Bansuri to Boehm

A Flutist's Guide to Practice Inspired by the Bamboo Flute

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About Dr. Allison Asthana

Highly devoted to teaching flute and music, Dr. Allison Asthana maintains an active private studio of a wide range of students. She places a special emphasis on student ownership of lesson topics and repertoire, achieving freedom and experimentation in practice, and building confidence as performers and musical advocates. She is passionate about exposing student musicians to a diverse range of composers, styles and genres. Dr. Asthana regularly leads master classes on a range of topics, including appearances at Baylor University, Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and the Austin Flute Society, in addition to many middle and high schools across Texas.

Dr. Asthana is the 2019 winner of the Byron Hester Competition and performed a recital as guest artist at the Houston Flute Festival in 2021. She is also the 2020 winner of the Presser Graduate Music Award from the Butler School of Music, receiving a grant to study Hindustani classical music and bansuri with expert flutists in India and to create educational resources for flutists – which is this book!

Dr. Asthana earned her Doctorate of Musical Arts at the University of Texas at Austin, where she served as the graduate teaching assistant of the flute studio, studying with Marianne Gedigian. She also holds degrees from Boston University and Baylor University, studying with Linda Toote and Dr. Francesca Arnone respectively. She currently performs as a freelancer throughout Texas, regularly performing with professional ensembles across the state. She lives in Sugar Land, Texas, and besides flute, enjoys experimenting with coffee, her houseplant collection, and spending time with her husband and puppy.
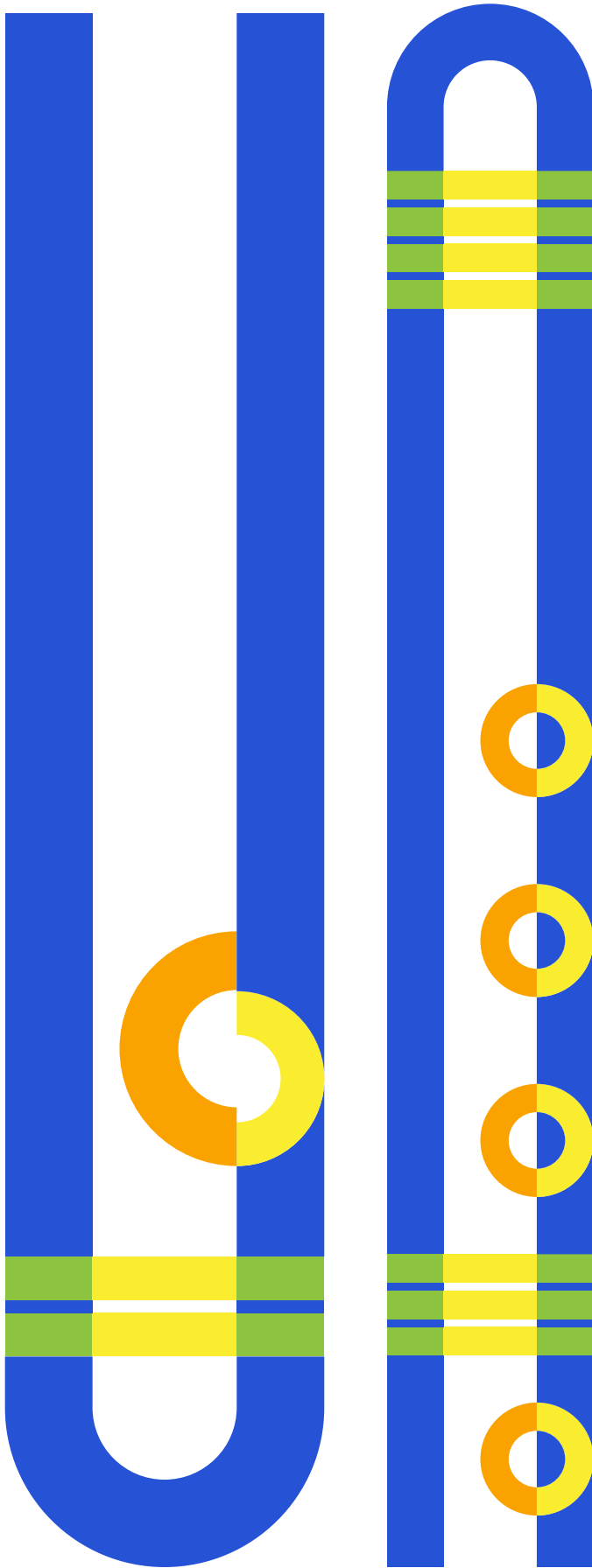
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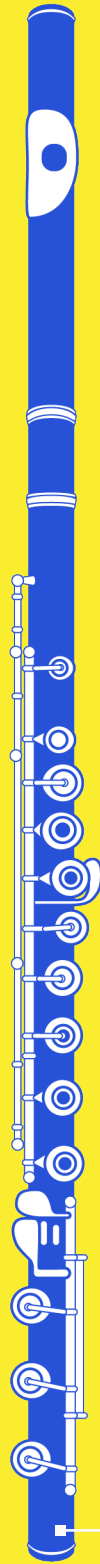
Bansuri

Boehm flute

Introduction

This book is meant to provide flutists who play the Boehm flute with an introduction to the bansuri playing style. It is written with the intent for the user to **play the exercises on a Boehm flute**, which is the (usually silver or gold) flute most commonly played in band or orchestra settings and also known as the Western concert flute. The practice strategies and exercises in this book are meant to improve technique and provide a musical framework to feel confident exploring new styles and types of music.

This is **not** a book to teach you how to play the bansuri, although I hope everyone has the opportunity to try! The good news as a flutist is that once you learn how to produce a sound on your flute, you already have a headstart learning many other types of flutes. The bansuri differs from the Boehm flute in that it has no keys, and the holes are often spaced further apart. The style in which it is played is also different, as outlined in this book. However, the basic way the two instruments are played is very similar and it is my hope that this book might inspire an interest in learning more about the bansuri and any other flutes (of which there are many!).

Happy practicing!

PLAY-ALONG FILES

Each chapter of this book will correspond with audio files that are included in the accompanying folder of the book download. The tracks are named based on which chapter and exercise they correspond to, in chronological order. Each file contains one of the exercises in a call and response style over a drone. You will hear a measure or segment of the exercise first, then a pause, during which you will play back the same segment. The goal of practicing in this way is to have a model that you try to closely imitate. Think of the audio track as your teacher! This style of practicing is based on the *guru-shishya parampara* in Hindustani music. Also known as the *guru-shishya tradition*, this term refers to the specific lineages of teachers and students. Teachings are passed down from the master teacher, or *guru*, to the student apprentice, or *shishya*. *Parampara* refers specifically to the lineage of teachers and students. In Hindustani music lessons, the teacher will typically play first as a model, and the student is expected to be able to imitate them.

If you are a flute teacher, try this style of teaching in your own lessons! The goal is to be able to demonstrate exactly what you want your student to play without using much, or any, notation or verbal explanation. Break down larger sections of music or an exercise into small chunks which are more easily imitable. See if your student can reproduce all of the nuances of your playing, including color, articulation, note length, timing, and vibrato.

In your own practice, aim to memorize the musical pattern of the exercise so you don't have to look at the notation. Once you are comfortable playing an exercise, try transposing it to different notes or keys.

THE BANSURI
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
BAMBOO FLUTE AND ITS USE
IN HINDUSTANI MUSIC

The word bansuri comes from two Sanskrit words: *bans* meaning bamboo, and *sur* meaning melody. This melodious bamboo flute, the bansuri, is played in Hindustani classical music and can be found throughout India. Like in many other cultures, the flute holds religious significance as well. In Hinduism, the deity Krishna is frequently depicted in iconography playing his bansuri, and there are many stories of Krishna and his flute-playing. The bansuri is a side-blown (or transverse) flute that has 6 or 7 keyless holes. It can be made in many sizes, which changes the key of the instrument. Larger bansuris are more commonly heard in formal performance, while smaller bansuris are typically associated with folk music and can be purchased from street vendors.

