



YARLUNG RECORDS
BOB ATTIYEH, PRODUCER

ADITYA PRAKASH
Karnatik Roots

DIANE & CRAIG MARTIN executive producers

ADITYA PRAKASH

Karnatik Roots

1	Jayanatasena	10:31
2	Hamsadwani	14:54
3	Shifting Sa	6:09
4	Kiravani	22:52
5	Brindavani, Khamas	5:03
6	Ragamalika, Brindavana Saranga	13:47
7	Natabhairavi	4:25

ADITYA PRAKASH *Karnatik Roots*

producer's notes

Our friend Cheryl McEnaney introduced us to Aditya Prakash a few years ago. Cheryl served as head of strategic marketing for Real World Records in North America and she knew of our deep love of classical Indian music at Yarlung Records. Aditya was born in Los Angeles and grew up in India and the United States, but with his busy international concert schedule he is rarely home in Tamil Nadu or California for long periods. Crossover and global music fans might know Aditya best from his jazz-infused Karnatik blend on his Aditya Prakash Ensemble¹ releases such as *Diaspora Kid* or from his concerts on National Public Radio. They might also know him from his tours in Europe, the Near East and Asia as the vocalist with choreographer Akram Khan and musicians Pandit Ravi Shankar, Karsh Kale, Anoushka Shankar and Tigran Hamasyan.

¹ Crossover group Aditya Prakash Ensemble morphs larger or smaller depending on venue and country where they perform. Except Aditya himself, no members of the Ensemble (APE) perform on this album. Please see pg 9 for musicians performing with Aditya on *Karnatik Roots*

next page: Aditya Prakash Ensemble performing in Singapore at the Esplanade. photo: Shri Sainis





But as adventurous and “crossover” as Aditya’s successes may be, they have always been firmly anchored in the classical Karnatik musical tradition of South India. Initially, Aditya suggested Yarlung work with him and his ensemble in the jazz and crossover global music genres, but by the end of our first conversation, Aditya confessed that his greatest desire was to honor and further explore the classical tradition with a purely acoustic recording focusing on some of his favorite ragas. I asked Aditya to compose a new work for us as well and he graciously agreed. Executive producers Diane and Craig Martin and Aditya and I discussed where we should record this Karnatik debut album, and we initially planned to record in Chennai. To our chagrin, we learned from Aditya and from our friend Ricky Kej that most of the concert halls in India are designed for light or heavy amplification, such that the natural acoustics Yarlung prizes would be difficult to achieve. Aditya had only worked in a “modern multi-mic” recording environment before, and for this album Aditya wanted the real Yarlung sound.

Thanks to Aaron Egigian, we were able to make this recording using the beautiful natural acoustics in Samueli Theater at Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa on August 1st, 2022. Aditya and musicians gave a live concert with this same repertoire in the hall on July 31st. Yarlung enjoyed recording *Men of Dharamsala* in India several years ago at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts; we look forward to returning to India for a different recording in the future.

next page: Aditya as a teenager





T M Krishna and Aditya

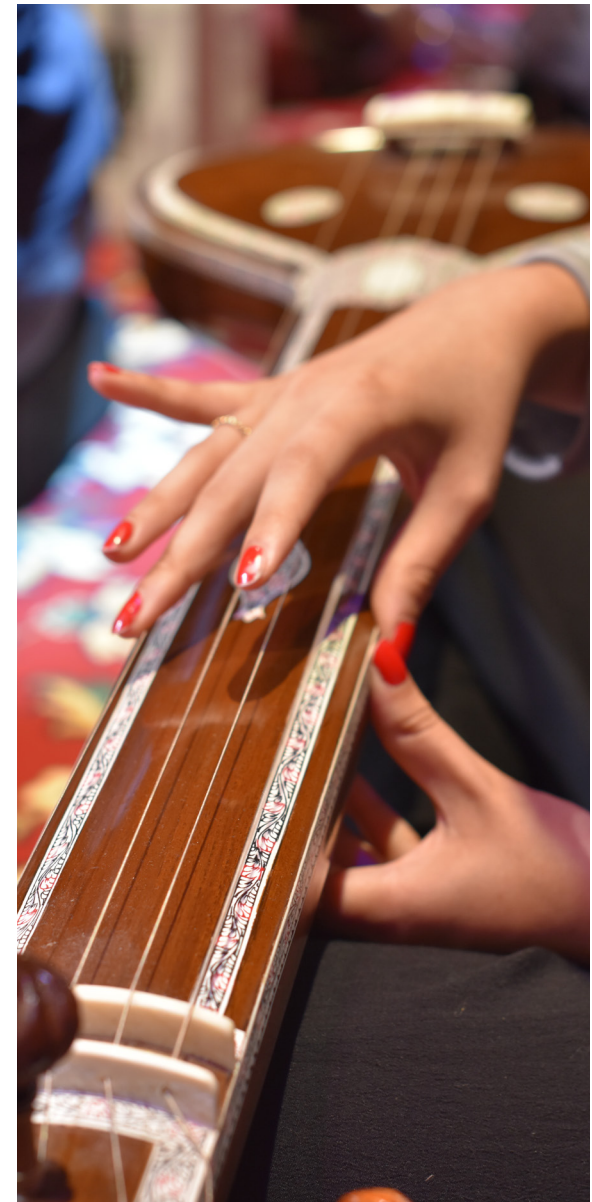
Before discussing the music, I wanted to explain something about our title and the words “Karnatik Roots.” These ragas express Aditya’s roots as “learned at the feet” of his many illustrious gurus.² These are not the roots of the Karnatik tradition in general. For listeners deeply interested in the history of Karnatik music, Aditya recommends T M Krishna’s book *A Southern Music: The Karnatik Story* published by Harpers in 2013. To global music lovers familiar with today’s greatest artists, our recording may sound ancient and archaic, traditionalist to a fault. But to an arch traditionalist, Aditya’s recording may sound modern and experimental, with Karnatik “flavor.” Traditional as his training may be, Aditya makes no particular claim to authenticity in this recording. And as his guru Mr. Krishna elaborates in *A Southern Music*, the static lineage of

