

MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

OCTOBER 2003



G. N. Balasubramanian (center) in performance

CARNATIC MUSIC FOR ANYONE

by Malathi Jivan

The Carnatic singer throws her voice at will, adding rich ornamentation to the beauty of an ancient composition. The years of structured learning and endless practice sessions are finally paying off as the audience gives her a standing ovation. While we will not delve deeply into the 800+ year history of this art form, Carnatic music originated as a medium of prayer in South India. Most compositions are in praise of popular Indian deities. Carnatic music has flourished and spread to all parts of the globe.

The fundamental difference between Indian classical music and most Western music is that the Indian music is essentially monophonic (with a single melody) while Western music can be polyphonic (multiple notes played or sung together), monophonic or a combination of both. Indian music, however, employs a far more complex variety of scales and rhythms, and like traditional jazz, allows the performer to improvise within a prescribed structure.

Music is the universal language of the world — once you understand the basic principles. Just as there are seven notes in a Western diatonic scale, the classic do, re, mi, we have up to seven notes in Carnatic scales. Their names are *sa (shadjam)*, *ri (rishabam)*, *ga (gaandaram)* *ma (madyamam)*, *pa (pancamam)*, *da (daivatam)*, and *ni (nishaadam)*. There are 72 possible Carnatic scales, however, each dividing the octave into a unique sequence of intervals.



Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles, God of the Note "Ni"

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REGIONAL MUSIC

by Deborah J. Beyer

We weren't far from the neon and glitz of Bourbon Street, but there was no neon here. The place was dim, the seating simple. The stage was hardly that, just a cleared area for the band. And the musicians weren't the slick, industry-massaged symbols from American Idol or the Las Vegas strip. Most were old men, most African-American, with a few "younger" (40- to 50-year-old) additions who had passed muster with the older players. This was Preservation Hall, an institution in New Orleans jazz history. And my children were the only youngsters in the place. It was a shame, I thought, that so many young visitors to New Orleans were not exposed to this fine tradition of the city and its musical history, taken instead to the commercial nightspots of the French Quarter and other high-tech family amusements of the Big Easy.



Preservation Hall, New Orleans

Visiting a musical institution such as Preservation Hall wasn't a new experience for either me or my youngsters. We'd done it often. From the country fiddlin' of the Grand Ole Opry to the "oompha" music of midwestern Oktoberfests, regional music was part of our family travels, part of their education, part of our life. So far, we have covered 42 states, and regional music has always been part of the travel experience.

We recommend it.

Not only does incorporating regional historical sounds expand our musical experience



Grand Ole Opry, Nashville, TN

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THE IN BOX

REJOINDER

Ted:

Thank you for your interesting article on voicing ("Many Voices", August, 2003). However, I have one bone to pick with you: your conceptualization of Schumann's illness. You use the phrase "Knowing that Schumann was suffering from late-stage syphilis. . ." Knowing? I think your remarks about his disease are inaccurate, and, to use your own words "are unsatisfying and disrespectful of Schumann's genius."

There is plenty of evidence that his mental illness was not due to syphilis. For example, if Schumann was syphilitic, how come Clara never got the disease from him, since they had quite a number of children? Rather, he was manic depressive, known these days as "bipolar."

For a thorough treatment of Schumann's life and, in particular, his illness, see *Schumann, The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*, by Peter Ostwald, Northeastern University Press, 1985, especially Chapter 17 "The Problem of Diagnosis." Dr. Ostwald is a trained psychiatrist.

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QUARTET SCORES

We are pleased to make available a new arrangement for string quartet of the complete *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky. It is one of 89 scores available for download at our web site.

Jeremy Nurse
<http://www.cacophonix.com/music>

TEMPERAMENTS

To provide a clear demonstration of what the different temperaments used in tuning modern and historical instruments sound like, I have made a website based on the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Please visit it at <http://www.geocities.jp/imyfujita/wtcpu004.html>

Thank you.
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MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT Volume 16 No. 5, October 2003. Published bimonthly at 67 Parkside Drive, Berkeley, California 94705, 510/654-9134, fax 510/654-4656, <www.musicfortheloveofit.com>. Edgar (Ted) Rust, publisher. Edgar Rust and Janet Telford, co-editors. Subscriptions: print \$24/year in U.S., \$30/year elsewhere. Internet \$20/year as email, \$30 with archive access. Single issue \$6.00/\$8.00. ISSN 0898-8757. © 2003 Edgar Rust.

PRACTICE TIPS

by Eric Proctor

PRODUCTIVE PRACTICE

From the ten minute tinkler to the professional perfectionist, satisfaction comes with progress, yet at times improvement may seem a will-o'-the-wisp.

Practice makes perfect — or does it? This would equate best progress with most practice. Only good practice will make perfect, or at least help us to perform better. It must be thoughtful, guided, aimed — and assessed for results. Repetition alone does not bring best progress.

The player who is asked, "What sound are you listening for? How can you improve it?" develops a mind which concentrates on achieving an aim. It emphasizes listening to assess as we play.

