

Kundalini Rising

Honors Thesis in Music Composition for 8 voices and 2 laptops
Composed and Conducted by Tomal Hossain ('17)

Buckley Recital Hall, Amherst College
Friday, January 27, 2017, 8pm

Performers

Soprano

Emily Willick

Becca Ruescher

Alto

Gabriella Rodriguez

Lexi Ligon

Tenor

Hannah Goodwillie

David Wang

Bass

Josh Young

Anthony Narag

Laptop

Jamie Sandel

Performer's Bios

Rebecca Ruescher (Soprano 1) is a senior at Amherst College from Malverne, New York. She studies music and psychology and enjoys singing in various groups on campus, including the Amherst College Concert Choir and the Amherst College DQ. She'd like to give a special shout out to Tomal for his brilliant work on this senior thesis and for being a source of inspiration and light for so many people at Amherst these past four years.

Emily Willick (Soprano 2) is a junior majoring in Music and Sexuality, Women's, and Gender Studies (SWAGS). In addition to Tomal's thesis, she sings in the Concert Choir, Madrigal Singers, and is also participating in Becca Ruescher's choral conducting thesis.

Alexis Ligon (Alto 1) is a Senior Anthropology, Music, and Interdisciplinary triple major. Lexi sings in Concert Choir and plays viola in the Amherst Symphony Orchestra. She is currently working on an interdisciplinary thesis documentary about the absence of African Americans in classical orchestras, expected to be completed in April 2016. Lexi plans on pursuing this topic further in her graduate school studies.

Gabriella Rodriguez (Alto 2) is a Senior Environmental Studies and Sociology double major. She sings in the Amherst College Blue Stockings in addition to working as a Peer Advocate of Sexual Respect. Upon graduation, Gabriella hopes to work with social justice nonprofits in New York City, her native home. Aside from her professional ambitions, she loves cooking and farming.

Hannah Goodwillie (Tenor 1) is one of the two Graduate Associates in Music this year, having graduated from Amherst this past spring with a double major in Music and Mathematics. She is hoping to begin a master's degree in choral conducting this coming fall, with the aim of pursuing a career as a choral conductor.

David Wang (Tenor 2) is a Senior Chemistry and Spanish double major. He sings in the Amherst College concert choir and dances in DASAC. After graduating from Amherst, he hopes to become a doctor and work in Latin America.

Josh Young (Bass 1) is a senior Physics major. Choral singing is his biggest nonacademic interest, especially Renaissance-era compositions and anything with low bass notes."

Anthony Narag (Bass 2) is a senior double major in Psychology and Music at Amherst College. In addition to working on his own honors thesis in music, he sings in and has directed the a capella group, Route 9.

Tomal Hossain Bio

From the age of eight, Tomal has intermittently studied Hindustani music, Ghazal, and traditional Bengali music with a number of visiting vocalists from South Asia including but not limited to Nabendu Bhattacharya, Mohammad Sayeed Khan, Prakash & Deepak Mishra, Mazhar Hussain, and Iqbal Hussein. He is currently continuing his studies of Hindustani music with Kolkata based artist scholar, Kishore Chakraborty.

Either in accompanimental, choral, or solo capacities, Tomal has shared the stage with notable South Asian musicians and music educators such as Rezwana Choudhury Bannya, Leena Taposhi, Ferdous Ara, Ferdousi Rahman, Salar Nader, and Ashish Sankrityayan. Over the years, he has been recognized for his performances by various music institutions including the Indo-American Community Theatre, Federation of Bangladeshi Associations in North America, North American Bengali Conference, and the Chhayanaut School of Music in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

At Amherst College, Tomal has supplemented his formal studies of Western art music and Jazz with his participation in several jazz combos, the Amherst College Jazz Ensemble, the Amherst College Glee Club and Concert Choir, the Amherst College DQ, and the Smith College Gamelan Ensemble. As a double major in Music and Computer Science, he is fascinated by the ways in which computer programming facilitates, affects, and transforms music practice, composition, and performance. In addition to his majors, Tomal is working towards completing a Five College Certificate in Ethnomusicology with a concentration in the music cultures of Muslim majority communities and South Asia. In addition to furthering his performance and composition commitments, Tomal looks forward to conducting ethnomusicological research via fellowship opportunities and graduate studies in years to come.

