

MeenD

Musical Connections

August 2012

I N S I D E

Shankar
Mahadevan
Unplugged



A Tale of
Two Cities

Anatomy
of the Rhythm



and much
more...

The Journey Begins...

Why Meend?

Well, to begin with, every child has dreams. Meend may have wandered into my thoughts sometime in my early teens, sitting in a classroom whilst pretending to learn something not remotely connected to music. But for many years, it simply lingered in some tiny corner of my mind as an unrequited dream.

I have been fascinated by music from a very young age. As a toddler I would protect my cassettes like boys take care of their toys. As I grew up, I learnt that many people around me also shared this passion. My dad always says, India is a singing country. We have music mellifluously flowing through our veins and brains. Music is the soul of our entertainment and recreation. Apart from Hindustani and Carnatic Classical, music has been a part of us, as right from our films, TV shows to our pastime games like Antakshari feature music as an indispensable part. As humans, we are obsessed about music. We sing in our bathrooms, we pray to God through music, we sing songs on happy and sad occasions. Even most of the Indian Gods play a musical instrument! I am yet to know of a person who ‘dislikes music’. You may not like a particular genre, but there exists nobody in this world who simple ‘doesn’t like music at all’.

But something that always bothered me is that despite the central role music plays in our lives, we have limited stuff written about music around us. Yes, there are books, and there’s thesis. But to be very frank, they are mostly, if not all, ‘for the connoisseur’.

Therefore, Meend! Meend is a sincere attempt to share musical stories, those people would love to read but would never know where to find, hence also the decision to introduce it on an easily accessible, online platform. Besides, the focus of Meend will not be restricted to just paticular genres of music. We’ll try to bring Metallica and Pt Bhimsen Joshi on the same page! After a lot of thought, we decided to zero in on Shankar Mahadevan for the cover of our first issue – for he epitomizes the term ‘youth icon’.

There are people without whom Meend would have stayed a ‘brainchild’ – Mrunmayi, who has been instrumental in getting my dream onto paper, and the rest of our wacky, zealous, humble team: Aabha, Sahil Amruta, Gandhaar (there’s another one, yeah!) and Mrugesh.

- *Gandhaar Sangoram*

A Tale of Two Cities

Amruta Bendre traces the stark similarities as well as the subtle differences between the musical cultures of Pune and Bangalore

A majestic stage, an ever-expected chaos at the counter for last minute ticket hopefuls, thousands of fellow connoisseurs gathered to hear their favourite artiste – I've been diligently attending concerts of Indian music ever since I was a child. Out of all the legendary artistes and the mindblowing music pieces they created out of some inanimate instruments, what always fascinated me the most was watching an earthen utensil from the kitchen being magically transformed into a beautiful rhythm machine!

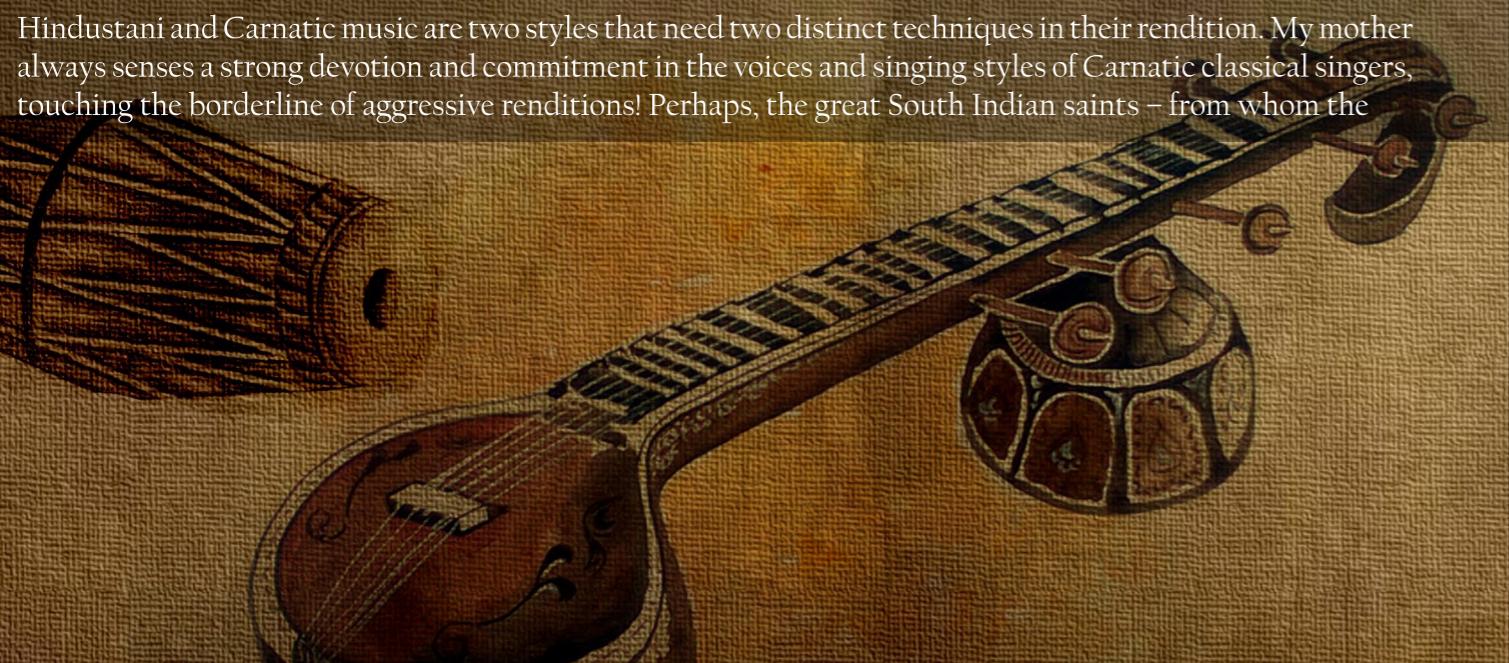
Thereafter I have trudged along various paths of music, but the day I shifted from Pune to Bengaluru was when my love for percussion was resuscitated and it drove me to look for a guru who could teach me the ghatam, or in kitchen-language; my granny's alternative refrigerator. My search was in vain, so I settled for vocal Carnatic classical music. Like an eager and enthusiastic child on the first day of school, I got dressed up in a pretty salwar kameez adorned with mirror work and showed up at my teacher's doorstep. She told me to sit down and there began my first class of sa re ga... correction: sa rii gaa maa – Carnatic style. Toward the end of the first class I learnt two lessons; one, I needed to brush up my rote learning skills and two, I simply couldn't wear anything with mirrors on it! My right palm had turned red from thumping my thigh to the Swarawali, set to the Adi taal. Unlike in Hindustani classical music, I realised Carnatic sangeet was far more ordered; at least in the initial stages of learning, where you learn strings of swaras or kritis and are expected to know them by heart.

