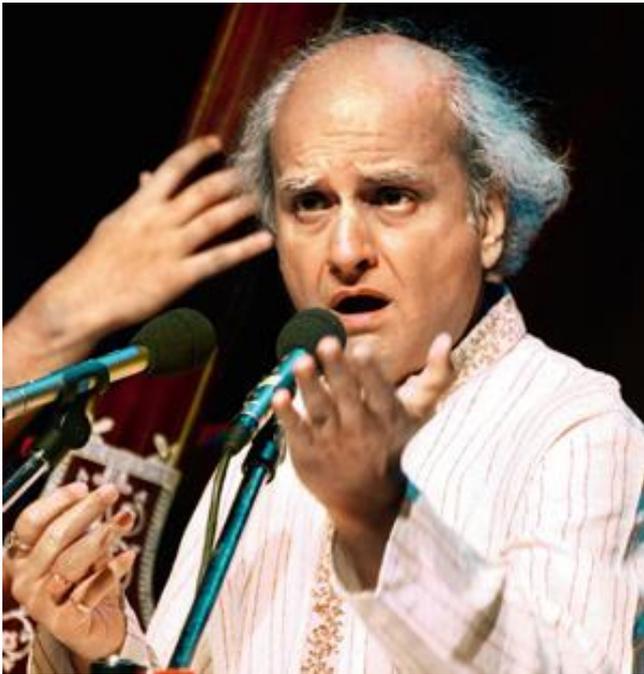


## ENTERTAINMENT FOR THE SOUL

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*Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar*

### Shanta Gokhale

There are times when one has heard and seen such compelling performances in the week gone by that one is tempted against one's best judgement to cram them all into the allotted space of a column. But that can only result in a dhobi list of facts, not a recreation of the experience that one wants to share with readers because it was so special.

I will therefore not discuss the solo performance of HeLa which I saw on Monday, except to say that it raised an interesting question of medical ethics which, I have now concluded, is too complex for a simple answer. I must also say that it wasn't only the powerful story Adura Onashile enacted for us about the immortal line of cells called HeLa that originated in a black woman's cervical tumour, and lived on to help

medical research worldwide that was memorable; but also my journey to the venue, Sitara Studio, over hills of dug up rubble and bits of pavement torn apart by crevices, designed to put me in painful touch with my age.

Let me concentrate, instead, on the other memorable event of the week, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar's music recital on the second day of the two-day festival organised by Svarit in memory of Pandit Dinkar Kaikini. Much to my regret, I had missed the dhrupad maestro Pandit Uday Bhawalkar's performance on the previous evening.

Pandit Dinkar Kaikini, whose death in January 2010 took from us a multi-faceted musical personality, a generous guru and a fine human being, used to say that he sang to engage his own mind and soul, not to entertain people. By entertaining he meant titillating the ears of listeners for momentary pleasure rather than taking them along on a journey into the heart and soul of music. Appropriately, on the stage of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan on Saturday, sat the living expression of atmaranjan as opposed to manoranjan.

Pandit Kashalkar began with a perfectly structured Yaman, in which he looked for and discovered, for his own and our pleasure, the unique beauties of that stately raga. He was a seeker in the universe of Yaman, in

constant touch with his innermost musical impulses, exploring ways to give supple voice to the myriad ideas that crowded his imagination. Where was the question then of thinking of us and our manoranjan? And why would we want to intervene between him and his music? We were only too happy to follow him gratefully, receiving the surprise discoveries he was making for himself.

Pandit Kashalkar's Yaman was a muscular exposition that kept our ears and minds alert. He did not repeat a single musical idea, nor did his taan patterns sound mechanically ground out. Every taan was unique, often slyly springing an unexpected twist on us that would make us smile at his wizardry. At the end of the vilambit and the tarana that followed, what we had was a dense, rich and radiant Yaman.

After a masterful performance like that, one is always a little apprehensive about what is to follow. But at the end of a whispered confabulation with his illustrious tabla accompanist Pandit Suresh Talwalkar, Pandit Kashalkar caught us completely off-guard by announcing raga Malkauns-Bahar. None of the better known combinations of Bahar with Basant, Hindol, Adana, Bageshri or Bhairav, but Malkauns of all ragas! Malkauns is as ancient a raga as Yaman, serious and introspective in character. Bahar on the other hand, is its exact opposite. It is light and cheerful, a herald of spring. To put these two ragas together was like setting up a conversation between a white-haired, inward-eyed yogi and an extroverted adolescent with a crown of flowers on his head.

But Pandit Kashalkar brought the two together into perfect harmony using a gliding transition between the fluty notes of Bahar and the deep notes of Malkauns. And every time he made that magical transition, the audience broke into a spontaneous 'wah'. However, a combination of such disparate ragas cannot be extensively elaborated. So, quite rightly, Pandit Kashalkar soon moved on from its slow tempo exposition to a lively, fast tempo bandish in pure Bahar, Phulawale kanth main ka.

Bound by the profound pleasure that Kashalkar's music had gifted to us, the audience poured out of the auditorium smiling bemusedly at one another. Outside there were no cabs to be had. But an unknown gentleman generously offered me a lift home, face aglow with an air of general benevolence. Music ke side effects!

## **GALLERIES**

**My 3am buddy**

**Prime time murder:  
The Sheena...**

**Who's afraid of  
cockroaches?**

**Cornered**