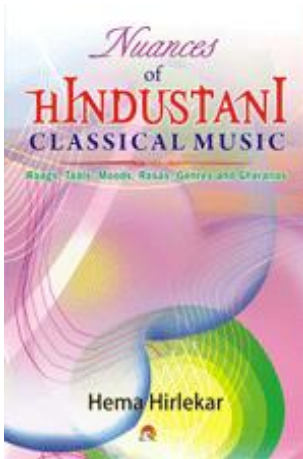




Nuances Of Hindustani Classical Music



Author: Hema Hirlekar
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Nuances of Hindustani Classical Music, is a book for people interested in Hindustani Classical music, people who like to listen to such music and would be glad for some information about it, people who are looking for an easy-read book explaining this music, people who feel that a little more knowledge about this music is required to enjoy it fully and for people who do not really want to know the theoretical or technical details but would be glad for a friendly book to understand the nuances of Hindustani Classical Music. The book shall be of immense benefit to those who want to take the first step in making Hindustani classical music an inalienable part of their lives. Nuances of Hindustani Classical Music is organised for extremely easy understanding of the terms, the music, the genres, the gharanas, and the concerts. The details are interesting, the anecdotes adding the human touch. A CD illustrating the finer points of the music accompanies the book.

INTRODUCTION

The world of Hindustani music is boundless, infinite, unsurpassed, and awe-inspiring science. According to me, to introduce this science, the biggest challenge—almost like lifting Lord Shiva's bow—is from where to begin? This is because the word 'sangeet' means, "Geetam, vadyam tatha nrutyam cha trayam sangeetmuchyateh". As per this saying, 'singing, playing instruments and dancing' are the three qualities together that form sangeet that is Godlike. While explaining such a God, innumerable ruchas in Vedas go on to describe Him, but beyond a point even the Vedas surrender saying 'Neti, Neti'. That is exactly what can happen while describing Music and its three elements.

Hema Hirlekar has taken up such a challenge for the sake of music lovers. And she has successfully tried to capture vocal and instrumental music with pertinent and appropriate words and that too in English. She has aptly named the book, Nuances of Hindustani Classical Music. The purpose of her book is to enlighten an interested reader about the nuances of this music, about how to appreciate and understand the science behind this divine music. She has provided all this information in her flowing and eloquent language for Indian readers as well as interested foreigners. In fact I will even say that this book is not just for the uninitiated music lovers but can be a great reference book even for the knowledgeable. The reason for this is that the author has distilled the essence of Hindustani music and has offered it to music lovers on a platter.

The material that she has tackled in this book is presented in a concise yet comprehensive manner. And that is absolutely right, as her aim is to introduce the subject within the boundaries of the book in a way that can enable an uninitiated person to appreciate and enjoy Hindustani music. The main subjects in the book—dhrupad-dhamar, khayal, raag development and expansion, and its nuances such as bandish, gat, upaj, rasa-aavishkar, taal, tihai – are such that may at first glance seem a little difficult, but with the help of the book a learner could soon become a connoisseur.

To be frank, is it possible to bind the sweetness of sugar, the deliciousness of honey, the ambrosia of amla in words? One has to experience the taste firsthand. Only then can one empathise with the words! That was my condition while reading this book. That is because any subject need not be understood immediately. Otherwise in this world did knowledge come first or a scholar? Did a hen come first or an egg? That is the case with this science of music. Appreciation of music and its science go hand in hand.

That's why uninitiated readers when reading the book will gradually acquaint themselves with the subject and then slowly learn to appreciate the beauty. That is the endeavour of the author at the end of her well-researched treatise. She has explained



difficult concepts in such easy and flowing language that 'Hats off!' For example this is how she explains 'Merukhand'—a complex idea—so effortlessly.

Ustad Amir Khan's gayaki was a synergetic musical language, a fusion of the Jaipur, Kirana and Bhendi Bazaar gharana styles along with the central theme of the Merukhand gayaki. This gayaki is very interesting and extremely difficult to master. 'Meru' means fixed or steady; and 'Khand' means section. In the present context, 'Meru' means fixed swars (notes) in a given raag. These notes can be arranged in many different ways using the theory of permutations and combinations. If there are only two swars, e.g., sa and re in a given raag, only two combinations sa-re and re-sa are possible. If there are three, then six different combinations are obtained. Proceeding thus, for seven notes in a raag such as Bhairavi, 5040 combinations (seven factorial) could be written down mathematically. Of course not all are sung at one time. Musicians aspiring to learn this 'Merukhand'-gayaki are trained to remember such combinations by heart and study these structures constantly.

Similarly she has kept up a light and friendly atmosphere while describing various gharanas, their histories, recalling interesting anecdotes and stories. For example while talking about the Delhi Gharana she says:

The Delhi Gharana of Hindustani music traces its origins to the time of the Delhi Sultanate. According to its current practitioners, there were two brothers during the time of Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish (1210-36)—Mir Hasan Sawant and Mir Bula Kalawant—one of whom was deaf and the other was dumb as well as deaf. The legend goes that they were called to court by the Sultan to sing in front of him! Hazrat Moinuddin Chishti Ajmeri found out about the plight of the two brothers and prayed for them and they were cured and got the gift of music from the Almighty and began singing beautifully. Hasan Sawant had a Sufi inclination and thus began singing qawwali and his tradition came to be known as the Qawwal Bachhe Gharana. Bula Kalawant became a court singer and his tradition came to be known as the Delhi Gharana. It is thus to be kept in mind that there exist inextricable links between the Qawwal Bachhe Gharana and what later came to be called the Delhi Gharana both in terms of familial/ disciple relations and stylistic affiliations and repertoire to this day.

Due to these well told stories this book does not become a studious guide but becomes a friend in the quest to understand music. Even when talking of light music the author says, "Ghazal has two angles. The poetry and the music." And goes on to explain ghazal unlike anyone else.

I think the last chapter, How to enjoy Hindustani Classical Music? should be read first. This will enable the reader/ connoisseur to understand and know the way to go about learning to appreciate such music.

The CD that is provided along with the book explains the nuances to the music lover—not just to the unversed but equally to the knowledgeable!

Well done.

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How to Enjoy Classical Music?

Listening to Recorded Music

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