Nonwestern Music

XI

"The highest aim of our music is to reveal the essence of the universe it reflects . . . through music one can reach God."

RAVI SHANKAR

The musical traditions of India date back over 3,000 years. The sitarist Ravi Shankar (center) is accompanied by a tabla (a pair of single-headed drums) and a tambura (a drone instrument).

Nonwestern Music

Nonwestern music reflects and expresses the diversity of the world's languages, religions, geographical conditions, social and economic systems, values, beliefs, and ways of life. Each culture has its own characteristic instruments, performance practices, tonal systems, and melodic and rhythmic patterns.

Nonwestern societies also differ in their range of musical styles: some have only folk music, some have both folk and popular music, and some have complex classical music as well. Thus nonwestern music can offer a wide range of listening experiences and cultural insights. Moreover, nonwestern traditions were an important source of inspiration for twentieth-century western music. For example, they influenced the French composer Claude Debussy, the British rock star George Harrison, and the African American jazz artist John Coltrane.

African music is closely associated with dancing. While moving, a dancer oftens sings or plays an instrument.

The koto, a plucked string instrument, is important in traditional Japanese classical music.

Music in Nonwestern Cultures

Characteristics of Nonwestern Music

Music of the nonwestern world is too varied to allow easy generalizations. Yet some features are common to most musical traditions. All over the world, music is closely linked with religion, dance, and drama. Music can serve as both entertainment and an indispensable accompaniment to everyday activities, magic rites, and ceremonies marking important phases of life. In addition, music is often used to send messages and relate traditions.

Oral Tradition

Nonwestern music is most often transmitted orally from parent to child or from teacher to student. Compositions and performance techniques are learned by rote and imitation. Music notation is far less important in nonwestern than in western culture. Many musical cultures—such as those of central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—do not have notation. Even when notation exists, as in China and India, written music traditionally serves only as a record and is rarely used in teaching or performance.

Improvisation

Improvisation is basic to many nonwestern musical cultures. Performers usually base their improvisations on traditional melodic phrases and rhythmic patterns. In some parts of the world, including India and the middle east, improvisation is a highly disciplined art that requires years of training. Indian and Islamic musicians create music within a framework of melody types, each associated with a specific mood, a specific set of tones, and characteristic phrases. There are many melody types, and within each the improviser can create a practically limitless variety of music.

Most musical cultures have a repertoire of traditional songs or instrumental pieces. In some cultures, these are relatively fixed and are performed similarly from generation to generation—as in Japan, where improvisation in classical music is practically nonexistent. But in other traditions, pieces are treated with great flexibility. In Iran (Persia) and sub-Saharan Africa, for example, performers freely vary melodies and add sections.

Voices

Singing is the most important way of making music in the vast majority of nonwestern cultures. Preferred vocal timbres vary widely from one musical tradition to another. In the middle east and north Africa, for example, singers cultivate a

nasal, intense, strained tone. A more relaxed and open-throated sound is generally preferred by singers in sub-Saharan Africa. The vast range of vocal techniques includes shouting, crying, whispering, sighing, humming, yodeling, and singing through the teeth. An amazing vocal technique is used among the Tuvans, a Siberian people located northwest of Mongolia. A male Tuvan singer can produce two sounds at the same time: a low, sustained tone together with a high, eerie melody.

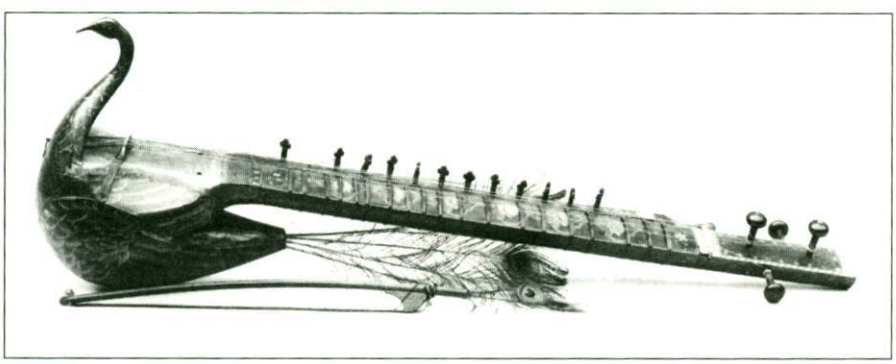
Instruments

Nonwestern instruments produce a wealth of sounds and come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and materials. Scholars usually group these instruments into four categories, based on what generates the sound.

1. ***Chordophones*** are instruments—such as harps and lutes—whose sound generator is a stretched string.
2. ***Aerophones*** are instruments—such as flutes and trumpets—whose sound generator is a column of air.
3. ***Membranophones*** are instruments—basically, drums—whose sound generator is a stretched skin or other membrane.
4. ***Idiophones*** are instruments—such as bells, gongs, scrapers, rattles, and xylophones—whose own material is the sound generator (no tension is applied).

The musical style of a culture is among the important factors influencing its choice of instruments. For example, chordophones (strings) are prominent in Islamic and Indian classical music, whose highly ornamented melodies require instruments with great flexibility of pitch. Idiophones and membranophones (such as bells, rattles, and drums) are featured in sub-Saharan Africa, where rhythm is strongly emphasized and music is closely linked with dancing.

A culture's use of instruments is also influenced by its geography and raw materials. Bronze idiophones are prominent in southeast Asia, where metallurgy developed around 5,000 years ago. Indonesian orchestras (gamelans) have up to eighty instruments, including bronze gongs, chimes, and xylophones. Instruments made of animal skins and horns are common in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where these materials are easily found. Among the Aniocha Ibo of Nigeria, for example, drums are made of animal skins, and aerophones



A chordophone: the mayuri, a peacock-shaped bowed string instrument from India.

