

CHARULATHA MANI 

## OF TWO ARIAS AND NINE RAGAS: ANALYSING MONTEVERDI THROUGH A KARNATIK LENS

### Establishing the Rationale: Monteverdi's Music as a Site for Analytical Engagement with Non-Western Musical Styles

In relation to the works of the seventeenth-century Italian composer Claudio Monteverdi, scholars have to date developed a vocabulary of analytical frameworks, allied techniques and associated terminologies based on the theories of Western classical music. Approaches to Monteverdi's works have indeed emerged from Western ideas of thinking about music, and thus a Western approach to analysis is well-founded and unsurprising. However, the current shift towards a global reframing of the history of Western music (Strohm 2018 and Irving 2019) could have implications for Monteverdi studies, not least because such reframing has already been influential in reshaping historically informed performance approaches (see e.g. Le Baroque Nomade 2006). The culturally pluralist nature of the early modern European context in which Monteverdi composed is now recognised as a framework which yokes to the global mobility of musicians and cultural influences at the time (Nieden and Over 2016). Some scholars have called for this framework to be emphasised in the ways in which his works are analysed and performed today (Pirrota 2013, pp. 235–40 and Wistreich 2011). Monteverdi's music is a fruitful site for dialectical engagement with non-Western musical elements and for comparative approaches to music analysis to emerge.

Current discourse regarding historical performing practice has seen a turn towards approaches that view music analysis, artistic practice and performance as complementary fields that inform and influence one another (Leech-Wilkinson 2017). The decolonisation of both performance and music analysis practices in the academy has also garnered support. A reconsideration through non-Western theoretical and analytical lenses of works that have hitherto been firmly established within the Western canon is, I argue in this article, one way to decolonise and thereby revitalise in a culturally responsive and responsible way the works that have endured from our past (Walker 2020, pp. 5–9 and Mani 2021). Reimagining Western music as an evolving thread of connections formed from a broad array of cultural influences, instead of reifying its status as a single 'uncontaminated' tradition, is a definitive way of rendering it sustainable into the future. It is also a way of declaring that the idea of Western music as we know it today did not spring up in a cultural vacuum (Burstyn 1997, Coelho 2005 and Irving 2018).

Such reimagination of that which is established, however, needs to have a rationale and theoretical framework for it to find relevance and application in the present. As a singer and researcher belonging to the Karnatik classical music tradition of South India, my understanding of music theory and music analysis in relation to the melodic aspect in music is through the framework of the Karnatik melodic system, the raga. My need to understand Monteverdi's music arose in the context of my doctorate. In my research, I explored his opera *L'Orfeo, favola in musica* (1607) from the perspective of Karnatik music – from melody and expressivity to embodied performance and musical gesture – through conceptual frameworks, practice and theory (Mani 2019). A central aspect of the exploration involved understanding the importance of identifying those melodic types in *L'Orfeo* that felt familiar to me. Two of the ways in which I further explored this familiarity were (1) vocalising Monteverdi's musical phrases employing my native Karnatik vocal style and (2) aligning them with the Karnatik raga structures of which they reminded me. In doing so, I was able to engage with Monteverdi's musical language using the tools of understanding afforded to me by the classical form of my culture, the musical knowledge system that is my musical 'mother tongue'.

A quick overview of what a raga is in Karnatik music is warranted here. A Karnatik raga is an ordered collection of notes within an octave that has ascending and descending patterns (Mani 2018a). Several raga types exist in Karnatik theory and practice, and one important feature of ragas is that they can be identified by characteristic ornaments and typical phrases (*prayogas*). Since Monteverdi's operatic music consists of a notated vocal line underpinned by a figured bass, I listened to the melody and mapped what I heard onto a raga. The fact that Monteverdi's compositional style is replete with ornamentation, affording scope for the virtuosic singer to explore and improvise on a simple melodic line (an attribute typical of the early Baroque), also appealed to my Karnatik sensibilities. As a Karnatik singer, I have been trained over the years to adopt a wide variety of ornaments and to use improvisation as a means of developing a melodic line into a complex edifice which still couched itself in the rhythmic framework of the piece. I was also trained by several gurus in an aural and oral method, that is, to listen, process, repeat, rework and refine. I found that I was leaning into the comfort of identifying within Monteverdi's phrases moments of raga-based familiarity and points of ornamentation (see Mani 2021, pp. 43–4). Not only did this come naturally to me, but also it revealed further pathways whereby I could explore Monteverdi's melodic ideas as improvisations that branched off from a basic structure. My experimental artistic practice, therefore, has proceeded alongside a theoretical examination of Monteverdi's music, yielding an analysis model that has been scaffolded by theory and practice in equal measure.

The objective of this article is not to claim that Karnatik melodic types, or ragas, had any direct influence on Monteverdi. Rather, I argue for the value that insights from South Asian music theory can add to the existing configurations of

analytical approaches to Monteverdi's musico-poetic settings and choices, and in doing so present a rationale for considering non-Western musical approaches to analysis as a framework for renewing and reimagining the notion of analysis away from the dominant knowledge regime of analytical truth in the Western sense. In demonstrating a cross-cultural approach to music analysis, this article also draws attention to the role of music analysis as a useful vehicle with which to decolonise music research through theory and practice. For these arguments, artistically and empirically, there could be no more culturally fertile backdrop than Renaissance Italy, which was a renowned centre of international trade and mobility that teemed with exoticism, from tangible artefacts, including musical instruments, to complex intangibles such as musical styles and ornamentation techniques (Locke 2015).

Sixteenth-century artists had both opportunity and means for cultural exchanges with non-Western peoples and cultures, and a cursory glance at Monteverdi's works reveals an interesting array of non-Western elements. Such influence can be perceived, to take just a few examples, in the descending tetrachord emblematic of his influential laments (Rosand 1979), which is typical of North African and Andalusian musical practices; in *gorgi*, vocal ornaments articulated in the throat, which hark back to Moorish ornamentation styles (Wistreich 1994); and in the ornamental *ciaccona* from the madrigal 'Zefirno torna' (published in 1632). Monteverdi has also turned to imagining a different time and place in history: Claude Palisca describes the *ritornelli* in 'Possente spirto' from *L'Orfeo*, featuring pairs of harps, violins and cornetti, as 'simulating the flourishes a kitharist [in ancient Greece] might have fingered and strummed' (2003, Sec. 6.4). Rather than implying literal non-Western stylistic influences on Monteverdi's compositional style, these examples invite us to consider the musical affordances of the prevailing cultural and political activities of the time, including global mobility.

