Vīṇā player Ranganayaki Rajagopalan (b. 1932) is a much-honored master of a South Indian classical (Karnatak/Carnatic) instrumental style named after the town of Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu, South India. She apprenticed from early childhood with Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer, a prominent member of a long lineage of court musicians. For this 2-disc set, she is brilliantly accompanied by the eminent mṛidangaṃ (double-headed barrel drum) player Srimushnam Raja Rao. This album includes a complete concert cycle of rāgam and tānam expositions and compositions by much-beloved composers Tyāgarāja, Muthuswamy Dikshitar, and others. The subtleties and complexities are illuminated by extensive explanatory notes by Richard K. Wolf.

2 discs, 2 hours 17 minutes, 24 pages of notes.

This album is a previously-unpublished volume of the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music which was transferred to Smithsonian to keep the series publicly available.
### Disc 1

1. **Rāga: Gauḷa / ālāpana** 0:56
2. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / pallavi  1:15
3. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / anupallavi  0:55
4. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / madhyamakāla sāhitya (1)  0:29
5. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / colkaṭṭu svara  1:39
6. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / caraṇam  1:24
7. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / svara kalpana  1:10
8. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / svara kalpana, second speed  3:10
9. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / madhyamakāla sāhitya (2)  0:27
10. Kriti: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati” / colkaṭṭu svara, third speed  0:51
11. **Rāga: Valaji / ālāpana**  5:16
15. Kriti: “Jālandhara” / svara kalpana  5:52
16. **Rāga: Pūrvikalyāṇi / ālāpana** 8:07
17. Kriti: “Minākṣi Me Mudam” / pallavi  1:46
18. Kriti: “Minākṣi Me Mudam” / anupallavi  1:41
19. Kriti: “Minākṣi Me Mudam” / madhyamakāla sāhitya (1)  1:16
20. Kriti: “Minākṣi Me Mudam” / caraṇam  2:02
21. Kriti: “Minākṣi Me Mudam” / madhyamakāla sāhitya (2)  1:56
23. Kriti: “Minākṣi Me Mudam” / svara kalpana  6:44
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Disc 1

24. Rāga: Bēgaḍa / ālāpana  4:35

Disc 2

1. Rāga: Hamsavinōdhini / ālāpana  0:35
2. Kriti: “Caranam Bhava” / pallavi  1:15

6. Rāga: Kharaharapriya / ālāpana  7:49
7. Rāga: Kharaharapriya / rāgamālika tānam  4:59
8. Rāga: Nāṭā / tānam  3:04
9. Rāga: Gaula / tānam  2:14
10. Rāga: Ārabhi / tānam  2:14
11. Rāga: Varāli / tānam  1:53
12. Rāga: Śrī / tānam  3:14
13. Rāga: Kharaharapriya / tānam  1:05
18. Kriti: “Čakkanirāja” / svara kalpana  5:08

21. Mangalām: “Pavamāna”  1:03
Ranganayaki Rajagopalan: Continuity in the Karaikudi Vīṇā Style

Richard Kent Wolf

Śrīmatī (Smt.) Ranganayaki Rajagopalan, recipient of the Government of India’s prestigious Sangeet Natak Award, is one of India’s finest exponents of Karnatak, or South Indian classical, music. She illumines this recording with an exemplary performance in the Karaikudi style of vīṇā playing. In addition to showcasing Smt. Ranganayaki’s outstanding musicality, these recordings aim to present a small body of substantial rāgas and compositions, and to render this body of music accessible to those not already familiar with the technical specifics of Indian music. To preserve a live concert atmosphere—in character, in balance, and in repertoire—Smt. Ranganayaki and the producers of this studio recording have chosen to limit editing to an absolute minimum.

Ranganayaki Rajagopalan

Smt. Ranganayaki was born in 1932, daughter of an employee of the Chettinad Palace in Madras. A mischievous child, she was sent off to live with a childless uncle in the south Indian town of Karaikudi—this is not the cruel banishment it may appear: sharing offspring with siblings is commonplace in India. Fortuitous it was, for her uncle lived next door to the renowned vīṇā exponent Sambasiva Iyer. Although Iyer was noted for his brusque and strict personality, he came to delight in toddler Ranganayaki, who demonstrated the ability to reproduce the pitches of his singing when she was only two years old. (For more information on Ranganayaki Rajagopalan, see Wolf 1991).

Sambasiva Iyer (1888–1958) and his older brother Subbarama Iyer (1875–1936), the “Karaikudi brothers,” were illustrious vīṇā players of the period, the seventh generation in a lineage of Tamil vīṇā players patronized by the rulers (Rājās) of Sivaganga and Pudukottai. Sambasiva Iyer produced no surviving offspring and, in part due to his exacting standards, few disciples. Smt. Ranganayaki, his seniormost disciple, and Iyer’s grand niece, Smt. Rajeswari Padmanabhan (1939–2008), are the two performers who benefited from the most significant period of training with him.

