



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

Accession No.: MH-09-14-D Date(s): November 8, 2009

Fieldworker(s): Maggie Holtzberg and David Filipov (Boston Globe)

Interviewee(s): Chris Pereji and Nisha Purushotham

Event: Apprenticeship FY 10 in tabla playing

Place of Recording: Basement music studio at Chris Pereji's home in South Attleboro

Recording Equipment: M – Audio Track II Microphone(s): M-Audio

Recorded in: _____ mono stereo

Tape Brand and Format: _____ Cassette 60 min _____ DAT 65 min
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Amount Tape Used: Cassette: _____ DAT: ABS time 1:57:00

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Brief summary of tape contents: Tuning of drum, Qayeda (set rhythm themes) using syllables, one develops variations, thinking in two halves, deep resonant sounds (Bhari or full) versus flat sounds (Khali or empty), attention to technique, playing in the same tempo, alternating index finger with middle finger, intonation as way of expression, building a variation, feeling your cycle versus counting your cycle, playing should be physical, emotional interaction not intellectual exercise, knowing in your gut where you are in the cycle, giving the audience something that is familiar, repeating versus changing the order of the syllables, making up the order, planning while you are playing, knowledgeable audience enjoys listening while clapping in Carnatic music, less so in Hindustani, assignment for next week – make variations and then play at two different speeds to the same clap. The formal lesson ends and we go into interview mode with David asking the questions.\

Length of time Chris has been teaching in US, birthplace, language spoken at home, his career as English teacher. Nisha's previous teacher, grant through RISCA and Southern New England Apprenticeship Program, Nisha's day job as a teaching artist and performing artist, Afro Cuban percussion experience, Chris removing frets from guitar to play Indian music, his teaching science and math here in Massachusetts, attends Boston University, now has career in software quality assurance. Wife and two daughters – dancers. Nisha studied piano, then Afro Cuban percussion, music as community building, empowerment, working with young people of Caribbean descent inspiring her to learn drumming of her country, wanting to reconnect with her homeland, father brought back set of tablas. Learning to internalize the music, learning to improvise. The guru-sishya relationship in olden times, living with master's family, absorbing how the master lives, in addition to the art form, nowadays more like Ashram. Money exchanged, but eventually one is expected to teach others and not expect anything in return. Respecting your instrument, your master. For centuries, women not traditionally tabla players, tabla associated with being masculine, here, parents bring only boys to tabla demonstration,

description of materials that tabla is made of, names of drums, range of pitches, custom at beginning of lesson – shoes removed, Namaste. Approach to music equate to prayer or mediation, the raga will play you, you don't play the raga, tala (rhythm), improvising compared to jazz. Classify three types of sounds and nice analogy to phrases, sentences, poetry. Then nice demonstration of recited syllables and playing.

Counter no./ABS	Contents
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The sound of Chris tapping with metal hammer to tune the seedha, the smaller of two drums. He explains the way the tabla drums are tuned. That will raise the pitch a little bit. If that doesn't help, then we move this. . . then they jump right in to the lesson.

So we'll begin with a new Qayeda. If you remember the concept of Qayeda, Qayeda means in Persian principle. We take the theme, which is made up of some syllables and it's called a principle because we can make variations, we can experience freedom and creativity. But the principle is that we have to use only those syllables. The syllables are Ghe Na Ghe Tha (he plays the tone as he says each syllable.) Ghe Na Ghe Tha -- using these four syllables, we'll make a theme that will fit into the 16 beat rhythm pattern. So when we count the 16-beat rhythm pattern, we use the claps, and the waves, like one two three four, five, six seven eight sixteen. And our theme, using these four syllables, Ghe na . . .

Because they are divided into groups of 4, generally we think we need to execute them four at a time, but that's not so. We can look at the punctuation – although we have the first line, Ghe na ghe ghe na, ghe ghe na, Na ghe ghe na, na ghe ghe na, the way I want us to think is, 1,2,3, 1,2,3, 1,2 1,2,3,4, 1,2,3,4. That's the first half.(he repeats) . . .

But if you think of the composition as 1,2,3, 1,2,3, 1,2, 1234 1234, if you think of that punctuation, it helps you decide where you want to put the emphasis on. If you were to write it on paper, it would be

Ghe nag he, ghe na

Na ghe ghe na, na ghe ghe na

In the second half, we have the similar idea

Ke na ke . . .

So the first principle is that we use only these syllables. Second principle of this Qayeda, or generally any Qayeda, is that when you develop variations of the Qayeda, you will always think in two halves. The first half will have this deep resonant sounds of [he plays] this bigger drum called the baayan. And the second half will usually begin with flat sounds like this [he demonstrates]. So we subtract the deeper sound and call it Khali. Khali means empty. The deeper sound we call it the Bhari. Bhari means full. So first principle of the Qayeda is that we'll use only these syllables, gha na ke na. Second principle is that we'll always demonstrate two halves. First half will have ghe sounds – deep. Second half will have the flatter sounds.

And now we'll look at the ending.

Look at the technique – he plays the cycle along with syllables. We end this theme with

So let's recite the thing first. I'll recite and then you can catch me. (they recite syllables together.) So this Qayeda is different from all other simple Qayedas where we have just two lines. . .ok, let's start again. (doorbell rings and Maggie goes upstairs to let in David Filipov, the Globe reporter.)