Monteverdi's 'transitional' music has been analysed over the years from Western perspectives (see Chafe 1992; Chew 1989; McClary 2004 and 2012; and Rosand 2007, pp. 346–73). Although recent scholars have advocated for 'a more intensive discussion of tonal concepts of the period', intercultural ways of analysing Monteverdi's music remain under-researched (Schulze 2010, p. 105). In this article, I offer a few examples to illustrate the ways in which I mapped selected arias from *L'Orfeo* onto various ragas. The analysis turns to South Indian music theory and the modal-tonal coexistence typical of the music of early seventeenth century to establish the rationale behind the raga selections. Through this article I also make a case for Monteverdi's music to be analysed through empirical engagement – that is, artistic research supported by musicology. Accompanying analytical pathways by experimenting with the musical material can yield varied angles that can interact with theory in ways that are meaningful and lateral to traditional approaches. This approach also speaks to intercultural reimaginings of Monteverdi's music in performing practice, in

line with the work of ensembles such as Le Baroque Nomade (2006) and the Pera Ensemble (2010).

### **Salient Features of Modality and Tonality in Seventeenth-Century Music and its Relevance to Karnatik Ragas**

Jeffrey Kurtzman's observation about the music of Monteverdi could be viewed as an invitation to take alternative approaches to its analysis: 'The difficulty Monteverdi's music poses for us, hovering as it does between modal and tonal composition, partaking of features of both, is that it does not wholly fit into any of the systems for which scholars have developed various analytical techniques and terminologies' (2000, p. 187). The fact that Monteverdi's music cannot be strictly categorised has meant that it is not only possible, but also useful, to analyse it from varied perspectives. An overview of some of the key Western analytical frameworks and undergirding principles that currently dominate Monteverdi studies can serve to contextualise better the angle and focus of the Karnatik interpretation that will follow in the next case-study section.

Susan McClary's influential analyses of Monteverdi's music (1976, 2004, and 2012), along with those of others, including Geoffrey Chew (1989) and Eric Chafe (1992), have approached Monteverdi's music from a transitional perspective, that is, one that stands at the junction of modality and tonality. McClary (2012, p. 4) is partial to Renaissance modes, considering modality a more suitable lens through which to view his music than the 'tonal types' approach advanced by Harold Powers (1981); she argues in favour of modality for 'analysis of a piece [of seventeenth-century music] as an internally coherent entity'. Declaring that 'tonality was never the only game in town' (McClary 2012, p. 17), McClary calls for the importance of social, contextual, historical, affective and subjective approaches to understanding musics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

I regard the versions of mode presented in Renaissance treatises as providing a more-than-adequate basis for critical analysis and interpretation of the music they seek to illuminate, and I do not believe we can account for the developments manifested by repertoires of the seventeenth century without having a firm grasp of sixteenth-century practice as coherent for their own cultural purposes. (McClary 2012, p. 4)

Paralleling this is research on the correspondences between Karnatik ragas and Renaissance modes. 'The essence of mode', according to Powers, 'lies in its mosaic, formulaic character', and 'this character is common to Christian Chant and Near Eastern and Indian monophony' (1958, p. 449). Here, Powers draws on observations regarding similarities between motives and formulaic procedures in Renaissance modes and Indian ragas offered by François-Auguste Gevaert (1895) and Egon Wellesz (1956). Powers, however, remains alert to the many differences between modes and ragas, noting that their contexts of transmission

and approach to improvisation and ornamentation vary (1958, pp. 450–5). There are noteworthy correspondences between modality and raga principles, as I have also established in relation to Monteverdi's music (Mani 2021, pp. 31–5). Their coexistence in this hybrid analytical paradigm is meaningful on both practical and theoretical levels.

Chafe (1992, pp. 38–49) understands Monteverdi's compositional structures in terms of modal hexachords, one of the prevailing systems of the time. Drawing on Athanasius Kircher's grouping of twelve modes in *mollis* and *durus* forms, Chafe suggests that Monteverdi constructed *L'Orfeo* using the prevalent seventeenth-century framework of four hexachords in B $\flat$ , F, C and G, housed within two systems (key signatures) – the *cantus mollis* (key signature with a B $\flat$ ) and the *cantus durus* (key signature with a B $\natural$ ). Chafe observes that Monteverdi, across his works, varied the harmonic colour by either rotating the modes (*mutatio toni*) within a particular system or varying the system itself (*mutatio modi*). To expand briefly on this concept, the *cantus mollis* system consists of the two-flat B $\flat$ , the one-flat F and the natural C hexachords. The *cantus durus* system constitutes the three traditional hexachords, the one-flat F, the natural C and the one-sharp G. Thus, the one-flat and natural hexachords overlap, and in each hexachord we find the note distribution tone–tone–semitone–tone–tone.

Another popular approach to Monteverdi's music which is often considered alongside the modal is from the perspective of tonality. Kurtzman summarises that 'harmonic colour' in Monteverdi's compositional style was varied by 'the frequent shifts between major and minor forms of the same triad' and tonal shifts emerging as 'discrete musical blocks' in the structure (2000, p. 186). Gary Tomlinson (1987), Massimo Ossi (2003) and Joachim Steinheuer (2007) have all employed a combination of modal and tonal terminology in their analyses.

Before casting the embellished vocal contour within the framing of Karnatik ragas, I offer a brief discussion on the ways in which melodic complexity was operationalised with novelty in the seventeenth century, allowing for diminutions, inflections, dissonances and improvisatory innovations in the vocal line. In seventeenth-century repertoire, harmonic considerations were reinforced by the adoption of thoroughbass; the bass line responded to textual meter while also coinciding with reconfigurations of the harmony. It followed certain formulae, including the well-known Romanesca and Folia, and these conveyed the grammar of implicit modal functions to listeners who would have already been familiar with the established families of bass-line procedures of the time (Kang 2011). With the bass offering harmonic emphasis, Monteverdi could develop tonal regions and connect them to hierarchies both locally and global through directed harmonic motion. The primary melodic line benefitted most from this more or less predictable bass-line patterning – it remained free to be adorned with the diminutions and *passaggi* typical of the times.