Sri Chinmoy Biography

Born Chinmoy Kumar Ghose in the small village of Shakpura in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) in 1931, Sri Chinmoy was the youngest of seven children. In 1944, after both his parents had passed away, 12 year-old Chinmoy entered the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a spiritual community near Pondicherry in South India. Here he spent the next 20 years in spiritual practice - including long hours of meditation, practising athletics, writing poetry, essays and spiritual songs.

In his early teens, Chinmoy had many profound inner experiences, and in subsequent years achieved very advanced states of meditation. In 1964, he moved to New York City to share his inner wealth with sincere seekers in the West.

Sri Chinmoy served as spiritual guide to students in some 60 countries around the world, encouraging a balanced lifestyle that incorporates the inner disciplines of prayer and meditation with the dynamism of contemporary life. He frequently travelled throughout the world to offer free concerts, lectures and public meditations, to meet with his students, and to meet and discuss spirituality with world and community leaders.

Sri Chinmoy's life was an expression of boundless creativity. His vast output spans the domains of music, poetry, painting, literature and sports. In addition to his creative pursuits, he also advocated athleticism including distance running, swimming, and weightlifting. He organized marathons and other races, and was an active runner and, following a knee injury, weightlifter.

Acknowledgements

I largely owe my improvisational abilities in jazz and electroacoustic media to Eugene Uman, my jazz piano instructor, Bruce Diehl, director of Jazz @ Amherst, and Jason Robinson, my music major adviser. Courses with Klara Moricz, David Schneider, and Morten Solvik have largely fueled increasing interest and appreciation of Western art music. Instruction in composition from Jason Robinson, Eric Wubbels, Gabriele Proy, and Eric Sawyer have had a profound effect on my musical knowledge and sensibilities. Additionally, Mallorie Chernin has served as a model and mentor to me for choral performance and conducting. The combined influence of my musical mentors at Amherst College has encouraged me to pursue music performance, composition, and education well into the future.

In addition to the various creative inputs that have guided tonight's performance, the efforts of many others have made tonight's concert possible. Within the Amherst College Music Department, I am indebted to Alisa Pearson, Manager of Concert Programming, Production and Publicity, and Ted Keyes, Concert, Production, and Building Coordinator. Special thanks to audio engineer Dan Richardson for running and recording tonight's sound and multimedia specialist Joshua Baum for filming tonight's concert.

I am so honored and fortunate to have worked with tonight's performers who have graciously volunteered their time and talents over the past several months in preparation for tonight's concert. In composing for and conducting them, I have learned much more than I had expected. Indeed, interactions and collaborations with my musician peers more generally have inspired me throughout my time at Amherst College.

Lastly, it would be amiss for me to not recognize the role that my immediate and extended family members have played in my musical development. My mother, Ummey Salma, my father, Zahid Hossain, and my brother, Pial Hossain have been particularly integral to this end. Time and after time, my family members' love and support have instilled in me the energy and self-confidence needed to strive for excellence.

Notes

The overall concept for *Kundalini Rising* stems from the meditational practice of Sahaja Yoga. Formally established in 1970 by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi, Sahaja Yoga practice rests firmly on the primacy of seven chakras (energy centers) located along the spinal cord. In the act of meditation, one makes affirmations and requests addressed to the divine relating to the qualitative associations of each of the seven chakras. In doing so, one's kundalini (spiritual energy) is thought to travel from the base of one's spine to the top of one's head. Through discipline and devotion, one continually strives to attain self-realization or self-transcendence, so to speak.

Just as each chakra in the human body is associated with qualities such as innocence, creativity, and peace, *ragas* (melodic frameworks) in Hindustani music are associated with specific moods and sentiments. The pitch collections and melodic aspects of each of the seven movements in *Kundalini Rising* draw extensively from seven distinct Hindustani ragas that reflect the qualitative associations each corresponding chakra. In this way, *Kundalini Rising* can be thought of as a soundtrack for guided meditation in the tradition of Sahaja Yoga. The piece calls for up to eight voices (SSAATTBB) and laptop. In addition to hearing digital effects and samples superimposed over the voices throughout the piece, short electroacoustic improvisations will serve as segways between movements.