Nisha plays the cycle. Let's look at the technique now. We'll wait for David.

Hello, - nice to meet you. Thank you for having us . . .

So once again, we'll recite our theme and then I'll show you the technique. . . Look at the theme. There are many spots where the ghe sound is repeated successively. There are places when after the ghe sound, there is another syllable. Ghe ghe versus ghe na , there is a difference. Whenever

you have two successive ghes, the technique of the first ghe is played with the index finger. The second ghe is played with the middle finger. Watch carefully – {he demonstrates.}

So if the syllable ghe is followed by another ghe, the rule is to play with the index first and then middle. Can you play, ghe na ghe, ghe na ghe, ghe na?

(She plays this while reciting syllables.)

Very nice. Now, na ghe ghe na, na ghe ghe na.

She plays without reciting

He recites syllables and then she plays. . .

The second half should start with the empty sounds. Ke na ke . . .

Now we'll combine the whole theme and play it as one unit. (They play together.)

So, there are some points to remember while we are playing. One advantage of developing a Qayeda into several variations, you can create something on your own, ok? Second thing is, the reason behind each Qayeda the syllables that the Qayeda uses will be fortified. Your technique of playing ghe or na or ke or ta will become finer and finer as you keep on developing. But the important thing to remember is that each time you attempt to play a theme or its variation, you should play in the same tempo. If you don't play in the same tempo, what happens is that we don't build an internal tempo, which is called the liya. We will see how we build into a higher tempo.

More playing

Things to remember in addition to starting with the index, the intonation on the ghe is different. And you're doing very well. (He strike ghe) – that's the first ghe. That's the second ghe. One is an open, more resonant sound. The pitch is different from the second one. The second one is a closed one, but the ghe is slightly higher. (He demonstrates the two pitches) Can you see?

Because of that variation in the pitch, there is some kind of expression that we build. If I play the same thing in a faster tempo, (he plays), you can see how two successive ghes are slightly different intonations. One is slightly higher than the other. So that's like speaking with some kind of emphasis, some kind of expression. Otherwise, everything would feel flat, like the sound is coming out of a [?] instrument or a computer. So now, you play the same thing; pay attention to the intonation. Can you play the whole thing?

She plays. Very nice.

O.K. Now we'll make a variation of this theme. Very common idea to build a variation is you take either the first line or part of a line and you repeat. When you repeat a group of syllables and still use other syllables in the similar way in the theme, and also demonstrate two halves, the first half with the deep sounds and the second half with the flat sound. And also pay attention to how each half is ending na ghe ghe na, na ghe ghe na, and still be able to fit it into your clap, clap, wave system, then it's a variation that we can use.

He recites syllables . . . so what I am doing is that my clap, clap wave system is going lopsided. So when we repeat, we still have to have a sense of where are we in the cycle. So we should know in our gut that we have passed the first half of the cycle and we are beginning the second half of the cycle. That will give us the sense to compose on the spot and finish up the piece. More syllables – let's count how many of those there are. . . . and then, what happens? If you bring another theme back, (syllables) so we have to be mindful of how much of the cycle we have used. So, a variation can be one cycle of theme. It cannot be one and a half cycle, it has to be two. It has to be three. It is always a multiple of the cycle, not a fraction of the cycle.

He recites syllables. So it's very long. Can you say how many cycles we have used?

We've used four.

Four. Now what if you make a variation that is six cycles. It's very hard. It becomes very tedious to remember how many cycles. So the idea is, not to really remember the cycles. The idea is to have a gut feeling of where you are. So your cycle is not being counted; your cycle is being felt. You understand the difference? We are not really going to play with our mind calculating where we are. We are not really going to say, this is half, this is quarter. Then the playing will become a mental exercise. The playing should become a physical, emotional interaction. We feel the rhythm. We don't really count the rhythm when we play; we feel the rhythm. So we develop a gut sense of the variations so that automatically, without anybody telling, we know we are in the second half or the first half. It doesn't matter if we go for 3 counts or 4 counts, or 4 cycles or 6 cycles.

Let's together play this variation. I'll see if you can remember. So the whole (syllables) that is played three times. Then bring back the theme. That's the variation. Play ke na ke, ke na ke, ke na. . . . and then bring back the entire theme. Okay? One, two, three . . .

They play together.

Wonderful, wonderful. Now, we will still use the same theme of repeating, but now not the entire first line. Syllables So when you repeat X number of times, half of the theme, then the number of cycles you would need to complete your theme would be different. It's like saying, you are repeating eight syllables when essentially you are only repeating four syllables. So, when will you complete your variation? It's endless. You can take a group of syllables, you repeat it in such a way that in your gut feel you're either using both halves of the cycle, only one half of the cycle, and how you want to finish it. We are always finishing it in one single pattern bringing (syllables). So, can you try by yourself repeating, ghe na ghe ghe na, only that much. Try to make one. It's o.k. if it doesn't fit. One, two, three, start –

She tries

OK let's stop there. You brought the ka ke . . . which, for me, is ending in only half a cycle. In the half of the next cycle, you are bringing the khali. So you were right in bringing the ka . . . but bring back the whole theme. Then it will fit. You'll start again. One, two, three, start

She plays

Beautiful. So, there is a difference. What happened here was, in the previous variation, we developed the entire line. So our gut remembered that, that's the duration. When we took only half of it and then tried to develop it, we were still in the mode of developing the entire theme. So our gut did not have enough practice or repetition to understand it's only half of it. So what do we do here? We have to come up with a system that works. Whenever we develop a new variation, we have to repeat it a few times so our system will learn first. And once we repeat it enough times, we get better at sensing what's the weight of this development we are doing.

