

Musicology Today

Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest

Issue 2 (42) April-June 2020

Title: *Konnakkol Manual – An Advanced Course in Solkattu* by David P. Nelson

Author: Mihai Murariu

E-mail: murariu_mihai@yahoo.co.uk

Source: Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest / Volume 11 / Issue 2 (42) / April-June 2020, pp 181-183

Link to this article:

musicologytoday.ro/42/MT42bookreviewsNelsonMurariu.pdf

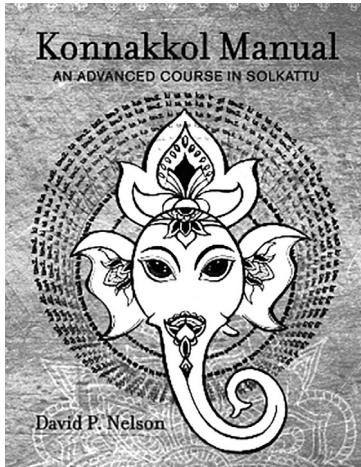
How to cite this article: Mihai Murariu, Rev. of *Konnakkol Manual – An Advanced Course in Solkattu* by David P. Nelson, *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 11/2 (42) (2020), 181-183.

Published by: Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică București

Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest is indexed by EBSCO, RILM, ERIH PLUS, and CEEOL

Konnakkol Manual – An Advanced Course in Solkattu by David P. Nelson

Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 2019



Indian classical music, more than six millennia old and formed across the entire Indian subcontinent, was only surpassed in popularity by classical music of Western inspiration. Divided, in the 16th century, into two distinct lines of development (Hindustani in the North, Carnatic in the South), it is currently present in all four corners of the world. The vastity of its birthplace and its age provide both branches with a comprehensive variety of specific genres and forms as well as with a markedly refined theoretical and technical level.

Despite its age, Indian classical music only stepped into the international limelight in the second half of the 20th century – in the US in particular, where it was quickly adopted by jazz and pop music or even assimilated and appropriated by the hippie movement. It was thus inevitable that it should become part of an educational setting, with the first dedicated institution founded in 1967 in San Francisco. David P. Nelson, ethnomusicologist, percussionist and the author of this book, started studying Indian music in the 1970, and by 2000, after two decades of studies and experience as a performer, he was teaching Carnatic percussion at the Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

No matter the geographical area, the genre or the form, classical Indian music is built on two fundamental elements, *raga* and *tala*. Audiences are probably more familiar with *ragas*, a form of pitch organisation – with no

direct Western counterpart – according to which musical scales and groups of melodic patterns calculated to inspire certain emotions are employed in a quasi-improvisatory setting. *Tala*, *raga*'s metric-rhythmic equivalent, is essentially composed of patterns of metric organisation whose pulse is executed by clapping or by making other distinct signs with the hands. Those patterns can be placed, both for practice purposes and as final product, over a rhythmic solfege based on certain series of syllables selected to match the number of metric elements and so as to facilitate enunciation and resulting in what is known as *solkattu*. Its vocal component (the rhythmic solfege as such) is called *konnakkol* and features similarities with the jazz scat techniques or even the more recent beat-box.

Given the oral nature of musical knowledge transfer in Indian music and the fact that disciples need years of individual study with their master – the author himself has trained for more than two decades with his mentors –, the institutionalization of the educational process brought with it the demand of written materials to support and facilitate this knowledge transfer. The book here reviewed, *Konnakkol Manual – An Advanced Course in Solkattu* (2019), has this very role, and is already the second dedicated textbook by David P. Nelson, after his *Solkattu Manual: An Introduction to the Rhythmic Language of South Indian Music (Music/Culture)* (2014).

A manual for the advanced study of rhythm in Carnatic music, the volume is composed of three sections. The first part states the author's intention, puts forward suggestions of learning and using the subjects taught, and presents the book's structure (Chapter 1). It then brings into discussion the concept of *tala*, applying it to the specific of the Southern tradition (Chapter 2), also explaining the concepts and notation particularities employed throughout the manual (Chapter 3).

The interesting case study in Chapter 4 points to and debates style changes across three successive generations of master percussionists. By identifying the differences, describing them objectively, and putting them into context, it delivers a powerful and suggestive learning tool. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 focus on the presentation and detailed commentary of certain *talas* specific to the style in question.

The second part may be short, but its importance and relevance are validated by the references to free video recordings on the Wesleyan University website intended to aurally illustrate the concepts discussed, while the third, and the last, part of the book proposes a series of specific exercises preceded by a brief glossary of the notation elements used.

Although rather difficult to follow for the uninitiated reader (I recommend reading first *Solkattu Manual*), *Konnakkol Manual – An Advanced Course*

in Solkattu brilliantly fulfils its mission as a didactic text. With a clear structure and a short, clear, and personal discourse, offering both context (essential for students educated outside of India and lacking an organic familiarity with the material studied), written and video examples, and a series of exercises designed to clarify and reinforce theoretical knowledge, this volume has the profile of a complex manual – mandatory reading for those wishing to increase their knowledge and skills in the field.

Mihai Murariu
National University of Music Bucharest

English version by Maria Monica Bojin