After years of taking music classes in Pune and Mumbai, learning music in Bengaluru ruthlessly refuted my belief that the voice quality is sine qua non for a singer. I had always believed I had a 'powerful' voice, not exactly 'playback' material. When I was training under Pt. Chandrakantji Limaye, he approved of the force in my voice. I also had the opportunity to learn a few lessons under Padmashree Padmajatai Phenani, who insisted on integrating more softness into my 'dumdaar' style of singing. Her own singing is almost feather-like! Moulding mellowness into the folk thrust of my voice was quite a herculean task. Just as I was close to accomplishing this feat, my voice was subjected to the scrutiny of Geetha Mami, my new Carnatic sangeet teacher who instantly gave her verdict "Your voice is too feeble!" I've been working hard on it, but till date, I have not managed to satisfy her one bit. During the Guru Pooja ceremony on Dassera, I was almost embarrassed when I heard her other students crooning – voices of little girls and boys boozing across the room. I often wonder where this force – so passionate and uninhibited – originates from.

Hindustani and Carnatic music are two styles that need two distinct techniques in their rendition. My mother always senses a strong devotion and commitment in the voices and singing styles of Carnatic classical singers, touching the borderline of aggressive renditions! Perhaps, the great South Indian saints – from whom the



Carnatic kritis originate – have something to do with Carnatic singers coming across as devoted disciplinarians. On the contrary, in Hindustani classical music, we make up our own sets of practice notes that are not necessarily sung in a particular taal. While learning Hindustani music, I distinctly recall my teacher encouraging us to 'experiment with the notes' from Day One, which was tough. On the other hand, in Carnatic music, my teacher emphasised on the perfect replication of what she sang, which, was equally challenging. I have hardly managed to sing either style effectively but I have come to appreciate their individual melodies nevertheless.