So, so far we have done (syllables). So let's look at these syllables and see what we can do with three syllables. If you reorder them, you'll get more variations. I'm saying, 123, 123, 12. I can say 321, 321, 12. The same numbers but I'm just changing them. But the count is the same. The punctuation is the same. Group of 3, group of 3, group of 2. 231, 231 12. Will it work? 132, 132, 12, will it work? 213, 213, 12. So now, you got an idea of just reversing or changing the order and you have a few variations. Take the theme and don't repeat anything else, just change the order and try to make a variation. Ghe na ghe, ghe na ghe ghe na– use only these three syllables

but change the order and see what you can come up with. Then let's clap and see if it fits into our scheme.

So, change the order within the groups of 1,2,3?

We separate with commas. 123, 123, 12. That's the idea. 321, 321, 12. 213, 213, 12. Let's recite first. Try to make one. Let's see how we go.

Na ghe ke, na ghe ke, na ghe

Last one is the same ghe na.

Oh. O.k., 1,2. – she tries again. Then finished up with na ghe ghe na. She stumbles a little bit but persists, getting it right.

OK, two things are happening. We are taking a theme. We are taking the second line constant. We are only playing with the syllables in the first line. So there is an advantage of keeping one of them constant. Because when you are playing to an audience, what happens is that they are looking for that repeating phrase. You can call it a refrain. They're looking for it. So when you are developing a theme, you may go on for two or three cycles. As soon as you bring in the na ghe ghe na, na ghe ghe na, they feel happy. They are listening to something they have heard. So they are expecting that. So, keep something constant. Don't be so unpredictable in your variations. There is creativity, there is freedom. But at least for the enjoyment of the people you are performing to, depending on who the audience is, give them something that they will learn in the first few minutes of your performance. So they will hear this, ka ta, ghe ghe na, ghe ghe na, na ghe ghe na, na ghe ghe na. And you play that a few times, that becomes part of their system. Now, when they are building developments . . .

(more variations using syllables and changing the internal order)

It becomes a little challenging therefore the importance of reciting and clapping. Second is, you change the order but you didn't change the order of every group. Take your time.

She tries reciting first and stumbles for a few times, then gets it, and then plays na ghe ghe, na ghe na ghe na.

Beautiful. Try again.

More attempts. It is clearly challenging.

Very nice, very nice. So once you have the idea, the next thing is to execute. So three steps: first you catch on to an idea of what you want to do to make a variation. Second thing is to recite with clap to see how it feels. And then, only then, you try to execute. What happens if you skip the wave, clap clap at a recital? What do you think? What do you think might happen?

You might not fall within –

You still may be playing but you may miss a chance to see whether your variations are fitting in. Unless there is an external device where there's a lehra playing or somebody is counting and clapping, you won't know. So the best thing is for us to recite with the clap, clap wave so we know whether it is fitting or not. So, now, let's make some variations. So now, we can take a

theme, after some development, we can highlight a different part of the theme. It's still the same syllables . . . he recites.

That was too fast. He counts off slower – She plays while he recites. Very nice, very nice. Questions on what's happening. Do you have any questions?

Not at the moment.

When you develop these variations, there's a way that we can think about the variations, so that one variation is flowing from the other. You develop one variation. The next one is kind of related to the other one. So if your variation is following the principle of repeating, you put them all in a group. Mentally, you organize them. For the next five minutes, I'll play the trick of repeating. Then, now I'm going to play the trick of changing the order. If you repeat in one variations, then reverse in the other variations, now repeat in the second variation, now change the order, so it's like you're not giving the ears of listeners to really understand what's going on here. So when you repeat, when the process is repeating, if you stick with that kind of technique for a few minutes, then, by the time you finish, people will get the idea, oh, this is what's going on here. She's playing on these two syllables. Now when you're reversing, stick with it for a few more cycles. Make more variations using the same principle. Then they'll catch on to it. If you play all of them in one row and not repeat the idea, it's very hard to keep them interested. So it's all about performance oriented. You want to enjoy; the listeners have to enjoy.

Now the challenge is, you make up the order. Let's start with Ta din deen na. Start the theme of this Qayedada and play as many variations as you can. When you think you can't go any further, play ta din deen na and end it. What I'm trying to say is, can you plan mentally while playing? I don't know what you're going to play. I'm not going to tell you what you're going to play. You don't know what you want to play. While you're playing, plan ahead and then make variations. When you think you're out of creativity, or it's too much now, come back to the theme [?] and end it. You can play two variations, three variations – it's up to you.

NP But don't play the theme at the end. Go right into deed da?

Right. So here's the thing. Teen da first, theme of the Qayedada, bunch of variations that you're comfortable with, end with theme. They all need to fit into clap, clap, wave. On the spot, you're developing on the fly. O.K., one, two, three, start.

