

ROLE OF HARMONIUM IN SOLO PERFORMANCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Harmonium is basically a western musical Instrument but now a day it is adopted by almost all Hindustani systems of music. In North Indian Music, Harmonium is used as an accompanying instrument for almost all types, viz: Khayal, Thumri, Folk Music, Film Music, Light Music, and so on. Along with this role as an accompanying instrument, it is also used to perform concerts as Solo Instrument.

Riyaz on Harmonium' with consideration of two major dimensions viz. Harmonium Solo & Harmonium accompaniment offers us multidimensional thought process. Riyaz, the word itself has the large scope like a Lotus with every single petal has its individual dimension and together forming own unique product. Thus Riyaz on and of in case of any instrument has its own dimensions, meanings, interpretations & implementations.

Harmonium player should understand skills/benefits and limits/cons of harmonium and should keep this in mind while performing the same.

PROS/BENEFITS

- 1. Bharana / As a Baseline Reference** - The sound which gives a strong support to a singer, which in musical language called 'Bharana' and allied supports for 'sur' to a singer. This also acts as baseline for vocalist to develop various patterns on it e.g. Murchana Paddhati.
- 2. Harmony and Melody** - Harmonium is the instrument which is able to provide both harmony as well as melody.
- 3. Tonal Quality & Selection of Harmonium** - For male singers, Harmonium of type Kharja -Nar and for female singers Nar-Nar type of harmonium is used. The purpose behind using this is to achieve better tonal quality which best matches with singer's voice quality
- 4. Varied Usage in different forms of music and types of instruments** - It is used as a solo instrument. It is also used for accompanying string instruments, accompanying Tabla as Lehra player, accompanying various forms of vocal music, styles of vocal music, accompanying dance concerts

CONS/LIMITATIONS

Lack of Meend renditions - Harmonium does not have 'Meend' in it. Also, no improvements/tuning can be made to achieve this as well.

Scaled Design and Perfection - As it is designed on a tempered scale it can't be treated as perfectly tuned as any string instrument.

Within pure classical music, except for Dhrupad and Dhamar, almost all rest of the forms like e.g. khayal, Thumri, Dadra, Chaiti, Kajari, Tappa, Tarana, Gazal, Trivat, Ashtapadi, Kawwali, Kirtan, Dance forms, Folk types like Lavani, etc. or any regional folk; same is the case with folk and film music accompanying with Tabla solo for lehora playing, everywhere harmonium is having great influence regarding increasing overall impact of the performance and compositions.

Let us concentrate on the point 'Riyaz' for harmonium accompaniment – Most commonly occurring scenario in the world of music. Riyaz not only includes building skills but also a change in the mindset to be an accompanist.

1. Being a Good Listener – The word listener is a key. It's just not a mere hearing but listening. Accompanist should be listening to all possible forms of music. Understanding aesthetics, expressions, underlying uniqueness of its renditions and pronouncing/reproducing it. This gives exposure to various types of music, its boundaries and sets a baseline discipline for him.

2. Being into Accompanist's Mindset /Changing the Mindset – One should keep in mind that even though no one is superior or inferior in music, you should be supplementary to Lead artist. Most important thing to remember it's an overall performance to which you are contributing. One should not get unnecessarily dominated and should be keen to produce his own unique supplementary creations which adds beauty to overall performance

3. Accompanying various forms of music - During Riyaz one should be keen on understanding the form of music he is accompanying to. He also should understand the meaning & expression of composition along with event/place for its rendition. Every form has its own beauty, dignity and unique originalities. Accompanist should be keen to retain all or most of its elements with its essence and should build on top of it which adds value to it. Venue also matters as you will come to know target audience, maturity, likes and dislikes which would allow you expanding or restricting your creations during accompaniment.

In Classical concerts its more on the literal following the vocalist. Many a times, as a follower, rendering composition as it is (Playing notes with 100% perfection) increases the impact and beauty of overall performance. Though it's following, vocal and instrument are two forms of expressing sound and more and more they match and harmonize each other, better is the performance. He should be able to reproduce the effect of pronunciation of letters of the bandish while accompanying the singer and bring out 100% of the aesthetics of the composition. While accompanying with the forms like Gazal, etc. free-lance playing is expected.

With different types of instruments it is lot more complicated, to deal with 'Laya', "Taal" and "Raag" itself as a composition and forming its expressions enhancing the impact of overall performance.

