

# Ekphrases



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## The Tabla-Tarang Performance

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The Tabla-Tarang performance at the prestigious Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre, Mumbai, was particularly challenging as I chose to explore the Gayaki-ang in Tablā-Tarang in this concert, demonstrating how to play the elements of vocal music in a staccato instrument.

The Tablas in my set up are arranged in a semi-circular pattern. For a general major scale *raga* like Yaman, the Tabla on the extreme left is tuned to the Pancham, or the fifth of the lower octave; the lower Sa, or the tonic (equivalent to the middle C) is placed a little ahead angularly on the left with respect to the Pancham, or the fifth of the middle octave; the Panchams of the lower and the middle octaves are kept at right angles; the higher Sa, or the tonic of the higher octave is placed angularly on the right with respect to the middle octave fifth, the two SAs thereby being at right angles; and the one on the extreme right making a right angle with the middle octave fifth is tuned to the Madhyam, or fourth of the higher octave.

The strokes on the Tabla-Tarang should be well planned and properly distributed so as to be played dexterously with both hands. The right hand should focus on the melodic patterns in the upward direction, and the left hand, downward. A phrase starting with a lower note going up to a higher note should always be played with the left hand playing the initial, or the first note, with the right hand subsequently taking over. The exact reverse is to be observed for a phrase starting with a higher note coming down to a lower one.

With the given limitation of range, it's important to keep the Alaap and the Vistaars well structured, so that the loss is not sensed by the audience. All the phrases must justifiably fit within the lower Pancham and the higher Madhyam. Sometimes the Madhyam should better be omitted, as the preceding Gandhar provides a stronger foundation to end a phrase in the upper octave for a *raga* like Yaman. The Gayaki takes over a great deal during such negotiations as the art of playing Tabla-Tarang gains a new perspective that helps both the artiste and the audience to shift the focus from the usual limitations to understanding the points where the boundaries are transgressed.

Even though the term 'Gayaki-ang' largely signifies Khayal in the context of instrumental music – thanks to Vilayat Khan – Gayaki-ang should not be considered any different from the Veenkaar-ang of playing Dhrupad since the Veena would be the closest to Vaani or Dhrupad

singing a few centuries back. My background of both Dhrupad and Khayal facilitates the application of both Dhrupad and Khayal Gayaki, though I keep the Dhrupad elements restricted within the three-part Alaap, and resort to the Khayal Bandishes for the mid-tempo (Moderato) or Madhyalaya melodic progressions.

The three-part Alaap comprises of the Alaap, a slow unfolding of the raga without a tempo; the Jod, where moderately slow rhythmic patterns of twos or fours delineate the heart phrases of the *raga* with apparently no accompanying instrument joining in; and the Jhala, where fast rhythmic patterns of fours build the crescendo of the first act. It must be remembered that the Jhala is usually repeated at the end of the second act of the same *raga* in continuation to the compositions played. The Jod could further be classified into three types – Vilambit Jod, Madhya Jod and Drut Jod. The tradition of Dhrupad, often received by many string instrumentalists, sometimes allows the accompanying drum to join in from the Madhya Jod and continue till the first Jhala.

The different rhythmic patterns of the Jhala often employ a continued striking sometimes once and at other times, thrice on one particular drum. In the first Jhala, the left hand is always on the lower Sa, and the right hand, on the other notes. The patterns usually start with a single strike on the lower Sa, with the left hand providing the structure to the entire section and three strokes on any one or a series of notes with the right hand that completes them. The second Jhala in the second act is just the opposite, where the right hand is on the higher Sa striking it three times and the left hand strikes one lower note to start the patterns.

Despite the impossibility of producing Meends and Gamakas in a staccato instrument, it is not entirely difficult to play an elaborate Alaap in the Tabla-Tarang as the phrases would never sound disjointed if structured well. The points occasionally demanding Meends or Gamakas might be managed with extra strokes on the notes involving the Meends or the ones initiating the Gamakas.

I played Yaman at the NMACC, and played two traditional Bandishes in Madhyalaya – “E Mori Gagara Na Bharana Deta,” and “Langara Turaka Jina Chhivori.” With both the Bandishes demanding an extreme meticulous vocal exercise, it was quite a challenge to reproduce them on the Tabla-Tarang exactly as they sounded when I sang them. However, the techniques mentioned above helped me to come to a negotiation with the apparent loss of the Gayaki and facilitated the application of the Gayaki, with nothing really lost in the intermedium translation. The firm notes were played with double-strokes, and the light ones, with single-strokes. The melodic movements across the scale were replicated with the right hand playing the sequence of the notes. With the fast vocal movements being reproduced through a proper balance between the left and the right hands and an adequate distribution of notes and strokes within them, the Gayaki was successfully produced in a non-legato instrument.

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### ***\*About the Musician***

Subhadrakalyan is a young, aspiring poet as well as a practising Indian classical musician specializing in Tabla. He has received extensive training in Tabla from Pandit Shankar Ghosh and Pandit Bickram Ghosh. He has also trained in Dhrupad under Pandit Uday Bhawalkar, Khayal under Ustad Jainul Abedin, Pandit Omkar Dadarkar and Vidushi Sanjukta Ghosh, and Sarod under Dr. Rajeeb Chakraborty. One of his biggest works as a musician is that he has revived the lost art of Tabla-Tarang. He has received a national scholarship from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, from 2022 to 2024, and is a B-High graded artiste at the All India Radio, Kolkata, since 2022.

Subhadrakalyan graduated from Vijaygarh Jyotish Ray College, University of Calcutta, with a major in English Literature, and completed his Master’s in Comparative Indian Language and Literature from the University of Calcutta. He worked as a junior journalist in *The Statesman*,

*Voices; TTIS-The Telegraph in Schools; and The Telegraph, Young Metro.* He now works as a freelancer for different print and digital media platforms.

Subhadrakalyan has recently brought out his debut collection of English poems, *Embers and Ashes*. The book has received huge appreciations and has been endorsed by eminent poets such as Pritish Nandy, K Satchidanandan, Sharmila Ray and Nishi Pulugurtha.