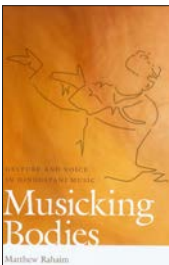


## India

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**Matthew Rahaim, *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music***

Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012. xv + 182 pages.

Cloth, \$75.00; paperback, \$24.95; ebook, \$19.99. ISBN 978-0-8195-7325-4

(cloth); 978-0-8195-7326-1 (paperback); 978-0-8195-7327-8 (ebook).

THERE IS A growing body of literature in English on classical Hindustani instrumental music for the general public as well as for academic scholars. Due to the overriding presence of Pt. Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan since the 1960s, many Westerners readily associate Hindustani music with the sitar or sarod in combination with the electrifying tabla demonstrations of virtuosos like Ustad Alla Rakha or his son Zakir Hussein. What is still largely unexplored is the rich vocal repertoire, which is grounded in religious devotion and is the foundation for most other forms of Indian music. Since most Hindustani classical songs are sung with Hindi lyrics that almost solely portray Hindu religious situations or experiences, cultural barriers have been in place with regard to their successful transmission outside of India. As a welcome addition to studies of vocal music, as well as an innovative approach to the genre of Hindustani Khyal singing, Matthew Rahaim, in *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music*, oversteps the language and cultural issues at stake by focusing instead on the kinetic dimension of classical singing as witnessed by students and audiences of vocal performance. Singers of

Hindustani *rāga* music, as it is also called, often utilize near-acrobatic forms of gesticulation in tandem with their vocal renditions that frequently startle unfamiliar listeners. In a first-of-its-kind analysis, Rahaim, having adopted the term “musicking” from Christopher Small, has offered us a sophisticated and technical explanation of the subtleties of hand and body motion employed during classical singing that recalls evidence from his personal training, interviews with Indian musicians, and current Western theories of speech, gesture, and nonverbal communication. The author has received training in vocal music from Pt. Vikas Kashalkar in Pune, India, whose brother Pt. Ulhas Kashalkar is a leading Hindustani vocalist. Overall, the book brings the reader to new understandings of universal body/mind cooperation and conviviality. The author’s insights and arguments are clear and articulate, supported by profuse illustrations of singers (utilizing black and white photographs and line drawings), diagrams of note and rhythm patterns, and sketches of hand movements. This book, a revision of the author’s doctoral dissertation, is a valuable addition to ethnomusicology literature as well as a resource for specialists in music theory, gesture, performance studies, and body/mind issues.

Taking issue with scholarly approaches that tend to isolate sound or music from natural environments including the body, Rahaim initially argues that, in reference to Hindustani singing, “In the moment of performance, the voice and the body are united in melodic action” (8), and “there is much to learn from gesture, posture, and the physicality of vocal production that cannot be learned from sound alone” (17). But he qualifies that “This is not a study of bodily movement as such, but a study of spontaneous gestural action that is co-performed with spontaneous vocal action: tracing curves in space, stretching virtual materials, sculpting virtual objects” (6). Since he observes that the subject of melodic knowledge embodied in gesture has largely been ignored by music theorists, he aspires to balance the scales by presenting a case for the solubility of music and bodily motion working together in parallel dimensions, each one influencing the other but not totally defined by the other. In chapter 1, “History of Moving and Singing in India,” the author makes reference to the early history of Sanskrit treatises on music that regarded gestural action and bodily movement as *doṣas* or faults in singing, which is carried forth to the nineteenth century as part of “the bulk of discourse about gesture that prefers stillness to motion” (19). Obviously disagreeing with these directives, and seeking to defend and explain the spontaneous gestural action in singing which the author has experienced in his training, he cites examples from Indian cinematic depictions of singing, Western theories of social stigmatization, and the writing of twentieth-century Indian musicologists like Rabindra Lal Ray who have taken seriously the phenomenon of how the “hand and the voice work closely together” (37) in classical vocal music. The argument may appear weak at this point, but the delicate blend of theory and example that the author weaves together from hereon impresses the reader with a deeper sense of both Hindustani music and the inherent value of holistic approaches to music performance.