Hindustani music originates from the Northern area of India and includes the performance of *raags* (a musical form that is based on a collection of notes, melodies, and other specific characteristics) on many traditional instruments, including the *sitar*, *tanpura*, *tabla*, and singing. Although the bansuri is an ancient instrument, its inclusion in Hindustani classical musical performance is relatively recent. The flutist Pannalal Gosh, who lived from 1911 to 1960, is credited with bringing the flute to larger audiences in classical performances. He also pioneered many playing techniques that will be mentioned in this book, such as *meend* and *gamak*. Another influential bansuri player is Hariprasad Chaurasia, an internationally acclaimed soloist whose individual playing style has influenced generations of flutists. I encourage you to listen to the recordings of these two musicians, as well as many others, to become familiar with the sound and style of the bansuri.

*A temple dedicated to Krishna
in Vrindaban, Uttar Pradesh, India.*

Tanpura

1
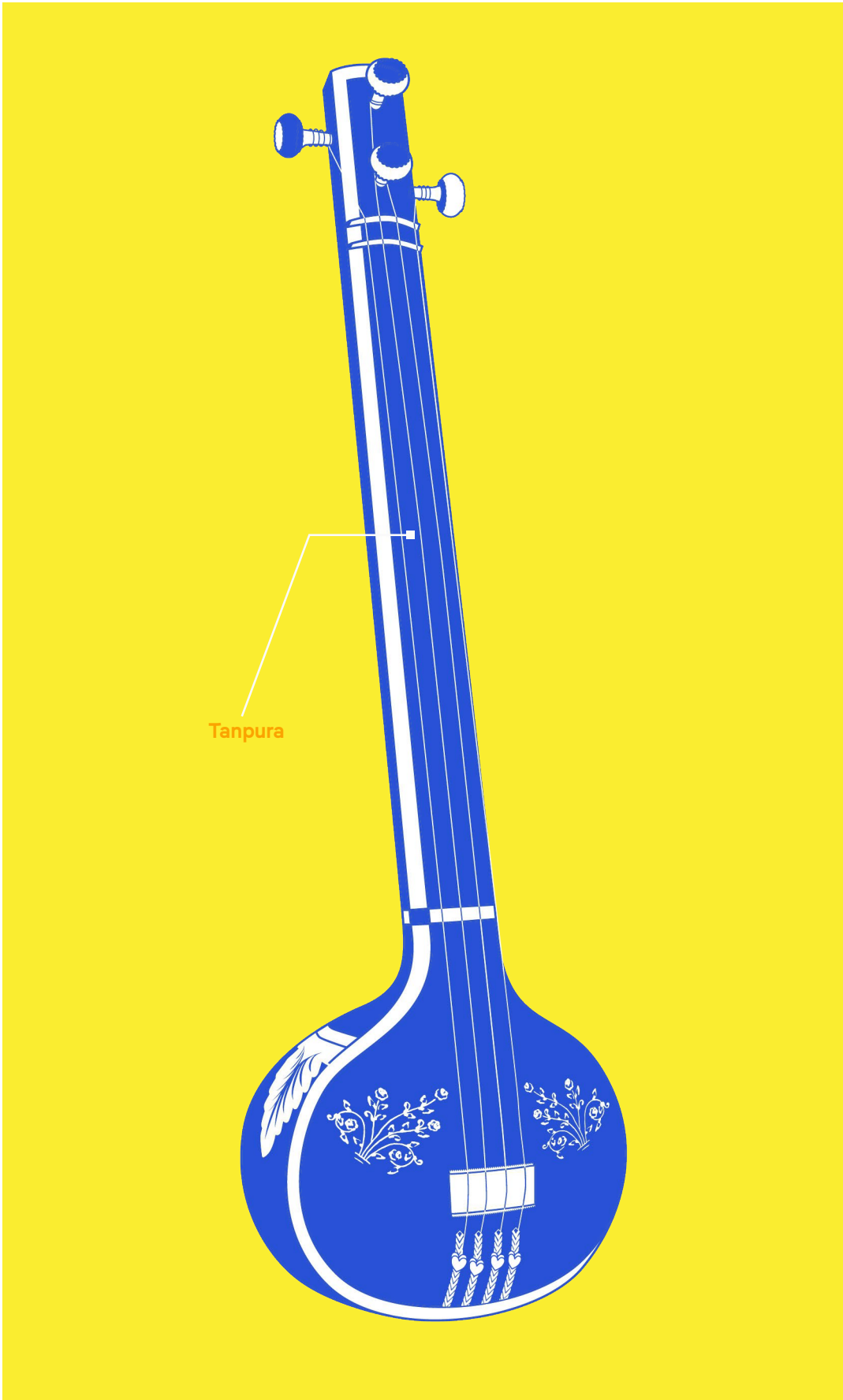
Drones: Part I

Training your ear to notice small differences in pitch is an important part of being a musician. The tuner is a useful tool I grew up using, as it provided valuable information: am I in tune? The tuner processed the pitch and returned with a report. You're flat, you're in tune, or you're sharp; and not only that, but by how much, down to the cent. For a perfectionist like me, the tuner seemed like the perfect tool, all condensed into a single small device or app. However, relying on the tuner to tell me whether or not my intonation was deemed "correct" led to some limitations. While pitch and intonation are concepts related to our sense of hearing, I was instead relying on my sight to develop my skill. In a performance setting, it is not possible to rely on your sight to make on-the-fly adjustments to your pitch. In these situations our ear must provide the valuable information on if we match

pitch or not. So, why not do all we can to hone our pitch discernment in daily practice? Music is sound, after all.

In Hindustani music, the *drone* provides a sustained, low, pitch. The instrument most commonly used to produce a drone is the *tanpura* [left], a large, plucked string instrument. The play-along tracks for this book will make use of a tanpura drone. There are also many other ways to produce a drone during your own practice. Many tuners have this feature (look for the "sustain", or "pitch" function), and of course, the internet has no shortage of videos, audio tracks, and websites with drones available.

F Major Scale

▸ Using Play-along Audio File 1

Start by using a drone on the first and fifth notes of the scale, F and C. This interval, the perfect fifth, establishes a tonal and harmonic center for our ears. Start on the first note of the scale, F, and play each ascending pitch one at a time, holding it long enough to let it settle and blend into the surrounding sounds. If you are using the play-along track, repeat after each pitch in a call and response manner, playing the same note for the same length of time. Once reaching the top of the scale, play the descending notes in the same manner, and try this exercise on other scales as well.
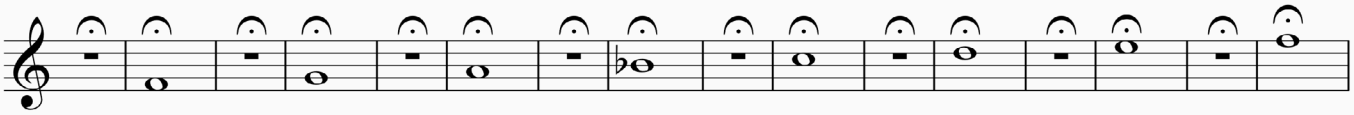
and so on…

Note: Use the double thumb fingering of B♭ in order for most note changes to involve only one finger movement.

