

THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN KARNATIK MUSIC CONCERT PLATFORMS

Surabhi .P¹ & Dr. M. Manjunath²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Studies in Music, University College of Fine Arts, University of Mysore, Mysuru

²Research Guide and Associate Professor, Department of Studies in Music, University College of Fine Arts, University of Mysore, Mysuru

Received: 25 Nov 2021

Accepted: 29 Nov 2021

Published: 30 Nov 2021

ABSTRACT

Accompaniment can be defined as a melodic or rhythmic support to a lead musician which enhances the concert experience to the listener. The accompanists' role in concerts is more challenging than the main artist. A good accompaniment can enhance the whole concert experience to the music connoisseurs. Training for concerts in order to accompany can only be achieved through years of intense sadhana and by stage experience. Many a time learning happens on the stage. Concert pattern in Karnatic music is very unique and has a high standard in its own unique way. An accompanist must support the main artist by not overdoing anything other than following what the main artist does but also accompany in such a way that the narrative sessions during concert in the manodharma parts like the neraval, swara kalpana or even during korappu enhances the main artist's ability to beautify his part of performance if the accompaniment is equally good.

KEYWORDS: Art of Accompaniment, Karnatik Music Bani, Guru Shishya Parampara, Concert Paradigm, Sampradaya Sangeetha

INTRODUCTION

In Karnatik Music tradition, a rich history of resources is available in both Lakshya(Practice) and Lakshana (Theory). There are many important factors that a musician must abide by while performing Karnatik music. The two main elements are raga and taala and of course shruthi and laya act as the supporting factors. The main intention of Karnatic music tradition is to showcase pure authenticity of a raga by rendering an alapana/ kriti / swara kalpana. When one fails to comprehend this, the tradition is lost. The definition of classical music as mentioned in the oxford English dictionary is 'something that has achieved the highest standard in an established system.' Hence those skills can only be obtained under the guidance of a good guru and therefore each Guruparampara has its own tradition (Sampradaya).

A Karnatik music concert is very unique when compared to other musical forms prevailing across the globe. There are two important factors that make Karnatik music different from other forms of music. They are:

- Concept of gamakas.
- Impromptu Improvisations while performing the manodharma aspects.

In a Karnatik music concert, there is a main artist (vocalist/ instrumentalist) as well as accompanying artist/artists. An accompaniment as described by the Webster's dictionary, is 'An Instrument or Vocal Part designed to support or Complement a Melody.'

Accompaniment can also be defined as a melodic or rhythmic support to a lead musician which enhances the concert experience to the listener. A wholesome concert experience can only be gained when there is an accompanist to a lead musician.

An accompanist can either enhance a concert experience by providing excellent support or could even lower the quality if not performed well. Hence a good accompanist acts as an enhancer who ultimately excites the main artist to perform well in a concert by exchanging ideas of improvisations through mutual music communication.

ACCOMPANIMENT IN KARNATIK MUSIC

The importance of accompaniment in Karnatik music has paved the way for the inclusion of many instruments after many experiments by music stalwarts and a set of fixed combination of instruments pleasing to the listeners has been established. This has scope for further changes and improvements. It is impossible to visualize any musical concert without an accompaniment. 20th and 21st centuries have given us evidences of different combinations of accompaniments in concerts which have been documented in many online platforms. A karnatik music accompanist must never be a mere emulator but an improviser. Understanding the style, tempo, musical idea of the main artist is a main factor of an accompanist.

One of the most challenging tasks of an accompanist is being an accompanist to different pathantarams. Each and every musician follows his/her Guru's footsteps and from different music traditions also termed as Sampradaya. Sampradaya can be explained as a particular style of music tradition where the disciples follow the structure and pattern of singing the compositions in a similar manner. This also holds good for the manodharma part where the raagaalapana , neraval and swara kalpana styles match with that of their gurus. The style of singing the compositional form may not vary but the manodharma can be delineated based on their creativity and this is what makes the musician unique as compared to others.