Karnatik music over thousands of years turns out to be a myth. As Aditya explained to me, “The notion that Karnatik music is ancient in a linear fashion – staying rooted and connected in sound and content over thousands of years – and that it is our job as practitioners today to maintain this line of purity and untainted tradition is a problematic one that overlooks and over-simplifies the deep transformation and evolution of Karnatik music over time. My teacher asked and urged me ‘What is Karnatik music to you?’ then continued urging me to ‘remove all the external paraphernalia

² Aditya’s principal vocal gurus include Debur Srivatsa, Rose Muralikrishnan, Sugandha Kalameghan, Palai Ramachandran, P S Narayanaswami, R K Shriramkumar and T M Krishna

and structural rules, and find out what Karnatik music means to you *there*,' he said, pointing at my heart, not my head. The Karnatik concert as practiced today is a very structured entity, in which lyrically dense compositions are the main focus, while improvisation occurs in the spaces between the compositions and in subtle ways during the composition itself. Although this practice is today considered a 'traditional' Karnatik concert, it is relatively new in the larger history of Karnatik music. So let us explore this tradition together and pay attention to the ways in which our hearts respond more than worrying about this too much in our heads."

Aditya and musicians perform seven ragas for you on this album. A raga is a melody (a collection of pitches), sometimes ancient, which often comes with a traditionally associated mood or temperament, and sometimes with a time of day for optimum performance. With a wink in his eye and mock professorial posture, Aditya clarified that a "raga is a melodic entity, a song, with a phraseology that has marinated over



tambura

time and been defined through existing compositions and the legendary practitioners of the form who have given the raga a distinct identity through their compositions and improvisations.” But then



Rajna Swaminathan playing her mridangam

Aditya grinned and admitted that to him, “a raga is a personality, a living being, a friend or partner that I must become intimate with in order to freely enter its world and even begin to explore it.” No wonder some of these ragas have been celebrated for generations.

Diane and Craig and I express our sincere appreciation to Aditya Prakash for his magnificent voice and leadership, to **Kamalakaran Vinjamuri** on violin, to **Rajna Swaminathan** on mridangam (South Indian drum) and to **Vini Sundaram** playing acoustic tambura, or drone.

Fellow recording engineer and equipment designer **Arian Jansen** and I used SonoruS Holographic Imaging technology in the analog domain to refine the stereo image, Yarlung's SonoruS ATR12 to record analog tape, the Merging Technologies HAPI to record 256fs DSD in stereo and surround sound and the SonoruS ADC to record PCM. We used our friend **Ted Ancona's** AKG C24 microphone previously owned by Frank Sinatra, and vacuum tube microphone amplification by Yarlung executive producer and designer **Elliot Midwood**. Our hearty thanks to executive producers **Craig and Diane Martin** for inspiring and underwriting this album.