TEN TIPS FOR PERFECT PRACTICE

1. Practice at the speed of no mistakes. In learning a new piece, the mental and muscular patterns are "grooved in" until secure, and confidence is built. When they are automatic, speed will follow.
2. Listen, trying to produce the sound you want.
3. Practice for rhythmic progression. Beating time to music does not make it rhythmical; rhythm depends on the flow of sound in time as it travels to reach every next beat. Defeat the tyranny of bar lines: pause after a strong downbeat, forcing yourself to carry the phrase forward across the bar line to that note; then play the passage without the pause but with the same forward flow. (See "Bring Your Music to Life," October 2002.)
4. Practice in a variety of ways. Challenge yourself to practice a passage in many different ways: *staccato*, *legato*, *p/mf/ff*, *8va*, pauses on the beat, in phrases, etc. This guards against repetition boredom. When a piece is generally known, start work at a place other than the beginning. If the first section gets the best of attention, knowledge of the piece will be uneven.
5. Plan the use of your practice time.
6. Build in essential features such as phrasing and fingering at the same time as you learn time and notes.
7. With time and notes known, add on all other aspects of the music.
8. Use consistent fingering.
9. Practice keyboard instruments separate hands first, with priority for the left.
10. Speed up gradually, or good preparatory work may be ruined: the faster you play in performance, the more you must balance it with slow practice for accuracy and control.

ON BEING A CHRONICALLY UNTALENTED CHAMBER MUSICIAN

by Paul Brest

I have read numerous essays by talented amateur chamber musicians, explaining why they love playing. Generally, it appears that their talent contributes significantly to their musical enjoyment. But can a chronically untalented amateur — in my case, a violist — also enjoy playing? Based on personal experience, the answer is yes, though the reasons may not be immediately apparent.

By untalented, I don't mean unmusical. I understand the harmonic and musical structure of what I'm playing and could sing my part in tune, with steady rhythm and good phrasing. But put a viola under my chin and a bow in my hand and all bets are off. Tone and intonation become wildly unstable. Fast passages are a jumble. And when the going gets tough, I can't help it: I rush. By chronically untalented, I do not mean that I never improve, but rather that progress takes place in what seems like geologic time. If I had started closer to the Middle Ages than to my own middle age, I might be pretty good by now.

Adult students can be more or less disciplined than children, and I was less — opting to work on chamber music parts rather than scales or arpeggios. Also, I have a condition that has required recurrent surgery on both hands, and limits my reach and agility. Whether for these reasons or just the absence of talent, I don't play very well.

Why does an untalented amateur enjoy playing chamber music? Curiosity plays some role. I've often converted an inquisitiveness about how things work into trying to do them myself. For example, having been intrigued by what goes on behind the cockpit door, I became a licensed pilot. There's no better way to understand how music "works" than to put yourself in the middle of it.

More enduring is the appreciation of a piece of music that comes from playing it, especially from working on it. Through listening to other parts, watching others being coached, working to put together difficult passages, you come to understand the piece from the inside — you gain a sense of ownership.

And then there's the pleasure of ensemble playing. Whether passing a phrase from one instrument to another, or providing the engine underneath someone else's solo (as violists do so often), playing together is a special joy: at its best, lovemaking with two or three or five others. To be sure, this would be more enjoyable, especially for my colleagues, if I could play my part with consistent elegance and timing. One does what one can.

That said, there are times when I'm sure I'm a burden on my fellow players, especially the stronger ones who know

the repertoire and know what they're missing from the viola section. For the most part, though, people are pretty tolerant, if only because violists are in relatively short supply and I am easy to get along with. Also, though hopefully they shouldn't be put to the choice too often, most people prefer a technically incompetent violist with some musicality than a player with the opposite characteristics. At least I would.

What about performing? Here I share the mixed feelings of excitement and panic with many far more competent amateurs. At the other end of the spectrum from sight-reading, there's something wonderfully focusing about working up a piece for a performance, trying to get each phrase as good as can be, and aiming for perfect ensemble. Even an untalented player strives for his best.

And the performance itself? Fortified by inderol, there is something exhilarating about offering one's best to others, and also in getting through the piece without stopping, no matter what. Unless real disaster has struck, the group's feeling when it's done is akin to a team's winning a game. Implicit high-fives, coupled with at least slight disbelief that we actually got through it. As for friends in the audience, they display the uncritical acclaim that one would accord a talking dog, amazed that he could do it at all. It's best not to ask too many questions after the concert.

By the way, an untalented amateur needn't limit his repertoire to easy pieces. Sure, I would never tackle the Bartok string quartets. But this summer, I was in workshops playing the Shostakovich piano quintet and the Brahms B-flat sextet. (As even talented amateurs know, the viola tends to be less exposed in pieces such as these than in, say, Haydn or Mozart quartets.)

Finally, a word about viola jokes. I have heard them all. I laugh at them, and even tell them, but always with the slight sense of guilt that my own playing stimulates new ones.