Concert pattern in Karnatic music is very unique and standard in its own way. The orthodox way of presenting it is to normally start from a varna then a short kriti and other compositions as structured by the well known Vidwan, Shri Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. However this pattern of singing concerts is not being followed strictly in recent years. The duration of a concert, tastes and preferences of the organizers and rasikas are taken into consideration and modifications are being made. Adapting to these challenges lies in preparing the list for such concerts. There are different concert themes which are becoming popular these days. The duration may be from a standard 2 and a half hour concert to half an hour concert. Whatever the case might be, the essence of classicism must not be compromised.

CONCERT PARADIGM

A Karnatik music concert usually comprises of a lead vocalist/ instrumentalist and accompanists. In recent years violin is usually preferred for a melodic accompaniment and mrudanga is preferred as the main percussive accompaniment. Even though two main accompaniments are structured for a concert, there are other instruments which can be used as upa Pakka Vaadyas. As the name itself suggests that it is considered as an extra accompaniment and not the main accompaniment. Upa pakkavadyas for vocalist can be used as the main accompanying instruments for lead instrumentalists. In a veena or violin concert there are usually two main rhythmic accompaniments. This would be mrudanga and ghata / mrudanga and khanjira like wise.

During laya vadya ensembles, the lead instruments are the rhythmic instruments and the melodic instruments are sometimes used as accompaniments like the concept of Lehra in Hindustani music where the harmonium player would play a fixed tune for multiple times and the variations in table are shown. Here the table is the lead instrument and the harmonium is the accompaniment.

An accompanist must be as good as the lead musician or even better. An accompanist's role in concerts is more challenging than the main artist. A good accompaniment can enhance the whole concert experience to the rasikas. Training for concerts in order to accompany can only be achieved through years of intense sadhana and by stage experience. Many a time learning happens on the stage. Adaptability and mastery over the instrument are the keys to becoming a successful performer.

TYPES OF ACCOMPANIMENT

4 important types of karnatik music accompaniment are:

Drone, Melodic and Percussive - Instrumental music

Vocal Assistance – Vocal music

Drone Accompaniment

This accompaniment maintains the aadhara shruthi of the artist and can probably be termed as Fillers. They give a continuous flow of orderly placed swaras which is usually the first and fifth notes sa and pa of the sapta swara or the 1st and 4th note i.e, sa and ma in case of the compositions sung in madhyama or for the ragas which don't have panchama in them. Rarely the 1st and the 7th swaras i.e sa and ni are played in a rhythmic pattern providing harmonic support and thus filling the gap of silence in between 2 songs or even in between different parts of a song like the pallavi and anupallavi etc.,

There are a few varieties of drone accompaniments. Shruthi accompaniments can be divided in different categories. They are stringed drones, wind drones, percussion drones and manually plucked and electronically played drones, single note and plural note drones, monophonous and polyphonous drones etc.,

In Indian folk music, single note drones are found like the ekatara where the shadja swara is played indefinitely to maintain a pitch by the performer. The modality of any musical composition can be defined by a single note like sa. Shruthi accompaniment is the most important accompaniment for a karnatik music performance where it enables the artist to maintain a constant shruthi throughout the performance and also provides a great ambience to the listener.

Tuntina. Tanpura, ottu, electronic tanpura, tanpura mobile application are some of the examples for drone accompaniments.

Melodic Accompaniment

As the name itself suggests the accompaniments that provide melodic support to the lead musician are known as melodic accompaniments. During recent years, violin has been considered as the best suited melodic accompaniment for karnatik vocal music.

Before the introduction of violin Flute and Veena were used as melodic accompaniments. Even today they are being widely used as melodic accompaniments for the music accompaniment provided for dance performances. In this case vocal is an accompaniment, as dance is considered as the lead art.

In case of a lead instrumental music, melodic accompaniments are chosen according to the tonal quality and the volume of the main instrument. In some cases only percussive accompaniments are opted. Melodic accompanist must provide a good support to the lead artist. Their individual skills are often exhibited during manodharma/ improvisation parts. This showcases the talent and in depth knowledge of the accompanist. However, their performance should not exceed in time and content than that of the performance presented by the main artist. Their part of presentation is far more challenging than that of the main artist. Some or most of the accompanists are not informed in advance about the list of songs that will be performed in a concert. It is an onstage test and a learning experience for the accompanist to improvise and showcase their talents.

