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It is a great pleasure that the Department of Rabindra Sangit, Dance and Drama, Sangit Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, has invited us to publish selected paper of the conference “**CREATIVE-2024: A Long Journey Begins**” held on 26 to 27 March 2024 at Sangit Bhavana, Visva-Bharati. We are honoured that Mohan Kumaran P., Associate Professor of Kathakali Dance, Department of RSDD, has kindly consented to edit and Dr. Mrityunjay Prabhakar, Assistant Professor, Department of RSDD co-edit the issue AUTUMN EDITION'24 of *Thespian Magazine*. The issue is peer-reviewed by esteemed academicians from different universities, and the department conducted the peer review process.



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Archival Dialogue in Hindustani Music: An Interdisciplinary Approach

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Abstract

Hindustani classical music has undergone tremendous transformations due to the advent of recording technology since the early 20th century. Recorded music has become an integral part of musical discourse today and we owe it to the early musicians, especially women musicians from the courtesan community who embraced modernity and new technology for the first time in the history of Hindustani music and made it possible for this music to be heard outside of the physical presence and private performance spaces of musicians. Hence, this became the first step in the notion of archiving and preservation of music for future generations of practitioners, musicians, researchers and connoisseurs. The conversation with new technology impacted the performance aesthetics including the method of presentation and also the duration of live and recorded music. In the context of improvisation based genres like *khyal*, which is the predominant form of Hindustani music today, engaging with archival music as a reference, becomes an important source for developing an individual expression in performance practice. This paper discusses the understanding about the nuances of archival material as both physical and digital sources that includes books, treatises, anthologies, biographies, journals, texts of notated compositions, interviews of practitioners, audio recordings, video recordings in different formats and the role of various archival spaces in the dissemination process of Hindustani music performance practice and pedagogy. Also shared are my engagements with the archival material in a few interdisciplinary projects: a sound project in a visual art exhibition as a vocal dialogue with western classical music; collaboration with ethnomusicologists in a project bringing together musicians, musicologists and visual artists; using music as a tool for climate change activism and being a participant in a global music archival digital project.

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Introduction

As a contemporary practitioner and pedagogue of Hindustani music, I have had a continued dialogue and engagement with archival material in print, audio and video formats. A practice which emphasizes on oral tradition and personalized training methodology and transmission of knowledge, Hindustani music and its practitioners have nevertheless, embraced technology in every aspect of music making; performance, teaching, dissemination and propagation. Sound recording and reproduction technology has transformed over the past hundred years, from the early gramophone era to the internet era, comprising of a host of varied formats from the mechanical to digital. It has impacted not only the performance practice of Hindustani music but also its preservation, access and archival process. This paper gives a brief overview of the recording formats which gave rise to different ways of archiving music. Also discussed is, how early musicians embraced new technology and its impact on the notions of presentation. The various sources of archival material specific to Hindustani classical music, are also shared. Finally, I deliberate upon my engagements with archive in a few interdisciplinary projects.

Archival Devices and Practitioners

An archive is a designated space which comprises of a compilation of audio, video and print material and provides access to researchers, scholars and practitioners in different areas. A music archive, as the name suggests, is a space with specific focus on music. In the context of Hindustani Music, the era of gramophone records in early 20th century, was also the first step towards the notion of archive and the preservation of music for future



generations. The arrival of the Gramophone records at the turn of the 20th century in India, was also a period of shifting patronage of Indian music and musicians, from princely states to urban centers, *kotha* (salon), theatre, recording studio and the concert stage. Recorded sound, in many ways, democratized classical music and brought many genres and artists into prominence; especially, women musicians and courtesans were some of the most successful recording artistes. Music that was the exclusive preserve of specific performance milieus such as the *chaklas* (courtesan's quarter), was now available for mass consumption (Farrell 37). The first commercial recordings of Indian music were made by F. W. Gaisberg¹ in Calcutta in the year 1902. Gauharjan, one of the most celebrated artists of her times, is considered as the first Indian musician to have recorded on the gramophone, by Gaisberg in Calcutta in 1902.² She recorded songs in Hindustani, Arabic, Kutchi, Bengali, Sanskrit, English and represented a variety of vocal music genres like *khyal*, *thumri*, *dadra*, and *ghazals*. Many other women musicians followed and became very successful recording artistes including Malka Jaan of Agra, Zohrabai Agrewali, Jankibai of Allahabad, Binodini Dasi, and Giribala from Calcutta to name a few. Gopeshwar Bandopadhyay, a *dhrupadiya* and a multi-instrumentalist who recorded *khyal* songs and Lal Chand Boral were some of the early male recording artists³ who were successful. In all the early recordings, due to the constraints of technology, the duration of each song is not more than three minutes. A reasonable duration of an improvised *khyal* and *dhrupad* rendition today is not less than at least forty to fifty minutes and there are various accounts to suggest that the duration of classical music performances was any different in early 1900s. Hence, it is pertinent to note, that condensing musical matter of forty minutes or so into three minutes without losing out on the aesthetic quality and improvisational emphasis, was in itself, a commendable feat on



