

Music 190rs: Performing and Theorizing the “classical” in South Indian Music

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Meetings:	Office: Memorial Hall 031
Mondays 10-12 (Music Building: Room 3)	Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30
Thursdays 11-12 (Memorial Hall 031)	Tuesdays: 3-4

Karnatak music is the “classical” music of south India (north India and Pakistan have their own, related, system of classical music called Hindustani music). Karnatak music is classical in the sense that south Indian performers and scholars consider it an art music, a “music of the scriptures”; they have codified a body of oral and written materials to teach, explain, and further develop its theories. The roots of today’s tradition in modern concert halls are found in the courts of princely Indian states and provincial towns, the personal and communal devotional practices associated with Hindu temples, and the outpouring of gifted and pious individuals who avoided associations with these institutions.

Karnatak music, like Western classical music, rewards the listener with an attuned ear who can understand the theoretical system underlying it. The Karnatak system is well articulated, governing aspects of melody, improvisation, and rhythm that are largely undeveloped in Western classical music. In this sense, studying Karnatak music in some detail enables those of us whose formal training is predominantly Western to shake some of our possible assumptions about how music, in general, “works.” In south India, for example, the fundamental unit of melodic analysis is not a discrete pitch, but a kind of bandwidth in which various kinds of contextually-specific oscillations must be performed. South Indian music does not have “meter” in the Western sense of a hierarchy of beats, but rather employs a repeating rhythmic framework, maintained outside the main musical performance (usually by beating the hand on the thigh and counting in a series of finger movements, claps, and waves), which confers an additional layer of rhythmic meaning to the gestures offered by the soloist or accompanist.

The music of South India does not possess the global prestige of common-practice period Western music, partly, perhaps, because it is also not associated with imperialism. Moreover, Karnatak musicians are largely inward looking; straying from the principles of Karnatak music would, from their perspective, simply produce another kind of music. Karnatak music provides a set of parameters within which limitless permutations can be accomplished. It would be a contradiction in terms for a Karnatak musicians to strive for radical novelty comparable with that of a Schoenberg or a Cage, for Karnatak music would no longer, in such a case, be Karnatak music; it could be an art music, an intellectual music, a kind of Indian music, but it would lose its identity as Karnatak music. One of the goals of this course is to understand what makes Karnatak music what it is, and how, within those constraints, those involved in this music channel their creativity and recreate the music anew through each generation.

South India alone is roughly 3/5ths the size of Western Europe; like European music, Karnatak music is actively being performed and taught beyond its immediate geographical borders in many parts of the world. One of the world centers for Karnatak music, for example, is Cleveland, Ohio, where the annual Tyagaraja Aradhana (in honor of the singer/saint Tyagaraja) takes place over

12 days nearly continuously. Thousands of listeners and performers assemble from all over the US and Indian musicians jockey for the chance to be included each year.

While one goal of this course is to train your ears and mind to discern the musicality of the Karnatak musical tradition, another is to learn to reflect critically on the relationship between theories of Karnatak music and its actual performance. “Theory” in Karnatak music is not simply given, it is created and recreated, strategically weaving bits together from early treatises and influential performers in the modern period. Theory takes on a special role in the colonial period and especially during the years leading up to independence, at which time the notion of a rule-governed, classical music system gained currency as a possible symbol of the Indian nation.

To gain access to music as “performance,” we will not only engage ourselves in a great deal of analytical listening, we will also play and sing together. Please fear not: your success in the class will not be measured by your talent as a performer. Performance will ground and inform your writing and discussions and, I hope, give you the pleasure it gives me.

The semester is organized in 2 halves. Before Spring Break we focus on recognizing and executing different components of a performance; after break, we focus on topics that cut across musical, social, historical, and textual domains. The class will involve discussing readings, exploring recorded musical examples associated with the readings, singing, and, depending on class size, playing the vina.

For the first weekly meeting (meeting “A” on the schedule below), for two hours, we focus mainly on listening and discussions of readings. For the second weekly meeting (“B”), for a single hour, we sing or play, building on skills from previous weeks and at times illuminating musical details from readings in meeting A.

Weekly expectations: read, listen and be prepared for discussion; do writing, if assigned; practice carefully for at least 30 minutes, prepare for listening quizzes.

Your final paper should be 25 pages long. Your choice of topic is broad. Some may wish to conduct fieldwork in the local south Indian community. Others might choose to analyze music on recordings or trace the treatment of a musical concept in academic or popular Indian sources. Pick a topic early and write a proposal by Week Three.