(winds) made from elephant tusks are used by the royal family and some chiefs. Where raw materials are scarce, as in the deserts of Australia, instruments may be few in number.

Along with musical style and geography, religious beliefs may influence the choice of materials. In Tibet, for example, trumpets and drums are made from the bones and skulls of criminals in order to appease demons. Instruments often have symbolic associations and are linked with specific gods and goddesses. They may be shaped like birds, animals, or fish.

Melody, Texture, and Rhythm

Most music of Asia, the near east, and north Africa emphasizes melody and rhythm, rather than harmony or polyphony. In the music of these cultures, the texture is often monophonic, consisting of an unaccompanied melody or a melody supported by percussion. In India and the near east, the melodic line is frequently supported by a drone, one or more tones sustained throughout the performance. In many parts of the world—such as north Africa, the middle east, southeast Asia, and the far east—music often has a texture in which all parts perform the same basic melody, but in versions that differ in ornamentation or rhythm. (This texture, called *heterophony,* is considered in Section 4.) Homophonic and polyphonic textures tend to be somewhat more common in sub-Saharan Africa than in most parts of Asia.

Nonwestern music uses a wide variety of scales. Most often, scales have five, six, or seven tones. Nonwestern melodies commonly use intervals smaller or larger than those standard in the west. Microtones—intervals smaller than the western half step—are frequent in the music of India and the near east.

Also, much nonwestern music has very complex rhythms. For example, because of the complexity of the rhythms used, drummers in India and sub-Saharan Africa spend many years learning their highly sophisticated art.

Interaction between Nonwestern and Western Music

During the twentieth century, nonwestern music felt the impact of American and European music. This influence resulted from increased urbanization, adoption of western technology, and access to radios, films, recordings, and western instruments. Western elements are often found in the popular music heard in the large cities of Africa, Asia, and the near east. One example of such popular music is the *high life* of west Africa, which combines European instruments with the steady rhythm characteristic of Africa. Some composers in the nonwestern world combine traditional elements with western forms and styles. (Ravi Shankar's Concerto for Sitar and Orchestra is one example. Another example is the Japanese composer Minoru Miki's *Symphony for Two Worlds,* which had its American premiere in 1994.) And in many areas, western and traditional music exist side by side. Yet there are vast areas of the world where traditional music is dominant. Many governments subsidize traditional performing groups to preserve their rich national heritage.

In the sections that follow, the traditional music of three areas—sub-Saharan Africa, India, and Japan—will be studied as a tiny sample of the vast wealth of nonwestern music.

Basic Terms

chordophone (page 576)
aerophone (576)
membranophone (576)
idiophone (576)

Music in Sub-Saharan Africa

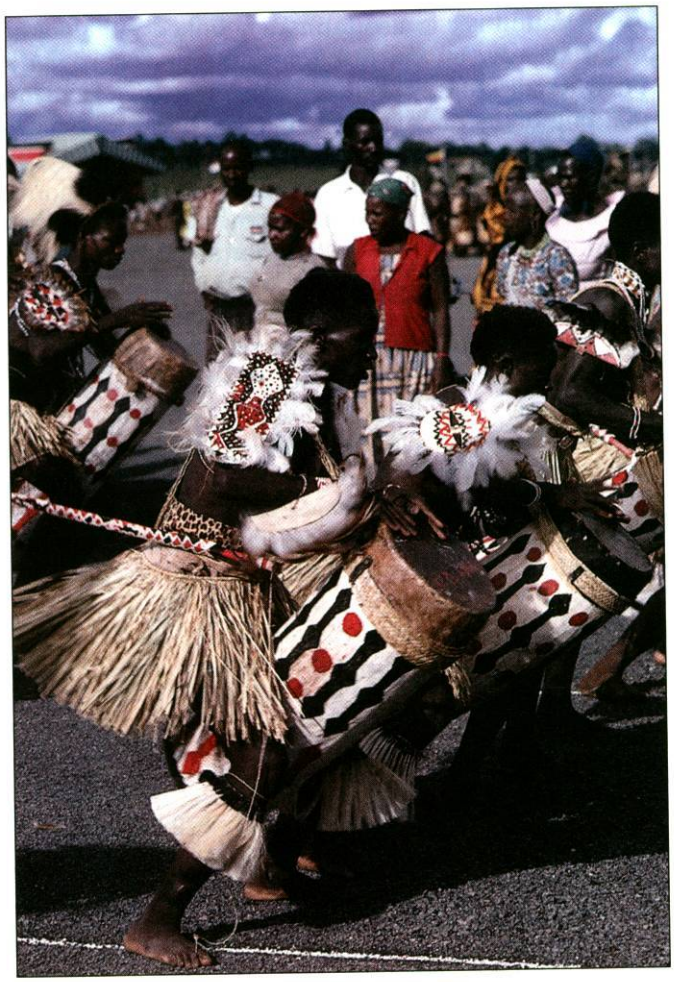
The African continent, which is more than three times the size of the United States, can be subdivided into two large geographical areas: north Africa, which includes such countries as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt; and sub-Saharan Africa (south of the Sahara Desert), which includes Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Angola, among many other countries. The population of north Africa is predominantly Muslim and Arabic-speaking, and its music is closely related to that of the middle east. This section focuses on the music of sub-Saharan Africa, sometimes called "black Africa," and generally, throughout the section, the word *Africa* pertains to sub-Saharan Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa, which is environmentally and culturally diverse, has several thousand peoples with different religions, social customs, and ways of life. They speak over 700 different languages (more than are found on any other continent). Though urban growth and industrialization are transforming sub-Saharan Africa today, many Africans still hold to traditional ways of life. Most peoples have polytheistic religions, live in villages, and devote themselves to such traditional occupations as agriculture and cattle raising.