So that's the story. I truly love playing the viola in chamber ensembles, working on pieces inevitably over my head. Whenever I have hand surgery, as I'm scheduled to do late this summer, and the doctor gives me the obligatory warnings, I shrug my shoulders and tell him that in the worst case I'll take up the trombone and practice outside his office. Though I've heard chamber music with trombones, I much prefer the string repertoire. But if it comes to that, I'll get some comfort from inspiring musical jokes in a new domain.

Violist and lawyer, Paul Brest is Executive Director of the Hewlett Foundation in Menlo Park, California.

THE RIGHT MOVES *by Ted Rust*

I was given a superb hour of coaching on gesture last summer at the Raphael Trio Chamber Music Workshop by Mary Ruth Ray, violist of the Lydian Quartet and a professor of music at Brandeis University. In that hour I learned to think of gesture as an expressive element that I should analyze, practice and rehearse right along with the pitches, rhythms and dynamics I intend to use in performance.

I had been working with two fine players for most of a week on Malcolm Arnold's *Divertimento* for flute, oboe and clarinet. We had it in pretty good shape. Mary Ruth walked in as we were doing a run-through, waited for us to finish and gently challenged us: "That sounds really good, but I think you can take it to another level. If I were seeing but not hearing you, I couldn't begin to guess the character of the piece. Tell me what it's about." So we told her our feel for the piece: its perky tunes, jazz-like ornamentation, jagged syncopations, making mocking references to British ceremonial music. She had us stand and show her with our body language as we played where the phrases were headed, the important off-beat accents, the *sforzandos* and *subito pianissimos*, that gave the piece its character. We never sat again in our remaining rehearsals and performance. It was hard mental and physical work, but within an hour we had sketched out a kinesthetic map of the piece and couldn't wait to develop it further.

A day later we knew from our audience's response that we had indeed taken the movement we performed, and ourselves, to new level. Well-planned gestures had helped us remember to execute the expressive details of the piece reliably. Where things went not quite as planned, our gestures alerted us what to expect. And we could sense the audience was completely engaged with our performance.

For all its power, gesture can be a wild beast. It can be disruptive of one's own technique and alarming to the ensemble, especially if it is first used or greatly amplified in the heat of a performance. Mary Ruth showed us how to tame the beast by choosing specific gestures for specific musical objectives, adopting a common gestural language, and rehearsing it together while there was time to decide what we wanted and work out the kinks before we had to perform.

A seeming paradox is that accurate and consistent technique demand a stable platform, but the simplest way of providing that platform, holding still, both inhibits gesture and prevents good playing. Is there a way to keep parts of the body accurately aligned with each other and the instrument, leaving the rest of the body free to move? There must, or there would be no *mariaichis*, Gypsy violins or marching bands.

One resolution of this paradox is to create a *precision zone*, a realm within which everything affecting sound production stays precisely aligned. Balanced posture is essential. For most winds and strings, the instrument stays aligned with the face and shoulders. Keyboard players often are taught to set the bench carefully to a height and distance where their forearms are level with or slightly below the keys.

Experimenting before a mirror, one can find out what can move how far without disrupting fluent execution, and gradually increase the amplitude of one's gestures without sacrificing balance, grace, fluency and good sound. Most winds and upper strings can free up everything from rib cage down, bending at the waist, hips or knees. Some head gestures work well for winds: watch a good player's instrument move as the head does, keeping the embouchure constant. Lower strings and keyboards need to be aligned with the torso, but the player's head and neck can be reasonably free. And when all else fails there are always the eyebrows.

What to say with gestures? If one only says what needs to be said, that will be plenty. Quietly establishing the tempo and meter by nodding a measure before starting is often nice: it focuses everyone and gives the effect of joining in rather than leaping from a standstill. (After the start, beating time is often unnecessary. However, when counting long rests, a nod on each bar line can be reassuring to all.) Gestures can highlight and clarify tempo changes, rubatos, cross rhythms and syncopated accents. They can point out moments of suspense, phrase peaks and levels of intensity. Gestures such as giving an entry cue or leaning towards a duet partner for a parallel phrase work best if they are acknowledged with a reciprocal, mirrored gesture by the other player.

When to start the gesture? On the beat *before* the musical event it signals. Without a good backswing, any gesture will be late, jerky and hard to follow.

How big a motion? Big enough to be seen, and in proportion with the intended musical emphasis. Repetitious, exaggerated or musically irrelevant gestures clutter and confuse the message. We have all seen writhing, prancing performers whose message is not "Listen to this" but "Look at me." If that's your intention, fine — sheer exuberance can be a nice thing to express — but after a while it does get tiresome.

Clear, expressive gesture can transform a competent performance into a barnburner. How? By clarifying the expressive content of the music, by strengthening the coordination of the ensemble, and by energizing both the performers and the audience. Like every other element of one's technique, it needs lots of practice.

Amateur oboist Ted Rust publishes Music for the Love of It. He is also a consultant in regional planning and economics.