Sambasiva Iyer maintained a “no nonsense” approach to music, typical of the conservative musicians of his time. Impatient with musical discussions, he believed the practical execution of music contained its own rules and standards. He emphasized preliminary exercises, which were uniquely refined in the Karaikudi school: elaborate ornaments and additional rhythmic components served as models for technique and improvisation at an advanced level. Sambasiva Iyer is credited with the composition of a number of melodic/rhythmic interludes, called cīṭṭasvara, and with several innovations on the instrument, both of which are firmly embedded in the practice of music in contemporary South India. Among the changes in the instrument were the introduction of a sound hole underneath the main playing strings and the use of wound strings for the bass, or madhyama sthāyi. It is said that he used gold and silver to wind the strings.
Both these innovations supported the unique style which has come to be known as the “Karaikudi style.” Because the brothers performed in an age in which microphones were not yet common, they needed to project the sound of their instruments using natural acoustic means. Sambasiva Iyer, in particular, appears to have refined the performance of gamakas (integral ornaments) on the vīnā, using a combination of on-the-fret plucks, hammer-ons, pull-offs, and string deflections, such that every detail was balanced and clearly audible. Such clarity and balance he then extended to every level of performance, prayōga (musical phrases), sangati (successive elaborations of a line of text), composition, and improvisation. The use of wound strings added volume and clarity to the lower range, and the hole in the vīnā provided minor amplification overall.

More than any other contemporary vīnā player, Smt. Ranganayaki is said to play in a manner that recalls the style of her illustrious guru. After Iyer’s death in 1958, Smt. Ranganayaki continued to grow as an artist by learning new compositions from other musicians, listening to concerts and recordings, and through a combination of these means and the use of published notations. The documentation for each piece below includes an item entitled “source” which provides information as to how a particular piece was transmitted to Smt. Ranganayaki. In general, the compositions transmitted to her directly by Sambasiva Iyer are preserved both in their structure of ornaments and sequential variations; she has gradually molded and worked with pieces learned from other sources to conform to her style.

**Srimushnam V. Raja Rao**

Sri Raja Rao is one of India’s finest performers on the double-headed barrel drum, mṛidangam. Born in 1955, the fourth in a lineage of classical drummers, Sri Raja Rao began performing at the age of seven. Since then, he has performed with India’s top Karnataka musicians, earned numerous awards, and toured extensively around the world.

Fluency in Karnataka music requires knowledge of the system as a whole, not just of one instrument or technique. Raja Rao is also an accomplished vocalist and kanjīra (small frame drum) player. An effective teacher, Raja Rao is dedicated to the techniques of the past: in an age when many teachers offer instruction in music schools and in hour-long lessons once or more per week, Raja Rao teaches only a few students at a time, inviting them to live in his house in the traditional method of gurukulavāsa. These students have assisted in the day-to-day running of the household.

Performing with a vīnā player is a challenge for mṛidangam players; they must tease out the rhythmic subtleties of the music without overpowering the instrument. Sri Raja Rao, who has been performing with Smt. Ranganayaki from a young age, is a master vīnā accompanist.
The Music: Karnatak Music

The classical or “Karnatak” music of South India shares its two basic approaches to musical organization with Hindustani music of North India: a system of melodic types called rāga, and a system of metrical frameworks for articulating rhythm called tāla. (For a good introduction to Karnatak music, see Reck 2009 and Viswanathan and Allen 2004. For a glossary of frequently used musical terms, see the end of this essay.) Rāgas are made up of individual scale degrees, called svaras, grouped into phrases (prayōga) characteristic of the rāga. Svaras are positions, or svarasthānas, in a scale combined with contextually delimited shakes, bends and slides between notes; although usually called “ornaments” in English, these musical gestures, or gamakas, are more than mere embellishments of a fundamental melody: they constitute the very fabric of Indian music. There are seven svaras, whose names are abbreviated as sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni. Other than sa, the drone tonic for virtually all rāgas, and pa, the fifth, which are fixed, each svara can be located at one of several possible svarasthānas. Taking sa as “C” (in this recording, Smt. Ranganayaki tunes her vīṇā to E♭), the range of svarasthānas for the remaining svaras are shown in Figure 1. Some of these values are rather theoretical in rāgas that require extensive gamakas.

A South Indian tāla is a distinct pattern of structural counts. In a concert one may observe experienced listeners articulate the tāla by gently clapping or waving one hand, and counting on the fingers. Singers, like listeners, show the tāla by rhythmic motions of the hand, while vīṇā players do so by using the small finger of the right hand to stroke a set of three side strings, called tāḷam tanti. Melodies and drum rhythms may articulate the tāla explicitly or create rhythmic tension by cutting across the structure of the tāla, later joining on an important count, usually the first attack point of the composition, i.e. the beginning of the first line of text. In South Indian music the attack point of the composition, called the eḍuppu (from the Tamil verb eṭu- “take up”), is not always the same as the first count of the tāla, which is called the samam. The name for one cycle of the tāla is āvartana, literally “turning around” or “revolving.”

In the technical descriptions below, the placement of svaras within the framework of the tāla is represented by the svara abbreviations, sa, ri, ga, etc., and a series of dots, representing subdivisions of the count. Thus, eight-count ādi tāla would be represented as //1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . / 5 . . . 6 . . . / 7 . . . 8 . . . //, with each number representing a count, each underscore representing a hand-clap, and in this case, each dot representing a subdivision (the number of subdivisions depends on the tempo of the piece). Ādi tāla is shown with the hand by a clap and three finger counts (counts 1 2 3 4) and two sets of one clap and one “wave” (counts 5 - 6 and 7 - 8). For longer tālas such as ādi when rendered in a slow tempo, one line of text will correspond with one cycle (āvartana) of the tāla. For shorter tālas such as miśra cāpu (1 2 3 4 5 6 7), a line of text may span several āvartanas.

