

The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

An Hour that Passed in a Moment Pandit Ravi Shankar Interviewed

by Rahat Fahmida

"Nothing is more futile than theorising about music. No doubt there are laws, mathematically strict laws, but these laws are not music; they are only its conditions — just as the art of drawing and the theory of colours, or even the brush and palette, are not painting, but only its necessary means. The essence of music is revelation; it does not admit exact reckoning, and the true criticism of music remains an empirical art."

It was incredible. Almost in a trance, I walked past the hotel lobby and waited for the lift to meet one of the world's greatest sitarists — Pandit Ravi Shankar Bhattacharya. As a performer, composer, teacher, and writer he has perhaps done more for Indian music than any other musician. A maestro of music, Ravi Shankar has the enviable distinction of taking, as a pioneer, Indian music in its unalloyed form, to the West.

For a few minutes I was tense and confused. I started wondering, what is music? This question occupied me for moments in the lift.

It seemed I skipped a heart beat, when the door opened to Guruj's room, and we walked in. After the initial greeting and introducing, I found myself seated on a sofa right beside Ravi Shankar and his wife Sukanya Shankar, whose eyes were luminous with a charming smile.

This great musician's personality, unassuming as it is, was in complete harmony with the quiet and not too opulent surrounding. His rather calm, though glowing, eyes suggested their possessor to be a man of the spirit rather than a dreamer; he had a gentle, delicate smile which never turned to bitterness. His delicately pale complexion and fine, fair, wavy hair added to his dignity. Clad in a dark striped kurta and churidar, his gestures, which were many, were all modest and graceful; his voice rather composed. His bearing was so distinctive and his manners so suggestive of the highest breeding that one could not help treating him like a divine figure. Everything about him brought to mind the convoluted, which on its incredibly thin stalk supports the cup of heavenly colour, but which is of so fragile a tissue that the slightest touch destroys it.

icising me for all these years, have come to recognise such works only lately.

"What I really oppose is mixing Western music with the Eastern one in a hotch-potch manner. It should not be, what we call in Bengali 'khichuri', or a cocktail of the sort.

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It was evident from Panditji's words that our realm is not of this world alone. Where could we find, like the painters, and sculptors, models of our art in nature? As he said sound is everywhere, but tone — that is, melodies speaking the higher language of the world of spirits — rests only in the breast of man. The musician — he who develops music into a clear, distinct stream of

consciousness — is everywhere surrounded by melody and harmony. Ravi Shankar said that it is not an empty smile and not an allegory when musicians say that colours, scents and beams appear to them as tones, and that musicians are aware of their intermingling as in a wonderful concert. In the same sense hearing is a seeing from within, so the musician may call seeing a hearing from within... Thus the sudden inspirations of musicians and the formation of melodies within the soul are the conscious appreciation and understanding of the secret music of nature as the principle of life and its activities. The sounds of nature, the rushing of wind, the bubbling of springs, and so on, are first of all the sustained chords to a musician, and later turns into melodies with the accompaniment of harmonies.

Which of the two — love or music — is able to lift man to the most sublime heights? It is a great question, but it seems to me that one might answer thus: love cannot express the idea of music, while music may give an idea of love. What separates the one from the other? They are the two wings of the soul.

As a renowned sitarist for



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years, and a dedicated learner of his illustrious guru Baba Alauddin Khan, he has seen the evolution of both vocal and instrumental music. His remark on the development of Bengali pop music was rather trite. "We don't have any Bengali pop music as such. We are only aping. We certainly do have talents amongst the younger generation, both in India and Bangladesh. For this reason we should try to make the best of what we have. I feel there should be more, exchanges of cultural talents between India and Bangladesh. This must and should be encouraged, as it will give the younger generation a broader exposure."

Uncertainty about the destiny of music, and the quality

of public appreciation of music, is not a new preoccupation. Ravi Shankar felt it clearly.

Panditji continued, "Herein lies the great and profound secret of music, something that can be felt but cannot be expressed in words. The ebb, the flow and all the conflicting tides of anger, love and the pleasure that's all but pains are united where tunes mingle and embrace one another."

"At present, the artistic errors that threaten us are of quite a different kind, though perhaps even more dangerous. The circumstances of life today have made it inevitable that the two extremes of death and pleasure rule our lives. The horrors of war have depressed our spirits, and misery has

been all too common, so that relief has been sought in the coarsest and most primitive forms of art."

