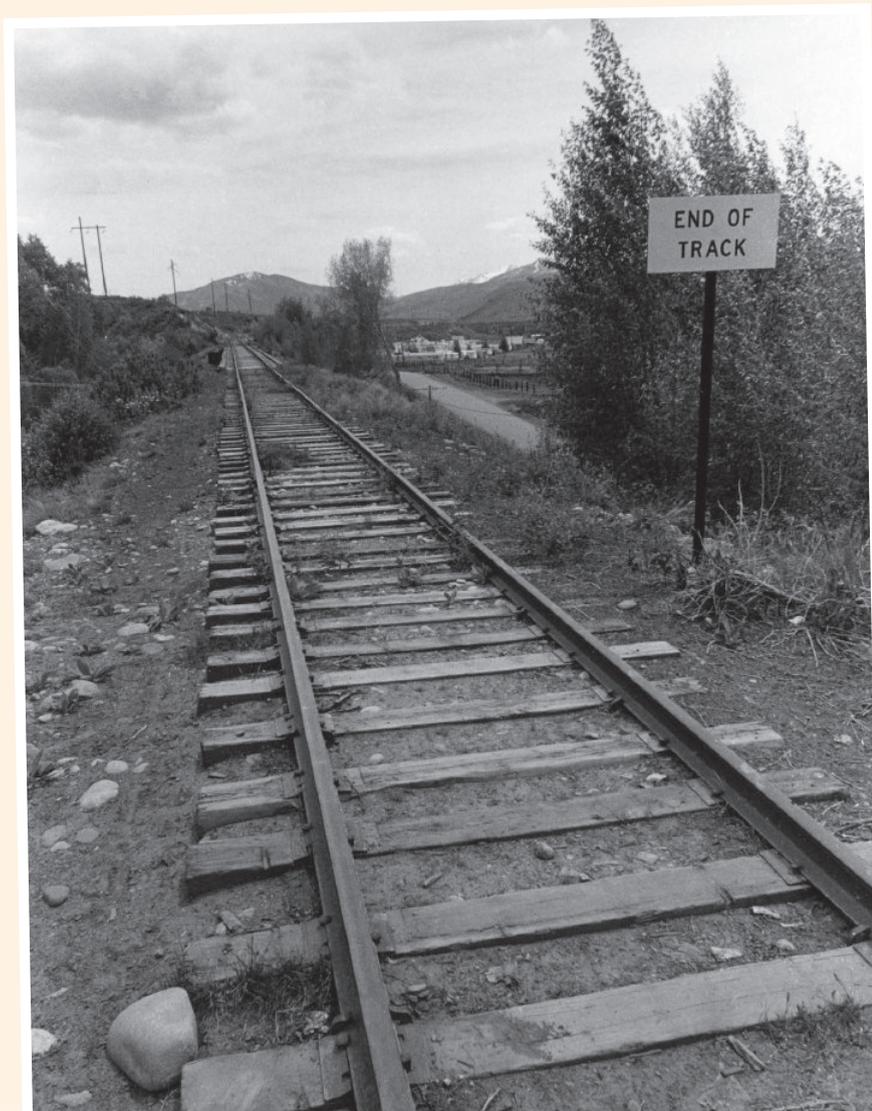
legends & legacies

1968

ASPEN

ABANDONED TRACKS

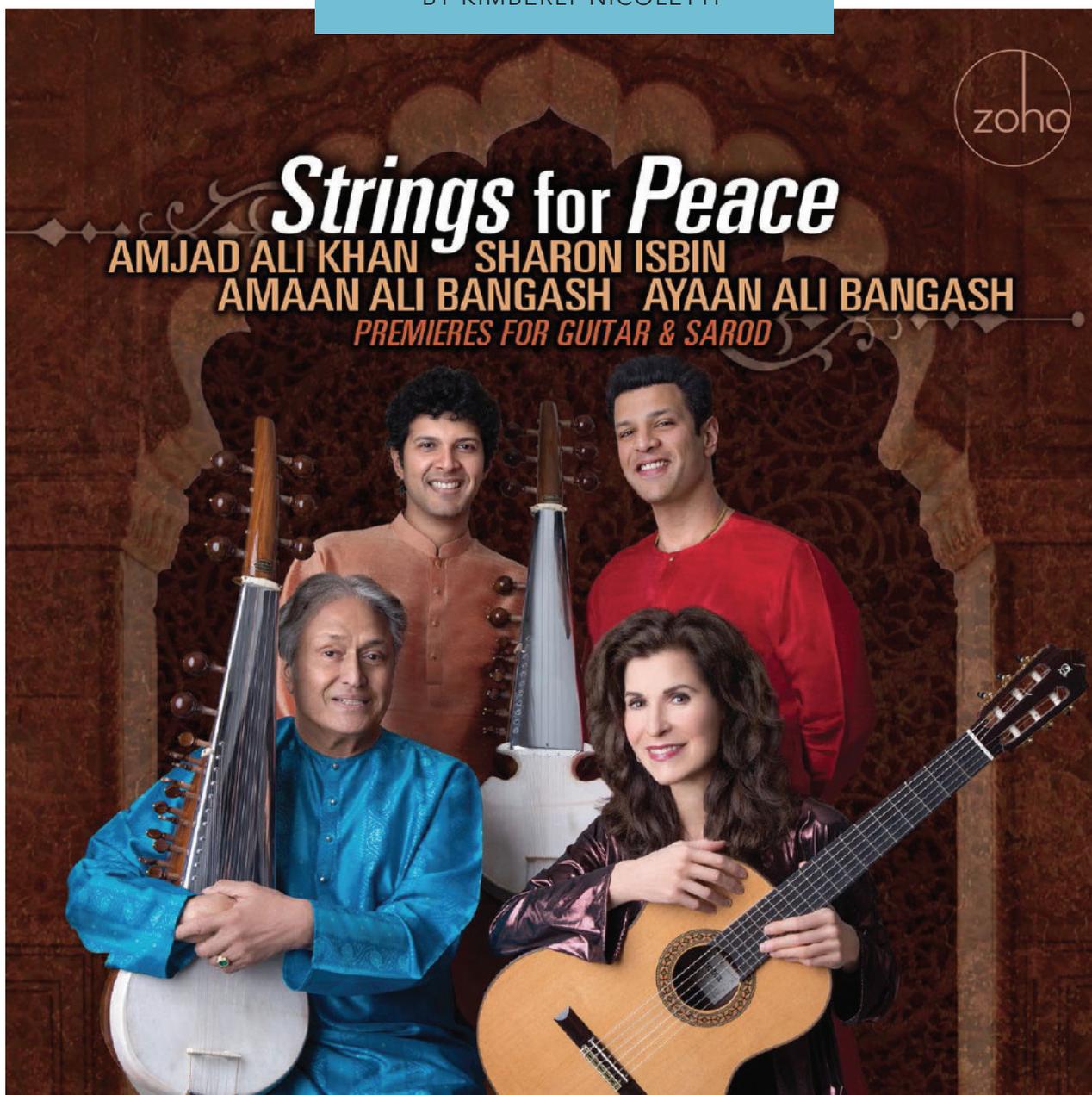
“RIO GRANDE TO ABANDON TRACKS IN ASPEN,” declared the Aspen Illustrated News on Aug. 8, 1968. “The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad has officially notified the Aspen city council that the company’s tracks will be withdrawn from Aspen and its land made available for development if no opposition comes from the city, the county or the Interstate Commerce Commission. Notification of the D&RGW’s plans was presented to the city council at its regular meeting Tuesday, Aug. 6. The railroad owns about 20 acres north of the Hotel Jerome in the C-2, light industrial district. The company did not reveal specific plans for the land, but implied that more specific proposals would be forthcoming. The city and various residents have in the past objected to track withdrawal, but recently the council reversed its previous stands and suggested to the D&RGW that if the company would develop plans for an industrial park, the city would lend support.” *Courtesy Aspen Historical Society*



A harmonious improvisation

Classical guitar meets Indian sarod through virtuosos

BY KIMBERLY NICOLETTI



WE ARE ALL ONE: This is the spiritual premise upon which “Strings for Peace” rests.

In 2019, before the spread of COVID-19 awakened the world to just how connected we are, multiple Grammy-award winner Sharon Isbin and sarod virtuoso Amjad Ali Khan recorded “Strings for Peace” (released in 2020). The collaboration melded Western and Indian traditions in a sacred and artistic flow. The intention behind the album included unity, a sense of oneness, reminding everyone that we are all one race: the human race.

“Strings of Peace” embodies the nature of a common family of stringed instruments, the guitar and sarod, playing together in harmony while still preserving each’s essence.

“Each of the artists brings the spirit of sharing the great unique treasures of their own artistic traditions, as well as finding common ground in ragas and medieval modes,” Khan wrote. “The idea is to achieve a cross-fertilization at both the cellular and cosmic levels of two classical music traditions, which are often held to be radically different. This is a blissful dream of a project ... of artists united under a common aegis, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, cultures, traditions, generations, genders, religions, upbringing and career paths.”

The meeting of the musicians supports not only an appreciation and understanding of each other, but also an ideal of how to heal a divided world through the joy and spiritual nourishment that music provides.

The Aug. 6 recital featuring Isbin, Khan and his sons dovetails with Aspen Music Festival and School’s commitment to increase diversity and cross-cultural exchange (*see related story, p. 3*).

When Isbin and Khan joined together to record the album, they had no idea what kind of loss, sadness, isolation and suffering the pandemic was about to deliver. The album emerged just at the right time.

“This music speaks to the power of spiritual healing and spiritual yearning that could be very valuable (now),” Isbin said. “If we all work together, there could be a lot more harmony in the world than there is now.”