The music of sub-Saharan Africa is as diverse as its people. Even so, most of its music features complex rhythms and polyrhythms, percussive sounds, and a wide variety of instrumental ensembles. Vocal music is often performed by a soloist and a responding chorus. Of course, the different cultures of Africa have influenced each other. For example, in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, such as Ghana and northern Nigeria, musical styles have been influenced by Arabic culture.

Music in Society

Music permeates virtually every aspect of African life. It is used to entertain; to accompany dances, plays, religious ceremonies, and magic rites; and to mark such events as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Healers use specific songs and dances to treat the ill. There are work songs to accompany digging, grinding,



Singing and playing instruments are interwoven into the fabric of African life.

chopping, and harvesting. Litigation songs are sung when people are in court arguing about property ownership. There are songs praising leaders, criticizing authority, and recounting history. Singing and playing instruments are so interwoven into the fabric of life that the abstract word *music*—as it is understood in the west—is not used by most African peoples. (However, there are words for *song*, *dance*, and *poetry*.)

An extraordinarily large number of songs are meant for particular occasions. For example, among the Fon—a people in Dahomey (in west Africa)—children sing a special song when they lose their first tooth. The Akan of Ghana have a ritual song to cure bed wetters. The Tutsi of Rwanda, who depend on cattle raising, have many different songs to praise cows and to accompany their care and feeding.

Music is essential to many African ceremonies. Among the Basongye of Zaïre, for example, the funeral of an important person requires the services of a professional musician who announces the death and praises the deceased. The musician clowns to cheer up the people at the funeral, allowing them to vent emotion.

African music is closely associated with dancing; both arts are basic to many ceremonies, rituals, and celebrations. While moving, a dancer often sings or plays rattles or other idiophones that are held or tied to the body.

African music is also intimately linked with language. Many languages are *tone languages,* in which the meaning of a word is determined by the relative pitch at which it is spoken. The same word can have four different meanings, depending on its pitch. Tone languages permit the use of music for communication. Drummers, trumpeters, and other musicians convey messages and tell stories by imitating the rhythms and pitch fluctuations of words. *Talking drums*—capable of two or more different pitches—are often used to send musical messages. A musician can even describe an event with the aid of a talking drum.

In Africa, music making is a social activity in which almost everyone participates. As a result, music is usually performed outdoors—in streets, courtyards, or village squares. There is spontaneous music making as well as performances by social and music groups at ceremonies and feasts. As in other cultures, the level of musical skill and training varies from one individual to another. Some highly trained musicians are employed at royal courts to entertain the monarch. Others are hired to sing songs of praise. Musicians may receive money or goods in return for their services. Musical tradition is orally transmitted, as are folklore and history. There is no musical notation, since the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa do not emphasize literacy.

Elements of African Music

Rhythm and Percussion

Rhythm and percussive sounds are highly emphasized in African music. This emphasis reflects the close link between music and dance in African culture. African music tends to feature complex polyrhythms. Usually, several different rhythmic patterns are played simultaneously and repeated over and over. Each instrument goes its own rhythmic way, producing accents that appear to be out of phase with those of the other parts. Dancers may choose any of several rhythmic patterns to dance to. For example, while one dancer follows a pattern played with a bell, another may dance to the rattle, while yet another follows the drum.

Percussion ensembles consisting mainly of drums, xylophones, or rattles are widely used. The instruments of percussion ensembles are carefully chosen to provide contrasts of tone color and pitch. The human body itself is often used as a percussion instrument. Hand claps, foot stamps, and thigh or chest slaps are common sounds in African music.

Vocal Music

African singers use a wide variety of vocal sounds. Even within a single performance a singer may shift from an open, relaxed tone to one that is tighter and more constricted. Singers sometimes whisper, hum, grunt, shout, and imitate animal noises. Yodeling—quick movement from a chest voice to a falsetto—is practiced by the Pygmies, among others.

Much African vocal music is characterized by a performance style known as *call and response,* in which the phrases of a soloist are repeatedly answered by those of a chorus. An exciting overlap of sound often results when the leader resumes singing before the chorus has completed its response. Singers are often

accompanied by ostinatos (repeated rhythmic patterns) played by percussion. Typically, African vocal music has short phrases that are repeated over and over to different words.

Texture

Unlike many other nonwestern cultures, African societies often have music that is homophonic or polyphonic in texture. Several voice parts may sing the same melody at different pitch levels, occasionally producing a series of parallel chords. Some African peoples also perform polyphonic music in which the different melodic lines are quite independent.

African Instruments

A great variety of instruments and instrumental ensembles are found in Africa. Ensembles have from two to twenty or more players. Performing groups include ensembles of instruments of indefinite pitch (bells, rattles, log drums) and ensembles of instruments of definite pitch (flutes, trumpets, xylophones, plucked lutes). There are also groups that combine instruments of both definite and indefinite pitch (flutes, drums, bells).

Idiophones

The most common instruments in Africa are idiophones, such as bells, rattles, scrapers, xylophones, and log drums. Most of these instruments are struck or shaken, but others are scraped, rubbed, plucked, or stamped against the ground. Many—like rattles, bells, and stone clappers—are instruments of indefinite pitch. A few—like the xylophone and *mbira,* or *thumb piano*—are tuned instruments.