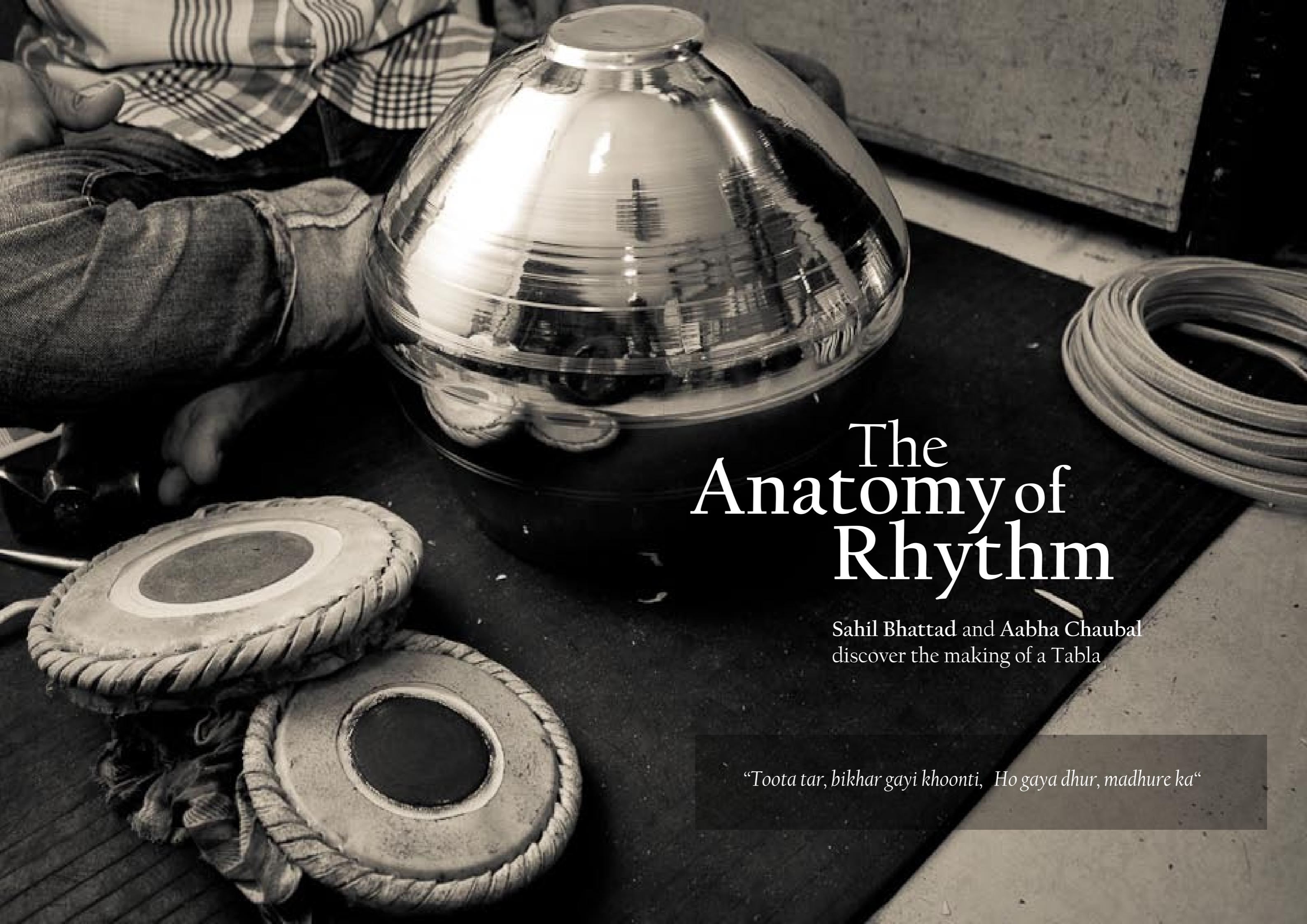


One day as I entered the class, my teacher invited me into her living room to watch the Thyagaraja Festival being telecast on TV. Celebrated in memory of the 17th century saint Thyagaraja – a composer of hundreds of kritis that are sung by every Carnatic vocalist to this day – the spectacle seemed like a familiar sight – probably because it conjured up a striking similarity to the annual Sawai Gandharva Mahotsav held in Pune! There was a stage in front of which were seated hundreds of men on one side and women on the other, all of them donned in a dress code fit for attendants of a grand wedding. I instinctively anticipated a singer to emerge and start performing on stage. However, I couldn't help but feel confused about the seating arrangement – why were the men and women seated like two armies facing each other on the battlefield? I posed my doubt to my teacher and before she could throw light on it, suddenly, to my astonishment, they all started singing a Carnatic kriti in unison! I was dumbfounded. After a couple of minutes, I asked my teacher if they belonged to some troupe. She brushed off the idea and told me they were all singers who knew the Pancha-Rathna Kirtanas of Thyagaraja. There also were flutists, violinists, mridangam and ghatam players accompanying the vocalists. It appeared as if Hindustani classical singers and accompanists from all over India started performing Yaman Kalyan as a group song! Of course, that would have been a chaotic prospect, considering the improvisational format of Hindustani music. But owing to the fixed compositions of Carnatic sangeet, the group rendition of the Pancha-Rathna Kirtanas was a smooth-sailing affair. My teacher informed that quite a few participants of this festival were the best singers from all over South India. It was like a chorus put up by the Bhimsen Joshis, Aarti Ankalkars and Suresh Wadkars of South India!

Music in Bangalore is omnipresent, with its enticing appeal. Each place possesses its unique musical flavour. Even the autowallas retain their peculiar taste in music with their own versions of 'Aashiqui' and 'Hawa-hawa'. If I visit a temple in Pune, I hear Lata didi's melodious "Om Namoji Aadya" in the morning and Pt Jasraj's chaste Gayatri Mantra in the evening. In Bangalore, I hear the a soul-stirring rendition of 'Vishnu Sahastranaam' by M. S. Subbalaxmi in the morning and Yesudas' "Swami Sharanam Ayyapa" strotra which evokes a similar sanctity and trance.

In Pune, we dote on the 'li'l champ' Mugdha Vaishampayan. In Bengaluru I fell in love with a little girl I once saw on TV wearing a silk 'parkar polka' and garlands around her ponytails innocently crooning "Andagaada Andagaada". Be it the the lively notes of the sanai choughada symbolizing the joyous announcement of a wedding successfully accomplished in the Peshwai wedding, or the spirited expression of the naadaswaram and the mridangam after the oonjal, music celebrates love and life with the same warmth everywhere.