BAND AID

by Joy E. Moses-Hall

The marching band is often thought of as the heartbeat pulsing the entire Coast Guard Academy existence. There are no violas in a marching band. So what's a violinist swab to do?

Conduct, of course.

My first leadership role at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy would be to conduct the Swab Summer Band. The first step toward conning a tender ship through big, buffeting waves is, apparently, to con a marching band across a stubbly parade field.

I had been a member of the Swab Summer Band two years earlier. I had never played in a marching band before, but my roommate, Patty, was enlisting as a trumpeter and I wasn't about to stand at inspection arms while she got to play ruffles and flourishes. So I signed up for cymbals.

How hard could it be?

There were two sets of cymbals. The first set I picked up was a pair of dinner plates, with a mellow, swish-swish sound. The other was two halves of a medium flying saucer, intergalactic, that clanged together with a gonging, cosmic crash. Dinner plates were catchy but flying saucers were the pistons of a band, and Kelly Burris, the other marching band free-lancer, was heading straight for them. Kelly was a nice girl from Illinois, a good six inches shorter than I was, and I convinced her that the big cymbals were ill-suited to her petite stature.

One lap around the practice field proved my own stature inadequate for the giant cymbals and I tried to think of a reason for Kelly to take them back. I barely had the strength to lug them across the field, let alone strike them together. At the end of each piece I managed a very loud, very satisfying crash, but it drained me until the next finale. Kelly and I spent the rest of the season alternating cymbal sets according to a schedule rigged very much in my favor.

By the time I was a junior-year, second-class cadet, ready to cut some leadership teeth on the spanking new class of swabs, I'd distinguished myself as best fit for staff duty. In a generous vote of confidence, I was designated Battalion Protocol/Band Officer.

So what does Protocol Officer do? I had no idea; I had to look up protocol in the dictionary to get the first clue. Turns out she arranges for a quorum of classmates to march in a drill parade for visiting Danish admiralty, against their will. I don't recall the exact nature of the

occasion, but apparently it hinged on whatever skimpy parade I could drum up. The admiral must be ruffled and flourished.

(No one volunteered for the parade, and the Assistant Commandant of Cadets clicked impatiently at me when I suggested we just offer him a boxed lunch. So I recruited all the assistant platoon leaders for one practice and one parade and got back responses so mawkish I thought perhaps my memo went out with a typo requesting them to carpet bomb the barracks during evening taps: "Sorry, Joy, even my sorriest kid is more important to me than the highest Danish admiral." But in the end they all stood at parade rest and told "Care for a Danish, Admiral?" jokes.)

While the role of protocol officer is not quite as vital as, say, Homeland Security Officer, Danish admirals will visit. The band commander, though, is paramount. If the Coast Guard, as every freshman knows, is "the hard nucleus about which the Navy forms in time of war," then the hard core about which the Coast Guard forms in time of honored guests is the band.

In the Swab Band, amazingly, my word was law. If I said, "You, Miss Swab A, carry the big cymbals, and you, Mister Swab B, carry the little ones," that was it. End of squabble. And if I shouted,

"Column right, march," while we were parading onto the drill field in front of the reviewing officials, they turned to the right, even if I had cut the corner too soon and the sousaphones were rapidly bearing down on the reviewers.

Now, there exists in marching parlance a fudge factor for just such situations, a command I've only heard used by band commanders, called Guide Right (or left), and it means, "Wiggle-your-way-back-over-into-the-middle-of-the-field-where-you-belong, march." The signal for it is to carry the mace at a twirling angle, and press the other hand to the forehead in prayer that the front row of marchers sees and hears you over his or her own extemporaneous din.

Which of course they did not, and I finally had to turn and join the band at the top left sousa and crowd his shoulder into the next sousaphone until the front row finally lurched right enough to miss the reviewers by a few crucial inches, and the rest of the band blindly followed.

My ship, no doubt, will someday come in on a stubbly parade field.

Joy E. Moses-Hall lives in Greenville, North Carolina.



KICKING THE BUCKET

by Eleanor Dusté

Paolo Uffizi had the worst job at the opera. It is natural that a boy of 12 should begin at the bottom of the employment ladder, but even so, he regarded his job — his first job — to be both unpleasant and degrading.

He only consented to do it because the Teatro Stupendo was going on tour to Egypt where they would perform Verdi's *Aida* in an authentic outdoor setting near the city of Luxor.

So what if he had to follow the elephants around the stage with a bucket and shovel. Next year he would have a better job and perhaps some singing lessons, as singing in the opera was his real hope for the future. At the moment however, Paolo's voice was in that biological limbo between octaves, undecided as yet whether to become a tenor or a baritone. By next year he would know, but for now there was nothing to do but follow the elephants around and do what he must.

Now at Luxor, rehearsals were not going well. It was beastly hot with the sun reflecting off the ancient stones of the amphitheater with all the cruelty of the worst of the pharaohs. The cast was short tempered. Costumes were stiflingly hot, make-up ran, wigs pinched.

