

Jan Gilbert
Thillana for Women's Voices

SSA

Optional: drummer and South Indian dancer

Set in Hindi

*Commissioned by WomenVoice, a consortium of choirs: Augsburg College
Riverside Singers, College of St. Catherine's Women's Choir, Hamline
University Women's Chorale, University of Minnesota Women's Chorus
and the University of St. Thomas Women's Choir*

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THILLANA FOR WOMEN'S VOICES

PROGRAM NOTES:

The *thillana* is a vocal genre in South Indian dance and music performance that prominently features drumming syllables as part of the text. The *Dhanasri Thillana*, named after the raga *Dhanasri* (similar to the Dorian mode) was composed by Swathi Thirunal, who was not only a prolific composer, but also the ruler of Travancore (now Kerala) from 1815 to 1829. The *Dhanasri Thillana* is one of Swathi Thirunal's most enduring works – performed frequently on both music and dance concerts throughout India. *Thillana for Women's Voices* is a new work inspired by Swathi Thirunal's original composition as interpreted by veena and vocal artist Nirmala Rajasekar. I have collaborated with Nirmala on several artistic projects, including *Suite for Veena and Orchestra* premiered at the Landmark Center in 2007, and *Shakuntala, A Sanskrit Song* for Soprano, Veena, and String Quartet. I am deeply grateful to Nirmala for introducing me to this *thillana*, and to Kathy Romey and *WomenVoice* for commissioning this project.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

South Indian singing uses a great deal of portamento and embellishment called *gamaka*. A CD of the original melody sung by vocal artist Nirmala Rajasekar and the Hindi pronunciation of the text are provided with the score. Experimenting with vocal sounds might be tried in the opening *Alap*, which is an introduction of the raga and can be stretched in time, with added improvisation. South Indian dance and drumming if available may be added to the performance forces. I have suggested the final chanting of rhythmic syllables on p. 11 to be in unison, but the director may experiment with other dramatic possibilities.

Text

Gita Dhunki takadheem Nadhrudithathom
Naache rahe Gori Tadithai Thaidithai Tarikita

Baaj Payal Kahoon jhanana jhanana
Jhanana, jhanana, jhanana, nanana thom (repeats)

thana Gaave thakatha thai ta thai
thai tha thai tha thanana dheem, dheem nakitataka dheem,
dheem nakitataka dheem, dheem nakitataka dheem
hatha thom, hatha thom, hatha (Gita etc)

Padhumanabha Thumhaari, Leela
Kya Kahoon mein Saavaro
Tapa Sankata Charan Ayo Soh hamaro thumharo

Thadheem, Thadheem, Thirana, Udanita
Taani, Taani, Thadheem, Thadheem Thirana
Naadhithom taka naka taka thathara
Thara thaani dheem, Alari Kalari taka
Tha tha tha ni taka, tham tham tham ni taka
Thom thom thani dheem dheem dheem
Thani alari tham tham tham, taka thani alari dheem dheem dheem,
Taka dhiku thani alari dheem dheem dheem

Swathi Thirunal

Translation

The beautiful girl dances to the lovely song with the rhythmic syllables “Tadithai, Thaiditai.”

She moves her anklets elegantly and they make the sound “Jhanana, Jhanana.”

To this the composer sings another melody and some more lines of rhythm phrases.

He then says “Oh Reverend One, I sing about the many games you play in this glorious spring time! Don’t tease me so relentlessly, for aren’t my sorrows yours as well?”

(translated by Shruthi Rajasekar)

Pronunciation:*

Gita Gee-ta a as in above *Devotional singing*

Dhunki Dhoo-ne-kee *of songs*

Takadheem Ta-ka-dheem *devotional syllables*

Nadhrudithathom Na-dhre-dee-tha-thom (o as in so)

Naache Naa-che *dance*

Rahe Ra-he e as in fed *continuing to dance*

Gori Go-ri (slight roll to r) *lovely person*

Ta-dee-tai, tai-dee-tai, ta-ree-kee-ta

Baaj Baa-je *feet*

Payal Pie-al-le *anklets*

Kahoon Kahoo.. (n just suggested) *I am saying*

Jha-na-na na-na-na *sounds of the anklet bells*

Thana tha-ne *rhythmic syllable*

Gaave gaa-vay *singing*

Ta-ka-tha thai tha thai na-kee-ta-ta-ka dheem, etc. *pronounced Tha-ka with a soft attack*

Hatha thom

Padhumanabha Pa-dhu-ma-na-bha *Krishna*

Thumhaari Thum-haa-ri Lee-la *playful presence*

Kya Kee-a (*as one syllable*)

Kahoon Ka-hoo... *I am saying*

Mein Meh *my*

Saavaro Saa-va-ro (*reference to Krishna*)

Tapa ta-pa *prayer*

Sankata Sen-ka-ta *difficulties*

Charan Cha-ra-ne *at the feet of/humbly*

Ayo ay-o *come*

Soh Hamaro Soh Ha-ma-ro *my sadness*

Thumharo thum-ar-o *your*

(see rhythmic syllables in text for last verse)

Additional drum syllables added by the composer:

Ta-tha-na Ta-jhu-nu (ta-jhoo-noo) Ta-dhi-mi (ta-dhee-mee)

Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa (equivalent to solfege)

*Hindi sounds not found in English – the t sounds are much softer, especially Tha, which resembles ta but is pronounced with the tongue touching the edge of the upper front teeth, and just popping out of the mouth

