

## **GUIDELINES FOR LEARNING RAGA & INDIAN MELODIES**

1. The development of aural skills is a gradual process. Best results are achieved by a little work done every day. This applies to the memorizing of the repertoire melodies - listen a little every day, and don't cram just before class.
2. The aim is that the *raga* and the pre-composed melodies will enter your long term memory. For deepening of aural awareness, long term memory needs to be activated. Long term memory takes longer to absorb material than short term memory. This is all the more reason to work on the repertoire melodies frequently and methodically.
3. Music can be either listened to actively or passively. Both approaches are useful for learning the repertoire melodies.
  - a) Active listening involves your full concentration, when you are alert and in a quiet space, free of distractions. Listen to the melody in its entirety several times, and then break it down into phrases or sections. Try singing with the recording, and stopping it before answering each phrase. Be sure to listen back to the recording to check what you've sung for accuracy (pitch, rhythm, intonation etc). Beware of waning concentration - its better to take a break than to "space out" during this type of work.
  - b) Passive listening involves listening in a casual manner, perhaps while doing some unrelated quiet activity (reading, cleaning, driving, etc). The music's general aspects will still be registered while it sounds on the peripheries of your aural awareness. I recommend that your initial listening of a new melody to be passive, and not too analytical. Progress with active listening will be so much faster thereafter.
4. When you feel the melody has begun entering your long term memory (so that you can sing it the next day without prompting from the recording), try recording yourself singing it, and comparing it with the original. Also, you should get together with your practice partner at least the day before class to check each other's renditions. Experience has shown that different people

have different levels of aural awareness in specific areas. It is likely that your partner will always be able to offer advice on how to correct some specific aspect of your rendition.

5. Try to limit the use of the piano or any instrument when learning melodies. Use instruments perhaps for getting starting pitches, but avoid playing along with yourself as you're singing.
6. Find a key that suits you and stick with it. Aim to keep the melody within your vocal range. You should be comfortable singing a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> below the tonic (lower *PA* or *DHA*), up to around the 10<sup>th</sup> above the tonic (*GA*).
7. Each week you are expected to come to class prepared to sing the work introduced in the prior class from memory.
8. The only visual aid that may be accepted in the viva voce examination are lyrics and/or solfege (*sargam*) for the composed melody (*bandish/gat*).
9. The aim is to learn the basic characteristics of each studied *raga* permanently, and to be able to reproduce the characteristic hierarchy of pitches and ascending/descending note order rules. An awareness of the intonation and microtonal inflection characteristics of the *raga* will also deepen your understanding of the musical language. By following the correct regime and placing all of these characteristics into your long term memory, you are actually developing your musicianship and personal style.
10. You should know the name of each *raga*, its placement in the day (*prahrar*), and theoretical ascending/descending scales (*aroha/avaroha*). Characteristic melodic catch-phrases (*pakar*) are also useful to memorize.

## ***SINGING WITH A DRONE (TANPURA)***

Indian classical music has been referred to as the most pitch-sensitive music in the world, and the attention you pay towards singing with the ever-present drone is of paramount importance. Here are some suggestions for beginning your practice. By following these suggestions you are “tuning up” and “warming up” prior to singing compositions and melodies in time.

1. Take the time to sit comfortably and relax. Sitting cross-legged on the floor is not a prerequisite for practising Indian music, but it feels grounding to remove shoes and sit on the carpet or a rug.
2. Start the drone first and sit and listen to it for a minute. Adjust the volume so that it is loud enough to create an ambience and support you, but not cover up the nuances of your voice. You need to be able to listen and sing without force.
3. Begin with SA. Take a deep breath and let the duration of each note you sing be dictated by your breath. Never be in a hurry to move notes or stop. Practice repeating a single pitch several times in a row. SA should melt into the drone sound perfectly.
4. Don't habitually scoop up. Notice the onset of each pitch you sing. The drone is your reference point and should be well established in your ear before you sing. Pre-hear the note you are about to sing, and then sing the note using solfege (*sargam*) and hold it as described.
5. Avoid vibrato. Use a straight pitch with a moderate volume.
6. As you sing each note, monitor yourself for excess tension and poor posture. Watch for jaw tension. Is your tongue relaxed for the open vowel sounds? Are you supporting the sound from the abdomen?
7. Whilst it is nice to close your eyes sometimes, I recommend that you are able to maintain full concentration on what you are doing while having your eyes open. Practice strengthening your concentration so that you are not distracted by visual input.
8. Finding beauty and interest in this seemingly simple practice of singing long notes with a drone is a sign of musical maturity and sensitivity. If you

find yourself getting bored or distracted, accept this condition and move onto something different. Come back to this practice later, and you'll find that regular practice with the right intention (the will to improve) will open up your aural awareness.

9. As you explore slowly moving notes in *alap* practice, check in with your posture and breathing (see point 6). Don't move from a note until your ear has registered where the pitch "clicks" in terms of its harmonic reference to the drone (particularly the tonic).
10. Aim to gradually explore your entire vocal range, producing long notes at the extremes of your range without unnecessary throat tension in the high register.