The elephants stood in a row at the edge of the stage, implacable, ready for their entrance, and Paolo stood behind them, ready for the inevitable. He felt dizzy from the strong animals smells and was dying of thirst.

At that moment one of the elephants gave way, and it took all of Paolo's resolve to put his shovel to the sticky mess. Yet he did it, one-handed even, using his other to pinch his nose closed. He picked up the bucket and retreated behind the stage, looking for a place in the trees to empty it.

Suddenly he was overcome by a wave of dizziness. He was so HOT! He began to feel faint and put the bucket down on the ground, then immediately passed out, remembering with the last second of consciousness to fall as far away from the bucket as possible.

At this moment, the famous soprano, Signora Rotundo, appeared from her dressing room, resplendent in her diaphanous *Aida* costume, and strode toward the stage.



She was in a temper. She complained that her dress was too hot (read that too small!), and her wig of long dark curls was like a band of iron around her head. However, with the fortitude of a true professional (and the desperate urgings of her agent, her vocal coach and several assistant conductors), she took a deep breath and made her way toward the stage.

Divas never look down at the ground, or indeed, in any direction other than upward — it is not part of their training. So of course Signora Rotundo did not see the bucket. She did, however, make note of the dreadful smell and promised herself she would never, ever, accept another outdoor engagement, especially in a hot, miserable place like this, even if it was for *Aida*.

She kicked the bucket. There was a horrible clang as it went sailing ahead, flinging its contents in every direction.

Signora Rotunda stopped in her tracks (wisely so) and for the first time in probably 20 years, looked down at the ground. She was horrified. All around her dozens of cast members were making excited sounds of disgust (YUK! ICK!), wanting to wipe their clothes off, but not daring to.

Diva Rotundo let out the high C of all times, a head-splitting, earth-shaking, bone-rattling high C that surely was heard all the way to Italy, which is where she wished she could be at that moment, more than anything on earth.

Paolo Uffizi woke up at the sound to find a hundred pairs of eyes boring into his skull. In his pathetically unstable pre-teen voice, he warbled the usual disclaimer "It wasn't me!" But everyone knew it was.

Faster than *prestissimo* Paolo was on his feet and running for his life. He ran down the hillside, across newly tilled fields as peasant farmers stood agape beside their oxen. He disappeared into the dense reeds on the bank of the Nile, and out of breath and exhausted, sank down into the water up to his neck. He prayed as he waited. He could hear the company, very angry indeed, fast approaching. They stopped at the river's edge.

Last to arrive was the orchestra conductor, whose impressive girth had slowed him down. "Where is that nincompoop?" he gasped.

“Nincompoop? What an appropriate choice of word”, laughed a chorus member (whose clothing had largely been spared). “More like nincomDOUBLEpoop!” he guffawed.

Soon everyone was laughing and Paolo decided it was safe to emerge from the water. Only Signora Rotundo could see no humor in any of this (also part of Diva training). She grabbed Paolo by his shirt collar. “You little *MOSTRO!*” she yelled. “I will rip off your head and throw it to the crocodiles!”

Suddenly there was silence. “Crocodiles?” a tremulous voice near the water said. “CROCODILES?” the chorus chorused in unison, looking about them anxiously.



“Don’t worry everyone. Calm down!” The voice of the orchestra’s oboist came through the crowd. “I have my oboe, and I will play my big solo from Act III. It is sure to charm any reptile, even a crocodile.” And he began to play (beautifully too). Even though no one had actually seen a crocodile, or even knew if there WERE any crocodiles in the Nile, they were grateful for the gesture and listened quietly.

Divas do not like being on the sidelines (also part of their training). Signora Rotundo could not resist joining in the famous “Nile Scene.” It was one of her favorites.

She began to sing, and suddenly 37 crocodiles (by the conductor’s count) emerged snarling from the reedy shallows, turned and swam out across the Nile, in abject terror.

A viola player stood at the back of the crowd. “Boy, it this going to look great on her resume,” he smirked. Viola players rarely get to gloat.

Eleanor Dusté contributes frequently to Music for the Love of It. Her knowledge of operatic culture (and the frequently heroic role of oboists therein) was acquired through careful observation during decades of free-lance oboe playing, for opera companies in the San Francisco area.

OLD DOG — NEW TRICKS? ABSOLUTELY!

by Janis Weller

In 2001, well into midlife, with one son in college and another on the brink, I left my responsible job and returned to graduate school to pursue long-standing passions in human development, psychology, brain research, education and assorted other fascinating topics, focusing particularly on music, musicians, teaching and learning.

My quick summary of that experience? Awesome. Magnificent. Incredibly stimulating and energizing. It is possible that education may indeed be wasted on the young. With no disrespect toward intelligent and earnest young students everywhere, it is just a radically different experience returning to school, and, importantly, I also received lots of support for my midlife endeavor (especially from my dear, patient spouse). But when I would tell people that I had returned to graduate school, it was also not uncommon to hear a rather condescending comment like, “Wellll, goood for yooouuu,” making me feel like some sort of ancient anachronism. So in support of feisty and curious Old Dogs everywhere, I’d just like to say that, yes, you *can* teach an Old Dog new tricks!

