

**Beyond Listening:**  
**A study on the audience's motives for attending live Hindustani classical concerts**

by

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## **Abstract**

Hindustani classical music audiences are considered to be an active and engaging group at live concerts. This thesis aims to explore the motives of different types of concert goers for attending live Hindustani concerts and their role in sustaining the tradition of live Hindustani performances. The study addresses the historical, cultural, social and pedagogical factors in relation to live Hindustani concerts and audience attendance. The audience's perspectives and experiences about listening to Hindustani classical concerts were evaluated through empirical research. The research findings draw upon participant observation, personal interviews and qualitative analysis. From the study, it is evident that the audience's purpose behind attending Hindustani concerts is multifaceted. While concerts are generally perceived as an avenue for entertainment, concert performances also act as a platform for the audience to enhance their musical knowledge and to meet like-minded individuals. The classical concert venues can hence be considered as a center for learning and social networking.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work done by Shruti Shashikumar Nair. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Indian Classical concerts,” No. Pro00087962, October 11, 2019.

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## BACKGROUND

This research reflects my passion and interests in Indian classical music as a vocal instructor, a performer, and a student of Hindustani music. My initial research plan was to study the evolution of Hindustani classical concerts, and I commenced my fieldwork in India to focus on questions related to the concert evolution over the last decade: what have been the changes in areas such as performing pieces, composition, style of presentation and use of technology during live concerts? What factors contributed to this evolution, and has the popularity of Indian classical concerts outside India had an influence on the on-stage presentations of classical *raga*<sup>1</sup> (scale) and improvisations? With a busy season of classical concerts year-round in the sub-continent, it was not challenging for me to shortlist the concerts for my fieldwork. However, during my first fieldwork event, a conversation I had with an elderly gentleman, a regular concert attendee, changed my perspective on classical music audiences. I realized the broader scope for a study on the Hindustani concert attendees and their listening approaches at live concerts.

My first fieldwork experience was a concert organized by GSB Sabha in Mumbai on January 05, 2020. The concert showcased a mix of instrumental presentations and vocal recitals. At this concert, while I continued to take notes amid the performances, the gentleman seated next to me asked, “Are you able to enjoy the performance if you are continuously taking notes?” This was then followed by an interesting conversation. He added, “When I am listening [to a performance], I cannot think about anything else. Though I may not understand [classical music] like you do, I feel that I am completely involved and connected with the artist. This live

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘Raga’ originated in Sanskrit and is defined as ‘the act of coloring or dyeing’ (the mind and mood/emotions in this context) and is therefore referred metaphorically to any feeling or passion especially love, affection, sympathy, desire, interest, motivation, joy, or delight (Mathur et.al, 2015, 1)].



performance is the artist's offering for me and hence, I feel important." I was reminded that my listening approaches were different as a student and as a musician. The conversation with the gentleman encouraged me to further explore the distinct groups of audience and their listening behavior at concerts. I was intrigued and convinced that the audience has a role at concerts—beyond listening.

Indian classical music, irrespective of Hindustani (North Indian) or Carnatic (South Indian) style of performances, has a prominent social and cultural set of conventions that can be evident in the form of repertoires, performers' gestures during performances and the *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-student tradition). Besides these influences, it is significant to note how the musicians and performers of classical music treat or imagine their listeners or audience. As shared by the gentleman, many Indian classical artists consider their performances as an offering (or a service) to the audience, and this consideration underlines the importance given to the audience. With my initial fieldwork experience and the insights gained, I decided to pivot my study to understand the motives of concert goers for attending live Hindustani classical concerts and their role in contributing to the sustenance of live Hindustani performances.

## INTRODUCTION

Expert music connoisseurs, or *rasikas*, are especially conspicuous: usually sitting as close as possible to the musicians and following the performance intently, they react visibly and audibly to the music they hear. As they listen, they demonstrate their musical engagement through a repertoire of conventional gestures and comments, using these to interact both with the musicians and with fellow audience members. (Alaghband-Zadeh 2017, 207)

The above lines are taken from Chloe Alaghband-Zadeh’s article, “Listening to North Indian Classical Music: How Embodied Ways of Listening Perform Imagined Histories and Social Class.” Alaghband-Zadeh, an ethnomusicologist, has analyzed how embodied ways of attending to music are associated with history, status, class and prestige, where she has described the act of listening as a form of embodied performance. The scholarly works on embodied listening of Hindustani classical music signify the active involvement of the audience at these concerts. The audience, referred to as *rasikas*,<sup>2</sup> play a vital role in Indian classical music live performances. *Rasikas* are considered as “conspicuous at live performances,” where they gesture and comment to express their enjoyment of the music (ibid.). The audience’s active participation and appreciation for ingenious performance pieces can be observed in the form of gestures and loud remarks like “*arey wah*” (oh wow), “*sabhash*” (well done). Hindustani classical music presentations take place in a wide variety of settings, from informal *baithak* style *mehfil*—a small scale event, where most listeners are seated on the floor, either at the same level or just below the stage—to large *mehfils* at commercial concert halls or arenas, where listeners are seated on chairs at some distance from the performers. The word *baithak* means a sitting place/room which itself

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<sup>2</sup> The word *rasika* is derived from the Sanskrit word which means full of passion and refers to a connoisseur who has the ability to appreciate a field (fine arts in this context).

derives from the Hindi word *baithna* that means “to sit”. The small-scale intimate gathering are generally perceived by *rasikas* as the ideal or traditional arrangement for classical music performances. This may be partly to do with an “assumed link to courtly musical performance in the past, where an intimate setting allowed for rich verbal and non-verbal interactions between the audience and the performers” (Clayton and Leante 2015, 417). Today, a typical *baithak mehfil* accommodates around 50 to 120 people with a dedicated space at the center of the venue for the audience to sit, where they are usually seen seated cross-legged on the floor. During my fieldwork, I sensed an informal and intimate social setting in *baithak* style *mehfils*. The concert organizers of small scale *mehfils* consider *rasikas* more like guests invited to their homes, and offer them an ambience of musical experience.

Since there is no assigned seating at a *baithak*, the *rasikas* usually choose their own seating of preference. It is an assumed cultural code of conduct to leave the chairs, which may be arranged on the sides or corners of the venue, to the senior citizens among the audience. I noticed that most of the audience members, especially the students who came in groups, preferred to be seated on the floor by choice. Unlike a commercial concert setting, where the performers are distanced from the audience by a raised stage or podium, *mehfil* setting enables audience to be in closer proximity to the performers. The performing artists sit on either an elevated or a carpeted area. In the case of a vocal concert, the center position on the stage is taken by the lead vocalist accompanied by a *tabla* player seated on the right to provide rhythmic accompaniment. Seated to the left is usually a key or string instrumentalist who provides the melodic accompaniment to the vocalist. The established musicians are seen accompanied by their students who play *tanpura* (drone instrument) or support with vocals.

The rasikas perceive that music performances in baithak style mehfiles reach heightened levels of performer-audience interaction, which typically tends to be lost in a big concert hall setting. During a casual discussion regarding the significance of audience sitting on the floor at mehfiles, a senior audience member shared that since Indian classical music is traditionally performed by sitting on the floor, the listeners extend the same posture to be in the same level as the performer. In a literal sense, this also implies that the audience are as proficient as the performers. The success of a mehfil depends equally on the artists' performance as well as the audience response to the performance. The etiquette and expertise of how and when to appreciate during a performance can be imbibed only by attending mehfiles regularly. The musicians and the audience share an unspoken level of understanding which can be gauged only by being a regular rasika. The understanding and interaction between the performers and the audience is not about quantifying audience responses to the musical performance, but about the musical experience attained through the act of performing and listening respectively within a shared space.

In other words, the musical experience at a mehfil is not merely about the performance of the artists or about how many instances the audience respond with gestures and/or words of appreciation. It is about how well the performers and audience co-exist to create an intimate musical experience for both. The intimate experience for the audience at mehfiles<sup>3</sup> can also be attributed to the improvisatory style of presenting ragas. Along with the presentation of ragas, which form the major component of any Hindustani classical performance, the capability of the performing artist and the accompanying musicians to execute the raga improvisations in a well-coordinated manner is what keeps the audience enthralled. This experience caters to strong

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<sup>3</sup> Katherine Schofield describing the historical context of the *mehfil* states that “authentic performance in Indian music today lies not in the restoration of old works, but in the reproduction of the fabled courtly listening environment of the mehfil, in which the raga is king for a time, and patron and performer together its humble servants” (Schofield 2010, 502)

performer-audience interactions during live mehfil. The audience responses during a mehfil are highly valued by the performers who take those as “an evidence of both a knowledgeable audience and a successful performance” (Alaghband-Zadeh 2017, 208).

While there is a vast body of literature on Indian classical music around the areas of improvisatory nature of the presentation, rhythm patterns and performer-audience interactions, the research works on the classical music audience and their experiences at live concerts are relatively limited. The existing studies primarily focus on audience interactions and their influence on artists or performing musicians. Hence, it is timely to study the audience’s perspectives to understand their motives for attending concerts and the takeaways from the live performances. With this thesis, I aim to explore the motives of the concert goers for attending live Hindustani classical concerts and understand whether the motives impact the way they listen at concerts. I would also like to determine if the audience can be categorized based on their motives, and evaluate their role in sustaining the tradition of live Hindustani performances.

## **CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH WORKS ON CONCERT AUDIENCE AND LISTENING EXPERIENCES**

The existing studies of concert audiences are spread across a wide range of disciplines including musicology, arts marketing, sociology, cultural studies and music psychology. The character of concert audiences and their listening experiences vary with each musical genre. Musicologist Franco Fabbri defines musical genre as “a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules” (1980, 52). One way of conceptualizing the audience is to view them as groups of individuals who share different levels of involvement with what they are seeing (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, 53). The different cultural and social conventions for how to behave before, during and after the concerts can impact the role of the audience, which may be dependent on factors including the type of music, performing artists and performance venue. Bonita Kolb, in the article, “The Decline of the Subscriber Base: A Study of the Philharmonia Orchestra Audience,” provides a model for representing audience members along a continuum of consumer, fan, cultist, enthusiast and petty producer (Kolb 2001, 53). Although the model was originally used to describe audiences of mass media, this can be adapted to describe concert attenders (Kolb 2001). The first group of audience members, the consumers, would attend a few concerts randomly and have a general interest in classical music. Fans, the second group, attend more frequently than the consumers, and would develop an interest in specific composers or certain star soloists. Their interests go beyond passive viewing, such as reading articles about their favorite stars and programs, and purchasing recordings of the music to listen to at home. Concert cultists would develop an interest in a specialized area, and pursue their interest by attending pre-performance talks on the subjects. The concert enthusiasts would pursue their interest in a more formal manner such as becoming subscribers of

an orchestra, as well as attending educational events and planning their social events around the concerts. For both the concert cultists and enthusiasts, concert attendance would become an important part of their identity and lifestyle. The last audience group, the petty producers, would not be content with merely appreciating the music, but would become amateur musicians, or arts professionals. Scholars Stephanie Pitts and Christopher Spencer categorize the classical concertgoers as “consumers” considering that typically classical music audiences are among the more privileged members of the society, with the time, wealth, and level of education assumed necessary to gain full enjoyment of a professional performance (2008, 228). However, the “fan” behavior tends to be associated with the audience of popular music: in the words of sociomusicologist Simon Frith, this audience consists of “fans who get their kicks from being a necessary part of the overall process” (1987, 140).

The distinct nature and experience of audiences can be attributed to how they are positioned within a live concert setup. Being an audience member at a classical music concert is distinctly different from being at a pop or a rock music concert. For instance, in comparison to audiences at a classical music concert, who are usually seated in darkened silence, the attendees at rock concerts often stand, bringing them closer to one another. While rock concerts offer a group experience, with the freedom for an individual expression in this experience, many classical concerts offer an individual audience experience, with the rules of a group expression influencing the individual experience (Vang-Pedersen, 2015, 42). Compared to other musical genres such as pop or jazz where it is acceptable to clap or cheer during the performances, the audience at Western classical music concerts generally restricts any form of response or appreciation until the end of a musical performance. In such concerts, performers are largely unable to gauge audience responses, as audience feedback such as cheering or clapping is often restrained to pre-and-post performance.

In contrast to the Western classical audiences who are expected to sit in silent contemplation during performance, audience members in jazz performance can be viewed as active participants, with their “responses to a musician's (often improvised) performance forming a 'communication loop' between performers and listeners” (Berliner 1994, 459). Using the framework of musicological reception studies, Western classical concert audiences are seen as quiet and thus passive “recipients of a message from the composer conveyed ‘top-down’ via the conductor and performers” (Toelle and Sloboda 2019, 3). In comparison, Indian classical music audiences, on the other hand, can be perceived as “remarkably active and noisy” (Alaghband-Zadeh 2017, 207). The role of audience is highly dependent on the relationship between the performers and audience and the socio-cultural setting in which a musical event takes place. Melissa Dobson, a music scholar, points out that audience musical engagement can be enhanced by a performer’s expression in the form of gestures and body movements or another audience member’s level of engagement. In her study, “Between stalls, stage and score: An investigation of audience experience and enjoyment in classical music performance,” Dobson (2010) explains the interdisciplinary nature of audience research by analyzing different levels of audience experiences based on:

- their levels of knowledge, prior experience, and liking of the works performed (*the field of experimental aesthetics within psychology*)
- the degree to which they feel comfortable and at home within a specific concert hall (*environmental psychology's 'place attachment'*).
- their level of excitement towards a celebrity status of a star performer, or by the uncertainty of attending a live event (*cultural and performance studies*)

The traditional audience research works focused primarily on aspects including audience demographics, participants’ interests, attendance levels and similar parameters to quantify success of a performance. These studies, in general, offered only little insight about the influence of live



musical environments on the audience (Kolb 2001). What make these studies less audience-oriented is the lack of exploring audience perspectives on musical performances. Dobson states that “the focus of traditional musicological research has been primarily on musical works and there has been a ‘lack of consideration’ from both musicology and music psychology about studies on audience experiences at classical music concerts” (2010, 6). The importance of musical works/texts over musical experience is perhaps the reason why less significance has been given to studying *who* listens to the music and how they perceive their musical experience. Sociologists Abercrombie and Longhurst explore the different types of audience experiences and claim that everyone becomes an audience in a larger context of a society (1998). Building on the works of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s social stratification of cultural tastes, Pitts states that there is a broader theoretical context of audience research in sociology and cultural studies (2016). It can be interpreted that people’s taste in culture and their social class can reflect in the way they listen and engage with the art (Bourdieu 1984). “Being a member of an audience is no longer an exceptional event, nor even an everyday event. Rather, it is constitutive of everyday life” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, 68). In their study, Abercrombie and Longhurst categorize the audiences as simple, mass and diffused in reference to the experiences of football fans. The simple audience members who attend a football game can become members of the mass audience when they watch the highlights of the same game. However, by wearing a football jersey, the football fan is incorporated into a diffused audience “performing his or her own identity as a fan in doing so” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, 160; Dobson 2010, 7). By definition, the simple audience event is considered to take place in a public space while the mass audience event usually exist in private places; and these events can be differentiated based on the level of audience-performer interactions. I feel this analogy can be extended to the context of Hindustani classical music

audience. A simple audience who attends classical concerts can be considered as a mass audience when they watch a recorded version of the same concert they attended or when they get involved in social media interactions related to the concert. Further, the mass audience becomes part of the diffused audience when they start following particular artists and get inspired—to learn and/or be entertained— from their performances.

