

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Master Teachers
Subject: Ali Akbar Khan
Discipline: Music

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Master sarode player and teacher Ali Akbar Khan teaching a class at the Ali Akbar Khan College of Music in San Rafael. Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Master Teachers

SUBJECT

Ali Akbar Khan & the Classical Music of North India

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

STORY SYNOPSIS

Ali Akbar Khan is one of the finest musicians of North India in the world, and he's devoted his life to passing along his gift to several generations of musicians, young and old. Spark visits Khan at the Ali Akbar Khan College of Music in San Rafael, California.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group
- Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance
- Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently
- Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another
- Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to the unique structure of North Indian classical music, as well its history and precepts
- To provide context for the understanding of North Indian classical music
- To inspire students to acquire a greater understanding of Indian culture through the music

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- SPARK story "At the Foot of the Master" about Ali Akbar Khan on VHS or DVD and necessary equipment
- Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sounds card, printer
- Cassette player, CD player, or computer audio program

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Pencils, pens, and paper

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

- Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects
- Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
- Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
- Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems
- Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at www.kqed.org/spark/education

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

In his native India, Ali Akbar Khan is considered a national living treasure, having passed down his musical mastery to more than 10,000 students worldwide. With a teaching style entirely distinct from that of Western classical musicians, Khan composes new ragas on the spot as his students listen and try to play by ear. In "Master Teachers," Spark sits in on a class at the Ali Akbar College of Music.

The Ali Akbar College of Music (AACM) educates students in the classical music of North India. Khan founded the college in Calcutta, India in 1956, but opened a second school a decade later in San Rafael, in response to the extraordinary interest of his Western students. Now in his eighties, Khan currently maintains a schedule of six classes per week, for nine months of the year.

The primary teachers at the AACM are Khan (also known as Khansahib), who plays a 25 stringed instrument called the sarode, and tabla player Swapan Chaudhuri. From these maestros students learn the musical skills necessary to play their instruments well according to time honored traditions of North India. In class students learn to play the music on the instrument of their choice—either Indian or Western—applying what they learn by listening, playing, and watching the master teacher. Students are also encouraged to learn the vocal music that serves as the foundation for all North Indian music. Mastering the vocalizing of the Indian rhythmic and melodic structures is considered a prerequisite to understanding how music is played on any instrument.

North Indian classical music is passed through the generations by listening and imitating teachers and memorizing lessons—prior to the current era there was very little written notation. Generations of classical Indian musicians have learned in this manner—by listening to a master teacher or musician and practicing until they learn the pieces.

Since the 1960s, however, every one of Khan's classes has been carefully notated.



Master musician and teacher Ali Akbar Khan playing the sarode for students at the Ali Akbar Khan College of Music. Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

SPARK visits Khan's classes, as students learn the ragas of North Indian classical music in the traditional method—by watching and listening to Khan and playing along. Khan learned to play in this manner, by watching and imitating his father, and now he's passing his knowledge onto own son, Alam, who is learning to play the sarode by studying in his classes.

Born in Bangladesh in 1922, Khan began his musical studies at the age of three. Later, concentrating on vocals and the sarode, Khan became the court musician to the Maharaja of Jodhpur and made the first Western lp recording of Indian classical music. Throughout his career, he has composed and recorded music, including for international films. Khan continues to perform all over the world and has received some of music's highest honors, including the National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

THE BIG PICTURE

There are two different systems of classical music in the Indian subcontinent; the Hindustani system, prominent in the north, and the Karnatik system, more common in the south. The music played and taught by Ali Akbar Khan at his College of Music is Hindustani, although the fundamentals are similar in both styles.

Indian classical music is based on a different musical structure than its Western counterpart. An Indian classical musician weaves a tapestry of different tones to create a pleasing sound. The structure consists of three overlaying sounds—the drone, the raga and the tala. The drone is a continual series of pitches that sounds throughout a performance. This wash of tones is a point of reference for everything else, like a “home base” to which musicians return after improvisation. Upon this drone, musicians layer ragas (harmonies) and talas (rhythms).

Raga is a word that has no exact English equivalent – conceptually, it can be thought of as a hybrid form that utilizes a specific musical scale (a set of notes) within the framework of a series of musical phrases that can be used to evoke emotional settings as a performer desires. Whereas a tune would not permit improvisation, a raga allows a performer freedom within a predetermined structure. A raga is made from of a range of tones (at least 5) like a scale, but unlike a scale in which notes are equal, ragas have a range of notes in which some are given more emphasis than others. There may be familiar phrases used in the performance of a raga, or specific ways in which the notes cannot be used. Every raga is associated with a particular mood, a particular time of day, or season of the year. The result of this freedom is a melodic structure that is easily recognizable, yet infinitely variable. No two performances of the same raga will be identical. The same raga may be played for a short period or a long period, and may create different moods and effects, yet still be the same raga.