A new compositional style that began to predominate around the turn of the seventeenth century – monody accompanied by thoroughbass – assumed further expressive significance in the context of opera: embellishments of the vocal line

could offer an additional dimension of emotion to the melodic line. Additionally, the bass line afforded opportunities for improvisation in the overarching vocal line. For instance, notes that the figured bass depicted at each point in the bass line could suggest zones for improvisatory expansion. This was evident especially in strophic arias. A strophic bass is configured according to the prevailing technique of deploying the same or a similar bass-line pattern for each verse of a multiple-verse (i.e. strophic) aria, with varying melodies in the overlaid vocal part (Palisca 2003). In this article I have elected to analyse two arias from *L'Orfeo* – the Prologo, sung by La Musica, and the Act III 'Possente spirto', sung by Orfeo – which exemplify how strophic bass variation on both simple and complex levels can open up contexts for intercultural musical experimentation.

### Melodic organisation: The Prologo and 'Possente spirto' from *L'Orfeo*

Monteverdi organises *L'Orfeo* (1607) on D-Dorian. At the outset of the opera, when all is well between Orfeo and his new bride, Euridice, the comfort of the pastoral world is evident in the D octave, often displaying an embellished fifth, A, and a tendency towards an inflected B $\flat$ . The strophic-bass aria 'Possente spirto' appears following Euridice's tragic death. Orfeo takes the opportunity to fall into the uncertain embrace of G, turning to B $\sharp$  to venting his sorrow and displaying a penchant also for the C region, in an attempt to persuade Caronte to ferry him across the Styx into the land of the dead to redeem his beloved. (Orfeo's magnificent effort does not persuade the ferryman, but when Orfeo continues to sing, Caronte falls asleep, and Orfeo steals the boat to row himself across.) In 'Possente spirto' a repetitive bass-line arrangement involving modal functions typical of the Dorian underlies each tercet strophe of the poem, save one, and Monteverdi offers two versions of the upper melodic line – one unadorned and the other florid – over each of these strophes (Steinheuer 2007, pp. 125–32). This possibility of choice demonstrated to virtuosic singers of the time that opportunities existed for creative exploration of the melody presented to them. In the simpler opening piece, the Prologo – sung by La Musica, the personification of music – the repetitive bass patterns do little besides toggling between fifths, playing with the tonalities around the A and D in the D-Dorian mode and allowing florid activity to be accommodated in the melodic layer.

Two key modal features that are salient to Monteverdi's musical language are brought to bear as keystone ideas on this analysis. First, cadences culminated at certain scale degrees falling traditionally on the first, fifth and third degrees of the mode. It must be noted that cadencing on the final and the fifth and third degrees emphasised the *finalis* of the mode and the reciting tones. The fact that it was not merely Monteverdi's handling of the *finalis* that yielded resolution at times destabilised the authentic forms, revealing plagal characteristics of the modal species as well. This is similar to ragas that are transposed down a fifth or up a fourth and whose vocal line is experimented with. Second, the modal feature that emphasises the B $\flat$ /B $\sharp$  interrelation affords a duality that defies the



diatonic characteristics of modal composition (Perry 2011, pp. 11–12). This feature aligns with the Karnatik vocal style, wherein certain scale degrees take on one-flat or natural characteristics based on the nature and direction of the phrase in question. (In Karnatik music, harmony is never a starting point for modal exposition.) Furthermore, triadic harmonisations on particular scale degrees in modal compositions are not limited by the constituent diatonic pitch positions; their inflections and diminutions lend themselves to scrutiny through the lens of a raga. Also, the minor and major harmonies on a given scale degree are both capable of suggesting different raga types. This feature is linked, importantly, to the subtle processes through which bass lines that were indeed generated by the modal lines themselves could then be flexible enough to accommodate a reshaping of the melodic contours in a raga-based reimagination.

Indian classical-music training is geared towards identifying the tonic and dominant, situating every other note within that reference framework and mapping an arrangement of pitch positions in an octave onto a known and widely accepted raga type (Viswanathan and Allen 2004). A typical South Indian musician is familiar with over 100 raga types, and there are hundreds of ragas, each with typical phrases and note-position (*swara*) arrangements, the relative distance between pitches determining the identity, grammar, typical phrases, ornamentation possibilities and, importantly, affective qualities of the raga. The local hierarchies that Monteverdi creates with the melodic line in alliance with the bass line give rise to major and minor tonalities, yielding discrete harmonic units for the Western ear while simultaneously suggesting to my Karnatik-trained ear a rotating set of ragas, and therefore a spectrum of emotions (Rowell 2015). Different ragas give rise to varied *rasa*-s, or affective sentiments, and while I do not venture to map specific ragas to specific affective qualities, I turn to the meaning, context and sentiment in Monteverdi's verses within which I find material evocative of ragas.

The ostinato bass line that is repeated strophe after strophe evokes local harmonic regions which support complex choices for small-scale improvisation on a phrasal level and for large-scale improvisatory departures which promise to return in due course to the harmonic fold. Both of these improvisatory pathways are central to the ethos of seventeenth-century vocal monodic practice and the Karnatik tradition to which I belong, as well as to the spirit of artistic experimentation with which I have approached the analysis here.

To reference the scalar frameworks of all the ragas featured here, I turn to a single compilation of South Indian ragas in Western staff notation by Walter Kaufmann (1976). This compilation serves as a tool enabling typically Western scholarly audiences to imagine the basic lattice structure of a wide array of ragas. A raga is not simply a scale. However, a scalar visualisation of the note positions in a raga is by no means an offensive starting point. This analysis is best accompanied by a video recording of the performance of the selected pieces involving the ragas that the analysis revealed in tandem with the practical exploration (Mani 2018b). I believe that this analysis, which has also

relied heavily on practice, when seen alongside the audio-visual media and 1615 edition of the *L'Orfeo* score, will allow the reader to experience the findings in a multisensorial format.