Did you know…

*The concept of **shruti** in Hinudustani music refers to the smallest interval of pitch that we are able to discern. Think about this: anytime you adjust your pitch to try and match someone/something else you are playing with, you pass through countless gradations of pitch in between where you start and end. In many types of music, these tiny intervals are used purposefully to color music in different ways.*

Do not try to change anything at first, simply listen and observe sensations that may occur. Does your sound produce bumps or beats in the sound? Does it blend seamlessly, in a way that makes it hard to distinguish? Does it produce any other tones that your ear picks up? Do certain notes in the scale sound differently against the drone? Are there some pitches which are more satisfying to play? There is no right or wrong outcome.

Repeat this exercise several times, and as you get more comfortable, try to play with different dynamics and tone colors. Is it easier or more challenging to play certain notes softly or with a full volume? What changes in your air, embouchure, or body help you match the drone? These questions are simply meant to start a process of introspection and exploration in your practice.

Now that the drone has been established as a part of your practice routine, we can begin to build upon it.

Your Space

Establish a dedicated practice area that feels comfortable and welcoming. During my bansuri lessons, we would sit on floor cushions in a simple but comfortable room, taking breaks for tea and water. This helped to break up the practice and also reminded me to relax.

It may not be possible to have an entire room, or even to use the same space consistently, but think of what helps you to feel comfortable and if there's a way to bring it to your space. For example, my ideal practice space has lots of natural light, easy access to a piano or keyboard, and a soft carpet or rug.

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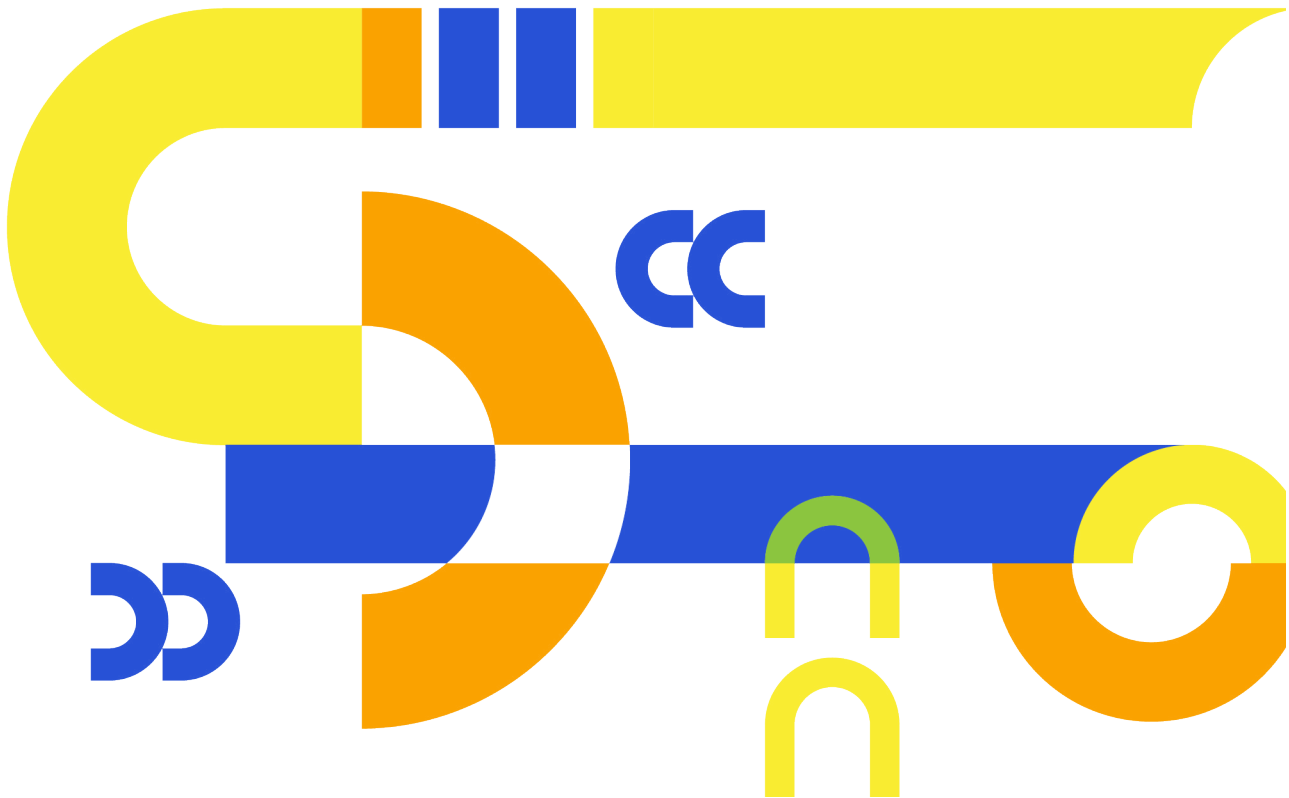
Drones: Part II
Meend

In Hindustani music, pitch bends and slides are a fundamental form of ornamentation. *Meend* is a term which refers to this technique, which involves moving the pitch continuously between two pitches (similar to a glissando or portamento in Western classical music). On the bansuri, meend is accomplished by gradually lifting a finger to uncover a hole or gradually sliding the finger down to cover a hole on the flute. This causes the pitch to slide up or down, respectively. (see Fig. 2-1)

On our Boehm-style flutes, *meend* and other pitch bends are often considered an *extended technique*, meaning it is less common and involves unconventional methods to produce the desired sound. We are able to produce meend between certain pitches using the finger-sliding method outlined above, but it is less effective because of the key mechanism. Because of this, producing *meend* can be assisted by rolling the flute away or towards the embouchure. In addition to learning this as a new technique, practicing meend is helpful in improving your tone flexibility and developing a keener sense of pitch precision. (see Fig. 2-2)
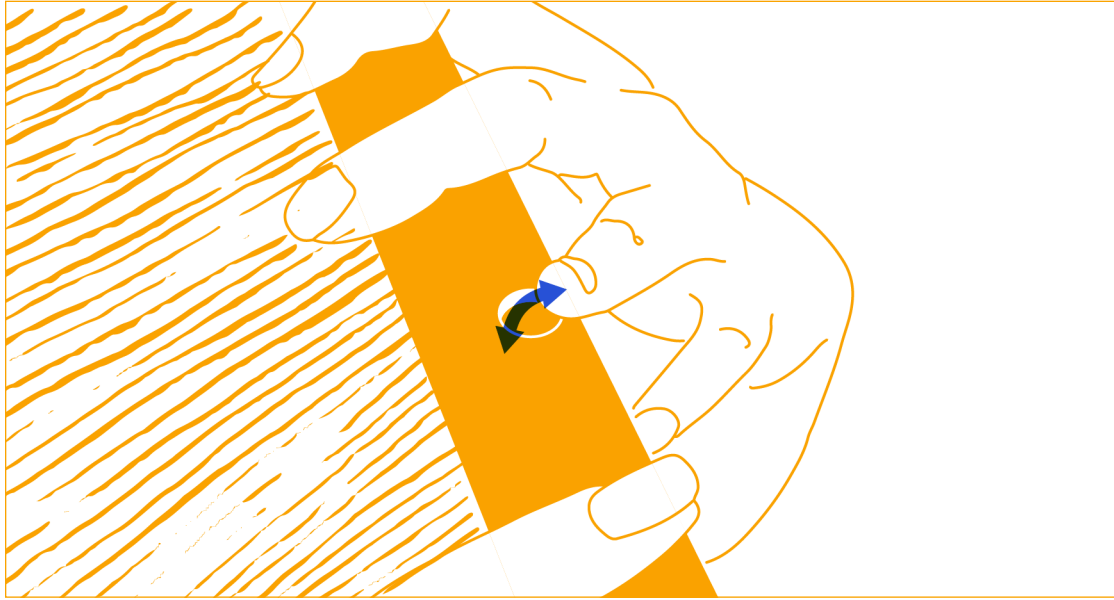
Fig. 2-1
On the bansuri, gradually lift a finger to uncover a hole or slide the finger down to cover a hole on the flute.
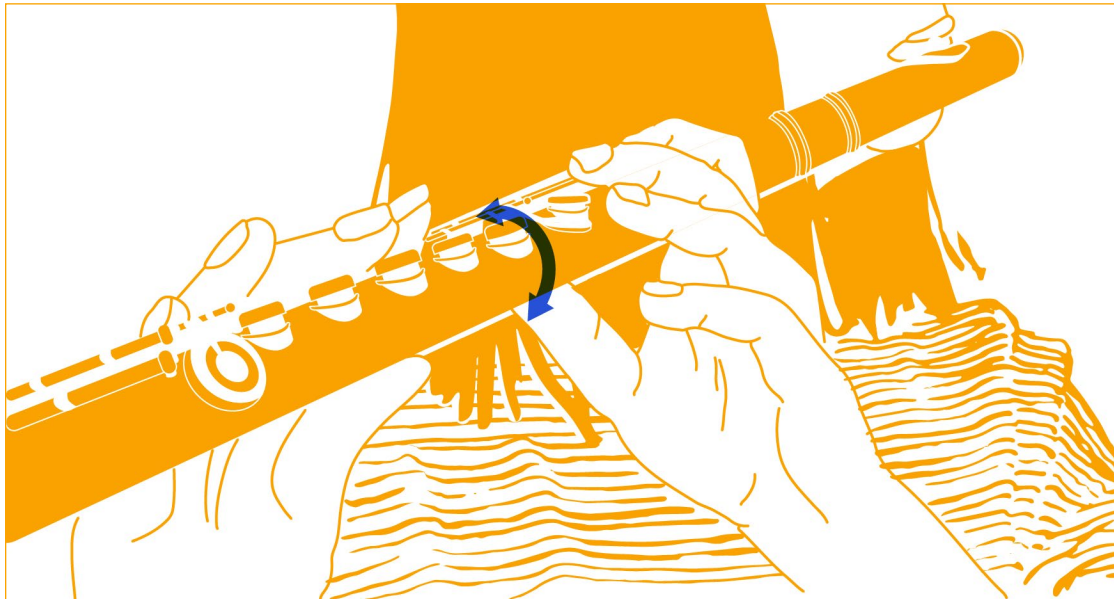

