

# THE TEACHING OF INDIAN MUSIC IN AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN EUROPE

## CREATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN MUSIC

A first generation of young western musicians became passionate about Indian music during the 1960s. Experienced as being a genuinely initiatory path, at the time this meant living in India for a number of years, immersing oneself in society while adopting the traditional oral teaching methods. This initiation into Indian music depended on a close relationship between master and student, as well as an almost ascetic practice of the instrument.

After returning to the Netherlands, a group of musicians from this generation decided to create their own association in order to continue to experience and share a culture that had become their own. These included the *sarangi* player Joep Bor and vocalist Wim van der Meer, both of whom collaborated in 1984/85 in the *Society for Traditional Arts Research* (ISTAR), based in New Delhi. The group settled in Holland along with Huib Schippers, Jane Harvey and Toss Levy, students of the *sitar* player Jamaluddin Bhartiya. Their project took shape in the form of a school for Indian music and dance: In 1986, they founded ISTAR Netherlands on the site of an abandoned school in which a group of alternative artists had squatted. Aware of changing musical tastes and pedagogical needs in an increasingly multicultural society, the Ministry of Culture and the Amsterdam Arts Council lent their support to the school.

ISTAR Netherlands enjoyed a rapid success as it attracted more and more students, a number of them from the Indian communities in Holland whose families were originally from Surinam. Artists such as Ram Narayan, Latif Ahmed Khan, Zia Mohiuddin Dagar and Arvin Parikh were invited for conferences and master classes. The school organised festivals with striking names such as *Mirrors of the East* in 1987, *A Musical Journey* in 1988, and *Young Masters of Raga* in 1991. The work of their predecessors paid off: The

ministry of culture and the Amsterdam Arts Council proposed that this school be integrated into the existing conservatory structure. The Rotterdam Conservatory made a proposal offering the possibility of including Indian music in a programme of professional instruction.

This integration was realised in the autumn of 1987, with the unusual advantage of offering students a fully-formed department from the onset.

## TEACHING CLASSICAL NORTHERN INDIAN MUSIC IN THE ROTTERDAM CONSERVATOIRE

The change of location brought with it new risks and challenges, and insights continue to develop to this day. For example, how do we integrate traditional oral instruction into an institutional environment? Can we alter the exclusive master-disciple relationship particular to India? Can it co-exist with a western university approach where the student studies with several teachers and must follow a number of courses on different subjects? How far can we take this adaptation before risking the loss of that which constitutes the strength and uniqueness of this teaching? Is professional instruction of Indian classical music possible in a period of five to seven years?

The recognition of these challenges is part and parcel of an original and courageous pedagogical project. Both the operation of the department as well as the success in the professional world of numerous former students suggests a positive response to this questioning.

Having grown under the direction of Joep Bor, the department of Indian music concentrates on the study of classical northern Indian music. One of the more successful ideas put in place by Joep Bor was to invite well-known Indian concert artists such as Hariprasad Chaurasia, Budhaditya Mukherjee and Faiyaz Khan to teach in annual residence. *Codarts* has also invited western or Indian musicians living in Europe to share their teaching methods. In addition to its practical effectiveness, this partnership approaches music from different but complimentary perspectives.

Incorporation into the Rotterdam Conservatoire has altered the profile of students, with significant consequences for the curriculum. Apart from Indian students or western students with an Indian studies background, the project has drawn musicians from Rotterdam or other conservatories studying classical, baroque, and jazz. A new generation of students has emerged in this double formation in response to an increasing openness to world music.

In addition to the main courses in vocal *dhrupad*, vocal *khayal*, bansuri, sarangi, sitar and *tabla*, the department has also proposed a musical ensemble class, music courses in applied theory, Indian and western music theory,

music appreciation, the discovery and recognition of the *ragas*, collective practice of *talas*, rhythmic cycles, and history of Indian culture.

The conservatoire also lends support to student projects such as concerts, intercultural encounters, and indispensable travel study to India.

## ADAPTATION OF TRADITIONAL ORAL TEACHING IN AN INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The instruction of classical Indian music is based on an oral tradition in which improvisation and memorisation play a crucial role. Alongside technical apprenticeship, the master improvises line by line for his students. The students repeat what they hear in increasing detail over the years as they become infused with the musicality, structure and aesthetic of these improvisations. Instead of memorising a raga fixed image, such as is the case with notation/score or recording, they familiarise themselves with an ever-moving image. The apprenticeship evolves progressively through the stages of this mimetic approach, beginning with the students following the teacher's transmitted improvisation until they begin to experiment with their own ideas.

The conservatory offers the possibility to complete the fundamentals through a mix of courses both on theory and in practice. Leading musicians on tour in Europe are frequently invited to give master classes, concerts, and conferences.

In addition, a research department has been created in order to produce publications designed for students and the general public. What is more, *Codarts* has a close relationship with the Sangeet Research Academy, which gathers musicians and musicologists from all over India. Each year a number of teachers participate in day-long conferences in Mumbai, focusing on larger topics relating to Indian music.

## PROGRAMME OF STUDY

Because our students typically have untraditional educational backgrounds, study at the conservatory begins with a preparatory year, in which we test their quality of motivation and aptitude in adapting to the ensuing educational system. The preparatory year is then followed by the 'first phase', which lasts four years.