### Case Study 1: Analysis of 'Possente spirto'

From a modal perspective, 'Possente spirto' has been analysed as being in G-Hypodorian (transposed mode; see e.g. Carter 2002 and Steinheuer 2007). The sixteenth-century theorist Giuseffo Zarlino described this mode as having an effect between sadness and joy ([1558] 1983, pp. 20–4); it corresponds to the *swara* (Karnatik notes) combination in the Karnatik raga *Kharaharapriya* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 259) (with an inversion in its diatessaron [corresponding to the fifth-to-octave gamut, *uttaranga*] and diapente [the tonic-to-fifth gamut, *purvanga*]) order. From the modal hexachordal perspective, 'Possente spirto' belongs to the *cantus mollis* system. This implies the presence of a B $\flat$  in the key signature, in a G mode (the *mollis* gamut with a flattened third scale degree), the flattened third coinciding with the *mollis* signifier, B $\flat$ . The aria has six strophes; the first to fourth and sixth tercets are examples of strophic bass repetition and melodic variation, and the fifth tercet is handled freely. The bass line repeats from strophes 1–4 and in strophe 6, wherein the vocal line almost follows the bass progression without variation in the verse commencing with the text 'Sol tu nobile dio'. The fifth strophe, commencing with 'O de le luci mie', is an exception: the downwards chromatic slide of the bass line breaks with the repeated bass pattern that undergirds the other strophes. The repeated bass-line formula is G–D–G–F–C–G–D–B $\flat$ –F–G–C–A–G–D–G. Here the letters refer to the bass notes that underlie each strophe. Each of these influences the scope of improvisation for the top melodic layer. For example, at the outset of the piece, the melodic line focuses on G while supporting the appearance of the inflections, B $\flat$  and F $\sharp$ . Although I offer this formula to orientate the reader to the substratum over which my melodic discussion shall take place, I wish clarify that the aim of this paper is not to provide a Western analysis of 'Possente spirto'; several of these already exist. It is to situate raga readings at key zones of the piece.

In the arias of *L'Orfeo* Monteverdi freely accesses the Dorian mode, exploring both versions of its sixth and seventh scale degrees as well as experimenting with leading notes tilting towards other scale degrees, such as  $\hat{5}$  and  $\hat{4}$ . From a hexachordal point of view, operating in the *mollis* system, we could surmise that he traverses between the three possible hexachords: the two-flat hexachord in B $\flat$ , the one-flat hexachord in F and the natural hexachord in C. However, in adopting two kinds of brighter harmonic usages, he does anticipate joy. First, with the frequent introduction of the F $\sharp$ , the D minor triad in the natural hexachord gently pushes itself to D major, instating the joyful F $\sharp$  as the third degree. Second, with the introduction of the bright B $\natural$ , the G minor triad suddenly morphs into a G major in certain special instances. Both these cases



relate to hexachords that employ fewer flats. Further, sharpened notes give a brighter and more joyful effect in tetrachords owing to the major intervals that they create and the inflections that these intervals accommodate. Whether examined from a modal or a hexachordal angle, the pitch movements seen here do not operate independently of the modal framework: they are congruent with the modal procedures and inflect the principal functions within the diapente. Importantly, these inflections serve to heighten dramatic and affective sentiment.

In the analysis below, I have identified the zones in which inflections occur and include commentary on ragas that map onto these transitions. The insights I have sought are linked to the nuanced choices Monteverdi makes in his improvisatory lines – especially the ornate one designed to animate the Orphic tendency towards grandiloquence and to feed the social and artistic need for virtuosic vocal display, in keeping with his time. Those zones, wherein Monteverdi inflects normative pitches chromatically in ways that tease out affective implications when considered against the backdrop of the attendant modal framework and the underlying formulaic bass, were what I found to be most interesting when mapping to ragas. Below is Striggio's Italian libretto of 'Possente spirto' with an English translation by Anthony Barrese (1996; slightly modified), to aid in the proposed word-meaning-raga mappings. For each of the passages discussed in each of the analyses, I have provided score sections with corresponding bar numbers. These are from the Clifford Bartlett edition (1993) of the score of *L'Orfeo*. Many such editions are available; this one was selected for its clarity and widespread acknowledgement in the field of musical practice.

Possente spirto e formidabil nume,  
Senza cui far passaggio a l'altra riva  
Alma da corpo sciolta in van presume.  
Non viv'io, no, che poi di vita è priva  
Mia cara sposa, il cor non è più meco,  
E senza cor com'esser può ch'io viva?  
A lei volt'ho il cammin per l'aer cieco,  
A l'inferno non già ch'ovunque stassi  
Tanta bellezza il paradiso ha seco.  
Orfeo son io che d'Euridice i passi

Segue per queste tenebrose arene,  
Ove giammai per uom mortal non vassi.  
O de le luci mie luci serene,  
S'un vostro sguardo può tornarmi in vita,  
Ahi, chi nega il conforto a le mie pene?

Sol tu nobile dio puoi darmi aita  
Né temer dei, che sopra un'aurea cetra  
Sol di corde soavi armo le dita  
Contra cui rigida alma in van s'impetra.

Mighty spirit and powerful deity,  
Without whom, to reach the other bank,  
Souls freed from their bodies hope in vain.  
I am not alive, no, after the death of  
My beloved wife, my heart is no longer mine,  
And without a heart, how can it be that I live?  
To her leads my path through the dark air,  
Not towards Hell, for everywhere  
Where there is so much beauty is Paradise.  
I am Orpheus, who follows the steps of  
Euridice  
Through the gloomy plains,  
To which no mortal man has access.  
O serene light of my eyes,  
One glance from you can return life to me,  
Alas, who can deny me comfort in my  
torment?  
Only thou, noble god, can aid me.  
Fear not, for only with a golden lyre  
With sweet strings do I arm myself  
Against the stern souls whom one in vain  
implores.

*The Sixth–Seventh Scale Degree Pairing Combinations*

Monteverdi's vocal line for 'Possente spirto' continually moves between four combinations of the sixth–seventh scale-degree pairs, while maintaining the third scale degree as B $\flat$ . These combinations are the pairs E $\flat$ –F, E–F, E–F $\sharp$  and E $\flat$ –F $\sharp$ . These four pairs cover an array of ragas that span the extremes between the sixth and seventh scale degrees, namely E $\flat$  and F $\sharp$ , and the continua positions in between. I shall discuss them in the context of the two main dualities that dominate the harmonic spheres of this piece, the E/E $\flat$  and F/F $\sharp$  juxtapositions.

