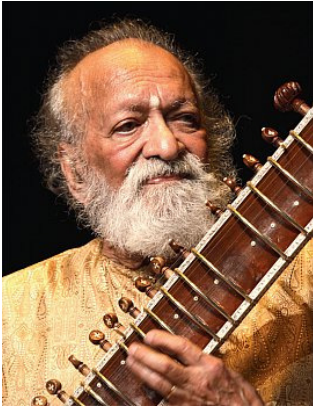


Sukanya an opera by Ravi Shankar



Royal Opera House
London Philharmonic Orchestra
BBC Singers

Ravi Shankar was one of the most influential musicians of all time. He inspired people from all walks of life and musicians from all genres of music. These included legendary names such as George Harrison, Yehudi Menuhin, John Coltrane and Philip Glass. Ravi Shankar's music rapidly spread throughout the world, crossing all cultural and generational boundaries.

Ravi Shankar envisaged *Sukanya* as a truly ground-breaking piece of musical theatre which will explore the common ground between the music, dance and theatrical traditions of India and the West.

Ravi Shankar was in a unique position to visualise the common ground between East and West. He was steeped in the ancient musical and dramatic traditions of India through his guru Baba Allaudhin Khan and he also gained a deep knowledge of the music and drama of the west from a very young age. And yet he lived in an age where jet travel, radio, television and recorded music opened up the world and introduced him to musicians from across the globe that he could share and learn music with.

As a young man Shankar experienced the reaction of Westerners to hearing Indian music for the first time: although many found it exciting he realised that it needed to be presented very carefully for the untrained Western ear to realise its depths. Thus, Ravi Shankar became the first Indian musician to explain these concepts to his audiences.

Shankar had a vision for *Sukanya* that would break the mould of traditional opera: a truly ground-breaking work which will explore the common ground between the music, dance and theatrical traditions of India and the West.

To fulfil this vision Shankar imagined the opera scored for Indian and Western musicians, Indian and Western voices (including Indian spoken percussion Konnakol) and Indian dancers. He was fascinated by film and visual imagery, and pictured the visual elements of *Sukanya* enhanced by electronic projection which will create the back-drop to the story on a series of screens placed around the stage developed by the Royal Opera House's in-house team of designers and technicians.

The music has been completed since Shankar's passing by David Murphy, in collaboration with Ravi Shankar's daughter Anoushkar Shankar.

Choreography will be by award-winning contemporary British dancer Aakash Odedra.

Orchestration

Concert version: 60 piece orchestra, 5 dancers, 5 solo singers and 4 chorus.
Premiere performances will be in London, Leicester, Birmingham and Bristol in May 2017.

Chamber version: c.24 total, with 2 singers, 3 dancers.
This version will be premiered in Leicester in Spring 2018, exact dates TBC.

Full opera-house version: TBC. Premiere performance will be at Opera San José, California in 2017/18 season.

We are seeking international performances of these versions, featuring musicians from the London Philharmonic Orchestra and singers and dancers from the original cast, conducted by David Murphy.

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Plot

Sukanya is based on a story from the Mahabharata. A joyful, accessible piece it is about the discovery of love late in life. It also relates to Ravi Shankar's own experience of life and love, his wife in fact is also called Sukanya.

In the story, Chyavana, a young man, is meditating in the forest. His meditation becomes so deep that ants begin to build a nest around him. Many years pass and a huge ant hill is formed.

One beautiful spring day King Shryayati comes to the forest with his retinue for a spring festival. His only daughter Sukanya notices the ant hill and seeing what looks like two jewels glowing from within, pokes them with a sharp stick.

There is a scream from inside the ant hill, the glow goes out and Sukanya, terrified, runs away. The king investigates the huge ant hill. Chyavana, now a great Sage and a very old man is revealed beneath, he has been blinded, and as compensation asks for Sukanya's hand in marriage.

The King, aware of Chyavana's spiritual stature agrees. Sukanya lives with the sage happily and faithfully in the forest.

One day she is spotted by the Ashwini Devas, two beautiful youthful demigods. They are twins, and ask: "why are you with this old man when you could marry one of us and live in paradise?"

Sukanya politely refuses the offer, confirming her devotion to her husband. The young gods speak again. "We have a deal for you. We will make your husband young and handsome exactly like us. You must then choose one of us three as your partner." Sukanya was willing to take this test.

The youths ask her to bring her husband to a lake. The sage and the young gods immerse themselves completely in the water at the same time. When they reappear, Sukanya finds three identical handsome youths. There are several different permutations of the story at this point – all will be revealed in the coming world premiere of the work.

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