## **1.1 Significance of live performances for audience experience**

The significance of live concerts, or rather the importance of liveness, is attributed to the presence of a performer and the audience at a common place. What connects the performer and the audience at a live performance is the way the art is performed by the former and the way it is received and interpreted by the latter being in that shared social space. With the advancement in recording technology, broadcasting systems and easier access to music, it is undeniable that, in the past few decades, there has been a paradigm shift in the way one listens to music. Until the advent of technological developments in the nineteenth century and the cultural shift in people's music listening methods, music has been experienced in a live context (Nettl and Russell 1998; Swarbrick et al. 2018). Stephanie Pitts, a professor of music education with research interests in musical participation and arts audience, states that listening as an activity has become self-regulated and more expressive in nature. "Widespread access to music of all genres through increasingly affordable and portable technology enables many listeners to construct a 'soundtrack' to daily life, accompanying everyday activities with music that helps to generate 'a sense of identity within an often impersonal environment'" (Pitts 2005, 257). While technology has provided a low-cost, convenient method for music listening, many people still continue to attend live concerts and

sometimes “at great expense in uncomfortable settings” (Baxter-Moore and Kitts 2016, 2; Brown and Knox, 2016, 235).

Durham Peters, a media historian and social theorist shares an interesting perspective about the difference between experiencing live and recorded music. Peters relates recorded music to “a souvenir, a marker of time and space” and live concert to an event where “one’s mortal time-line on earth is spent” (2001, 718). Peters furthermore reinforces that the irreplaceable value of a live experience as the witness of an event. “‘Being there’ matters since it avoids the ontological depreciation of being a copy. The copy, like hearsay, is indefinitely repeatable; the event is singular, and its witnesses are forever irreplaceable in their privileged relation to it” (ibid.). Philip Auslander, a scholar of literature, media and communication, explains that the key cultural perceptions of liveness that contributes to the significance of live performances are: “the live event is ‘real’, and mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real” (1999, 4). However, he also questions the value placed on live performances over mediatized ones by explaining the idea of “liveness” (2012, 3).

Liveness is not an ontologically defined condition but a historically variable effect of mediatization. It was the development of recording technologies that made it both possible and necessary to perceive existing representations as “live.” Prior to the advent of these technologies (e.g., sound recording and motion pictures), there was no need for a category of “live” performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility. The history of live performance is thus bound up with the history of recording media, and extends over no more than the past 100 to 150 years.

The key point that Auslander makes is that live performance in its nature is not a product of the masses but rather much more intimate experience for the audience. Besides witnessing and listening to live performances by the artists, the audience gets an opportunity to understand the experiences of other audience members in the form of enjoying the way other members listen, participating in the collective applause and the chance for conversations about the performance

(Pitts and Spencer 2008, 227). It is significant to note that there is a social element connected with experiencing music in a live concert. This social element can be extended beyond musical genres to any live performances, whether in a jazz club, a concert hall or a mehfil. A sense of connection—both with the performers and other audience members—and the feeling of being surrounded by like-minded and appreciative others—seems important for the concert audience (Burland and Pitts 2012, 529). Drawing upon the above research works, the social construction of expectations resulting from live concerts can be seen as shaping audience members’ motive to attend concerts.

## **1.2 The role of audience in Western classical music performances**

In Western classical music concerts, any form of visible interaction between the audience and the performers is generally unseen. It can be argued that the prevailing classical concert culture is not designed to provide the audience an opportunity to participate actively but to enable concentrated listening in silence. A general observer might believe that it is impossible to include participatory practices in Western art music, as the music is written by a composer and performed from a score, which normally leaves no room for participatory creativity by audience members. “The classical music and the way it is performed publicly seem to rely on the presentational context, with a stage confronting an auditorium, marking the division between performers and audience” (Auslander 2008, 66; Toelle and Sloboda 2019, 4). Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino establishes a binary distinction between presentational and participatory music, the latter implying that everyone present at a performance joins in, mostly in amateur and community music settings (Turino 2007; Pitts 2005). Christopher Small’s work *Musicking* provides a holistic view of a symphony orchestra concert hall setup. While considering the effects of more intrinsic aspects of canonic Western art music, Small describes the nature and meanings of both performing and

listening within this context (1998, 41; Dobson 2010, 1). Similarly, Pitts's qualitative research on the audience at chamber music festivals broadly questions the stereotyped portrayal of Western classical music audiences as passive (2005, 257). Her study investigates the roles and experiences of listeners and states that the audience associated their listening experiences at concerts with a sense of collectivity and community. This feeling among the audience was attributed to valuing them as an "active audience in a socio-musical setting" (Pitts and Spencer 2008, 228). Extending on the works of Pitts, music scholars Radbourne, Johanson, Glow and White explore various other perspectives about audience experience at classical music concerts. Besides collective engagement, knowledge, risk of attendance, and perceived quality of the performance are regarded as the key factors that could enhance or detract from the concert experience for classical music audiences (2009). In contrast to the feeling of "collectiveness," music scholar Sam Thompson highlights the idea of individuality in the listening experience at classical concerts (2006, 227). In the context of my research, both collectiveness and individuality are relevant, where the former can be credited to listening at a shared physical space with other audience members, and the latter can be attributed to the individual's personal responses while listening. In addition to the experiences of concert attendees, Dobson considers the perspectives of non-attendees for better evaluating audience experience at a classical concert. The assumption and experience of a non-attendee "holds considerable potential for gaining fresh insight into the factors that affect the enjoyment and experience of concert attendance" (Dobson 2010, 32). Similarly, understanding the experiences of long-term concert attendees of classical music helps to identify the barriers or opportunities that could impact the future audience growth and satisfaction (Pitts and Spencer 2008, 228).

The research works on audience indicate the importance of exploring how music is received, transmitted and experienced in Western classical music, and thereby signifies the promise of extending such studies to non-Western musical traditions. “Literature on the reception of music is mostly confined to studies of Western music and Western audiences and the work on non-Western repertoires or on processes of cross-cultural reception is extremely scarce” (Leante 2013, 3). Within the context of Hindustani classical music, there has been a lot of importance given to musical works including theory, raga system and the improvisation styles. However, the study of the reception of Hindustani classical music needs further attention especially considering the improvisatory nature of the music. Though the audience interactions at Western and Hindustani classical concerts can be clearly distinguished, the methodology used to explore Western classical audience experiences can be extended to the context of Hindustani classical too.

## **CHAPTER 2: HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC, MEHFILS AND RASIKA**

To provide a context for this study, it is important to reflect on the evolution of classical music in India. Besides looking into the existing works on Indian classical audience and concert experiences, this chapter provides a brief explanation of history, impacts of colonialism, nationalism and pedagogical practices within Hindustani classical music.

### **2.1 History and development of Hindustani classical music**

The scholarly works about India's (pre-Independence) musical practices focus largely on the Mughal rule and the lives of the musicians who lived and performed in the courts of wealthy princes. The development of Hindustani classical music dates back to the traditions of court musicians during the Mughal Era, although the tradition clearly integrated earlier traditions of music into the era (Bakhle 2005, Schofield 2010, Weidman 2006). Prior to Muslim rule in North India, “music remained, to a large extent, associated with the temples and religious occasions,” and though music was held in high esteem, musicians “had no respectable social status and they did not enjoy any social privileges at all” (Bhat 2009, 68-69). The musical culture of North India that became popularized as “Hindustani music,” for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is believed to have established “within an interlocked grid of courtly patronage, networks of Hindu devotional and Sufi mystical practices and popular spaces of secular and religious entertainment” (Subramanian and Barlow 2007, 1779). Ethnomusicologist and researcher of Indian classical music, Max Katz (2012) states that Hindustani classical music has developed with a great resistance to communalism and quotes the words of Peter Manuel:

North Indian music evolved as an inherently syncretic and collaborative product of Hindu and Muslim artists and patrons, thus constituting a resilient island of communal harmony more or less impervious to the antagonisms polarizing society at large ([1996] 2007, 120).

It is also not a new argument that India's classical music traditions, both Hindustani and Carnatic music styles, are "confections of late colonialism" (Schofield 2010, 487). "In comparison with its classicized, colonial reinvention, this earlier music of North India's princely courts was apparently unmarked, unprestigious, unsystematized, with no interest shown in its age or authenticity, and no conscious link to written theoretical traditions" (ibid., 488). In other words, the Indian art music culture underwent a radical transformation and was reinvented "through colonial encounters" (Weidman 2006, 9).

A significant change in the history of Indian music is associated post-Independence years, due to the efforts taken by musicologists and Indian nationalists (noted below) to create a nationalized music in India. In the words of Indian historian Janaki Bakhle, "a major difference was that a particular genre of music in India came to be seen as "simultaneously classical and national," and was consequently entitled "Indian classical music"" (2005, 4). The result of a nationalized classical music in India led to the introduction of a notation system alongside the traditional guru-shishya parampara and gharana system<sup>4</sup> of education. The method of teaching and learning of classical music in these traditional systems drew upon oral tradition. Described by the Indian scholar T. G. Vaidyanathan, guru-shishya refers to "master paradigm that runs like a leitmotif through India's checkered history," (1989, 148) and the bond between a master (guru) and a disciple (shishya) is particularly significant in the training of the arts in India. Many scholars have researched and presented their works about the significance of this tradition of guru-shishya

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<sup>4</sup> Gharana system is considered as a community of performers (often associated as a family or lineage). It is in the sense that Gharanas act as guardians of a particular community's musical tradition - a socio-musical phenomenon claimed to link famous performers to a heritage of the Gharana system (Neuman 1990).



parampara. Bhat (2009) states that most of the creative thinking is nurtured by the open and genuine relationship between the guru and the shishya. As the guru "lives, eats, breathes and sleeps music," so the shishya imbibes the atmosphere of the art, inadvertently internalizing both musical knowledge and a broader foundation of contextual information (Neuman 1990, 54). "With no separation between a 'teacher' and a 'curriculum' to be taught, the shishya learns by emulating the guru, by becoming absorbed in him or her" (Weidman 2006, 276).

The institutionalization of Hindustani music, primarily credited to musicologists V.N. Bhatkande and V.D. Paluskar, is considered as an important milestone in the music education in India and a step to transition from "a system of court patronage to one of public consumption and commercialization" (Gaiind 2008, 135). While music education in the West typically relies on notation, reading scores and musical analysis, Hindustani music learning is primarily through observation, imitation, repetition, and memorization (Oppenheim 2012, 69). Hence, even with the institutionalization of Hindustani music, the improvisatory nature of the music makes the learning process significantly rely on oral tradition. As in the words of ethnomusicologist Regula Qureshi,

the existence of authoritative theoretical doctrine and a disciplined oral tradition of performance extending back over several generations serves to legitimize Indian art music and its theoretical constructs. Further, this is only legitimized if the study has been under the guidance of a recognized master with a reputable artistic and performance pedigree (2012, 5).

Supported by oral tradition, a typical training pattern of Hindustani music involves learning the structure of ragas, repertoires and techniques of improvisations. The guru-shishya parampara relies on "not merely the transference of facts, techniques, [and] examples set by the teacher, but creating in the mind of the shishya the fullest awareness of the subject taught" (Menon 1983, 18).

## 2.2 Research works on Hindustani classical performances and embodied practices

The scholarly works pertaining to Hindustani classical performances predominantly highlight the performer-audience relationship, the embodied forms of performance by classical musicians and the training methodologies. The traditional practices of Hindustani classical performances assume an unspoken two-way communication between the performing artists and the audience. The quality of the performance is dependent on the quality of the audience participation in the form of interjections and gestures indicating their positive responses (Rao, n.d.). During Hindustani mehfil, the audience members are presumed to know the concepts of ragas and *taal* (beat cycle/rhythm), which help in creating a *bhava* (mood/feel) during a performance; and the performers refine or enhance this basic mood with their rendition style. The bhavas can in turn be interpreted as the raw ingredient to be cooked/elaborated by performers in order to induce in spectators the *rasa*<sup>5</sup> or flavor of enjoyment specific to that particular bhava (Ram 2011, S163). During stage performances, vocalists and instrumentalists are often seen swaying their bodies and using hand/head gestures. With reference to matured and established musicians, their classical presentation during mehfil indicate a command of bodily techniques including hand gestures, alignment of hand and leg extensions, body posture, breath control, apart from the knowledge of melody, raga, repertoires and bhava (Ram 2011). Beyond aesthetically pleasing, these bodily gestures by performers play multifaceted roles not limited to appreciation towards

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<sup>5</sup> In rasa theory, the bodily experiences of affects are called the basic *bhavas*/ moods. Although often translated as emotions, bhavas correspond much more closely to affects, for they are located centrally in the body. The rationale for this lies in performance itself, since the bodily comportment and facial expressions of basic emotions such as anger, love, and disgust can be both observed by the performer and reproduced in heightened form for spectators. These aestheticized essences are the rasas (Ram 2011, S163).

accompanying artists, rhythm tracking and audience interactions. These gestures have become a vital part of music performance to the extent that they are transmitted from gurus to their students.

In his book, *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music*, Matthew Rahaim, an ethnomusicologist and a Hindustani vocalist, introduces the concept of musicking bodies (the bodies of musicians as they perform) as “always already embedded in social relations,” (2012, 109) highlighting how a body trained in the discipline of North Indian classical music “carries both aesthetic and ethical value” (ibid., 126). Rahaim states that “the gestures that are improvised alongside vocal improvisation embody a special kind of melodic knowledge passed down tacitly through lineages of teachers and students who not only sound similar, but who also engage with music kinesthetically according to similar aesthetic and ethical ideals” (ibid., 126). The concept of musicking bodies not only emphasizes the ideas of performance through bodily gestures, but also broadly implies the association of the concept of melody, musical experience and the transmission of culture and tradition. In a similar vein, anthropologist Amanda Weidman discusses social aspects of the “body-sensorial” knowledge that is transmitted from teacher to disciple in South Indian classical music (2012, 214). Other ethnomusicologists have made similar arguments stating how embodied performance is central to sustaining socio-cultural memory and knowledge (Rahaim 2012).

Alongside the studies that explore the nature of embodied performance of Hindustani musicians, there are studies that also focus on the role and behavior of Indian classical audiences and their embodied listening practices. Leante states in the article, “Imagery, Movement and Listeners’ Construction of Meaning in North Indian Classical Music,” that “the process of embodiment acts as trait d’union between metaphor and sound and informs the way people talk about their experience of music and describe the images and feelings to which it gives rise” (2013,

4). While she showcases the embodied form of listening as an expression of the audience's inner feelings, Daniel Neuman (1990) and Brian Silver (1984) indicate that the listening can reflect the audience's imagined memories and their social classes respectively. Listening to Hindustani music is rich in "connotations and are therefore reminiscent of the intimate, prestigious, aristocratic performance contexts for North Indian classical music of the past" (Alaghband-Zadeh 2017, 208). This association signifies that the audience listening practices evoke courtly etiquettes attributing this to the listeners' social status. Most of the research works on North Indian classical music have primarily focused on how the audience creates an impact on the performances, how the audience interacts through audible acknowledgements, and how the musicians feel about their audience. However, as Alaghband-Zadeh mentions in her article, the voices of the listeners are largely unseen in the previous studies (2017). Alaghband-Zadeh highlights the importance of how the listeners hear, what they hear, and why they hear a certain way through her study. Since Alaghband-Zadeh's works have been significant in framing the structure of this thesis, a summary of her work has been provided below.