Xylophones are particularly important in Africa; they are played solo, in small groups, and in orchestras of from ten to more than thirty members. The Chopi, a people of southeast Africa, are noted for large xylophone ensembles including instruments of different sizes ranging from soprano to double bass. In some parts of Africa, a single large xylophone is played by several performers simultaneously. Xylophones have from about ten to over twenty slats, sometimes with gourd resonators attached. Spiderwebs are often placed over small holes in the resonators to create the buzzing sound favored by African musicians.

The *mbira* (*sansa, kalimba,* or *thumb piano*), which is native to Africa, is a melodic idiophone capable of producing elaborate melodies. From eight to over thirty tongues made of metal or bamboo are attached to a sounding board or box. The tongues are plucked with the thumbs and forefingers. The mbira's tone is often enriched by the jingle of shells or metal pieces attached to the resonator. Vocalists often use the mbira to accompany themselves.

Another important idiophone is the *slit drum,* a hollowed-out log with a long slit on top. Some slit drums are small enough to be held in the hand, while others are tree trunks over 20 feet long. Variations in the width of the slit allow two and sometimes four different tones to be produced when the slit is struck. The slit drum is used both as a "talking drum" for signaling and as a musical instrument, often together with membranophone drums.

Two musicians play a slit drum while three others play membranophones.

Membranophones

Drums with stretched skins or other membranes are also important in African culture. They are essential to many religious and political ceremonies, and they are used for dancing and regulating the pace of work. Talking drums are used to send messages over long distances. Drums are often considered sacred or magical; some Africans believe that drums contain the spirits of ancestral drummers. The manufacture of drums is usually accompanied by special rites, and drums are sometimes housed in special shrines and given food and offered sacrifices. Drums are often regarded as the property of the group, rather than that of an individual; and they frequently symbolize power and royalty. Some African chiefs are accompanied by official drummers when they move from place to place.

Drums are usually played in groups of two to four. However, in parts of east Africa—Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda—ensembles of up to fifteen drums are played by four to six performers. The drums are often tuned to different pitches and are used to perform melodic music similar to that of xylophone ensembles.

African drummers are among the most sophisticated in the world. They can produce not only complicated rhythms but a wide range of tone colors and pitches as well. Within an ensemble, drummers have specific roles. It is usually the chief drummer who has the freedom to improvise within the traditional framework. Other drummers repeat certain rhythmic patterns over and over.

Drums come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and forms. There are drums shaped like cones, cylinders, kettles, barrels, goblets, and hourglasses. They are made from logs, gourds, and clay. They may have one or two drumheads made from skins of such animals as snakes, lizards, goats, and monkeys. Some drums produce just a single sound; others—like the hourglass-shaped *pressure*

drum—can produce a variety of pitches. The two heads of the pressure drum are connected by thongs; by varying the arm pressure on the thongs, a player can control the tension of the heads and so change the pitch. The pitches of the pressure drum often imitate the tone language spoken by the people. Sometimes, special devices are used to get certain sounds: for example, seeds or beads inside a closed drum or pieces of metal or small bells attached to a drum's rim.

Aerophones and Chordophones

The most common aerophones (winds) are flutes, whistles, horns, and trumpets. Reed instruments are less widespread. Flutes are usually made of bamboo, cane, or wood; horns and trumpets are made from animal horns, elephant tusks, wood, bamboo, and gourds.

Chordophones (strings) are used throughout Africa and come in many types and sizes. Most are plucked or struck, perhaps reflecting the African musician's preference for percussive sounds. One of the most widely used chordophones is the musical bow, which looks like a hunting bow. The string is plucked or struck with a stick. Some musical bows have a gourd resonator; with others, the player's mouth is used as the resonator.

We'll now study three examples of music from sub-Saharan Africa.

Song from Angola

Basic Set:
CD 8 59
Brief Set:
CD 4 58

A call-and-response pattern dominates this song from Angola, which consists of four statements of the pattern ababc. The performance involves brief solos for male voice (a), even shorter choral responses (b), and longer phrases for chorus alone or for chorus together with the soloist (c). Notice how the soloist's voice—somewhat tense and nasal—becomes increasingly intertwined with the chorus. In the background, several drummers perform different rhythms simultaneously.

Listening Outline to be read while music is heard

Song from Angola

Solo male voice, chorus, drums

(Duration, 1:25)

59 58 0:00	**1.** Drums introduce solo; choral response; solo; choral response; larger choral phrases.
0:21	**2.** Solo; choral response; solo; choral response; longer choral phrases, solo tone interjected.
0:41	**3.** Solo; choral response; solo; choral response; soloist with longer choral phrases.
1:03	**4.** Solo continues into choral response; solo; choral response; soloist with longer choral phrases.

Mitamba Yalagala Kumchuzi

Basic Set:
CD 8 60

Percussive sounds and complex polyrhythms are featured in *Mitamba Yalagala Kumchuzi,* a dance song of the Zaramo people in Tanzania. First we hear percussion instruments—tin rattles and tuned goblet drums and cylindrical drums—producing a variety of rhythms, pitches, and tone colors. Then the percussion instruments are joined by a group of voices singing a dance melody.

Listening Outline to be read while music is heard

Mitamba Yalagala Kumchuzi

Voices, 5 tuned goblet drums, 4 tuned cylindrical drums, tin rattles

(Duration, 1:30)

60 0:00 **1.** Goblet drums, cylindrical drums, tin rattles, complex polyrhythms against basic pulse.
0:43 **2.** Group of voices with dance melody, percussion accompanies.

Hinganyengisa Masingita

Basic Set:
CD 8 61

A xylophone orchestra of the Chopi people of Mozambique plays *Hinganyengisa Masingita,* one movement from a dance. A complete orchestral dance may contain as many as fifteen movements, most having their own lyrics sung by the dancers.