The complex and demanding systems of rāga and tāla are important not only for their regulatory
roles, but also for their symbolic roles in modeling the orderliness of the cosmos. In one famous story, the misrendering of rāgas on earth led to the maiming and disfigurement of the celestial musicians, the gandharvas. In a conservative South Indian household, such as that in which Ranganayaki Rajagopalan studied, a musical error is regarded as something of a moral flaw; growing up in an age of such conservatism, a student could be beaten for minor technical errors in playing.

Karnatak music repertoire is vocal; unlike the instrumental tradition of Hindustani music in North India, there are no compositions in Karnatak music that are specifically intended for melodic instruments, although each instrument lends a unique idiomatic style to the rendering of a rāga. Karnatak compositions are songs; spirituality pervades the lyrics of these songs, most of which propitiate Hindu gods. Musical literacy entails understanding the lyrics as well as the placement and groupings of syllables; the musical quality of text is so important that connoisseurs criticize instrumentalists who do not properly articulate the phrases of the text using the techniques available on their instruments, plucking at all consonant attacks. Most Karnatak musical lyrics are in Telugu and Sanskrit, and the literal understanding of their meaning varies among listeners according to their regional vernaculars—Tamil speakers will have only a general understanding of Telugu texts and vice versa.

The extra-musical associations of Karnatak music are not exclusively religious; a few rāgas may be connected with particular times of the day, others with distinctive moods, and even supernatural powers. Since the prevailing mood of a rāga should match its performance context, performers avoid performing a sad rāga such as mukhāri during a wedding. Students learn customary musical behavior through sometimes humorous anecdotes, “don’t perform rāga X before breakfast, or you may not be able to obtain food for the entire day.” They also learn that the correct performance of a rāga may create a potential for extra-musical power, such as the bringing of rain. Few people actually regard musical performance as crudely efficacious or magical; still the idea that rāgas point beyond themselves to the physical and spiritual worlds is firmly entrenched in South Indian musical culture.

The fact that Karnatak music boasts rich and imaginative cultural associations should not lead us to conclude that musical performances generate an aura of mysteriousness for Indian listeners; on the contrary, musical practice retains an everyday quality: audience members shuffle in and out of concerts; babies shriek, and air horns of trucks and buses penetrate the air. Traveling in South India, one may observe performances of Karnatak music in a variety of venues—peoples’ homes, Hindu temples, and modern concert halls. During music festivals, such as the December festival in Chennai (Madras), one may hear dozens of concerts every day; music performances are also common in connection with weddings, birthdays of famous composers, and Hindu holidays.

The Vīnā

The vīnā in Karnatak music, like the piano in Euro-American art music, is an icon of the classical musical system; it is also an embodiment of divinity, the goddess of music and learning, Sarasvati.

The instrument features twenty-four brass frets, laid in wax under four main playing strings. Three additional strings (tālam tanti) lie on a curve approximating a forty-five degree angle and
are stroked with the little finger of the right hand to mark out the tāla. The frets must be reset from time to time, and the wax, a mixture of beeswax and lamp-black, needs also to be refreshed. Artisans who perform this type of work and other minor repairs can be found in all major south Indian cities. The late C. D. Sambandam was the specialist entrusted with setting the frets of Ranganayaki Rajagopalan’s vīṇā. His small, crowded shop, located near the famous Kapaliswara temple in Mylapore, Chennai, is shown at left.

Each octave is subdivided into twelve, roughly equal intervals. The increased popularity of the Western pitch pipe has led to a gradual adoption of equal temperament in tuning some instruments. Ideally, intervals in relation to the tonic drone are more or less just; thus the fourth fret on the vīṇā should produce a third scale degree intoned slightly lower than a tempered major third. Whereas singers may derive some intervals from the overtone series of the drone-producing stringed instrument, the tambūrā, vīṇā players compromise between the intervals they can deflect from adjacent frets and those they produce by playing a note on a fret.

Instruments called vīṇā and cognates have found a place in Indian organological history since approximately 1000 B.C.E. The term vīṇā has generically referred to stringed instruments, harps, plucked lutes, and bowed lutes; now the term vīṇā refers to particular types of plucked lutes. The modern Sarasvati vīṇā, represented in this recording, evolved out of a combination of stick zithers and central Asian long-necked lutes, probably about three centuries ago. The body, neck, and head of this Tanjāvūr-style instrument are carved out of jackwood (in this case, a single piece) and decorated with color-inlaid deer antler. The secondary resonator, which rests on the performer’s left knee, is a natural gourd—although most players opt for the more robust materials of paper mache, metal, or fiberglass.

Key to Notation:

- \( x \) = release of svara "x" with a deflection of string, leading to a slight raise in pitch
- \( \downarrow x \) = approach to svara "x" from above
- \( a \rightarrow b \) = slide from svara "a" to "b"
- \( \sim \) = shallow oscillation on a single note
- \( \cdots \) = oscillation between two adjacent svaras accomplished through string deflection
- \( \cdots \cdots \) = deep oscillation between two svaras at least a minor third apart, accomplished through string deflection

South Indians do not ordinarily transcribe Karnatak music using Western staff notation; rather, they use their own notation, which is based on the svara names sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni. To illustrate this, in some of the following examples the svara name corresponding to a note or group of notes is placed above the staff. The “key” signature is merely a convenience here, meant to indicate roughly the position of each scale degree.
The Performance