I am now looking forward to discover the Bangalorean versions of the Bhajni Mandal, Laavnis and Powadas...



The Anatomy of Rhythm

Sahil Bhattad and Aabha Chaubal
discover the making of a Tabla

"Toota tar, bikhar gayi khoonti, Ho gaya dhur, madhure ka"

Kabir, a 15th century mystic poet, explained in one of his works the importance of each and every component of an instrument in creating harmony. The slightest aberration, even in the smallest and the seemingly insignificant part, is enough to make music noise.

The importance of every string, every peg, every little thing, so simply expressed in these lines, got us wondering of all the things that go into making an instrument. We wanted to bring to you the genius of this arduous and fascinating process. The first instrument that came to our minds was the most common and indispensable percussion instrument in Indian music: the Tabla.

To learn the process we visited Shaikh Muscials, an old music shop located on Satara road, which has been making percussion instruments since 1961. Mustafabhai and Haneefbhai, the current owners, walked us through the nuances of their family tradition of making tabla.

On a cloudy Thursday afternoon we walked in to a small, congested workshop to find four artists squatting on a messy floor, deeply engrossed in their work, oblivious to the regular load shedding. It was only when they noticed our journalistic intrusion that they suddenly became conscious of the inhospitable appearance of the work place. "Haan, aiye aiye. Jumer kuch baithne ko la. Sorry aaj lights nahi hai." After much pandemonium of clearing up the floor, discarding broken stools, inverting buckets for seats and our polite efforts of declining their offers, we finally made ourselves comfortable on the floor. And so began the amazing discovery of the art and science of tabla making.

Believe it or not, it all starts from a goat! It is goat skin that is used to make the top surface or 'pudi' of a tabla. After the goat is skinned in Solapur, the skin is washed and cleaned in a solution of water and alum. It is then beaten into an even sheet and heated in a kiln of lime. The central part of this sheet is the skin over the stomach of the goat, whereas the fringe parts are the limbs. When the skin is finally hard and flat, it is stretched on a wooden plank, nailed at the ends and dried in shade. Depending on the size and the pitch of the tabla the skin is cut into circles with the help of a wooden ring and a flat blade. The hence cut skin has to be



washed, cleaned, wiped and dried once again. Two congruent circles of skin near the stomach are sewn together using a cord with a small opening on the upper layer and placed on the body of a tabla. The harder parts of the sheet are used as fillings in between the pudi and the edge of the body to avoid slitting the pudi. Similar procedure is repeated on another body and both these tablas are tied together in such a way that they face opposite directions.

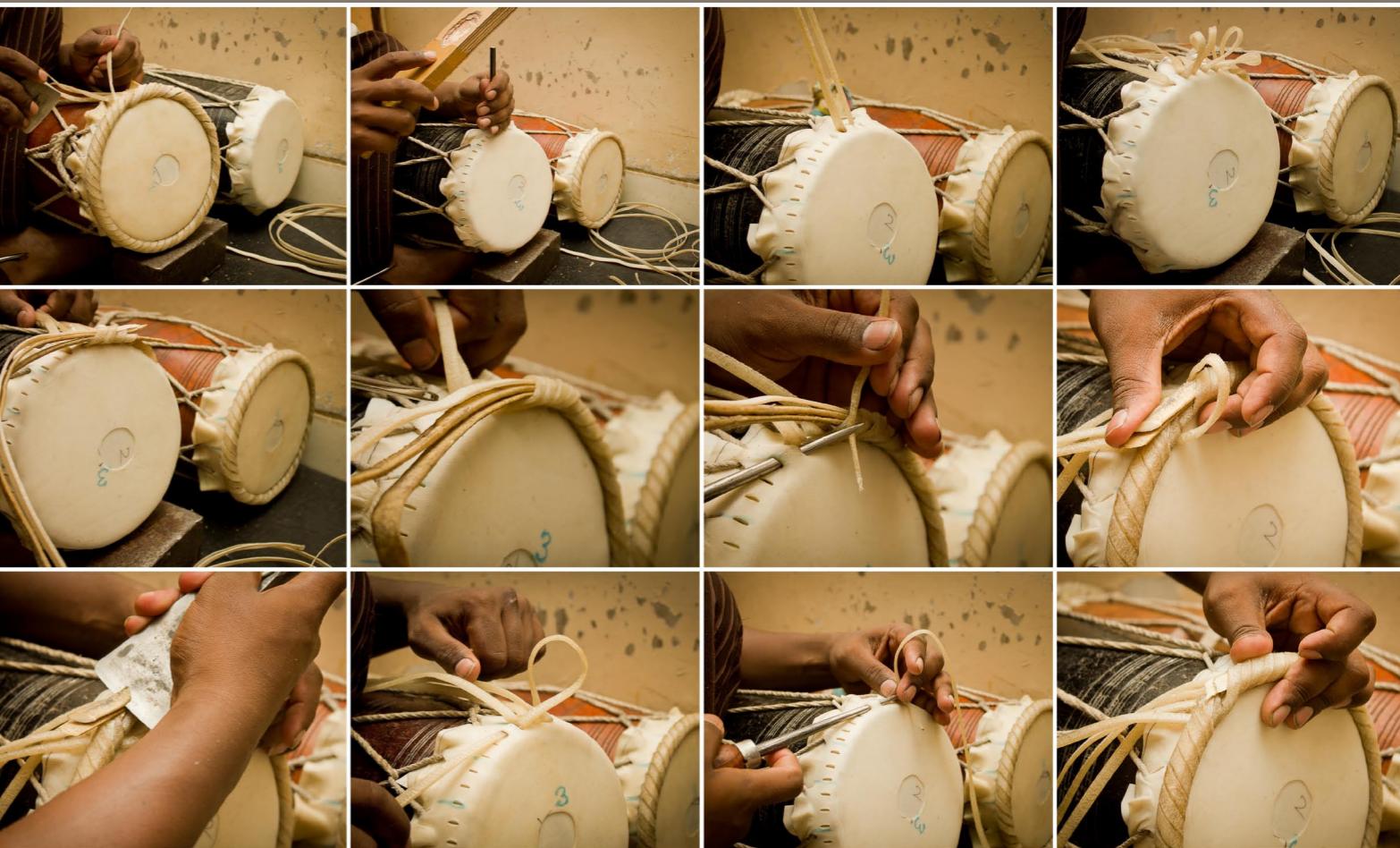
Once dry, a bigger concentric circle is cut on the upper layer to expose 'lawa.' The upper layer which is slightly harder than the lawa is called 'chaat.'



