

November 19, 2012

Notes from the East



A NEW CHANT Be Being performs the Li and Sa project at The Music Academy Photo: S.R. Raghunathan

Plenty of vocals and drums, a little twang and chime and a search for new musical boundaries marked Be Being's concert at the November Fest

It was all about weaving an intricate tapestry of ancient Buddhist philosophy for a modern world. Be Being's Li and Sa Project on day two of *The Hindu* Friday Review November Fest, however, had music throbbing with melancholy and choruses that demanded an openness to new sounds. Stepping away from classic music for the meditation that one encounters on the long road to nirvana, the concert was an aural recreation of an introspective state where one's thoughts drifted past without hold.

The essence of Be Being's music moved from player to player, beginning with the vibrating chords of Shamanistic rituals that kept pace with the drums and ended with trembling cymbals held aloft by two monks. Soon-a Park (*gayageum* - long zither with movable bridges), Won-Il Na (*piri* - oboe made of bamboo), Joon-il Choi (*janggu* - hourglass-shaped double-headed drum), Seung-Hee Lee (*pansori* - Korean traditional vocal art) and Jieun Kang (*haegeum* - fiddle with two strings) sang in unison for 'Bokcheongke'. The song with no instrumentation shrugged off melodies for an ever-widening pattern of rhythms.

'Cheeonsoobara', with its computerised sounds and blaring conches, portrayed the harsh lives of wild warriors on horses as they galloped along a windswept land with few fences and fewer roads. The search for that elusive road continued in 'Gulsoo' where crystal bells and zither strings lent voice to a narrative. The rims of the drums were used in 'Beodeuseun' and the zither played a beautiful melody replete with repetitive notes.

‘Sabangyoshin’ was a percussion festival with the *janggu* playing a threshing sound while robed monks in elaborate headgear swayed and danced on stage. ‘Kajikye’ had the five voices sing in unison with a prayerful incantation by a monk. The vocals faded in and out between the strings and the pitches rose and fell forlornly.

‘Shikdangjakbeop’ and ‘3234’ lent genuine beauty towards the end of the concert. The former elevated minimalist chorus to solemn ritual while the latter, interspersed with claps, based on elaborate cadences anchored by the percussionist had a wavelike and wispy quality.

The Li and Sa project aimed to address the transient nature of desire with a scattered flow of melody, rhythm and voice. But the music was confined to the realm of unfamiliar sounds and stayed shy of catharsis. Although the concert showcased earthy darkness to music’s light, it left the soul in search of so much more.