He claps and waves and she plays what he has just described.

OK, you did very nicely. There were a couple of spots where you brought in the ka te ghe ghe na, so, were you aware of how

Yes.

How did you become aware of those things? Was it clapping?

Right, right.

If I were not clapping, you probably wouldn't have.

No.

So then what happens is that ka te ghe ghe na is coming at half of the theme. So when you brought in before, either you are losing four beats or eight beats. So when you end, you're probably ending halfway through the cycle. Or one and a quarter ways through the cycle. So what happens, you can still enjoy, you can still have fun but people who know tabla, they really enjoy while clapping. Because they get an enjoyment out of figuring out what is happening. So they will figure out, oh, she missed it. (giggling) No big deal, no big deal. But always be ready for those who will be knowledgeable, who want to enjoy by counting. In Carnatic music, it's a

must. Everybody is doing this (clapping and waving.) More than Hindustani. But Hindustani, even if they are not, they are doing it mentally.

So, when we are performing to a group, there could be a six year old, seven year old kid who is doing this thing (clapping and waving) So it's important to have some system. Best thing is to build it in gut. Build it here (he points to his gut) so you know, you know the halves. So it's a feel. It's impossible for us to count everything when you are performing for 15, 20 minutes. It's really not possible for me. I go by the feel. I know I'm in the middle of a cycle. And ending the cycle. OK?

So, what's next week's regimen for you? Practice this thing. I showed you two or three ways. I would like to see you make variations and then play them in two different speeds. Now you played (he recites). What's the double of this? (He recites the same syllables twice as fast.) Try that. If that is not possible, reduce the initial speed a little bit so you can play a composition in two speeds that are possible for you. Any questions?

When you are doing the double speed, the counting is twice as fast?

Ah, no, no. That's a good question. This clap, clap, wave is like a constant thing that you work against. So this is like a metronome. (he demonstrates counting and clapping, with the clapping staying steady.) I'm not changing this – the tempos is not changing, the pattern is not changing. Against this you have to build.

Chris turns to David and Maggie -- Any questions for you?

DF How much time do we have? Do you need to go?

NP I'm o.k.

CP I'm fine.

DF How long have you been teaching?

CP I've been teaching in the United States for about 15 years now.

DF And you were born –

CP I was born in India. South India.

DF So you're native language is not Hindi?

CP Not Hindi. Mine is Telugu.

DF Were you born here?

NP I was actually born in India. My family is from the south of India but I was born in New Delhi.

DF So which language do you speak in India?

NP My family speaks Tamil and Telugu on my father's side.

DF So could you do the lesson in Telugu?

NP No, unfortunately. I can understand Tamil, but I cannot speak –

CP I can do a lesson in Telugu. The syllables are the same.

DF Your English is immaculate so obviously you've been teaching for awhile.

CP Yah, I taught English for a living back back home in India. So that's why I can speak somewhat o.k.

DF You've been teaching 15 years. How long have you been studying?

NP Three years with some breaks inbetween.

DF And when did you meet in this process? You didn't start with Chris.

NP No. My first teacher was Nitin Mitta [through Rhode Island State Council on the Arts] and then Chris was my teacher for the second year. Actually, it's not 3 years, it's 2 years. This is the beginning of the 3rd year.

CP In 2005 she studied with a good friend of mine, Nitin Mitta, a very good tabla player. In 2007 she studied with me through a grant with RISCA. And then this year we have been fortunate enough to get another grant, so Nisha could continue with me.

DF And so, you skipped 2008?

NP Mm-hum.

DF Was that out of economic or artistic necessity?

NP A combination. As a freelance artist – I'm a teaching artist and a performing artist – resources for intensive private study is not always possible for me.

DF That makes sense. What is your artistry in?

NP I'm a classically trained pianist so I work in a local school as a director of music, both directing a choir and directing a church band. And I've been studying Afro-Cuban percussion for ten years and teach Afro-Cuban workshops mainly with young people, from upper elementary through high school. I've recently started doing some intergenerational workshops as well.

DF So, obviously she has a musical background as well as a background in rhythmic drumming.

NP – is a director of church choir in Providence – where she had lived for 11 years prior to moving to Roxbury. DF asks about recording equipment and other instruments – Chris supplies sound for visiting Indian classical musicians in the area. He also plays guitar

CP I love music and my family has a lot of people who have been musically oriented. My dad's uncles, they were all singers.

DF This stringed instrument here?

CP That's a guitar that I defretted it. I removed the frets so I could play it like an Indian instrument. Indian instruments use an idea called meen [?], the glide. As soon as I defretted it, I noticed that it is very hard to play. So, I'm in the process of building a guitar myself with the help of some people who know how to build guitars. My idea is to keep the Spanish guitar structure as it is, add sympathetic strings to it, and then be able to play ragas on it.

MH Has anyone ever done that?

CP There are people who have attempted it and I think they are also performing. But mine defers from them in design. So far, the models I have seen, the sympathetic strings sit on the side of the main strings. I want to design them so the strings are traveling right under the main strings.

MH mentions the hardanger fiddle with its sympathetic strings

DF Why don't you just purchase a sitar?