We were just about to proceed to the next step when a small kid came strutting along with a kettle of chai and tiny plastic glasses. The much deserved tea break proved to be a lot of fun. As we bonded over tea and exchanged our stories, Mustafabhai shared with us the history of their family business. “My abba was a very good tabla player and learnt how to make tablas from Mr. Mehendale of Mehendale Musicals. He started this shop in 1961 when we were just kids. We grew up watching our father work on tablas and eventually started assisting him. Learning to make a tabla requires 15 – 20 years of training and practice which we fortunately received under our own roof. We can play the tabla but don’t perform because after all many can play but very few can make it.”



And so it was time to get back to work. The next step is making the ‘gajara’ or the interlinking ring of a flat string around the edge of pudi. The string, ‘malu’, manufactured in Kondhwa in Pune is made from the skin of a young buffalo. Two hours prior to the process, malu is soaked in water to soften it and is very tactfully woven into the skin along the rim. Two strings of malu whose length is determined by running it twice around the circumference and once along the diameter are used to make the gajara. Sixteen equidistant marks are made on the circumference of the pudi; each of these gaps is then further divided into 2 or 3 parts depending on the size of the tabla. So the pudi has either 48 or 64 parts called “ghar”. The malu is then intricately woven in a specific alternating pattern into the pudi and around a bunch of relatively thick cords.



So far we have the two layers of goat skin (pudi) stretched across the mouth of the body (khod for tabla and bhabha for dagga) with the malu coiled around the pudi. The next important move is to create tension on the pudi which is achieved by connecting the top surface of the tabla to the bottom surface using a cord called ‘vadi’. A coil of vadi is added at the bottom for this purpose. The vadi (also made from buffalo skin) is then run from the coil, through the gajara over the 16 marks previously made on the pudi. The vadi plays the essential role of pulling down the gajara thereby creating the ideal tension on the pudi and tuning it to perfection. Small cylindrical wooden blocks are inserted between the body and the vadi for fine tuning.





After this basic assembling process is complete, comes the most tedious job which can take as long as three whole days: applying ink or 'shai' to the tabla. The ink, specially ordered from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, is basically a mixture of pulverized iron and processed wheat.



This mixture is then blended in a homemade adhesive made from 'maida' and applied in layers on the centre of the pudi. It is the shai that gives tabla its pitch and dagga its base. Depending upon factors like the thickness of the goat skin, the tension on the pudi, the target scale of the tabla etc. the number and the thickness of the layers of the ink is determined. It requires immense skill to be able to strike a perfect balance between the tension on the skin and the amount of ink to achieve perfect unison of a tabla and a tambora.

For the ink to fuse with the skin a smooth stone is rubbed with light pressure, creating heat, on the inked portion. Inking the tabla is much like painting eyes of an idol. Until the eyes are painted it is just stone. The moment they are complete the idol comes to life. "The goat skin is after all dead. The tabla breathes because of our touch, our care," said Haneefbhai on an emotional note.

While we were still mesmerized by the simplicity of this beautiful statement he moved on to the final step of tuning a tabla; inserting a thread in between lawa and chat. The thread plays an unusually important role in the resonance a tabla creates. The thread creates an air gap between the two layers thus giving the sound waves enough space to oscillate in between. The fine fibres of the thread help sound resonate for a longer time, as long as eight whole seconds. As he demonstrated how big a difference a small piece of thread can make, we witnessed the dead skin transform into a perfect rhythm instrument.



Zapped by the science and craftsmanship involved we sat there absorbing each and every aspect of this intricate process. Even without doing anything, we felt within us, the satisfaction that an artist experiences when he beholds his creation. A few more lines from the same poem of Kabir's came to us and a smile spread on our faces, unwittingly –

*"Ainchat tar, morodat khoonti,
Nikasat raag Hajure ka"*

(Tighten the strings, twist the pegs And it sings the song of the Lord)



SHANKARNAMA!