In this movement, the xylophone orchestra is first heard alone and then joined by voices. Several times, a solo male voice is followed by a male chorus singing in unison. Excited high-pitched yodeling can also be heard. The singing dancers are inspired by the xylophone orchestra, which creates enormous drive through its ostinatos.

Classical Music of India

The musical traditions of India, which include folk and popular music, date back over 3,000 years and are thus among the oldest in the world. Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, Indian classical music developed two distinct traditions: *Karnatak music,* of south India; and *Hindustani music,* of north India (an area that now includes Pakistan). The centers of north Indian music were the princely courts, whereas south Indian music was performed in temples. The music of north India absorbed many Persian elements because many of its

rulers came from Persia and were Muslims. The music of south India developed more along its own lines.

When India came under British rule during the nineteenth century, north Indian classical music was still performed mainly for small, elite audiences at princely courts. But aristocratic patronage declined during the twentieth century as India made the transition from British rule to independence. Many musicians lost their jobs around 1947—the date of India's independence—when almost 600 princely states of India were abolished as political units and merged with neighboring territories. Indian performers turned to the general public for support, just as European musicians did during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Today, Indian musicians broadcast on radio and television, make recordings, and compose music for films. Some teach in colleges or give concerts for large audiences. Many Indian artists now travel and give concerts throughout the world.

Performers

Indian performers consider their music spiritual in character. "We view music as a kind of spiritual discipline that raises one's inner being to divine peacefulness and bliss," writes Ravi Shankar (b. 1920), one of the most important Indian musicians. "The highest aim of our music is to reveal the essence of the universe it reflects; . . . through music, one can reach God." This spiritual emphasis is reflected in the texts of south Indian songs, which have religious associations. Indian musicians venerate their *guru* (*master* or *teacher*) as representative of the divine. A special initiation ceremony usually occurs when a guru accepts a disciple. The student is then expected to surrender his or her personality to the guru.

Musical traditions are transmitted orally from master to disciple, who learns by imitation, not by studying textbooks or written music. For example, Indian music students imitate their teacher phrase by phrase at lessons and sing or play along at concerts. Although India has various systems of musical notation, they give only the basic melodic and rhythmic elements. The development of these elements—the essential ornaments and musical elaborations—cannot be notated and must be learned from a teacher.

Improvisation

Improvisation plays an important role in Indian music. In few other cultures is improvisation as highly developed and sophisticated. The improviser is guided by complex melodic and rhythmic systems that govern the choice of tones, ornaments, and rhythms. Before being allowed to improvise, young musicians must study for years and practice many hours a day mastering basic rules and techniques. Improvisations are generally performed by a soloist and a drummer. They last anywhere from a few minutes to several hours, depending on the occasion and the mood of the performers and audience. Both vocalists and instrumentalists improvise.

Elements of Indian Classical Music

Indian music is based on the human voice—so much so that the pitch range of all Indian music is restricted to less than 4 octaves. Instrumentalists often

imitate a vocal style of performance. Composed pieces are songs performed by a singer or an instrumentalist, with the instrumentalist imitating vocal styles. And songs are used as a springboard for improvisation.

There have been many composers in south India, producing thousands of songs. The greatest composers were Tyagaraja (1767–1847), Muthuswamy Dikshitar (1775–1835), and Shyama Sastri (1762–1827). These three musicians were born in the same village and were contemporaries of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven; they are called the "musical trinity."

Highly embellished melody—both vocal and instrumental—is characteristic of Indian music. Melodies often move by microtones (intervals smaller than a half step). Melodic lines are subtly embellished by microtonal ornaments, tiny pitch fluctuations around notes. Slides of pitch provide graceful transitions from one note to another.

Indian melodies are almost always accompanied by a drone instrument that plays the tonic and dominant (or subdominant) notes throughout the performance. The basic texture of Indian music, therefore, consists of a single melody performed over an unchanging background. Rather than the harmonic progression and polyphonic texture of western music, Indian music has melodic and rhythmic tension and relaxation. The main drone instrument is the ***tambura,*** a long-necked lute with four metal strings that are plucked continually in succession. The constant sound of the drone contributes vitally to the atmosphere of the music. Besides the soloist and the tambura players, there is a drummer who maintains the rhythmic structure and may also perform rhythmic improvisations.

Melodic Structure: Raga

In Indian classical music, melody is created within a melodic framework called *raga.* A ***raga*** is a pattern of notes. A particular raga is defined partly by the number of its tones and the pattern of its intervals. Each raga has an ascending and descending form with characteristic melodic phrases and tonal emphases. Particular ornaments and slides from one note to another give each raga its individuality.

The term *raga* comes from a word meaning *color* or *atmosphere,* and an ancient saying describes raga as "that which colors the mind." Ragas have many extramusical associations. Each raga is linked with a particular mood, such as tranquillity, love, or heroism. Ragas are also associated with specific gods, seasons, festivals, and times of day or night. They involve so many dimensions that Indian musicians spend a long time learning each one. Some distinguished musicians restrict themselves to performing only about a dozen ragas. Within the framework of a raga, great artists can create and improvise a limitless variety of music.

Two ragas are shown here.

Raga *Malkauns*

Raga *Yaman Kalyan*

Rhythmic Structure: Tala

Rhythm is organized into cycles called *talas*. A ***tala*** consists of a repeated cycle of beats. Although beat cycles range from 3 to more than 100 beats in length, the most common cycles have 6 to 16 beats. A cycle is divided into groups of beats. For example, the 10-beat tala called *jhaptal* is divided 2-3-2-3, while the 10-beat tala called *shultal* is divided 4-2-4:

Jhaptal									
|1	2	|3	4	5	|6	7	|8	9	10|
Shultal									
|1	2	3	4	|5	6	|7	8	9	10|

Each beat in a tala may be divided into smaller time values, just as a quarter note in western music may be divided into eighth or sixteenth notes. The most important beat of the tala cycle is the first. The soloist usually plays an important note of the raga on the first beat. Apart from the main beat, other beats receive secondary accents at the beginning of each group division. Singers and members of the audience often keep time with hand and finger movements on accented beats and hand waving on less important ones. Talas are performed in a variety of tempos ranging from slow to very fast.