—Bob Attiyeh, producer

mic check before Segerstrom Center concert the day before our recording session for *Aditya Prakash: Karnatik Roots*
l to r: Rajna Swaminathan on mridangam, Aditya, Radhika Bhuckory playing tambura, Kamalakaran Vinjamuri on violin,
(Vini Sundaram played tambura on our album)



THOUGHTS ON THE MUSIC

Aditya Prakash

Raga I: *Jayantasena*

The album begins by introducing each artist and instrument individually in a short improvisation before we perform together in Raga *Jayantasena*. This is not customary in a Karnatik concert. I begin by singing a poem in the Kannada language written by the 12th Century female mystic author **Akka Mahadevi** from Karnataka. I offer a rough translation:

Like stillness inherent in the ground

Like flavor inherent within the fruit

Like gold inherent within an ornament

Like oil inherent within a seed

Like fire inherent within wood

God or Love is inherent within the feeling of our hearts

This introduction is completely improvised based on the raga *Jayantasena*, the only raga composed by **Thyagaraja** (more formally known as **Kakarla Thyagabrahmam**) born in 1767 and considered a saint. Thyagaraja revolutionized and repopularized Karnatik music and was thought to have written over 20,000 pieces during his lifetime. Following the introduction we launch into *Vinata Suta*, also by Thyagaraja which praises the god Rama. Following the composition, we improvise briefly on the *swaras* (solfège) of the raga but return again and again to the main refrain of the song; this is known as *kalpana swara* singing. Lyrics: Akka Mahadevi and Thyagaraja, Language: Kannada and Telugu.



R K Shriramkumar and Aditya

Raga II: *Hamsadwani*

The composition we rendered in this raga is often considered the most famous Karnatik composition, *Vatapi Ganapatim*. Composed by the prolific **Muddusvami Dikshitar** born in 1776, this song has been popularized so much over the last century that it has almost gone out of vogue and is no longer performed so frequently. Too much of a good thing, perhaps. When revisiting and relearning this song from another one of my mentors, R K Shriramkumar, he taught me the version of the song that was written in the text known as *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini* (SSP)

and this approach breathed fresh new life into the song for me. This SSP remains a primary source of detailed notation for Muddusvami Dikshitar's compositions. As mentioned earlier, many Karnatik musicians and practitioners add their own flair and flavor to compositions, adding more melodic motifs to the existing structure provided by the original composer. The results of such over-embellishment can result in works of great beauty, but can also result in the composition veering far from its original intention. When I relearned *Vatapi Ganapatim* in the way it is notated in the text, its simplicity, stillness and beauty appealed to me greatly. Our version tries to capture this much slower, refreshingly simple and meditative experience. I expand upon one of the lines and improvise (while keeping the lyrical meter intact) as I develop the melodic content. This style of improvisation is known as *niraval*. Following *niraval* I take up *kalpana swaras* as in our first track.
Lyrics: Muddusvami Dikshitar, Language: Sanskrit.

Raga III: *Shifting Sa*

This is an original composition and concept of mine and this track offers our most experimental approach to Karnatik music on this album. Bob said it is one of his favorite tracks in our recording. The constantly moving tonal center can be destabilizing when singing a raga, a challenge I welcomed in this piece. The sound of the tambura (drone instrument which you heard open both the previous songs) is a quintessential part of the Karnatik sound and provides the tonal center, which usually



Kamalakaran Vinjamuri, violin

does not shift during a performance. As you may notice, there is no tambura in this song. Instead, Kamalakiran on violin provides the tonal center, which shifts throughout the piece.

Modal jazz fans will recognize a strong contemporary influence in *Shifting Sa*. When performing this piece, the three of us must maintain the identity and phraseology of the densely ornamented ragas: *Todi*, *Simhendramadyamam* and *Vasanta*, while shifting the tonic constantly. This shifting nature also affects the way in which Rajna plays her mridangam. The tonic pitch, which is the primary stroke that resonates in her drum, must be masked or hidden when the tonic shifts. This piece is non-linguistic and is heavily improvised vocally.

Raga IV: *Kiravani*

This piece is a confluence of four different improvisational styles: *virutam* singing (using poetry and raga together), *kalpana swara* as in our first track, then *tanam* (rhythmic but non-cyclical singing using the words “ta nam” in different formations), and finally *niraval*. The seamless blend morphing from one style of improvisation to another is one of my favorite achievements in this piece, and this blending is rarely done in Karnatik music. This blend took form when I was creating and experimenting with a piece of mine called “Lord of the Cave” for Aditya Prakash Ensemble, arranged for voice, guitars and drums. Our version of *Kiravani* also allowed for a unique interplay between mridangam and voice. Here Rajna’s mridangam moves fluidly between pulses and time signatures while simultaneously providing the tonic bed, allowing me to harmonize and blend with the mridangam. Later in *Kiravani*, I asked Rajna to embed a drum solo within a one line composition known as a *pallavi*. Lyrics: Apayya Dikshitar, Language: Sanskrit.