During the five years completing their main courses, the students attend various classes in: Musical ensemble known as *Sangat* class; an instrumental side subject such as voice and/or tabla; Indian music theory; Western music

theory; rhythmic collective practice (*tala* class); aural training; World Music; education/transmission; career orientation; art and cultural policy; teaching methodology; music pedagogy. In their final years, students can take courses in studio production, raga analysis, and specific internships. For the past two years, the Conservatory has also offered a Master's degree. In the Master's programme, much emphasis is placed on artistic research.

In the academic year of 2006–07, *Codarts* started to institute a minor course of study in order to entice students to open themselves to other forms of music. These include departments for Western classical music, jazz, pop, and World Music from India, Turkey, Latin America, Argentine Tango, and Flamenco. These offer a range of courses and workshops uniting students from different departments, such as a minor course of study in different approaches of improvisation including workshops on contemporary, minimalist and modal improvisation with Henri Bok, bass clarinetist, Willem Tanke, organist and pianist and Henri Tournier, flutist.

## THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES OF TEACHING INDIAN MUSIC TO WESTERNERS

Due to their cultural environment, western students pursuing Indian music must pass through a less intuitive and more analytical apprenticeship than their Indian counterparts. Western teachers who themselves have been confronted with this difficulty serve as mediators and translators, or 'filters', and adapt their pedagogy accordingly.

These are several points that are particular to this great musical tradition, which seem to be central in the teaching practice:

- Seeking a heightened awareness of precision through working with a drone;
- Continual recourse to memory;
- Concentrate on note playing, on a single note rather than systematically on melody (particularly essential in the art of the prelude);
- Making much with little: taking some material, explore the possibilities of a few notes by playing with rhythm, tone, tension, and the different ways of approaching the note;
- Elaborating melodies based on a fixed rhythmic formula;
- Work in cycle in a hypnotic way;
- Discovering a supple and free way of rhythmic playing;
- Intensive exposure to many different interpretations, recordings of great masters past and present, and different musical genres and styles;
- Regularly practising improvisation;

- Constant strengthening of the oral memory;
- Favouring recordings over the use of musical scores, using the latter only as prompts or analytical tools, so that the student may either repeat the recording faithfully or use a certain pre-recorded line as the basis for an improvisation;
- Use visual memory, such as the graphic representation of ornamentation and melismatic playing, visualising rhythmic cycles and the use of proportional writing;
- Using the voice and developing an inner voice – an inner awareness of improvisation.

## HOW LEARNING A FEW RULES CAN HELP ONE TO FOLLOW THE TECHNIQUE OF IMPROVISATION IN CLASSICAL INDIAN MUSIC

In addition to the work underway in Rotterdam, teaching internships as well as adapting Indian music for various teaching purposes in different French institutional contexts have also been experienced in the past few years. This has provided us with more insight in how Indian music can also be instrumented in a broader music education.

For example, work in the global area of improvisation through exposure to Indian music based on a course of workshops on *Indian and contemporary improvisation* to third-cycle students from all disciplines, coming to weekly classes to learn improvisation during two years. The same methodology has been developed in a briefer cycle to diverse groups of musicians and teachers in the context of professional development trainings proposed by the ARIAM Île-de-France and the CEFEDM in Rueil-Malmaison.

This is a brief summary of a few methodological tools used. The melodic part, or *raga*, is transmitted orally, a group of students repeating and memorising the improvised phrases, step-by-step. This is followed by a prelude outside of the beat (*alap*) and its rhythmic development, known as *jod*. The teacher's role is to give an example of improvisation for each step, presenting a clear structure of elaboration, and to re-play each role in a sort of relay game.

For the rhythmic portion, or *tala*, the unique peculiar Indian system of teaching rhythm is presented in which each beat of the finger on the tabla is linked to an onomatopoey, where dialogue is built with the help of melodic rhythm, and mathematical rhythms play a special role. Students learn a rhythmic cycle, or *tala*, and its rhythmic melody, or *theke*, then a short melodic composition, or *gat*, in two parts, the *sthayi* and *antara*. Little by little, the same task of semi-improvisational relay is built.

It is exciting for teachers in this environment to observe after a brief period the moment when a student gains a different perspective or perception of this music. This happens after assimilating certain techniques and trying, through improvisation, to understand its inner role.

## CONCLUSION

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With all its strengths and weaknesses, the experience at the Rotterdam *Codarts* Conservatoire offers material for an ongoing reflection on a number of questions about teaching music outside of its original context. What are the deeper risks addressed in this context? What places, what multiple forms exist or are invented, what are the goals to be achieved? What range of professional gateways can be envisaged for students in a multicultural environment? What artistic and pedagogical exchanges can arise, and what is the impact on music pedagogy in general?

The case of the inclusion of Indian music in the curriculum of the Rotterdam Conservatoire demonstrates some issues that we come across in many of the intercultural music education practices in our multicultural cities. Everyday practice at the WMDC, where conservatoire students and music school pupils and amateur groups and school classes meet constantly, means that decisions about these issues are quite often made on the spot, in practice, on the work floor so to speak. By making them explicit and thus taking world musics seriously within our music education practice, we work on building a more inclusive music practice for all our audiences in Rotterdam.

## Resources

For more information about the World Music Academy at *Codarts*, and the Indian music department in particular, as well as the activities of the *World Music & Dance Centre*, the following websites can be consulted:

[www.codarts.nl](http://www.codarts.nl)

[www.wmdc.nl](http://www.wmdc.nl)

[www.cdime-network.com](http://www.cdime-network.com)

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