

Syllabus : Exploring North Indian Classical Music

Part 1: Acquaintance

Session 1 : The Swara and the Saptak

In this session, we explore the Indian Musical Scale, which consists of 7 musical notes, called the Swara. These have names, which are abbreviated to Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dh and Ni, and the scale they form is called the Saptak.

- We begin with the Sa, the Tonic.
- We go on to explore the Re, Ga, Ma and Pa.
- Then go on to the Dh and Ni, and thus cover the whole Saptak.

At each stage, we can experience the swara for ourselves, by singing or playing along with the practice exercises.

These are the seven basic notes, called the Shuddha swara. Some of them can shift their positions, up or down.

- The Sa and the Pa do not shift from their position.
- The Re, Ga, Dh and Ni can have their shifted down. These are then called the Komal versions of these notes.
- The Ma can shift up, when it is called the Teevra Ma.

Again, we can sing/ play along the practice lessons, and experience these for ourselves.

Thus finally, at the end of the session, we are well conversant with the Indian Musical scale, with all of its 12 swara.

Session 2: Raga, the Concept.

Indian Classical Music is all about the Raga, and presenting a Raga is the purpose of a performance. In this session, we understand the basic concept of the Raga.

- We begin with the very basic concept and start looking into how a Raga is formed.
- We understand all the rules that apply to making of a Raga. We do this with the example of Raga Bhoop. We can get a good feel of the swara set, by singing/playing along with the practice patterns.
- We briefly explore the possible combinations of the swara, that can make up numerous more Ragas.
- We get to know a few more Ragas, and understand their construct, viz. Ahir Bhairav, Jog and Yaman. Again, the practice patterns help us experience these combinations better.

Session 3: Laya and Tala, the Concept

Besides the Raga, Tala is the other Uniquely Indian musical concept, and the two together make up a performance.

Just as the Raga is made up of the swara, it is the concept of Laya, which forms the basis of the rhythmic cycle of Tala.

- We begin with understanding the basic concept of Laya, the punctuating of time.
- We then go on to see how the cycle of Tala is formed.
- We take the example of Teentala, the most abundantly used Tala cycle, and understand the concept.
- We then go on to look at some more popularly used Tala cycles.
- The practice lessons here help you learn holding and dividing time.

Session 4: Raga, Internal structure and aesthetics.

In this session, we delve deeper into the structure of the Raga, and look at the aesthetic elements.

- We begin with understanding the concept of Chalan, which stipulates the melodic phrasing in a Raga.
- Continuing with the example of raga Bhoop, we go on to see how the concept applies to this Raga.
- The two most prominent swara in the Raga are defined as part of the Chalan, and these are called the Vaadi and the Samvaadi swara. We understand these and their relationship, as applied to raga Bhoop.
- We then look at some more Ragas, and see how the Chalan works for them, continuing with earlier examples of Ahir Bhairav, Yaman and Jog.
- The practice lessons in this session let you sing/play along with the phrases of these Ragas.

Session 5: Tabla, and the structure of Tala

In this session, we look deeper within the structure of the Tala, and see how the Tabla is used as the main percussion instrument.

- The term Laya is also used to indicate the tempo of the rhythmic cycle. We begin with understanding the three basic tempos, the Vilambit, Madhya and Druta laya.
- We then get within the cycle of the Tala, and understand all the related terminology.
- The sounds produced by the Tabla are known as Bols. We look at various Bols that form the language of Tabla.
- The Tala cycle when used for accompaniment of a vocal performance is known as Theka. We understand the difference between the Tala and Theka.
- Practice lessons in this session help you learn to keep up the cycles of some popular Talas.