

## Music and the Ram Family

Music in the Ram family started in earnest in Sophiatown, where the two elder siblings, Rabin and Vevek, grew up in an extended paternal family home that housed twenty people. Subjected to All India Radio programmes, Bollywood Songs and Jazz piqued their interest at an early age – at this time the penny whistle introduced by Spokes Mashiyane was popular in Sophiatown and dominated the local music scene. Their early experience was a mixed bag of splendid musical genres.



**Vevek Ram**



**Rabin Ram**

The main influence was probably Jazz as their uncle Pallie was a jazz fanatic. He had a group of friends that frequented the Ram home, and they spent many hours listening to Jazz LPs. His collection was so extensive and unique that he was often referred to as “Pallie LP”.

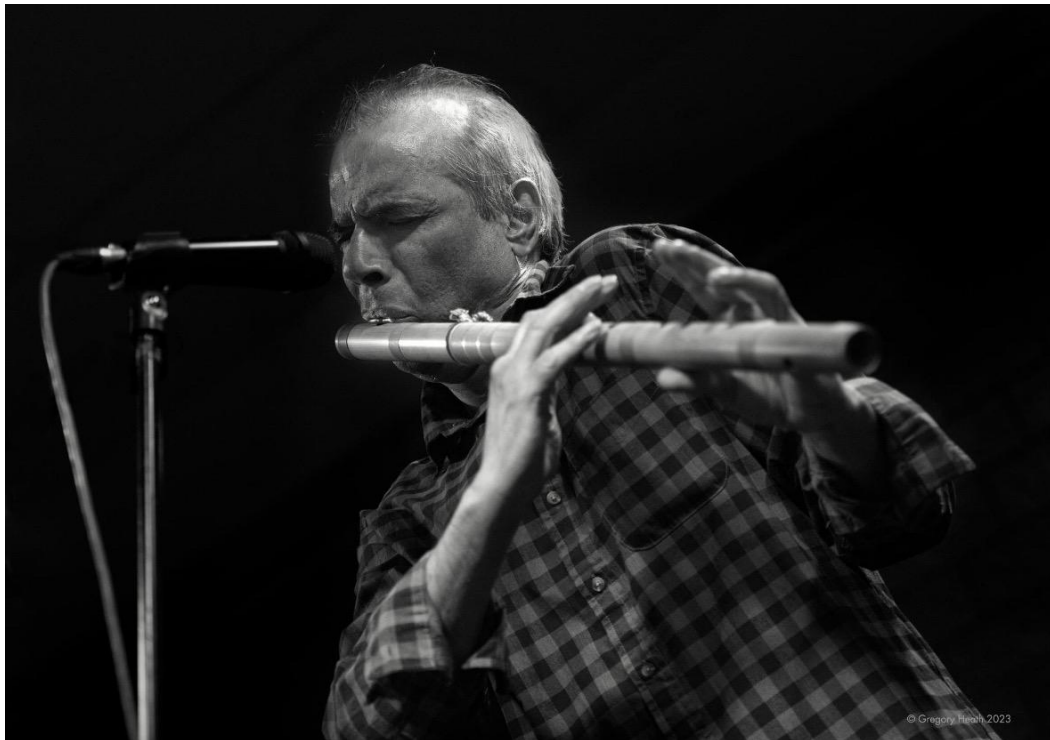
On being forcibly removed by the Group Areas Act and dispatched to the army camp in Lenz, the family remained close knit. A maternal uncle and activist, Suryaprakash Nannan (aka Billy) lived in a barracks nearby and had a significant influence – he played alto saxophone that further encouraged the brothers’ interest.

Soon after the family welcomed youngest brother Deepak, who was born in Newclare at our maternal grandma’s home. In 1960, the family then moved into Lenasia after their father had a proper house constructed.

Continuously adding to the jazz LP collection resulted in quite a substantial library. Listening to Jazz continued through to their youth right up to high school. After matriculating Rabin and Vevek acquired an alto saxophone, flute and bass guitar.

Rabin and Vevek joined a local group Sludge, that played popular music with some jazz influence – Rabin on saxophone and Vevek on flute and bass guitar. The band practised in their uncle’s garage and performed mainly at a local club called, The Spiders Web.

Having frequently visited Dorkay House in the Johannesburg CBD where many jazz musicians used to congregate and share music, the siblings were introduced to many musicians – in particular Kippie Moeketsi and Mike Makhalemele.