The rhythm of Indian music is remarkably complex and sophisticated. Young drummers spend years with a master drummer memorizing hundreds of talas and their variations. Drummers and instrumental soloists sometimes have exciting dialogues in which rhythmically intricate phrases are rapidly tossed back and forth.

Instruments

Although the most important performing medium in India is the voice, there are a dazzling variety of instruments of all kinds. In north Indian classical music, instruments have become about as popular as the voice. Many instruments are associated with specific gods and goddesses. For example, the flute is associated with the Hindu god Krishna, and the *vina*—a plucked string instrument—is linked with Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess of wisdom. We will describe only a few of the best-known instruments.

The ***sitar*** is the most popular chordophone of north India. It is a long-necked lute with nineteen to twenty-three movable frets. There are seven strings, which are plucked: five are used for melodies, and two supply drone and rhythmic effects. The sitar also has nine to thirteen sympathetically vibrating strings that give the instrument its characteristic sound. These strings lie under the frets, almost parallel to the plucked strings. The most famous sitarist today is Ravi Shankar.

The *vina* is the most ancient plucked string instrument of south India. It has four strings for playing melodies, and three strings at the side of the fingerboard can be used for drone and rhythmic effects.

The *sarod* is a north Indian string instrument plucked with a plectrum of ivory or coconut shell. It has six main strings: four for melodies and two for drones and rhythm. Eleven to sixteen other strings vibrate sympathetically.

The *mridangam* is a two-headed barrel drum popular in south India. It is played with the open hands and fingers. The right drumhead is tuned to the tonic, and the left head functions as a bass.

The north Indian counterpart of the mridangam is the ***tabla,*** a pair of single-headed drums played by one performer. The right-hand drum is generally tuned to the tonic note, and the left-hand drum functions as a bass drum. These drums, which are played with the hands and fingers, can produce a wide variety of pitches and tone colors. The tabla is vital to north Indian concerts and is used for solos as well as accompaniments.

Maru-Bihag, by Ravi Shankar

Basic Set:
CD 8 62

Brief Set:
CD 4 59

The performance here is an improvisation by the sitarist Ravi Shankar on the evening raga *Maru-Bihag*. As usual, the sitar is accompanied by a pair of drums (tabla) with a *tambura* (a drone instrument) in the background. In his spoken introduction to the recorded performance, Ravi Shankar illustrates the raga pattern and the tala (beat cycle) used as a basis for this performance. The ascending and descending melodic forms of *Maru-Bihag* are as follows:

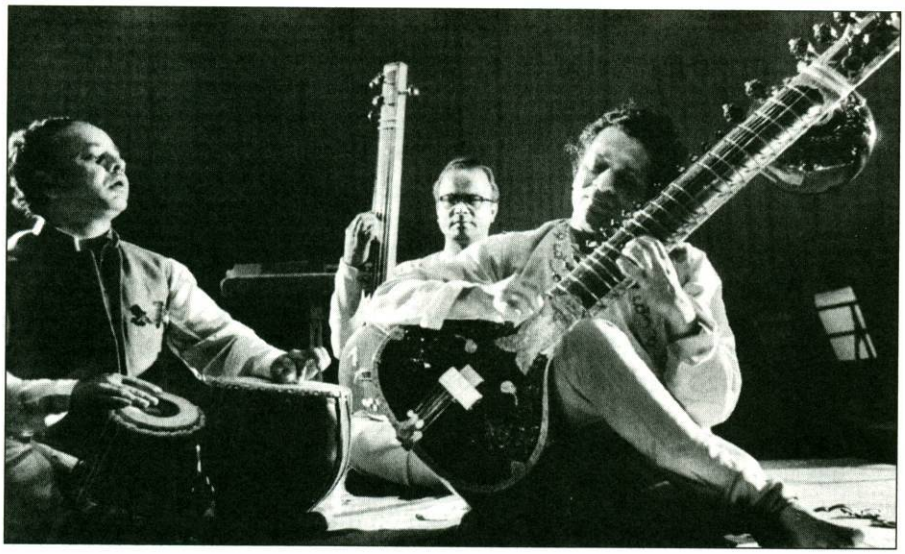
62 59

Raga *Maru-Bihag*

The tala, played by the tabla, consists of 10 beats divided to give 2-3-2-3. In the illustration as well as the performance, it is not easy to perceive the beats. Each one is often subdivided into shorter drum strokes, and accents often come off the beat.

63 60

The performance opens with an *alap,* a rhapsodic introductory section in which the sitar is accompanied only by the tambura playing the tonic and dominant notes of the raga pattern. The sitarist plays in free rhythm, without regular beat or meter. Ravi Shankar conveys the basic mood and character of the raga by gradually unfolding its melodic pattern, characteristic phrases, and important tones. There are many long notes, microtonal ornaments, and slides



The sitarist Ravi Shankar (right) is accompanied here by a tabla (left) and a tambura (center).

The north Indian counterpart of the mridangam is the ***tabla,*** a pair of single-headed drums played by one performer. The right-hand drum is generally tuned to the tonic note, and the left-hand drum functions as a bass drum. These drums, which are played with the hands and fingers, can produce a wide variety of pitches and tone colors. The tabla is vital to north Indian concerts and is used for solos as well as accompaniments.