Grading:

Attendance and participation: 30%

Response papers (almost weekly): 20%

3 Quizzes: 15%

Final paper: 35%

Useful Texts (purchase not required):

Viswanathan, T. and Matthew Harp Allen. 2004. *Music in South India: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press. (abbreviated: MSI)

Nelson, David. 2008. *Solkattu Manual: An Introduction to the Rhythmic Language of South Indian Music*. Wesleyan University Press (distributed by University Press of New England).

Other Readings and listening: Available on course website or on reserve in Music Library

Reference Materials (On reserve or online):

[Ramanathan, Hema and N. Ramanathan. 1999. Etymological and Technical Definitions of Musical Terms. *Sangeet Natak* \(133-134\): 25-32](#)

Sambamoorthy, P. 1952. *A dictionary of South Indian music and musicians*. Madras, Indian Pub. House. 3 vols; and vol. 4 (2007)

Sambamoorthy, P. 1949-63. *South Indian music*. 6 volumes.

Subba, Rao B. 1956-. *Bharatiya Sangeet: Raga Nidhi; Encyclopedia of Indian Ragas, a Comparative Study of Hindustani and Karnatak Ragas*. Poona: V. Patwardhan, Chairman, Vishnu Digambar Smarak Samiti.

READ THESE TWO BY WEEK 4

[Reck, David. 2000. Musical Instruments: Southern Area. In *South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent. The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, vol 5*, 350-69. Selections: 350-59](#)

Catlin, Amy. 2000. Karnatak Vocal and Instrumental Music. In *South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent. The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, vol 5*, 209-235. (note also accompanying recordings). [Selections: 209-212; 220-29; 230 \(last par\)-35](#)

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Introduction: Sounds and Contexts

B: Being an active listener

Week 2: Representations

A:

[Bor, Joep. 1988. The Rise of Ethnomusicology: Sources on Indian Music c.1780-c.1890. *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 20: 51-73.](#)

Assignment:

Writing: ~400 words discussing approaches to Karnatak music in at least 3 of the following publications/journals *Sruti* magazine (Loeb Music: ML5 .S726); *Journal of the Music Academy of Madras* (Loeb Music: Mus 13.76); *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society* (Loeb Music Mus 30.237); Personal copies on reserve of: *Kalakshetra Quarterly*; *Bansuri*. The Hindu (newspaper): see, e.g. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/mp/mpcl04.htm> or concert reviews, e.g.: <http://www.hindu.com/fr/2006/01/13/stories/2006011302590800.htm>. Those familiar with these sources already might wish to consult and comment on the treatment of Indian music in American and European ethnomusicological journals, such as *Asian Music*, *Ethnomusicology*, and *Yearbook for Traditional Music*.

[Listening examples from class, week 1](#)

B:

[MSI: Chapter 1, pp. 1-33](#). Do all listening associated with this reading ([click here for links](#))

Week 3: Units of Study

A: Cultural Performance and Tradition

[Singer, Milton. 1958. The Great Tradition in a Metropolitan Center: Madras. *Journal of American Folklore* 71 \(281, Traditional India: Structure and Change\): 347-388.](#)
[L'Armand, Kathleen and Adrian. 1983. One Hundred Years of Music in Madras: A Case Study in Secondary Urbanization. *Ethnomusicology* 27\(3\): 411-438.](#)

B: Raga

[MSI: Ch. 2, section on raga only, pp. 42-55](#), and all associated listening

Week 4: Raga

A:

(Complete Reck and Catlin background readings if you have not done so)
[Pesch, Ludwig. 1999. The Illustrated Companion to South Indian Classical Music chapters 11-13, pp. 87-127.](#)
[Viswanathan, T. and Jody Cormack. 1998. Melodic Improvisation in Karntak Music: The Manifestations of Rga. In *In The Course of Performance*, 219-33, ed. B. Nettl and M. Russell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.](#)

B: Listening: [Ranganayaki Rajagopalan's performance of kiravani raga](#)

Week 5: Raga and Tala

A: Raga and modal theory

[John Clough; Jack Douthett; N. Ramanathan; Lewis Rowell. 1993. Early Indian Heptatonic Scales and Recent Diatonic Theory. *Music Theory Spectrum* 15\(1\): 36-58.](#)
[Rowell, Lewis. 2000. Scale and Mode in the Music of the Early Tamils of South India. *Music Theory Spectrum* 22\(2\): 135-156.](#)

B: Tala

[MSI: Ch. 2, section on tala, 34-41](#); all associated listening
[Ranganayaki Rajagopalans version of kaligiyunte](#)

Week 6: Rhythm, Time and Concert Structure

A: Tala and time

[Nelson, David. 2000. Karnatak Tala. In South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent. The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, vol 5, 138-161.](#)

[Rowell, Lewis. 1992. Time. In Music and Musical Thought in Early India, 180-224.](#)

B: Concert structure

Ranganayaki Rajagopalan: Continuity (forthcoming) Compact Disc and [Notes](#) by Richard Wolf
[MSI: chapter 3: 56-69](#); all associated listening.