### **2.3 Analysis of Alaghband-Zadeh's works on embodied listening**

Alaghband-Zadeh focusses on the audience perspectives of live classical music, asking how the act of embodied listening connects to the wider social, historical, and discursive worlds of North Indian classical music. She has approached her study in three ways:

1. connecting listening to the past and evoking cultural memory and remembered past
2. learning about the ethics of listening and understanding if the audience preferences had an association with the social class and prestige
3. analyzing listening as an embodied performance

Alaghband-Zadeh's works show how the larger idea of history, status, class, and prestige can be associated to classical music audience and their listening experiences. She states that contemporary listeners connect their experience through an imagined history narrative of the golden age of Indian classical music. Alaghband-Zadeh points out that listeners have a tendency to compare recent classical concerts to the ones a few decades ago by stating their sense of dissatisfaction on factors like the duration of the concerts, the know-how of the audience, the venue and the evolving concert presentations. Portraying the audience perspectives, she conveys the perception that the decline of quality of audience resulted in the decline of music to an extent that musicians had to cater to the audiences with increasingly low-brow tastes. Drawing upon the arguments that Bourdieu (1984) makes in *Distinction*, Alaghband-Zadeh illustrates the rasikas' embodied listening practices in a way that links their musical tastes to culture and social class. She points out that knowledge of classical music and involvement with the art culture teaches rasika about the mannerism of listening to the extent that rasikas adapt to the certain norms of expressing music within the culture using specific body language and gestures.

Alaghband-Zadeh's works draw on analysis and findings based on the audience's perspectives and connects their views with larger social factors. However, her works seldom speak about who the audiences are, why they attend concerts and what their key takeaways are from attending concerts. Extending the approach taken by Alaghband-Zadeh, this thesis aims to study how the audience's listening experience can be intertwined with their motives behind attending live Hindustani concerts. My research aims to explore the scope of these questions by taking into consideration the voices of individuals within different audience groups, and analyze how their listening behaviors support the intended purposes of their concert attendance.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodology for data collection to be able to understand audience's perspectives. The aim of the qualitative approach is to discuss the nature of Hindustani classical music concerts and highlight the divergence of the cultural and social associations with the musical genre through the lens of the audience's listening experience. The presence of both qualitative and quantitative methods helped to reflect on similar perspectives through different lenses.

My initial plan towards this research was to attend concerts in Mumbai and Thane districts in India during January and February 2020. I also reached out to my Guru, Ganheera Hema Upasani to take her blessings and advice. In addition to some preliminary insights, I gathered contact information of some of her fellow musicians, who could possibly participate in my research. I also reached out to my music social network and local music organizations to expand the list of participants for the surveys and interviews. Two main groups of participants contributed to this study, although I did not intend to deliberately classify the participants. Group 1 constituted the participants, who willingly completed the survey and/or follow-up interviews. These participants were a part of the audience from the concerts I attended. Group 2 constituted the participants whom I shortlisted from music communities in Mumbai and Thane. This group also included my contacts and additional referrals received during the study. As I progressed through my research, it became evident that the participants from both these groups primarily constituted music students, musicians (including teachers) and music appreciators<sup>6</sup>. Music critiques, press/media, concert organizers, volunteers and family members of performers/organizers were

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<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this study, I refer non-musicians as music appreciators, who didn't fit into the groups of students, musicians or teachers and attend concerts regularly (at least five concerts a year).

also seen as a part of the audience. Though I had conversations with these groups, they are not primary contributors to this research as they represented only a small subset of the audience. My discussions with concert organizers to understand about any criteria they considered to attract the audience provided some interesting insights. For instance, nowadays, to promote aspiring performing artists in front of a larger audience, classical concerts are often planned to have a separate segment of an upcoming artist prior to the performance by an established artist.

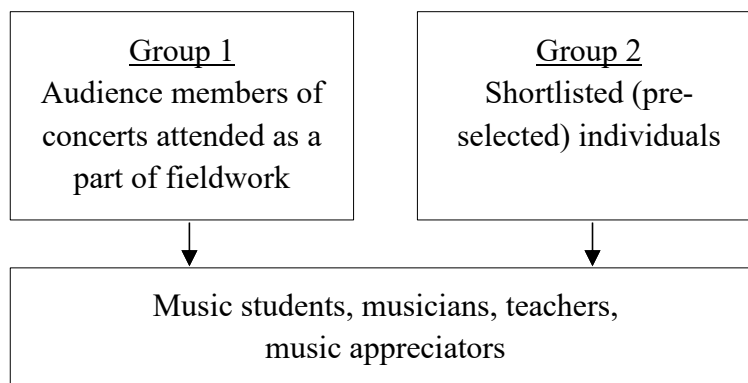


Figure 1: Audience group classification

Responses from the research contributors were collected through survey questionnaires, structured and semi-structured interviews, which allowed flexibility to explore deviations from core discussions as needed. The main objective of data collection was to get insights from the participants about their opinions on attending live classical concerts, how listening to live classical concerts impact their respective music roles as a student, a musician, a teacher or a music appreciator, and how listening further influences their perspectives on classical music. As an example, my gurus have always emphasized the importance of listening to classical performances to better understand ragas and the possibilities of raga improvisations. Hence, I was keen to validate this perspective further from the students. In addition, more specifically, I was interested in the following questions from each participant group.

From students:

- whether they preferred attending live *mehfils* or listening to recorded music
- how frequently they attended live concerts
- whether they take notes or keep audio or video recordings for learning purpose
- whether and how attending concerts impacted their level of understanding or learning of classical music

From musicians/teachers:

- if their approach to listening during live performances has changed over time
- what impact concerts has had in shaping them as a musician or as a teacher
- whether they encourage their students to attend concerts along with their training

The initial participation rate for the surveys was not as high as I initially expected, with an average of ten responses from each concert venue. Although there was always a willingness to participate, the time commitment to take out from their concert experience seemed to be a hurdle for the participants to take part in the surveys. For this reason, most interview sessions at the venue were brief. However, some participants willingly shared their contact information and I reached out to them for follow-up interviews.

### **3.1 Research positionality**

This section reflects on my position and views in relation to this study, which might have an influence on my research process and interpretation. Evaluating the researcher's positionality helped me to understand how the participants would “place” me and vice versa. I felt my guru's identity embellished my role as a researcher and realized that introducing myself as my guru's student enabled the participants to better associate with me. Upon mentioning my guru's name during conversations, Hindustani classical music and performances instantaneously became the



core topics of discussion. For example, the conversation would begin with “Oh, how long have you been training under her,” “where is she performing next,” or “yes, she had mentioned your research to me”. Though preparations were needed for engaging in discussions, my experiences in the roles of a student, a teacher and a performer helped me to initiate the conversations with ease with participants. I relied on semi-structured interviews, as I knew, with my knowledge and experience in Hindustani music, that I would be able to build on conversations especially by referring to music technicalities as needed. At times, the conversations needed to be re-routed to the core topic, as the discussions deviated from my research topic to other areas (with questions about my native place, my life in Canada, the weather).

The closeness of my race and ethnicity with the participants helped me to be one among them who shared the same (or similar) socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics. This also placed me in a better situation to gain trust with the participants during the interviews. Besides gender, I recognize my age may have had an influence on the research process, mainly in building rapport with the participants. It was critical for my research to interview older participants, who could provide better insights from their depth of experiences. In Indian culture, older age implies respect, and therefore, it is possible that the elderly might not extend much respect to a younger researcher like me, which could adversely affect the quality of my research. For this reason, I made conscious efforts not to fall outside of the “norm,” which included making sure to greet by saying “Namaste” and dress in Indian traditional outfit, which is perceived to be appropriate to a classical concert setting. However, in contrary to my initial assumption, the elderly participants were appreciative of my inquisitiveness to learn from them and contributed compassionately to the information gathering process.

### **3.2 Research approach**

The scope for this research study emerged from my experiences being a Hindustani classical performer as well as a frequent attendee of classical concerts. Although an unbiased study is impossible, a well-rounded approach was taken to evaluate my research quality by keeping in mind the different factors such as my closeness and association to the topic and how information was gathered/interpreted while following the ethics protocols. Being classically trained and having a good understanding of a typical classical concert structure, I was able to understand the significance of many related activities before, during and after the performance at the venue. During my fieldwork, I was prepared to take the role of a researcher and not get carried away being a patron listener of classical music. With a phased approach planned, my focus was to collect as much information during fieldwork and leave the main analysis to a later stage. My fieldwork included audio recordings of interview sessions, which helped in better interpretation of participant perspectives afterwards. Personal interviews included open-ended questions to be able to gain wider perspectives.

My proficiency with the local language and culture helped me to closely connect with the participants. I felt the participants quickly understood my research aims and supported me with sharing their perspectives openly. For instance, communication in Hindi or a combination of Hindi and English led to more candid conversations. The qualitative research for this study is not heavily influenced or impacted by a specific gender, which was considered prior to the fieldwork. Though it could be argued that my research topic is not gender sensitive, my questions and interactions with the participants were carefully chosen to assure a comfortable space for all participants irrespective of their gender. Reflecting on the usefulness and relevance of this topic, I feel this

study could benefit performers and arts organizations equally to draw correlation between audience preferences and concert planning.

### **3.3 Fieldwork**

This section outlines the methods used to support my research work through qualitative research and ethnographic fieldwork. The primary method used for data collection was participant observation. My fieldwork was conducted in Mumbai and Thane during January and February, 2020. I decided to choose a mix of instrumental and vocal recital concerts with a diverse combination of performing artists, venue, concert theme and organizers. I started with some selected concerts from the list of musical events charted out in the All Events India website and newspapers. I attended ten live concerts and a few workshop sessions which provided me the opportunities to be one among the audience and also to volunteer with organizing one local concert. A consideration while selecting concerts was not to repeat a venue during the course of my fieldwork. While the type of venue wouldn't impact the scope of my research, I planned to attend concerts at small and large auditoriums to observe whether the venue size impacted performer-audience interactions. This is in connection with what Clayton and Leante (2015) states, that "an intimate setting allowed for rich verbal and non-verbal interactions between the audience and the performers" (417). This intimate setting at smaller venues was in fact evident from one of the concerts I attended at Thane Sahyog Mandir, where the audience also had an option to sit on the floor with closer proximity to the performers, as seen in figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Photos from fieldwork at Thane Sahyog Mandir

### 3.3.1 Experience from fieldwork

This section narrates my experiences from one of the concerts, featuring Dr. Ashwini Bhide, the internationally renowned classical vocalist, and outlines how most Hindustani music concerts are structured and performed. The concert was organized by Karnataka Sangha - Kala Bharati in Mumbai on February 19, 2020. As a close admirer and follower of the performances of Dr. Bhide on social media, I was thrilled to listen to her live performance. The first feeling that struck me was that the venue seemed more like socio-cultural space for people of common interests. The ambience with the arrangements, conversations, emotions and gestures all appeared to be centered around classical music.

As I entered, I noticed all the performers were on stage finalizing the sound check. The artists were seated on a raiser on the stage, and the main vocalist, Dr. Bhide, positioned at the center of the raiser, was accompanied by a harmonium and tabla player beside her. While the access to audience seating during sound check is not permitted in most of the large scale classical concerts, in this case, the audience was allowed to witness the sound check. The audience was permitted to enter the hall to occupy seats which gave a feeling of an intimate and informal performance space. The artists on stage during the sound check made eye contact, and gave

occasional smiles to greet the audience. I could observe the excitement of the audience on seeing the artists. Nevertheless, they were cautious to not engage in any conversations with the artists prior to the concert, which I felt is a reflection of their familiarity and knowledge about the audience's role during classical concerts. Familiarity between the organizers and few in the audience was also revealed. More than a "meet and greet", there were gestures for seeking blessings from the elderly. This portends the inseparable aspect of cultural elements from music and performances. A better social interaction was evident at the venue with the audience connecting with each other on different topics prior to the concert. The conversations around me ranged from general topics to upcoming concerts, the featured performing artist and their signature compositions. More than a musical event, I felt a personal connection among the organizers and the audience. This can be attributed to the cultural influence where the organizers consider the audience more like their personal guests rather than ticketed attendees.

The performance began with the artist announcing the raga to be presented and an introduction. Presenting ragas without introduction was a common practice among purists, and this indicated that the artist acknowledged that the audience is knowledgeable about the ragas. This also meant that the artist is not taking away the experience of the audience in guessing the raga while it is being presented. Seemingly, this trend has taken a change in recent years. Nowadays, the artists seem to educate the audience by explaining the raga and the composition for presentation. Personally, I have witnessed this trend during my experiences attending Indian classical concerts even in Canada, and as a performer, I have tried to observe and emulate the technique of communicating with the audience during my concert performance.

The raga introduction was followed by the presentation of *khayal* (classical composition), which is typically the main part of any Hindustani classical concert. The Khayal includes three

parts: *alaap*,<sup>7</sup> a slow paced unmetered improvisation section; *bandish*,<sup>8</sup> lyrical part of the composition and; *taan*<sup>9</sup> a fast tempo improvisation. The key elements in a performance attributes to the performer's precision in improvising creative patterns of notes along with the coordination among the accompanying musicians. Dr. Bhide was also accompanied by two of her senior students on stage (seated behind her), playing tanpura and singing, while some of her other students were seated among the audience. This is a significant component of guru-shishya parampara and also an influence of Indian culture in music, where the students accompany their teachers for any help during the event and/or to support with playing tanpura and/or as a supporting vocalist. This is considered as a learning experience for the students, and typically senior students are chosen to accompany the guru on stage. From a personal experience, I have felt that the opportunities to share the space with my gurus on stage help to gain more experience and confidence with on-stage performances during my early training days.

Unlike Western concerts that demand complete silence, Indian classical concerts typically seek audible artists' interaction. As this concert progressed, the artists established a good connection with the audience, who responded visibly. An ingenious piece from the artist was followed by loud remarks like "arey wah", "sabhash" from the audience, which may be perceived as noisy; however, indicates the appreciative concert attendees. Many music students were seen following the percussion rhythm engaging their fingers/hands in resonance. At the same time, it was also observed that a section of the audience silently enjoyed the performance by swaying their head with closed eyes.

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<sup>7</sup> *Alaap* is a note by note delineation of a raga bound by a slow tempo, but not bound by any rhythmic cycle (Mathur et.al, 2015, 2).

<sup>8</sup> *Bandish* is the lyrical part of the composition or raga based repertoires.

<sup>9</sup> *Taan* (or referred to as *Gat*) is a fast tempo improvisation and follows a rhythmic cycle (Mathur et.al, 2015, 1).

