Indian Classical Music
by students of sitar virtuoso Pandit Kartik Seshadri

Wednesday, December 5, 2018 – 5:00 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Music Center Recital Hall

Selections will be announced from the stage by Mr. Seshadri.

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Indian classical music known as Raga Sangeeth, is an improvised art form based on the concepts of Raga and Tala. The historical origins of this spiritual musical tradition date back to the sacred Hindu scriptures known as Veda(s), which were the early precursors to the system of music that developed gradually. Raga(s) are the tonal idiom for improvisation and these precise melodic forms while essentially modal in structure, acquire their distinct musical identities from a complex range of factors: the Indian tonal system of perceiving the octave as 22 microtonal divisions (Sruti); the subtle nuances, inflections, and ornamentations associated with each Raga; and the particular emphasis of certain notes (Vadi, Samvadi) within the specific ascending and descending (Arohana and Avarohana) movement of each Raga. While all Raga(s) are specific to the time of the day (morning, evening or night) some Raga(s) are performed only during certain seasons, festivals or special occasions. The melodic and rhythmic aspect of our tradition is completely consistent with our aesthetic and philosophical idea that each Raga expresses a single dominant mood (Rasa). The nine Rasa(s) associated with our music are: Shringara (sensuous or erotic), Hasya (humorous), Karuna (pathos), Rudra (anger), Veera (heroic), Bhayanaka (fearful), Vibhatsa (disgust), Adbhuta (wonderment) and Shanta (tranquility).

The second aspect of improvisation in Indian classical music pertains to the concept of rhythm known as Tala. A Tala is conceptualized in cycles of beats ranging anywhere from a three beat cycle to a 108 beat cycle. There are other complex cycles in fractional beats such as 41⁄2, 61⁄2, 111⁄2 to mention a few, that make for complicated improvisations. An accomplished musician of Indian classical music has to develop complete mastery and facility over both Raga and Tala to acquire the total freedom of improvisation within the complex constraints that Raga and Tala impose on the performer. Indian classical music is predominantly steeped in melody and rhythm as opposed to the ideas of contrast manifested in harmony, counterpoint and modulation which shape traditions such as European art music or Jazz. The challenge of our music lies in the musician’s ability to shape and develop an entire musical edifice of a Raga and to express its fullest depth and excitement. This is acquired through many years of Talim (training) with a master musician (Guru).

A typical performance of instrumental Indian classical music begins with Alap, Jor and Jhala rendered on the solo instrument such as Sitar, Sarod, etc. While the Alap is a slow, spiritual, non-metric rendition of the Raga, the following sections Jor and Jhala are somewhat free and bound to a more defined pulse. The Gat (theme) follows the previous sections and it is in this section that the concept of Tala is introduced and the accompanying percussion instrument (such as Tabla or Pakhawaj) joins the main instrument.

**Sitar:** The Sitar is one of the most popular stringed instruments of northern and eastern India and has gained much attention in the West during the last few decades. The instrument usually consists of 20 strings of which seven strings constitute as the main playing strings. There are 13 sympathetic strings that respond in sympathy to the main strings. The instrument also has a track of twenty metal frets that are movable and can be tuned to the specific tonality of each raga. The main facet of the instrument is that the strings can be pulled or stretched over the metal frets to obtain gliding and melismatic effects much in keeping with the ideal of Indian music to emulate the human voice.

**Tabla:** The Tabla is a two piece drum referred to as Tabla for the right-handed drum and Bayan for the left-handed drum. The Tabla (right-hand) is a pitch specific drum tuned to the main tonic note of the performer. The Bayan is a bass drum that can produce a variety of sounds by exerting pressure on the skin of the instrument. The instrument is tuned with a metal hammer.

**Tambura:** This background instrument also referred to as Tanpura is used to lend a drone or continuo effect for the performer and listener alike. The instrument usually consists of 4 to 5 strings and is tuned to the main notes of the Raga.