

Introduction to Modal Singing

Raag Yaman

- Ascent (Aroha): Ni Re Ga Ma# Dha Ni Sa
Descent (Avaroha): Sa Ni Dha Pa Ma# Ga Re Sa
- Sonant-Consonant Pair (Vadi-Samvadi) Ga and Ni (these are common cadential pitches along with Sa and Pa)
- Time: Early Night (9 PM – 12 AM)
Affective description: “Lord in white garments and pearl necklace on a splendid lion-throne, under a royal umbrella, fanned with a whisk, chewing betel.” – Meshakarna (1570)

Indian terms

Raga – musical mode; a tonal framework for composition and improvisation

Chalan – melodic outline of a Raga; literally ‘movement’

Pakad – key phrases or motifs that define a Raga

Vadi – dominant note; literally ‘sonant’

Meend or Mind – gradual slide (portamento) from one note to another

Turkish/Ottoman terms

Makam – musical mode; a tonal framework for composition and improvisation

Seyir – melodic progression; literally ‘guidance’

Çeşnis – the affective quality of a pitch; literally ‘flavors’

Why map our music on the 5-limit Lattice?

The Lattice is an analytic tool that visually displays the genetic makeup of each tone, i.e. the pathways by which a particular tone comes into being. Our work is to marry this analytic makeup (described in the language of harmonics, ratios, and intervals) with the particular quality of the tone (experienced in our individual singing and playing).

“Try to appreciate your melody not so much as an up-and-down ride, or even a series of intervals, but rather as a succession of related harmonic states, a succession of moods. The secret of melody is that it is a thread of feeling-states such as these.” (W. A. Mathieu)

A sampling of questions to ask in analysis:

What mode does the melody employ? How many notes make up the mode? What notes of the mode are cadenced on? Does it group the mode into smaller parts, i.e. if it is a 7 note scale, are there sections of mostly pentatonic playing/singing, or notes that are saved for cadences, etc.? Does the mode modulate to other modes, i.e. is there more than one distinct mode? Is the mode heavily overtone (as in Yaman), or heavily reciprocal (as in natural minor)? What kind of affect does the mode have? Is the musical affect reflected in the lyrics or vice versa?

Homework suggestions: Sing Yaman, Personal composition and analysis with a lattice, Notate and analyze with a lattice a melody of your choosing