Similar to how the musical material of *Kundalini Rising* reflects qualities of the seven chakras, the texts chosen for each of the piece's seven movements directly deal with said qualities, i.e. innocence, creativity, peace, love, collectivity, forgiveness, and self-transcendence. Each selected text is either a short poem or writing excerpt by Sri Chinmoy who was a spiritual leader and prolific author, poet, artist, and musician of the twentieth century.

Although the poetic and musical material of *Kundalini Rising* are directly modeled after Sahaja Yoga meditational practice, the piece was intended to be accessible for an audience necessarily familiar with Sahaja Yoga philosophy or Hindustani music theory to appreciate the work. The work has taken form as a standalone piece more appropriate for the concert hall than a place of worship. Additionally, influences for *Kundalini Rising's* musical and thematic clearly extend beyond South Asian creative and spiritual models. The chorals sounds of Perotin, Palestrina, Arvo Pärt, Meredith Monk, John Tavener, Veljo Tormis, and John Adams among others have keenly factored into *Kundalini Rising*. The piece's digital side draws from the likes of Stockhausen, Xenakis, Massive Attack, Flying Lotus, Radiohead, Galimatias, and Squarepusher.

Working through composing, conducting, and performing "Kundalini Rising" has been an adventurous and eclectic experience. The compositional process for the piece began in Spring 2016 in Vienna, Austria. Thereafter, movements of the piece have been varyingly composed in Boulder, Colorado, Wilmington, Vermont, Los Angeles, California, and finally Amherst, Massachusetts.

Program Order

I. “Child-Like Innocence”

Chakra: Mooladhara (innocence, wisdom)

Raga: Hamsadhwani

Text: *From the Source to the Source, no. 309*

Child-like innocence,
Saint-like purity
Are divinely one
In reality-sea,
In vision-sun
And cosmic-run.

II: “A Creative Newness-Satisfaction”

Chakra: Swadishthan (pure knowledge, creativity)

Raga: Miyan ki Todi

Text: *Ten Thousand Flower-Flames, part 19, no. 1825*

O my doubting mind,
You are indeed a destructive
Nothingness-ambition.
O my crying heart,
You are indeed a creative
Newness-satisfaction.

Mvmt. III: “The Secret of Contentment”

Chakra: Nabhi (satisfaction, peace)

Raga: Malkauns

Text: *Ten Thousand Flower-Flames, part 73, no. 7277*

The secret of contentment
Give what you have,
Your mind's poise,
And become aware of what you truly are,
A perfect choice and immortal voice
Of God.

Mvmt. IV: “Compassion-Eye”

Chakra: Anahat (love, compassion)

Raga: Bhairav

Text: *Sail my heartbeat sail, part 1 no. 62*

My Lord, connect my heart-wings
To Your Compassion-Eye-Light;
I shall fly and fly far beyond
The domain of ignorance-night.

Mvmt. V: “Kindness Is Not Blindness”

Chakra: Vishuddhi (diplomacy, kindness)

Raga: Jaijaiwanti

Text: *Ten Thousand Flower-Flames, part 3, no. 239*

Kindness is not blindness.
Kindness is oneness-awareness.
Blindness is failure:
Failure within, failure without.

Mvmt. VI: “Forgiveness”

Chakra: Agnya (forgiveness, resurrection)

Raga: Bageshri

Text: from the book *Forgiveness*

O Forgiver of all my shortcomings,
Forgive me.
A new hope is being born in my heart.
I shall cry from today on
To grow into Perfection’s beauty-delight.

Mvmt. VII: “At Last I Shall Listen”

Chakra: Sahasrara (self-transcendence, integration)

Raga: Bhairavi

Text: from *The Dance of Life, part 1*

At Last I Shall Listen
My past is heavy with
The lifeless
Meaning.
A frightened thought
My fast-approaching future
Is.
I have the body and soul
Of hope completely in my
Thoughts.
I shout at the top of my lungs.
My soul embodies the weight of
Despair.
At last I am now learning the art of listening
to God's
Voice.
“Son, in your soulful silence is
My fruitful message,
My All.”