In fact, Old Dogs can be pretty good at new tricks.

An Old Dog can put the new trick in context, look at it in relation to her or his experience with previous tricks, imagine new ways to approach the trick, or perhaps invent completely different tricks that work even better.

Old Dogs are curious and questioning about new tricks.

Old Dogs can consider the relationship between the tricker and the trickee, along with the future potential of others being interested in new tricks. Old Dogs can see the global relationships between various tricks and may be able to attract and inspire others around new tricks.

In short, where “New Dogs” often simply learn a new trick for the trick’s sake, Old Dogs will connect a new trick to every other trick they’ve ever learned, observed or imagined.

We Old Dogs don’t need to settle for “sit,” “stay,” or “roll over.” The broad perspective and deep insights of a life lived create a fabulous foundation for new learning of any kind. So if you are an adult who is considering dusting off that old oboe or pursuing your lifelong dream of playing the piano or cello, I encourage you to embrace your Old Doggedness and just *do* it. Ahh-ooooooooohhhh!

Flutist Janis Weller is founder/director of The Elision Institute, a catalyst for evolution and growth in the training and support of musicians in Robbinsdale, Minnesota.

THE LISTENER

Sharon B. Gurwitz

Every September, we went through the same drill at Tatnuck School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Miss McDonald, the music teacher, walked around the room and made each student sing “Three Blind Mice” or “Pop Goes the Weasel.” Those who had really horrible voices were dubbed “Listeners,” segregated in the front row, and forbidden to open their mouths all year during music class. I was a Listener every year from first grade through sixth, making music class the low point of my elementary school career.

This was quite a comedown for a girl who owed her life to music. My father had been the top clarinet player in the Classical High School marching band. Soon after he arrived in Belgium during World War II, he was plucked from the infantry, handed a clarinet, and ordered to fill an opening in one of the Army bands. When there was no music to play, band members guarded the higher-ups. These higher-ups didn’t go to the heart of the battles, so he avoided being on the front lines on D-Day. Few from his original infantry unit survived the attack. And so, thanks to the clarinet, he was able to return to Worcester after the war and become my father.

My experiences with Miss McDonald squelched any interest I might have had in learning to play an instrument. Why court failure? My father practiced the clarinet once in a while, but otherwise music didn’t play much of a role in our family’s life. My musical awakening occurred one Sunday night during *The Ed Sullivan Show*. There was Elvis Presley, hips swiveling, lips pouting, crooning, “Don’t Be Cruel” and “Love Me Tender.” I was mesmerized. After days of ardent pleas, my parents finally bought me a record player and my first record, “Hound Dog.” It wasn’t long before my interests expanded beyond Elvis. Afternoons I’d rush home from school to dance along to *American Bandstand*. Saturday mornings were set aside for that week’s Top Ten. Ear glued to the radio, I’d carefully write down the lists. I was never willing to sing out loud, but I memorized every lyric and mouthed along to all the hits by Elvis, the Everly Brothers, and Buddy Holly. Before I knew it, the Beatles arrived.

I started college in a small town without much going on. When there were concerts at the school, I’d go for the diversion. I enjoyed these live classical music performances, but my record purchases still centered on The Doors and Simon & Garfunkel. Later, when I moved to Chicago, classical music became more important, thanks to the Chicago Symphony. Ravinia, the orchestra’s outdoor summer home, was a magical place — picnics under the stars, with Mozart and Schubert filling the air. During the winter I subscribed

to a chamber music series held in a ballroom above the symphony’s main hall. The conversations among instruments resonated with me. For Valentine’s Day one year a boyfriend gave me a set of all nine Beethoven symphonies recorded by the Chicago Symphony. I started splitting my time in the record store between the rock and classical sections.

After Chicago, I lived in London for a few years and then became a permanent New Yorker. One of the many great things about both cities is the abundance of live classical music, and I partake whenever I can. When I hear a piece I like at a concert or on WQXR, New York’s classical music station, I add it to my wish list of CDs to own. I still like Bruce Springsteen, but I spend money on Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin.

Over all these years, I’ve never managed to sing an on-key note, play an instrument, or read music, but classical music has become a central part of my life. It enriches every day. The music can soothe or stimulate, match or alter moods. Mainly it’s pleasurable, but it’s also intellectual. Why do I like this and not that? Can I tell the difference between one performance and another? Can I identify the composer or the piece when I hear a snippet? Learning about composers’ lives and music history adds to the enjoyment.

Five years ago, I discovered the adult education division of Juilliard, our local and world-renowned music school. I started by taking the introductory course in listening to classical music. The following term, I signed up for a course in listening to piano music. I thought it was strange that the teacher, David Dubal, greeted most of the students by name the first day of class. I discovered that many had taken the course over and over, for up to ten years at that point. I have become one of those repeaters.

