

SITAR – READING COMPREHENSION

What is a Sitar?

A sitar is a South Asian stringed instrument played much like a guitar. It is larger than a guitar, having more strings, and is capable of a truly unique sound because it has a deep round chamber at the bottom and two layers of strings., it is most well-known due to its role in Hindustani Music, the distinctive music of northern India and Pakistan.



History of the Sitar

Stringed instruments are among the oldest types of instruments created by people. One, the *veena*, had been around in India for more than 3,000 years.

With the arrival of Islam, in what is today Pakistan and northern India around 800 A.D., a new stringed instrument arrived known as a *seetar*, meaning 'three strings,' which was carried by the first Persian Muslim soldiers.

Native Indian court musicians made changes to a similar instrument called the *veena* to produce notes that were more in line with the tastes of Persian nobility, and the Persians would ultimately give an adaptation of the name *seetar* for the instrument, now known as the sitar.

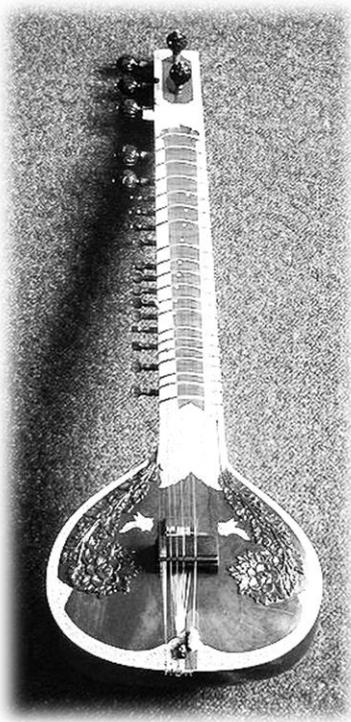
By independence in 1947, the sitar was one of the sounds of South Asia, and radio stations there could not seem to play enough as, by now, it was a well-loved sound.

Worldwide Fame

With the growth of the world music scene in the 1960s, the sitar was one of the biggest exports of Indian music. Vilayat Khan began playing the instrument for foreign audiences in the 1950s, but it wasn't until a group of boys from Liverpool took interest that the reputation of the sitar really took off. The Beatles, especially George Harrison, were famous for their love of the instrument. He wrote *Norwegian Wood* and played very basic sitar but then later, as he improved wrote 'Within You Without You' seen today as one of the greatest mixtures of Indian and European pop songs ever recorded.

Noteworthy in his role of introducing the sitar to these musicians and to a wider audience in general was Ravi Shankar.

In time, the instrument's sound became part of the soundtrack of psychedelic music. With the current growth of Indian culture worldwide, especially with regards to Bollywood, it is little surprise that the sitar remains popular today.



Name: _____ Date: _____

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Vocabulary

1.) What does the word 'distinctive' mean in the first paragraph?

- a.) unpleasant or not very nice
- b.) a characteristic of a person or thing making it different
- c.) something which is very common

2.) What does the word 'tastes' mean in the fourth paragraph?

- a.) to have an experience of something
- b.) using your tongue to decide if you like something
- c.) what people like and do not like

3.) What does the word 'export' mean under the heading 'Worldwide Fame'?

- a.) something made and sold in your own country
- b.) to send to another country for sale
- c.) to buy in from another country

Retrieval

1.) Who carried the new stringed instrument when Islam arrived in now what is known as Pakistan and northern India?

2.) What helped the reputation of the sitar in Europe during the 1960s?

3.) Why is the sitar still popular today?

Inference

Why do you think the sound of the sitar was so exciting for people in the U.K. and U.S. in the 1960s?