In the same way that ragas are melodic structures, talas are rhythmic structures. The tala can be thought of a rhythmic cycle, divided into a set series of beats that are collected into groups. A tala is usually represented by a series of strokes (called “bols”) on the tabla, reflecting the groupings within the tala.

A tabla player varies the strokes that he or she plays, but will do so in a manner consistent with the basic rhythm of the tala.

In particular, a player will differentiate between the tali (on-beats) and the khali (unstruck sounds or non-emphasized durations) defined for each tala. The most important beat of the tala is the first one, called a sum. In performance, the soloist may go off on a long improvised phrase that may last for many cycles of the tala, but will always return to the composition on the sum.

Ali Akbar Khan plays the sarode, one of two plucked string instruments in Hindustani music. The sarode is a fretless instrument that typically has 25 strings. Of these 25, fifteen are “sympathetic” strings, and six are tuned to various drones, leaving four primary playing strings. The sarode can be played with fingers or fingernails, or with a plectrum made out of a piece of coconut shell, which is similar to a guitar pick.



Ali Akbar Khan’s son Alam follows instruction from his father during class. Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS

Ambrose, Kay. Classical Dances and Costumes of India. New York: Allied Publishers, 1985.

Banerji, Projesh. Basic Concepts of Indian Dance. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1984.

Clayton, Martin. Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance. Book and CD edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. -- In depth analysis of North Indian classical music raga (melody) structure and contents from the focus of time.

Jairazbhoy, Nazir Ali. The Rags of North Indian Music: Their Structure and Evolution. New York: South Asia Books, 1995. - Explores the basics of Indian classical music ragas (melodies), and their structure and development throughout history.

Menon, Raghava R. Penguin Dictionary of Indian Classical Music. New York: South Asia Books, 1995. - Basics of Indian Classical Music, with illustrations and photographs. Perfect for the beginner in Indian music.

Pesch, Ludwig. Illustrated Companion to South Indian Classical Music. New York: South Asia Books, 1999. - Showcases the instruments, practices, performances, and history of South Indian Classical music in images.

Saltzman, Paul. Beatles in Rishikesh. New York: Viking Press, 2000. - In depth look at the impact and influence of Indian music and traditions on the music and performance of the Beatles.

WEB SITES

Ali Akbar Khan College of Music Web site - <http://www.aacm.org>.

Asavari School of Indian Music & Dance - <http://www.asavari.org/index.html>.

Buckingham Music - Web site, a full resource site for Indian classical music, including a full explanation of the structure and quality of the music, illustrations and descriptions of the instruments, and a “store” to purchase books, audio recordings, videos, and instruments -

<http://www.buckinghammusic.com/tall.html>
<http://www.buckinghammusic.com/index.html>

Carnatic Music Association of North America – Web site including listings of schools and associations for information and learning - <http://www.cmana.org>.

Center for the Performing Arts of India at the University of Pittsburgh - <http://www.univ-relations.pitt.edu/india3>

Chandra and David’s Tabla Web Site – A complete site on the tabla, its history and how to play it - <http://www.chandrakantha.com/tablasite>.

Chitresh Das Dance Company and School - Marin-based Chandam School of Indian Music and Dance, the school of Chitresh Das and the Chitresh Das Dance Company, including schedule and classes – <http://www.kathak.org>

Garamchai - Listing of schools and academies offering Indian dance and US music school - <http://www.garamchai.com/danceschools.htm#California>

Raga Net - Web site and an educational magazine for the music and arts of India, featuring lessons on Indian music and the various instruments such as sitar, tabla, dilruba, etc.; site also offers gifs, examples of audio excerpts, and midi files - <http://www.raganet.com/RagaNet>.

MEDIA

CD-Ali Akbar Khan-Signature Series/Vol.1 CD-AMMP 9001
Ragas Chandranandan, Gauri Manjari and Jogiya Kalengra.

CD-Ali Akbar Khan-Signature Series/Vol.2 CD-AMMP 9002
Three Ragas: Medhavi, Khammaj and Bhairavi Bhatiyar with Rigmala.

CD-Ali Akbar Khan-Then and Now. Sindhu Bhairavi, Pilu Baroowa with Chatural Lal (1955). Hemant and Hindol-Hem with Zakir Hussain f(1994).

CD-Ali Akbar Khan-Passing on the Tradition -AMMP 9608
Marwa and Puriya Kalyan from a 1995 Concert.

CD-Ravi Shankar-Maestro's Choice Vol.1 CD-A-91003
Asa Bhairav, Kaushi Kanrra and Misra Gara Dhun.

CD-Ravi Shankar-Live in Concert CD-NF 150057 Asa Bhairav and Misra Bhairavi.