Dr. Bhide engaged with the audience between performance pieces by sharing her insights and her prior experiences of performing the selected raga. I felt these interactions by Dr. Bhide resulted from continued responses and acknowledgements from the audience as her words seemed very impromptu. A clear two-way communication was evident between the artist and the audience, which is a testimony of a successful presentation in front of a knowledgeable audience. After three performance pieces, Dr. Bhide paused to see if the audience had any *farmaish* (request) and resumed the concert with some of the requests. The concert seemed like a respectful offering to cater the needs of the audience. Though the audience could be seen as a larger unified group, I felt there was more interactive engagement between those who came to the concert in groups as compared to solo attenders. By and large, the audience seemed to consist of students, musicians, friends and families of organizing committees, and senior music patrons. As everyone present in the venue seemed connected to classical music in some way (even just by the fact that they are in the same physical space for a common purpose), it was easier for me to start a conversation amongst the audience. Though there might be critiques among the audience, generally, there was a positive and appreciative environment at the venue, whether it be between the performing musicians, audience or both.

Dr. Bhide ended the concert by presenting a *bhajan* (devotional composition) in raga *Bhairavi*, often the raga used by many musicians as the finale piece. The concert concluded with a long applause and a standing ovation from the audience. There was no grand exit for the artists, and they waited on the stage to continue their interactions with the audience. This is not an uncommon practice at Indian classical concerts, where the performers will stay back on the stage showing their willingness to interact with the audience. These interactions could be feedback or appreciations from the audience or even a chance for the audience to take a photo with their

favourite artist. For the performers, extending their time for these audience interactions is considered satisfying, just like performing on stage. As an ardent follower, getting a chance to talk to Dr. Bhide, as seen in figure 3 below, and seeking her blessings was a very fulfilling moment.



Figure 3: Photos from fieldwork at the concert featuring Dr. Ashwini Bhide

### 3.4 Interviews

A key consideration for my interviews was to gain direct perspectives and opinions from the respondents, while ensuring a comfortable setting for communication. According to philosopher Steinar Kvale (1996), an interview is “a conversation, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the [life-world] of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meanings of the described phenomena” (174). In a similar vein, Schostak states that an “interview is an extendable conversation between partners that aims at having an ‘in-depth information’ about a certain topic or subject, and through which a phenomenon could be interpreted in terms of the meanings interviewees bring to it” (2006, 54).

Since understanding the audience perspectives was key to my research, I felt interviews would assist in exploring participants’ experiences and opinions better than any other ethnographic tool. The qualitative interview sessions helped the conversations to be flexible and more engaging



to understand an individual's beliefs and perspectives. Kvale explains qualitative research interviews as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation” (1996, 1). The focus of my qualitative interviews hence was less on closed questionnaires and more on open-ended questions to collect in-depth information. The open-ended conversations also provided opportunities for me to follow up on any new or interesting perspectives that emerge during the interviews. The interview participants were selected primarily based on their musical affiliation. Fifteen participants were interviewed, who were primarily concert attendees and included musicians, aspiring musicians, non-musicians and students. The musicians interviewed included local artists (from Mumbai and Thane) who are actively involved in performances and teaching. The musicians were selected based on reference from my guru. Their familiarity with Indian classical music and their teaching and performing experiences helped with the contribution of some good insights. For instance, with a solid understanding about Indian classical music and performance trends, the musicians were able to acknowledge my research aim and respond to my questions citing their personal experiences.

Besides local artists, I also reached out to the music department of a few colleges. Based on the responses I received and the willingness to participate, the other identified musicians were shortlisted. The aspiring musicians interviewed included those who accompanied the artists at the concerts I attended or who were actively involved in organizing the events. The music appreciators were shortlisted from my social circle based on the criterion of having attended a minimum of five concerts within the last year. The students interviewed constituted the vocal students from Soprano School of Music in Thane and those who attended the concerts. Demographics of the participants was not a criterion for selection of participants or for any further data analysis.

The interviews included questions to understand the participants' musical background, expertise and hobbies in related fields, their perspectives about Indian classical music and training methodology. The discussions also included questions to understand the participants' thoughts about attending live concerts, whether and how concerts added value to their music learning and what they enjoy (and don't enjoy) during live performances. A set of fixed questions were initially prepared for all the participants, especially for music students, to understand their views about the influence of classical concerts in their music training. For instance, I aimed to understand how long they have been engaged in training, how often they attended live concerts and what segment of a concert they enjoyed more. Another example of focus area was to understand if they believed in taking notes while attending concerts or whether they made efforts to incorporate their concert experience into their performance or riyaz (practice) sessions. Based on the responses, I gauged their level of music involvement to ask more specific questions. Some responses from my initial interviews were brief and hence, I had to present the questions in different ways to lead to detailed conversations. A few interviews didn't proceed in detail as planned, when the students responded that they don't attend concerts regularly. These interviews were not included for this research analysis; however, the students had an unanimous acknowledgement that attending concerts was important to enhance their learning process. With participants' permission, the interview sessions were recorded using a voice recorder app on my phone/tablet. While transcribing the audio recordings, I realized I could have asked more follow-up questions for certain interviews. However, the timely transcription of interviews helped me to prepare a more holistic set of questions for the rest of the interviews and improve my interviewing approach.

### **3.5 Survey**

The participants for the survey were selected primarily through direct interaction at the concert venues and/or via email distribution of a survey link using Google Forms. The Hindi language translation with Google Forms was helpful to get responses from non-English speakers. The participants at the venue were provided with a tablet to fill in the survey. The individual responses will remain anonymous in accordance with ethics requirements; and the collective analysis of the survey is presented in this research paper. The qualitative type of survey does not aim at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at determining the diversity of some topic of interest within a given population (Jansen 2010). This type of survey “does not count the number of people with the same characteristic (value of variable) but it establishes the meaningful variation (relevant dimensions and values) within that population. In short, the qualitative survey is the study of diversity (not distribution) in a population” (ibid., 3). The surveys were completed in January and February 2020 with forty seven responses received. Google Forms provided the flexibility to collate the responses or accessed individually. The survey questions were selected to understand the broader insights about:

- whether the participants are associated with performing classical music through singing, playing an instrument or performing classical dance
- the participants’ motive for attending classical concerts

### **3.6 Out of scope**

It is important to note that this study doesn’t provide a comprehensive and holistic view about the purpose of audiences attending live classical concerts. There is potential for more research work on further related areas *as* such ethnographic studies on audience and live concert experience are hardly conclusive. It is beyond the scope of this research to focus on the

demographics of the audience. The study doesn't consider the age, gender, social or financial status of the concertgoers. Though my research aims at exploring the motives of the audience attending Hindustani classical concerts, it doesn't consider the non-attenders. The study also does not take into consideration of the criteria in which the audience select the type of concerts they attend. For instance, the reasons for selection may vary, not limited to choosing a concert based on accessibility of venue, size of concert hall, ticket price, featured artists and accompanying musicians. It may be challenging to get opinions from all audience members and hence, this study and the findings are thoroughly based on sample responses and perspectives.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The analysis and findings presented in this chapter are based on the empirical data collected from my ethnographic fieldwork. In addition to this academic research, the findings are also supplemented with self-reflective analysis including my personal experiences as a Hindustani vocalist, as an instructor and as a student. The data collected from different sources was analyzed collectively and individually. The audience groups identified as a part of this research can be broadly categorized into students (vocalists or instrumentalists), musicians or aspiring musicians (vocalists or instrumentalists) and music appreciators. Upon completion of my qualitative research and fieldwork observations, I conclude that the motives of these audience groups to attend live classical concerts can be categorized to three areas: pedagogy, enjoyment and social engagement.

### 4.1 Pedagogy

Pedagogy in the context of Indian classical music could be extended to a broader concept beyond referring to a teaching methodology. For the purpose of this research, I define pedagogy as a process of musical transmission gained not only through institutionalized student-teacher learnings, but also by engaging and learning music in a socio-cultural space.

#### 4.1.1 Views on pedagogical methods

Traditionally, Hindustani classical music was transmitted through the pedagogical method, guru-shishya parampara (Slawek 1999), in which training is primarily through oral transmission. Like in the training of any other art forms, Hindustani music teachings also emphasize the importance of consistent *riyaz* (practice). It is the responsibility of the shishya to absorb the teachings of the guru through riyaz, which is more than mere dedication to rigorous practice but

“a preparation for an unattainable perfection that symbolizes a certain accomplishment of one’s inner development” (Neuman 1990, 34). A common practice in the training process is to have students repeat, imitate, and memorize the phrases taught by the guru. In the context of proper retention of orally transmitted knowledge, Bonnie Wade, an ethnomusicologist explains the two key conditions that are significant for the learning process. “The first condition requires that the music be remembered precisely as it was learned and the second condition requires adhering to a well-designed and executed system in a way that the lessons learnt can unlikely be forgotten” (Wade 2009). When it comes to the training of improvisation techniques, the gurus need not instruct on what to sing or play; however, they encourage and guide shishyas to experiment within the well-defined raga system. Viram Jasani, a renowned Indian sitar and tabla composer states in regards to this learning process, “you start playing those phrases and eventually you get to the stage where you don’t repeat the phrases your teacher has taught you, you start creating your own different phrases within that raga” (Bailey 1980, 17; Oppenheim 2012, 27). The Hindustani music training can hence be considered as a combination of theoretical and performance-based learning.

As described by Jairazbhoy, (1995) “when different performances of the same raga are examined we find that allowing for divergence of tradition and the possibility of experimentation, not only are the same notes consistently used, but also particular figurations or patterns of notes occur frequently” (Mathur et.al, 2015, 2). This improvisatory nature of raga requires the music students to practice and experiment with raga to better understand the possibilities of creative improvisations. “The nature of Hindustani classical music is such that performers are expected to devote a great deal of time and effort to the study of the musical discipline” (Qureshi 2012, 6). To complement the direct learning from a guru, a live classical performance becomes a learning center to observe how the musicians unveil and present a raga in their own unique styles. In addition to

regular riyaz and lessons, attending live concerts helps students to devote their time to not only experience the presentations of various artists but also be in an environment of classical music, which is a significant aspect of the training. As expressed by a student rasika:

While attending live concerts, I am like a thief. I want to steal all the musical attributes of the performer so that I can incorporate them in my performances. Right from the beginning of a classical concert, you start picking up things; you start learning. As you do that, there's a connection that begins to form with the music you hear. Having said that, it's not necessary that one learns music, more listening makes it more relatable. (Interview with the author<sup>10</sup>, February 02, 2020, Mumbai).

I noticed a prominent presence of student groups at all concert venues, and many students were seen accompanying their gurus, which demonstrated the existing relevance of guru-shishya parampara. Personally as a student, the opportunity to accompany my guru on stage playing tanpura or as a supporting vocalist was something I always looked forward to. Such concerts were a unique opportunity to learn from the guru while also being in closer proximity to other performing musicians. Besides learning about raga and various bandish, concerts provide an opportunity to draw upon the best practices of performance, performer-audience interactions and improvisation styles. As mentioned in the introduction, the importance of liveness in a performance attributes to the presence of a performer and the audience in a shared space. The factor of liveness contributes to being able to experience not only the level of precision, creativity and improvisation by the main performing artist, but also the mutual understanding and synchronization among the accompanying musicians. Most of the student interviewees share that live concerts are an opportunity to witness how vocalists, instrumentalists and accompanying artists showcase the spirit of musical coordination and aesthetics on stage. As a student rasika shares:

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<sup>10</sup> All the interviews and discussions were facilitated and translated by the author. Refer Appendix for transcriptions. All the discussions are considered as informal conversations as a part of the fieldwork.

Concerts are my job shadow sessions. To become a performing artist, I need to listen and understand the aesthetics (referring to mannerisms) and coordination among other accompanying musicians during live performances (Interview, February 02, 2020, Mumbai).

During the training sessions with the guru, a student learns the music theory and observes the guru's style of singing/playing with an aim to be able to imbibe and imitate the teachings. In other words, attending live concerts provides an opportunity for shishyas to complement the learnings from their gurus. For instance, while teaching a new raga, a guru explains the notes used in the raga, the important phrases (pattern of notes) and the exercises to enhance the raga rendition. This is followed by teaching the repertoires and compositional part of the raga. For students, live concerts thus become an avenue to witness how the notes and patterns of a raga can be presented in a professional manner and how the concepts of raga extend in the form of aalap, bandish and taans. In other words, listening to the raga presentation at concerts plays a vital role for students to learn the concept of raga in its full form.

On the contrary, it may not be easy to interpret and analyze ragas during live concerts, and listening to live classical performance needs experience. A student rasika shares that being in an environment of live classical music and listening to different performing artists is an element of learning by itself:

We are so interested in listening to other artists, because the more you listen, the more you learn. We are always learning new things in every concert. More than actually understanding, I believe listening, is more important (Discussion, January 26, 2020, Mumbai).

As an audience, the manner of listening and learning differs based on the individual's engagement with music. For instance, the audience can listen to niche details of a composition and focus on sections that are important for their training. On the other hand, the audience can also listen holistically to adopt the key takeaways from the overall concert experience. For instance, as a



student rasika, I could listen specifically to the artist's improvisations and observe the patterns of *sargams* (notation based on solfege) used in the composition. Alternatively, I could focus on the overall rendition style to understand how the artist brings out the rasa in the raga.

In response to my question regarding what to specifically listen for and learn from live performances, Dr. Chousalkar, an accomplished Hindustani vocal instructor, emphasized the listening techniques at concerts, and how concerts can play a role in shaping the classical music understanding of a student or a musician. She shares her experience on how her guru emphasized the best practices to keep in mind while attending concerts. She explains:

Smt. Susheela, my guru, taught me how to listen to music. "sunne ki bhi tehzeeb hothi he (listening also has its rules). There is a different flavour while listening at concerts. You don't have to show other people at concerts that you understand classical music, you don't have to be seated at the front and make certain gestures. And, as a student, don't compare the singer to your teacher. Your teacher may be wonderful. But [by] comparing the singer with your teacher, you will lose [the opportunity] to know what the performer has to offer. So, there is a need to attend the concert with a clean slate like mind and absorb what comes to you. Note that if a singer has some habit that is not very pleasing, be particular that you are not imbibing it (Interview with Dr. Chousalkar, January 23, 2020, Mumbai).

With the use of the term "flavor," Dr. Chousalkar refers to the approach of listening to live music presentations. Rutuja Lad, a student and an aspiring musician responds from a shishya's perspective:

When you are attending music classes, or listening to recorded music or even a recorded version of a concert, you are getting information or knowledge about the art. However, when you attend live concerts, you get an experience, an experience to put your learnings into a shape (Interview with Rutuja Lad, February 26, 2020, Mumbai).

There can be different ways in which listening at live concerts can contribute to learning, whether you are a student or a musician. Dr. Chousalkar shares her perspective as a musician, how listening facilitates critiquing and analysis<sup>11</sup>:

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<sup>11</sup> Grammatical errors in the sentence were left uncorrected to preserve originality of the interviewee's statements.

When I listen to my contemporaries, I start looking for what's new (in the performance), how much has the performer evolved and grown as an artist. What level has the performer reached? Comparing his/her growth curve... When listening to an instrumental concert, as a vocalist, I look at the design they do and how I can incorporate it into vocals? After so many years of performance, listening to new and upcoming artists/youngsters, unfortunately, there is a critic inside (me) who wants to say something, “ areh... yeh theek nahi hua..” (oh, this was not done right) but you still have to find out, irrespective of the level of the artist, what are they trying to do with the art. Are they contributing to the art, are they not? Or are they just being there?! There are people who are disturbing the tradition, contributing and some who are just there! All these analyses happen as an audience. Because I am in this field (Interview with Dr. Chousalkar, January 23, 2020, Mumbai).