Disc 1

Tracks 1–10

Genre: Kriti
Composer: Muthuswamy Dikshitar (1775–1835)
Rāga: Gaula
Tāla: Miśra Cāpu (seven counts, grouped 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 )
Title: “Śri Mahāgaṇapati”
Language: Sanskrit
Source: Kandadevi Narayana (a disciple of the famous vocalist, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar)

Rāga characteristics:
Ascent (ārōhaṇa): C D♭ F G B C (sa ri ma pa ni sa)
Descent (avarōhaṇa): C B G F D♭ E F D♭ C (sa ni pa ma ri ga ma ri sa)

Gaula ideally introduces this recording because it illuminates important aspects of the rāga concept. A rāga, more than a mere scale or collection of discrete pitches, is a system for structuring melodic composition and improvisation characterized in part by syntax. In this example there is a gap between D♭ and F in the ascent (i.e. ga [E] is absent) and the melody descends via a crooked path as seen above. The final descent from ma (F) to ri (D♭), often features a prolongation of the second degree and is an especially characteristic phrase of this rāga. According to South Indian classical music theory, the value of this second degree is special, spanning an interval of slightly less than a semitone above the tonic. In practice, this interval is somewhat variable and is articulated through an upward oscillation from the drone tonic.

Just as syntax is an important component of a rāga’s internal structure, so too is syntax important in macro performance structures, including that of the whole concert. Karnatak musicians often mark the commencement of a concert with a special type of piece, the varṇam, which is a technical warmup piece played in several tempos. Sometimes, as in this recording, they begin with a kriti, a type of piece that can be played at any point within a performance. In this example, a sense of “beginning” is conveyed through lyrics and choice of rāga. Here the lyrics (sāhitya) address the auspicious elephant-headed god, Ganapati (Ganesh), who is propitiated before any important undertaking and at the outset of every musical and dance performance.

Before rendering the composition (marked by the entrance of the drum, mridangam), Smt. Ranganayaki performs a rhythmically elastic form of improvisation called ālāpana (lit. “discourse, conversation,” track 1). The length of an ālāpana in a performance depends on a number of factors, including the length of the piece it precedes, the position of the piece within a recital, and what is known as the “scope” of a rāga, or its range of possibilities for variation. Gaula’s distinctive crooked descent makes it easily recognizable, but also places a limitation on the number of ways a performer can sequence its constitutive svaras.
The rhythmic framework (tāla) for the composition “Śrī Mahāganapati” is called miśra cāpu tāla and contains seven brisk counts. One should listen for the return of the instrumental rendition of the first line of text, “Śrī mahāganapatiravatumām,” which can be recognized by the svaras sa ri ma / pa (C D♭ F / G) corresponding to counts one, two, three, and four of the tāla respectively. At the fourth count Smt. Ranganayaki gently strikes the angled side strings, or tāḷam tanti, to indicate the tāla. In the notation below, the bar line corresponds with the first count of the tāla, dotted lines indicate the fourth and sixth counts of the tāla, and the asterisk on the fourth count indicates the articulation of the tāla on the vīṇā using the tāḷam tanti.

This composition, like most Karnatak compositions, contains three main sections, the pallavi (track 2), anupallavi (track 3), and caraṇam (track 6). Within each section is a series of repeated melodic lines (again, lines of text when sung) building in the manner of a theme and variations. Each full line of variation is called a sangati. These sangatis are part of the composition proper and are not normally improvised by the performer. At the end of each of these sections the first line of the pallavi recurs. Following this is a gap, during which the vīṇā provides an ālāpana-like filler and the mṛidangam player improvises a brief cadence which leads into the attack point (eduppu) of the section that follows.

Muthuswamy Dikshitar commonly inserted additional subsections into his kritis; this is one example. Following the anupallavi proper is the madhyamakāla sāhitya (“middle-speed text,” track 4), beginning with the words “komaḷatara.” As shown below, the distinctive features of this “middle speed” section are the density of syllables—almost every svara is articulated by one—and the regular subdivision of the count into two pulses, yielding a straightforward sequence of 14 pulses for each āvartana. The composer inserts his own nom de plume, “guru guha,” into this section.
Immediately following the madhyamakāla sāhitya is a less common subsection, called the colkaṭṭu svara (track 5). Colkaṭṭu (“word construction”) refers to the mnemonic syllables drummers and dancers use to vocalize rhythmic patterns. In this example, Dikshitar combines drum mnemonics with sargam syllables (the svara names, sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni) to create a hybrid text. The first āvartana uses sargam syllables pa-ma-ga-ma-ri-ga-ma corresponding to the svaras performed; the second āvartana makes use of the rhythmic vocalizations “ta-na-ka-jam” followed by the sargam ni-sa. The first eight āvartanas are notated below.

In ethnomusicological writings, it is common to talk about rhythmic texture in terms of density in contrast with tempo. One can maintain a steady tempo and play notes at, say, one note per pulse, or two notes per pulse, or four notes per pulse. The texture becomes more dense, but the tempo remains steady. The density of svaras in relation to counts of the tāla decreases in this section and this gives the impression of a decrease in tempo, however, the speed of the tāla always remains constant. When South Indians refer to the speed at which a musical passage is rendered within the framework of a constant tāla pulse, they use the term kālam. The first eight āvartanas of the colkaṭṭu svara are rendered in the slowest speed, or the first kālam. Smt. Ranganayaki then performs the next eight āvartanas of the colkaṭṭu svara in the second kālam, doubling the density of svaras in relation to the count. Moving to the third kālam, she doubles the density again as she renders the last two āvartanas of the colkaṭṭu svara. Following this she repeats the entire colkaṭṭu svara in the third kālam. Since the first eight āvartanas, played now at four times the original speed, require only two āvartanas; the second section, now played at twice the density at which she originally rendered it, requires four āvartanas, and the final two āvartanas are repeated unaltered, the repetition of the entire colkaṭṭu svara in this speed is completed in eight āvartanas. The whole anupallavi, including madhyamakāla sāhitya and
colkaṭṭu svara, then concludes with a repetition of the pallavi.