A RICH TRADITION

As a sixth-generation of the Bangash lineage, rooted in the Senia Bangash School of music, Khan is one of the 20th century’s greatest masters of the sarod, according to the British Songlines World Music Magazine. He performs worldwide and has earned multiple accolades, including the UNESCO Award, UNICEF’s National Ambassadorship, the World Economic Forum’s Crystal Award and Padma Vibhushan, the highest Indian civilian award, in addition to honorary doctorates from multiple universities.



OPPOSITE:
“Strings for
Peace” album
cover.

ABOVE: Amaan
and Ayaan Ali
Bangash and
Sharon Isbin
performing at a
live concert at
Mumbai Royal
Opera House in
February 2019.

He has given the sarod a fresh interpretation, while maintaining its timeless traditions and considers the audience the “soul of his motivation.” His love for, and belief in, the power of music has inspired him to create many new ragas and interpret traditional notions of music in new ways. Indeed, as his website states: “He is a man who has proven his indomitable belief in the integration of two of life’s greatest forces: love and music.”

He practices that integration each day, both on and off stage. When he performs, his invigorating improvisational style extends beyond race, creed and culture.

“You don’t need any familiarity with the music,” Isbin said, adding that their collaboration brings a sense of excitement, energy, community and depth of feeling. “(You) can feel the expressivity of what is coming from the stage and the power of that.”

Every performance differs, which is exactly what attracts Isbin.

“I’m drawn to that energy because it’s so powerful,” she said. “The performers are genius in the way they capture the cosmic spirit of the music. ... In an amazing way, it interweaves our varied musical, spiritual and artistic traditions with mystical beauty, creativity, grace and great emotion.”

A TRADITION OF HER OWN

Isbin has become quite a legendary musician, and instructor, in her own rights. Acclaimed for her extraordinary lyricism, skill and ability to adapt to any genre, she was the first guitarist to receive the coveted honor of 2020 Musical America Worldwide Instrumentalist of the Year. Like Khan, she has garnered numerous accolades, from “Guitar Player” magazine’s Best Classical Guitarist award and Concert Artists Guild’s Virtuoso Award to the first guitarist to win the Munich ARD Competition. And she, too, has expanded her instrument’s repertoire with some of the finest new works, in addition to commissioning and premiering more than 80 pieces by world-renowned composers.

She describes “Strings for Peace” as “an extraordinary program of ragas for guitar and sarod (that are) an eloquent and impassioned call for harmony — in music, religion and culture throughout the world.

“It is one of the most rewarding and beautiful experiences in my musical career,” she said about the project, which began as a tour in India in February 2019.

But it’s her role here in Aspen that stands out to locals and visitors. She has been directing AMFS’ classical guitar program since 1993 and has earned a reputation for presenting all kinds

IF YOU GO...

WHAT: A Recital by Sharon Isbin, classical guitar, and Amjad Ali Khan, sarod

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Aug. 6

WHERE: Harris Concert Hall

TICKETS: \$75

IN ADDITION: Isbin’s talented AMFS students perform chamber and solo works at a free Spotlight Guitar Recital at 2:30 p.m. Aug. 10 at Harris Concert Hall and a free Music with a View concert at 6 p.m. Aug. 16 at Aspen Art Museum.

MORE INFO:
aspenmusicfestival.com

of rousing performances during the festivals, from bluegrass and bossa nova to jazz collaborations with other top artists. In addition to being the founding director of Juilliard’s guitar department, she also instructs small, elite groups of outstanding guitarists in Aspen.

“It’s so exciting to guide and mentor a new generation of musicians and bring — and discover — them here,” she said.



‘Raga is like a living entity. ... A raga must be invoked.’

— Amjad Ali Khan

PROGRAM NOTES

In addition to Isbin and Khan, Saturday evening’s recital features Khan’s sons, Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash. Amit Kavthekar will accompany them on the tabla.

The program includes “Sacred Evening,” a romantic night raga, evocative of sunset and evening ambiance; “By the Moon,” a raga set to a 16-beat meter and associated with the second quarter of the night; and “Romancing Earth,” a peaceful raga, which expresses joy, devotion, happiness and love and reflects Indian classics and latter-day Bollywood. Khan will also perform traditional raga and folk music.

“Raga” literally involves improvisation within a set framework of ascending and descending notes; it’s something that develops and evolves through improvisation in the present moment.

“Raga is like a living entity,” Khan wrote. “A mere scale is not a raga. A scale is more like a skeleton. ... A raga must be invoked.”

Isbin will open the recital with “Asturias by Isaac Albeniz.” Inspired by the rich and passionate tradition of flamenco, the art form likely has roots in people who traveled to Spain from India. Through her collaboration with Khan, Isbin has discovered a new appreciation for “Asturias by Isaac Albeniz,” “as if hearing it for the first time — I was able to viscerally feel the migration.”

And Saturday’s recital promises to be filled with moving music.

“This is one of the concerts I’m most excited about playing,” Isbin said about her 29 years directing the classical guitar program in Aspen. “The music is gorgeous.”

ABOVE: Amjad Ali Khan (center) and his sons Amaan and Ayaan Ali Bangash.

OPPOSITE: Guitarist Sharon Isbin.