Fig. 2-2
Produce *meend* by rolling the flute away or towards the embouchure.

Body Awareness

Always have a mirror nearby during your practice to see how your body and the flute are moving. I like to have a full-length mirror in my practice space, but if you are not at home, a smaller mirror is useful to set on your music stand. Think of the mirror as your teacher, and practice teaching yourself. Do you notice any extraneous tension or movements that obstruct your playing? If what you're doing involves movement, like the meend exercise in this chapter, is your flute actually moving as much as you think? Can you see your embouchure move in the way you intend?

Using Meend on a Scale

▶ Using Play-along Audio File 2

With the drone, we can use meend to further practice training your ear and centering the pitch. On each note of the scale, start on the written pitch, and follow the direction of the pitch bend lines to move the pitch first lower (rolling the flute in) then higher (rolling the flute out), coming back to the starting pitch by the end of the measure. Embouchure adjustments can also help maximize the amount of pitch bending you are able to achieve. When flattening the pitch, bring the upper lip forward to point the air down, while moving bottom lip moves slightly backwards; this points the airstream lower. When sharpening the pitch, move both lips forward, the bottom lip more so, to help raise the airstream.

and so on, descending down the scale

Note: F natural will be used rather than F# in this scale in order for only one finger to move between every note, except from C to D, and D to E.

Did you know...

The Hindi word **aaroh** *refers to a set of notes which are ascending from lower to higher, and the word* **avroh** *refers to notes which are descending from higher to lower. Practicing both the* aaroh *and* avroh *or a scale or* raag *(more on* raags *later!) is crucial to mastering the notes (*swaras*) in all contexts.*

While playing this exercise, go slowly enough to hear when the pitch you play begins to match the pitch of the drone. Become very familiar with the audible sensations of hearing the note gradually settle in and blend with the drone. The audio track will provide a reference for pacing, but feel free to adjust the duration and pacing of each note as needed. Play this exercise with other scales once you are comfortable with the technique.

Notice which notes are more flexible than others, and enjoy the feeling of flexibility and freedom. Flute is one of the most flexible instruments because of all the variables involved! Embouchure, aperture, air speed, air direction, flute placement, and more all affect the sound we produce. This can be challenging at times, but is also the source of immense freedom of expression. Once you realize how much room you truly have, you will feel more confident to explore the boundaries of the sounds the flute can produce.

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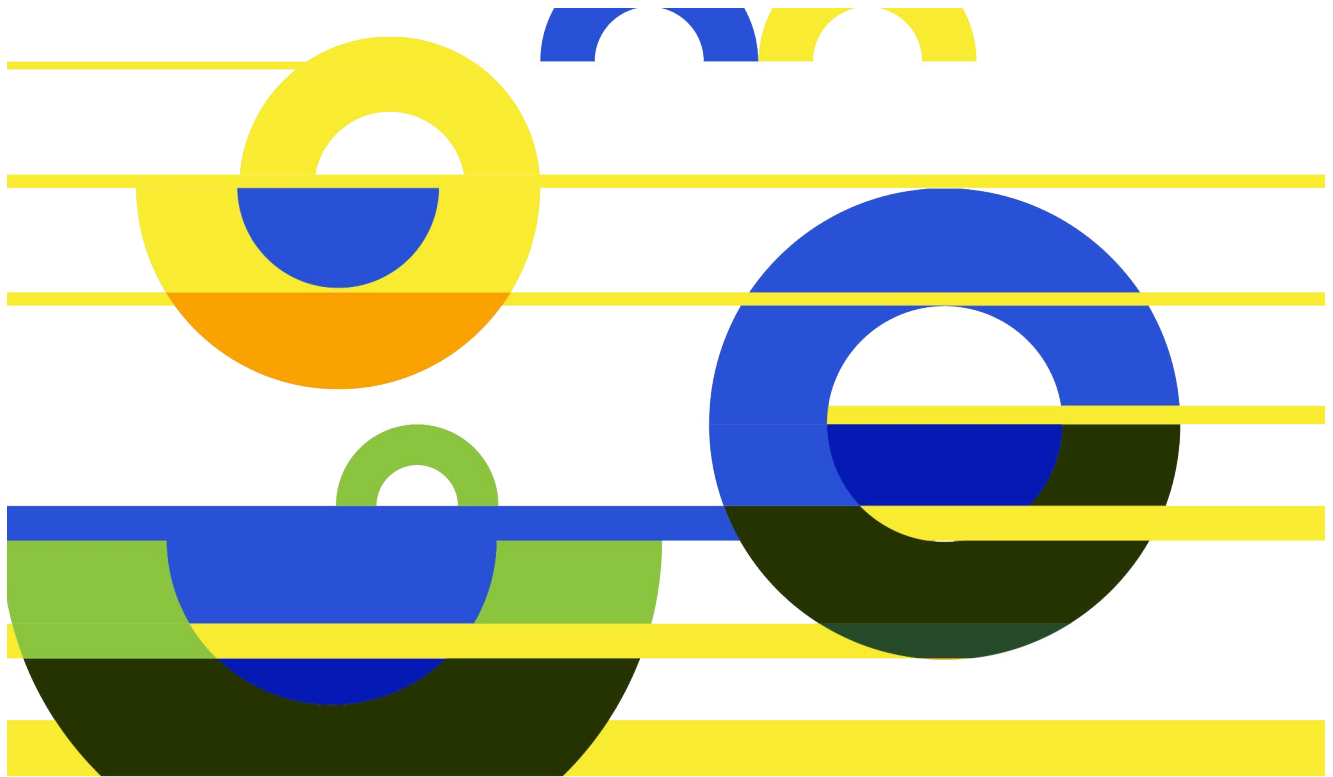
Building the Scale: Alankars

Most pieces of music you will play are based on a collection of notes from which melodies and harmonies are built. These collections are referred to as scales, and are either ordered by ascending or descending pitch. In Hindustani classical music, a *raag* is a collection of notes and melodic fragments. A *raag* is similar to a musical scale, but also includes melodic motives to further distinguish the specific mood it is meant to convey. Think about this: there are only so many ways to arrange our twelve chromatic pitches into scales; you'll run out of options eventually! However, there are countless numbers of raags because of their unique characteristics. A raag

will be associated with a specific time of day, place, mood, color, and include different melodies and rhythms. The possibilities are endless!