The next major section, the caraṇam (track 6), begins with the words “sūvarnā karsana.” It contains three lines of text, each with a distinct melodic setting. The first line is notated below. After introducing the third line of the caraṇam, “prakāsakaro,” Smt. Ranganayaki improvises in a form called svāra kalpana. Like composed sangatis, each svāra kalpana phrase must return to the beginning of a line of text on a particular count using a string of svāras that blend in melodically. After the first couple of iterations in which she renders the line, “prakāsakaro bhavajaladhināvo,” and cycles back using transitional phrases, Smt. Ranganayaki begins svāra kalpana and returns only to the phrase “prakāsakaro” (track 7). The listener may recognize this section by syncopation on the octave “C” at each returning phrase. Generally svāra kalpana progresses from shorter to longer phrases. Theoretically these conform to a proportional expansion of āvartanas (i.e. ½, 1, 2, 4, 8); in practice, musicians seldom adhere rigidly to this model. Unless the piece is itself in a rapid tempo, the svāra kalpana is usually performed in two speeds (kālam), as it is here (the second speed begins at track 8). After finishing svāra kalpana, Smt. Ranganayaki completes the melody accompanying the third line of the caraṇam text (not notated), performs a second madhyamakālā sāhitya (track 9)—different from that in the anupallavi—repeats the entire colkaṭṭu svara in the third kālam (track 10), and concludes with a return to the pallavi.

Figure 6

caraṇam (CD 1, track 6), first line:
Tracks 11–15

Genre: Kriti
Composer: Muthiah Bhagavatar (1877–1945)
Rāga: Vālaji
Tāla: Tiṣra Eka (Three counts: // 1 2 3 //)
Title: “Jālandhara”
Language: Sanskrit
Source: Aural learning from contemporary practice in Madras

Rāga characteristics:
Ascent (ārōhaṇa): C E G A B♭ C (sa ga pa dha ni sa)
Descent (avarōhaṇa): C B♭ A G E C (sa ni dha pa ga sa)

Smt. Rajagopalan precedes her performance of “Jālandhara” with an ālāpana in the rare rāga valaji. Characteristic in this rāga is an emphasis on the svara ga (E), which appears at the beginning and ending of many musical phrases, and is striking as the only svara lying between the first and fifth scale degrees. The composer of “Jālandhara,” Muthiah Bhagavatar, was famous for this and other compositions in unusual rāgas.

This composition is played here in tiṣra eka tāla of three counts. Smt. Ranganayaki strokes the tāla strings on count one. After completing the ālāpana (track 11), pallavi (track 12), anupallavi (track 13), and caraṇam (track 14), she performs svara kalpana (track 15), returning to the svaras ga pa, corresponding to the first two syllables of the first line of the pallavi, “Jāla.” The eduppu is on count one.

Tracks 16–23

Genre: Kriti
Composer: Muthuswamy Dikshitar
Rāga: Pūrvikalyāṇi
Tāla: Ādi (Eight counts in which each count gets two pulses: //1 2 3 4 // 5 6 // 7 8 //)
Title: “Minākṣi Me Mudam”
Language: Sanskrit
Source: Sambasiva Iyer

Rāga characteristics:
Ascent (ārōhaṇa): C D♭ E F♯ G A G C (sa ri ga ma pa dha pa sa)
Descent (avarōhaṇa): C B A G F♯ E D♭ C (sa ni dha pa ma ga ri sa)

With this item Smt. Ranganayaki introduces an element of grandeur into her recital. The rāga pūrvikalyāṇi, an evening rāga described by the late musicologist P. Sambamoorthy as appropriate for expressing “loneliness and detachment from the world,” provides extensive scope for improvisation. In keeping with the rāga’s character and the length of the composition, Smt. Ranganayaki precedes the composition with an appropriately lengthy ālāpana.
In addition to the striking tonal features of this rāga, its contour is crooked: proceeding from the fifth to the upper octave tonic, melodies characteristically ascend to dha (A) the sixth scale degree, return to pa (G) the fifth, and leap to the octave sa (C). Aside from the tonic and fifth, which are theoretically supposed to remain “pure” or free from ornament, all the svaras of this rāga are rendered with gamakas; commonly, phrases will alternate between those that omit sa and pa (C and G), these plain, stable svaras, and those that include them. “Minākṣi Me Mudam” is set to ādi tāla, consisting of eight counts; counts one, five, and seven are articulated on the tāla strings of the vīnā (and again by an asterisk in the notated examples).

The composition is addressed to the goddess Minākṣi, whose most famous temple sits in the center of the South Indian city of Madurai. According to popular belief, Dikshitar, a devotee of the mother goddess in all her forms, composed a set of pieces to goddess Minākṣi shortly after receiving word of his brother Chinnaswami’s death. This was also one of Dikshitar’s last compositions, and it is said that he asked his disciples to sing this piece to him just as he was about to die. Like the Dikshitar piece heard at the beginning of this recording, this composition too includes two madhyamakāla sāhitīyas, one at the end of the anupallavi (track 19) and one at the end of the caraṇam (track 21). (The second madhyamakāla is played in the second speed 48 seconds into track 21).

