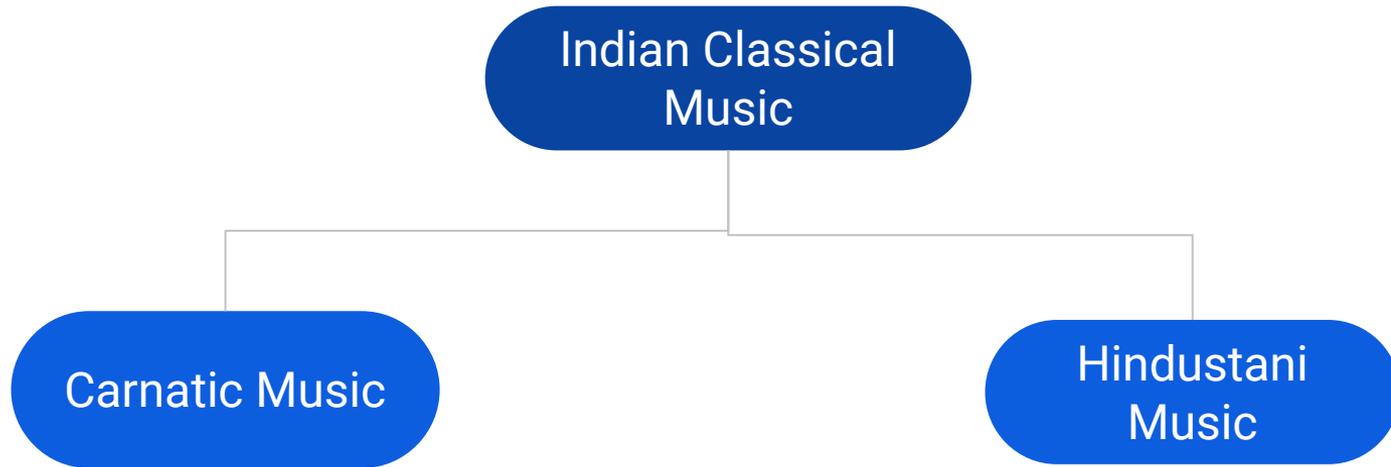


# Carnatic Music

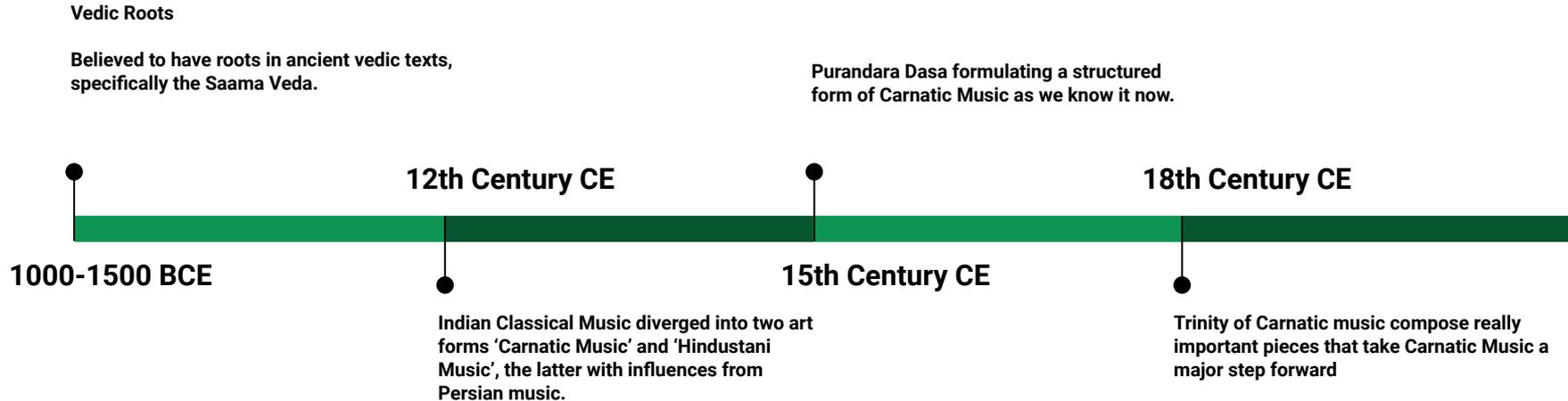
Classical Music from South India

“I think Indian music has had a greater impact on me than any other influence” - John McLaughlin

# Two Classical Music Forms in India



# A Brief Timeline of Carnatic Music



## Purandara Dasa, the “Pithamaha” (Father) of Carnatic Music



Source: The Hindu

# The Trinity of Carnatic Music



**FUN FACT:** The era of the Trinity parallels with the Classical era in European Music!

(From left) Muthuswamy Dikshitar, Thyagaraja, Shyama Sastry

# A Contemporary Carnatic Music Concert



Mridangam, a  
percussion  
instrument

Vocals

Violin

# How did the violin come into Carnatic music?

During the start of the 19th century, Baluswami Dikshitar (brother of Muthuswami Dikshitar, one of the trinities) learnt western violin and adapted the same to Carnatic Music.