In order to prepare yourself to play any piece of music, including a raag, it is important to practice the scales or collections they are built from in various patterns. These exercises are called *alankars*, a word which directly translates to mean "ornaments". Alankars can be any organized chain of notes, played in both the *aaroh* and *avroh*, as well as including repeated notes.

Alankar Basics

▸ Using Play-along Audio Files 3.01 through 3.07

Did you know...

Just as many people have learned Do-Re-Mi *as syllables that match each note of a scale, Hindustani music also has specific words, or syllables, for each note/*swara*. These notes in ascending order are:*
Sa-Re-Ga-Ma-Pa-Dha-Ni-Sa*.*

Rather than notating these exercises out, the first few patterns will be indicated first by note name, to be played within the F Major scale. After this, they will be indicated by scale degree number (1-2-3 etc.). The goal with these is to understand the **pattern**, so you can easily play them within any other scale. You can also try them in different octaves!

Pitches in **bold** are up one octave; pitches in *italics* are down one octave.

Note: If using the play-along file, try these first without looking at the book!

ALANKAR 1 ▸ **3.01**

First, play the scale up and down one octave:

F-G-A-B♭-C-D-E-**F**-E-D-C-B♭-A-G-F

Next, tongue each note of the scale twice, three times, and finally four times:

FF-GG-AA etc.
FFF-GGG-AAA etc.
FFFF-GGGG-AAAA etc.

ALANKAR 2 ▸ **3.02**

F-G, G-A, A-B♭, B♭-C, C-D, D-E, E-**F**   1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4-5, 5-6, 6-7, 7-**1**
F-E, E-D, D-C, C-B♭, B♭-A, A-G, G-F   **1**-7, 7-6, 6-5, 5-4, 4-3, 3-2, 2-1

ALANKAR 3 ▸ **3.03**

F-G-A, G-A-B♭, A-B♭-C, B♭-C-D, C-D-E, D-E-**F**   1-2-3, 2-3-4, 3-4-5, 4-5-6, 5-6-7, 6-7-**1**
F-E-D, E-D-C, D-C-B♭, C-B♭-A, B♭-A-G, A-G-F   **1**-7-6, 7-6-5, 6-5-4, 5-4-3, 4-3-2, 3-2-1

From this point on, the notes will only be shown by scale degree.
Remember, if you are playing in F Major, 1=F, 2=G, 3=A, and so on.

ALANKAR 4 ▸ **3.04**

1-2-3-4, 2-3-4-5, 3-4-5-6, 4-5-6-7, 5-6-7-**1**
1-7-6-5, 7-6-5-4, 6-5-4-3, 5-4-3-2, 4-3-2-1

ALANKAR 5 ▸ **3.05**

1-2-3-4-5, 2-3-4-5-6, 3-4-5-6-7, 4-5-6-7-**1**
1-7-6-5-4, 7-6-5-4-3, 6-5-4-3-2, 5-4-3-2-1

ALANKAR 6 ▸ **3.06**

1-2-3-4-5-6, 2-3-4-5-6-7, 3-4-5-6-7-**1**
1-7-6-5-4-3, 7-6-5-4-3-2, 6-5-4-3-2-1

ALANKAR 7 ▸ **3.07**

1-2-3-4-5-6-7, 2-3-4-5-6-7-**1**
1-7-6-5-4-3-2, 7-6-5-4-3-2-1

Progressive Alankars

▸ Using Play-along Audio Files 3.08 through 3.14

Here are a few more alankars that follow different types of patterns and combinations, and become a bit more complicated as they go. Besides these, see what other alankars you can come up with.

Note: Try these exercises on all different scales! Set your drone to the first and fifth note of the scale, and follow the same pattern.

ALANKAR 8 ▸ 3.08

1-2-1-2-3, 2-3-2-3-4, 3-4-3-4-5, 4-5-4-5-6, 5-6-5-6-7, 6-7-6-7-**1**

1-7-1-7-6, 7-6-7-6-5, 6-5-6-5-4, 5-4-5-4-3, 4-3-4-3-2, 3-2-3-2-1

ALANKAR 9 ▸ 3.09

This pattern will be familiar to those who have played their scales in thirds. I did not include all of the other intervals, but try out the same ascending and descending structure in fourths, fifths, and sixths as well.

1-3, 2-4, 3-5, 4-6, 5-7, 6-**1**

1-6, 7-5, 6-4, 5-3, 4-2, 3-1

ALANKAR 10 ▸ 3.10

1-2-1, 2-3-2, 3-4-3, 4-5-4, 5-6-5, 6-7-6, 7-**1**-7, **1**-**2**-**1**

1-7-**1**, 7-6-7, 6-5-6, 5-4-5, 4-3-4, 3-2-3, 2-1-2, 1-*8*-1

ALANKAR 11 ▸ 3.11

1-3-2-1, 2-4-3-2, 3-5-4-3, 4-6-5-4, 5-7-5-4, 6-**1**-7-6, 7-**2**-1-7, **1**-**3**-**2**-**1**

1-6-7-**1**, 7-5-6-7, 6-4-5-6, 5-3-4-5, 4-2-3-4, 3-1-2-3, 2-7-1-2, 1-*6*-7-1

ALANKAR 12 ▸ 3.12

1-2-3-2-1, 2-3-4-3-2, 3-4-5-4-3, 4-5-6-5-4, 5-6-7-6-5, 6-7-**1**-7-6, 7-**1**-**2**-1-7, **1**-**2**-**3**-**2**-**1**

1-7-6-7-**1**, 7-6-5-6-7, 6-5-4-5-6, 5-4-3-4-5, 4-3-2-3-4, 3-2-1-2-3, 2-1-7-1-2, 1-7-*6*-7-1

ALANKAR 13 ▸ 3.13

1-2-3-2-3, 2-3-4-3-4, 3-4-5-4-5, 4-5-6-5-6, 5-6-7-6-7, 6-7-**1**-7-**1**

1-7-6-7-6, 7-6-5-6-5, 6-5-4-5-4, 5-4-3-4-3, 4-3-2-3-2, 3-2-1-2-1

ALANKAR 14 ▸ 3.14

1-2-1-3-2-1, 2-3-2-4-3-2, 3-4-3-5-4-3, 4-5-4-6-5-4, 5-6-5-7-6-5, 6-7-6-**1**-7-6, 7-**1**-7-**2**-1-7, **1**-**2**-**1**-**3**-**2**-**1**