On a similar note, during my interview with Dr. Sangeeta Shankar, a music professor and a renowned violinist, shares why as an advanced level music student, it is important to analyze music from a critiquing standpoint. She explains:

As a student, by attending concerts, you learn how to listen to classical performances. Approaching listening from a different perspective, one should also look for any mistakes being made by the performers. You should be able to perceive mistakes to grow as a student and eventually as a musician. Then only you will be able to make sure to not make those mistakes during your own performances (Interview with Dr. Shankar, February 25, 2020, Mumbai).

Performing at mehfiles are key milestones in a student’s music learning journey. Being a student, I have always been encouraged by my gurus to perform at various concerts or mehfiles. The importance of showcasing the art beyond theoretical learning was always emphasized during my training, and as a result, my approach towards listening to classical performances evolved over time—from a student’s perspective to a performer’s. This perspective was reinforced by Dr. Chousalkar, who shares that students need to have opportunities to showcase their music to enhance their learnings of the technicalities. She adds, “as a student, I always listen [attend live concerts] and try to match the performer’s music with mine, in a way to know how much further I need to go [improve]. When I started performing, I looked at the audience and felt [understood] what they looked for; or noticed how they were reacting.” She claims that listening at concerts

helps students to understand the scope of learning, interpreting and presenting classical music. “Listening to any classical performer, I was amazed to see how a performer ruled the stage and captured the attention of the audience. And gradually, [I] started seeing myself in the same place. That’s when I realized that I wanted to do the same. The entire audience was enraptured by the musician’s singing.”

Both Dr. Chousalkar and Dr. Shankar emphasized the importance of attending a combination of concerts including instrumental performances, vocal presentations, *jugalbandhi* (duet of two solo musicians) performances featuring artists from student performers to experienced musicians.

#### **4.1.2 Views on culture and identity within pedagogy**

Beyond musical expression, Indian classical music can be considered as a medium to learn about the Indian culture. Though Indian music pedagogy has evolved over the years in India due to social, economic and political interventions, cultural influence is an inseparable factor in the guru-shishya parampara. Kruger explains that music and musical transmission to be inextricably linked to culture and can be considered as a “reflector and generator of social and cultural meaning” (2009, 1). It is not an uncommon trend in India for parents to enroll their kids into classical music or dance classes to get a closer affiliation to their cultural roots. Having knowledge about classical music is perceived as an identity signifier of Indian culture by music appreciators. Dobson points out how a concert is linked to the idea of ‘cultural hub’, when the concert hall is surrounded by factors influencing cultural traditions (2010, 210). A similar perspective was shared by some interviewees, who related concerts as an avenue for cultural learning and for creating progressive interest in classical music. A student from the Soprano School of Music comments, below, how she found her interest in singing by attending concerts regularly.

As a kid, you are learning classical music because there's a certain influence from parents. You attend concerts with parents, and these are opportunities to feel connected with one's culture. These concerts need not be core classical events at large venues, but also small mehfil or performances in temples. Through classical compositions and their lyrics, we also learn about Indian mythology. I eventually got interested in singing (Interview, January 26, 2020, Mumbai).

In the guru-shishya parampara, the students' education was not only confined to music learning but also extended to the transmission of social and moral values (Oppenheim 2012). During my fieldwork, I observed students and performing musicians exhibit gestures for seeking blessings from their gurus and the elderly. The performing artists consider it as important to remember and acknowledge their gurus on stage, which is a reflection of the inseparable aspect of cultural and moral values from the performing art. These values, which are a part of guru-shishya parampara, are not explicitly taught during training sessions, rather imbibed naturally and witnessed through musicians at concert venues. Compositions are taught and preserved in relatively static form through generations, but the necessary grammar for interpreting raga must be learned and mastered by each individual. Hindustani music, as a tradition, places value on many factors beyond the transmission of musical objects (Oppenheim 2012, 60).

#### **4.1.3 Views on modernization within pedagogy**

The institutionalization of Hindustani music resulting from modernization altered the music pedagogical practices from the early twentieth century onwards. "With the modernization of the guru-shishya parampara, shishya(s) now meet their guru for training lessons once in a week or even less frequently" (Vedabala 2016, 7). As a result, students now spend relatively less time with their gurus, which could be an argument that the traditions of guru-shishya parampara is on a decline. However, the popularity of Indian classical concerts supplement as another opportunity

for students not only to learn, but also to be closely associated with the classical music environment. As an interviewee states:

I like the whole idea of how classical music performances are structured how it starts with the slow Aalap and how the raag is established through the composition, and the performers interpretation of the raag through improvisation and finally showcasing their skills in the form of fast paced Thaans. This structure hasn't changed in many years (Interview, January 25, 2020, Mumbai).

In the context of pedagogy, Indian classical concerts are likely to continue to attract at least a section of the society (students, aspiring musicians and performing artists) and contribute to continuous learning and sustaining the tradition of live classical performances. Citing learning as a motive, 51% of the survey respondents chose “to enhance their knowledge about classical music while being a student” as a reason for attending live concerts.

## **4.2 Enjoyment**

Live concerts can be considered as a pleasurable experience, and for this study, enjoyment is considered as an emotion of pleasure or a “feel good factor” gained from attending concerts. Music Psychologist Emery Schubert explains the fundamental function of music as its ability to create pleasure in the performer as well as the listener, while other functions may be considered secondary to pleasure-producing capacity (2009). The ability of music to create pleasure is also explained in the context of live music by Frith who defines live music as “a public celebration of musical commitment, a deeply pleasurable event at which our understanding of ourselves through music is socially recognized” (2007, 14). A student from the Soprano School of Music and a regular concertgoer, explains the difference in experience of a live and non-live performance when asked about why he attended concerts:

I would have heard an artist several occasions through my recorded playlist or on television, [or] social media. But, being able to see that artist at a live concert and the

experiences I gain during their live performances is what motivates me to keep attending [live concerts]. Also, another exciting thing for me is the ambience, to be a part of an active crowd [engaged audience] (Interview, January 28, 2020, Mumbai).

The participants expressed enjoyment as an explicit reason for concert attendance, which led me to investigate further on how the audience expressed enjoyment during live concerts and whether the manner of listening influenced the level of enjoyment.

#### **4.2.1 Musical knowledge for enjoyment**

Listening is a significant activity during live Hindustani concerts to an extent that listening can be considered as a performance by itself. A repertoire of conventional gestures and acknowledgements were visible during my fieldwork; any praiseworthy performance pieces were followed by stereotypical expressions like “arey wah”, “sabhash”. Listening at classical concerts encompasses the way the audience responds, which is an indication of audience enjoyment. The performing artists I interviewed, considered these gestures as evidence of an appreciative and entertained audience. Anthropologist Kalpana Ram states that audiences do not need to know the intricacies of classical theories to respond with appropriate affect and emotion. As an example, Ram points out that “the slowed elaboration of ragas generates pleasure by taking what is given and putting it together in a fresh way that brings shared delight” (2011, S165). This shared delight is visible not only between performers and the audience, but also among the audience members who “feed off one another's bodily gestures of appreciation; the shaking of the head which begins almost immediately in a good concert, the murmured '*bes*h', '*vah*\'*kya bat*', (words of appreciation) the varied hand gestures that indicate levels and different kinds of appreciation, from enjoyment of a technical flourish to a surrender to the emotion in the performance” (Ram 2011, S165). Of course, not everyone in the audience may have the level of classical music understanding to appreciate a technical or improvised section in the performance, as one of the *rasikas* admits.

I love everything when a good artist performs. But, when things get too classical or technical, I don't understand it. So it's not a question of liking or disliking it. I just try to enjoy and not get into understanding too many details. Though I have some understanding about the Ragas and Sargams, the moment I try to analyze while listening, I can't concentrate and enjoy the performance. I go with a free mind and love the ambience and overall musical experience (Discussion, January 26, 2020, Mumbai).

As shared by the rasika, there is no right or wrong way of listening at the concerts. Personally, I notice that I enjoyed listening to familiar repertoire presentations at concerts since this allowed me to compare and appreciate (as well as critique) the performer's improvisation and presentation of the repertoires. Thompson investigates the relationship between repertoire familiarity and enjoyment, by considering the effects of prior familiarity to Western classical music and concert audience experiences (2006, 218). This approach can be extended to Hindustani music; however, the familiarity of the concept of raga can be noted as the underlying factor for audience enjoyment. What is even more intriguing and enjoyable for Hindustani audiences is the experience of listening to familiar ragas through each artists' style of presentation. The unfamiliarity of repertoires or ragas can generate a level of inquisitiveness and trigger a different listening approach during concerts. Even when music technicalities are not understood, the audience tends to focus on the overall listening experiences of a raga, which in theory, is associated with specific rasa. In other words, knowledge about classical music need not be a key factor for enjoyment at concerts. However, familiarity with the concept of raga helps with understanding the structure of a live performance which can make the concert experience more enjoyable. "The audience members do not consider the presence of novelty or familiarity in isolation, and that they seek to balance these features with other elements of the concert. These elements include the capacity for variance in a live performance of a familiar work, or by choosing to hear a new work by performers whose quality of performance they trust" (Dobson 2010, 236). There have been instances when I have enjoyed the artists' presentation skills and not focused on the musical elements; for instance, on

the skills that ranged from execution of fast paced tough improvisations supported by their bodily expressions to their mutual understanding with the accompanying artists. From a musician's standpoint, Dr. Shankar shares how she is able to just enjoy the concert without listening with an ear for critiquing technicalities:

When I go to a concert, I definitely have my eyes and ears on everything. But most importantly, I look at the overall “aanandam” (happiness) that I can get out of the concert experience. At my stage as a performing musician, I may notice imperfections that others would not; that would be anyway obvious to me. So, one option is going [to concerts] with a critical eye [viewpoint] to point out what is wrong or right. The other option is to overlook any errors, enjoy and observe the good things of the presentation. What is that I can just enjoy without looking at any technicalities? Just feel good and enjoy the performance (Interview with Dr. Shankar, February 25, 2020, Mumbai).

A different opinion from the audience, in connection with their preferences<sup>12</sup> as listeners, indicates the need for a balanced selection of musical pieces to cater to the enjoyment levels of different audience groups:

Many times, there is a mixed crowd of people; people who just love music [referring to those without musical background], also there are students, musicians. So while having [organizing] such concerts, all these things should be taken into consideration and the concert should be presented in the way so that everyone can equally enjoy it. For example, too much technicalities or extensive ragas could be less enjoyable or end up being too much to accept [comprehend] for the pure music lovers. [For] Musicians, students etc would be fine [would enjoy], so keeping a balance is key (Discussion, February 22, 2020 Mumbai).

The above opinion from the rasika was expressed from a performer's perspective by Dr. Chousalkar, who comments:

You have to look at the audience and gauge through them. variety of audience and have to please everybody. Not much grammar in music is required always. Need to be entertaining – audiences are there to get entertained. What are the audience looking for in a mehfil? enjoyment, looking to spend time in a happy, nice way. Unlike in a drama/movie, classical music performance has no pain, sorrow or any such emotions. So basically, a concert is a happy place to be. It should be created as a “happy place” from a performer side and the audience side (Interview with Dr. Chousalkar, January 23, 2020, Mumbai).

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<sup>12</sup> The considerations to determine can be based on the type of concert, geographical location of venue, demographics of the audience and so on. The performers also can time their improvisations during the performance based on the responses from the audience or even provide explanations as an act of educating the audience if needed.



Her perspective that classical music has no pain or sorrow is arguable; however, in this context, she is referring to the holistic happiness element provided by concerts. She adds the concert venues should be a “happy place” for both performers and the audience.

#### 4.2.2 Visual and audio aesthetics for enjoyment

Live concert attendance is not only about listening to music but also gaining an opportunity to enjoy the visual and audio aesthetics during live presentations.<sup>13</sup> Santosh Kumar Pudaruth, a Hindustani vocal instructor, states how experiencing an art form can be driven by the sense of perception. He explains:

It is the aesthetics what is beautiful, interesting, exciting, uplifting, and entertaining in such art-forms as music, painting, drama, sculpture, literature, and dance, among others. In a general way, depending on the nature of the art-forms, the “beautiful” is experienced through any one, two, or more of the five senses of perception. In music, the aesthetic is experienced directly through, primarily, the sense of hearing and, at most, the sense of sight, in a disinterested contemplative manner (2016, 2).

Aligned with Pudaruth’s perspective, I find that the visual experience at live concerts is not limited to seeing the artists perform but also seeing the audience and their reactions. Notably, as audience members, it matters less if their gestures and responses to the performance were unanimous with the rest of the audience. What matters is the experience of being part of an audience who are appreciative. One interviewee described the reasoning behind such an experience with an interesting example:

Attending a live concert is always a very different experience for me. I definitely don't understand many times, or may be most of the time, the technical reason why I “waah” (appreciate) during performances. But I go with the flow of the audience and also when I feel like the performer has presented an outstanding phrase. I enjoy the overall feel and also its amazing being part of such an [enthusiastic] audience. Just like when a cricket player plays an amazing shot, everyone praises him. Not necessarily, all of them know how

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<sup>13</sup> The venue aesthetics including the stage setup, decorations, lighting and so on are not factored in as part of visual experience for this comparison.

the shot was played, but it is about appreciating the effort (Interview, January 26, 2020 Mumbai).

The interviewee expresses the feeling of being among an appreciative audience as what makes attending live concerts more enjoyable for him. Of course, each audience member is unique and will have a different perception. However, all the participants I interviewed seemed to care less about the synchronization of their responses with the group, rather than expressing the pleasure of being present at the venue. Dobson states through her study that the behavior codes of Western classical concerts enable the audience members to devote increased attention to the listening experience in a way they may not always do when listening to recordings (2010, 192). She highlights that listening at Western classical concert halls allowed a predominantly individual experience since audience members are generally precluded from talking during performances. Though the audience of Hindustani classical music is perceived as an active group, their responses including gestures and short words of appreciation are not perceived by the audience members as distracting or noisy. In a way, such responses create an environment for individual appreciation, and hence, the idea of individual experience holds true at Hindustani classical concert venues.

My personal experience attending the concert at Thane Sahyog Mandir made me realize what it meant to listen individually and at the same time, experience music collectively with a group of appreciative audience. As a musician, I observed that I had the individual space to focus on the musical technicalities as well as be positively influenced by the other responses from the audience. More than being able to share my individual reactions along with the group, I valued the collective feeling of being able to unanimously appreciate particular sections of the performance. In other words, that feeling of being able to listen along with a group of classical music enthusiasts made my experience more enjoyable.

From my analysis, it can be noted that enjoyment at live concerts is determined by factors including liveness, familiarity with repertoires and visual aesthetics. These factors, when combined with individual listening and collective audience experience, attract regular attendees to live concerts. Enjoyment was seen as a primary motive from my survey results, where 74.5% of the survey respondents chose “to enjoy listening to live music performances” as one of the reasons for attending concerts.

