

# World Music

Music of India: classical and popular styles



# Rag

- # A *rag* is the basic melody which forms the basis for melodic improvisation.
- # It is similar to a Western scale in that it ascends (goes up) and descends (goes down).
- # However, unlike a Western scale each rag is individual, so that the pitches of the notes may vary not only between different rags, but also in the ascending and descending forms.



# Rag

- # There are also varying numbers of notes in different rags.
- # This is because, unlike a Western scale, each rag has a unique mood, which is associated with a different occasion, season, purpose and emotion.
- # There are over 200 different rags.
- # In a performance the rag is used as the basis for improvisation.



# Tala

- # The tala is a rhythm pattern that forms the basis for a set of repeating rhythmic cycles.
- # The tala is usually played by the tabla drums.
- # There are different talas, but the most common tala used in the music of northern India is the *tintal* (or *teental*).
- # Tintal is a symmetrical rhythmic pattern made up of four individual, main beats, repeated four times (4+4+4+4).



# Tala

- # Each individual beat is called a **matras**, and the first beat of the cycle is called a **sam**.
- # During a tala cycle, rhythms are improvised by both the tabla player and the instrumentalist or singer, but must start and end on the first beat of the cycle (the sam).
- # These improvised rhythms, or **bols**, contrast with the main beat of the cycle, often using accents or syncopation, and are similar to the improvisations in jazz or rock music, where each performer tries to outdo the previous improvisation while still keeping within the cycle of beats.



# Activity

- # Working in a group of three or four, try improvising over this *tintal* tala.
- # Choose different percussion instruments. One player plays the matras (individual beats) at the beginning and then repeats them for each cycle (shown in the grid below).
- # The other players improvise using accents and syncopation (bols), each in turn – but always starting and finishing on the first beat of the cycle (sam).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
sam	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X



# Raga

- # A raga performance contains all three of the elements used in Indian classical music: melody (based on a rag), the drone, and the tala rhythm played by the tabla drums.
- # There is usually a defined structure for a raga performance, with different sections.
- # The first section, called **alap**, starts with a slow exploration of the notes of the rag.
- # It is in *free time*, often to the accompaniment of a drone.
- # The final section, called **gat**, contains the rhythmic tala cycle introduced on the tabla, solos, and improvisation.
- # There are often other sections in between the alap and gat, and since ragas are improvised, they can last for several hours.



# Bhangra

- # Bhangra originated in the Punjab district of India and Pakistan, and is traditionally a kind of folk song/dance performed during harvest.
- # It is now associated with a fusion between Western popular music styles and features of Indian classical music.
- # Bhangra is characterised by the use of Indian instruments such as the *dhol* (a type of drum), repetitive rhythms, and the Punjabi language (with typical shouts of 'hoi'), mixed with Western instruments such as the synthesiser.





# Listening Activity

- # Listen to an excerpt from a performance of Raga Bhim Palasi, played on the bansuri.
- # At first you hear the alap section. Notice the improvisatory feel as the bansuri explores the various notes of the rag to the accompaniment of a drone, and the lack of pulse, creating a sense of free rhythm.
- # At the end of the alap, the table drums enter playing the tala rhythm, using Rupak tal (a 7-beat cycle).



# Listening Quiz

- # Listen to an excerpt from 'Bhangra Fever' by MIDIval Punditz.
1. Name two features of the music which are influenced by traditional Indian music.
  2. List two features which show the use of music technology in this excerpt.
  3. What is the time signature of this excerpt?
  4. Which term best describes the melody?  
whole tone                  triadic                  ostinato sequence
  5. On which beats of the bar do you hear the shouts 'hoi' or 'hi'?



# Key terms

- # **Cycle** – (here) a rhythm, melody or harmony that is continuously repeated. Its repeats may be varied in some way.
- # **Matras** – the individual beats in the rhythmic cycle
- # **Sam** – the first beat of the rhythmic cycle.
- # **Bols** – improvised rhythms which contrast with the main beat.
- # **Alap** – the opening section of a raga. Improvised and in free-rhythm.
- # **Gat** – the final section of a raga. Contains a ‘tune’ with improvisation and tala.