Percussive Accompaniment

Any vocal or instrumental performance is incomplete without a rhythmic support. No doubt there are many concerts that are being performed without any accompaniment these days but the beauty adds up when there is a rhythmic support. The nuances of rhythm when well supported by the percussionist add to wholesome experience which becomes enjoyable both to the performer and to the listener. A percussionist needs a deeper understanding of the melodic music along with the taala and its calculations. The innumerable varieties in different karnatik music compositions have varied taala patterns. Knowing popular compositions can help the percussionist perform aptly to the composition by giving suitable kaarvai and endings.

For instance when a percussionist performs for 'endaromahanubhavulu' each charana has a ta di gi na tom pattern.

Ga Ri , Ri Sa Ni is the ending swara part of the first charana ' samaganalola' and when the percussionist knows this well, the performance can be more enjoyable. Mrudanga is being used as a lead percussion accompaniment. It has been widely used in karnatik music concerts as a lead accompaniment for both vocal and instrument music. This instrument when well tuned and performed enables the artist to provide even show a few swaras like sa and pa with gentle strokes. This needs a lot of skill and practice.

Upa Pakka Vadya (Additional Accompaniment)

A concept known as the upa pakkavadya applying to percussion accompaniment is evident in Karnatic music concerts. This means an accompaniment to the main accompaniment. When there is a lead musician and a main rhythmic accompanist and one more rhythmic accompanist accompanying the main rhythmic accompanist, he becomes an upa pakka vadya player and can also be called as the additional accompanist. In the recent day concerts the main rhythmic accompaniment is usually a mrudanga and the additional accompaniments or the upa pakka vadyas are ghata, khanjira, morching etc.

While observing these instruments it is evident that the acoustic volume of the upa pakka vadya is slightly lower when compared to mrudanga (usually considered as the main accompaniment). It is also important to understand that the upa pakka vadya player accompanies the lead musician as well as the melodic accompanist and the main percussion accompanist. The role of a upa pakka vadya player is truly challenging and is always anticipating in a concert.

Vocal Assistance

Even though this is not technically an instrumental accompaniment, the concept of accompaniment lies in vocal music as well. When we observe the concerts in karnatik music when there is a senior artist performing as a lead vocalist sometimes there will be a person seated slightly behind him accompanying him in vocal. This is usually a disciple of the main artist. The vocal accompanist usually renders the compositions along with the main artist in a slightly lower volume than the main artist. Whenever the lead musician sings a sangati twice and has not completed the second time, the vocal accompanist completes it by filling the gap. The main artist usually sings the manodharma parts alone or they are sometimes rendered by the vocal accompanist.

QUALITIES OF AN IDEAL ACCOMPANIST

Gaining Mastery over the Instrument

Intense practice (sadhana) can take a musician to great heights. Experience in handling one's own instrument needs rigorous training. Over the years music has evolved and ways of practice techniques have been modified and there are resources available to correct, replicate and modify one's own playing technique. Understanding the method of producing fine tunes in an instrument is possible by applying right fingering techniques in case of percussion instrument and can even start with a right posture in case of all the instruments.

Knowledge of Vocal and Instrumental Music (for a lead vocalist)

When the lead vocalist has the knowledge of both vocal and instrumental, the quality of his performance will enhance. Having basic knowledge in mrudanga can help the lead musician enjoy the laya aspects of the instrument. For instance, korappu will have an exchange of ideas between the lead vocalist and the accompanist. This experience will have a different level of communication between the artists when the vocalist has knowledge in mrudanga and vice versa.

Being a Good Listener

Listening to the main artist's style of singing or playing an instrument is the first and foremost requirement that an accompanist must have. When we observe the upa pakkavadyas in concerts, the ghatam/ khandjia/ murching performers usually don't accompany the 1st half of the 1st composition that is presented on stage. That is because they tend to observe the main artist as well as the fellow accompanists to soak in the pattern and style of rendition of all the artists in his mind.