Since this is a piece of considerable classical import, Smt. Ranganayaki introduces an additional type of improvisation, niraval (track 22), using the first line of the caraṇam as its basis. Niraval is a melodic improvisation on a line of text, roughly preserving the distribution of syllables within the structure of the tāla; on the vīnā, the syllables of this text are articulated by plectrum strokes on the string. The essential difference between niraval and svara kalpana on the vīnā is that in the former the improvisational section is tied to the durational patterns of the text so that svaras intervene between plucks; in the latter, the rhythms are independent so that virtually every svara is plucked. It is a rule in Karnatak music that if niraval is performed, svara kalpana must follow. Thus niraval tends to appear in only the most elaborate expositions of repertoire.

In this piece, niraval and svara kalpana (track 23) take the first line of the caraṇam as a point of departure. The line of text begins not on the first count, but halfway through. Note that the first line of the caraṇam, when rendered in the context of the kriti proper, begins with the svaras ga, ri, sa (E, D♭, C). This same first line is rendered with a slight difference in the niraval and svara kalpana sections, beginning instead on pa: pa . pa ma ga ri . sa (G G F♯ E D♭ C). In relatively
expansive pieces such as this, the tāla pace is rather slow. You will notice a point of emphasis on count five of the tāla after each episode of niraval and svara kalpana. The technical term for this is aruti (the “t” is pronounced like “th” in “the”), which means “termination” in Tamil. In English we may call this the “arrival point” in that, after the eduppu, the two instruments cadence here—usually on the important svara ga (E) in this composition.

Figure 8

caranam (CD 1, track 20), first line. Syllables above the staff are surga (solfege); those below the staff are lyrics:

First line of caranam as rendered at the commencement of niraval (track 22) and later used as basis for svara kalpana (track 23):

Tracks 24–27

Genre: Kriti
Composer: Tyāgarāja (1767–1847)
Rāga: Bēgaḍa
Tāla: Ādi
Title: “Nādōpāsana”
Language: Telugu
Source: Kandadevi Narayana

Rāga characteristics:
Ascent (ārōhaṇa): C E D E F G A G C (sa ga ri ga ma pa dha pa sa)
Descent (avarōhaṇa): C B♭ C A G F E D C (sa ni sa dha pa ma pa ga ri sa)

In general, the theoretical structure, “ascent” (ārōhaṇa) and “descent” (avarōhaṇa), of a rāga provides only the barest outline of that rāga’s characteristics. The characteristics of this rāga are a case in point: different sources provide varying degrees of detail and emphasize alternate aspects of a rāga even in so brief models as those of the rāga’s ascent and descent. The versions of bēgaḍa rāga’s ascent and descent provided here were taught by Sambasiva Iyer to Ranganayaki Rajagopalan. Of note here, again, is the characteristically crooked syntax of the rāga. There are also features difficult to represent on paper. For example the svara, ma (F), is
always rendered with a *gamaka*; this *gamaka* sometimes oscillates between E and F; sometimes between E and an unspecifiable interval above F; and sometimes clearly between E and G. This *ma* is important and unique to this *rāga*, owing both to its intonation and insistent, accentual quality. The *svara*, *ni*, is also prolonged with a special, insistent *gamaka*, usually spanning the interval between A and C. The *gamakas* on *ma* and *ni*, combined with the phrases in which they appear, provide a parallel phrase structure. This is an example of a *rāga* in which a *svara* takes alternate varieties according to context: another manner of descent requires *ni* to be a B♭—in this case not prolonged, but rather quickly passed over.

The composition “Nādōpāsana” is the creation of South India’s most popular Karnatak composer, Tyāgarāja, who, along with other composers such as Muthuswamy Dikshitar, is a saintly figure. In this piece, Tyāgarāja sings that the trinity of Hindu gods, Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā, glory in the sound of music. They transcend formalistic Vedic religious practices of the past, and embody the sacred formulæ (*mantra*), designs (*yantra*) and rituals (*tantra*) of the mystics. The following is adapted from William Jackson’s translation of “Nādōpāsana” in *Tyāgarāja: Life and Lyrics* (264):

```plaintext
pallavi: ||: Intent on musical sound, Śiva :||
Viṣṇu and Brahmā shine, and happily thrive, O mind!

anupallavi: These *Veda*-uplifters transcend the *Veda*s;
Pervading the entire cosmos;

pallavi: Intent on musical sound, Śiva
Viṣṇu and Brahmā shine, and happily thrive, O mind!

caraṇam: They are the spirit of the *mantras*, the *yantras* and the *tantras*
Living innumerable aeons,
They revel in the rhythms of strings and melodies of tones
These self-mastered ones, whom Tyāgarāja worships;

pallavi: Intent on musical sound, Śiva
Viṣṇu and Brahmā shine, and happily thrive, O mind!
```

Although this is a substantial composition, the relatively determinate contours of the *rāga* and the need for special treatment of scale degrees four and seven (*ma* and *ni*, F and B♭) limit its suitability for *svara kalpana*; furthermore, this *krītī* immediately follows a lengthy *krītī* by Muthuswamy Dikshitar, and thus should be shorter for the sake of balance. The juxtaposition of these two *rāgas*, *pūrvikalyāṇi* and *bēgaḍa*, is interesting and well-planned. Two of the half-step intervals, sa-ri and ma-pa in the former *rāga*, are in this *rāga* whole-step intervals. This provides a strong sense of contrast and replaces the “lonely” and “detached” quality of the previous *rāga* with the lively, optimistic quality of the this one. Yet a curious continuity is afforded between the two via the shared characteristic phrase *pa dha pa sa*. 
Disc 2