PHOTO COURTESY | www.shankarehsaanloy.com

Be it singing the title track in Hindi for Winnie the Pooh or a Marathi abhang at the Sawai Gandharv Mahotsav in Pune, versatility could very well be Shankar Mahadevan's middle name. To skeptics asking 'why', he passionately answers 'why not'!



There are many images of this personality that surface time and again. And they are triggered by a multitude of factors. It could be seeing someone out of breath, or the juxtaposition of multi-cultural influence such that you cannot trace back his exact roots. Or the sheer passion and exuberance in a performance such that it transcends way beyond your sub-conscious. Shankar Mahadevan while being a synonym for core talent is certainly no mystifying artist either. The ease with which he renders the most intricate music compositions is just as obvious as the nonchalance in his disposition. Team Meend honors this powerhouse of an experimenter in its premier issue.

When we put forth our motto of sharing with our readers the musicians' approach to music rather than the drama and the politics in their life, Mahadevan congratulated the team for the fresh approach. He also added "Readers now need a new perspective that would educate them to identify good music and mediocre music". Following are excerpts from the interview.

1) *It has been more than a year since Shankar Mahadevan Academy was launched, which is certainly a different approach to learning music. What gave you the faith that this method will work for a society and an art that has its origins in the Gurukul method of learning?*

Just because something has existed around for a hundred years does not mean that it is still relevant in contemporary times. There are always multiple methods of doing things. As the world evolves and becomes a more advanced place to live in, it brings in modern methods or technology to our disposal. It is our responsibility to use it to our benefit. There are various factors that restrict people from travelling, to be in a Gurukul. We are trying to bring out the best possible curriculum, syllabi and ways to teach music to such people. I believe our attempt is very honest and it is seen by the reaction of the students, teachers and parents. So I think we are on the right path.

2) *Hindustani and Carnatic Classical music have unique flavours. What do you feel is the core difference between these two styles with respect to the arrangement of the notes and the use of rhythm?*

Hindustani and Carnatic are forms of music that have different styles of expression. The former is very cycle driven. So the singer waits for the particular phrase on the table to know when the cycle is coming to an end, especially in the vilambit lay. However, the dhrupad-dhamar of Hindustani classical is very close to the Carnatic form of music. Carnatic music is very rhythmic and melody goes along with the rhythm right from day one. You feel the mridangam player and the singer go hand in hand, because the compositions are also rhythmically phrased. So, Hindustani classical music takes rhythm sentence by sentence whereas Carnatic classical takes it word by word.

3) *How has your training in Carnatic classical music influenced you as a composer or a singer?*

I cannot claim that any one style influences my music. However my training was in Carnatic classical music. So the grammar of my music is certainly influenced by that heritage. On the other hand, living in Mumbai and interacting with so many musicians of various genres, any individual with the passion for music will be open to be inspired by other styles. And this is

true not only for classical but also encompasses Western, Hindustani, Carnatic, Gazals, Bhavgeet, Natyageet.

4) We have seen you sing a Rajasthani folk song “Banna re” with the Carnatic classical singer Aruna Sairamji accompanied by a violin and a mridangam. At the same time, we have been delighted with you going into a playful jugalbandi with Hariharanji on “Chappa chappa charkha chale” in a wild concert. What makes your music so believable and workable on such varied platforms with such a varied audience?

I think when your vocabulary is very wide; you have a plethora of options to choose from to communicate a particular feel. My language of music is not restricted to film music just because I am doing Bollywood compositions. I use different languages to interpret film music. Somebody has to start, and with conviction create music, which he believes in, and to which people are unknown about. The more I delve further into it the more I get excited by understanding the intricacies of the new genre. The fascinating (and almost overwhelming) exposure equips me to bring various forms of music into mainstream or commercial music. For example, in ‘Sapnon se bhare naina’ I have used a thumri kind of a feel, or in ‘Baavre’ I have



PHOTO COURTESY | www.shankarehsaanloy.com

used folk music. If my knowledge was only about film music then I would be composing like it always has been; in a typical way and I would not be able to diversify.

5) You have composed film as well as non-film music. Is there a difference in approaching the two?

More than the approach, I try to gauge what the requirements are. For film music I always remember that we are composing for somebody else. It's not for us. We are composing for the director and for the film. So the approach has to be completely different there. When we are composing for yourself you are the captain of the ship so you can do whatever you want.

6) What comes first? The essence of the lyrics or the ‘ras’ of the raga you set them to? Has it ever happened that you composed a disco number on a solemn-sounding raga?

Many a times we compose the melody first, so we do not have anything fixed in mind. We keep trying things while jamming. Sometimes words dictate a particular raag, at other times not so much. I have composed “tumhein aaj maine jo dekha” in yaman. We also have compositions like ‘Sapno se bhare naina’ which has a drums and base track but is set in bhairavi.

7) Most of the films today have a romantic number as well as a disco and a sad song in varied styles. Do you think Indian audience will ever be ready again for musicals like Tansen, Baiju Baawra, Sardari Begum or Umrao Jaan that are dedicated to a single kind of music?

