

RagaJazz Music

Ragas & Rhythms, Part One

‘Three Skills you can learn to integrate Indian ragas and rhythms into your own music.’

Three Key Skills:

One: Deep Listening

It's extremely important if you want to absorb these sounds, aesthetic feeling & concepts of Indian music that you listen to traditional *raga* music as much as possible! As you cultivate your ear to the sound of the *tanpura* you will begin to recognize the intervals and identify & name the *sargam* notes (*Indian sofeegio*). This will help you understand the raga movements. In the next video we will apply this same practice of deep listening to the *tala* (rhythm cycle) as they develop the performance.

Two: Vocalization

Singing and reciting the *sargams* (notes) and later rhythmic *bols* (words representing drum strokes), will be an integral part of our learning and absorption process. We vocalize in two ways with the notes and with the rhythms. For now, focus on vocalizing the three scales with their note names on the next page and you will be on your way to building the foundation of skills needed to learn and absorb Indian music from its melodic base.

Three: Integration

The first thing we need to integrate is the sargams with the sound of the tanpura. Play a drone and sing the scales in any key you're comfortable singing in. Then try playing them on your instrument while singing or if you're a wind player think of the note names as you play.

Always listen to the tanpura as you sing or play. It's very important to integrate your ear listening to the sound (or the feeling of each interval) of each note in the context of the tanpura. In other words you Sing Ga and you hear the feeling of the pure *5:4 Major Third in its relationship to the tanpura. This will bring you into focus with the melodic content of the *raga*. Practicing with the rhythmic elements will shape the *tala* (rhythmic cycle).

*5:4 (or 5/4) refers to the ratio which, reflects the interval of a pure third in the harmonic series. The 5 is Ga (3rd) and the 4 is the Sa (fundamental). The fifth harmonic is the major 3rd so we represent it mathematically as 5, the root or fundamental is represented by 1 but since its location is 2 octaves (+a 3rd) below we need to double the speed of the frequency twice ($1 \times 2 = 2$ & $2 \times 2 = 4$) to raise the note to be within one octave

Listening

Check out the listening list suggestions on the RagaJazzMusic Facebook Page or email for a list of suggested listening links. I will be adding listening tips and learning questions on the page weekly as we add more material and deepen our understanding of the raga and tala systems.

When you listen to a new piece of Indian music, 1st find the Sa and make the recognition of the intervals and scale as an exercise. Later we're going to develop these deep listening muscles to recognize much more subtle movements and the defining elements in the ragas.

SARGAM (Indian Solfeggio) & Three Thaats (parent scales)

Sing in whatever key is comfortable for you...

Bilawal Thaat (major)

Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Śa	Śa Ni Dha Pa Ma Ga Re Sa
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (1)	(1) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Kalyan Thaat (lydian)

Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Śa	Śa Ni Dha Pa Ma Ga Re Sa
1 2 3 #4 5 6 7 (1)	(1) 7 6 5 #4 3 2 1

Bhairavi Thaat (phrygian)

Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Śa	Śa Ni Dha Pa Ma Ga Re Sa
1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 (1)	(1) b7 b6 5 4 b3 b2 1

Additional Terms

Arohi ~ Ascending scale

Avarohi ~ descending scale

Alaap ~ opening meditative movement

Gat ~ instrumental composition set to tala (rhythm cycle) such as teental (16), ektal (12), jhaptal (10), rupak (7) etc.