

SAST106-001: Beginning Sitar I (2023C)

Instructor: Jagadeesh Gokhale.

Syllabus

This course will introduce students to playing on the *Sitar*. Students will acquire command over the instrument and learn to perform traditional *Hindustani* (north Indian) musical material – melodic forms (*ragas*) set to rhythm cycles (*talas*).

Home assignments will involve listening to selected clips of *Hindustani* Art music to gain insight into its intricacies and understand dynamic melody-rhythm interconnections that professional musicians often generate spontaneously.

Class instruction (and attendance) will be key as there will be no written notation provided – following the oral pedagogical tradition of *Hindustani* music. Instruction will cover information on musical notes and their production on the *Sitar*. Students will practice playing musical scales, figures, and key embellishments that are integral to *Hindustani* musical expression. The course will proceed in the following steps:

- Posture and address: The “dos and don’ts” of handling and playing on the *Sitar*.
- Fingerboard and strikes: Selected note sequences in the diatonic melody scale and strike exercises to acquire command over the *Sitar*. These will be regularly performed during class.
- Melodic phrases (*sargam*) following a preselected melodic form (*raga*).
- Introduction to *Hindustani* rhythm cycles – key rhythm markers, accent (*sam*) and opposition (*khali*). Attributes of rhythm markers and their role in melodic coordination.
- Students will hear examples of off-cycle melodic innovations and alternative “point-counterpoint” melody-rhythm arrangements (*tihais*).
- Performance of a fixed composition (*gat*) within the *raga*’s melodic structure anchored to a 16-beat rhythm cycle (*Teen-tala*).
- Auxiliary melodic sequences in low, mid, and high registers (*stahyi*, *manjha*, *antara*, respectively) to complement the *gat* and facilitate *raga* exposition.
- Melodic extensions to expand on the aural spectrum of the *raga* – toward free innovation within the *raga* with the *gat* as a melodic anchor to the rhythm cycle.

- Students will complete home-listening assignments on various aspects of *Hindustani* music – historical developments and contemporary performance practices. Students will post their responses to class assignments on Canvas.
- Students will perform material in the *raga* that they have learned for a semester-end group performance before a live audience.

Course Notes

Students are expected to devote two hours per week outside of class- and review-session times to practice playing on the *Sitar* and up to two hours every two weeks for posting answers to assignments.

The final course grade will be based on a weighted average of scores on posted assignments, two practical quizzes, a written multiple-choice mid-term exam, semester-end live performance, and a final exam including practical and written elements. Students at/near the top of the score distribution will receive grade A.

Access to the Williams Hall Music Room will be granted to enrolled students for practicing – throughout the day excluding *tabla* class times (MW 5:15-6:45p). Please work around practice-schedule conflicts with *tabla* students who will also use the Music Room to practice.

A one-hour review session will be held upon student request on Fridays after 5p.