



## Resource Guide for Educators and Students Grades 4–12

What is traditional music? It's music that's passed on from one person to another, music that arises from one or more cultures, from their history and geography. It's music that can tell a story or evoke emotions ranging from celebratory joy to quiet reflection. Traditional music is usually played live in community settings such as dances, people's houses and small halls.

In each 30-minute episode of Carry On™, musical explorer and TikTok sensation Hal Walker interviews a musician who plays traditional music. Episodes air live, allowing students to pose questions. Programs are then archived so you can listen to them any time from your classroom or home. Visit Carry On's [YouTube channel](#) for live shows and archived episodes.

### Episode 18, Sujatha & Shriya Srinivasan

**Sujatha Srinivasan** is a master performer and teacher of *Bharathanatyam*, a classical Indian dance form consisting of dance movements, mime and colorful costumes. She is the founder of the Shri Kalaa Mandir Center for Indian Performing Arts in the Cleveland, Ohio area. One of her star pupils is her daughter **Shriya Srinivasan**, who in addition to being a Bharathanatyam dancer and choreographer has a doctoral degree in biomedical engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Bharathanatyam** is one of India's most popular art forms. It began in the Tamil Nadu region of south India around 2,000 years ago, possibly much earlier. It was originally danced by female temple dancers to express religious themes and stories. Bharathanatyam is usually danced to Carnatic music, which is based on a heptatonic scale consisting of seven notes like the Western "do re mi" scale with the addition of tones between the main notes. These "detours"—oscillating slightly above and below the main notes—are called *gamakas*. Shriya demonstrates the sounds of both Western and Indian scales [HERE](#). Carnatic pieces are usually composed pieces of music, but improvisation is also used.

Except for storytelling, the word "Bharathanatyam" contains all the elements of the art form:

- "Bha" is the beginning of the word *bhava*, which means expression, or emotion.
- "Ra" is the beginning of the word *raga*, which means music.
- "Ta" is the beginning of the word *taal*, meaning rhythm (also called *thala* or *thalam*).
- "Natyam" means dance, or theater.

During the colonial period of the 19th century, Bharathanatyam was in danger of dying out under the rule of the British, who did not approve of the dance. But it was revived in the early 20th century, and artists began performing it on stage around 1930.

Today, the dance form is performed all over the world. It is one of the best known and most popular forms of Indian classical dance. The strictly traditional form of Bharathanatyam is performed by a single female dancer who stays on stage the entire time. The *guru*, or teacher, of the dancer conducts the "orchestra," usually consisting of a singer, drums and a drone instrument. Dancers sometimes wear bells around their ankles, adding percussive rhythmic elements to the music.

As Sujatha points out, "Practitioners have a responsibility not only to maintain their traditions, but to cater to a new landscape and audience." And so Bharathanatyam has evolved to encompass modern themes. Sujatha has used the traditional elements of Bharathanatyam to choreograph new dances for her dance company on themes such as climate change and women's issues.

Both Shriya and Sujatha are musicians as well as dancers and choreographers. As Shriya demonstrates on our episode, she is a skilled singer. Sujatha sings and plays the mridangam, a South Indian percussion instrument.

## Vocabulary

**Choreography** – Planning the arrangement of the movements, steps and gestures of a dance for all the dancers involved; "composing" the dance.

**Drone** – A sustained sound of a single pitch that continues throughout all or most of a musical piece. "Drone" also refers to the instrument or voice that produces and sustains the sound.

**Guru** – In the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit, *guru* means a teacher or master or guide. The word literally means "heavy," referring to the amount of knowledge a teacher carries around. But it also means "one who dispels darkness"—*gu* mean "darkness" and *ru* means "light."

**Scale** – The set of notes used to structure a piece of music.

**Mime** – Expressing action and emotion without words, using facial expressions, gestures and body movements.

**Mudra** – Gestures of the arms, hands and fingers used to symbolize people, animals, objects and feelings in Bharathanatyam. For example, when Sujatha greets us at the beginning of our episode, she says *Namaste* and uses the mudra for a respectful greeting; her hands are held palms together in front of her. There are hundreds of mudras, which vary from region to region. They symbolize things in nature like animals, clouds and thunder; objects such as arrows; emotions such as anger or sorrow; and actions like drinking.

## Activities and Questions for Students

**Before you watch the episode**—Locate the following places on [Google Maps](#) or a printed map.

Country: India; find the state of Tamil Nadu in south India.

The US: Find Cleveland, Ohio.

**After you watch the episode**—Complete assigned activities and questions from this list, which progresses from simpler to more complex.

