

Editors' Introduction to the *AAMSA* journal

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WELCOME to Volume 1 of the journal *Analytical Approaches to Music of South Asia* (AAMSA).¹ Beginning with this inaugural volume from 2023, we plan to publish one volume per year, on rigorous and critical music-analytic research, broadly conceived, as applied to any kind of music current in or originating from the South Asian region, past or present.

[2] The recent expansion of “world music analysis”, over the last two decades, testifies that deep, comparative enquiry into aspects of structure and meaning in all music, informed not only by ethnomusicological or ethnographical, but also by theoretical and analytical methodologies for music, is of compelling interest, and essential for understanding human musical activity and experience in its richness and diversity. Then why dedicate a separate journal to music of the South Asian region?

[3] One reason for doing so is that the cultures of South Asia have for millennia been highly self-analytical, providing the world with important models for understanding aspects of human culture and experience (such as language). In music, there is a long theoretical tradition, rich technical vocabularies and aesthetic concepts, and rigorous pedagogical traditions. Materials for research also include extensive archives of recorded music since the beginning of the 20th century, and notated examples or repertoires from the mid-first millennium CE onwards, not to mention the accumulated experience and oral tradition of thousands of living expert practitioners. Although analysis of specific performances has not been common in the past, psychological, mathematical and computational approaches to music analysis now flourish in the region. There is abundant scope for a regionally-focussed journal.

[4] Another reason for a journal is that international interest in the music of this region has been especially strong since the 18th century, beginning with colonial-period scholars such as William Jones and Augustus Willard. The increasing availability of live and recorded performances to global audiences in the 20th century has encouraged serious international attention, and ethnomusicologists and other researchers have immersed themselves in various combinations of

performance, historical enquiry, ethnography, music theory and indeed analysis. An analytical or theoretical mindset has characterised much of this research, long before the recent expansion of world music analysis (for example in the work of Harold Powers or Nazir Jairazbhoy). An early focus on classical music has more recently expanded to embrace many other genres, including popular, film, religious and folk music (however defined). Recent interest in past and continuing effects of colonialism has fuelled an already existing concern for sharing of research materials and other benefits. International ethnomusicology and world music analysis conferences frequently include panels specifically focussed on South Asia.

[5] We therefore believe the conditions exist and the time is ripe to create a forum for dialogue, engagement and collaboration between South Asian and international researchers, between researchers and performers, and between South Asian and other traditions of music theory and analysis, leading, we hope, to greater mutual understanding. The composition of our editorial team and Advisory Panel testifies to this objective, as do the authors of our first volume. Through such engagement there is the opportunity to challenge and test assumptions about cultural specificity, or about cross-cultural or universal validity, and to discover new analytical approaches and hypotheses. The literature of Western music theory and analysis, and other related fields (such as mathematics, linguistics, cognitive and computational science, etc.) can be mined for methods of general applicability, while the insights of ethnomusicology, history, anthropology, and other humanities disciplines can help us to contextualise our analyses in relation to South Asian cultures, societies and histories.

[6] Just as we are keen to promote cross-cultural engagement and understanding, we are also keen to avoid too narrow an understanding of “analysis”. As we state in our [Call for Papers](#),

“we are open to the widest possible range of subject matter and methodologies, including: quantitative and qualitative approaches; transcription and analysis of performance or notated repertoires; comparative analysis of specific items, performances, or styles; mathematical approaches and computational analysis; evidence for the history of theory and performance; linguistic and cognitive approaches; organological and iconographical research; processes of composition and improvisation; relationships between music and dance, gesture, or the visual arts; soundscape analysis; etc”.

[7] In what, then, does analysis consist? According to the Greek etymology of the English word, it means the act of unbinding or separating something out into its component parts. But the purpose of such separation of components is to understand their relationships, and hence, the functioning of the whole; just as Henry Ford reportedly took his watch apart, but then re-assembled it, whereupon it worked again. Music is not exactly an object like a watch, and it has been characterised as a combination of human activities (“musicking”) that consists of much more than a particular series of sounds.² That series of sounds, nevertheless, has an integrity, as a tangible outcome of the whole musicking process, that invites understanding; and as our [Call for Papers](#) suggests, many other aspects of musicking can also be dis-assembled and re-assembled in

relation to the sound-series. An important kind of music analysis is thus context-sensitive analysis, where in the words of John Blacking, the aim (however difficult to achieve) is “to describe both music and its cultural background as dialectically interrelated parts of a total system”.³

[8] However, this also raises an issue—and one not exclusive to South Asian music—that there exist as many “cultural backgrounds” as there are musics. Many of these even present conflicting views on musical concepts, theories, analytical methodologies, and performance practices. (Witness, in this regard, the debates and arguments regarding the “correct” performance of a given *rāga* that exist among the various *gharānās* of South Asian performance practice.) For this reason, we remain sensitive to the fact that there may be no one “correct” analysis of any given music of South Asia, and we encourage our contributors to propose novel ways of understanding such music, provided they respect the facts. And we maintain an editorial policy of not rejecting a contribution because it conflicts with the traditional literature or practice of South Asian music, owing to these being by no means universally accepted within the traditions of South Asian music themselves.