In class, brilliant Juilliard students play the piano and David chats about the piece or the composer. The setting is intimate: two grand pianos in a classroom holding about forty people. For two hours a week, it’s piano music heaven. It never gets stale: the piano repertoire is huge, the performers keep changing, and David has a seemingly bottomless supply of fascinating things to say.

David preaches that classical music needs more than composers and performers to survive and flourish: it also needs good audiences. His class helps the pianists become better performers and the students become more perceptive audience members. I’ve always held people with musical talent on a pedestal, and I still do. But now I’m standing a little taller myself, because I have an important role to play, too. I’m a Listener.

Sharon B. Gurwitz is a management consultant and writer living in New York.

CARNATIC MUSIC continued from page 1

What is a *raga* or *ragam*? A *ragam* or *raga* is the scale used for a song, a sequence of intervals adding up to an octave. The *sa* on which it starts is variable. The *Shruti* is the set of three notes, *sa*, *pa* and the higher *sa*, which a singer can sing comfortably, within which the song is sung or played. These notes are sustained as a drone throughout a song.

The basic beat that accompanies a song is called the *thalam*. Here is how the very first thalam (*Adi Thalam*) would look. All beats are marked by striking the right hand or fingers lightly against the right thigh.

Beat 1: Palm downward, lightly strike your right thigh.

Beat 2: Strike your little finger against your thigh.

Beat 3 and 4: Repeat with ring and middle fingers.

Beat 5: Palm downwards, lightly strike your right thigh.

Beat 6: Now turn your hand so that your palm is facing upwards and strike your thigh gently.

Beat 7 and 8: Repeat 5 and 6.

Here is a first exercise for voice or keyboard.

Playing it is easy. Use the following key.

1= Thumb 2= Index finger

3= Middle finger 4= Ring finger.

Note:
1. This notation is used for ease of understanding. The time interval for each note is usually a little longer than shown here.
2. The thalam we have discussed is made up of 2 beats (8 notes).

1st Kalam (Speed)

2nd Kalam

3rd Kalam

Carnatic Equivalent for Western Notes

S	R	G	M	P	D	N	S	S	N	D	P
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1
M	G	R	S								
4	3	2	1								

A word on speed: There are 3 speeds: slow medium and fast, all controlled by how you subdivide the beat. The tempo of the beat remains constant. The figure above shows all three speeds. Notice how the number of notes per beat keeps doubling. Moreover, remember, this one is easy: no left hand notes!

Now try to sing the words *sa, ri, ga . . .* exactly in tune with these notes while following the thalam with your right hand. Beginners find the process of singing to the thalam pretty complex so don't be too worried if you seem to be lacking this skill. The *sa* may start on any note and as long as the corresponding intervals between notes are maintained, you will get the same effect. The above is just one way of going about learning the ropes by playing the notes on a keyboard. As for voice

training, there are definite exercises at each level of learning and all teachers follow the same structure when they teach Carnatic music. The student is introduced to songs that have words only after he or she has mastered the seven basic notes and tested the upper and lower limits of his or her voice.

Tips for the first time listener:

- Don't be overwhelmed even if this is your first time at a concert.
- Trust your musical ear.
- Take your knowledge of the basic notes with you.
- When you hear *Adi Thalam* you can always join the beat.
- Have fun!

Here are two more exercises to try.

A few final tips for the enthusiast:

- Listen to a lot of music. The internet is the best source for Carnatic music.

Exercise 2

Voice

Exercise 3

- Keep an eye out for concerts by people coming in from India. No one spends money to bring them in unless they are good.
- The best method to become an exponent of this performing art form is to find a good teacher.

Malathi Jivan is director of Raag Taal LLC, a school of South Indian music and dance in the state of Washington, on the Internet at <http://home.comcast.net/~raagtaal/>. She can be contacted at <malathi.jivan@comcast.net>. Other internet sources of information on Carnatic music, musicians and performances include www.carnatic.com/, www.artindia.net/carnatic.html, www.karnatik.com/ and www.southindiafinearts.org/.

REQUIEM FOR THE YODEL

by John Dinan

One of the clear passages between the Depression era and our modern world was the day the yodel died. I



Jimmie Rodgers
Country Music Hall of Fame

I remember hearing yodeling on the radio by individual artists and as part of commercial presentations for Philadelphia Scrapper. Eddy Arnold and his Cattle Call was a favorite of mine. Other yodelers include Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams. The old "B" westerns, especially those with Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, had a lot of yodeling.

The dictionary defines yodeling as "Singing with frequent changes from the ordinary voice to falsetto and back again." Another definition read "Rapid variations in tone and pitch which convey the joyful spirit of Alpine folk songs." Like a lot of things, it's hard to define but you know it when you hear it.

As a kid, most kids could yodel in my neighborhood. We took great delight in calling a pal out of his house with a yodeling flourish. "Jimmy-odeloieeee" or "Leo-odeloieeee" would bring the response – also in the yodeling flourish – "I'll be right out-eloidieeee."

To this day I haven't lost the touch, which I inflict on my grandkids. The question "Wanna hear grampy yodel?" is met with some groans but they're going to get it whether they want it or not!

