

Hello everyone!

### **CI Music Hour Recap 9/7/23**

Last week, mridangam artist, Aswin Surya, joined our group. Aswin is a high school senior who has been playing the *mridangam* for over 8 years and participates in regular performances.

To begin the meeting, we watched a performance of Aswin playing the mridangam accompanied by the violin. You can watch this from 8:05-13:10 [here](#). We learned that the mridangam is a percussion instrument which plays a central role in Carnatic music. This musical genre originates from Southern India and usually features a vocalist and a string player, such as a sitarist or violinist, in addition to the mridangam player.

Aswin demonstrated three main styles of mridangam playing in Carnatic music. The first style, called *Pudukottai*, is characterized by heavy use of the left side of the mridangam, which creates a heavy base sound. The second style, called *Thanjavur*, is characterized by mathematical patterns that guide the musicians in following the same rhythmic pattern. The third style, called *Sarvalaghu*, is characterized by simpler rhythmic patterns in which the musician highlights more nuanced changes in dynamics. Aswin then described the different parts of the mridangam. The right side of the drum has two concentric circles each of which create a different timbre. The percussionist can use both of these sections to employ five different playing techniques. The left side of the instrument creates a bass sound to complement the sounds of the right side. There are a total of three different playing techniques employed on the left side. The two sides together can be used to create a variety of timbres. Each of these playing techniques has a name which when strung together, indicates a specific rhythmic pattern that the percussionist will play. There are hundreds of different patterns, referred to as *konnakol*. Often times, mridangam artists will learn to speak the rhythms before actually playing the instrument. Aswin led our group in clapping along to an eight-beat pattern while speaking the rhythmic pattern for the group. He then demonstrated the pattern for us on the mridangam. Following this explanation, Aswin performed a solo for us on the mridangam. One participant shared that they had been struggling listening to various instruments with their implants but discovered that they enjoyed listening to the drum after enjoying Aswin's mridangam performance. Aswin also described that as someone with hearing loss, he noticed that playing this style of music helped him to listen to music or sounds in his everyday life with more intention. He also shared that playing the mridangam helped him to process information faster, since he often has to perform many fast paced rhythms.

Aswin ended our session by sharing another performance which you can watch from 1:58:30 to 2:02:40 [here](#).

If you would like to watch a recording of last week's music hour you can watch it [here](#) and read the captions [here](#).

Lastly, Aswin has been working on creating an app that translates American Sign Language into English text in real time. If anyone would be interested in testing it out and sending Aswin a brief testimonial, please do so! You can find the app [here](#) and reach out to Aswin via email here: [aswinsurya@gmail.com](mailto:aswinsurya@gmail.com).