CP I love the guitar. I love the guitar. The main reason is I can play guitar to a level where I feel comfortable and present a raga. And now, at this age, if I have to learn the sitar, it's very difficult for me. I also spread my time between tabla and the harmonium and the sound and the singing. And adding the sitar would be somewhat unrealistic to achieve my goals.\

DF How old are you?

CP I'm 55.

DF So you've been teaching here for 15 years –

CP Teaching music. Back home in India, I was teaching college. I was the head of the department of English. I came here in '88. And then I tried for college teaching here – they all needed a doctorate. Things were tough. So I started teaching at a primary school. Then I moved to a middle school, and taught high school. I was not teaching English, I was teaching other subjects such as math, physics, chemistry, biology. General science. Then in '98 I quit teaching because I was interested in computers. My students really motivated me to learn computers. I went to Boston University to take some courses in computer education. And then became a business analyst. I worked for a couple of years as a business analyst and then picked up Q.A. – quality assurance testing. That was in 2000. Since then I have been working in software quality assurance testing.

DF So this is in addition -

CP This is a passionate hobby. For a living I do software QA testing. This is to keep my tradition, keep my passion alive and fulfill my love for music.

DF Do you have family?

CP Yes, I have family. I have a wife and two daughters.

DF Are the daughters musically inclined?

CP They are. When they were little they learned the piano. And they learned Carnatic South Indian vocal with a local teacher. They also learned Kuchipudi, which is a different type of dance in the south. They seem to like Kuchipudi more than Indian music. So they stuck with dance.

DF How old are they?

CP They are 23 and 21. They are still here. The younger one is at Northeastern studying health sciences.

DF Nisha, how old are you?

NP I'm 39.

DF Was music your education?

NP Not in college. I studied privately for ten years in my childhood and adolescence. And then, like Chris, music was always there; it was a hobby. But my work was in community development and also community organizing for six years and also doing some leadership training with young adults and adults around issues of their communities – how to come together and make change. I came back to music as an outlet to relieve some of my stress. When I came back to music I started studying with some master musician percussionists down in Providence – teachers, who like Chris, not only presented technique and rhythm styles but also presented the cultural context and history. Living in Providence with a predominantly Dominican and people from various parts of the Caribbean, as well as people from Nigeria and Liberia, I began to see a way for music to be a means for community building, for education around the history of the Americas, and for empowerment. And so it was kind of a bridging of a passion for music with a passion for social justice. It was unexpected that I would come back to music in a full time way, in a professional way. The experience of teaching young people of Caribbean descent inspired me to learn a drumming tradition of my country of origin. And my father happened to come back with a set of tablas from a trip to India. It just feels like this journey to the tabla has been very organic.

DF So, when you saw the effect of your teaching Afro Cuban drumming you realized you could have the same effect by learning the drumming of your culture.

NP Yes, in the sense that I've lived in predominantly white communities, predominately African American communities, predominantly Latino communities and that has been very enriching, but I think that yearning for a connection with people of my own homeland and a yearning for a regular practice of a cultural tradition that was centuries old, was always there. So there's a way in which this centers me. There's a way in which gives me something to stand on in a multicultural environment that the United States is becoming more and more. So I've seen this parallel of the impact on students of mine with my own experience with this tradition.

DF When you practice here, there's more than just a musical lesson. The expression you kept using was gut sensation. And that goes beyond ta ta, ti ti ta. The mentor apprentice relationship here, does it go beyond just musical training? Is there also some philosophical or spiritual training?

CP It's basically the philosophy I carry about music. For me, music is primarily for enjoyment of the self. It also can entertain others, which is secondary for me. When I engage with a rhythm instrument, I have developed an understanding of how I really enjoy it. I enjoy it more when I really feel it. And when my approach is intellectual, I may miss out on the enjoyment part of it. So whether it may be for five minutes or ten minutes, even practicing new material, I want to make it part of my system and really flow with it. Feel with it.

DF Is Nisha getting that?

CP That's what I'm teaching and I'm confident she understands that and also appreciates that. In fact, after our first session after we completed study under the first grant, she gave me this little book, THE MUSIC LESSON. It's written by Victor Wooten. I read this book from page to page and asked Nisha, hey, most of the philosophy of this book, it's like I'm reading about myself. What she said was, yes, I read it myself and after seeing that you think similarly to the author, then I thought you should read it.

DF OK, that's intellectually, but from the point of view of the way she's internalizing the music, is she starting to get that approach, the way that you see it?

CP Yes, she is getting that.

DF So, just from listening to your answers for just a few minutes, I understand that you see music that is not just superficial but also something organic. And maybe even in a deeper sense, it connects with the way you are in society – what you do, who you are working with. Do you see yourself starting to get into this idea of music as a spiritual experience that is first and foremost a groove that you get into and secondary what it does for the audience? It sounds to me that more than a philosophy of what your music does in connection with other people, it sounds like what Chris is trying to teach is how your music becomes an outgoing of whatever you have inside of you. And that seems like a very tricky thing to pick up.