A striking example is seen in strophe 1 (bars 106–111) in the use of the E to set 'nume' and its immediate juxtaposition with the E $\flat$  at 'altra riva'; the powerful god capable of granting passage across the Styx to eternity is contrasted against the poor dead souls who long for the elusive liberation. The bass at 'nume' sits firmly on a G while moving a fifth below to D for 'altra riva', allowing A and F $\sharp$  to find their places in the opening lines of the aria under discussion here. The raga (all references to raga assume G as the tonic) suggested in the E $\flat$ –F combination of the sixth and seventh scale degrees is known as *Natabhairavi* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 205), and the raga suggested in the E–F pairing is *Kharaharapriya* (Mani 2012). Karnatik musicians consider *Natabhairavi* to be a stark, darker affect than *Kharaharapriya*, and this perception aligns with the notion of increasing brightness as the two-flat hexachord in B $\flat$  (with the single semitone *mi–fa* between E $\flat$ –F) morphs into the natural hexachord in C (*mi–fa* between E–F), the gateway into the brighter *durus* domains. The shift between the C major and C minor triads draws our attention to the E and E $\flat$  alternations and leads to a sense of gloom. A toggle between E and E $\flat$  in relation to G as the tonic spotlights two different raga types – one, *Kharaharapriya*, known for its balanced quality, and the other, *Natabhairavi*, for its darker, meditative hue. *Kharaharapriya* is very popular in Karnatik music; Saint Thyagaraja offers over forty compositions in this raga (Mani 2012). There are, however, very few compositions in *Natabhairavi*, and even those are seldom elaborated on in concerts. Monteverdi's bass line at this point conveniently accommodates both these raga variations to the melody, informed as it already is by the modal lines that overlay it.

The D–E–F $\sharp$ –G arrangement is a diatessaron that maps to the brightest hue a raga with a minor third can assume (without considering *vivadi melas*, those involving dissonant *swaras*). This raga is known as *Gowrimanohari* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 315) and note-wise maps approximately to the melodic minor. The introduction of the F $\sharp$  instead of the F into the mode could be viewed tonally in terms of a chord with its root position at D, assuming a major (with F $\sharp$ ) quality instead of the usual minor quality (with F). The dramatic impact of the occurrence of the F or F $\sharp$  is significant: the F $\sharp$  tends towards the brighter B $\sharp$ , but Monteverdi systematically curtails this propensity, reintroducing at every juncture the brooding quality of the B $\flat$  yielding to the overarching melancholy, shocking Orfeo back into his wretched reality. For example, when Orfeo refers

Ex. 1 'Possente spirto', bars 125–127: the raga *Natabhairavi* raga is identified

to his wife as dear to him in 'mia cara sposa', the syllable 'ra' is sung to an F#, a hopefulness to which even the cornetti respond favourably. But soon he reverts to the realisation of his plight; in 'e senza cor com'esser può ...' he turns once again to the cold embrace of the dyadic E $\flat$ –F sixth and seventh scale-degree combination. Ex. 1 (bars 125–127) depicts this E $\flat$ –F pair and its similarity to the *Natabhairavi* raga.

The final strophe of the piece (when Orfeo finishes his well-presented argument) dwells in a duller zone, E–F; he sings of the souls of stone, 'rigida alma', which do not melt for the lyre that he holds (bars 183–185). However, in his fervent hope that Caronte will be moved by his entreaties, he finishes his aria with the E–F# pairing contoured in 's'impetra', thus clinging to an expectant brightness of hue. The E–F and E–F# pairings are indicative of the ragas *Kharaharapriya* and *Gowrimanohari* when considered in the context of the other notes in the Dorian mode, as shown in Ex. 2.

A three-semitone separation is witnessed in 'van presume' (bars 112–115), describing the attempts of the soul that end in vain, the E $\flat$ –F# pairing positioned strategically at both ends of a florid proclamation of futility (Ex. 3). The raga corresponding to this sixth-and-seventh combination, with the B $\flat$  as the third, is known as *Keeravani* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 249), the harmonic minor. Owing to my experiences and the teachings of gurus, I find this a moving and meditative raga. Bringing melodic material from this raga into the interpretation of Monteverdi's melodic line at this point seemed a natural thing to do for me in the protracted ornamentation at 'van', heard between 25'50" and 26' in my performance of the work (Mani 2018b).

The complexity of harmonic colour in Monteverdi's style admits not only modal harmony but also functional harmony that reinforces cadential closure in

Ex. 2 'Possente spirto', bars 183–185: *Kharaharapriya* and *Gowrimanohari* combination

183

d'al - ma in van s'im - pe - tra

5 6 - # # 4 # #

Ex. 3 'Possente spirto', bars 112–115: *Kharaharapriya* moving into *Keeravani*

112

Al - - - ma da

113

cor - - po - - sciol - ta in - van

114

pre-su -

115

me

Ex. 4 'Possente spirito', bars 139–141: *Natakurinji* is suggested in this section

the melody. In analysing Monteverdi's writing while deriving a Karnatik reading, I have come to realise that functional harmony can be suggested by quickly rotating from one raga to another, while modal harmony may be instated on returning to the raga that was the initial point of departure. In these rotations of raga that closely follow departures from the mode, the bass line remains Monteverdi's.

### *The Third Scale Degree: B $\flat$ /B $\natural$ Duality*

From the sixth and seventh scale degrees I now turn to  $\hat{3}$  to claim that the most striking of dramatic shifts occur in Monteverdi's handling of it. There are various moments in the piece in which Monteverdi induces a change in emotion as he shifts from the overall gloom of B $\flat$  to the optimistic B $\natural$ . This may be read as one of the affordances of modality of the period, as I noted above. Regardless of how it is explained, the presence of B $\natural$  is summoned at pivotal points. Orfeo's enthusiasm in his utterance 'tanta bellezza' (bars 139–141) as he recalls the plentiful beauty of Euridice is an excellent example of how Monteverdi employs the B $\flat$ /B $\natural$  duality.