Week 7: Listening intensive

This week we spend both sessions analyzing a concert recording using the listening tools we have developed. If possible, we will involve a visiting performer or attend a concert at about this time.

Week 8: Treatises

A

[Rowell, Lewis. 2000. Theoretical Treatises, In South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent. The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, vol 5, 17-41](#)

[Rowell, Lewis. 1987. The Songs of Medieval India: The Prabandhas as Described in Matanga's Brhadhesi. Music Theory Spectrum 9: 136-172.](#)

B

3/22-3/30 Spring Break

Week 9: Analyzing and Arguing about Raga

A:

[Allen, Matthew. 2007. Systematize, Standardize, Classicize, Nationalize: The Scientific Work of the Experts Committee of the Music Academy of Madras, 1930-1952.](#)

[Viswanathan, T. 1977. The Analysis of Raga Alapana in South Indian Music. Asian Music 9\(1\): 13-71. \(recorded examples\)](#)

[Experts committee discussions of ragas](#)

B:

Listening to Begada and other ragas subject to debate among South Indian musicologists

Week 10: Style and Affect: Crossing Musical Lines

A:

Weidman, Amanda. 2006. *Singing the classical, voicing the modern: The postcolonial politics of music in south India*. Introduction and Chapters 1-3

[Wolf, Richard. 1991. *Style and Tradition in Karaikkudi Vina Playing*. *Asian Theatre Journal* 8\(2\): 118-137.](#)

And if you have time. . .

[Geekie, Gordon. 1980. *The Study of Individual Carnatic Musicians*. *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 12: 84-89.](#)

[Poursine, Kay. 1991. *Hasta as Discourse on Music: T. Balasaraswati and Her Art*. *Dance Research Journal* 23\(2\): 17-23.](#)

Further resources:

[Wolf, Richard. 1989. *Innovation, Interpretation and the Maintenance of Tradition in the Karaikkudi Style of Vina Playing*. M.M. Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.](#)

[South Indian Vina Tradition And Individual Style. \(Volumes I and II\) \(Musician's Family, History, Voice And Instruments, Analysis, Inventive Notation, India\) by Subramanian, Karaikudi S., Ph.D., Wesleyan University, 1986.](#)

B:

Week 11: Melody and Text

A:

Weidman, Amanda. 2006. Singing the classical, voicing the modern: The postcolonial politics of music in south India. Chapters 4-6

[Catlin, Amy. 1985. *Pallavi and Kriti of Karnatak Music: Evolutionary processes and Survival Strategies*. National Centre for the Performing Arts \(NCPA\), Bombay, *Quarterly Journal* XIV\(1\): 26-44](#)

And if you have time. . .

[Kuckertz, Josef. 1999. *On Textual Understanding in the Songs of Thygarja*. In *Essays on Indian Music*, 50-61, ed. S. Thielemann. Mumbai and Baroda: Indian Musicological Society.](#)

[Subramanian, Karaikudi S. 1993. *Interrelationships Among Text, Tune, and Tone in Karnatak Music*. In *Text, Tone and Tune: Parameters of Music in Multicultural Perspective*, 159-175, ed. B. Wade. New Delhi: AIIS ARCE and Oxford and IBH Publishing Co.](#)

Week 12 Theorizing

A:

Subramanian, Lakshmi. 2006. *From the Tanjore court to the Madras Music Academy: A social history of music in south India*. Chapters 1-3

[Wolf, Richard. *Forthcoming. Of Varnams and Vocables: The Special Status of Some Musical Beginnings*](#)

And if you have time . . .

[Morris, Robert. 2001. Variation and Process in South Indian Music: Some Kritis and Their Sangatis. Music Theory Spectrum 23\(1\): 74-89.](#)

Week 13 The Construction of the Classical

A:

Subramanian, Lakshmi. 2006. *From the Tanjore court to the Madras Music Academy: A social history of music in south India*. Chapters 4-6

Further reference:

[Peterson, Indira. 1998. The Evolution of the Kuravanci Dance Drama in Tamil Nadu: Negotiating the Folk and the Classical in the Bharata Natyam Canon. South Asia Research 18\(1\): 39-72.](#)

Papers due on the last day of class