The violin fit perfectly for playing carnatic songs for its beauty in gamakas or the sliding/oscillation of notes.

# Major Elements of Carnatic Music

- Shruti
- Swara - Note
- Laya - Rhythm
- Ragam - mode or scale

“Shruthi Maatha Layam Pitha”

Translation: Shruthi is equivalent to a mother and rhythm,  
the father

# Shruthi

A concept which is fundamental to Carnatic music.

The Key/Pitch of a song is equivalent to the Shruthi.

The key note of the Shruthi played becomes the base of a composition/song.

*“Any sound heard by the ear is called Shruthi”*

This establishes a system of swaras (notes) which are relative and not absolute.

A “harmony” of two notes Sadjamam ( the 1st note of the key), and Panchamam (5th note of the key) are generally played to represent a Shruthi.



Credit: Art.com

# Swaram

A musical note is a Swaram.

Remember the swaras are relative to a given shruthi. They are not absolute notes.

## Basic Seven Swaras

- Sadjamam
- Rishabham
- Gandharam
- Madhyamam
- Panchamam
- Dhaivatham
- Nishadham

# The Sixteen Swarasthanas (Note placements)

Position	Swara	Short name	Notation	C as Sa	Interval Name
1	Shadja	Sa	S	C	Root
2	Shuddha Rishabha	Ri	R1	C#	minor 2nd
3	Chathusruthi Rishabha	Ri	R2	D	Major 2nd
3	Shuddha Gandhara	Ga	G1	D	major 2nd
4	Shatsruthi Rishabha	Ri	R3	D#	minor 3rd
4	Sadharana Gandhara	Ga	G2	D#	minor 3rd
5	Anthara Gandhara	Ga	G3	E	major 3rd
6	Shuddha Madhyama	Ma	M1	F	perfect 4th
7	Prati Madhyama	Ma	M2	F#	sharp 4th /flat fifth
8	Panchama	Pa	P	G	fifth
9	Shuddha Dhaivatha	Dha	D1	G#	minor 6th
10	Chathusruthi Dhaivatha	Dha	D2	A	major 6th
10	Shuddha Nishadha	Ni	N1	A	major 6th
11	Shatsruthi Dhaivatha	Dha	D3	A#	minor 7th
11	Kaisiki Nishadha	Ni	N2	A#	minor 7th
12	Kakali Nishadha	Ni	N3	B	major 7th

# Laya (Rhythm)

Rhythm has been quantified in different ways in different art forms

In Carnatic music “Thalam” (Plural : Thaalaas) is the concept used.

This is equivalent to time signatures in European Classical Music.

The most common Thalam seen is Adi Thalam. This is analogous to the 4/4 time signature.

There are 7 major thalas which are fundamental and we obtain different versions of them by modifying their attributes.

# The Seven Thalam

Dhruva Thalam	1011
Matya Thalam	101
Rupaka Thalam	01
Jampa Thalam	100
Tripata Thalam	100
Ata Thalam	1100
Eka thalam	1

# Ragam

Ragam (pronounced as raagam) is a melodic framework on which compositions and improvisations are based.

No exact equivalent in the European Classical Music with the closest being a mode.

The framework is based on a set of notes and musical motifs/phrases specific to the ragam (plural: raagaas).

A Ragam has a set of ( not so strict) rules.

A System of 72 ragas called the Melakartha Ragas are the principal ragas and the rest are derived from the Melakarta Ragas (there are thousands!).

# The Rules - I

A raga is represented by its Aarohanam (ascending scale) and Avarohanam (descending scale).

Eg, Raga Mohanam ( Major Pentatonic Scale )

Aarohanam : S R2 G3 P D2 S'

Avarohanam : S' D2 P G3 R2 S

But, just the notes of the raga aren't enough to single out on a raga!

# The Rules - II

Apart from the Aarohanam and the Avarohanam, a set of musical motifs unique to the ragam are a requirement.

From the previous example

The major musical motifs of the Ragam Mohanam are

GRG - GPGRS - Sdp - pddS - dSR - SRG - GRGP - GPDS - PDS - DS'R'G' - G'R' , G'R'  
S' - R'S'D ; - S'DP , - DPG , - PGR , - RD , S

These phrases are to be played with specific gamakas or oscillations (more later) to bring out the full essence of the raga!

# There are instances where two ragas have the same notes, but they are different!

Example:

Anandabhairavi :

Reethigowla:

Aarohanam: S G2 R2 G2 M1 P D2 P S'    Aarohanam: S G2 R2 G2 M1 N2 D2 M1 N2 N2 S'

Avarohanam: S N2 D2 P M1 G2 R2 S    Avarohanam: S' N2 D2 M1 G2 M1 P M1 G2 R2 S

In a concert, the aarohanam and avarohanam won't be played. This means both the ragas will have the same notes!

The point is that the “feel” of the raga and the motifs play a very important role in raga identification!

## “Not so strict” rules??

Aarohanam, Avarohanam and the musical motifs are important to a raga.

But the stress is given to the essence or the feel of the raga perceived by the audience!