CD & Book: "Learning Tabla" by David Courtney - CD & book set for beginners, including boles and more. Purchase information at: <http://www.buckinghammusic.com/indianmusicutorials/pages/tablatut.html>.

Video-Shivkumar Sharma and Gungubai Hangal-Live AV 126
Shivkumar Sharma plays Rag Kaushi Kanada and Gangubai Hangal sings Rag Todi. Both performances are from the Savai Gadharva Festival in 1990.

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Ali Akbar Khan College of Music - <http://www.aacm.org>.

Basant Bahar – A non-profit Bay Area organization for the promotion and preservation of the heritage of classical music and dance of India - <http://www.basantbahar.org>

Chhandam School of Indian Music and Dance, the school of Chitresh Das and the Chitresh Das Dance Company, including performance schedule and classes - <http://www.kathak.org>.

LOTUS (LOcal Talent UnderScored) - a platform for Bay area local artists to showcase their performance skills in Indian Classical Music. Concerts are held on the third Saturday or Sunday of every month in the afternoon - <http://www.svlotus.com>.

South Indian Fine Arts – San Jose-based organization dedicated to the promotion, preservation, and presentation of South Indian fine arts. SIFA goal is to advance South Indian arts both through the promotion of leading artists as well as through community involvement in various musical and artistic activities – <http://www.southindiafinearts.org>.

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Bol

The abstract spoken syllables of the language of Indian dance, drum and music

Drone

The constant pitches in North Indian classical music, usually played by a stringed instrument

Gharana

Meaning “house” or “family” a gharana refers *a lineage of teaching a defined musical style*. Most present day gharanas began 100-300 years ago when the Mogul Empire in India collapsed. Gharanas dedicated to dance, singing, and instrumental music used to be found throughout North India. Organizationally, a gharana was similar to a craftsman’s guild. For a musician or singer, having a lineage back to a notable gharana was a prerequisite for obtaining a position in the royal courts. Creatively, each gharana defined a certain “style” or “school.” In the 20th century, the isolation of the gharana system limited an artist’s skill, techniques, and repertoire when a diverse musical knowledge became more desirable. Today, gharanas exist only in vestigial form - the loss of royal patronage coupled with the loss of the individual artistic identities of each house in the face of changing tastes and expectations has virtually destroyed the system

Khali

Meaning “empty,” in music, the khali is a counterpart to the clap of the hand or tali. Together, they are the foundation of keeping time in North Indian music - called “kriya.” The khali is used to designate the first beats of a measure of music. The first beat of a cycle (called a sum) is strongly stressed. The khali is also a way in which singers communicate with the tabla player.

Tabla

A two-part drum originated roughly in 18th India – the tabla is the centerpiece of North Indian classical music. The right-hand drum, called a dayan, dahina or tabla is a cone-shaped drum carved out of a one piece of hard wood. The shell has one opening covered by a stretched animal skin or hide. The left-hand drum is called a bayan or duggi and is bowl-shaped, made of polished copper, brass, bronze, or clay. The bayan also has a hide-covered end

Tala

The tala measures time. It is a complete cycle of a fixed number of beats defined in bars, each one divided into the smallest fraction. It maintains the balance in music. There are over 100 talas, but only 30 talas are in common usage and only about 10-12 are played regularly. Some talas have a 3 beat cycle, others have a 108 beat cycle, depending upon the situation in which they are played

Laya

The tempo of music, sustaining uniformity in time in 3 divisions -- vilambit, madhya and drut. Laya can also refer to the number of pulses per beat, such as aad laya which in western nomenclature would refer to triplets

Matra

The smallest unit of the tala

Tali (or Tal)

The clap of the hands or “on beats” for keeping time in Indian music (see “Khali” above). A tali can range in number, for instance, there are 16 beats in the tal played for most Kathak dance, the classical dance of North India. A 16-beat tal called is a teental.

Raga

Indian music is based upon two important musical structures – the raga and the tala. Raga is the melodic form while tala is the rhythmic. A raga has 7 notes and it functions in much the same way as a scale does in Western music, although the details are quite different.

Sum

The sum is the division of the tala (rhythm) and the stress on the first beat. Talas that have the same number of beats may have a stress on different beats, e.g. a bar of 10 beats may be divided as: 2-3-2-3, or 3-3-4, or 3-4-3. The 'sum' is the most important stressed beat throughout a recital of Indian music. Within this structure of fixed beats, musicians can improvise everyone comes back with stress on this first beat of the cycle

Theka

A theka is an arrangement of bols in a specific manner to indicate a tala. The first beat of a theka is the sum.

SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

North Indian Music

Consider the different shapes of the various instruments played by North Indian musicians, such as the sarode, sarangi, the israj, the tabla, the sitar, and the harmonium (descriptions and images available at <http://www.buckinghammusic.com>). Divide the instruments into strings, percussion, and wind instruments. Then ask students to compare them to Western instruments of the same type. What are the differences? What are the similarities?

Using the information about Hindustani music in this guide, and the recordings listed, ask students to identify the different instruments by listening – the sarode, the sitar, the tabla, etc. Challenge students to identify the drone (the constant sound or pitch that is heard throughout a piece), the raga (the melody), and the tala (the improvisational segments).

Building on the questions above, play a recording of North Indian classical music for students. After listening to a single composition all the way through 1-2 times, divide the students into three groups – one to follow the drone, one to follow the tala, and one to follow the raga. Challenge them to clap, hum, or tap their part of the composition along with the musicians.

Have students listen to a recording or live performance of North Indian music and the various instruments mentioned above. Through discussion, make comparisons to other musical forms that they are familiar with, such as Western, Latin, Chinese, Filipino, etc. Have them explain what they liked best about the Indian recording/live performance and why.

Invite students to write a 1,000-word essay on North Indian Classical music and Western music and culture. Their essay should offer a comparative analysis about the styles of music and the relationship to their cultures.

RELATED STANDARDS

MUSIC

Grade 3

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Listen to, Analyze, and Describe Music

1.3 Identify melody, rhythm, harmony, and timbre in selected pieces of music when presented aurally.

1.5 Describe the way in which sound is produced on various instruments.

Grade 5

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.4 Describe the influence of various cultures and historical events on musical forms and styles.

Grade 7

AESTHETIC VALUING

4.2 Apply criteria appropriate for the style or genre of music to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of performances, compositions, arrangements, and improvisations by oneself and others.

Grades 9-12 Advanced

AESTHETIC VALUING

4.3 Compare and contrast the musical means used to create images or evoke feelings and emotions in works of music from various cultures.

SPARKLER:

* In pairs, create a dance, using the music of North India as a point of departure, and thinking about the rhythm and mood of the music as well as words of the song, if any. Sing or chant the song as an accompaniment to the dance. Perform the dance for an audience of classmates.

Finding Out About India

Project a world map onto a wall in the classroom, and ask students to find India and identify the Northern and Southern halves. Move on to a map of India, and spend time with the class locating the individual states in the North and Southern regions. Suggest that students find out about the different ways that people could get to India from California and report back to the class.

Ask students to search the Internet and visit their library to uncover basic facts about India, and the differences in culture and customs between the North and South. They should then focus on the music and the difference between North and South Indian music forms (Hindustani and Karnatic). Which instruments are played in the North? Which instruments are played in the South?

Encourage students to try to find examples of music from either region to play to the class– they should look in their library, asking the librarian for assistance, or ask friends, family and relatives if they have examples of Indian music at home.

Music and Community

Ask students to explore and report to the class on music in their community. Point out that they can use such resources as telephone directories, newspapers, guidebooks, fliers posted on bulletin boards, etc. Ask students to focus on answering these questions: What is available for audiences of live music? What is available for those who wish to participate in creating music?

Numbers - Counting to 10 in Hindi

Teach students to count to 10 in Hindi, the national language of India. The numbers 1-10 are: ek, do (as in doe a deer), teen, char (as in charbroiled), paunch, che (rhymes with hey), saut (rhymes with not), dus, gyarah, and barah.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



Rhythmic Cycles

Students can learn North Indian musical rhythms by creating them visually. Ask students to each draw a diagram of a clock. Then add the divisions of a 16 beat tal (called teental) by writing in the numbers as follows: enter 1 where 12 would be, 5 where 3 would be, 9 where 6 would be, and a 13 where 9 would be. This clock now represents the full 16 beat tal. Then have the students count aloud following the clock notations, starting with one and ending on one. You will notice as you come around the clock that there is no 16. As a result, when you arrive back at the beginning of the cycle, you are once again on 1 rather than 16. When saying the beat aloud, end on 1. Indian musicians and dancers must always end a composition on “one.”

RELATED STANDARDS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Grade 6

World History and Geography: Ancient Civilizations

6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of India.

1. Locate and describe the major river system and discuss the physical setting that supported the rise of this civilization.
2. Discuss the significance of the Aryan invasions.
3. Explain the major beliefs and practices of Brahmanism in India and how they evolved into early Hinduism.
4. Outline the social structure of the caste system.
5. Know the life and moral teachings of Buddha and how Buddhism spread in India, Ceylon, and Central Asia.
6. Describe the growth of the Maurya empire and the political and moral achievements of the emperor Asoka.
7. Discuss important aesthetic and intellectual traditions (e.g., Sanskrit literature, including the *Bhagavad Gita*; medicine; metallurgy; and mathematics, including Hindu-Arabic numerals and the zero).