STIMMUNG
This word is one of the masterly accomplishments of the German lexicon, pregnant with emotions and mathematics as well! Etymology links it to the Greek for 'mouth' and its connection to 'Stimme' (voice) is quite obvious. The emotional impact of the voice, its cause and effect, are embodied in this word which is so suggestive that it has entered the vocabulary of various other languages. Some scholars have chosen it to translate the Sanskrit term rasa (lit.: sap, taste, essence), an important concept in Indian philosophy as well as musicology.

Rasa can be described as 'sentiment, aesthetic experience/enjoyment'. It refers to the effect of music on the listener and is viewed as the ultimate and highest aim of art. The 'Theory of Rasa' originated in the realm of drama. Numerous thinkers and scholars have elaborated upon it. Traditionally, eight or nine categories of rasa are commonly accepted: erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, heroic, terrifying, odious, marvelous. Some authors include peace as well. Due to the illusive nature of sound these categories cannot be applied to music systematically and their theory is elaborate and controversial. However, musicians are aware of the relevance of rasa in the context of performance and have engaged with it constantly.

RAGAS
To go deeper into this subject, we must consider another fundamental concept in Indian art music: raga, 'that which colours the mind'. The term refers to the melodic modules, frameworks on which the Indian musical system is based, and emphasizes once again the emotional impact of sound while shifting the attention from mouth (as in 'Stimmung' and rasa) to eyes. The Sanskrit root 'ranj' means 'to colour, tinge'. In modern language we find the word raga translated also as 'attraction, passion, emotion, love'. Ragas generate rasas. In other words, the colouring of the mind through melody stimulates the tasting of the emotions. Many translations of the German word 'Stimmung', making the span from tuning and temperament to mood and sentiment, are tightly interwoven in the practice and theory of Indian music.

Let me now elaborate on the concept of raga, as we currently understand it and experience it. Ragas are often described as musical personalities or beings that may be evoked through a disciplined process of creativity. It takes a long time to master them since they have to be rendered by effectively unfolding their full potential. Their distinctive musical character (raga-bhava) has to be recognisable and move the heart of the listener through an appropriate choice of sonic, melodic, rhythmic, semantic components, techniques and stylistic elements. Ragas are not defined by immutable laws, but are rather conceived as fluid, organic entities. They are manifested within a process in time and cannot adhere to pre-ordained musical outcomes as in the case of notated music. Ragas keep changing shape; new ones are born while others are forgotten. They are granted full status only if repeatedly played and heard. Their main features have to be established and tested by experienced performers whose knowledge and interpretation contributes to the definition of the raga-bhava itself. In this context, Indian musicians often speak of a 'raga grammar', sets of rules and patterns
that determine the selection of intervals and characteristic melodic movements. This practical knowledge is aurally transmitted and guides the melodic development of every performance; it is an essential framework for the manifestation of each raga's personality.

A raga is performed in one of the music genres that are in vogue today (dhupad, khyal, thumri, tarana, instrumental gat etc.), and possibly according to the style of a specific school or master. A performance includes brief loosely composed sections followed by lengthy improvised/flexibly-memorised variations. Thus, musicians are free to interpret a raga in their own personal way provided an effective and accurate portrayal of the raga-bhava is achieved. In some way, they have to reach a state of surrender, allowing the raga to manifest itself through the music (Van der Meer, 2007).

Even though the process of generating a musical Stimmung has improvisation as a major element we could more accurately say that Indian musicians learn to compose in real time, rather then improvise. They have to keep referring to the raga's 'rules' and the customary development prescribed for the rendered form and genre. The interaction of memory, inspiration and creativity required for composing on-the-spot a recognizable though ephemeral musical personality is a product of what is called the 'symbolic thinking' of Indian culture.

Let us now look more closely into some aspects of raga-music making. As we have already seen musicians craft the raga's character and shape it anew in each performance. This generative process requires a cultivated ability to arrange larger forms impromptu as well as to elaborate on finer details while remaining aware of the overall impact of the performance. Thus, accurate pitching, oscillating and bending of the tones come into play, parallel to the chiselling of micro-melodies, the improvisation of larger melodic frames, and the apt use of rhythmic elaborations. All these aspects have to be kept in view while the focus has to be fixed on the individual, unique nature of the raga, its customary ways and its unforeseen, yet unexplored landscapes.

Looking back at our starting point, that is the multiple meaning of the German word 'Stimmung', we find that Indian musicians do create moods by means of precise and differentiated tunings, including scales, modes, intervals and micro-intervals with their individual treatment and typical melodic phrasing. By giving their undivided attention to micro and macro aspects both in a fluid context (i.e. microtones and micro melodies but also long-duration performances and musical forms), performers are able to effectively achieve an emotional impact. The concept of raga itself and the systematic arrangement of its features support the creation of a clearly identifiable mood. Masters can dose and control its intensity while listeners long for loosing themselves in the uplifting experience of rasa. Ultimately, the degree of intensity of this experience remains subjective: performer and listener are bound in a relationship of interdependence. Interestingly, concertgoers can never choose the raga they will listen to, since the selection is often decided at the last moment by the performer and is never mentioned on programs. Rasikas (those who enjoy rasa) may only choose the performer they wish to listen to, trusting his/her ability to evoke ragas in an effective way.
MORE ON RASA
According to Indian philosophy, while the magic of the music is at work, the emotions induced in the listener become impersonal, unworldly. *Rasa* may be described as a 'transcendent mode of emotional awareness' (Rowell, 1992). It does not identify daily-life sentiments and it is experienced through aesthetic distance, leading to a state of detached bliss (*ananda*). During the musical enjoyment, all the various rasas are seen as converging into a single condition of peace (*shanti*). Tasting *rasa* through music becomes a sacred act comparable to a mystic state of non-differentiation. Because of its spiritual import, this activity is part of many Hindu rituals and practices. Vaishnav Hinduism has extensively and minutely codified such a concept of total-art by including numerous kinds of aesthetic relishes in the rituals. All known art forms, tasting of drinks and foods, enjoying perfumes and incense, ornaments, erotic symbolism, the synchrony of all these ingredients, produces an intensification of the *rasa* experience. Such synergy is of the highest level, because the ingredients have to be unadulterated and possess spiritual qualities of purity (*sattv*) to be suitable for worship. In parallel to this, relishing such beauty with aesthetic detachment becomes an offering on the path to self-knowledge.