In constructing 'tanta bellezza', he meanders with plentiful *gorgi* from F4 to F3, plunging even lower to B $\flat$ , if only to introduce a pronounced shift into the bright tonal sphere. This he does by employing the gesture C–B $\natural$ –G, which lands on the tonic after a minor repose at the comforting major third, laden with bittersweet expectation, underscored by the bass-line segment B $\flat$ –F–G. The C–B $\natural$ –G descent in the melodic line relates directly to a key motive, *prayoga*, in the raga *Natakurinji*, mapping onto a cadence across the scale degrees 4–3–1 (Ex. 4). *Natakurinji* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 358) is a derivative (*janya*) of the seven-tone parent scale which maps to the Mixolydian mode, *Harikambhoji* (Kaufmann

Ex. 5 'Possente spirto', bars 179–181: *Anandabhairavi* indicated by variations to the third scale degree in this section

179

Sol di cor - de so - a - vi | ar - - - - - mo il di - ta

1976, p. 349), and is believed to denote *sringara rasa*, the feeling of expectant love. A thought on the Euridice's surpassing beauty is all that is needed for Orfeo to summon the feeling of hopeful love in his music, even if only for a fleeting moment.

Yet another example when the B $\flat$  appears as an emblem of hope is when Orfeo appeals to Caronte's good sense in 'sol di corde soavi' (bars 179–181). The gradual descent from D through C to B happens over the bass line tracing B–F–G–C–A. This section is a part of the final strophe, 'sol tu nobile dio', described by Palisca: 'this version, shorn of ornament, reveals the formulaic nature of the tune for singing poetry' (2003, Sec. 6.5). This formulaic tune is the one that the basic bass-line framework suggests and reinforces, not only in this unornamented strophe but throughout all six strophes in this piece. However, the correspondences between the tune and the bass line emerge with greater clarity in this unornamented strophe.

In 'sol di corde soavi', Orfeo's attempts to convince Caronte become tinged with despair as the B $\flat$  creeps in at '-avi' and the melody gravitates towards the temporary centre a fourth above the tonic, C. This tendency is discernible in instances throughout 'Possente spirto' whenever Orfeo makes bold to express the B $\flat$ . The sudden shadow cast by the B $\flat$  effectively portrays his heaviness of heart, which no joy but having Euridice back could rekindle. I map this B $\flat$ /B $\natural$  duality in this phrase 'sol di corde soavi' to a raga known as *Anandabhairavi* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 223) which uses not only the primary third, B $\flat$ , but also a 'foreign' note (*bhashanga swara*), B $\natural$ , in its signature motives (*prayogas*) conveying pity and joy in equal measure (Ex. 5). *Anandabhairavi* has an affinity for the fourth scale degree, C, and completes its identity by drawing to itself the F $\sharp$  and E in its key *prayogas*. I recognise both these features as interpretative possibilities typical of Monteverdi's inflections over the bass-line formula.

### Shift of Tonic

I have situated the raga *Purnachandrika* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 437) in the zone nominated for improvisation at 'O de le luci mie' (bars 163–165). The change



Ex. 6 'Possente spirito', bars 163–165: *Purnachandrika* achieved by shifting tonic to B $\flat$

of focus to the B $\flat$  as a temporary tonal centre could be read as Monteverdi's way of responding to the release from the relentless bass line, which afforded departures, no doubt, but not drastic or dreamy ones that dared Orfeo to even for a moment look to hope beyond his current predicament. The melodic line at 'O de le luci mie', E–C–B $\flat$ , would suggest a new raga if a temporary shift of tonic from G to B $\flat$  were to be instated. In Karnatik music, the shift of tonic while maintaining the mode (and therefore the spaces between the notes of the mode) is referred to as *graha bheda*m, the *graha swara* being the note position that acts as the tonal centre. Shifting the tonic to B $\flat$ , the pitch E becomes the subdominant of the raga, and C the major second. Introducing a major third with respect to the new tonic and completing the contour yields departures in a raga called *Purnachandrika* (Ex. 6).

This is a raga that signifies joy and positivity; it is a derivative of the raga *Shankarabharanam* (the scalar equivalent of which is the major diatonic scale). *Purnachandrika* is a *vakra* raga: in descent, it moves from the major third degree to the fourth before descending to the second. Its mapping with Monteverdi's choice of harmonic placement for the text 'O de le luci mie luci serene' ('O serene light of my eyes') demonstrates the effectiveness of his approach to composition: Orfeo has just decoupled from Caronte and turned to a dreamy vision of Euridice. Karnatik ragas have affective qualities, and these have been expressed variously over the last several hundred years – as overall sentiment (*rasa*) as well as specific emotion (*bhava*) in literature. The moods suggested by ragas, however, depend on the ornamentations that operate on them at any given point in their layout (Mani 2021, pp. 44–7). Steinheuer notes, 'Monteverdi creates a complex system of reference in which musical codes are assigned to specific semantic layers' (2007, p. 131). Extending this observation into the context of raga, I propose that as ragas adopted in the melodic interpretation of Monteverdi subtly move from one type to another, so do the underlying *bhava* suggested by them. The complex system of musical codes in Monteverdi's syntax is evidenced by the use of diminutions and inflected notes within the mode. In parallel, the emotions that they convey are reinforced through the *bhava* suggested by the ragas.

Table 1 Raga-like material in 'Possente spirito', based on variations in third, sixth and seventh scale degrees

Third scale degree	Ragas related to 'Possente spirito'	Sixth–seventh scale-degree combination
With B $\flat$	<i>Natabhairavi</i>	E $\flat$ –F
	<i>Kharaharapriya</i>	E–F
	<i>Gowrimanohari</i>	E–F $\sharp$
	<i>Keeravani</i>	E $\flat$ –F $\sharp$
With B $\sharp$	<i>Natakurinji</i>	E–F
	<i>Purnachandrika</i>	Sixth absent, seventh F $\sharp$
	<i>Anandabhairavi</i> – B $\flat$ usual, B $\sharp$	E–F
	( <i>bhashanga</i> )	

To summarise, the analysis suggested the following ragas in key zones across the piece: *Natakurinji* ('tanta bellezza'), *Purnachandrika* ('O de le luci mie') and *Anandabhairavi* ('sol di corde soavi') as zones for deeper improvisation, understood as departures into ragas from the original melodic line, in 'Possente spirito'. I then recontextualised the score-based analysis discussed above into further artistic experimentation, practice-based refining and finally performance (Mani 2018b). The ornamental and variation-led improvisations, understood as being unimpeded by rigid structure yet contained within the broad contour of the melodic line, found their place in the ragas *Natabhairavi*, *Kharaharapriya*, *Gowrimanohari* and *Keeravani*, as shown in Table 1.