1-7-1-6-7-**1**, 7-6-7-5-6-7, 6-5-6-4-5-6, 5-4-5-3-4-5, 4-3-4-2-3-4, 3-2-3-1-2-3, 2-1-2-7-1-2, 1-7-1-*6*-7-1
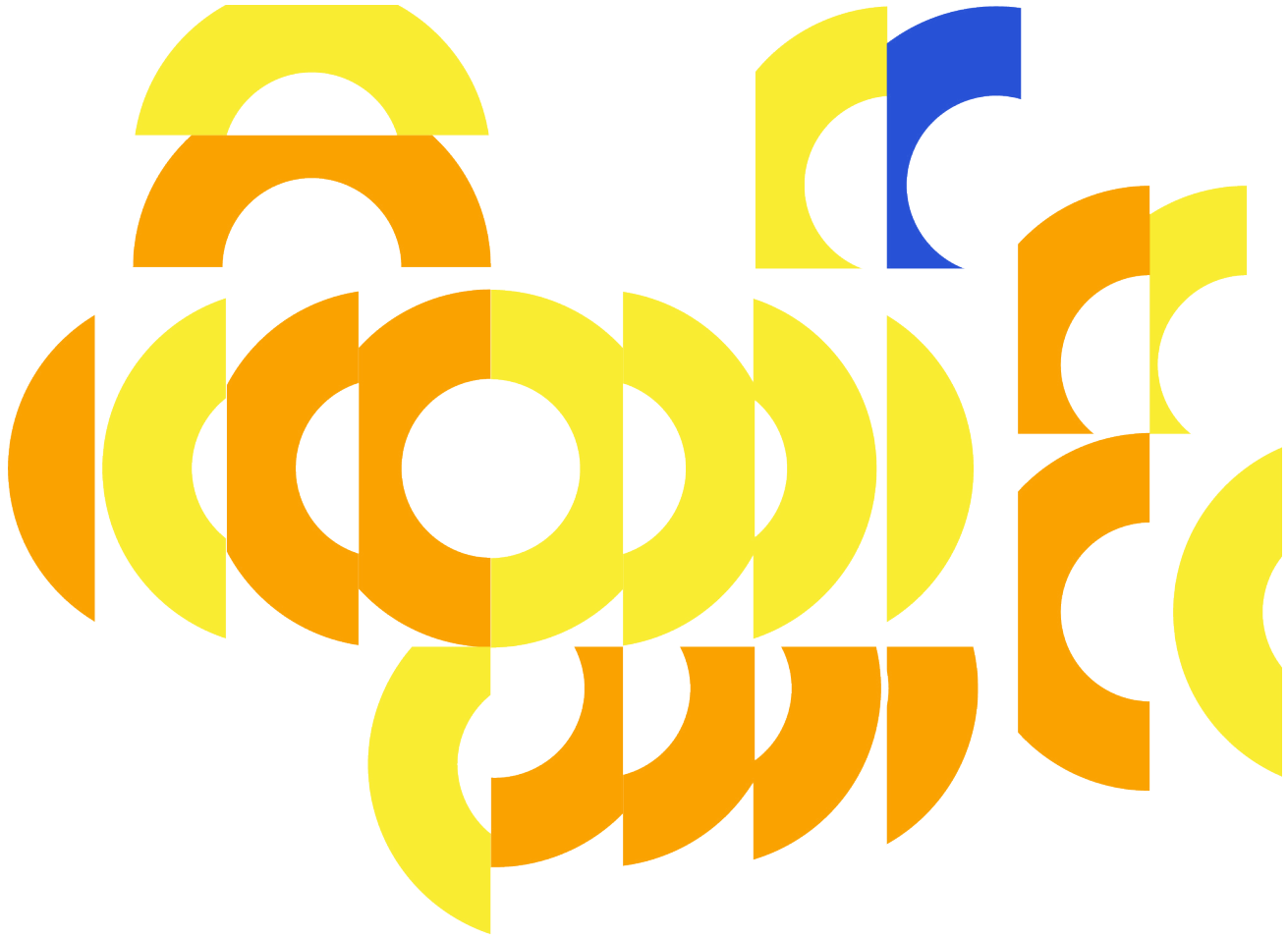
Beauty Does <u>Not</u> Equal Pain!

Playing a musical instrument should not and does not have to be painful! If you are experiencing any amount of discomfort while practicing, your body is telling you to take a break. It is important when taking a break to let your mind rest as well – mental practice is a wonderful thing, but it is still active practice, and does not count as a real break! Take the opportunity for some deep breaths, and release each part of your body. It helps me to specifically check in with my shoulders, jaw, and elbows. All of these should be released and relaxed.

If you are experiencing any pain while practicing, it is likely due to overuse or misuse of a body part further "up the chain" (such as shoulder tension causing wrist or finger pain), and I would suggest consulting your teacher or an experienced coach for help identifying the underlying issue.

4

Internal Rhythm: Taals

Taals in Hindustani music are a fundamental part of practice and performance. A *taal* refers to the meter and rhythmic pulse. A *taal* is typically established using clapping, verbalization, finger tapping, or percussive instruments. Taals, along with raags, form the foundation for the performance of Indian classical music.

Similar to the relationship between scales and *raags*, *taals* can be compared to musical meters, or time signatures, in Western music. They both divide beats into regular groupings and have some sort of regular pulse. However, taals can vary in rhythm and are sometimes much longer than a Western time signature, combining multiple metrical groupings to form a longer cycle.

Tabla

Teen Taals

- ▸ Using Play-along Audio File 4
- ▸ See Video 03 for a demonstration of *teen taal* with hand and finger tapping

Teen taal is one common taal in Hindustani music, and from first listen may sound similar to a 4/4 time signature, as it is 4 equal groups of 4 beats each. However, teen taal places different levels of emphasis or importance on each grouping, shown by the syllable used to count it out. See the example below:

Dha	- Dhin -	Dhin -	Dha	**Dha**	- Dhin -	Dhin -	Dha	Dha	- Tin -	Tin -	Ta	**Ta**	- Tin -	Tin -	Dha	**Dha**
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	1

Because a taal is cyclical in nature, it is important to always end back on the first beat.

Did you know...

The most common instrument used to add the rhythmic component of Hindustani music is the tabla. *The tabla is a percussion instrument from the Indian subcontinent which consists of two hand drums. A tabla player may change the pitch the drum produces by applying pressure with the heel of their hand.*

Try counting one cycle of *teen taal* out loud, this time adding the corresponding hand and finger tapping which is helpful in keeping track of the beat groupings and emphases.

Taals are a huge and important concept in Hindustani music, and this book does not attempt to fully teach it. However, I believe there are useful applications to music in Western styles and notations.

For example, what if we used the hierarchy of groupings in a piece of music that is written in a 4/4 time signature? Not every measure would be of equal importance, and within a measure of four beats, the first and the fourth would carry greater importance than the second and third beat. This can help with decisions you make about phrasing and the ever-elusive concept of "musicality". Many musicians have already explored this topic (such as Marcel Tabuteau's note grouping method), but music becomes much more natural when it is fluid and varied, as opposed to remaining static and unchanging.

Internalized Rhythm

Look to other art forms for inspiration on internalized rhythm. Dance is something which combines music and rhythm with body movement — that's about as internalized as you can get. Look up videos of Indian classical dance and notice how each movement is specifically tied to a moment in time. When we are playing the flute, the instrument should feel like an extension of our entire body, rather than a separate, foreign object.

Did you know...

Another type of ornamentation played on the bansuri is also very common on our Boehm flutes: vibrato! The word for vibrato in Hindi is **kampan***, and also refers to fluctuation of pitch up and down caused by oscillating the speed of the air. Vibrato on both instruments is inspired by the voice.*
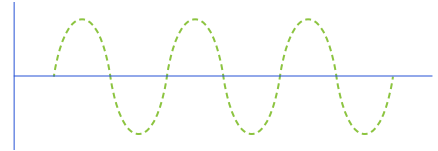
5

Ornamentation: Gamak

One of the characteristics that makes Indian classical music, and specifically Hindustani music, so unique is the concept of *gamak*. *Gamak* literally translates to "ornamentation", and is something that does not have a direct correlation in Western music. Musicians describe *gamak* as a sort of "caressing" of the note, and describes how one arrives on a certain pitch, either from above or below the pitch. Bansuri players specifically will move their fingers over and across the holes of the flute in a circular motion. Because the finger is moving in this way, gamak ends up sounding like a combination of a grace note and fast *meend*.