In case of folk music, the rawness of the poetic and musical aspect of the composition, as well as, the polished version of the same has to be maintained separately.

There should not be influence of playing techniques as well as expression styles of one form over another. Rawness of musicality factor of any folk composing, means , one may it may indicate the impure version of any raga or the "dhunes" which have given birth to the ragas got establishment as a raga structure, quite scientifically based sequence of swaras and follows the rules of ragas but basically could be treated as "dhun ugam ragas.

In such case purity of ragas need not be maintained, only the folkness of the composition and its expression should be looked after.

For that, certain touches, cut notes, grace notes should be used, for fingerings, during accompaniment , which is must to be practiced by the accompanist.

4. Techniques of Playing – One should be keen on applying appropriate weight, sound while making a keystroke, command over sound control and keen on tuning it with Lead artist. One has to adapt the style of playing for classical, semi classical, western and various other forms of music. One should not get a feel of notation is getting played rather it should be a complete composition.

5. Selection of Harmonium - Selection of Harmonium is primarily on tonal quality, sweetness and tuning towards vocalist or lead instrument. There are many types of harmonium according to placements of 'Reeds 'and according to the tones of it. Horizontal and vertical are two major types found normally according to the placements of reeds. Tone-wise if we look at it ,we found Kharja – Nar , Nar –Nar ,and mixed ,etc. The addition of Kharja and quality of Reeds decide the quality of swaras produced. In recent years scale –changer harmoniums are developed which are really proving helpful for the harmonium players as well as for the singers in emergency change of swaras/ scales and flawless performance. Now a days harmonium with multiple keys for a single 'swara' are also developed to avail of utmost tuning though it can't compete with string instrument.

Now let's take a quick look at Riyaz for Harmonium Solo Performance

When we start thinking about the solo performance of the harmonium, one should think of composing, new gats on it, instead of playing some catchy and speedy Bandish, normally rendered during classical vocal or instrumental concepts. The new gats should be able to express the plus points of the harmonium as an

instrument, as well as skill of the solo player as a composer/performer. While composing gats, the composer should not cross the rules, of that particular form, and should not lose the essence of that form, and rasa, the main, soul of any composition.

Harmonium player should also do Riyaz in all scales despite availability of Scale Changer Harmonium.

One needs to practice or do Riyaz of composing in different ragas and different talas with different aesthetical points, spaces in the composition. Also one should do Riyaz of composing different forms of music like, Khayal, Thumri, Dadra, etc. from classical music, semi classical music, light music, folk music, ,etc. and so on.

During composition one should do Riyaz to compose almost all types of poetry in all possible languages in which ones' expression level is utmost. One should also do Riyaz, to compose mere tunes of the poetry, pieces, and mixture of even both of them. Also one should try to compose pieces between stanzas', composed by any other composer and try to make the composition a homogenous one.

One should also do Riyaz of composing different types of poetry. For that, one should try to learn, or to understand the meaning of that poetry at least and if possible should learn the style of expression of that particular language as far as possible. Also one should keep on finding good tunes, popular tunes and use as they are, or with some appropriate changes in them for certain composition in the mother tongue of the composer.

For doing all these things successfully, high and versatile listening level, concentrated and focused studies, and doing Riyaz of introspecting the things to add some creative values and status to it, is highly needed.

Thinking about the Karnataka music, though it is difficult to play on harmonium, one should always try to reproduce Karnataka music without giving shade or touch of north Indian classical music. But obviously the Laykari and its specifications of the Laykari are not at all ignorable from Karnataka music. One should try to use this aspect of Karnataka music, in appropriate places during playing harmonium as well as during composing a Gat or composing any tune.

The last but not the least important thing in this is , even after achieving these entire skills regarding performing of Harmonium, one should also try to learn the making and tuning of the Harmonium ,which will help for more thoughtful expression by the Harmonium Player.

Coming towards the conclusion, for creative expression of the artist, as well as the instrument, one should do Riyaz of every good aspect regarding the artist and the instrument.

Riyaz is not merely achieving skill in performance, but to adopt all possible concern things to enhance the level of performance by observing and improving self discipline may be as an accompanist or solo artist or a composer and so on. But, it is definitely a self disciplinary process to improve the personality as an artist as well as a human being to have the best and ideal orientation and expression of it towards music.