## Case Study 2: Analysis of the Prologo

Before I turn to the analysis, I present below Striggio's Italian text for the Prologo and an English translation of it by Gilbert Blin (2017; slightly modified) to aid in cross-referencing the word-meaning relationship to the music.

Dal mio Permesso amato à voi ne vegno, Incliti Eroi, sangue gentil de' regi, Di cui narra la fama eccelsi pregi, Nè giunge al ver, perch'è tropp' alto il segno. Io la Musica son, ch'a i dolci accenti, Sò far tranquillo ogni turbato core, Ed hor di nobil ira, ed hor d'amore Posso infiammar le più gelate menti.	From my beloved Permessus, I come to you, Glorious Heroes, noble bloodline of Rulers, Of whom Fame relates high praise, Without quite attaining the truth, as it is too high a mark. I am Music, who in sweet accents, Can make peaceful every troubled heart, And so with noble anger, and so with love, Can I inflame the coldest minds.
--	--

---

Io sù Cetera d'or cantando soglio Mortal orecchio lusingar talhora E in questa guisa a l'armonia sonora	Singing with my golden Lyre, I like to charm, now and then, mortal ears, And in such a fashion that I make their souls aspire more
De la lira del Ciel più l'alme invoglio	Towards the resounding harmony of the lyre of Heaven.
Quinci à dirvi d'Orfeo desio mi sprona D'Orfeo che trasse al suo cantar le fere, E servo fè l'Inferno a sue preghiere Gloria immortal di Pindo e d'Elicona. Hor mentre i canti alterno hor lieti, hor mesti, Non si mova augellin fra queste piante, Nè s'oda in queste rive onda sonante,	Hence desire spurs me to tell of Orfeo: Of Orfeo who tamed wild beasts with his song And made Hades answer his prayers, To the immortal glory of Pindus and Helicon. While I vary my songs, now happy, now sad,
Ed ogni aurette in suo cammin s'arresti.	No small bird shall move among these bushes, Nor on these banks shall a sounding wave be heard, And every little breeze shall stay its wanderings.

---

Monteverdi has cast the six strophes of the Prologo within a *cantus durus* D mode (the *durus* gamut that houses a minor third). From a modal point of view, the Prologo is in D-Dorian. Chafe observes two key features in his analysis of the Prologo: the rotation between the flat and natural hexachords and the strong tonal spheres surrounding the tonic (D) and the dominant (A) of the mode (1992, p. 127). The bass line underpinning each of the five strophes is varied rhythmically ever so slightly to accommodate the *endecasillabo* (eleven-syllable) setting of the text in the overlaid melodic line (Chrissochoidis 2011). The Prologo is enclosed by a four-bar ritornello that also repeats in a condensed form between strophes. Each strophe begins on a D minor triad and ends on an A major triad. The condensed ritornello begins with an A minor triad. The melodic line circles back around the fifth scale degree, arriving at a D major tonality, asserting a strong tonic–dominant relationship. The flat hexachord contributes to the introduction of a *mollis* signifier B $\flat$  at semantically significant points in the structure. These have been elaborated in the analysis that follows.

The bass line formula for this strophic bass aria is D–G–A–C–F (E)–D–G–C–G–D–A–E–A. Strophe and bar numbers from the notation of the Prologo from the 1615 edition of the *L'Orfeo* score (pp. 1–5) have been provided for the examples discussed. Just as in 'Possente spirto', here too the B $\flat$ /B $\natural$  juxtapositions induce quick changes in harmonic colour, and I shall describe them using the strophe 'Io la Musica son' (strophe 2, bars 41–47) as an example (Ex. 7) Firstly, the B $\flat$  appears as a dramatic repose in 'accenti'; secondly, it stands against the relief of a hopeful B $\natural$  ('ed hor d'amore'), which speaks of invoking love, proclaiming the ability of music to inflame ('infiamar' [B $\flat$ ]) icy minds ('gelate menti' [B $\natural$  to A $\natural$ ]). The affective powers and attributes of music to which the text refers are systematically assigned contrasts by Monteverdi with the interplay between B $\flat$  and B $\natural$ . This indicates to me that the raga identified as a prime

Ex. 7 Prologo, bars 41–47: the B $\flat$ /B $\natural$  duality is seen

41

Io la mu-si-ca son ch'ai dol-ci-ac-cen - ti so far tran-quil-lo

44

o-gni tur-ba - to co - re et hoi di no-bi-l'i-ra et hor d'a-mo-re pos -

46

- s'in - fiam-mar le più ge - la - te men - ti

interpreter in this piece must be one that displays a B $\flat$ /B $\natural$  coexistence in its sixth scale degree.

Monteverdi uses the F $\sharp$  as he opens the third line of each of his strophes, which contrasts with the darker F $\flat$  at the commencement of the second line. This manifests another duality, F $\sharp$ /F $\flat$ , as is clear from the very first stanza, which introduces the noble rulers (bars 25–33). There is a noteworthy contrast between the F $\sharp$  in ‘incliti Eroi’ against the F $\flat$  in ‘di cui narra la fama’, which speaks of fame. This duality indicates that the raga-based interpretation of this piece must be made using those raga motives that display a strong F $\sharp$ /F $\flat$  duality in their third scale degree (Ex. 8). With the bass line fulfilling the responsibility to situate the modal procedures, the melodic line remains unhindered and able to sustain the inflections and chromatic slants afforded by these two dualities. This quality of the melodic line allows a flexible raga to be employed as the analytical lens.

