

India's Cultural Ambassador Weaves Musical Magic on the North Shore

by Jennifer Nesselroed

A long-time student of Ravi Shankar, Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt belongs to an elite group of musicians whose musical lineage can be traced back to Mughal Emperor Akbar's court musician Tansen and his Hindu guru, Swami Haridas. Creator of the Mohan Veena, the Grammy Award winner Bhatt has mesmerized the world with his dazzling musicality, virtuosity and bewildering command over the famous instrument that bears his name. Joined by his son Salil Bhatt and Ramkumar Mishra, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt will perform at the Capilano College Performing Arts Theatre on February 18 at 8pm.

Outstanding features of Bhatt's style are his natural ability to play the 'Tantrakari Ang' and incorporate the 'Gayaki Ang' on Mohan Veena. With his sheer virtuosity and limitless supply of melodies, Bhatt won a Grammy Award in 1994 with Ry Cooder for their World Music Album, *A Meeting by the River*. This album established him as a star performer, and acknowledged him as an innovator and a soulful composer.

Vishwa Mohan has become a cultural ambassador of India by glorifying and popularizing Indian culture and music throughout the world. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt

attracted international attention with his adaptation and 'Indianisation' of the western Hawaiian guitar in the Mohan Veena, a perfect assimilation of sitar, sarod & veena techniques. He gave it a revolutionary design and shape as well as adding fourteen more strings. With blinding speed and faultless legato, Bhatt is undoubtedly one of the most expressive and versatile slide players in the world. He is a mentor to blues and folk virtuosos Harry Manx, who himself has taken the Mohan Veena to the concert stages and music festivals of the world. Bhatt's latest creation has been a new 35 stringed instrument called the Vishwa Veena.

Apart from his reputation as a star performer, Vishwa is a master collaborator as well. His historic jugalbandi with Chinese Erhu player, Jei Bing Chen established him as the first Indian ever to enter into such a union of disparate styles. Similarly, Vishwa has also combined styles with American dobro master, Jerry Douglas, US country/blues legend, Taj Mahal, and Arabian oudh player, Simon Shaheen. These unions have all resulted in critically acclaimed internationally released recordings. Vishwa's further musical journeys have included composing *Music for Relaxation* for Music Today,



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