### **4.3 Social engagement**

For the purpose of this study, I define social engagement as any activity that can bring together a section of people with a level of participation for a meaningful purpose. It is also important to mention that the scope of social engagement considered in this research is within the space of concert venues and any follow-up interactions on social media.

While a concert is primarily intended to showcase the artists’ on-stage performances, it also facilitates a level of interactions off-stage among the audience. Dobson cites the work of Brenda Gainer, who conducted in-depth interviews with regular attendees of live performing arts to make the case that concerts play the role of facilitating social interaction among the audience. Gainer states that “sharing social experiences including using arts events to build bridges with distant acquaintances, or even just being able to talk about experiences of attendance with others who attend similar events, were key motivations for attending arts performances” (Gainer 1995, 258; Dobson 2010, 18). Many audience members shared the perspective of seeing concert venues as a place to connect with people and be a part of a community who appreciates classical music. The venues provided a realm where the attendees could socialize and converse about topics of common interests. Such off-stage social interactions were evidently visible at all concerts I

attended. Notably, in my fieldwork data, social interaction can be interpreted as a secondary motive for attending concerts, along with the two reasons mentioned earlier, pedagogy and enjoyment.

Though a secondary motive, social engagement was visibly a common theme across the audience groups. For a student, the social interaction meant meeting other students, especially shishyas of performing artists, and further expanding their network to collaborate on learning and performances. For instance, a classical vocal student finds it beneficial to get to know a tabla/harmonium student, and thereby collaborate on musical engagements. Such support and partnership is important in Hindustani classical training, since performances are mostly a collaborative showcase. As another example, a vocal recital will usually be accompanied by a tabla and a key/string instrument or vice versa. A rasika (harmonium student) states:

I am here to listen, but I also like to attend with my friends. Most of them I know (became friends) in the last one to two years of attending concerts. They are my music group friends. we all have a whatsapp group and, there everyone shares about music [concert] plans, plan for [attending] the concerts together. [Attending concerts as a group] I have realized that it's like a group study, like how we do for school exams. We can analyze the performance together and learn from each other (Interview, February 02, 2020, Mumbai).

In a similar vein, musicians I interviewed also acknowledged concerts as a venue to meet other artists and professionals from their field. Their shared interactions can range from getting to know each other's artistic perspectives, to increased performance experience to and self-promotion. The prominence of live concerts is not just confined to on-stage showcases (performers and performances), and has been gradually shifting towards off-stage spaces as well. Food and refreshments served during planned intermissions or before/after the presentations at Hindustani concert venues is a reflection of the importance given to off-stage participation. Besides this social engagement, these interactions are a networking avenue for musicians to promote themselves, which could lead to future collaborations or business opportunities. Dr. Shankar explains why networking and people skills are important for a musician's career:

If you want to make a career, if you want to be successful at ... at anything where people are involved, whether it's music or anything ... Now what is your raw material? Your raw material is people. Not just at concerts, but everywhere. It's people who are going to call you for concerts, people who are going to get [offer] you work, people who are going to appreciate [you as a musician], people who are going to do everything. So what you need apart from music skills is also people skills (Interview with Dr. Shankar, February 25, 2020, Mumbai).

Dr. Chousalkar shares her perspective on how concert venues have evolved as a center for motives other than attending to music. Hence, she finds the idea of going to concerts with an intention for self-promotion bewildering. She adds:

Another aspect that has crept into attending concerts..[is] how as musicians, you attend concerts to meet people to build on your PR (public relations) and probably even a fashion/trend. If I am seen at your concert, it means both of us are on the same side [shares similar perspectives]. Strange thing, we cannot point it out but we can feel this at concerts (Interview with Dr. Chousalkar, January 23, 2020, Mumbai).

As discussed in the chapter one, live concerts are an opportunity for the audience to witness the performing artists at a closer proximity. Concert attendance also appeared to be motivated by the desire to physically see their favorite artists “in the flesh” (Brown and Knox 2016, 238). This appeared often to be influenced by the desire to improve the likelihood of getting the chance to “possibly meet the band” and “shake hands” (ibid.). For the Hindustani classical audience, there is also a sense of participation in a shared musical experience with the performing artist that elevates their experience of liveness. As described in Chapter Three, it is not an uncommon practice at Indian classical concerts for the performing artists to extend their time on stage to interact with the audience post performances. These interactions are valued by the participants and are cited by the audience members as another reason for attending concerts.

The social engagement that commences from concert venues extends beyond the physical space to online social platforms. A common theme that emerged from a section of the participants

was that they preferred to share, on social media platforms, their experiences attending concerts in the form of photos or blogs. A rasika shares:

Besides the concert experience, I also like the fact that my friends get to know about my interests in attending concerts when I post photos and videos from concerts. I always try to see if I can get a photo with the performing artists, whether I follow them or not (Discussion, February 22, 2020, Mumbai).

While some believe this as an expression for bragging and status enhancement, others consider this as a new way of portraying personal interests. Interestingly, though some participants touched on this perspective, none of the audience members I interviewed acknowledged “status enhancement” to be their motive for concert attendance. An interviewee comments:

And I have seen audiences who come to concerts because they feel it’s part of a social status/symbol, also at the same time, really keen music lovers who would travel far and wide to attend concerts [for the music experience]. Also there’s a bunch of audience which goes to a concert thinking of it as a nice social thing to do and feel good to be a part of it. Wide range of reasons to attend concerts [other than for music], right? (Interview, January 21, 2020 Mumbai).

While social engagement was noted as one of the reasons for concert attendance, pedagogy and enjoyment remain as the primary motive for regular concert goers to attend live concerts. Reflecting on the motive of social engagement, 32% of the survey respondents chose “to meet people with common interest and socialize” as one of the reasons for attending live concerts.

## CONCLUSION

The key findings from this research establish that there are specific reasons why regular concert goers attend Hindustani live concerts. The audience groups can be broadly categorized into students, musicians (aspiring and professional) and music appreciators. Focusing on both the audiences' and performers' perspectives, this research explores the distinct ways in which these audience groups listen to Hindustani live concerts and the key takeaways from the performances. Pedagogy, enjoyment and social engagement are demonstrated as the key motives for the audience's repeated concert attendance. The research also highlights how these motives influence the ways in which the audience groups approach listening at concert venues.

I believe that the Hindustani concert audience, especially the regular attendees, can be considered as more than listeners at the venues. They establish an embodied form of listening, whereby listening at concerts can be considered as a performance by itself. There are no established rules to listen at Hindustani classical concerts; however, the manner of listening should facilitate the individual's intended purpose or motive of listening. There is an interplay of embodied performance and embodied listening, which facilitates learning and entertainment. Within this interplay, the listeners can perceive a musical composition in their own ways and also connect with the performer's style of presentation during live concerts. The idea of embodied listening by Chloe Alaghband-Zadeh, as noted in Chapter One, situates the individual listening within imagined histories of North Indian classical music. Though Alaghband-Zadeh states that the audience lamented about the decline of the golden age of Indian classical music, no one that I spoke with seemed to consider that classical music has met such a decline. They expressed the changes evolving with respect to use of electronic tanpura, sound acoustics, etc.; however, I felt

that the audience, especially the regular concert attendees, appreciated the efforts of contemporary musicians in keeping the tradition of classical music alive. In a way, the shared and collective audience experiences at Hindustani concerts not only play a significant role in influencing the artists' performances but also contribute to a great extent in sustaining the classical concert practices.

With the wider popularity of social media, online platforms now play an unprecedented role in facilitating virtual (remote) opportunities for music learning, social interactions and networking. Live concerts are no longer limited to physical venues. Music concerts can be now "streamed live" to audiences around the world without the limitation of confined concert hall seating. Even though attending live concerts on social media cannot replace the experiences at concert venues, it still could be perceived as a more engaging experience than listening to pre-recorded music. Online concerts still serve the purpose of learning and enjoyment, as the basic listening elements are still preserved. While performer-audience engagement can be argued to be limited on social media, the ease of access to live performances on the Internet has allowed concert goers to interact with a broader group in a quicker fashion. The new digital age allows attendees to express their feedback and feelings in different ways including tweets, tags and posts, which even helps non-attendees to connect with those events. As Scott and Harmon (2016) adds, social media now allows concert-goers to share photos, videos, and comments with offsite but online friends, who in turn may reward concert-goers with instant feedback such as "likes". Notably, the current scenario with the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a steep increase in online live concerts. This leads to the question of whether the relevance of live concerts in physical spaces will be sustained in the future, and how these new online concerts will impact audience interaction.



Reflecting on my recent personal experience performing on Facebook live at a classical concert facilitated by the Sarb Akal Music Society in Calgary, I felt the direct engagement between me and the audience seemed missing during the live stream. A continuous interaction from the audience was present in the form of chat conversations. However, the lack of audible acknowledgements and compliments which I experience as a performer at live concert venues impacted my overall performance. Without visible and audible engagement, I was less motivated to present vocal improvisations. I realized how important the audience is. It was evident that the lack of a true audience engagement could impact the effectiveness of a “collective space” for listening and performing, which I noted in this study. I feel that without this collective space, both performers and audience will not have the same degree of experience, which otherwise would have been present at a concert venue. Most importantly, the “liveness” experienced at concert venues is irreplaceable by online live sessions and for these reasons, I feel the social media live performances will continue to coexist with physical venues.

In my research, the participants identified live classical music as traditionally rich in the sense that any changes over the years can still retain its “true essence,” and live concerts will contribute to sustaining the art form. What does the future hold for live concerts at venues with the emergence of social media? Will the trend in venue attendance diminish? While these questions remain unanswered for now, I believe the unique characteristics of live performances and venues will continue to be popular, as the Hindustani classical audiences attend live musical performances for reasons beyond listening.

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# APPENDIX

## 1. Survey questionnaire

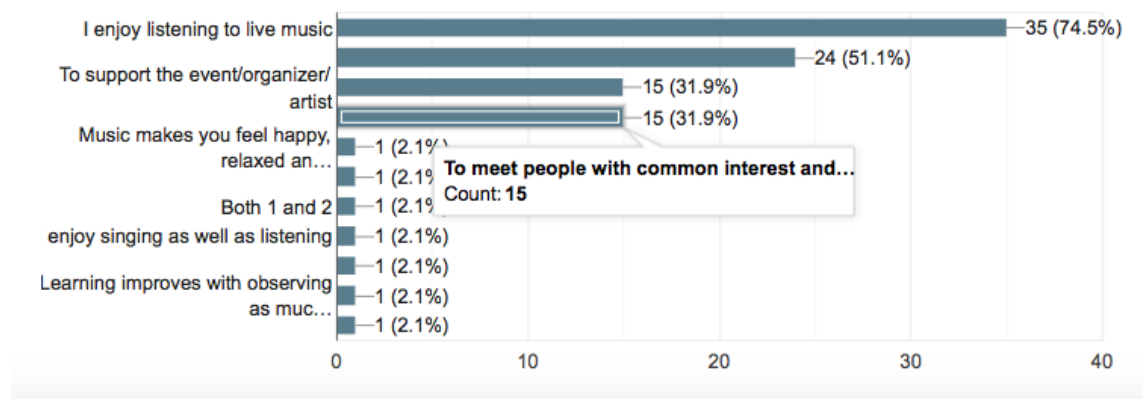
Survey questions were selected based on the following factors in mind:

1. Do you sing, play any instruments or perform Indian classical dance? Please specify.
2. Why do you attend classical concerts? You may choose more than one option.
3. Let's assume that you are not related to the organizer/artist. What are the chances that you would still attend the concert?
4. What is the probability that you would try to musically analyze the performance post the concert?
5. I also attend concerts so that I can showcase myself as a musician/concert follower/music lover/artist. Please rate the statement.

## 2. Survey analysis

Why do you attend classical concert? You may choose more than one option.

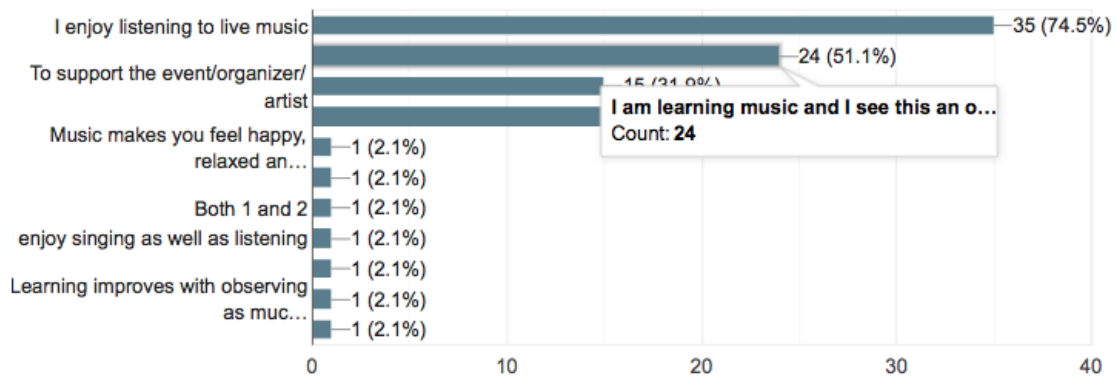
47 responses





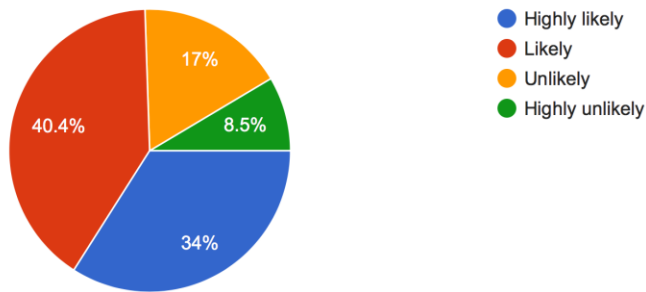
Why do you attend classical concert? You may choose more than one option.

47 responses



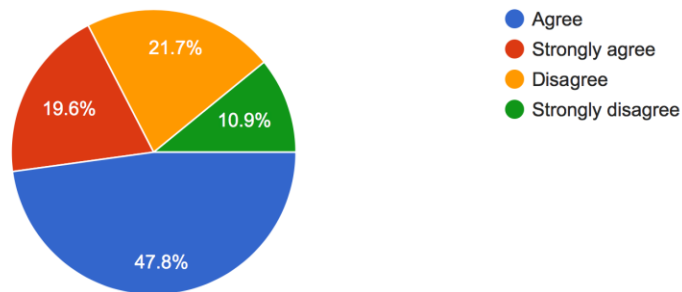
What is the probability that you would try to musically analyze the performance post the concert

47 responses



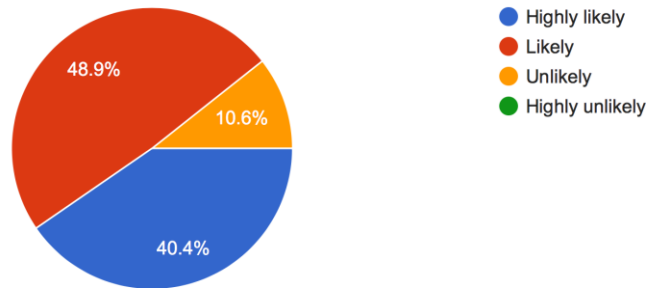
I also attend concerts so that I can showcase myself as a musician/concert follower/music lover/artist. Please rate the statement

46 responses



Lets assume that you are not related to the organizer/artist. What are the chances that you would still attend the concert?