Panditji said that the chief reason for the degeneration of present-day music lies in the fact that people want to get bodily sensations from music more than anything else. Emotion is out of date and intellect a bore. He sadly said, "Appreciation of art which has been born of profound thought and intensity of experience necessitates an intellectual effort too exhausting for most people of the present day. They want to be amused; they would rather feel music with their bodies than understand it through their emotions. In an age of neurasthenia, music, like everything else, must be a stimulant, must be alcoholic, or it is no good..."

"As I feel music can only be

tolerated, it seems, as an accompaniment to something else, a dinner or a dance or what not.

"What is the effect on young people who may perhaps hear some great work for the first time in such an environment? The music will inevitably become associated in their minds with hopping and prancing and jiggling, and in the end they will themselves be unable to hear it without twitching and fidgeting."

While talking, the maestro's natural propensity for wit and humour and happy manner of relating common occurrences in an uncommon way enabled him to throw persons and things in sharp focus.

About the prime age for sitar players or rather for learning any music, he said, "The younger one starts the better it

is. A big advantage lies in the fact if one is born and brought up in an environment where there is a culture for music. And the best time to begin learning is between the age of eight to ten, when it is easier for them to pick up tunes and understand rhythms." About his own students Panditji said he teaches under the phenomenon of 'Guru Shishwa Parampara', meaning the traditional teacher-student relations. This also means he never accepts money in exchange for his teachings. Raviji chooses the students, judging them not only by their talents but also by their dedication and devotion. Some of his best 'shishwas', that is, disciples, who have already made a mark include Deepak Chowdhury, Shamim Ahmed, Partho Sarathy, and many others.

Born on the April 7, 1920, in the city of Varanasi, in Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Ravi Shankar Bhattacharya, in 1989 celebrated his 50th year of concertising. His father Shyam Bhattacharya and elder brother Uday Shankar Bhattacharya are prominent figures in their own fields. As a performer Pandit Ravi Shankar has the advantage of being a great composer too, who transfused into minds his inspired meaning. No one can really forget his little animated countenance when lighted up with the glowing rays of genius. It is as impossible to describe it, as it would be to paint sun-beams.



At the recital

Starting to talk about assimilation of Western music with that of the East, Ravi Shankar said that this could very well be regarded as a controversial area. He, as both performer and composer, has experimented in this area and at one point, been unkindly criticised and accused of commercialising Indian classical music. So the gifted musician said, "This is a creative field. But since I dwell both in composing and performing, as far as my composition is concerned I am an orthodox and purist. This does not mean that I don't like innovation or experiment blending Indian classical music with electronic technology of the Western world. Many of you might have listened to my experimental records — 'Tana Mana', 'Ravi Shankar in Kremlin', 'Passage' — the last being an experimental work with Philip Glass — and others. "Those who have been crit-



With brother Uday Shankar

China's Conveyor-belt Art Invades the West

If the paintings that adorn the open-air art markets of Europe's capital cities seem so similar, it is because they were probably painted by the same 'artist' in one of China's art factories.

They crop up in London, Paris, Madrid, Sydney and New York — the same sunsets, wide-eyed children with cute pet kittens, Turner-style landscapes and stormy seascapes.

China's art factories employ armies of painters to copy any painting in a matter of hours for less than US \$45 a week in wages.

In a factory just across the border from Hong Kong in China's special economic zone of Shenzhen, 20 men turn out small canvases of garish sunsets taking less than an hour for each one.

In another, a row of artists sits painting the same thing on several different canvases. One paints the trees, the other the sky and a third the bushes.

A fourth sings the work with a flourish — not always with the same name.

"It depends on the market," explained a Hong Kong importer, who preferred to remain anonymous. "After all, Chinese names are difficult to pronounce and remember."

