

Levitation Practice
for the Sublimation of Time in the
Modal System of the Maroon Glacial Cirque

Joseph Largent

In honor of Pandit Pran Nath (1918-1996)
for his 102nd birthday
November 3rd, 2020

Performed by
Dhikr Allah Ensemble

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Background:

(non-essential reading)

This is a fairly simple composition, with tonal material adapted from the mode of Raga Miyan ki Malhar, a famous and profound Raga in Indian Classical music. The raga is only played in the evening during the rainy season, and is seen as the raga to represent storms, thunder, the monsoon, and rejuvenation. For general reference, listening to and playing along with recordings of Raga Miyan ki Malhar may be helpful for you. There are not many recordings in C, but here are some that are nice to play with/listen to:

[Ustad Mohi Baha'ud din Dagar - Miyan Ki Malhar \(rudra veena, Dhrupad\)](#)

[Uday Bhalwalkar \(Dhrupad\)](#)

[Gundecha Brothers \(Dhrupad\)](#)

[Sr. Dagar Brothers \(Dhrupad\)](#)

These recordings all contain two faster sections that come after the slow *Alap* section, the *Jor* (*light pulse*) and *Jhalla* (*fast pulse*). We won't be getting into these styles in this one, though I love them very much.

The piece is influenced highly by the N. Indian Classical genre of Dhrupad, which is known for its very long, delicate, and subtle alaps (improvisations where each note of the scale is unfolded and explored). It is common to stay on a note for a very long time, while making small changes to it. Dhrupad has been in decline for decades in modern India, as many see it as a boring genre, in contrast to modern playback music for Bollywood films, modern/light classical (Thumri, Bhajans, some Khyal), and other injections. No one has time to sit around and listen to slow music. Yet, those who are attracted to the genre are fed generously by the slow, meditative, subtle, and contemplative nature of the sound, the patience of the artists performing, and the spiritual benefits of playing and listening. Pt. Pran Nath studied and sang within a very small sub-sect of performers in the Indian Classical genre of Khyal (which is now very animated and rapid) within a school called the Kirana Gharana. Kirana musicians were originally experts of voice, sarangi and rudra veena, though players of the rudra veena have been in decline for decades with the instrument now being at risk of extinction. Much of this changed in the 1910s/20s with the rise of Ust. Abdul Karim Khan and his cousin, Ust. Abdul Wahid Khan, who together split the Kirana Gharana into two different paths: 1) Karim Khan's lineage - the light, emotional, and elaborate, which yielded singers like Bhimsen Joshi, but also yielded shorter alaps and more movement in notes, and 2) Wahid Khan's lineage, which consisted of a few musicians with backgrounds in dhrupad, namely Pt. Pran Nath (Wahid's disciple), and Ust. Hafizullah Khan (Wahid's son, sarangi player)-- this branch consisted of a longer alap, longer notes, and more subtly in movement, forming a bridge between Dhrupad and Khyal genres.

November 3rd, 1918 was Pt. Pran Nath's birthday, dying on June 13th, 1996 in SF, CA. One of the best biographies for Pran Nath that I've read is on the website of Sur Laya Sangam, a space in Berkeley that was started by his first disciple, Sri Karunamayee, and Joan Allekote, a disciple of Pran Nath and Karunamayee-ji. You can read the bio here: <https://srikarunamayee.com/pandit-pran-nath/>

I was told that Pran Nath would often say, "When you play, you are making an offering to God..." The idea is to make every note beautiful, each tone worthy of something you would give to a divine being. I'm not religious or spiritual myself, but this helps me considerably.

Individual Parts:

Jocelyn:

We will essentially be singing phrases back and forth, occasionally aligning. Take your time. There is no rush to complete a phrase, to go as long or short as me, or to do exactly what one of us does. We will be using the phrases we both create as inspiration for the other. To end a phrase, sustain your final note, and fade out. I will pick up, or if Michael or Noel wants to add a phrase, they will pick up and we can drone on the 1st or 5th. Just as we explored in

Dream Stasis, we will be following a style of alap (unfolding the scale note-by-note), starting from tonic, improvising with all the notes that exist between the lowest one we can reach and the tonic, and then moving our

way up note-by-note (eventually to the highest note we can reach). Each note we add will be integrated in our improvisation with all of the available notes, but since we are revealing a new note each time, it will be good to give

some emphasis to the new note, integrating it often. This may sound complicated to explain, but is simple in application :)

Notes:

1st, 2nd, minor 3rd (always with a very delicate oscillation), 4th, 5th, 6th, minor 7th, 7th
C, D, Eb, F, G, A, Bb, B, C

Root note: C

Shape of notes: minor 3rd can only be used on descent, m7th always used in phrases accompanying natural 7th. The fourth and minor 3rd are always in a relationship with each other. For example, when descending the scale and hitting the minor 3rd, coming back to the 4th before going down to the 2nd gives the relationship more emphasis.

If one of us hits and sustains on the 2nd, the other can hit a 5th below to create harmony. Consider harmonies when possible (i.e. C with any note, G with

Note: All instrumentalists, Noel, Michael, Danielle, Tae, Russell,
you can all sing on the root note (C) and the 5th (G). You can begin singing 10 minutes after the beginning up to 5 minutes before the end. This is noted in the *Composition Structure*.

Noel and Michael, if at any point you are following what Jocelyn and I are doing, you are welcome to follow, repeat or create a phrase of your own. If you're interested in accompanying or creating your own phrases, check out Jocelyn's section for details of the vocal notes and "rules" we are following.

Noel:

Droning in:

1/1, 9/8, 6/5 (gentle oscillation when hitting this note), 4/3, 3/2, 5/3, 7/4, 15/8, 2/1

SA is C

Michael:

Tonic (C), 5th (G) are primary notes to hit. Aside from that, improvising with other notes you hear as you'd like. A few notes aside from the tonic and 5th to take long amounts of time on are the 2nd, 7th, minor 7th, and 4th. Any of the material that is written for other musicians you are free to use too!

Danielle, Tae & Russell:

Droning on:

C, G, C

As you come in, try unfolding each note. For example, start by opening the C alone, and then the G after some time, and then the octave C.

After some time, begin exploring other notes for medium durations of time: 2nd, 4th, 7th (D, F, B), I will mark these for you if you need!

Russell, your part will vary a bit, as your keyboard is expanded and you have control of dynamics via your stops. Follow the same pattern as above, but once you reach the octave C (I will show you), continue moving up the octave until you open all the labeled drone notes. Keep playing with your single stop open, and after we hit the 45min mark, you can open up the higher stop (playing with two stops open). Reverse this exactly as we near the end. This is all noted in the *Composition Structure* and I will run through it with you :)

Composition Structure:

See the attached page which shows the structure graphically.

LEVITATION PRACTICE

In The
Medal System of the
Maroon Glacial Cirque

राग मियाँ मल्हार

Ascent: SRMPDNS

Descent: S N DPM g MRS

— Voice

— Reed boxes

— Strings