47 responses



Summary of key statistics from the survey:

- 74.5% of the respondents chose the reason for attending live concerts: to enjoy listening to live music performances
- 32% of the respondents chose the reason for attending live concerts: to meet people with common interest and socialize
- 51% of the respondents chose the reason for attending live concerts: to enhance their knowledge about classical music while being a student
- 74% of the respondents would try (likely or highly likely) to analyze the performance post-concert for learning purposes
- 67% of the respondents chose (agreed or strongly agreed) the reason for attending live concerts: to showcase as a musician, concert follower, music lover or artist
- 89% of the respondents chose (agreed or strongly agreed) that they would still attend live concerts irrespective of their relationship with the organizers
- 79% of the respondents answered that they are involved either in singing, playing an instrument or performing Indian classical dance. Out of these, 25 chose the reason for attending live concerts: to enhance their knowledge about classical music while being a student (which can be related to *Pedagogy* purpose). In other words, the majority of the respondents (25 out of 36) who are learning or practising music/dance consider live concerts as a center for learning and knowledge enhancement.
- Out of the 21% of the respondents who are not involved either in singing, playing an instrument or performing Indian classical dance, everyone chose the reason for attending live concerts: to enjoy listening to live music performances. In other words, all respondents who are neither learning nor practising music/dance consider primarily attending concerts for enjoyment.

### 3. Transcription of the interviews

#### Discussion 1 – January 26, 2020

1. S (Shruti): How do you understand different music? For e.g., when you're not a tabla player, how do you find the difference? How do you understand that music?

A (Attendee): You don't need to understand it always. Sometimes it's just enough to listen to it as a common audience. The fact that it makes you feel nice when you hear it. Just feeling nice, and actually knowing about it, might just be two different things.

S: I don't play an instrument, I only sing. As a student, I used to count beats, so do you do that? Or do you just appreciate the music and the artist?

A: Yes, that's how it is mostly.

2. S: Okay, last question: Why do you think attending a concert is important as a music student?

A: Sometimes it's important to know how to present it. It's necessary because this very art, it's something we must carry forward. The younger generation, for the time being, isn't too aware of the instruments. So it's important to take it to them, and this is probably the way to make them attend such concerts too.

#### Discussion 2 – January 26, 2020

1. S: If you know an instrument/ or a music piece already, how easy is it to appreciate it when you hear another artist do it?

A: Classical music is much more different from other forms. Western music is much easier to understand. Go to concerts, just hang out, and relax with a drink in hand. It's not the same with classical music. Right from the beginning of a classical concert, you start picking up things; you start learning. As you do that, there's a connection that begins to form with the music you hear. Having said that, it's not necessary that one learns music, more listening makes it more relatable.

2. S: What do you do to understand the music, being a tabla player yourself?

A: Yes, first of all there are so many taals in which tabla players perform. As Shridharbhai said, Aadhi taal has 16 beats. So, it was out there among us. That instrument is a south Indian instrument, so not everyone relates to it that easily. Tabla has now gone to the next level becoming easier to understand, for e.g., unlike Mridangam, where everyone needs to be told about the taal prior to the solo, it's easier for the audience to get a hang of it. As a student, it becomes easier for me to understand.

3. Okay, last question: Why do you think attending a concert is important as a music student? And also, how often do you attend such concerts?

A: Very often. We are so interested in listening to other artists, because the more you listen, the more you learn. We are always learning new things in every concert. More than actually performing, listening, I believe, is more important.

4. S: How do you compare instruments?

A: All instruments are different, so it's not really about comparing. Every instrument has its own uniqueness and importance, so it's about embracing the same.

#### Interview 1 – January 21, 2020

S: Do you play any instrument or sing?

A: tabla.

S: How long have you been listening to concerts? How often do you attend concerts?

A: Once a week

S: Prefer vocal or Instrument concerts, being a performer yourself?

A: Have a liking for both.

S: What is a good concert according to you? What do you notice the most?

A: The connection an artist has with the audience. Raag, feel, helps to connect.

S: What would you not like in a concert?

A: Asks for options, yet doesn't give a conclusive answer.

S: Do you musically analyze a concert or do you just enjoy the music?

A: I do analyze.

## **Interview 2 – January 21, 2020**

S: Do you sing or play an instrument?

A: I sing.

S: How long have you been listening to Indian classical music?

A: Last 2-3 years.

S: How often do you attend concerts?

A: Hardly

S: Any preference: vocal or instrumental concerts?

A: Vocal concerts

S: How would you describe a good concert?

A: Depends on my interest which is usually vocal: soft music. Slow music that interests me, connects with me.

S: Classical specifically, or with reference to today's concert, what is your favorite part in a concert?

A: Bandish

S: Do you believe a Raag pertains to a specific feel?

A: Yes

S: Do you get emotionally connected to these, and while you do, do you try to think about the music, how it is woven or do you just enjoy it?

A: I try to understand it through the notes or notations. And since I have started learning, the student in me is willing to make me do it.

S: While listening to a concert, I admire the skill of the performer more than analyzing the musical patterns?

A: Being a student, I just admire. Haven't reached the stage where I can analyze the music yet.

S: Do you prefer to get a detailed explanation before a performance, e.g., Raag, Bandish etc.

A: Yes, I would.

S: Do you like to understand the technicalities of raag, improvisations etc. after listening to it in a concert? For e.g. Something you may not pick up during the performance, would you like to learn how it could be done later?

A: Yes

S: If you would just be a music lover, would you still want to learn it?

A: Yes, I would still want to.

S: Being a student, would you like to have a segment where you are made to understand, "How to learn or how to listen" in the whole learning of Hindustani training process?

A: Yes, as you said, I believe every singer has a different take, a different tone, so I would love to.

S: As a student, do you have anything specific to say about Indian classical concerts? Like, what happens in a concert, how there's an impact on the audience?

A: Many times, there is a mixed crowd of people; people who love music, there are students etc. So while having such concerts, all these things should be taken into consideration and the concert should be presented in the way so that everyone enjoys it. For e.g., too much technicalities or extensive raags, could be boring or end up being too much for the pure music lovers. Music lovers, students etc. would be fine, so keeping a balance is key.

### **Interview 3 – January 21, 2020**

S: Asks for name and intro.

A: Dr Rupali - homeopathy, I am a dietician by profession.

S: Do you sing or play an instrument?

A: I sing. With this course, I'm learning Harmonium as well.

S: How long have you been listening?

A: From my childhood.

S: Concert listening – how often?

A: Once a while.

S: Is there a preference for vocal or instrumental?

A: Vocal.

S: How would you describe a great concert? Good elements?

A: First of all, I would prefer an open venue for a concert. Instruments should be nicely audible, good bass, my personal preference is slow music more than the modern stuff.

S: Classical concert specifically, or with reference to today's concert, what is your favorite part in a concert?

A: Bandish

S: Do you believe a Raag pertains to a specific feel?

A: Yes, it does,

S: Do you get emotionally connected and while you do, do you try to think about the music, how it is woven or just enjoy it?

A: Yes

S: When you do, do you think about notes or how the movement of the Raag is?

A: How the movement of the raag is.

S: Agree or Disagree Questions. While listening to a concert, I admire the skill of the performer more than analyzing the musical patterns?

A: Yes, agree.

S: Do you prefer a detailed explanation/intro before a performance, e.g., Raag, Bandish etc.

A: Yes.

S: Do you like to understand the technicalities of the raag, improvisations etc.? For e.g., something you may not pick up while the performance, would you like to learn how it could be done later?

A: As a normal person, I would just enjoy, as a student, yes, I am willing to learn.

S: Do you think that one needs to be a singer to understand the technicalities?

A: Be a singer, or one must learn music.

S: When you're learning the notes or doing riyaaaz, do you think such elements need to be included to make you understand it in a concert.

A: Yes.

S: Being a student, would you like to have a segment where you are made to understand, “How to learn or how to listen” in the whole learning process?

A: I don't think so, because the students learning music will anyway have an idea about it. Those who are music lovers not learning music, I believe they are here just to enjoy the whole experience.

#### **Interview 4 – January 21, 2020**

S: Asks for name and intro.

A: Maitreya, I'm preparing for Medical exams.

S: Do you sing or play an instrument?

A: I Sing, I also know how to play harmonium and tanpura.

S: How long have you been listening to Indian classical music?

A: Last 4-5 years - learning, have been listening Indian classical music right from when I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

S: How often do you attend concerts?

A: Given a choice, I would attend daily. Whenever there is one in the city and I get time, I attend.

S: Any preference, vocal or instrumental concerts?

A: Vocal, because I aspire to become a vocalist.

S: Classical specifically, or with reference to today's concert, what is your favorite part in a concert?

A: Jhaala, the fast part.

S: Preference: aalap or sargam in a jhaala?

A: aalap

S: Do you believe a Raag pertains to a specific feel?

A: Yes, of course.

S: Do you get emotionally connected and while you do, do you try to think about the music, how it is woven or just enjoy it?

A: Yes, I do get connected.

S: Agree or Disagree Questions. While listening to a concert, I admire the skill of the performer more than analyzing the musical patterns?

A: Can't say, both of it actually, but mostly my focus is on what the artist performs. So yeah, I guess I do admire it.

S: Do you prefer a detailed explanation before a performance, e.g., Raag, Bandish etc.

A: Yes, since I learn, I would be able to learn.

S: Do you like to understand the technicalities of Raag, improvisations etc.? For e.g., something you may not pick up during the performance, would you like to learn how it could be done later?

A: Yes, I would. But, since the classical concerts are quite long, I doubt if I'd be able to recollect all the details after the concert. But, if I can, then I definitely would.

#### **Interview 5 – January 21, 2020**

S: Do you sing or play an instrument?

A: I sing, don't play.

S: How would you describe a good concert?

A: Haven't really attended many.

S: Do you believe a Raag pertains to a specific feel?

A: Well, I don't personally feel it being an outsider, but I'm sure it does to others. Feeling wise, not really. But knowledge wise, it does. Personally, I haven't been able to catch it.

S: Any reason for not attending concerts?

A: Possibly because I am not adequate enough to appreciate it. I'm not very well informed.

S: When you listen to an aalap, do you think you are able to get the flow of it?

A: aalap, yes.

S: Do you enjoy listening to aalap?

A: Yes, I do.

S: In comparison to other segments, which is the most enjoyable segment to you?

A: Enjoy singing aalap and bandish I do, not yet the taan. But, when others sing the Taan portion, I do enjoy, personally, I have not quite been able to sing taans myself.

S: So, this is from your singing perspective?

A: Yes, I am unable to do it myself. But I love it when good singers do.

S: When really good artists perform, what would be the most enjoyable segment?

A: Love everything when a good artist performs. But, when things get too classical or technical, I don't understand it. So it's not a question of liking it.

-I love everything when a good artist performs. But, when things get too classical or technical, I don't understand it. So it's not a question of liking or disliking it. I just try to enjoy and not get into understanding too many details. Though I have some understanding about the raags and sargams, the moment I try to analyze while listening, I can't concentrate and enjoy the performance. I go with a free mind and love the ambience and overall musical experience.

S: When there's really fast paced exciting segments in a concert, is the fact that you don't understand it that concerns you the most?

A: Yes, that in a way is my limitation and that's why I don't go for concerts.

S: Do you feel like breaking it down or understanding it, when there's really fast patterns, segments, taans etc. in a concert?

A: I'm unable to comprehend it, so I just leave it there.

S: While listening to a concert, I admire the skill of the performer more than analyzing the musical patterns?

A: Yes, agree. Even so, when the performer is someone I personally know. Otherwise, it's just a normal feeling, not much.

S: Do you prefer a detailed explanation before a performance, e.g., Raag, Bandish etc.

A: Yes. Sometimes there's too much talking, just a brief intro is good.

S: Prefer vocal or Instrumental in classical concert? What do you prefer?

A: It's more about Vocals.

S: Is it because you're learning?

A: Possible. But, I'm not much into instrumental music. Sometimes, Baansuri, yes, when it comes to instruments. But, I can't play it, so I just like listening to it.

### **Interview 6 – January 23, 2020 – Dr. Uttara Chousalkar**

As a kid – you are learning classical music because there's a certain influence from parents. You attend concerts with parents and these are opportunities as well to get close to your culture. These concerts need not be core classical events at large venues, but also small Mehfiles or performances in temples.

Attending tabla solo – Counting every avarthan; and felt like an achievement that whatever complexity was being played on the tabla, I was still counting the beats right.

3:09-3:40

While listening to vocal music – listening to any classical performer – I was amazed to see how a performer ruled the stage and captured the attention of the audience. And gradually started seeing myself in the same place. That's when I realized that I want to do the same. Entire audience was enraptured by the musician's singing. Smt. Susheela (guru) taught me how to listen to music - "sunne ki bhi tahseeb hothe he... You don't have to show other people that you understand classical music, you don't have to be seated at the front and make certain gestures (Taal, Waah waah). Tahseeb sikhaati hai, you let elders sit in front, Aap peeche baitho. You shouldn't disrupt the concert. When you go to a concert to listen as an audience, don't wear bangles which will make too much sound, don't wear big earrings that will dangle or create any distraction, don't carry plastic bags obviously. I always used to listen to concerts and try to match the performer's music with mine. In the sense, to know how much further I need to go. When I started performing, around 6th standard, I looked at the audience and felt what they looked for; or noticed how they were reacting.

4:40-5:10

How to present as a performer - dressing?

Don't wear bold colors, it should be plain if so. Should not be wearing heavy jewelry, that's not what the audience needs to see. Don't move too much. You have to look at the audience and gauge through them. variety of audience and have to please everybody. Not much grammar in music is required always. Need to be entertaining – audiences are there to get entertained. What are the audience looking for in a mehfil – entertainment, looking to spend time in a happy, nice way. Unlike in a drama/movie, classical music performance has no pain, sorrow or any such emotions. So basically, Concert is a happy place to be. It should be created as a happy place from a performer side and the audience side.

When I listen to my contemporaries, you start looking for what's new, what new has the performer presented, how much has the performer evolved and grown as an artist. What level has the performer reached? Comparing his/her growth curve. Attending a friend's concert, the primary reason being them being your friend. When listening to an instrumental concert – as a vocalist, I look at the design they do and how I can incorporate it into vocals.

After so many years of performance, listening to new and upcoming artists/youngsters – unfortunately, there is a critic inside who wants to say something –“ areh... yeh theek nahi hua..” but you still have to find out, irrespective of the level of the artist, what are they trying to do with the art – are they contributing to the art, are they not? Or are they just being there? There are people who are disturbing the tradition, contributing and some who are just there. All these analyses happen as an audience. Because I am in this field. At the same time, if I am at a dance concert, I will be the most raw audience because as a musician, I know the music, the beat, the raag – but I still have to learn and understand what is happening in the dance. It's not the same as a music concert.

I prefer to go to concerts where there are not too many artists; maximum two artists. Not very keen on going to concerts where there are multiple artists as the artist would get very less time which according to me is not enough. Love singing and listening in Chamber concerts. Especially home concerts – even better as they are much more vibrant. Lot of things are happening – dialogues happening. Closer to the audience too.



