Topic Proposal

A Method for Performing Hindustani Music on the Clarinet

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Topic Statement

The purpose of my study is to develop a method for performing Hindustani music on the clarinet, aimed at professional Western performers. Materials for the method will be drawn from transcriptions of clarinetist Master Ebrahim and flutist Hariprasad Chaurasia, as well as my own observations and experiences learning Hindustani music. Before proceeding to the heart of the study, I will give some background on the historical and social position of Indian wind instruments, and the adoption of the clarinet.

Because the clarinet is a versatile instrument, it has been adopted by many ethnic musical traditions around the world, including those of India. I became interested in the use of the clarinet in Indian classical music after hearing the Carnatic clarinetist A.K.C. Natarajan. Indian classical music is divided into two main traditions: Hindustani music in the north, and Carnatic music in the south. Carnatic music is less rigid than Hindustani music and has embraced Western instruments, like the clarinet and violin. I discovered that the clarinet is also used in Hindustani music, albeit by only a few musicians today, and that it was most popular in the 1950s. The most renowned Hindustani clarinetist was Master Ebrahim (1915-1980), who broadcast Hindustani music on the radio.

Need for Study

Despite the surge in interest in Hindustani music in the 1960s, there has been little research on wind instruments. Wind instruments were neglected for a long time in India, due to their immersion in folk music and their association with low castes. Also, there has been little historical information about them until recently. There is even less information

on the history of the clarinet in India. Moreover, I have found no written material on Master Ebrahim.

The two main aspects of Indian music theory are raga and taal. Raga can be loosely defined as an ascending and descending pattern of notes with a defining mood. Taal refers to the variety of rhythmic cycles, and underlies all types of folk and classical music. Since Indian music is an oral tradition, most theoretical knowledge about ragas is obtained from a guru (teacher). A variety of books aimed at Westerners have been published explaining general aspects of raga and taal, but these are meant for string players and percussionists. Since few people play Hindustani music on the clarinet, there has been nothing written about the challenges of raga development on the instrument. Many books include rough transcriptions of ragas, but these do not show use of microtones, and rarely show the complexity of rhythm. Hindustani musicians rarely write music down, but an accurate transcription is helpful to Western performers attempting to understand this music.

Given the above, I propose to transcribe a performance of Master Ebrahim playing raga *Bhimpalasi*. He did not make any recordings of Hindustani music, but I was fortunate enough to obtain a tape of one of his broadcasts, found by Ralph D'Mello in the All India Radio archives. D'Mello could find only this one tape in the archives. Ebrahim is of particular interest because he was, and is to this day, the only clarinetist in India who played on a Boehm system clarinet, such as Western clarinetists use.[*] Despite this, he still managed to effectively portray the nuances of Indian music. Indian musicians have a long tradition of taking the techniques of singers and other instrumentalists, and imitating it on

[*] All other Indian clarinetists, both Hindustani and Carnatic, use the thirteen- key Albert system clarinet.

their own instrument. This is especially the case with instruments that have no traditional repertoire, such as the clarinet. I believe that the technique of flutist Chaurasia is well suited to transferal to the clarinet.

Engaging the Literature

There has been much written on the general history of Hindustani music, and its surrounding social structures. The books by Holroyde and Massey give a comprehensive account of Indian music, from ancient times to the present, detailing important developments in the evolution of the concept of raga. They provide dates and facts about the Muslim invasions of India, and the blending between Indian and Islamic music that produced Hindustani music. Hindustani music was the music of the aristocracy; the rest of India was immersed in folk music, in which wind instruments participated. The two main wind instruments are the bansuri (a bamboo flute), and the shehnai (a keyless double-reed instrument). Some variety of both of these instruments is found in almost all Indian folk music. Folk music is accorded much less prestige than classical music, and is therefore scantily documented. The most comprehensive account of Indian folk music is the set of volumes by Sharma. Sharma gives some history of folk music, and its relation to classical music, which is entirely neglected in other accounts of Indian music history. The volumes on the folk music of Gujarat and Rajasthan are particularly useful, since these regions have a long tradition of folk wind playing.

The beginning of the twentieth century marked a number of changes in Hindustani music. Wind instruments and other folk instruments began to be used in Hindustani music, and the whole social structure of music changed as India moved from

British rule to independence, and musicians lost royal patronage.[1] Neuman has the most in-depth account of the rise and fall of the gharana system (schools of musical style), while Meer details musical changes in the twentieth century. The low social position of wind instruments in India has a long history, and has been documented by Jairazbhoy, Booth, Bullard, and Ganguly. Booth states that both Hindu and Muslim musicians tend to be of low social position, and that this stems from the idea of ritual pollution. Instrumentalists often handle instruments with animal skins, such as drums, and contact with this is considered polluting. Likewise, bodily fluids are also polluting, so wind players are polluted from contact with saliva.[2] Percussionists and wind players are more polluted than string players, and therefore are lower in the musical hierarchy. Subsequently, winds were not considered suitable for Hindustani music, and were relegated to folk music for most of their history.

Little has been written about the emergence of the bansuri as a classical instrument, except the article by Rao and the dissertation by Bullard. Bullard's work, though concerning the flute tradition of south India, nevertheless gives an excellent account of the history of flutes in India. The man who invented the bansuri used in Hindustani music today and who popularized it as a classical instrument, Pannalal Ghosh, is likewise meagerly documented, except by Moudgalya and David Philipson. The history of the shehnai has been more fully explored, thanks to the interest of ethnomusicologists Jairazbhoy and Flora. Jairazbhoy's series of articles on the families of

[1] Daniel M. Neuman, The Life of Music in North India: the Organization of an Artistic Tradition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), 168.
[2]Gregory D. Booth, *Brass Baja: Stories from the World of Indian Wedding Bands* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42.