The notes and phrases need not be exactly the same. The specific gamakas (oscillations between notes) if played well, will automatically bring out the ragam.

Example: The Raga Hindolam has the notes S G2 M1 D1 N2, but the Dhaivatham (D) to be played is oscillating between D1 and D2 to bring out the feel of the ragam.

# Types of Compositions in Carnatic Music

- Sarali Varisai
- Janta Varisai
- Alankaram
- Geetham
- Varnam
- Keerthana
- Krithi
- Swarajathi
- Thillana

Beginner lessons to make the student understand the basics of swaram,thalam,ragam

# A Carnatic Concert

Happens for 3 hrs without a break!

Following is the structure of a contemporary concert

- Any Varnam or a Krithi/Keerthana on Lord Ganesh ( a Hindu god)
- A Krithi/Keerthana
- Ragam, Tanam and Pallavi (Improvisations over a Ragam, will be seen soon)
- Krithi/Keerthana in a lighter Ragam
- Thillana/Ashtapathi/Javali
- Mangalam

# Gamakas

Oscillations/sliding between two to three notes are gamakas.

Gamakas are **INDISPENSIBLE** in Carnatic Music.

These oscillations are classified into 15 different types based on whether it is a slide or an oscillation or a tremble.

Kampita is the most important of them all.

Gamakas and way they are played are one of the most important attributes in a ragam. In certain cases they can even change the ragam!

A short description of the 15 gamakas:

TIRIPA	Playing one of the notes of a phrase with some stress
SPHURITA	A janta swara phrase wherein the lower note in between each janta swara group is faintly heard. The second note of each janta is stressed
KAMPITA	A shake. When one oscillates between two swaras while holding a particular swara, a kampita is achieved
LINA	Merging of a note softly into another note
ANDOLITA	A free swinging. Holding on a note for some time and then pulling the string or gliding on it so as to reveal a higher note
VAḲI	Producing the chhāyā of two or three notes from the same swarasthāna by deflecting the string in a circling manner (only in fretted instruments)
TRIBHINNA	Produced by placing the left-hand fingers on a swarasthāna so that the fingers are in contact with three strings, and then by plucking the three strings with the right hand fingers either simultaneously or successively (only in fretted instruments)
KURULA	This is the production from a swarasthāna, of the note of another sthāna with force
AHATA	Sounding a note and then producing another note without a separate stroke (only in vina)
ULLASITA	Jāru or glide <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Etra jāru (ascending)</li><li>• Irakka jāru (descending)</li></ul> Starting on a note and reaching a different (higher or lower) note by gliding over the intermediate notes
PLĀVITA	This is a variety of Kampita
GUMPITA	Belongs to vocal music. The tone is slender at the start and goes on increasing in both volume and pitch
MUDRITA	Belongs to vocal music. Produced by closing the mouth and singing
NĀMITA	Belongs to vocal music. Singing in a slender tone
MISRITA	Mixture of two or three of the other varieties

# Manodharma Sangeetham

Perhaps the most abstract part of Carnatic Music. The phrase Manodharma Sangeetham itself translates to Music from the heart.

All the parts of manodharma sangeetham are based on improvisation over a ragam.

The different types

- Raga Alapana
- Tanam
- Pallavi
- Kalpana Swaram

# Raga Alapana

Artists present their own interpretation of the ragam. This is the principal way to introduce a ragam to the audience before any song.

Follows no rhythm or beat cycle. It is all upto the artist to modulate based on what he feels to improvise. Sung with syllables Ta, dha, ri, na, thom.

Even though it is mostly upto the artist it has a certain “structure”.

- Starting slowly and exploring in the lower octaves of the ragam
- Then exploring all possibilities of phrases in all speeds within the raga and reaching the the higher octave.
- A proper conclusion with the phrases slowly brought down to the octave where it was all started.

[Ragam Mohanam - Akkarai Subhalakshmi](#) [Raga Mohanam by Dr L Subramaniam](#)

## Tanam

This improvisation of a raga is similar to the Raga Alapana but it is set to “loose” rhythmic patterns and is generally more faster than an Alapana.

While singing, it is sung with the syllables from the phrase “Anantha Anandam tha”.

[Dr Jayanthi Kumaresh- Naataikuranji & Shanmukhapriya-](#)

[Sandeep Narayanan - Shanmukha Priya - Tanam](#)

# Pallavi

This section of improvisation is where a single line of lyric which fits a one thalam cycle duration is taken and is sung as the lyric where the ragam is explored further in different speeds, octaves and phrases.

Pallavi has a specific thalam cycle going on while the improvisation is happening, so rhythm plays a pivotal part here. Generally, it is finished with a solo by the percussionist(s).

[Sanjay Subhramanyam RTP Kalyani \( Pallavi at 17:15\)](#)

# Languages of the compositions

Songs written in all major South Indian Languages

- Telugu
- Sanskrit ( Language present from the Vedic Period, German has its roots in Sanskrit!)
- Tamizh
- Kannada

# Western Instruments other than violin



Source: Wikipedia.org

Keyboard, viola and even Cello are tried by various artists to be brought into Carnatic music!

That's all folks!

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