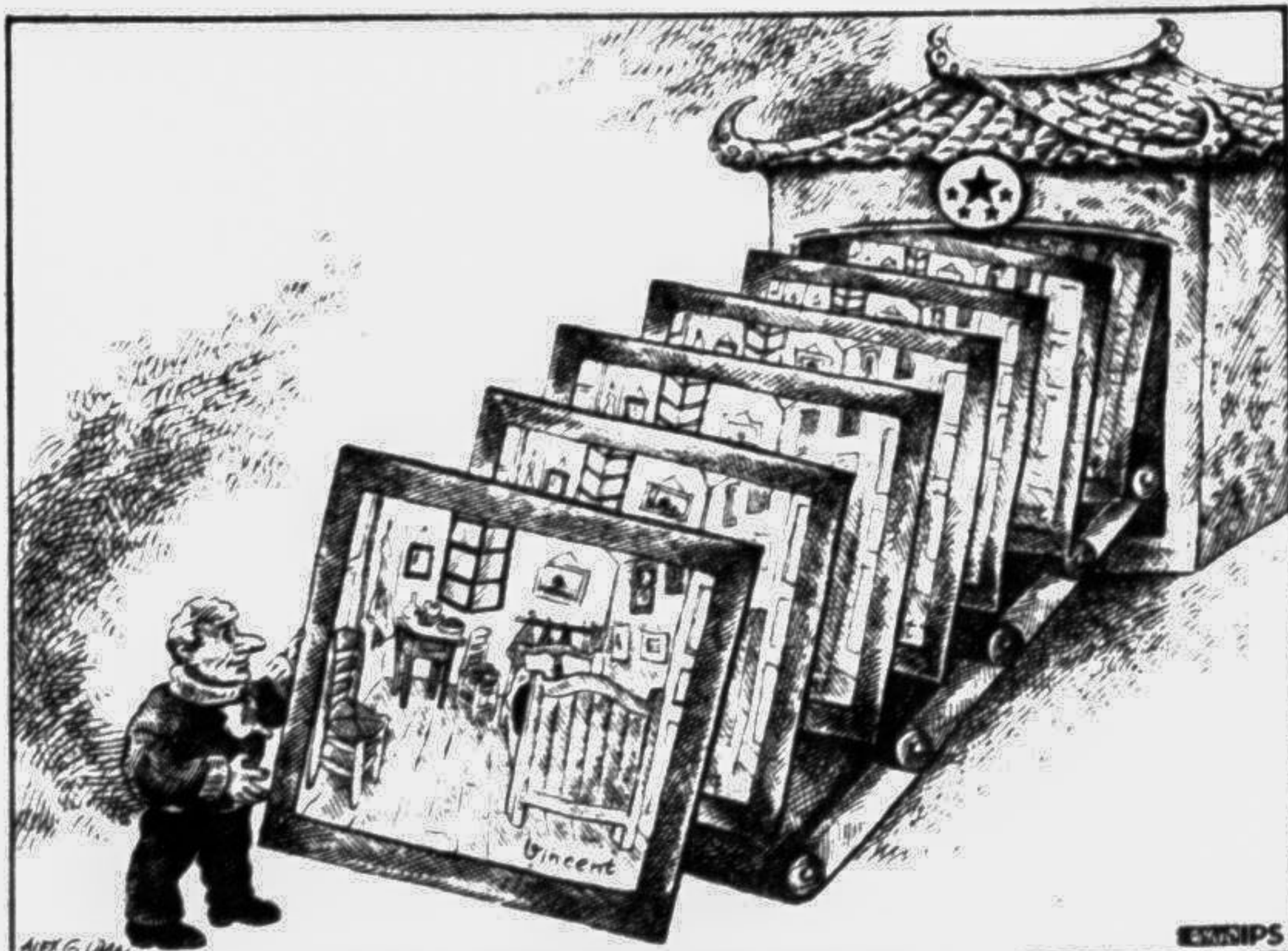
For the Italian market, 'Cafferi' is a common name for Britain, 'Hood'

In one Shenzhen factory, an artist is dabbing half a dozen copies of Vincent van Gogh's famous 'Irises'.

A few are signed 'Vincent', others have illegible signatures, and still others have no signature at all. Traders often give the artist a European name, claiming he is well-known.

Others are sold by mail order as "a rare chance to own

Artists and consumer groups in the West are alarmed that the flood of factory-produced paintings from East Asia is threatening the livelihood of genuine artists and victimising unsuspecting buyers. Yojana Sharma of IPS reports, from Hong Kong.



an original..." The less scrupulous traders get their best mass-production artists to copy real artworks and pass them off as originals.

In Paris, 'freelancers' hired by mass-art traders daub paint on their fingers and pretend to be art students trying to earn their keep by selling a few paintings which they claim are their own.

In Britain, dealers have been caught selling paintings worth little more than 10 dollars for several hundred times the price.

Some dealers have been known to employ door-to-door salesmen who pass off the works as 'genuine investment works by European masters'.

Chan Po-ling, a Hong Kong-based commissioning art

dealer with links with several factories in China, says he sets a quota of, say, 40 small canvases a day.

"Anyone can do this," he said. "I train them for three months and then after six months, if they are no good, I let them go." But he denied these were art factories: "They can take the canvases home to

complete if they want. And some are family businesses. I would not say it is conveyor-belt art."