NP I am lucky in that one of the piano teachers I had, a teacher from Russia. And again, there's a connection between Chris and other teachers in my life. She was very clear and insistent on good technique and gave me exercises for developing that. But she also pushed me to be, as she put it, not be a good girl. And to learn these compositions, that were set compositions, but to bring my own feeling and as much of my experience as I could to it. And I remember the one recital where I felt that I had made a lot of technical mistakes – she came to me and embraced me and said that was wonderful, because I had put so much feeling in it. An interesting thing with both Afro Cuban percussion and North Indian percussion is this aspect of improvisation. That there are these set Qayedas, or these set rhythm styles that you learn but so much of performance is about improvisation. And improvisation that are based on these structures – in Afro Cuban music, klave, in this music Teen Taal. So there's this element to bringing feeling to the Qayeda but also having the freedom to improvise. And I will say that I get that and am trying to live in to it but it is the place where I have the most growth, most anxiety. That initially, I don't trust that I will be able to come up with interesting improvisation but I'm definitely getting that it's not just about this series of bols.

DF There are patterns that you need to learn and there are people in the audience that are expecting to hear these patterns. So you establish a pattern and then you improvise on top of that. But you also have to return to this pattern, so that they know you are on the same piece. (To MH – are you getting what I'm getting about this, compared to last time? Has anyone done a dissertation between pibroch and North Indian drumming? It's there, right? You're pretty much describing, if you take away the music and the cultural connection, traditional Scottish bagpiping and what you are doing are exactly the same thing, starting with the fact that the way you teach it is to sing it, canteroch. And the second part is that it's not written down but that everybody, the masters all know how it's supposed to go. And finally, you improvise it based upon the way you internalize it, however, you have to be in exactly the same place – so you'll play for 30 minutes, we actually witnessed one of these, and you know exactly where you are.

MH They were in a kind of trance. Actually, I have a question. Back to the guru system of teaching, and how that differs from somebody just coming in and having their regular hourly lesson. You talked about almost becoming a member of a family. Just talk about that for a little bit.

CP It's a very ancient system where a particular art form used to be within the families. For many reasons. Most important reason was a lot of musicians were court musicians. Their revenues came from concerts that they did in the king's palace. So they wanted to keep the art

form within their families so that it wouldn't jeopardize their potential for income. So that is the working class musicians. But there were other people who were very rich who could afford to go to anybody, pay them and learn music. It was best learnt to actually live with the master in his house because the teaching aspect of the music was not limited to 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock, 4 pm, 5 pm. It's a creative art form. It depends on the mood and inspiration; muse you may call it. So the teacher, or the master, would have his disciples and he's doing his daily chores. He comes up with this great composition and he asks one of his disciples, go bring the tambura [sp?]. And he gets the tambura and he asks the disciples, "Sit here." And he's singing, he's not necessarily teaching. He's singing and developing his ala and the student is absorbing it. So it's not always like, do this this way. It's like, be around me and absorb everything. Now when the master observes that a certain student has an inclination more than the others, there is an affinity. There is a sense of recognition that this kid has something. Maybe I'll start with techniques for him. And that's where it began.

So, he would give position to that student and tell his wife and his siblings that, from here on, this person will be staying – so what we eat, he will eat. What you wear, he will wear. Anything we celebrate in the family, this is part of the family. So they lived with the master and observed the master, not only what the master does with his art form, what's the characteristics of the master? How does the master treat his fellow beings? When does he get up? What kind of personal priorities does he have? Is he a God fearing person?

So, in addition to a particular art form, which can be limited to some parts of the day, spread sporadically here and there, the student is learning a lot of other things from the master. Basically, how to live life. How does the master treat his wife? How does the master love his students? How does the master treat his own children? What's his idea about money? Does he really depend on money? What kind of attitude does he have for his art form? Is it like a religion for him? Is it number one priority? So there are some eccentric stories where the master didn't care for anything else; they didn't bother even for food. Their devotion was to the instrument. So people that studied under that master in a guru-sishya, they developed that aspect. So they thought that music was God and everything else didn't matter. But some masters were more balanced. Music is just a thing, it's a beautiful thing, but more important than music is being kind. Being open minded. Being forgiving. So depending on the master, people learned different aspects of life and different priorities about music. And technique was one of the things proportionally to how good the master was and intensely the master taught and how much priority he gave [to technique]. Some masters said don't worry about the technique; it will come. Some masters said, get the technique right; after that, we'll talk about the other things.

But today, there are these guru-sishya parampara, as we call them and there are places where people can go and enroll, but it's not a similar setting like there's a master teaching two or three students. Now it has grown into a bigger area like an ashram. So the master is not confined to one place, but all the students live there. And the master also travels, tours around and does his concerts, visits other countries. But when the master is there, they get a chance. And the master will also instruct his senior students to keep on the tradition and make sure that everybody's practicing in the right technique.

And other things that go with responsibility of the house is washing the clothes, washing the dishes, going to the grocery, helping the lady of the house. So, responsibility of how to raise a family, how to use money.

MH Is there any money exchanged?

CP Ideally, the masters did not accept money. But today, there is some money exchanged.

DF But your relationship, if you are borrowing from this tradition, it's only within the context that you both have jobs and you can only meet during certain times. There are aspects of the guru-sishya relationship but it can't totally be that.

CP It can't. Right now like Nisha, she's studying as part of a grant. And there are students who meet me on Saturdays and they pay me. And there are some students who cannot afford but they still want to learn. And they come and learn and I don't expect any money from them.

DF So other than the fact that you sometimes give some classes for free, what are some of the other aspects of the guru-sishya relationship that enter into this one?

CP I think I didn't understand the question. Can you repeat the question?