Two other links to the theory of *rasa* worth mentioning are: the association of *ragas* with specific times of day/year and their own peculiar moods; and the *raga-mala* tradition of painting where *ragas* are personified and portrayed in miniatures accompanied by a poetical description.

DHRUPAD MUSIC
*Dhrupad* is the most ancient genre still being performed and traces its origins in the Vaishnav temples of North India in the 14th -15th cent.; it is deeply influenced by Hindu (and Sufi) ritualistic practices, including the Yoga of Sound (*nada yoga*). Among the distinctive features of a *dhrupad* performance, we find the preference accorded to slow tempi, detailed micro-melodic treatment and long duration (to stabilize pitches/shades, to impress them on the consciousness). If tuning is the basic material from which the *raga* emerges, also the structure and arrangement of the music greatly contribute to its specific emotional impact. The depth, clarity and sober treatment typical of this genre are conceived to support the aesthetic experience thus making the tasting of *rasa* the main purpose of the performance. This is certainly one of the reasons why *dhrupad* is regarded as the most 'classical' and uplifting music of North India.

We have seen how, in order to be perceivable and heart moving, the Stimmung of a *raga* has to be artfully established and maintained. Once a musician has learnt the basic 'grammar', he or she has to cultivate the art of neatly and attractively shaping the musical form through meaningful reiterations and variations. The music has to hold the attention of the listeners, creating expectations and fulfilling them at the right moment. Mastery lies in being capable of establishing the mood of a *raga* from the very first tones, sustaining, deepening, embellishing it, considering it from various perspectives. Understanding the process of evoking the *raga*, of making audible its peculiar mood, is the key to the forms and aesthetic ideals of Indian art music. Performers have to ignite the affect every time anew and cannot fix the details of its musical treatment in advance, as if mirroring the process of life in its continuous, unrepeatable flow. Music becomes a
reflection of Nature and her laws, culminating in the experience of rasa and its rapture. Since only experienced musicians are able to give full justice to this task, singers in India usually perform till a very ripe age, in spite of bodily limitations. Their listeners are looking for the delights of rasa and will accept flaws and physical weakness in exchange for a masterful portrayal of the raga-bhava.

AN EXPERIMENTAL TAKE ON RAGA
To round up this excursion into the realm of Indian music, I wish to include an unusual approach to the subject found in a contemporary work, John Cage’s SOLO for VOICE 58: 18 microtonal ragas, from his Song Books (1970).

Cage’s ragas challenge the performer to experiment with this very concept of ‘tuning = mood’ outside the traditional and habitual Indian tuning system. The combination of extremely odd and unusual pitches or pitch sequences (such as a slightly flat octave or microtonal clusters) leads to unprecedented raga-bhavas. In the score of SOLO 58, Cage instructs the singer to “think either of the morning, the afternoon or the evening, giving a description or account of recent pleasures or beauties noticed.” openly referring to the classical Theory of Rasa. However, he gives his contribution to the discussion by, characteristically, abandoning any traditional model and leaving the interpreter free to find his own associations. Moreover, he clearly diverges from the classical Indian approach by directing the singer to focus on the memory of personal experiences. The resulting friction between the individualistic western attitude to “describe pleasures and beauties noticed” and the more impersonal treatment of emotions embedded in the raga tradition encourages further speculations.

The experimental and anarchistic approach to ragas in the Song Books seems in fact to lead to a re-assessment of the correspondence between rasas and given intervals or modes. As chance selected intervals that are deeply dissonant to the Indian ear (such as a flat octave or a very high fourth) come into play, rasas become much less classifiable and standardized, lending unexpected colourings and hues to Cage’s microtonal ragas. His approach allows the singer to draw on his/her own experiences, and combine them with the discipline of performance to foster the growth of unheard-of and unpredictable rasas.

No matter how eccentric and displacing the raga-bhavas in the performance of SOLO 58 may turn out, I experience them as an admirable affirmation of the concept of raga and Indian symbolic thought. The resulting process of re-evaluation has led me to the conclusion that even ‘experimental’ ragas may take on a meaningful shape and be effectively evoked. When creativity is consciously aimed at establishing a mood, a Stimmung, this becomes a 'demonstration of our capacity to feel' (Edwin Gerrow, in Rowell 1992). Musical components and procedures fall into place guided by a one-pointed will, and no other purpose is apparent except liberation from constraints (moksha).
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