Indian oboes detail their Persian origins, and assimilation into Indian music. Flora examines the various styles of shehnai playing, from folk music to Hindustani music, through looking at shehnai families. The biographies of Bismillah Khan by Poddar and Ganguly give accounts of the low social position of shehnai players, and show how Bismillah Khan raised the status of the shehnai to that of a Hindustani concert instrument.[3]

The history of the bansuri and the shehnai, and their recent elevation to classical instruments, is significant to the clarinet, since the clarinet was adopted by Indian wind players. The clarinet came to India with the British invasions, and according to Woodfield's work on British musicians in India, thirteen key clarinets first arrived in India around 1770.[4] Both Booth and Herbert discuss the clarinet and Indian wind bands, and Booth details the progression of the clarinet from its use in military bands to its adoption by shehnai families. Shehnai players took up the clarinet, liked for its large range, and began using it in their traditional folk music. For some time, the clarinet was mostly used in wind bands (which played both British and Indian popular music) and in smaller folk ensembles as a substitute shehnai.[5] Booth's book *Brass Baja* is the most in-depth study of the world of Indian brass bands. The clarinet took on all the prejudices directed against wind players, and was additionally frowned upon for being a Western

[3] Rita Ganguly, *Bismillah Khan and Benaras: The Seat of Shehnai* (New Delhi: Siddhi Books, 1994), 32.
[4] Ian Woodfield, Music of the Raj: A Social and Economic History of Music in Late Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Indian Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.
[5] Gregory D. Booth, "Brass Bands: Tradition, Change and the Mass Media in Indian Wedding Music," *Ethnomusicology* 34 (Summer 1990): 254.

instrument.[6] Nevertheless, when the status of wind instruments changed in the twentieth century, the clarinet was likewise positively affected. In the mid-twentieth century it slowly began to be used in classical music, most notably by Master Ebrahim and Alamghir Khan. After their deaths, the use of the clarinet declined somewhat, though clarinetists are mentioned in the newspapers, as in Mavinkurve's interview with clarinetist Solapurkar.[7]

From a performance standpoint, I have found few books on Hindustani theory that are helpful. This is partly because Hindustani music is quite abstract, and there is no prescribed pedagogy for learning. Knowledge of Hindustani music was designed to be secretive, in order to keep music within certain castes, as Neuman discusses. Recently there have been some important books though. Clayton's book on taal is the most definitive work on Hindustani rhythm. Bagchee's *Nad* is a comprehensive guide on musical forms, and raga development. Jairazbhoy's book on Hindustani music gives a very detailed account of the theoretical relationships between ragas. Several large works also give a survey of Hindustani ragas, such as the volumes by Kaufmann, Danielou, and Bor. The Kaufmann and Danielou give some history and explanation of theory, and then give a brief outline of all the major ragas. They include the basic ascending and descending pattern, defining mood, and give short transcriptions in Western notation as examples. The Bor is particularly helpful because it also includes CDs of the transcribed

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[6] Gregory D. Booth,"Socio-Musical Mobility among South Asian Clarinet Players," *Ethnomusicology* 41 (Autumn 1997): 490.
[7] Aishwarya Mavinkurve. "In Your Shoes: Bandmaster Bandopant Solapurkar," *Indian Express*, April 28, 1998.

performances. In general these works are useful as references, but cannot go into a full description of each raga.

All of these books use Western notation, despite the fact that they discuss the ragas using Indian terms, and that most Indian musicians cannot read Western notation and do not conceptualize their music that way. There is only one book that uses Indian notation, Ruckert's book from the Ali Akbar College of Music. As a student of a disciple of Ali Akbar Khan's, this is the notation I have learned. I also think that it in many ways, the Indian notation makes more sense for this music, as Ruckert says, "Certain of the typical ornaments and rhythms of Indian classical music appear unnecessarily more complex when written in Western notation…[and] Western notation can imply a whole tradition of tonal and rhythmic information, much of which is not useful for interpreting Indian music."[8] Indian notation usually gives just the skeleton of the music, and is very helpful for understanding the development of the raga. Musicians add their own ornaments, to suit their instrument and ability. For my purposes, though, I think that showing shrutis (microtones) and exact ornaments of a given performance are helpful, and this can most easily be done in Western notation. For my transcriptions of Chaurasia and Ebrahim, then, I think it will be more illuminating to write them in both Western and Indian notation.

Method

I anticipate using historical and descriptive methodologies for the historical section of the study. For the background of the clarinet in the past fifty years, I plan to

[8] George Ruckert, *Introduction to the Classical Music of North India* (St. Louis: East Bay Books, 1991), 15.

interview Bombay clarinetist Ralph D'Mello, who has observed the use of the clarinet in popular and classical music. As a contemporary of Master Ebrahim, D'Mello can give first-hand accounts of Ebrahim's career. I also plan on using descriptive methodology when discussing the theory of Hindustani music, as well as my own experiences and observations during my study of Hindustani music with sitarist Daisy Paradis. I will also use my experiences in studying recordings of Master Ebrahim, and attempting to recreate his sound and style.

In attempting to get as accurate a transcription (Western notation) as possible, I will model my transcriptions on several authors: Danielou gives characteristic ornaments in Indian music, and Laszlo Lajtha precisely notates complicated rhythms typical of improvised music in his work on Hungarian folk music. For treatment of microtones, I will use the notation in Phillip Rehfeldt's *New Directions for Clarinet*. The Indian notation will be the same as that used in the Ali Akbar College of Music.

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