Tracks 1–5

Genre: Kriti
Composer of the text: Narayana Tirtha (1650–1745)
Composer of the melody: T. M. Tyagarajan
Rāga: Hamsavinōdhini
Tāla: Rūpakam
Title: “Caraṇam Bhava”
Language: Sanskrit
Source: T. M. Tyagarajan (via Ranganayaki Rajagopalan’s daughter, Jayanthi)

Rāga characteristics:
Ascent (ārōhaṇa): C D E F A B C (sa ri ga ma dha ni sa)
Descent (avarōhaṇa): C B A F E D C (sa ni dha ma ga ri sa)

The poet who composed the text of this piece, a musician who gave up the pleasures of a worldly life to become a sanyāsi, or religious ascetic, lived in Tanjāvūr in the early 17th century. It is common in the history of Karnatak music for a musician in a later period to adopt the text of a famous composer and set it to a new melody. This is an example of such a piece, set to a melody by the late musicologist and vocalist T. M. Tyagarajan, a longtime professor at the institution where Smt. Ranganayaki formerly offered instruction, the Music Academy of Madras. Jayanthi, Smt. Ranganayaki’s daughter, received instruction from T. M. Tyagarajan and others when she was enrolled there. Ranganayaki Rajagopalan learned this piece from her daughter, vocally, and adapted it to the vīṇā.

In the context of a concert, this piece serves as an upbeat, brief interlude between compositions of comparative gravity. Noteworthy in this rāga is the absence of the fifth degree of the scale, G. Smt. Ranganayaki concludes the piece with a brisk svara kalpana (track 5), returning each cycle to the first word of the pallavi, “Caraṇam,” on the svaras // dha ma ga . . . //.

Tracks 6–19

Genre: Kriti
Composer: Tyāgarāja
Rāga: Kharaharapriya
Tāla: Ādi
Title: “Ĉakkanirāja”
Language: Telugu
Source: Sambasiva Iyer

Rāga characteristics:
Ascent (ārōhaṇa): C D E♭ F G A B♭ C (sa ri ga ma pa dha ni sa)
Descent (avarōhaṇa): C B♭ A F G E♭ D C (sa ni dha ma pa ga ri sa)
All Karnatak music concerts climax in what is known as the “main piece.” In this case it is the substantial kriti, “Ĉakkanirāja.” Smt. Ranganayaki enriches her rendition with all four major types of improvisation: ālāpana (track 6) and tānam (tracks 7–13), which precede the composition (tracks 14–16), and niraval (track 17) and svara kalpana (track 18), which follow it. Tānam, a pulsed improvisation on the rāga, usually appears only once in a concert, and is particularly well suited to the vīṇā. Tānam is recognizable on the vīṇā by a constant pulse, strumming of the plectra on the strings, and rhythmic cadential phrases; tānam may or may not be accompanied by the mridangam, but in either case is not in a tāla per se.

During the tānam Smt. Ranganayaki embeds within her rendition of kharaharapriya “a garland of rāgas” (rāgamālika). One of these rāgas, gauḷa, was already encountered on the first piece of the first disc in this set. The rāgas in the rāgamālika appear in the following order:

1. nāṭā (ārōhaṇa: C D♯ E F G A♯ B C)  avarōhaṇa: C B G F D♯ C)  (track 8)
2. gauḷa (ārōhaṇa: C D♭ F G B C)  avarōhaṇa: C B G F D♭ E F D♭ C)  (track 9)
3. ārabhi (ārōhaṇa: C D F G A C)  avarōhaṇa: C B A G F E D C)  (track 10)
4. varāḷi (ārōhaṇa: C E♭ D♭ G A♭ B C)  avarōhaṇa: C B A♭ G F♭ E♭ D♭ C)  (track 11)
5. śrī rāga (ārōhaṇa: C D F G B♭ C)  avarōhaṇa: C B♭ G A♭ B♭ G F D♭ E♭ D C) (track 12)

The Karaikudi style of vīṇā playing is famous for tānam, especially in this standard series of five rāgas. These are known as ghanā rāgas (ghanam is a vocal style related to tānam) because they are easily delineated in the tānam style. The trick in a rāgamālika is to introduce a change in rāga cleverly, and also to reveal the characteristics of the new rāga quickly, using a small number of svaras.

Let us now examine the structure of the first line of Tyāgarāja’s composition in kharaharapriya. The pallavi (track 14) begins after one half a count with a slide on the second string of the vīṇā, from the open string on the svara, pa (lower range G), to ri (D). This pa-ri combination is conceptualized as the svara ri in this context. Similarly, the slide from pa to sa (G to C) after that is conceptualized as the svara sa (C). The two iterations of the svara ni on the sixth count are played with a gamaka spanning the notes A-C. Although Karnatak music is largely an oral tradition, the use of written notation is also common. As mentioned previously, the melody of a composition is sometimes notated in sargam, using svara names, with varying degrees of rhythmic precision and melodic detail. Compared below are notations of the first line of “Ĉakkanirāja”: the first is in sargam notation; the second is sargam transcribed with Western letter-note names; and the third is staff notation:

(Note: the count is subdivided into four; svaras with only the first letter of the abbreviation and an underline indicate double the speed)
Continuity in the Karaikudi Vīnā Style

As long as a royal road exists... [why take a small lane?]