the part of all the early recorded musicians. For instance, a cursory analysis of Gauharjan's rendition of raga Bhupali suggests a balance of pre-composed *bandish* and improvisational tana passages neatly presented in less than three minutes. Similarly, much later, 78 rpm recordings of ragas Nand, Tilak kamod, Lalit and so on by Kesarbai Kerkar, the great *khyal* exponent of the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana, are some of the finest and aesthetically complete renditions, despite the short duration of each song. With technological advancements in subsequent eras, the total duration of music recordings increased considerably. The initial mechanical and acoustic era of 78 rpm records eventually gave way to vinyl records in the form of 45 rpm extended play (EP) records and long play (LP) records in the late 1950s, with better sound quality and extended duration. Following the EP/LP era, audio and video cassettes in mid 1960s continued till compact discs (CD) took over in mid 1980s.⁴ The internet era today has enabled the documentation and listening of music in completely transformative ways wherein digital files of recorded music can be stored in pen drives, hard disks and the cloud (virtual storage). There have been ongoing efforts to digitize music stored in different physical devices (mentioned above) and make this archive available to a larger public via different institutions dedicated towards the documentation and dissemination of Hindustani music.

Sources of Archival Recordings (Physical and Digital)

Archive is always something which is removed from its original location and shared in a different situation. Archival spaces represented by individual collectors and institutions, have played an important role in the process of collection, preservation, digitization and dissemination. According to the comprehensive report on Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy



and Principles published by UNESCO in 2004, there are five different types of sound archives: broadcasting and studio, programming, audiovisual, national, and university & academic archives. The process of archiving involves two sections namely proactive archiving and reactive archiving. Proactive archiving, is when access to collections is initiated by the archive itself, as opposed to reactive archiving, when the users of an archive initiate access. Proactive archiving can take the form of broadcast, the production of collection-based products such as CDs, the digitization and delivery of material online, exhibitions, lectures, presentations and so on.

In the context of Hindustani classical music, there are various sources from where archival recordings can be accessed today.⁵ For instance, nationally recognized institutions and archives like the Sangeet Natak Akademi (situated in New Delhi along with multiple branches in different states), National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA, Mumbai) and ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata, India's best known conservatory for Hindustani classical music training; Broadcasting and studio archives such as the All India Radio and Doordarshan (Government run institutions with large repository of music post-independence), the Films Division which includes specifically commissioned films on classical music and musicians; Academic and university archives such as the Archive of North Indian Classical Music in the School of Cultural Texts and Records at Jadavpur University, Kolkata and the Department of Music, Durham University in the UK.

All the institutions that have been mentioned above, have a website and relevant information can be accessed online. The National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) was established in 1969 in Mumbai and is dedicated to promoting and propagating multiple



genres of performing Arts including music (Indian and Western), dance and theatre. The NCPA website provides access to the catalogue of the music library archives and one can also physically visit the centre to access the archives. Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) is an institution that was established in 1953 to preserve and promote the vast cultural heritage of India expressed in music, dance and drama. It also works in collaboration with governments and art academies in states and territories of the country. Their website provides information about the audio-visual library which can be physically accessed by musicians and researchers. Additionally, their YouTube channel has recordings of programmes (including performances that are streamed live) curated by SNA. Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) was established in 1985 and was visualized as a centre ‘encompassing the study and experience of all the arts’. National Cultural Audiovisual Archives NCAA (under IGNCA) provides online access to audio visual material in Hindustani Music apart from other material. The All India Radio (Prasar Bharati) is a national broadcaster and has played a major role in the propagation of Hindustani classical Music for more than 75 years. Part of the vast archive can be accessed through their official YouTube channel AIR Raagam. With prior appointment, one can physically visit any AIR station to access the archive section and listen to the recordings. ITC Sangeet Research Academy (ITC SRA) established in 1978 in Kolkata with a vision to nurture young exponents of Hindustani classical music and also a space bringing together maestros of different gharanas under one umbrella, houses a vast repository of recordings of past and present masters. Gajananbua Joshi, Sharad Sathe and many other scholar musicians have been recorded in SRA with a purpose of documenting their music and preserving different gharana stylistics and also for the documentation of compositions. Although the archives are mainly for the resident scholars, music researchers



can directly contact the concerned person to access the archival material.