While the practice may not be strictly illegal, many believe it is unethical. And some artists' groups in Britain and the United States are concerned that it threatens the livelihood of genuine artists.

Some half a million canvases produced in East Asia flood Britain in a year and recent US Customs figures show that some US \$24 million worth of such paintings were imported over a three-year period.

After much campaigning by consumer groups, the US state of Massachusetts now requires factory-produced paintings to be labelled 'unoriginals' to protect unsuspecting consumers. But elsewhere there is little protection under the law.

Retired British art restorer Harold Hill has waged a personal campaign against the trade in Britain.

"I'm not a snob about art, but I don't like to see people getting fleeced," he said, citing a military genre painting for sale in one British hotel for over US \$6000. Genuine value: probably US \$10.

Hong Kong dealers say consumers are not being misled since it is "patently obvious" when a painting is a mass reproduction or an original.

"Naturally, if an artist is painting swiftly to a deadline to meet an order, it won't be the same quality as someone who has taken many, many hours and a great deal of painstaking care over his work," said Chan.

"Consumers have only themselves to blame if they can't tell the difference," he said.

Dream : The Other World

by Rajesh Joshi

EVERYBODY dreams, but only a few care to know why they dream, what is the necessity and what may be the physical interpretation.

Dream is a series of images and ideas that occur only during 'sleep' — a state in which all emotions lie at their lowest ebb; although sleep varies in depth from drowsiness to sound sleep.

Dreaming occurs in periods of rapid eye movement (REM). In this stage, the eye balls are seen to be moving back and forth with extreme rapidity, beneath the closed eyelids.

Dreaming is manifested by some irregularities such as breathing becoming irregular and rapid; blood pressure and pulse rate increasing; and in the case of snorers, they are found to stop snoring. Unspoken communications, feelings and moods contribute to a dream and so form part of a fantasy life.

Scientific research on Dreaming is enhanced by the device called Electroencephalogram (EEG). EEG is a record of brain waves which provide a good index of the state of sleep without waking or disturbing the sleeping person. According to EEG, when the brain waves show the typical faster waves, the person is said to be in light sleep or waking. This sleep is also known as REM sleep because it is accompanied by rapid eye movements (REMs) which is not seen in other forms of sleep. This REM is the stage in which most dreaming occurs, and are also known as paradoxical sleep.

Biological Necessity: REM studies indicate that everyone dreams every night, except during certain abnormal states such as high fever. It has been noted that in individuals deprived of REM sleep, a "REM rebound" occurs where one devotes more time to dreaming on the following night, as if to compensate for the lost dreams of the previous night.

Psychological Necessity: One important speculation on

dreaming is that it organizes and maintains brain functions during sleep such that brain does not get disorganized during long periods without effective external stimulation.

Dream Reports

Dream is said to be a 'personal document, a letter to oneself', so a dream not interpreted is like a letter not read.

Reports of morning dream are more rich and complex than those collected early at night. And, immediate reporting differs to some extent from what is reported after longer period of wakefulness.

Most of the reporting shows that dreams are quite egocentric, although presence of others is typically recalled. And only one third of total number of persons dreamt are unknown, or never seen before.

Dream Analysis

From the time immemorial, dreams are interpreted in order to foretell the future. But Sigmund Freud saw the hidden meaning of understanding the individual's motives. The impulses and memories which turn out to be unconscious due to repression or such things, give rise to 'latent dream', which are wish — fulfilling.

Sometimes dream is considered as 'guardian of sleep' due to it being less worthy and less anxiety-provoking. This makes the sleep undisturbed with external stimuli disguised as dream components. The forces of repression are considered to be somewhat relaxed.

Present State of Research: It is established that everyone describes dreaming if awakened at the right moment. So the old ideas such as brain injuries abolish dreams, colour is not usually expressed in dream, and some people do never dream, etc. are taken as not true.

In the experiments conducted to study reactions of 'dream deprivation', the subject is not allowed to go through paradoxical sleep or REM period. This deprivation of REM sleep was found to be followed by dreams of

Although nightmare often means very bad, terrifying dream, experiments have shown that in both nightmare and sleepwalking, dreaming is usually absent.

When anxiety-provoking films are seen before sleep, it is reported that periods of paradoxical sleep get elongated, and the dream contains more anxiety and incorporate elements from the films. Similarly, dreams containing themes of anxiety or depression occur in times of general anxiety or depression. And, the successive dreams of a single night show some degree of continuity in their content.

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