I don't know when was the last time somebody had the conviction to make a movie on a particular topic related to music, or when a composer, with the right credibility, has composed music for that movie. As the world is becoming a smaller place, the world of music seems to be expanding by the day.

8) How has Sufi music or Jazz come to influence our audience?

The common man is getting access to every kind of music right in his bedroom. The Internet, the mobile, youtube; it's a revolution! You can listen to Amir Khan and Michael Jackson on the same screen. You have access to everything. People are exposed to all these forms of music now. It is similar to the culinary revolution we see around us. People are not stuck to one cuisine. With access to various musical cuisines, all these are becoming a part of their musical palette. They are getting used to the taste. That's why when they hear it they don't mind other kinds of music coming in. At the same time when a classical melody comes their way, there is still an eager audience for it. There is a market for every kind of music, every track.

On this note we expressed our gratitude to Mahadevan for his faith in reinventing music and doling out the most exquisite compositions. Here is wishing him all the best for his upcoming projects that involve seeking new musical talent over the mobile phone or creating some more foot-tapping music with who knows ...a pinch of Jazz with a dash of the sitar!

OFF THE BEATEN 'TRACK'

Pune-based flautist

Gandhaar Amin explores an unseen side of Indian music, that goes beyond Bollywood and classical, to unveil a treasure trove of alternate, unconventional genres

In the last year of my graduation, the most common question that every single ‘uncle and auntie’ would invariably ask me was, “What do you plan on doing after you pass out of college?” Whenever I replied with a monosyllabic ‘music’, they would look at me strangely, perhaps wondering if this was some kind of a twisted humour. The ones who couldn’t contain their curiosity would say, “That’s fine, but what do you ‘actually’ want to do in life?” After heaps of such conversations, I developed the knack of staying calm and repeating with a sugary smile, “Music it is!” While most of them would give up on their quest to dig out my future plans from me, some rare, open-minded ones would go on and ask me what being a professional musician really entailed.

So I realised that I needed an answer to that question, not for theirs but for my own sake. I needed to know what ‘music’ had in store for me. Ideas and memories started floating, and the two experiences that stood out were – having learnt classical music since the time I was an infant and having performed and composed with musicians from other genres in the recent years. Like any average follower of music, I started assuming there were only two things that I could do as a professional musician in India – classical performances or composing for Bollywood. And right then, popped up an epiphany. The question that went on to be a deciding factor in my choice of career was – if not classical or Bollywood, what else?

Here’s a little trivia. For the last few years, a lot of music is being made in India outside of

Bollywood, some of which has also started getting incorporated into the film industry lately. Something like this was unheard of till about ten years ago. But today, there’s an all-new brood of musicians in India who have made it big as ‘independent artistes’.

Let’s dig a little deeper into the early history of rock music in India. The first Indian record company was the Gramophone Company, which sold EPs, LPs and 45 rpm records of rock-and-roll acts from the USA and Britain. Later in 1970, Polydor, a German Label, began an India label distributing rock music. The most notable rock acts in India during this period were The Mystics from Mumbai (known as Bombay at that time), Beat-X from Chennai (Madras) and Flintstone from Kolkata (Calcutta). These bands had successful EP and LP releases and played regularly in Indian universities and colleges in the 60s and 70s. During this period, Indian musicians started fusing rock music with traditional Indian classical music. That was around the time ‘Indian fusion’ started creating waves, a trend that had also started trickling into Hindi film music.

Around this time, India gave rise to one of the most renowned rock musicians of the world. Farrouk Balsara (known to the world as Freddie Mercury), who famously declared that one of his formative influences was Lata Mangeshkar, began his musical journey as a teenager with the rock band The Hectics in Mumbai, in 1958. The arrival of MTV in the 1980s brought along the trend of music videos to India, increasing the money needed to produce an independent music album by leaps and bounds. Some of the notable bands formed in this period were Rock Machine (now known as Indus Creed), and the IIT Powai based Axecalibre.

The 90s saw a rise in the number of musicians trying to fuse rock music with Indian Classical. Palash Sen’s Euphoria, which was earlier a typical English rock band, started a cool new trend of writing songs in Hindi, and got instant fame, turning into a household name. This gave birth to ‘Hindi Rock’, which is now immensely popular in India. Agnee, a highly popular band is now spearheading the Hindi rock movement in Pune.

Currently, Indian rock music probably has a larger following than ever, yet it’s still negligible compared to the limelight hogged by Hindi film music. Quite a few glitzy, larger-than-life events, exclusively dedicated to rock music, are taking place. Independence Rock and LivewWire (hosted by IIT Bombay), are two extremely prestigious concerts to have played at for Indian rock musicians. Festivals such as NH7 in Pune, Fireflies in Bangalore and Sunburn in Goa have picked up as well.