[9] This is not to say that anything goes, or that one cannot impose any existing standards of research onto music of South Asia. There is space at the table for established principles of music theory, whether drawn from South Asian *saṅgīta śāstra*, or Western-music approaches such as Schenkerian analysis, or cognitive psychology, or linguistics, etc. The standards that such approaches propose for understanding specific musical phenomena may have cross-cultural or even universal validity. This notion of a principle, or doctrine, or top-down schema, that can frame one’s understanding of a given phenomenon, is deeply rooted in South Asian culture, as witness the ancient Indian concept of *śāstra*. A *śāstra* is a text, or a body of literature or doctrine, that systematically lays out the operational principles of a field of knowledge or human behaviour. Panini’s seminal grammar of the Sanskrit language (c. 500 BCE), which later stimulated the international discipline of linguistics, is a *śāstra*; and the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata (c. 500 CE?) is regarded as the foundation of dramatic, poetic and musical theory (including dance) in South Asia. Such *śāstras* in different domains establish theoretical frameworks for action that are prescriptive as well as descriptive; but they do so by making implicit, non-verbal, informal knowledge and practice (*prayoga*) explicit and systematic.⁴ Similarly, music analysis can infer sense-making regularities and meaningful features from the musical material itself, as a bottom-up, data-driven process, in harmony or even conflict with top-down theoretical principles.⁵ In a similar way any listener, it may be argued, intuitively and unconsciously analyses music when they hear it, because otherwise it would be experienced as random noise; to some extent we automatically relate its components to each other, to the whole, and to previously-learned schemas, even in the case of unfamiliar styles of music.

[10] We are fortunate that our first volume comprises three contributions that illustrate different approaches to analysing South Asian music, and also involve very different materials, even though they all focus on South Indian music, and especially on its rhythmic aspects.

Krishnaswamy and Wells show how an algorithmic approach to analysis of rhythmic processes can generate new possibilities for creative practice, demonstrating also the fruitfulness of collaboration. Paolo Pacciolla takes an integrated approach combining analysis of percussion compositions with ethnography, religion, and history, with respect to a ritual dance genre—*kaḷameḷuttu pāṭṭu* of central Kerala—from outside the classical tradition of Karnatak music. Arati Rao brings to life a historic genre of devotional song—the *suḷādi* songs of the Haridāsa sect—by analysis of notations in the context of theoretical developments in the 16th–17th centuries, leading to reconstruction of a selected example of a form of heterometrical composition no longer performed today. Between them these studies begin to map the range and diversity of materials and approaches available for the analysis of music of South Asia.

[11] We wish to thank the authors, for their contributions, co-operation, and patience while the processes of publication were worked out for the first time; and all who gave of their time and expertise behind the scenes, including reviewers, advisory panel members and editorial assistants.

[12] We look forward to receiving further contributions on topics within the broad scope of this journal (please see the [Call for Papers](#), and further guidance on the website [<https://southasia.iftawm.org/guidelines/>]). These may be submitted at any time: after peer review, revision, editing and formatting, we plan to issue each accepted article online when it is ready, which we hope will result in shorter production times. Articles published during a given year will cumulatively constitute a volume at the end of that year. Authors are encouraged to share their published work by posting links to the journal on academic networks and social media. We end by emphasising the following words from the Call for Papers:

“AAMSA is committed to inclusivity and diversity of authorship, particularly welcomes contributions from under-represented groups, and aims to promote dialogue between scholars within and outside the South Asian region. Multi-author collaborative research is encouraged. Copyright in articles published by AAMSA will remain with the authors.”

We look forward to hearing from you.

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NOTES

1. AAMSA is also conceived as a research unit “devoted to analytical scholarship on music from South Asia,” and as such is affiliated with the International Foundation for the Theory and Analysis of World Musics (<https://iftawm.org/>). This is itself a research unit in the Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation at the City University of New York Graduate Center. The AAMSA journal is a first initiative of the AAMSA research unit.
2. Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: the Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
3. Blacking, John. 1971. “Deep and surface structures in Venda music”, *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 3, 91–108. For an example of this kind of analysis, see Paolo Pacciolla’s article in this volume.
4. Pollock, Sheldon. 1985. “The theory of practice and the practice of theory in Indian intellectual history”, *Journal of the American Orientalist Society*, 1105.3, 499–519.
5. An example of such conflict can be seen in Arati Rao’s article in this volume (§105), where the metrical implications of a notated song conflict with the canonical segmentation of the *tāla aṭa*.