MH It's a good question though.

DF Well, we were just talking about the guru-sishya tradition of teaching. Given that you and Nisha can't have all of that, since she doesn't live here and you both have your own lives, how do you take from that tradition and apply it to these classes?

CP We can't apply everything, but some of the things we apply like, not only Nisha but there are other students that I teach that are basically younger – when I interact with them, I try to bring out the things that they miss by living in a country other than India. I teach them things like books are a source of knowledge so we should treat them respectfully. Instruments, you may think they are just made of metal, clay and wood, but still, you should love them and respect them. You should respect one another. And you should respect the guru. So when I first sit with them I say Namaste to them. I do it consistently every week so they learn it's a nice thing to do. And I say it when there are others entering our class and your school and you should try to practice these things. So when you see elders, it's the proper thing to do, Namaste. So those things are taught by the guru in the guru parampara.

I also try to teach them, when you have an art form and there is anybody that appreciates it, if you can, try to teach them the proper way and never expect anything in return. I tell them, when you're able to, it's basically free. That's what I try to teach them.

DF So you said that you try to give free classes to people. This is funded by a grant – how many students do you have that you teach for free?

CP I have four students that I teach for free and one of them is an adult.

DF And how many students in all do you have?

CP In all I have about eight students.

DF Is it a traditional thing for women to learn tabla? Because the traditional Scottish bagpipe playing woman actually caused trouble when she was doing well in Scottish competitions because, not only weren't men used to women playing, but the idea of women winning an award

CP No, it hasn't been traditional. In South India, women were encouraged to learn to sing. And learn to dance classical dance, like the Bharatanatyam, and also play the veena. The reason for that was to be a cultured person knowing the art forms and to add value to being eligible for marriage. So traditionally, women, girls were taught these things like dance or music or singing so they were more marketable in the area of marriage and so they could attract richer people or more qualified people. Now, some of these students who learnt, they also learnt that they are very passionate about this art form, so they want to perform in the public.

So for many centuries, there was a lot of opposition. In the area of singing it was not so much as in the area of tabla. But there are more women who dance, more women who sing as performers than tabla. Because, psychologically, tabla was associated with being masculine. And people in those days thought it's not a cup of tea for a woman. You need to be a strong person. Things like that. It is a challenging instrument but there have been some masters who have accepted girl students like [Ala ?] and he taught a lady named [?] and she's a very professional player.

DF So it is possible now in India.

CP It is possible. There are at least a handful of star women performers in the area of tabla.

DF So it overcame centuries-old opposition but it's been around for how long, a generation?

CP Yeah, this kind of mentality has been around for many generations. At least I can say for the last 20 years we are seeing women tabla players coming up.

DF I mean, there weren't women rock star guitarists 30 years ago either.

CP But that doesn't mean the society has changed much.

DF In a traditional family in South India, it's very unlikely that a woman will be a tabla player.

CP Yes. Even in this United States, when I announced I'll be available in this venue, please bring your children so I can demonstrate tabla, it's a common tendency for parents to send only the boys, because it's a tabla thing. They don't really think, even now, that their girls should be interested or take on tabla.

DF I didn't get, how long have you been in the United States?

NP Most of my life. I've been here since I was two years old.

DF Question about the instruments – what are they made of, the body?

CP The body – this one here is made of rosewood. We call it seesha wood. And this one here is selected for top class tablas because of its uniform density. And it has a nice tone. It comes in different flavors. This top part is made of goat skin. And these straps, these are basically cow's guts.

DF And the round things, what are they called?

CP These are called pegs. The idea is, when we hit them with this hammer [tap] it tightens. It tightens here, the pitch goes higher. And if I bring them up, the pitch goes lower. The sound is controlled by this black spot, basically. This black spot is a paste that is made up of stone and iron filings powdered. And they mix it with some kind of glue, apply it layer by layer, and then at the end of each layer they rub it with some soft rock that you can find in the rivers. What happens is, as soon as it dries up, it develops cracks within itself. You can see minute cracks.

So this mechanism works as a regulator of how long the ring should be. [He taps drum and it rings.] So it's ringing for a few seconds. [he taps again]

DF You just two different notes. An octave.

CP Yah. So I let it vibrate. The ring was complete. I blocked the ring by putting my finger and instead of hitting it here, I hit it here. And it's all possible because of this little regulator. If these cracks were not to be there, that wouldn't happen.

In the very old days these used to use rice as some kind of glue but now they are using different material.

DF Now the two different drums, do they have different names? The large one and the small one.

CP Yah. Most people play with the right hand. The word for right hand in Hindi is seedha. So they call this small drum seedha. Opposite of seedha is baayan, means left handed. So they take this drum and in some parts of India they call it baayan.

DF And I noticed that the two seedhas were not in tune.

CP It's because the diameter is different. So the smaller the diameter, the higher you can tune it. But it also depends on how thick this material is [I think he is referring to the head of the drum.] The thinner, the higher you can tune it.

DF But do they need to be in tune? If you're playing with another instrument, it has to.

CP No, they need not be. It has to have a balanced tune all around it, it needs to sound the same. But if Nisha and I are playing together, we can be in different tune. But if Nisha is playing with a sitar player, it has to match the pitch of the sitar player.

