

Darpana:

Mirroring Traditions of Raga & Harmony

Vidita Kanniks, Indian classical singer
Andréa Walker, soprano
Rohan Krishnamurthy, Indian percussion
Caroline Giassi, oboe & recorder
Boel Gidholm, violin
Christopher Haritatos, cello
Naomi Gregory, harpsichord
Deborah Fox, lute & theorbo

Invocation: Deeparadhana Sloka Traditional Chant arr. Vidita Kanniks
Sandhya Raga Pandit Ravi Shankar (1920-2012), arr. Vidita Kanniks

Ay, mi! Dame de valour Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)
Douce dame jolie
Jao mat Jao Sri Swati Tirunal Rama Verma III (1813-1846)

Quand on vous dit Joseph Chabanceau de La Barre (1633-1678)
Que faites vous Sylvie Michel Lambert (1610-1696)
Doux rossignols chantez Julie Pinel (ca.1710– after 1737)

Singara Velane Deva S.M. Subbaiah Naidu arr. Vidita Kanniks

Nottuswara Sahityas Mutthuswami Dikshitar (1776-1835) arr. Vidita Kanniks
Shakti Sahita Ganapatim/La Bastringue
Paradevate
Ah vous dirai-je maman/Shyamale Meenakshi

O Primavera Luzzasco Luzzaschi (1545-1607), arr. Rona Nadler*

Zefiro torna e di soave accenti Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)*

Program notes

The world of Indian Classical Music is no monolith. With origins dating back as far as the Vedic times, this living, breathing tradition stands as a remarkable testament to the richness and diversity of the South Asian subcontinent. Informed by early Vedic scripture and regional folk musical practice, Indian Classical Music took shape as a high art form designed to be performed in royal court settings and in temples, often integrated into worship. It was eventually categorized into two major umbrellas, the older *Carnatic* music of the southern Indian region, and *Hindustani* music of the northern region. Although distinguishable in terms of sound, style, instrumentation and performance aesthetic, these two styles share a number of core theoretical principles: *raga* (scale or mode), *tala* (rhythm), *laya* (tempo), *bhava* (expression), and *shruthi* (tonal center) that characterize what we recognize today as Indian Classical Music.

Our program, *Darpana*, came together over a shared curiosity sparked by the fascinating similarity in performance practice between Indian Classical & Western Early Music. Virtuosity in both of these traditions is rooted in the ability to listen, emote and deliver heavily affected performances through the use of ornamentation – not just notated or prescribed ornamentation but the internalized vocabulary of an entire world of style and nuance that a musician is required to learn, almost like a language. In Western music we are used to hearing music in major or a shade of minor, but the modal complexity of Indian ragas reaches far beyond. Discovering parallel modes in medieval music that share the same contour as certain Indian ragas makes for an amazing cross-genre discovery. The level of sensitive group listening, tuning and adaptation required in a period ensemble setting also mirrors the culture within an Indian Classical ensemble; thus the name *Darpana*, literally meaning ‘mirror’ in Sanskrit. Our program explores creative ways of mirroring two distinct musical worlds, showcasing the common threads between.

We open with an invocation of the sacred evening light or lamp with the *Deeparadhana Sloka*, an ancient Sanskrit mantra perfectly fitting for the upcoming festival of Diwali (*Deepavali*). This leads us seamlessly into an arrangement of the legendary Pandit Ravi Shankar’s *Sandhya Raga* literally meaning ‘raga for the evening’. This Hindustani raga, *Yaman*, mirrors the western Lydian mode. Originally written for a large ensemble of Indian instrumental musicians primarily featuring sitar, this vivacious piece is re-imagined for baroque ensemble and vocalist, sung entirely in Indian *sargam* or solfege. Assuming the role of the sitar, the soloist takes on the challenge of bringing the same electricity and vocal acrobatics required for this interpretation. The tabla brings a fast and uplifting energy to this piece, building momentum and leading the band into a *dhrut tintal* similar to a Western *prestissimo*.

We next have a set of duets that juxtapose parallel textures, sounds and poems. We pair medieval French composer Guillaume de Machaut’s well-known secular *virelais* with a composition by Sri Swathi Tirunal Rama Verma III. Hailing from a royal family, and declared king while still in the womb, Maharaja Swathi Tirunal was known for being a significant patron of the arts and an accomplished musician himself. Although he is primarily known as a connoisseur of Carnatic music, he was well-versed across traditions and is credited with composing over 400 compositions in both Carnatic and Hindustani disciplines. His secular *bandish* (art song) *Jao mat jao* features text in Hindi, showcasing the Hindustani *khayal* form. These pieces make a harmonious match - sharing remarkably similar thematic material in the poetry and musical material in the melodies (western Dorian mode or the Indian Raga *Kaafi*)

The three French *airs de cour* are an excellent example of western style ornamentation in the 17th century. In the songs by Lambert and de La Barre, a beautiful melody overlaid with small embellishments is further enhanced in its *double*, or the next verse, with more virtuosic melodic ornamentation. Julie Pinel's *Doux rossignols* features a duet between the singer and the violin as the nightingale. This duet is mirrored in the following piece, *Singara Velane Deva*, a modern take on an iconic duet between Carnatic vocalist and originally *nadhaswaram* (a South Indian period reed instrument). For today's concert, the baroque oboe gets to shine. This piece is famously depicted in the 1962 Tamil-language musical/film *Konjum Salangai*, a story set during the early Chola dynasty (8th-13th century). This duet itself exhibits musical mirroring through a riveting call/response relationship between the voice and nadhaswaram as they aim to mimic one another, culminating in a grand finale.

We then travel into a fascinating Indo-Colonial soundscape. The *Nottuswara Sabityas* are a collection of folk and traditional western airs set to Sanskrit text by Carnatic *Vageyyakara* (composer/poet) Mutthuswami Dikshitar (1776-1835). The term *Nottuswara Sabityas* is a hybridization of the word note (*nottu* being a Tamil loanword), with the Sanskrit words *swara* (notes/pitches), and *sabitya* (text). Dikshitar heard the British bands playing these tunes as they occupied Madras during the reign of the East India Trading Company. An erudite composer, Dikshitar traveled widely across India, drawing inspiration from Hindu temples and Hindustani music. Perhaps it is no surprise that his prolific compositions also borrowed the simple and catchy European band music. He set a total of 36 of these tunes including the well-known 'God Save the Queen' among others, that now have a place in standard Carnatic pedagogy and performance. These tunes traveled not only to India but also to Britain's North American colonies, and are still heard around the world today – ironically belonging to all who encountered and innovated upon them.

We conclude our program with an evocation of spring – exploring music from the late Renaissance with an Indian touch. Characterized by highly florid ornamentation, Luzzasco Luzzaschi's madrigals call for melismatic *fioritura*, mirrored by Hindustani vocal *taans* or *aakar*. Monteverdi's famous ciaccona *Zefiro torna e di soavi accenti* makes for a jubilant conclusion to our program. In the spirit of improvisation and a diverse display of virtuosity, every member of the ensemble shines as they come together for a totally unique spin on a beloved classic.

--- Vidita Kanniks (with additions from Rohan Krishnamurthy and Deborah Fox)