1. Bharathanatyam is about storytelling. Watch [the first dance](#) that Sujatha dances. What story would you make up to go with it?
2. What story would you make up to go with the first dance [that Shriya dances](#)?
3. Bharathanatyam includes mime—telling a story with hands, feet, neck and the rest of the body, including the face. Act out a story with mime using a simple fairy tale such as "The Princess and the Pea," or act out the story of your day yesterday. Use any kind of gestures or movements you like.
4. Take a look at various mudras [on this website](#) and read the descriptions of their meanings. Try three or four mudras. Is it easy or difficult to arrange your fingers like those of the dancer's? Try three or four mudras one after the other.
5. Shriya's guru—or master teacher—is her mother. Do you have a guru who has taught you something over a period of time?
6. Sujatha says it takes up to 10 years to learn the basics of Bharathanatyam. What's the longest you have been learning an instrument, sport, skill or language?
7. Try some of the gestures that Sujatha performs in the song "[Vande Mataram](#)," like the gesture for flowing rivers and orchards. Write a short poem or story about your neighborhood, city or town—or a trip you took—and mime your poem or story by making up gestures to act it out.
8. [Watch "Diwali Night 2015"](#) all the way through if you can (it's 6 minutes). Shriya executes a number of intricate moves on both the right and the left side of the body. Get to a clear, safe space on your floor and imitate one of those moves. Now try it on the other side. Is it easier on one side than the other? Which one?
9. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write and illustrate a review of Sujatha and Shriya, what they talked about, and the music you heard. Describe the music, your favorite things about it, and what more you wish you could see or know about. Be sure to give your article a descriptive title!
10. At the beginning of our episode Sujatha says *namaste* to our host Hal. This is a greeting, the equivalent of "hello." But Google around a little—what does this word mean in Sanskrit, the ancient language of India?
11. Sujatha says she immigrated from India nearly 30 years ago. She is part of a thriving Indian American community in Cleveland, where she has founded a center for Indian performing arts. If there had been no other Indian people in Cleveland, how might that have affected her practicing her art?
12. Watch a little of the first dance that [Sujatha dances](#) and compare it with the one [Shriya dances](#). Are their movements different? How would you describe the difference?

13. "[Diwali Night 2015](#)" is a Bharathanatyam piece Shriya dances that explores the nature of the universe. It has all the classical dance elements but is danced to rhythmic, modern music. How well do you think Bharathanatyam adapts to modern music? What do you think modern music adds to or detracts from Bharathanatyam?
14. [Listen to Shriya sing](#) a scale the Western way, with "do re mi" and then with gamakas, the sounds between the main notes. Now try to sing the scale with gamakas. Easy or difficult?
15. Listen to the opening part of the song "[Vande Mataram](#)" that Shriya sings. Can you sing the notes from memory? Or does it take a few tries?
16. Try your voice at gamakas, the sounds between the notes in the Carnatic musical scale. Listen to a simple tune sung with gamakas at the beginning of [this video](#). Now imitate it. You don't have to be a great singer! Just use your ear and try out the Carnatic sound.

## Additional Resources

### Sujatha Srinivasan

[Facebook page for the Shri Kalaa Mandir Center](#) for Indian Performing Arts. Sujatha is the founder of the center, which offers training in Bharathanatyam that "encompasses culture, knowledge of music, critical thinking and adherence to the classical dance form and technique."

"[Joy Dance](#)," with members of the Shri Kalaa Mandir Center dancing to pop music with Bharathanatyam movements.

[Sujatha and members of Shri Kalaa Mandir Center](#) performing an Indian stick dance.

### Shriya Srinivasan

[Shriya's Facebook page](#) with links to videos and events.

[Anubhava Dance Company](#) – "Anubhava" means "The Experience." Shriya is co-director of the company, "a vibrant group of first-generation, Indian-American/Canadian artists" who practice the ancient art form of Bharathanatyam and explore its relevance to modern society.

[Facebook page for Anubhava Dance Company](#).

Videos featuring Shriya's dance performances and choreography:

- [Promotional video](#) for the company with samples of various dances.
- [Bharathanatyam excerpts](#).
- "[Amba Sloka](#)" – Notice that Shriya's mother Sujatha is given credit for the choreography and for being the guru (master teacher).
- "[Diwali Night 2015](#)," a classical Bharathanatyam piece that explores the nature of the universe. It has all the classical dance elements but is danced to rhythmic modern music.
- [#handwashjathi](#), a fun interpretation of hand washing using classical Bharathanatyam gestures.

## Indian Dance, Music and History

[The Story of India](#) – This website is an online companion to the PBS series of the same name. It presents an interactive timeline of the rich history of India, its cultures and its arts, including Bharatanatyam.

[A visual dictionary](#) – Various mudras and their meanings. Scroll down to the bottom of the webpage for a video of the mudras, with narration on their symbolism.

Voices of Asia [Dancing Gods](#) – A video of mudras and demonstration of how to do them. The narrator gives the Sanskrit name of each mudra, and the video shows the mudras on classical Indian sculptures.

[Cleveland Thyagaraja Festival](#) – "The largest Indian classical music festival outside of India." Now a 12-day festival with 8,000+ attendees, Thyagaraja has been suspended until pandemic conditions have improved. Check its [Facebook page](#) for updates.

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We want to make Carry On™ even more useful and enjoyable for students and educators across the country. [Send us your feedback!](#) Tell us what you liked and what we could do better. And please... tell other educators and schools about the show. Help us all carry on!

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With the help of generous donors, [Carry On™](#) is produced by the nonprofit [Northeast Ohio Musical Heritage Association](#) (NEOMHA). The show is programmed by [Laura Lewis](#), artistic director of NEOMHA's [Lake Erie Folk Fest](#). Carry On's resource guides are the work of writer and musician [Rita Lewis](#).

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