On our Boehm flutes, *gamak* works best between notes that involve only one finger movement, which is why the exercises work nicely in F Major (C to D being the only exception). Play the written grace note quickly and at the moment just before the written note changes. For Exercise 3, lightly tap the finger as quickly as possible (imagine touching a hot stove with your fingertip!).

The exercises shown here are only to get you started on the concept of *gamak*. Just as there are many patterns that can become an *alankar*, try to devise your own exercises to incorporate *gamak*, or go back and play the *alankars* in the previous chapter with *gamak* added!

EXERCISE 1 ▶ 5.1

EXERCISE 2 ▶ 5.2

EXERCISE 3 ▶ 5.3.1 and 5.3.2

etc., through all keys

EXERCISE 4 ▶ 5.4

PRACTICE TIP

Faster is Not Always Better

Although it is tempting to play an exercise you have worked on as fast as possible, this is not always the best way to improve. It can be fun to play fast, but devote even more time in your practice to playing things slowly. When we are able to hear each note change to the next, it is easier to identify and solve problems. When you are ready to go faster, try increasing the speed in small sections at a time. That way, when you are ready to perform something at a fast tempo, you know for a fact that every note is accounted for and sounds its best!

6

Putting it Together: Raag Yaman Bandish

A *bandish* is a composition that incorporates both *raags* and *taals*, and will follow the melodic and rhythmic rules of each.

Raag yaman is a *raag* that is easily played on the bansuri, because it follows the natural scale of the instrument. This means that the notes used do not include any half-holed fingerings. *Raag yaman* features all of the notes of a diatonic scale, with a raised fourth. For those who are familiar with Western musical modes, this is similar to the Lydian mode. On our Boehm flutes, the scale that most closely matches both of these characteristics (only using

the natural scale of the instrument, and a raised fourth), would be an F scale with all natural notes.

Remember, though, that *raags* are not just scales, but also include specific musical motives and other specific qualities. The melodic fragments that are essential to a *raag* are called *pakad*. Every performance of a *raag* is different, but the *pakad* will always be included.

Raag Yaman — Time of Day: Evening, 7 - 10 p.m.

PAKAD

in scale degrees:

| 7 - 2 - 3 | 7 - 2 - 1 | 5 - 4 - 2 - 3 | 2 | 7 - 2 - 1 |

in Hindustani swaras:

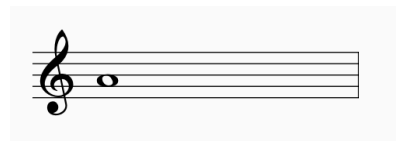| Ni - Re - Ga | Ni - Re - Sa | Pa - Ma - Re - Ga | Re | Ni - Re - Sa |

AAROH

| 7 | - | 2 | - | 3 | - | 4 | 6 | - | 7 | - | 1 |
| Ni | - | Re | - | Ga | - | Ma | Dha | - | Ni | - | **Sa** |

AVROH

| 1 | - | 7 | - | 6 | - | 5 | 4 | - | 3 | - | 2 | - | 1 |
| **Sa** | - | Ni | - | Dha | - | Pa | Ma | - | Ga | - | Re | - | Sa |

VADI *most important note*

3
Ga

SAMVADI *second most important note*
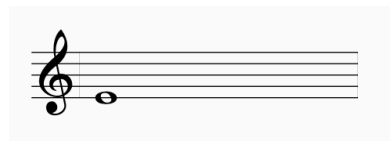
7
Ni

The *bandish* we will learn, taught to me by Pt. Sunil Kant Gupta, is in *Raag Yaman* and *teen taal.*

First listen to the *bandish* all the way through, noticing how *teen taal* rhythm lines up with the various sections (including the 8 beats before the flute enters). Do you notice measures that contain the *pakad* of *Raag Yaman*? Many phrases start or rest on the vadi and samvadi as well, in this case the notes A and E. After listening, play through the bandish on your own. Finally, listen to the example track which includes *gamak*, and try adding your own *gamak*!

Bandish in Raag Yaman
Teen Tal, 90 BPM

▶ Using Play-along Audio Files 6.1 (full demonstration with flute part),
6.2 (full demonstration with example gamak),
and 6.3 (tabla and tanpura only)

Road Map: Play repeats first time only. "D.S. al fine" applies both times. After reaching "Fine" the first time, go to the Antara. Repeat the final two measures before "Fine" at the very end. Total number of measures played: 44.

STHAYI *First Phrase*

ANTARA *Middle Phrase*

Sing It!

If you are having trouble playing something, or trying to figure out how to make it sound even better, try singing the phrase you are working on. The voice and flute are very similar in many ways; they both involve using large amounts of controlled air, and require resonance and good use of the entire body to sound the best. Being able to sing something will internalize it both physically and mentally. Also, if you're like me, singing is not quite as comfortable as flute-playing, so when I go back to my flute it's much easier to play the way I want!

7

Improvisation

So far we have played a pre-composed song using *Raag Yaman*. However, the most traditional performances of raags involve a great deal of improvisation. Hindustani musicians who are intimately familiar with all of the components that make up a certain *raag* are then able to perform pieces that follow a certain structure.

The most common structure of a *raag* performance is as follows:

Alap - jor - jhalla - gat

1. **Alap** The slow, improvised, introductory section of the raag. There is no regular pulse or percussion in this section, and it serves to introduce the main melodies (pakad) of the raag and establish the overall mood. This section is usually the longest in duration.

2. **Jor** The transitional section of the raag in which a regular pulse and percussion (such as tabla) is first introduced.

3. **Jhalla** The fastest section of the improvised raag performance, characterized by lots of energetic rhythms and heavy use of percussion.

4. **Gat** Another name for a bandish, a pre-composed (non-improvised) set of phrases that are played with rhythmic accompaniment and over a drone. A gat/bandish will often be played at the conclusion of a raag performance.

Improvisation Inspired by Raag Yaman

▶ Using Play-along Audio File 7

Using what you have learned about *Raag Yaman*, try your hand at playing a short improvisation inspired by the *alap* section of a *raag* performance. Although improvisation means you will be coming up with what to play "on the spot", try to stay within the guidelines outlined below.

Rhythm free (no *taal* or meter)
Notes to include All natural pitches (F-G-A-B-C-D-E-F)
Notes to start or rest a phrase on A (the *vadi*) and E (the *samvadi*)

First, with the recording, play through the *pakad* in order. This will establish the mood and sound of the improvisation.

After that, begin to create your own melodies over the drone. They can be as short as one note, or a bit longer once you are comfortable.

Feel free to add *gamak* as well, particularly on repeated notes.

There is no specific way to end your *alap*-inspired improvisation, but if you would like to draw inspiration from the *bandish* of the previous chapter, ending on F (*Sa*) works well.