I was surfing the net to see what's going on with yodeling and am sad to say that it seems to be declared a dead language (and I do consider it a language). Supposedly it is still used by the Inuit, the Lapps and the Chippewa, but its passing is acknowledged. I do, however, see an occasional country singer on TV who has incorporated traces of the old Eddie Arnold-type yodel in his or her song — so all it not lost. In addition, there is a book on the market by Rudy Robbins and Shirley Field: *How to Yodel The Cowboy Way*, and Norman Gwaltney offers an Internet yodeling course.

So, what is the pleasure of the yodel? I suspect it's some pre-human exercise of the vocal chords to make (interesting) sounds while exercising the lungs. In short, basic musical fun, available to those whose musical talent is (on a scale of 1-10) near zero. Will the yodel every make a comeback? Don't hold your breath! Save it for a yodel.

John Dinan is a professor of English at Central Michigan University

TRAVEL

continued from page 1

and education, it leads to a greater understanding of the places we visit and lifestyles involved. For instance, a car radio playing a tape of mournful, poignantly lonesome cowboy music while the family drives for hours through the flat, empty prairies of Nebraska makes the experience more profound and helps one understand the original source of the music. One can almost envision cowboys gathered around their campfires, strumming away the lonely evening hours after moving cattle toward the famous stockyards at North Platte. Our family had many lively discussions about the portability of certain instruments, which allowed them to be easily carried to the Americas by early immigrants or to travel westward with the earliest settlers. We investigated instruments made from or decorated with indigenous materials in areas we traveled, including gourds, coconuts, shells, feathers, reeds, tin, animal sinew and skin, bone, horn, ivory, and woods of all kinds.

Incorporating regional music education into your family travels is simple; only a few simple steps before departure are needed.

Check the websites for the cities you'll be visiting. Look for event calendars, activities, and attraction headings to locate music festivals, music preservation societies, or museums of musicians and musical instruments. Our on-line research on New Orleans, for instance, led us not only to Preservation Hall, but to a jazz festival and information on zydeco music and its history. On the internet, we also

found the aforementioned Oktoberfest, a Dutch festival that featured wooden shoe *klompen* dancing and the music that accompanied it, a museum devoted to antique musical instruments, and a



Alpenrose (an oompah-yodel band)
2002 Stiftungfest, La Crosse, WI

Texas festival with music that drew on the Tex-Mex heritage of the area. Don't overlook period festivals, such as Renaissance fairs that are held across the country. These are fine sources of musical exposure for young children. Interesting music can also be found in many unlikely places, such as at gatherings of storytellers and on street corners.

Visit your local library before you travel and borrow tapes and CDs to use in your vehicle or portable music players while traveling. Look for books on the musical heritage of the region you'll visit. Look for opportunities

to purchase authentic music as you travel — at small, locally-owned music stores or at music festivals. Many local musicians will have products for sale where they perform.

During your travels, focus on unusual local instruments such as ukuleles, Indian flutes, steel drums, spoons, jaws harps, ocarinas, castanets, concertinas, bongo drums, conch shell horns, and maracas. If inexpensive versions of these are available for sale during your travels, purchase them so your children can try them and can share with other students when they return home. Local instruments made by artisans from regional materials make great souvenirs.

When broadening your children's musical education, two words are key: lighten up. Education need not take the form of a formal lesson, concert, or lecture. Let the atmosphere teach. Renaissance fairs exposed our children to lutes and mandolins, lyres and harps, recorders, and other instruments they had never seen before while they wandered wide-eyed amidst the knights and ladies of the fair. Musical appreciation can occur simply and enjoyably through absorption. When youngsters love the music, they'll do the hard work themselves. I've noticed all my children practice harder on their formal lessons after a heady dose of musical exposure through family activities. One child taught herself to play a secondary musical instrument by searching computer websites for instruction and learning by herself. I eventually noticed how serious she was and the progress she had made and offered formal lessons in that instrument as well as her usual piano.

Exposing children to music through family travels builds awareness and appreciation of diversity. They can see that music springs from its environment and the diverse people in it. They learn, too, that musical ability can open doors to great fun, extra income, and new relationships (it doesn't hurt for a parent to point out those benefits, either!) The pianist in the upscale restaurant or shopping mall, the musicians at the Renaissance fair, the country western band members at the western rodeo, the orchestra on the cruise ship, the Dixieland quartet on the riverboat, and the players at the Hawaiian luau are all doing what they enjoy in fun settings and earning some cash at the same time. Even if your child never becomes a professional musician, that cash can come in handy during high school and college. Adept enough, your student-age child will not want for a summer job, a point never lost on a teenager.

But even if music never earns our children a dime, they have been enriched by the exposure to it. And exploring it during family travels has made our memories deeper and richer — and our family more harmonious.

Deborah Beyer's "Inviting Termites" appeared in the April, 2003 issue of Music for the Love of It.



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Castle Lnare, West Bohemia

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