***Deepak Ram***

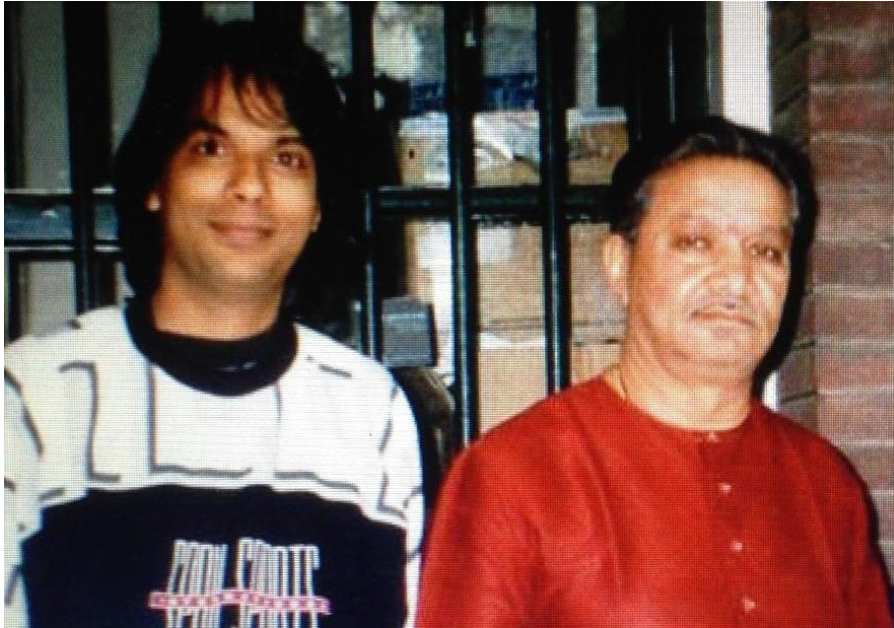
Both Kippie and Mike spent many weekends in the “Sludge garage” in Lenasia playing with the band but mainly sharing their expertise and teaching the band members the art of Jazz – this was a great influence in the future of the band and beyond.

At this point in time Deepak began playing the Indian flute (Bansuri) and started learning melodies from Indian film songs mainly – all self-taught.

An interesting twist was provided when the brothers learnt that the great saxophonist, John Coltrane had engaged with Sitar Maestro Ravi Shankar to learn classical Indian music – in particular techniques in improvisation in North Indian Raga music. This led to them showing an interest in Indian music.

In the mid-1970s, the three siblings met with Jeram Bhana, who at the time resided at the Tolstoy Farm in Lawley near Lenasia. Jeram introduced the rudiments of Indian Raga music to the brothers. Vevek at this stage took to the Sitar, Rabin the violin and Deepak Bansuri and Tabla. This introduction led to the brothers to further explore and learn Indian music.

Deepak studied in India under several teachers, learning vocal, bansuri and tabla. His bansuri teacher (Guru), the great bansuri master Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, had the deepest influence in Deepak's music.



***Deepak with Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia***

Vevek learnt the art of sitar in Indian music first from Ustad Shamim Ahmed and later from Pandit Shubendra Rao, both of whom were senior disciples of Pandit Ravi Shankar.

Rabin went to Chennai for a year to learn South Indian or Carnatic music – vocal and violin from Smt Dwaram Mangathayaru. On his return to South Africa he started playing the Sarod, mainly self-taught, but having subsequently met and enjoyed master classes with Ustad Ashish Khan, son of Sarod maestro Ustad Ali Akbar Khan.



***Vevek with Pandit Ravi Shankar***

Rabin and Vevek currently perform solo concerts and duets on Sarod and Sitar respectively, mainly in South Africa. In 2004, they formed the group “East meets West” and were joined by a cellist, saxophonist and tabla player. The group have performed widely in South Africa at most major festivals – to date having over twenty performances to their credit. They continue to perform as “East meets West”. The group perform mainly works composed and arranged by them.

Both these siblings pursued their music on a part time basis whilst being fully employed – Rabin in the corporate world and Vevek mainly as an academic as Professor in Computer Science at the University of Natal, prior to also teaching Indian music at the University of Durban-Westville. As composer, Vevek’s composition for Sitar and orchestra, which he performed with the English Chamber Orchestra was voted as one of the ten most significant musical events in South Africa in 2004.



***Rabin with Ustad Ashish Khan***

Deepak resides in Washington as a full-time musician and composer and has performed in the US, South Africa, India, UK, Ireland, France, Austria, Germany, Lebanon, Turkey, Taiwan and Holland. He has had the honour of performing with his teacher, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia in Geneva, London and Paris. Deepak, who has a Masters’ degree in Music from Rhodes University was awarded Best Instrumental album at the SAMA Awards in 2000 for his album “Searching for Satyam”. He was also nominated in 1999 as Best Male Artist at the SAMA Awards for his album “Flute for Thought”. In 2007, Deepak was given the Award of Outstanding Contribution to Arts and Humanities by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce in California. He lectured at the University of Durban-Westville’s music department for four years and also taught at the University of California in Santa Cruz as a visiting

professor. Deepak has nine solo albums to his credit and appears as a session musician in over sixty albums.

His bansuri can be heard on movie soundtracks such as “The Fast and the Furious”, “Matrix Revolutions”, “India, Kingdom of the Tiger”, “Stealth”, “Before the Rains” and recently, “Greytown Girl”.

Deepak is a versatile musician and has collaborated with various artists including, Darius Brubeck, Bheki Mseleku, Dhafer Yousseff and also performed with the South African band, Tananas. The millennium concert at Robben Island hosted by Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki saw Deepak performing with Sibongile Khumalo and the Rwandan diva Cecile amongst others.

Deepak has many students in the US and elsewhere, mainly in India. His senior students are excellent musicians performing as solo and recording artists.

Vevek and Rabin residing in Gauteng are passionate about spreading the beauty of North Indian Raga music, which they continue to do through performing and teaching young musicians.

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