DF What's the range of pitches you can tune it to?

CP This one is actually made to play in the scale of C# to D#.

MH One whole pitch?

CP Yah, one whole tone. So right now it's tuned in C#. I played this in a concert last night. This is the larger drum. This is made for a pitch which is much lower. So we have tablas wider than this which can go deeper. And I have probably tuned it to go in the scale of G.

This larger one, most of are made these days of copper or brass and coating with nickel or chromium. In the olden days, they used to have clay ones. And I actually have a clay one. Nowadays, they are making with the fiberglass also. I have one if you'd like to see.

MH What's the name for the little pillow it sits on?

CP We just call them rings.

DF I missed you coming in. Before you start, other than Namaste, is there anything that you have to do to start the lesson properly?

CP Generally, when we enter the area, we take the shoes off or leave the shoes in a corner. And then you greet the people around you including the master. Depending on what religion you follow, people do this thing to their instrument like bowing to their instrument. I don't generally do it. I respect my instrument but I don't worship it or say Namaste to my instrument, because of my belief. I am a Christian and I believe in the commandments, Though shall have no other God. So, I try to make sure tabla is not my God.

DF So Eric Clapton is not either. [Laughter] And you?

NP I was raised Christian and I am working as a church musician. But I do see this as one of my spiritual practices and one that helps to center me, spiritually. So I don't bow to my instruments but they are certainly part of my faith expression as much as what I do on a Sunday morning.

DF Is there anything that I've missed that you feel it's important to say about this? I guess the thing I didn't ask was – I guess it wasn't difficult to establish that Chris was a carrier of a folk art. When the panelists were finding out the mentor relationship, I assume that this wasn't difficult either.

CP A couple of things that you obviously know. Our approach to music, especially with instruments, we equate it to prayer. We equate it to meditation. Another approach is, at an advanced level when you are presenting ragas, although we have a definition of a raga saying that this raga has five notes going up or six notes going down, but our masters teach that the raga will play you, you don't play the raga. That means you dwell on the exercises, notes and practices of that raga for so much that the vocabulary of the raga becomes part. And when you want to play, the raga is expressing itself through you, through your instrument. But if you were to play the exact opposite way planned, I'm going to play these notes in this order, it defeats the purpose and the spirit of the raga. So it's a very spiritual thing and we are encouraged to learn an instrument, whether it's a tabla or a vocal practice to get to that level where you clear up everything and then start approaching the raga and the raga will unfold itself.

This music is defined as a tala. Tala is the rhythm cycle. So if you take a rhythm cycle, it's basically 16 beats, and when you start developing, it should flow out of you.

I know people personally who have walked out of a concert because the singer has uttered one note that doesn't belong in the raga.

MH Are they all 16 beats?

CP No. I can demonstrate some beats for you. The one that we played was in 16 beats. It goes: ta din din ta, ta din din ta, ta din din ta, ta din din ta. [He plays 1:42:10]

So this is 16. We have 12 beat cycles, 10 beat cycles, 7 beat. The 10 beat cycle goes de na de de na, de na de de na, de na de de na, de na de de na. [He plays] It's equal to the 5/4s. This is like a framework; this is like four pillars of a building and I can build first floor, second floor, third floor, and the arrangement in those four floors is different. . . I can divide the space into durations of quarter beat, 1/8, 1/16. So mentally I've made a framework and some divisions within that framework. And it depends on the individual player how you want to interpret those

spaces. So you can say that each space has a subdivision of eight more spaces. Or one may see a subdivision of only two.

MH And that was interesting when you were saying that little kids will keep time clapping.

CP It's more popular in the South of India in Carnatic music. It's an expected thing in a concert. They're all taught, but you don't see it in North India, Hindustani concert people doing it. But they do it mentally.

DF – gets cell phone numbers. Apologizes for coming in late.

The idea of the story is to basically illuminate what is the best job in the history of the universe: Maggie's. And basically to focus on the five relationships to show this program, what it's doing. . .

CP I run into this situation every once in awhile. There is this artist coming from India and he can't afford to bring all of his accompanying artists. So, he lands in New Jersey. He finds some accompanists who want to play tabla or harmonium. So he's there playing in the concert. Just five minutes before the concert starts, he says what raga he is going to present and what's the tempo he is going to present. And they jam. It's an extemporaneous conversation. And it still works because we are working on the same framework. We know that these are the notes; we know that these are the beats. It's like jazz.

And one very primary thing, the way we learn is through uttered syllables. These syllables represent some sounds. You can basically classify sounds into deep sounds, ringing sounds and flat sounds. [he demonstrates all three] And combining these sounds, we make syllables and we make phrases. We make sentences. Or we make it run like poetry. And the way we learn is simple sounds like na na or ta na.[He demonstrates syllables and then plays them for a minute or two.]

MH I remember from mridangam – are they the same syllables?

CP They are different syllables but the idea is the same.

Chris brings our attention to the sweets he has laid out for us. Barfi, which comes from the word which means snow. Have some sweets please. This also –

Maggie hands Chris a release form. It's like halavah – this is similar but has a brittle taste to it. Take some home.

And do you know the harmonium? I play the harmonium also and accompany visiting musicians. We continue to try the sweets – which indeed are incredibly sweet.

CP Thank you so much for coming. It's an honor to have people come.