Having discussed some sources of archival recordings which are available in physical spaces like institutions (that also have a digital presence), what follows is a brief overview of exclusively virtual sources. The 'Internet Archive' is a non-profit digital library with a very vast repository of digital material including text/books, audio/sound, video/film, software. It provides meta data with information about the collector and the original source. The website also clearly states that it is to be used for non- commercial purposes (this is also to safeguard themselves from any future copyright issues). In the context of Hindustani music, there are audio and video recordings, guided lectures and interviews.

YouTube is the largest available digital archive. One should be aware about how to search for relevant material by using appropriate keywords. In the context of Indian music, to mention a few channels amongst a very vast selection, the YouTube channel of First Edition Arts consists of live concert recordings of contemporary practitioners of Hindustani and Carnatic music with a very high production quality, Official YouTube channel of Deodhar's School of Indian Music comprises of archival recordings of eminent musicians and YouTube channel of Films Division consists of several specially commissioned films on classical music. Most contemporary musicians have a personal YouTube channel which becomes spaces for not only visibility and promotion but also documentation of their own performances. Likewise, a large number of music organizations have their own YouTube channels where concerts curated by them are uploaded. In most cases, the consent of all the stakeholders, which includes the artistes and accompanying musicians, is often not taken and hence this becomes a contentious issue as far as copyright is concerned. Though a serious



discussion on this matter is beyond the scope of this paper, it nevertheless, needs to be highlighted.

Hence, the dissemination of archival material can be in physical archives and virtual spaces through the digital medium. However, archival material is not confined only within institutions and the internet, but is also with private collectors. A large part of these collections have been lost to posterity but there have been certain commendable efforts worldwide and also in India, to bring private collectors under one umbrella. One such example is that of the Society of Indian Record Collectors founded in 1990 by Suresh Chandvankar along with others in Bombay with support and guidance from Micheal Kinnear (discographer and researcher of Indian records from Australia). The objectives of the society include ‘to bring together all persons and institutions interested in preservation, promotion and research in all aspects of Indian musical culture’ and to publish an annual journal ‘The Record News’.⁶

My Engagements with Archival Material

As a *khyal* practitioner for more than three decades it remains an enriching experience to recall and directly make multiple stylistic references as a collective archive of the past and the present. As a student of music, one is constantly creating archival material in different formats whether it is notating and documenting compositions of one’s repertoire or audio and video recordings of one’s learning process (*talim*) and performances. A practitioner also draws from the immense archival material that exists elsewhere as mentioned in this paper. The performance and teaching of an improvisation based genre like *khyal* is thus an



amalgamation of these multiple archives to create an individual expression. Likewise, my engagements in certain inter-disciplinary projects have also involved the use of archival material.

A Vocal Dialogue with Wagner's 'Faust Overture': I participated as a vocalist composer in a visual art exhibition titled Land Natural, Gendered and curated by Amit Mukhopadhyay at the Nandan Gallery, Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan in October 2015. According to the concept note of the curator, the exhibition stretched the notion of land from Plato's cave to Hitler's Bunker as a basic structural framework of patriarchy, war and occupation and incorporated the idea of motherhood as a natural organic space of compassion and hosting. In this context, I composed a sound piece responding to the music of Wilhelm Richard Wagner, who was a 19th century German composer, theatre director and conductor. Hitler was an admirer of Wagner's music, though it can be conjectured that this was more so because he identified with Wagner due to the latter's anti-semitic and highly controversial writings on the Jews. Richard Wagner composed the musical score inspired by the tragic play 'Faust' written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe between 1806 (part1) and 1831 (part 2). The musical score was written in 1855 (first written between 1840 and later re-written). The work, in itself, is a picture of restlessness of the soul, its aspirations, and its struggles with destiny. As a vocalist specialized in Hindustani (North Indian) classical music, I explored my space through different melodic progressions in specific ragas or musical modes. I juxtaposed the symphonic piece by Wagner with my responses to the experience, through the medium of voice based on the Hindustani classical music idiom. Comprising of a collage of a few ragas of myriad moods, I included melodic phrases of multiple ragas since the musical score (of



Wagner) in itself, is an amalgamation of different moods. The phrases used are based on ragas like Harikauns, Todi, Shree and Bhairavi, all of which evoke a sense of pathos, restlessness, forcefulness and sometimes also tranquility. This new compositional piece was shared as a sound file in the physical space of the exhibition as a vocal dialogue with western classical music.