As a performer, I have seen all this. We can find two to three faces in the audience who seem very receptive and you tend to look at them and get feedback. It's not that you are looking at them to get any acknowledgment, or adulation. It's just that the audience can be the graph of how your performance is going. And I have seen audiences who come to concerts because they feel it's part of a social status or symbol, also people who are really keen music lovers who would travel far and wide to attend concerts. Also there's a bunch of audience which goes to a concert thinking of it as a nice social thing to do and feel good to be a part of it.

Audience who want to listen to popular classical songs. Very small portion who would look for a new element/song/raag in the performance. Multiple ways people listen to music performances in a concert. I have attended concerts with one artist performing for over three hours. Another interesting part of the concerts is the interval segment. That's the time where we interact with co-students, some celebrities, (unlike the recent TV celebrities). Excitement as kids to see celebrities. Bhimsen Joshi's 25 years celebration concert as he performed in the organization for twenty five years. Mega celebration venue – celebration Vile Parle Music Circle. Singing greeting bandishes for Pandit ji.

As a student in the audience– was always ready dressed up – In case you are asked to go and sit on stage for tanpura accompaniment. All these things are disappearing – changed a lot in looks wise! Looks have become more important than the matter. Somehow losing the flavor these days. Less organic and very planned! Concerts should be like home cooked food and not like packed food! Organic adjustments are missing nowadays.

There's really a need for educating the audience – despite mentioning to keep phones on silent, and phones ringing – it's a bad thing! And the worst thing- while tuning the tanpura, people are talking. I really feel the need to go to school level to teach kids how to listen and appreciate the music. Another aspect that has crept into attending concerts – Attending concerts to meet people to build on your PR. Fashion/Trend – If I am seen at your concert, it means both of us are on the same side. Strange thing, we cannot point it out but can feel it. You are told – if there are 2 musicians discussing the musical scenario and connection badhenge? Are you going to listen to the performance or for networking?

Audience at a concert has reduced as there are now different mediums of listening to music. Overall range of audience – old people, Ok group of middle age, kids – attraction to see the person in person.

17:20 onwards

When you go to a classical concert – to listen as a student- you ought to dress up in a particular way. Listening to a concert – one should be in the most comfortable dress so that your full attention is dedicated to the performance and you are not focusing on your sitting postures or adjusting your position....

As a student – don't compare the singer to your teacher. Your teacher may be wonderful. But comparing the singer with your teacher – you will lose to know what the performer has to offer. So, there is a need to attend the concert with a clean slate like mind and absorb what comes to you. Note that if a singer has some habit that is not very pleasing, be particular that you are not imbibing it. If you start criticizing that element, you are bound to get it on you. Observe how the singer is treating or dealing with their accompanists and also treating the audience. If the performer is not building a connection with the audience, not conveying

anything with the audience, no rapport – there is some downfall. It's very important that you interact with the audience- not just talking or cracking a joke. Well you could do that too – once a while on stage. And if it seems appropriate to entertain the audience. But what vibes the artist has with his/her accompanists/ audience – is he snapping / boring /ignoring them /involving them/ respecting them. As a student, one needs to observe these things so that you know in future, how and how not you should be presenting yourself on stage.

Very good idea to take a notepad and make notes about the performances. Pros and cons of the artists and discuss with your guru. That you observed and heard these ways. Ask Guru what they think about your analysis. And your guru will lead you. Sitting quiet is also very important at a concert. Even the whispers among the audience is something that affects a performer. Listening to music is also a meditation. Listening to music needs to be an action and not just something in the background! Just sitting down and listening to music, not doing anything else is a very important thing to become good at music, especially for students. Have to have ongoing research to become good as a student. The idea of Gharana is fading, but as a student – it will be good musician.

On-going research is very important. Introducing the raag before the performance – pre-independence and now?

In older times, pre independence and even after independence, mehfil used to be on a 'chote pehmane pe'. Meaning that, mehfil used to be attended by an audience that was musically very knowledgeable. For instance, if an artist during that time, were to actually introduce the raag, it could be treated as an insult by the audience! When I was a student, we used to discuss among ourselves about what the raag is etc., if it wasn't announced before a performance. Sometimes, lyrics would be put out in front of the audience before the performance itself, while sometimes, nothing would be discussed.

As a performer – Chousalkar's guru told her that as a performer on stage – you are there to entertain the audience, so take them along with you. Don't leave them alone –they need to know what you will be singing. At the same time, there will be critics in the audience who may say “oh you are singing the same raag again, last venue also you sang this one, etc.” So, there's always a wide variety of audience catching on something or the other. “Dressing...” based on venue, weather, sitting posture. It's like a festivity for many!

Have noted that in some concerts, some flower sellers would be around a concert hall trying to sell the flowers to a possible audience. Some organizers have also gone a step further and arranged for different types of flowers, both for men and for women. There have been many house concerts as well where people have come from faraway places to just sit in a small space and enjoy music; so the audience has been there for the music at various levels and interests.

Regarding the different types of venues and concerts happening, there is a discussion about concerts in small halls like Sahyog Mandir, to big auditoriums and also early morning concerts in open spaces in natural ambience to listen to music and have fun. Coffee being an important part of a mehfil. Not much for snacks, but coffee surely. Corporate events have started having a lot of concerts nowadays which was not the case before. Background visuals is something that has started to come into the picture lately. I wouldn't necessarily say that it is disturbing. But I would question if it's necessary, because any which way, the

music is creating a canvas, then you should be focusing on the canvas instead of the background. Mehfil, earlier used to be so simple. No backgrounds, no stage, no curtains, the wires could be seen etc.

Nowadays, compared to older times, there is a significant effort on the part of the organizers to pep up smaller halls to make it look more artistic and it's lovely in a way. The fact that people think of such places as an important place for music; just that it should be done in a way not to disturb the audience.

In classical concerts also, nowadays there are comperes which wasn't common earlier. One announcer used to be there and that was about it. Don't think comperes are a disturbance, but it's a new thing. It's a role given to them, unfair to call it disturbing. Artists being vocal about their thoughts during a concert is a really good thing, them discussing why I'm doing this, what I think about it. These things that artists say, audiences really love. Personally too, I have received compliments for the same from my audience. The audience in a way gets an opportunity to compare you with other artists/ guru who might have done similar things in their concerts. People will judge you, they will try to match you up.

Media coverage, accessibility on the internet has led to people knowing about raags etc. I have seen a lot of people who don't understand a particular raag/Taal but they enjoy listening to it. Similarly people have told me that if they're listening to a new raag and if I really give them an intro and an insight, they really enjoy it. If it's an unknown raag, as a performer you must make it easier for the audience out there to understand it through your music, not necessarily explaining.

Farmaaish - Some artists like it, some expect it - be ready for it, some don't really like it. Audience also expect the artist to sing a bhairavi.

(Narrates a story where impromptu singing was done by an artist and people were very happy to sit along and listen because it was late in the evening and the last train had already left. The artist sang through the night and people left the next morning catching the first train. Due to time constraints nowadays, impromptu singing has reduced a fair bit.)

Something that I have observed off late is how museums have started hosting mehfil/ classical music concerts. I would also like to tell you about a different kind of music and a different kind of audience and performance. I sing the baul music also which is from Bengal. This doesn't necessarily cater to the audience, as in, we do sing in front of them, but not necessarily to make them happy. It's a spiritual kind of music. It is a meditative kind of music where the listener or observer can also go on a meditative journey because of the creation of the sound or because of the text of the song. The philosophy of song is what attention is about. There is a huge audience for spiritual music. (Cites Kabir Music festival in Mumbai as an example).

Artists don't necessarily plan to impress the audience and yet, it has a different impact, more like a therapeutic effect where the audience is there to listen to the lyrics and to learn from that; to go on that kind of trance. Both performer and audience are there for the mediation in music. In classical music, there is a lot more planning. For instance the artist must know the art of presenting, must know how to perform the taans, how to select bandhishes etc. None of this happens in baul. It has a completely diff impact on individuals. People analyze themselves, free themselves of blockades, blockades of pain, sorrow or hurt.

I have seen people cry, really come out of the zone that they were locked into. That makes them happy later, it's all stress free

When I learned about Boul, I realized that the audience is full of people from different walks of life and from different places, countries. Mostly there are people from other countries for the retreats, they don't necessarily understand the lyrics or language or the culture, it's all about the feel. Also another thing that reminds me of is, I have seen people say that they don't understand an instrument at all. Like, they would understand vocals, but not instruments because there's nothing really to hold on to for them. No support systems for them. Even harder is to go and understand percussion concerts. There are people who will go for such concerts, not understanding much, but will go there to hear the sound of the percussion and enjoy it. Every music concert will have different kinds of audiences. It will never be like there's the same kind of audience. There will also be an instrumental loving audience that think why the artist is singing the same line again and again.

So, comparing all of these factors, I'm just very sure that the audience has a very important role to play. If we can, through our research and work, educate the next upcoming generation as to how to listen to music, it will be very beneficial to sustain classical music. Because if you don't understand what you are listening to and how to listen, you'll just sit and come out of a concert and not appreciate the music. Nowadays, a problematic factor I believe is that there's a real lack of music reviews unlike older days. Back then, there were musicologies, music critics, thinkers, musicians themselves, who used to listen to concerts and write reviews about the same which was important. For example, if I'm a well-educated person in music and I listen to your concert, and write good/bad about it, not criticizing particularly, it was a necessity back then, unlike nowadays, which is not very thorough coverage through the media. In those days, there were regular reviews every week (2-3) and for me as a research student it was very beneficial. For instance, if you want to know about events in the 1970's, how would you possibly know? Only newspaper clippings will help you; there were obviously no recordings of all the events back then. So I think that is missing nowadays and it should come back. It's not because of the lack of the people's interest, somehow it is the lack of interest in printing houses, although I don't know why.

S: We spoke about the cosmetic part of music, now, as a professional musician, do you closely observe the variations sung by artists in a raag during a performance or how they keep repeating the things, like in aalap for that matter in a concert, when you attend one?

Yes, yes it is automatically made note of. There are singers who are changing raags a bit too, but I'm skeptical of it. Changes from person to person.

There are many artists who like to stay in the safe zone, while there are others who are very flamboyant with their choices, some are keen on trying new things, and as a performer myself I'm definitely looking for that in a performance. As a performer I might start with something very familiar and then go into something new. And every artist would feel the need of showcasing something new because there is so much knowledge within him/her.

About Carnatic music trends where artists sing the classics and have stopped with new compositions - the trend is there in Hindustani as well. Singing popular raagas and not venturing into new ones. We have

theme concerts as well which we missed out in our discussion. Badha concerts, barkhs, morning concerts.. Asthaphar programs - where different prahars' songs are sung. There are still organizations which are doing things like, start a concert in the concert, and go on till the next day, where there are multiple artists which is like a theme based concerts. So, this is something that we have started having. People putting themes into classical music is very interesting. Another thing that has helped classical music become more user friendly or hearing friendly is the introduction of fusion in classical music. Film songs with an addition of classical music or having classical/jazz touch with filmy touch. I won't rule these out. I won't say that it should not happen. I'm not a purist, because if that's the case, one is not growing as a musician. I can choose to attend or not attend such concerts, or whether I want to sing these or not. That won't work now.

People were skeptical earlier because there was a feeling that the main structure of classical - raags would lose its way. It won't work like that now. You can't stop anyone now. I know that the raags are being mixed and it could possibly be damaging the raags. But, this will happen. Fusions are being blamed now, but in olden times, there was a constant blame over the authenticity of raags, based on how it was sung, so that's been a cycle all these years of which raag is more popular. So, you can always find flaws as a listener. But, if you're a broad minded musician, you should be able to just let it be and be candid enough to answer questions related to this. One should not be a performer who says extreme things "like this is not good, this should not be done". Audience doesn't like these vibes. They are just really there to be happy and enjoy concerts.

**Other main interviews with key contributions to this study:**

Interview 7 – February 3, 2020 – Anonymous (Duration – 9:00)

Interview 8 – February 17, 2020 – Sridhar Bhat (Duration – 5:34)

Interview 9 – February 19, 2020 – Rutuja Lad (Duration – 13:17)

Interview 10 – February 25, 2020 – Dr. Sangeeta Shankar (Duration – 17:20)

## 4. Ethics approval: Notification of Approval

### Notification of Approval

Date:	October 1, 2019	
Study ID:	Pro00087962	
Principal Investigator:	<a href="#">Shruti Shashikumar Nair</a>	
Study Supervisor:	<a href="#">Michael Frishkopf</a>	
Study Title:	The changing trend of Hindustani classical concerts from 1998-2018	
Approval Expiry Date:	Tuesday, September 29, 2020	
Approved Consent Form:	Approval Date 10/1/2019	Approved Document <a href="#">Consent Form</a>

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has received a delegated review and been approved on behalf of the committee.

Any proposed changes to the study must be submitted to the REB for approval prior to implementation. A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Anne Malena, PhD.  
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

*Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).*

## 5. Ethics approval: Information Letter and Consent Form

### Appendix A1 Information Letter and Consent Form

**Study Title: The changing trend of Indian classical concerts from 1998-2018**

#### **Research Investigator**

NAME: Shruti Shashikumar Nair

ADDRESS: University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2R3

EMAIL: shrutish@ualberta.ca

#### Background

The research is conducted as a part of my Master's program (Master of Arts in Ethnomusicology) at the University of Alberta and the results of this research will be used in support of my thesis. For the purpose of my thesis study, your input will be valuable and will be used for studying and analyzing the topic in detail.

#### Purpose

This research may be published as a part of a paper (electronic or non-electronic) and/or may be used for teaching or reference purposes at the University of Alberta or other institutions.

#### Study Procedures

- Your input and expertise may be documented for the purpose of my research paper in the form of any or in combination of the following methods
  - Interview sessions
  - Personal opinions and observations
  - Personal and shareable music related repositories and collections
  - Networking with musical focus groups and other relevant contacts
- Your identity may be included in the form of photos, video and/or audio recordings, which may be taken as a part of the research fieldwork

#### Benefits

Your contributions and input shared may be highlighted and referenced in my research paper, if you are in agreement with the same. There may be no direct benefits.

#### Risk

Any information or input shared by you during the course of my fieldwork may be used as a basis for certain analysis and in-depth study of my topic. You have the right to seek any clarification from me prior to completion of my research paper.

Voluntary Participation

- You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary
- You may choose not to continue your participation at any point without any penalty during the course of my field work
- Once published, you will not be able to revoke your participation, identity or information provided

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- All the data collected and shared will be stored in various forms, not limited to, digital files, audio and video recordings, scanned written notes, in my personal laptop.
- You may choose to be identified for my research and any detail provided by you will be used to context of my research paper only
- The data may be retained indefinitely and may be applicable for future publications and/or for teaching purposes
- Anonymity of your work and/or identity cannot be guaranteed in a group context
- If you request, a summary (electronic version) of the research will be sent to you
- You may choose to send me a written notification (for eg: email) to refrain from using your reference in my study (up to a week from providing the information)

Further Information

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.

Consent Statement

I have read this form and/or the research study and the has been explained to me. I may choose to provide verbal consent. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form if requested. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

I agree to be identified in your research

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date