Each time a line is performed it is repeated once; after performing this basic form of the melody, the artist plays a number of composed variations (sangati); in this case there are a total of four sangatis (the first version is also considered a sangati).

Figure 9: Čakkani rāga mārgamu

The tessitura of the anupallavi (track 15) is different from and usually higher than that of the pallavi; rather than exploring and extending the register above and below the lower sa, the anupallavi begins on dha in the middle range. This time the section begins not on the ½ count but on the ¾ count.
The caraṇam (track 16) begins again on the ½ count, with a gamaka outlining the swaras pa-
dha-pa (G-A-G), and proceeds to develop a melody in the lower range once again. The second
half of the caraṇam (lines 3–4 of the text, 1 minute 2 seconds into track 16) is melodically
similar to the anupallavi but carries a different text. This melodic parallelism is found in many
kritis. At the end of each section, pallavi, anupallavi, and caraṇam, the pallavi theme serves as
both a melodic and textual refrain.

After the pallavi refrain, Smt. Ranganayaki proceeds seamlessly from the caraṇam into niraval
(track 17) and uses the first line of the caraṇam as the point of departure. Note again that the
improvisations return to the pa-dha-pa figure (and variations thereof) on the half-count; this
does not occur every cycle, for the length of the improvisations increases incrementally. And
like our previous example, there is a secondary cadence on count five, the aṟuti of the tāla. The
speed of the niraval then doubles, again starting short and increasing in length. Svara kalpana
follows (track 18), maintaining the same structure: short-to-long, slow-to-fast.

After the svara kalpana, Sri Raja Rao plays a mṛidangam solo, or tani āvartana (track 19); this
too is calculated to conclude on the ½ count, or first svara of the caraṇam.
Track 20

Genre: Bhajan
Poet: Sur Das
Rāga: Hambir (also known as Hamirkalyāṇi)
Tāla: Ādi
Title: “Krīḍata Madhubana”
Language: Braj
Source: Sambasiva Iyer

Rāga characteristics:
Ascent (ārōhaṇa): C E G F♯ G A B C (sa ga pa ma pa dha ni sa)
Descent (avarōhaṇa): C B A G E F♯ E D C (sa ni dha pa ga ma ga ri sa)
{n.b. authorities disagree on how to define this rāga}

According to Smt. Ranganayaki, the text to this piece is attributed to Sur Das, a devotee of the Hindu deity Krishna who lived in North India sometime in the late 16th or early 17th centuries. It is not clear who set the poem to music, or when it was set. The rāga was borrowed from North India, probably in the early decades of the 20th century. The genre, bhajan, is a devotional song; although it is possible that this song was popular in North India at some time, it is also possible that the bhajan was composed by a South Indian using a North Indian rāga. Following the main piece of a concert, the remainder of a performance is usually dedicated to pieces of a “lighter” nature, such as devotional songs, folk songs, and pieces in regional languages. This is an example of one such piece, although typically a concert will include a number of such pieces, often performed at the request of audience members.

Track 21

Genre: Mangalam
Composer: Tyāgarāja
Rāga: Saurāṣṭra
Tāla: Ādi
Title: “Pavamāna”
Language: Telugu

This recording, like Karnatak music concerts generally, concludes with a genre called mangalam, which means “auspicious.” The mangalam is a special kind of kriti whose rāga is considered particularly auspicious.
**Glossary of Frequently Used Terms**

**ālāpana** A form of rhythmically elastic melodic improvisation in a rāga.

**āvartana** The name for one cycle of the tāla.

**eḍuppu** The attack point at the beginning of a composition, which does not always fall on the first count of the tāla.

**gamakas** Integral ornaments. More than embellishments of a fundamental melody, these musical gestures constitute the very fabric of South Indian music.

**kālam** The speed at which a musical passage is rendered within the framework of a constant tāla pulse.

**kriti** A three-part vocal composition that can be sung or played with or without improvisational sections preceding and following it. The kriti is the main compositional genre heard in a Karnatak music performance.

**mṛidangam** A double-headed barrel drum.

**niraval** A melodic improvisation on a line of text that roughly preserves the distribution of syllables within the structure of the tāla.

**rāga** The melodic framework for composition and improvisation in Karnatak music.

**sangati** A full line of variation. Each composed sangati must return to the beginning of a line of text on a particular count using a string of svaras that blend in melodically.

**sargam syllables** The svara names sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni.

**svara kalpana** A form of melodic and rhythmic improvisation using sargam syllables. Each episode of svara kalpana must return smoothly to the pitch and position of the eduppu within the tāla structure.

**svaras** Individual scale degrees combined with context-sensitive gamakas that make up rāgas. There are seven svaras, whose names are abbreviated as sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni.

**tāla** The metric framework for compositions and improvisational forms such as svara kalpana, niraval, and the drum solo.

**tāḷam tanti** A set of three side strings on the vīṇā. Players mark out the tāla by stroking this set of strings with the small finger of the right hand.

**vīṇā** A plucked string instrument with 24 brass frets. Vīṇā is an iconic instrument of South Indian classical music. It typically has two steel and two wound copper strings on the neck and three side strings from pegs on the side of the neck called the tāḷam tanti.
Reference and Further Reading


Credits

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