

Indian Raga



Introduction

- Indian music can be divided into two great musical traditions.
- Hindustani tradition – the music of northern india
- Carnatic tradition – the music of the south.
- You are going to study the Indian Classical tradition of the north.
- This is a tradition steeped in legends that proclaim that music was enjoyed by the deities.
- Music performances take place in temples and at religious festivals.
- Performances can last for hours.

Oral Tradition

- Indian classical music is not written down using conventional notation as in the western tradition.
- Instead it is taught through listening and playing by ear called the oral tradition.
- Gharana – system of master-pupil teaching.

Rag

- A rag is a set of ascending and descending notes which can be described as being halfway between a scale and a melody.
- Each Rag has an association with a certain time of day or season resulting in different moods being evoked.
- It is used as the basis for Improvisation in a raga performance.

Tala

- This is a cycle of beats used as a basis for rhythmic improvisation played on the Tabla drums.
- Two common tal patterns are:
 - Rupaka = 3+2+2
 - Tintal = 4+4+4+4
 - Sam = the first beat of the cycle.

Indian Instruments

- The voice is considered to be the most highly regarded instrument and all other instruments are ranked according to how close their sound is to the voice.

The Sitar



- The sitar – This is the most well known instrument
- This is a long necked plucked string instrument with 6/7 main strings
- The sitar is the instrument that is the soloist in a raga performance.
- Soloist Techniques include:
Rapid improvised flourishes, ornaments (gamaka), ascending and descending scales (tan) and sliding between the notes (meend)

The Tanpura/Tambura



- This instrument is similar to the sitar but it has 4 strings.
- The Tanpura's function in Indian raga is to play the drone.

The Harmonium



- This is a free-standing musical keyboard instrument similar to a Reed Organ or Pipe Organ. It consists of free reeds and sound is produced by air being blown through reeds resulting in a sound similar to that of an accordion. The air is supplied by hand-operated bellows alternately depressed by the player.
- This instrument's function is raga music is also to play the drone.

The Tabla

- These are the most common Indian drums and are found in a pair of different sizes.
- In a raga performance the tabla play in the Gat/bandish section. The final section of the performance.



The Sarangi



- The **Sarangi** is a bowed string instrument. Of all Indian instruments, it is said to most resemble the sound of the human voice.
- Like the sitar it is a solo instrument able to imitate vocal ornaments such as gamakas (shakes) and meend (sliding movements).

The Sarod



- The **sarod** is a stringed musical instrument. It is known for a deep, weighty sound (contrast with the sweet, extremely rich texture of the sitar). The tonal quality somewhat resembles the classical guitar, particularly at the lower notes, though in the higher ranges the sound is less rich than the guitar.
- It is a fretless instrument like almost all other Indian instruments, since Indian music depends extensively (in some cases almost entirely) on continuous slides between notes, known as meend (glissando).
- The Sarod is another solo instrument in a raga performance.



The Dhol Drum

- The **dhol** is a double-sided barrel drum played using two wooden sticks, usually made out of bamboo and cane wood.
- The stick used to play the bass side of the drum is a bit thicker (roughly about 10 mm in diameter) and is bent in a quarter-circular arc on the end that strikes the drum, the dagga.
- The other stick is much thinner and flexible and used to play the higher note end of the drum, the thili.
- The drum is slung over the neck of the player with a strap usually made up of ropes or woven cloth.

The Structure of Indian Raga: Alap



- This is the opening section of a raga performance.
- The tempo is slow.
- There is no sense of metre (free time).
- The soloist explores the notes of the rag, setting the mood.
- The soloist is improvising.
- The Tanpura is playing the drone.

The structure of Indian raga: Jhor



- This is the second section of an Indian raga performance.
- The tempo is steady/medium.
- A sense of pulse is now established.
- The improvised music becomes more rhythmic and elaborate.

The structure of India raga: Jhala



- The third section of the raga performance.
- The tempo is fast.
- There are exciting rhythms.
- This is the high point in the piece.
- Virtuoso display demonstrating advanced playing techniques.

The structure of Indian raga: Gat/Bandish



- The final section of a raga performance.
- The tempo is moderate to fast.
- The tabla drums play in this section only and introduce the rhythmic cycle 'tala'.



- This is no longer improvised but is a fixed composition. Musical dialogue takes place between the instrumentalist and the drummer.

You need to know about:

- The Oral Tradition.
- The Instruments and their roles withing the raga performance.
- Rag and Tala.
- The sections of a raga performance and their features.