



TABLA

Introduction

Tabla, a pair of tuned drums played with both hands, is the principal percussion instrument used in North Indian classical music. The pair of drums consists of a high-pitched, precisely tuned right hand drum, the dahina (also called Dayan or tabla), and a low-pitched, less precisely tuned left-hand drum, the bayan. The dahina is responsible for many of the resonant ringing and clicking sounds (or bols). The bayan provides the bass and is recognizable for its swooping bass sounds, which provide colorful embellishment. The combination of the two drums lends itself to a vast repertoire of bol combinations and permutations.

Origin

The tabla developed as a hybridized drum, influenced mainly by the mridangam and the pushkara. (Ancient Indian percussion instruments.) It is also said that the present day Tabla is an improved form of a very old drum called Durdur.

The name 'tabla', probably derived from the Arabic word for a drum (generic), called the 'tabl'; and possibly to some extent the Turkish word 'dawal'. Another popular notion is that Amir Khursuro invented the tabla by splitting the pakhwaj into two drums. This is highly disputed. Abul Fazil, the court recorder neither mentions nor describes the tabla, leaving doubt that Amir Khursuro invented the tabla, contrary to a previously popular notion. The Muslim invaders undoubtedly influenced the culture and structure of the tabla. However, the earliest depictions and literature describing the tabla as we recognize it today come from the 18th century. Over the last two centuries the tabla begins to take the forefront of percussion instruments in north Indian classical music. We can trace the family lineage of the gharanas from the 18th century onward. Over this time, the tabla slowly changed, the Dayan decreasing in size while the



Bayan increased. During this time the instrument slowly became the primary drum for both classical and popular music of north India.

The evolution of Tabla gharanas.

Percussion instruments similar to tabla can be seen in Indian temple sculptures dating back thousands of years, however it is generally agreed that the present form of tabla became popular in the royal courts of Delhi during the 17th and 18th centuries. The individual usually credited with the most significant developments of tabla technique and repertoire at this time was Siddhar Khan Dharhi. His grandsons and their various disciples carried the art of tabla playing to other major centers of North Indian cultural life, dispersion that naturally led to the evolution of a number of distinct regional performance styles. At the present time these schools of tabla playing or gharanas (- derived from the Hindi word ghar or "house"-) commonly include those of Delhi, Ajrada, Benares, Farukhabad, Lucknow and Punjab. Each gharana has imbibed the essence, culture and character of its founding city/area into its tradition.

Construction and Tone

Tabla is noted for its unique tonal quality. This quality is derived primarily from the complexity in construction of its drumhead commonly known as pudi. There are basically three parts of the pudi - 1) The weaving (gajara) 2) The membranes 3) The syahi (black spot).

The weaving (gajara) is a heavy ring of woven leather and rawhide, composed of thong made of thick buffalo hide, which is woven into the pudi around its periphery. It functions as a tensioning hoop and gives mechanical strength to the pudi.

TRIAUM



A QUEST FOR RHYTHM

The resonation membrane consists of two components, the maidaan (or laav) and the chaat. The chaat is an upper annular layer of skin which covers only the outer periphery of the sounding surface. It is an important part of the resonating membrane. The chaat is important because it has great effect upon the tonal quality of the tabla. The maidaan has the distinction of being the only skin which covers the entire opening. The syahi (the black spot in the center of the pudi) is probably the most distinctive part of the tabla. It is there to give the tabla its distinctive tone.

Technique

The tabla is played almost entirely with the fingers. On both drums strokes are divided into "open" and "closed" sounds, each of which has at least one monosyllabic name for use in aural instruction and memorization.

On the Dayan, open sounds are produced with the index finger striking either the outer ring (the chaat) the inner ring (maidaan) or the black dot in the middle (syahi). These sounds are called ta, tin, and tun, respectively. Closed strokes involve alternating the index finger with the other three fingers on the syahi (tete), making a cupped slapping motion on the syahi (tak), and using alternating sides of the full palm of the hand over the whole head of the drum to produce a muffled "flapping wing" sort of sound (dhere dhere).

On the Bayan, the open sound is called ghe and is produced with either the index finger or the middle finger. Articulation of this sound is achieved by varying pressure with the wrist to modulate the pitch, and also by sliding the wrist across the head in various ways to produce quick glissandi (this last technique being more common in folk and light classical music). The closed sound, kaat, is played by slapping the hand down on the head of the drum, with the fingers extending out to the edge.

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Context

The tabla is used throughout Northern India in all forms of music, but is most often associated with vocal and instrumental classical music, in which it is the predominant form of accompaniment. Devotional music such as the Sufi qawali, the Hindu bhajan, and the Sikh shabad also make extensive use of the tabla. Lighter song forms, such as the ghazal, as well as film soundtracks and Hindi pop music of all sorts also feature the tabla. There is also a tradition of solo performances. Presently, Tabla is used with great effect in music genres like fusion, jazz, etc.