A small set of jazz musicians in India is also catering to the musical needs of an even smaller group of jazz listeners. When the Hutson sisters from Mumbai performed on a late night show on the All India Radio in 1937, it was probably the first time that people in India ever heard jazz. Although jazz was never a very known musical genre in India, a lot of jazz musicians from all around the world came here and learnt Indian Classical music, right from John Coltrane to Dave Brubeck, and they echoed that it completely changed their outlook towards music! John McLaughlin, the legendary jazz guitarist, collaborated with some equally great Indian musicians like Zakir Hussain, Vikku Vinayakam and L. Shankar to form the famous acoustic fusion group Shakti.

Back home, quite a few independent musicians and music producers of Indian origin have made a mark on the international music scene. Prasanna Ramaswamy, a guitarist from Chennai was someone who'd learnt Carnatic Classical music all his life. Then he went to The Berklee College of Music in Boston in the USA, where he studied contemporary jazz music, and after passing out from there, he mixed the two genres and has now formed a unique style of his own. His first album, Be The Change, was a huge success in the American as well as the global jazz circuits. Karsh Kale is known to be one of the biggest music producers in the USA. Indian DJs like Jalebee Cartel and Medieval Pundits, too, have collaborated with foreign artistes and pulled off the acts successfully. Acts like Pentagram, Shaai+Func, Parikrama and many more are proving their mettle as well.

Till a few years back, a youngster who wished to learn any kind of western music would have to formally go to a University in the US or Europe. This was a near-impossible feat, unless you were willing to pay an obscenely huge amount of money. But, recently, a few Universities imparting education in western genres and boasting of acceptable quality have come up in India. With music essentially taught on a one-to-one, personal level in India via the guru-shishya parampara, some Universities like the Sangeet Research Academy (SRA) based in Kolkata, have attempted to formalise the process of teaching music. The Banaras Hindu University also has an esteemed music department which follows a similar practice. The A R Rahman School of music in Chennai is probably the first of its kind in India. With the revered composer for its dean, one can pursue a degree in western classical music here. The Swarnabhoomi Academy of Music (SAM), also in Chennai, offers a degree as well as small certificate courses in jazz.

"In one way or the other, Bollywood influences any aspiring/professional/amateur musician's life in India. But as a drummer I had to always think of alternative ways to survive through music and since Bollywood has a strong buying power, session recordings started taking place. Drum programming and live tracking also started creeping into Bollywood. The standard of music, especially from the post production angle, shot up high, with cutting edge musicians getting on the job as composers/arrangers and producers. All said and done, be it performing with jazz/funk bands, West African percussion ensembles, teaching or even performing as a back-up musician, it's basically all about focussing on giving your best," freelance drummer Varun Venkit of 'Taal Inc' opines.

But most importantly, what this scenario has achieved is offer the Indian listener a wider choice in genres of music, besides making it easier and more enjoyable for young Indian musicians to take up these 'hatke' genres. This brings us to my epiphany. I realized – if I extracted the good parts out of the various forms of music from the west and blended them with the rich styles of Indian Classical music, the world will get to experience a whole new face of music. The future does seem bright for unconventional genres and music beyond Bollywood and classical. All the audience needs is an open mind – and they'll have the world in their ears!

MUSIC REVIEW OF THE MONTH



Trippin on new sounds

Gangs of Wasseypur parts 1&2

Sneha Khanvalkar has turned out to be the flavor of the season. *Gangs Of Wasseypur* comprises an intriguing, yet fun mix of all those sounds that you wouldn't normally get to hear in a Hindi film soundtrack. The tunes are simple, extremely catchy and hummable, the reason they're tough to get out of your head. While the first part has 14 songs, the second one has no less than 13. But then, Anurag Kashyap has always been the man with the discerning ear.

The one track that really grows on you has to be O Womaniya. Both the versions of the song are rocking, with their simple folkish tunes from up north, and foot-tapping rhythms. Hunter seems to have a Caribbean outlook to a very Indian tune that resembles Pancham's 'Nani teri morni ko' from *Masoom*. Kehke Loonga, which is the tagline of the film, is classic Kashyap style music, with Music Director Amit Trivedi crooning. Tain Tain To To is a fun track sung by Sneha herself. Ik Bagal is reminiscent of Gulaal music, with Piyush Mishra giving his vocal cords some exercise. Overall, the soundtrack is an outstanding effort of blending unconventional music from all over the world.

In Part 2, Kehke Loonga comes back to haunt you but with an entirely different quality. There is heavy use of Dubstep, which lately has invaded the Indian Music scene. Electric Piya might stand as the star in the soundtrack, along with Chi Cha Ledar which is an amazing mashup, sung by a local-train aspiring child artiste Durga. I believe the basic, amazing reason why the music seems so different and unheard of is because of the sheer simplicity of the tunes. Devoid of grand orchestras, tonal extravaganzas and chord progressions, the music transports you back to the Romantic Era. Sneha solely rides on the power of her arrangement. *Wasseypur* just re-affirms the fact that music arrangement has become the most important facet of popular music in India. And Sneha is her own chief music arranger, unlike many composers in India who just build a tune and then hire arrangers to do the rest of the job. Sneha has turned some heads previously with *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* And *L.S.D.*, but this has to be the soundtrack that will be a turning point in her musical career. I'm sure waiting to see what she's got to offer next after this extended Sound Trippin' of 27 tracks!

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