*It's important for me to mention that this exercise is **not** a traditional raag or alap. It is something that draws concepts and information from both things in an effort to begin an understanding of this type of music. As with all of the other concepts in this book, I urge everyone to do further research and find videos of authentic Hindustani performances to hear all of these things in their original context.*
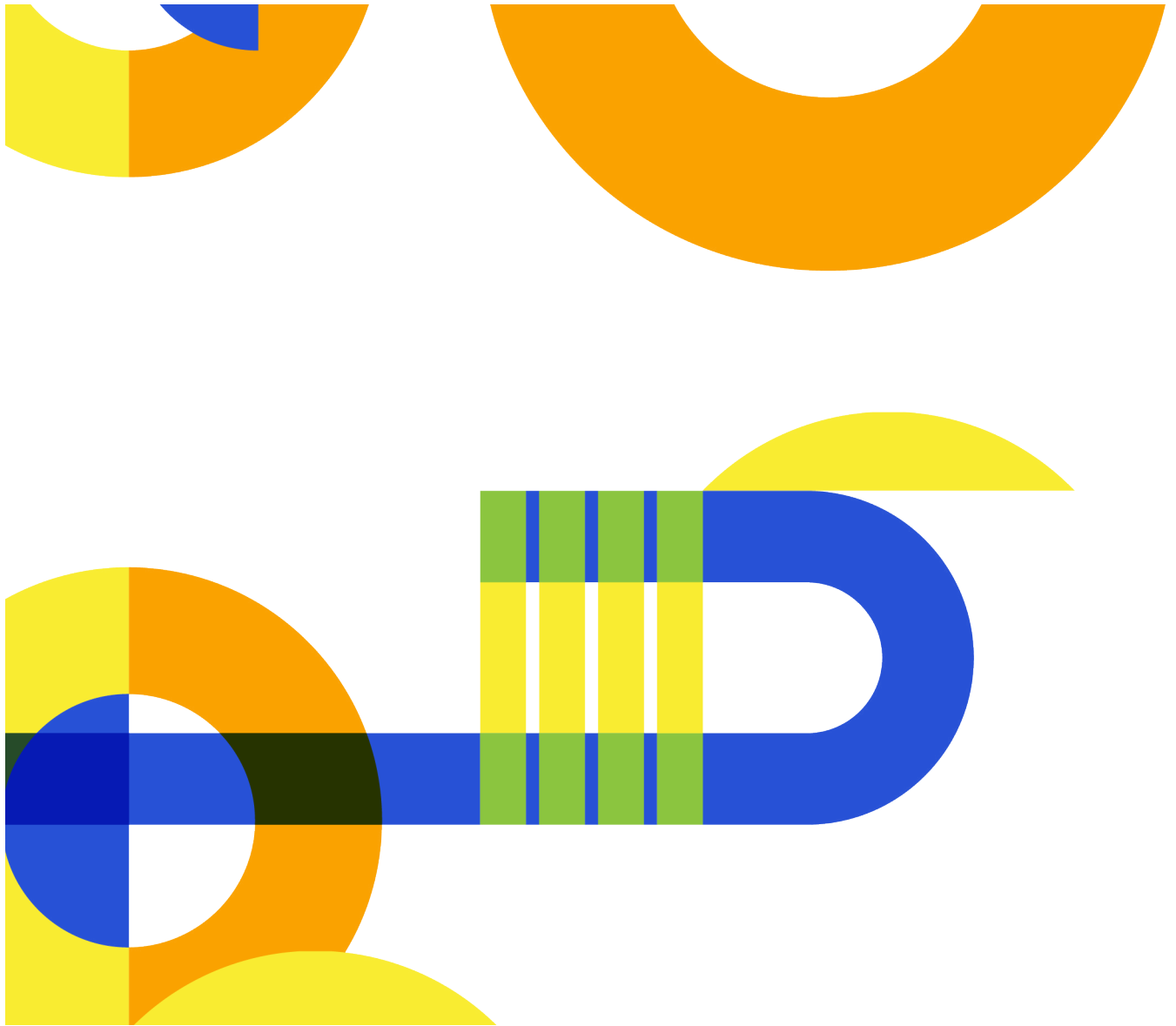
Conclusion

I hope this book has provided you some new ways to practice and learn skills on your flute, and also a better understanding of the bansuri tradition and what makes it special. Flutists are lucky people, because wherever we go in the world, we can find other flutists! If you'd like to learn more about playing the bansuri, the next step would be finding a teacher who can guide you. Additionally, the website has even more resources, including links to performances, a list of flute repertoire inspired by Hindustani music, articles, and helpful websites.

Glossary

Aaroh Notes ordered by ascending pitch within a raag or alankar. Directly translates to refer to something which is high, as a mountain.

Alankar An organized chain of notes that can be played as a patterned musical exercise. Directly translates to "ornament" or "adornment".

Alap The opening, improvised section of a raag that slowly introduces the primary pitches and melodic fragments of the raag. This section is often quite long, unmetered, and slow in tempo.

Antara The second section, or phrase of a bandish.

Avroh Notes ordered by descending pitch within a raag or alankar. Directly translates to mean "descent" or to refer to roots and creeping vines.

Bandish A precomposed melody that is set in a specific raag and performed over a drone and with a rhythmic accompaniment (taal). A bandish (also called a "gat") will often be heard as the concluding section to a full raag performance, preceded by the alap, jor, and jhalla sections.

Bansuri The wooden, keyless flute of the Hindustani classical music tradition. The instrument is typically constructed from bamboo and contains six or seven keyless finger holes.

Gamak A performance technique used in Hindustani classical music which refers to ornamentation or embellishment before a pitch or between pitches. Gamak can describe any way in which a pitch is arrived at, often sounding similar to grace notes or or a fast glissando.

Gat The other name for a bandish (See "bandish").

Gharana A specific school of musicians or artists who are connected via lineages of apprenticeship. Students of the same gharana adhere to the same musical style. The Hindi word ghar means "house".

Guru-shishya-parampara This term refers to the specific lineages of masters and apprentices. Teachings are passed down from the master teacher, or guru, to the student apprentice, or shishya. Parampara refers specifically to the lineage of teachers and students.

Jhalla The concluding section of a raag performance, characterized by rapidly accelerating rhythm, heavy percussion, and increasingly energetic melodies.

Jor The section of a raag performance at the end of the alap, before the jhalla. The jor is signified by the introduction of a meter or steady pulse, and often the addition of a percussion instrument such as the tabla.

Kampan A performance technique used on wind instruments that involves oscillating the speed of the air used, causing a fluctuation or vibration in audible pitch. This is also called vibrato.

Meend A performance technique in Hindustani classical music which involves moving continuously from one note to another note. The sound of meend is comparable to portamento or glissando.

Pakad In a raag, the short melodic fragments or groups of notes that are essential to performing the raag. Pakad serve to demonstrate the character, or essence, of the specific raag.

Raag A collection of notes and melodic fragments that conveys a certain mood or state of mind and provides a melodic framework for improvisation. A raag is similar to a musical mode or scale, but also includes more distinguishing elements and does not have a direct correlation in Western music.

Samvadi The second most important pitch in a raag. Similar to the dominant in Western music.

Shruti The smallest possible gradation of pitch which is possible to perceive, or the microtones between the selected pitches of a raag.

Sthayi The opening section, or phrase, of a bandish. It will contain a phrase that is repeated multiple times throughout the section, similar to a rondo in Western music.

Swara A musical pitch, or note.

Taal In Indian classical music, it refers to the meter and rhythmic pulse. A taal is typically established using clapping, verbalization, finger tapping, or percussive instruments such as small cymbals or a tabla. Taal, along with raags, form the foundation for the performance of Hindustani classical music.

Tabla A percussion instrument from the Indian subcontinent which consists of two hand drums. Tabla is considered the primary percussion instrument used in Hindustani music. A tabla player may change the pitch the drum produces by applying pressure with the heel of their hand.

Tanpura A stringed instrument, originating from India, that is performed by plucking strings to create a drone. The drone provides the framework for another instrumentalist or vocalist to improvise within the raag.

Vadi The most important pitch in a raag. Similar to the tonic in Western music.

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