

Classical,Carnatic and Light Music

Classical Music

According to the Western system of classification, the word "classical" denotes in music a period (era) of composers who wrote in a particular style. T.S. Rajagopalan, a renowned south Indian classical musician, described classical music as one that has an established, refined chaste and excellent form of music with well laid down grammar, principle, and tradition.

In India, classical music is a synthesis of art, literature, science, mythology, religion, and philosophy. The present day Indian classical music has two schools - the Carnatic (South) and the Hindustani (North). This bifurcation of the unified system of Indian classical music that occurred nearly six hundred years ago, culminated in the emergence of the "*Daakshinaadya*" (Southern) system, subsequently renamed as "*Carnatic music*".

Carnatic Music

The word used to denote musical sound is '*naadam*'. It is said that '*naadam*', is the basis of '*shruthi*' (pitch) and '*shruthi*' gives rise to '*svaram*' (notes) and '*svaram*' in turn give rise to '*raagam*'. *Raagams* are systematic arrangements of notes and form the basis of all Indian melodies including those in Carnatic music. The notes are arranged - in ascending (*aarooohanam*) or descending (*avarooohanam*) order with in the octave in a raagam. *Raagam* may be roughly equated with the Western term 'mode or scale'. The Carnatic tradition is based on fully composed musical pieces called '*kritis*' (compositions) which like the sonata or the fugue, have certain well-established structures that fully elaborate the *raagam* set to a '*taalam*' (rhythm /beat) in all its emotional and textual ramifications. The '*taalam*' (rhythmic forms) are also very complex. Many common rhythmic patterns exist. They revolve around repeating patterns of beats. Carnatic singing has well defined rules and grammar that needs to be learnt systematically under the guidance of an able *guru*/teacher (i.e., training is essential).

Another characteristic aspect of Carnatic singing is the ability of the trained singer to produce vocal embellishments or ornaments. The term used to express ornamentation in Carnatic singing is '*gamakam*'. *Gamakams* are subtle (and not-so-subtle) decorations of notes, usually referred to as "shaking the note" in general musical terms. They come in various forms and are incorporated into '*raagams*' (musical scales), giving each note a unique characteristic and delicate beauty when performed. There are many different types of *gamakams*. Moving from one note to the next (usually with an

oscillation in pitch) is a *gamakam*. Moving down from a higher note to the next lower note in a scale is also considered as a form of *gamakam*. These can be done rapidly and in succession, giving long runs of great beauty when executed with skills acquired through training and creative improvisation of the singer based on his/her training.

Light Music

'Light Music' is predominantly from the Indian film industry and popularly called the '*filmi sangiit*'. It is a commercial genre comparable to the Western 'Top 40'. Infact, the term 'film song' is today a misnomer because there are many songs of this genre that have never been in any film. So a more general term for this sort of music is 'light music'. The birth of the Indian film song may be traced to the advent of India's first sound motion picture in 1931. At the same time, it laid the seeds for this new musical genre 'light music'. In the early years, many of the actors and actresses sang the songs that appeared in the film in their own voice. Most of them had a classical base and actors often were chosen specifically for their singing abilities. Later, in the 1950's, the introduction of 'playback' singing in the Indian film industry gave birth to another group of singers called the 'light music singers'.

The Indian light music has classical and traditional elements, along with Western jazz, rap, disco, or other styles that may be in vogue. It sometimes has a mix of all the various elements. Light music singers require specialized qualities different from classical Carnatic singing, this difference often necessitating singers to choose one or the other 'career choice' in singing (most often, both singing styles can not be performed by a single person). This choice appears to be related to physical / physiological and political reasons. Light music singing requires singing in various pitches (usually in high falsetto) unlike traditional Carnatic singing which uses lower pitches for singing (Boominathan, Krishnan, Neelakantan & Nagarajan 2004). The voice of the light music singer is considered to be "thin", while a "heavy" voice was more suited for Carnatic singing (Durga, personal communication). Light music could be sung by anyone with relatively little or no training if his or her voice suited the use of a microphone (public address system) and had the appeal that was required for film music