

Holi Re

From the March/April 2009 issue of Music Express (Volume 9, No. 5)

ABOUT THE SONG...

Chhanda Chakroborti created the song, "Holi Re" for the International Children's Choir (ICC). She was working on her Ph.D. at the University of Utah and her daughter Bibi, age eight, was a member of the ICC. As the choir was preparing a performance for the Ambassador of India, their director, Dr. Kathy Sorensen, asked Chhanda if there was a song that she would suggest they learn. Chhanda explained that in India, songs are usually made up as needed and seldom written down, so finding a printed song was unlikely. She explained that to create a song, one first needed to choose the lyrics, then a raga, and then the rhythmic structure. After those were done, she then set about creating a song for the choir. That was in 1992. She and Bibi performed it with the ICC for several years before returning to India. The children have thoroughly enjoyed singing this, especially the phrase "Sava Gopiyana milli ranga vari pichakari" because it is like a fanciful tongue-twister. They also enjoy starting at a moderate tempo and speeding up as fast as they can go. This has basis in Indian performances, where a raga or theme is stated in a slow tempo, then improvised at a more and more energetic pace through its conclusion. Though this song is printed here in *Music Express* for the first time, please keep in mind that these songs are normally transmitted only orally/aurally. People just learn them by hearing them sung. Lots of improvisation is customary. Songs are not set in stone, unless they have been performed in a Bollywood movie!

ABOUT THE WORDS...

General Translation:

Today we will play Holi with Shyama. (a Hindu deity)

We will get together.

We will fill the squirt guns with liquid colors.

We will color Shyama with colors.

aaj – today

Shyama – Krishna (This is another name for him. According to Chhanda*, it means the dark-skinned one and is the one to which most songs of Holi are addressed.)

sanga – one part

Gopiyana – women in the cowherd community (At one part of his life, Shyama lived with the Gopis.)

milli – get together

ranga – colors (liquid colors)

vari – fill

pichakari or pichkari – squirt guns

Shyamako – Krishna

***Quote from Chhanda about Shyama:** "The Shyama of this song is the same as Lord Krishna in the Sri-Madbhagavat Gita (an ancient Hindu religious book.) In this song, he is depicted as the darling love of all the Gopi women. Everyone wants to play Holi with him and splash him with colors. Gopis consider themselves fortunate to have known him in his childhood in Vrinda van, in Northern India where he grew up."

Copyright © 2009 by HAL LEONARD CORPORATION
International Copyright Secured All Rights Reserved

The original subscriber of Music Express magazine has permission to reproduce this page for instructional use only. Any other use is strictly prohibited.

ABOUT THE MUSIC...

The melody is set in a springtime raga called the “bahaar” raga. More particularly, it is a spring evening raga whose principal mood is happy. This is appropriate because Holi is a happy festival that occurs in the spring. Its distinctive sound comes from its use of a flattened third and both regular and flattened seventh.

The rhythm is sixteen beats set in “tin taal” (also spelled teen tal): beat, 2, 3, 4, beat, 6, 7, 8, rest, 10, 11, 12, beat, 14, 15, 16. The accompaniment is tabla. Created and sung by Chhanda Chakroborti for the International Children’s Choir, 1992, transcribed by Kathy Sorensen.

A little background from Chhanda’s perspective:

This holiday is sometimes referred to in English as the Color Festival. Holi and Diwali are the two main festivals of India. The Color Festival is celebrated in the springtime when the colors are returning to the trees, shrubs, grass and flowers. It is extremely festive in nature, similar to Mardi Gras in the U.S.A. It only lasts one day. On this day, people wear clothes that they don’t mind getting wet as other people squirt them with colored water and colored powder. The water is squirted from large brass squirt guns called pichakari, as well as from smaller squirt guns and squirt bottles. There are various competitions on this day. Because this is the beginning of a new season, on the day before Holi people light fires and burn old items from their households (old clothes, old papers and other things that are no longer needed). This is the culmination of an actual spring-cleaning and yet is symbolic of getting rid of the old so that the new can come.