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**Debashish Bhattacharya**

## Pandit Debashish Bhattacharya: The Sound of the Soul review – expansive Hindustani music

The centrepiece of the album sees the guitarist stretching out across a 40-minute track



Debashish Bhattacharya playing the Hindustani slide guitar

**David Honigmann** JANUARY 27 2023

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The master, and in many respects the inventor, of the Hindustani slide guitar tradition, Debashish Bhattacharya has spent decades exploring the links between his instrument and other cultures. He has probed its links with the Hawaiian slide guitar, played Indo-jazz fusion with John McLaughlin, collaborated with everyone from Ballaké Sissoko to Bob Brozman and the Derek Trucks Band. He has released a number of records with the British label Riverboat, the best of which is *Calcutta Chronicles*, an unadorned set that showed off the three guitars of his own invention, with 22, 14 and four strings respectively.

*The Sound of the Soul*, released by the North Carolina label Abstract Logix, is another traditional work in the spirit of *Calcutta Chronicles*, though where that album had nine tracks, some only a few minutes in length, this has just four — the longest of which runs to almost 40 minutes. It pays tribute to the master sarod player Ali Akbar Khan, with whom Bhattacharya studied as a young man, and something of his thoughtfulness can be discerned in Bhattacharya's guitar playing.

The format of the four pieces is roughly the same: a single percussionist (mostly Swapan Chaudhuri on tabla) as a base for Bhattacharya's improvisations. He plays the chaturangui, his 22-string guitar, with drone and sympathetic strings bringing the sonority of sitar and sarod to the six melodic strings.



On the centrepiece “To His Lotus Feet”, Bhattacharya stretches out fully — a quarter-hour, slowly climbing opening alap, all tentative microtonal essays, with a lower-toned string coming to the fore, the instrument in dialogue with itself. Then Chaudhuri enters for the jhor, setting up a slow patter that occasionally flicks into double tempo, as if urging the guitarist from contemplation into action. Bhattacharya resists, then suddenly lets forth a climactic jhala, tabla and strings flying everywhere but always in full control.

★★★★☆

*'The Sound of the Soul' is released by Abstract Logix*

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