After setting up chapter 2, “Gesture and Melodic Motion,” Rahaim presents a series of innovative concepts (*rāga* spaces, curling gestures, extrasonic associations, and so on) and takes us on a journey with examples from various informants in

chapter 3, “Rāgas as Spaces for Melodic Motion.” Chapter 4, “Melodic Motion in Time,” organizes bodily motion and singers’ hand shapes according to the system of *tāla* or rhythmic cycles. Chapter 5, “The Musicking Body,” describes various hand techniques used by singers (that is, catch and release, andolan, virtual objects in space, and so on). It should be mentioned that not all vocal lineages emphasize hand shapes and arm movements. The author’s tradition, Gwalior Gharana of Khyal, heartily supports these gestures while the Agra Gharana and the Indore Gharana (Ustad Amir Khan; see page 30) give them less importance. Among the Khyal gharanas, Agra is closest in form to Dhrupad, which is also quite restrained in terms of gesture, and so on. One aspect not mentioned in the text is that the Gwalior Gharana absorbed stylistic elements from the Islamic Sufi tradition of Qawwali singing, which is known for elaborate gestures and bodily movement. Chapter 6, “The Paramparic Body,” draws upon Katherine Young’s notion of “family bodies” to discuss the formation and transmission of “non-material bodies” of musical motion across teaching generations that disciples of Pt. Jitendra Abhisheki and Pt. Gajanan Rao Joshi have carried forward in their own manner. The author explains how each distinct *paramparic* body is constructed according to the personal choice of the artist. Without becoming totally arbitrary, however, the *paramparic* body is always integrated with the virtues and aesthetics of the master-singer in ways that express restraint and dignity in performance. As more broadly stated in the conclusion (134), “No body, after all, moves in a vacuum; no body learns to be itself by itself. Every body, whether, speaking, singing, or silent, has a *parampara*.”

In addition to the responses above, I offer some suggestions or corrections as follows. When presenting the notes of a particular *rāga* (*sā re gā*, and so on) within the paragraphs, as is the case when discussing *śrī rāga* (36) and *rāga bhīmpalāsī* (“Bhimplas,” 45, 55), the flatted notes are not indicated. Yet in diagrams in other parts of the book (36, 40, 42, 54, 60, 63, 67, 74, 75, 83), the author uses a system whereby flatted notes appear in hybrid form, combining the Western flat ( *b* ) symbol with the Indian *sargam* notes (*sā, re, gā*, and so on) and this is both confusing to the introductory reader and frustrating for the musician/scholar accustomed to either the Western staff system or the Hindustani system whereby flatted notes are generally underlined (that is, *gā, dhā*, and so on). Furthermore, in the text there are only passing references to the underlying philosophical basis of Indian music, Nāda-Brahman (*naad*, 13, 101), but without definition in the Glossary. Likewise, an important and indispensable ornament of Indian classical singing is *mīnd* (glide between notes), which is most readily represented by hand motion in singing but is only mentioned once (98) without definition. Beside these, the Glossary has omitted the term *khatka* (98), another important ornament that relates to melody and hand motion.

In branches of ethnomusicology, music is often viewed as a secular art form that is essentially a technical skill set acquired from teachers by music students and cultivated for its own sake. This approach frequently de-emphasizes the religious component of music that, if mentioned, is seen as a case of culture due to the anthropological bent of ethnomusicology. Indian classical music began in ancient India as a spiritual form of devotional worship and Yogic or Tantric self-realization in

conformity with Hindu mythical and religious themes. Despite the fact that Indian classical music has endured through many centuries and religious climates both Hindu and Muslim, these aspects have not disappeared. Unfortunately the author notes the *bhakti sampradāyas* (Hindu devotional lineages) as peripheral to Indian music at best (112), and also seems to downplay Hindu religiosity while nearly 90 percent of lyrics in Hindustani Khyal indicate religious situations or descriptions of mythic pastimes of the Hindu gods Krishna, Shiva, Durgā, Rāma, and so on. For example, a Hindi composition associated with Krishna is cited and analyzed by the author (74) without context or translation.

Another aspect that is missing from this book and which would have given more strength and breadth to the comparative discussion is the art of choral conducting in the West. Here one finds a vivid example of sustained hand and arm movement without vocal utterance, evidencing the kind of rigid separation between music and body that the Indian tradition of vocal music, according to the author, seeks to repudiate. Hidden surprises in the book include an interesting discussion of medieval neumes used in notating Gregorian chant, the tune “Happy Birthday” presented in Indian notation, and physiological analyses of throat and voice production. A noted strength of the book is where a particular gesture of a guru is isolated and found to be interpreted in diverse ways by his direct disciples, a feature only realized through genuine fieldwork and firsthand observation by the author.

Three appendices follow the six chapters, the first two containing diagrams of “Planes of the Body” and the “Teaching Lineages of Jitendra Abhisheki and Gajanan Rao Joshi,” and the third a “Note on Methods.” Next are useful [End] Notes followed by a handy Guide to Transliteration, Glossary of Terms, and List of Names. The Bibliography, while containing many current listings on diverse subject matters related to Indian music, performance, and gesture, lacks entries for the works of Fritz Staal, Stephen Slawek, and Bruno Latour mentioned in the text. There is also an Index.

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