Mutual Understanding

Mutual understanding and mutual communication through music is definitely an important aspect in a concert. Knowing what to perform or when to accompany is a crucial factor. For instance an upa pakka vadya player starts performing after the 1st rendition or midway through the composition. This is because he first observes the playing technique of the lead percussionist. Likewise, the mrudangist or the lead percussionist must be gentle while performing to a veena or even during vocal concerts where it must not over power the concert.

Anticipation

Being on the toes during the concert is truly essential for an accompanist. In karnatik music concerts knowing the compositions that is presented in a concert before hand is not possible. The main artists might sometime inform the accompanist well in advance about their concert list or the concert might be full of surprises on stage by choosing to sing/

play the composition on stage. Even if the list is known, manodharma is something very unique in karnatik music concerts. The rare sancharas in raga alapana or the sarva laghu / trishra or gati bheda swaras in swara kalpana or the raga tana pallavi which needs to be played with full anticipation are the features that an accompanist needs to be thorough during his performance.

Supporter and Motivator

Supporting the main artist by not overdoing anything other than following what the main artist does but also accompany in such a way that the narrative sessions during concert in the manodharma parts like the neraval, swara kalpana or even during korappu enhances the main artist's ability to beautify his part of performance if the accompaniment is equally good. The percussive accompanist must be adept in showcasing jatis similar to the swara patterns sung by the lead musician.

Stage Presence

Being attentive and mindfully present are as important as being physically present on stage. New innovations sometimes happen instantly on stage. There are a few instances where many vidwans have even composed pallavis on stage and have presented them. Accompanying such pieces needs skill and stage presence of mind. The difficulty of a pallavi lies in its formations of taala, raga and arudhi kaaravai etc. Usually the main artist renders the pallavi once and it is first observed by the accompanist. When it is rendered for the second and the third times the accompanist must be able to grasp the same and reproduce it accurately. If the accompanist has prepared himself by doing years of sadhana, listening sessions of good concerts and has the experience of accompanying to such pieces, only then he will be able to reproduce such pallavis instantly on stage. Stage presence is not just restricted to a single composition. The accompanist must be mindfully awake thought the concert.

CONCLUSION

Thus the whole ambience of a karnatik music concert is filled with a blend of different paathantarams, yet well coordinated and competent to each artist in their field of expertise. Unlike pre written music score which is seen in western music, Karnatik music is very dynamic and spontaneous but subtle with many beautifying contents and acts as a gift to the field of music. This genre of music enables one to express one's musical ideas creatively. Varied types of musical compositions enable the musician to gain great knowledge and mastery in shruti, laya and manodharma. Accompanist is as important as the main artist if not more as he is the one who can lift up or bring down a concert performance. Giving enough credit to the accompanist is extremely important and essential. A great performer is the one who enjoys his music and appreciates the music of the accompanist. These good vibes make the concert a wholesome package to the listener.

REFERENCES

BOOKS REFERRED

1. Sambamoorthy P (1957)- *Sruti Vadyas*, published by All India Handicrafts Board.
2. Sambamoorthy P (1967)- *The Flute, The Indian Music Publishing House G. T. Madras*,

THESIS REFERRED

3. Gopalakrishnan T.V and Uma Maheshwari P, (2017) - "Layathwam in Karnatik Music", submitted to Bharatidasan Universit, <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/206271>.

WEBSITES BROWSED

4. Pappu Venugopala Rao (2016), article titled "Spotlight on upa pakka vadyam" Published in The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/music/Spotlight-on-Upa-Pakka-Vadyams/article16121926.ece>
5. S. Grimmer (2011), Article Titled "Continuity and change: The guru-shishya relationship in karnatic classical music training" published in Research Gate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292876204_Continuity_and_change_The_guru-shishya_relationship_in_karnatic_classical_music_training
6. Discussions in rasikas.org – A Carnatic Music Community, (2008) – "Banis and Patantaram" <https://www.rasikas.org/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7504>
7. SRGMPDN, A Forum for Carnatic Music, Washington DC, An Article in Forum Presentation - "Carnatic music concert overview" http://srgmpdn.weebly.com/uploads/8/7/5/6/8756748/carnatic_music_concert_overview.pdf