Ex. 8 Prologo, bars 25–34: F $\sharp$ /F $\flat$  and B $\flat$ /B $\sharp$  dualities suggesting the raga *Kapi*

25  
Dal mio per-mes-so a ma - to a voi ne ve - gno

28  
in - cli ti e-roi san-gue gen-til de Re - gi di cui nar - ra la fa-ma ec -

31  
cel - si pre - gi ne guin - ge al ver perch'è trop-

33  
p'al - to il se - - gno

A raga that demonstrates both the dualities, B $\flat$ /B $\sharp$  and F $\sharp$ /F $\flat$ , is the raga *Kapi* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 282). While several ragas in theory hold such a duality, *Kapi* was also my intuitive choice in the experimental trials, as it is a raga associated with compelling spirituality (Mani 2013).

The occurrence of C $\sharp$  immediately prior to B $\flat$  in the second line of the melody covers the gamut suggestive of the raga known as *Bahar* (Tanarang 2018). *Bahar* displays both C $\sharp$  and C as its seventh scale degree, in line also with the

bass-line formula at that point, the C providing a scaffold for the improvisatory choices at the melodic level. *Bahar*, an essentially North Indian *vakra* raga that is very sparingly used in lighter Karnatik pieces, finds a place here owing to the occurrence of a *prayoga* typical of it – G–A–C–B $\sharp$ –D – in Monteverdi's phrasing at the end of every second line (for instance, 'lusingar talhora' or 'sanguie gentil di regi'). The raga retains the B $\sharp$  brightness, while balancing it with a starker harmonic zone introduced by the F $\sharp$  as its third scale degree. Thus, this raga is the link to the F $\sharp$ –F $\sharp$  as the melody morphs into the raga *Kapi* in the third lines of the strophes.

Monteverdi hesitates at the B $\sharp$  before cadencing on the fifth scale degree in the last phrase of every strophe (except the very last, which he abruptly 'arrests' at 'in suo cammin s'arresti' on the B $\sharp$ ). The dwelling on the B $\sharp$  at every such cadence invited, in my imagination, a G $\sharp$  into the mix. The presence of the C $\sharp$  harmony in the bass line at 'gelate' anticipated this invitation. The G $\sharp$ , when considered with respect to the tonic (still on D), assumes an augmented-fourth position, known in Karnatik music as the *prati madhyama*. The raga that results is *Saraswati* (Kaufmann 1976, p. 648), an asymmetric-scale *janya* raga, sharing its name with the goddess of music in the Indian tradition (see again Ex. 7).

To summarise, I nominated the ragas *Bahar* and *Saraswati* for improvisatory departures that build on Monteverdi's melodic material and selected the raga *Kapi* as the one that steers the small-scale improvisations. The raga *Bahar* pushes at the seventh scale degree, sharpening it and brightening the mood as it does so. This characteristic suits the positive light in which *La Musica*, Orfeo's lifeline, is presented by Monteverdi at the outset of the opera. Likewise, the raga *Saraswati* invokes music in the Karnatik tradition, the sharpened fourth scale degree offering a refreshing harmonic colour, buttressed by the dramatic descent the raga accommodates as it plunges to the second scale degree on A. The small-scale improvisations in *Kapi* experiment with subtle ornamentation rather than manipulating the overall melodic layout itself.

### **Implications: Multi-Perspective Analysis as a Way Forward to Locate, Foreground and Synergise Diverse and Distributed Knowledges**

The experimental approach and the analyses together yielded insights into the ways in which links between raga and modality/tonality concepts could be strengthened in a cross-cultural analysis. The precise points at which the raga transitions occurred coincided with points at which local hierarchies were taken over by my creative imperative to embellish. This imperative to move beyond the score drives both seventeenth-century vocal ethos and Karnatik ethos, challenging prevailing notions of *Werktreue* and text fetishism in Western music. In my doctoral thesis (Mani 2019) and accompanying performance (Mani 2018b), I indicated these transitions and raga forays in a bespoke performance score and pointed out the two distinct levels of improvisation: as ornamented variations within an unchanged melodic line and as unstructured departures.



I see the potential in this analysis to be interpreted in the future by those who wish to perform Monteverdi from not only an intercultural perspective, but also an unconventional one that uses improvisation much more commonly than is presently the norm in early opera. The above analysis demonstrates that music such as that of Monteverdi's operatic arias and even madrigals – situated at the liminalities of modality and tonality and demonstrating a strong melodic line throughout – holds the potential to be explored from various perspectives, especially non-Western ones. Such exploration offers ways to reimagine established norms of performance and study, aligning with calls for interrogations of Western musical identity as posited by scholars who are currently active in scholarship which looks to construct a global history of Western music (e.g. Leach, Fallows and Van Orden 2015; and Irving 2019). This kind of analysis could be a rewarding research field that those familiar with or wishing to expand on their knowledge of intersectional aspects of Indian and Western musics could undertake. They might stumble upon an exciting way to decolonise their practice and renegotiate their comfort zones. I certainly did.

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## NOTE ON THE CONTRIBUTOR

Charulatha 'Charu' Mani is an expert in Karnatik vocal music of Southern India. She was awarded a PhD in historical musicology with a dissertation entitled 'Hybridising Karnatik Music and Early Opera: Voice, Word, and Gesture' from the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (August 2019). Charu commenced in the role of Lecturer Creative Arts and Health at the University of Tasmania in October 2022. She was Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of Music, University of Queensland, between 2021 and 2022 on the 'Creative Arts and Human Flourishing' National Impact Grant. Her research explores decolonising perspectives to analyse the global history of Western music. Through her ongoing work with marginalised communities, her research examines the role of singing and songwriting for health and well-being. She is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

## ABSTRACT

Commencing from an elaboration of extant theoretical and analytical positions in Monteverdi studies, this article closely analyses two of the most well-known arias from Claudio Monteverdi's earliest opera, *L'Orfeo* (1607), from the melodic perspective of the Karnatik music of South India. In identifying ragas within Monteverdi's melodic structures, this approach evidences the author's practice-based explorations of the arias while harking back to global influences that have shaped the identity formation of Western music. This approach to music analysis serves two primary purposes. First, it offers one

way to decolonise and reimagine the music that emerged from an essentially multicultural early modern Europe. Second, in privileging artist-researchers' embodied oral aural knowledges, which emerge from practice, the approach makes a case for analytical approaches which aid in practice and which offer complementary lenses through which to view locate knowledges that are complex, embodied and non-Western in their theoretical and analytical bases.