Maru-Bihag, by Ravi Shankar

Basic Set:
CD 8 62

Brief Set:
CD 4 59

The performance here is an improvisation by the sitarist Ravi Shankar on the evening raga *Maru-Bihag*. As usual, the sitar is accompanied by a pair of drums (tabla) with a *tambura* (a drone instrument) in the background. In his spoken introduction to the recorded performance, Ravi Shankar illustrates the raga pattern and the tala (beat cycle) used as a basis for this performance. The ascending and descending melodic forms of *Maru-Bihag* are as follows:

62 59

Raga *Maru-Bihag*

The tala, played by the tabla, consists of 10 beats divided to give 2-3-2-3. In the illustration as well as the performance, it is not easy to perceive the beats. Each one is often subdivided into shorter drum strokes, and accents often come off the beat.

63 60

The performance opens with an *alap,* a rhapsodic introductory section in which the sitar is accompanied only by the tambura playing the tonic and dominant notes of the raga pattern. The sitarist plays in free rhythm, without regular beat or meter. Ravi Shankar conveys the basic mood and character of the raga by gradually unfolding its melodic pattern, characteristic phrases, and important tones. There are many long notes, microtonal ornaments, and slides

from tone to tone. After opening with a downward glissando (glide) across the sympathetic strings, Ravi Shankar first explores the lowest notes of the melody and then plays slightly higher ones. In this performance the introductory section (alap) is 2 minutes in length. (In other performances, however, the alap can last as long as an hour.)

64 61 The entrance of the tabla playing the tala (beat cycle) marks the second phase of the performance. Ravi Shankar presents the *gat*, a short composed phrase that recurs many times. Between these recurrences, there are longer sections of improvisation. As the improvisation progresses, Ravi Shankar generates excitement by using increasingly rapid notes and by moving through the low and high registers of the sitar. This performance is a spectacular display of virtuosity and musical imagination.

Basic Terms

tambura (page 586)
raga (586)
tala (587)
sitar (587)
tabla (588)

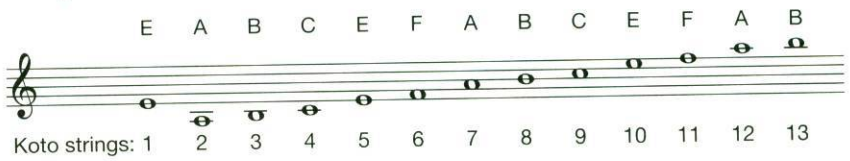
Koto Music of Japan

The rich musical culture of Japan embraces both folk music and a tradition of classical music that goes back over 1,000 years. Traditional Japanese classical music includes sacred and secular works, theater music, vocal and instrumental music, and works for orchestra, chamber ensemble, and soloists. There is a wide variety of styles, forms, instruments, and musical techniques. We shall explore some characteristic features of this music by focusing on the koto, a plucked string instrument whose importance in Japanese music is comparable to the importance of the piano in western music.

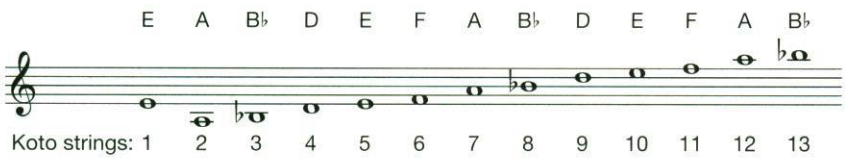
The Koto

The ***koto*** has thirteen strings—of silk or nylon—that are stretched over a hollow soundboard about 6 feet long. Each string has a movable bridge. The player tunes the thirteen strings by adjusting the placement of their individual bridges. The two most common koto tunings are called *hira-joshi* and *kumoi-joshi;* each uses only five different pitches:

Hira-joshi Tuning



Kumoi-joshi Tuning



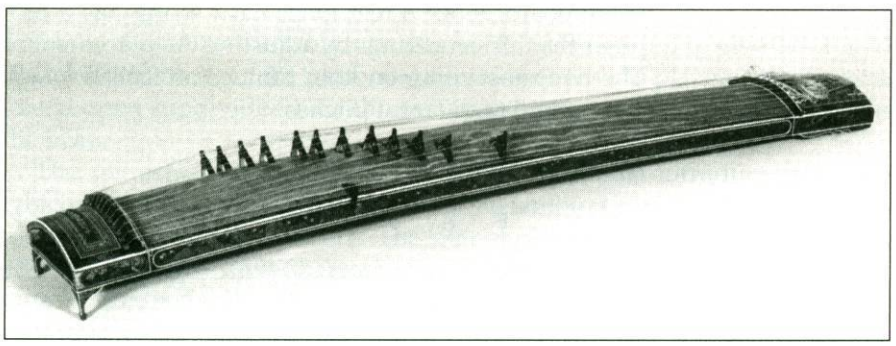
The strings of the koto are plucked with ivory plectra worn on the thumb, index finger, and middle finger of the right hand. The strings may also be struck and scraped with the plectra to produce a variety of tone colors and musical effects. Two common right-hand playing techniques are a slide across the strings (resembling the glissando on western string instruments) and a rapid shaking of a single string (like a tremolo).

The koto is not limited to the pitches produced by plucking an open string. The player may raise the pitch of a string—usually by a half step or a whole step—by using the left hand to press down the string on the left side of the movable bridge. Left-hand pressure is also used to obtain ornamental pitch slides and "bent" tones.