“*Khyal: Music and Imagination*” is a research project conceived by ethnomusicologists Dr. Laura Leante (principal investigator) and Prof Martin Clayton (co-investigator) at the Department of Music, Durham University, UK.⁷ They have had a long term association with Hindustani classical music and have collaborated with several artists from Maharashtra and West Bengal, over a period spanning more than two decades and have built up a rich archive of live concert recordings, currently housed in Durham University. Their project ‘*Khyal: Music and Imagination*’ which was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK (AHRC) in 2016, ‘brought together musicians, musicologists and visual arts to explore the *Khyal* genre of north Indian classical music and to stimulate the artists to produce original works of visual art inspired by the music’. As part of this project an original artwork was created by visual artist Mahjabin Imam Majumdar in response to a recording of Raga Marwa performed by me. This live concert recording, which belongs to the archive of the Department of Music in Durham university, was filmed at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, Pune, Maharashtra in 2010. The project provided me with a unique experience of looking at a visual representation of my rendition of raga Marwa. In the painting, I could see the interpretation of some of the emotions of the evening raga, which evokes feelings of restlessness, strength, pathos, melancholy and anxiety. The dominant



presence of the tree and the intricate work within, represents the complex melodic structure of raga Marwa, and with respect to my performance, the expansion and exploration of the raga. This project is an example of how archival materials can be used for specific curated research projects which are interdisciplinary in nature. In this case, a live concert recording from the archive is being used to generate a project around visual artists and musicians to create original art works and visual representations of the music.

Music for Climate Justice (M4CJ) is an organization that launched an online platform to raise voice against climate change and featured music performances from 350+ artistes around the globe, representing multiple genres and styles of music. All the performances were pre-recorded and streamed live during the United Nations Conference of the parties (COP-26) in Glasgow, Scotland from 5th to 12th November 2021. Warren. Senders, Hindustani vocalist, teacher and climate activists who was one of the team members and producers of M4CJ, invited me to participate in this project. I recorded a composition in Raga Dash followed by a short message supporting the struggle for climate justice around the world. According to senders⁸, the M4CJ project, while raising funds through music, for the UNESCO and local groups doing climate and environmental work around the world, also attempted to highlight the world's musical diversity and beauty, making the point that climate change threatens not just our infrastructure, agriculture, and ecosystems, but also humanity's rich and varied cultural heritage. Hence, this is an example of recording a performance, creating an archive which then becomes part of a much larger online archive of artists' works, bringing together diverse voices and highlighting the problems of climate change.



Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed the different aspects of recording devices and sources of archival recordings and dissemination with specific reference to Hindustani classical music. I have also shared some of my collaborations with practitioners of other disciplines, using archival material from my recorded music performances. These projects further reiterate the fact that archive can provide and expand the possibilities of inter-disciplinary conversations. In the digital era, the access to music archive is very vast and hence, it becomes an added responsibility for music practitioners to have a critical perspective towards engaging with the archive in performance and research.



Endnotes

¹ Frederik William Gaisberg was an American composer and recording engineer, best known for being one of the earliest music producers for the Gramophone. During his maiden trip to India in 1902, he was a representative of the London based Gramophone and typewriter Ltd.

² For a detailed account on the development of gramophone industry in India, see Farrell.

³ Information from personal collection based on an audio-visual presentation on ‘Some Forgotten Voices of North Indian Classical Music’ by Rantidev Moitra held in October 2018 in Sangit Bhavana, Santiniketan.

⁴ For a comprehensive account on technological transformations in sound recording and 100 years of gramophone industry in India, see “Indian Gramophone Records: The First 100 Years” by Suresh Chandvankar.

⁵ This is not an exhaustive list. The sources mentioned here are illustrative examples of archival material in each of the categories namely institutions, broadcasting archives and archival initiatives in academic spaces.

⁶ For more details about the activities of The Record News, see “The Record News” by Suresh Chandvankar.

⁷ See “*Khyal*: Music and Imagination” for more details.

⁸ Personal communications with the author of this paper.



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