Raga V: *Brindavani, Khamas (Thillana)*

I wanted to include a purely instrumental piece in our recording even though such “modernism” is atypical for a Karnatik vocal recital. I asked Kamalakiran on violin and Rajna on mridangam³

³ see Kamalakiran Vinjamuri, violin, page 14; and Rajna Swaminathan on mridangam, page 9



Aditya's father Kikkeri Prakash, Palai Ramachandran, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer (seated center) and Aditya ⁴

to combine two different compositions based on two different ragas. This melding is also uncommon in a Karnatik concert. By linking the occasionally similar phrases and notes of the very different sounding ragas, we wanted to achieve a uniquely cohesive sounding composite of the ragas. I think Rajna and Kamalakiran succeeded brilliantly. These classical ragas evolved over time as they all do, and Kamalakiran honors the great Karnatik

musicians Patnam Subramaniam Iyer and Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna with this *Thillana* composition.

⁴ Aditya cherishes this image of himself as a teenager gathered with his father Kikkeri Prakash, Palai Ramachandran (one of Aditya's primary gurus), and Aditya's grand-guru the legendary vocalist Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, who performed until the age of 92. Iyer remains Aditya's musical hero to this day. Iyer was also Palai Ramachandran's teacher. (Patnam Subramaniam Iyer, honored in *Brindavani*, *Khamas* passed away 101 years before the death of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer in Chennai, 2003. The two gentlemen shared the same ethnoreligious Tamil-speaking philosophical tradition of the Hindu Advaita Vedānta school focusing on nondualism)

Raga VI: *Ragamalika alapana, Brindavana Saranga* (Soundararajam)

Soundararajam is another masterpiece composition by Muddusvami Dikshitar. Similar to *Vatapi* in *Hamsadwani* on track 2, most performers present this song today with myriad changes from the original. Our version follows the exact notation in the SSP. It feels transcendent and sublime to experience the simplicity and stillness of each note as I sing it. To introduce this song, we offer an improvisation known as an *alapana* (free of a time cycle and rhythmic accompaniment) in various ragas. I chose these ragas carefully; they are all ragas normally part of the Hindustani style which influenced Muddusvami Dikshitar greatly. Dikshitar was specifically influenced by the *Drupad* style in Hindustani music. Muddusvami Dikshitar traveled widely in the Indian subcontinent, and he was fearless and bold in his experimentation and adoption of “foreign” musical styles, thereby increasing the diversity and musical palate in the Karnatik world. Lyrics: Muddusvami Dikshitar, Language: Sanskrit.

Raga VII: *Natabhairavi*

This composition, typical in Hindustani concerts and known as a *Tarana*, is a counterpart to *Thillana* in Karnatik music. (*Thillana* makes up an important part of *Brindavani*, *Khamas*, as



heard in track 5.) *Natabhairavi* pays homage to sitar maestro Pandit **Ravi Shankar**, with whom I had the pleasure of singing and touring. Mr. Shankar took the scale from this Karnatik raga: *Natabhairavi* and played it in his distinctive style, which we honor in this performance. Absorbing Karnatik music was not unusual for Ravi Shankar. His performances revealed many Karnatik influences, rhythmic as well as melodic. *Natabhairavi* was born out of the melakarta raga classification system, which dates as

early as 1550. I so enjoy Ravi Shankar's brilliance, blending melody and rhythm in a simple catchy way. He was a true gift and I very often recollect my memories with him, which I cherish. Singing this piece always gives me a burst of joy, energy and fun and it was a treat to end our concert and recording in this fashion.

– Aditya Prakash
December 12, 2022
Chennai, India

photo: Aditya with Ravi Shankar and Sukanya Rajan Shankar at their home in Encinitas

Executive Producers: Diane and Craig Martin

Recording Engineers: Bob Attiyeh and Arian Jansen

Mastering Engineers: Steve Hoffman, Arian Jansen and Bob Attiyeh

Microphone Preamplification: Elliot Midwood

AKG C24 microphone: Ancona Audio

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Tray image courtesy Miguel Estrada

Additional images courtesy of Prakash family photos

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Aditya performing in Europe with Akram Khan
next page: Aditya Prakash Ensemble performing
in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at the Music
Center of Los Angeles County



after a concert in Ravi Shankar's home



ADITYA PRAKASH

Karnatik Roots

Jayanatasena
Hamsadwani
Shifting Sa
Kiravani
Brindavani, Khamas
Ragamalika, Brindavana Saranga
Natabhairavi



Breaking the Sound Barrier

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