Historical Background

Like Buddhism, woodblock printing, and much else in Japanese culture, the koto originally came to Japan from China. It was imported sometime between 650 and 750, along with Chinese and Korean musicians who came to play in the Japanese court orchestra. The koto was used in Japanese court music (*gagaku*), which is among the world's oldest surviving orchestral music. By the tenth century, the koto was also used as a solo instrument by the court aristocracy. The earliest surviving solo koto music dates from the sixteenth century. This music, which is ceremonial in character and is therefore heard mostly in temples, was performed only by Buddhist priests, Confucian scholars, and aristocrats.

Most masterpieces of traditional koto music were composed during the Edo period (1615–1868), when the capital of Japan was moved to Edo (now Tokyo). During this period, Japan isolated itself from contact with foreign cultures. However, an increasingly wealthy merchant class stimulated new developments in the arts such as color woodblock prints and kabuki theater, a form of drama that combines acting with brilliant music and dance.



The importance of the koto in traditional Japanese music is comparable to that of the piano in western music.

The early Edo period saw the rise of koto music intended for entertainment, rather than for religious rites. It was composed not by scholars or priests but by professional musicians, many of whom were blind. These blind musicians belonged to a special guild that protected their professional and economic interests. The guild also bestowed ranks, of which the highest was *kengyō*, or *master of koto.* Koto masters earned their living by teaching young women from well-to-do families. The blind musician Yatsuhashi Kengyō (1614–1685) is known as the founder of modern koto music.

Koto Music

The koto is used for solos and duets, for vocal accompaniments, and in combination with one or more other instruments (with or without voice). An important chamber ensemble consists of koto and voice together with the *shakuhachi* (an end-blown bamboo flute with five holes) and the *shamisen* (an instrument with three strings that are plucked, also spelled *samisen*).

Fusako Yoshida, a "master of koto."

The most important type of music for solo koto is a theme-and-variations form known as *danmono*. The theme is presented in the first section (*dan*) and is then varied in subsequent sections, which have increasingly faster tempos. New melodic material is also placed between phrases of the original theme. Each section consists of 104 beats in duple meter (except the first section, which has 108). Danmono pieces were composed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The most famous piece of this type is *Rokudan* (*Six Sections*), attributed to Yatsuhashi Kengyō. Since the nineteenth century, these solo pieces have often been arranged for two koto or for other instruments such as shamisen and shakuhachi.

Another basic form of koto music is *tegotomono*, a song cycle with extended instrumental interludes. The simplest type of song cycle consists of three parts: song—instrumental interlude—song. Tegotomono developed during the eighteenth century. Today song cycles are performed by an ensemble consisting of voice, koto, shamisen, and shakuhachi.

The Japanese koto repertoire is made up of traditional pieces that are passed down from teacher to student and learned by rote. Rote learning was a necessity, since many koto masters were blind. Though a system of musical notation had long existed, musical scores were not used in teaching or performance until after World War II.

Most koto music is based on pentatonic (five-tone) scales that correspond to A–B–C–E–F or E–F–A–B–C on the piano. In this music, the precise quality of each individual tone is of great importance. The performer strives to give each tone the proper dynamic level, tone color, pitch inflection, and ornamentation. When the koto is used as part of a chamber ensemble, no instrument (or voice) is allowed to outshine the others. The instruments and voices blend together without losing their individual qualities.

Music for koto and other instruments or for koto and voice is usually heterophonic in texture. ***Heterophonic texture*** occurs when all parts perform the same basic melody, but in versions that differ in ornamentation or rhythm. However, the parts sometimes become so independent that the texture becomes polyphonic.

Godan-Ginuta (Nineteenth Century), by Mitsuzaki Kengyō

Basic Set:
CD 8 65

Godan-Ginuta, by Mitsuzaki Kengyō (?–1853), is one of the earliest and most brilliant pieces conceived as a duet for two koto. As its title indicates, *Godan-Ginuta* has five sections (*godan* means *five sections*) and evokes the sound of cloth beating against a wooden block called a *kinuta* (*ginuta*). Japanese women once used the kinuta to clean and soften cloth in autumn, and so the music of *Godan-Ginuta* is associated with that season.

In this duet, the two koto are tuned to different scales, and one instrument is pitched 5 steps higher than the other. The two koto are of about equal importance and often engage in a lively dialogue with rapid give-and-take. Variety is created through changes between monophonic, heterophonic, and polyphonic textures. Typical of koto music are the many tones which are "bent" upward or downward. Also characteristic are the duple meter and the flexible tempo,

which is often held back or pressed forward. The rhythm of *Godan-Ginuta* is particularly exciting and features much syncopation.

We'll now focus on the opening section of the piece, which is included in the recordings. *Godan-Ginuta* opens with the two koto playing long notes in unison. These tones represent the sound of the kinuta (the wooden block). As the section unfolds, the tempo quickens and the rhythm becomes increasingly animated. Toward the middle we hear a characteristic koto sound: rapid scrapes of the plectrum along the top of the string. This section of *Godan-Ginuta* ends with a point of repose when a long note is played in unison by the two koto.

Listening Outline to be read while music is heard

MITSUZAKI KENGYŌ, *Godan-Ginuta*

Opening Section

Duple meter ($\frac{2}{4}$)

2 koto

(Duration, 2:49)

65 0:00	**1. a.** Downward skips, long notes in unison.
0:10	**b.** Quicker notes, dialogue between two koto; low register.
1:01	**2. a.** Downward skip, long notes in unison; faster tempo, more active rhythms.
1:33	**b.** Scrapes alternate with repeated notes.
1:54	**c.** Rhythmic motive tossed rapidly between two koto.
2:00	**d.** Two koto play together, tempo accelerates.
2:35	**e.** Two koto in unison; downward skip, long notes in unison end section with a point of repose.

Basic Terms

koto (page 589)
heterophonic texture (592)