

Playing Nine Emotions

This chapter grew out of a presentation given by Raman Kalyan at the WORLD FLUTE SOCIETY convention in Eau Claire, Wisconsin on July 28, 2016. The topic was “*Creating Emotions with Indian Ragas*” and Raman demonstrated his approaches to evoking each of the nine essential emotions used in the South Indian tradition of Carnatic music. He evoked an amazing array of emotions and feelings by using a combination of scales, ornaments, playing techniques, and special effects on his set of bansuri flutes.

Could these techniques transfer to Native American flutes? Rather than learning a set of individual playing techniques, could we use emotions as the motivating goal? Could we make this playing approach accessible to participants at flute circles and workshops without requiring advanced skill levels?

These questions became the major focus of our music practice in the months following Raman Kalyan’s presentation. We explored playing techniques, researched Carnatic music theory (a vast subject, which we could only scratch the surface), and mapped



the mountain of potential scales. At workshops throughout the fall and winter of 2016, we experimented with facilitation techniques that might open doors for others into this approach to making music.

Emotions and Music

The link between music and emotion has been studied extensively, but is not yet clearly understood. We know that much of the emotional content in movies is conveyed by the music – simply hearing the “danger theme” from *Jaws* can elicit a fear response. That direct link often happens between flute

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player and listener – a direct emotional link is created that transcends language and defies analysis. Many theories have been proposed, but none are universally accepted.

However, we do know that listeners absorb the intended emotional content of performed or recorded music even if they are not familiar with the instruments, culture, or scale of the music ([BALKWILL 1999]). If you ever get the opportunity to turn off the music track on a movie (a few DVD or Blu-ray editions of movies allow you to do this), watch some portion of the movie with the dialog and environmental sounds turned on, but without the music. It immediately becomes obvious how the music cues the emotional reaction of the viewer.

While this music-emotion link is powerful for listeners and viewers, we began to find that the value of our “Playing Nine Emotions” sessions was quite different. In session after session, flute players gave us valuable feedback on the exercises:

- Exploring emotions that participants may not have played before opens a gateway to new techniques that had never been tried before.
- Watching how others played each of the emotions – both live and on recordings – gave participants valuable ideas and inspiration.
- One way to approach many of the emotions is to use an alternate scale. This gave participants a particular reason and

goal to learn a new scale, and really get comfortable with it.

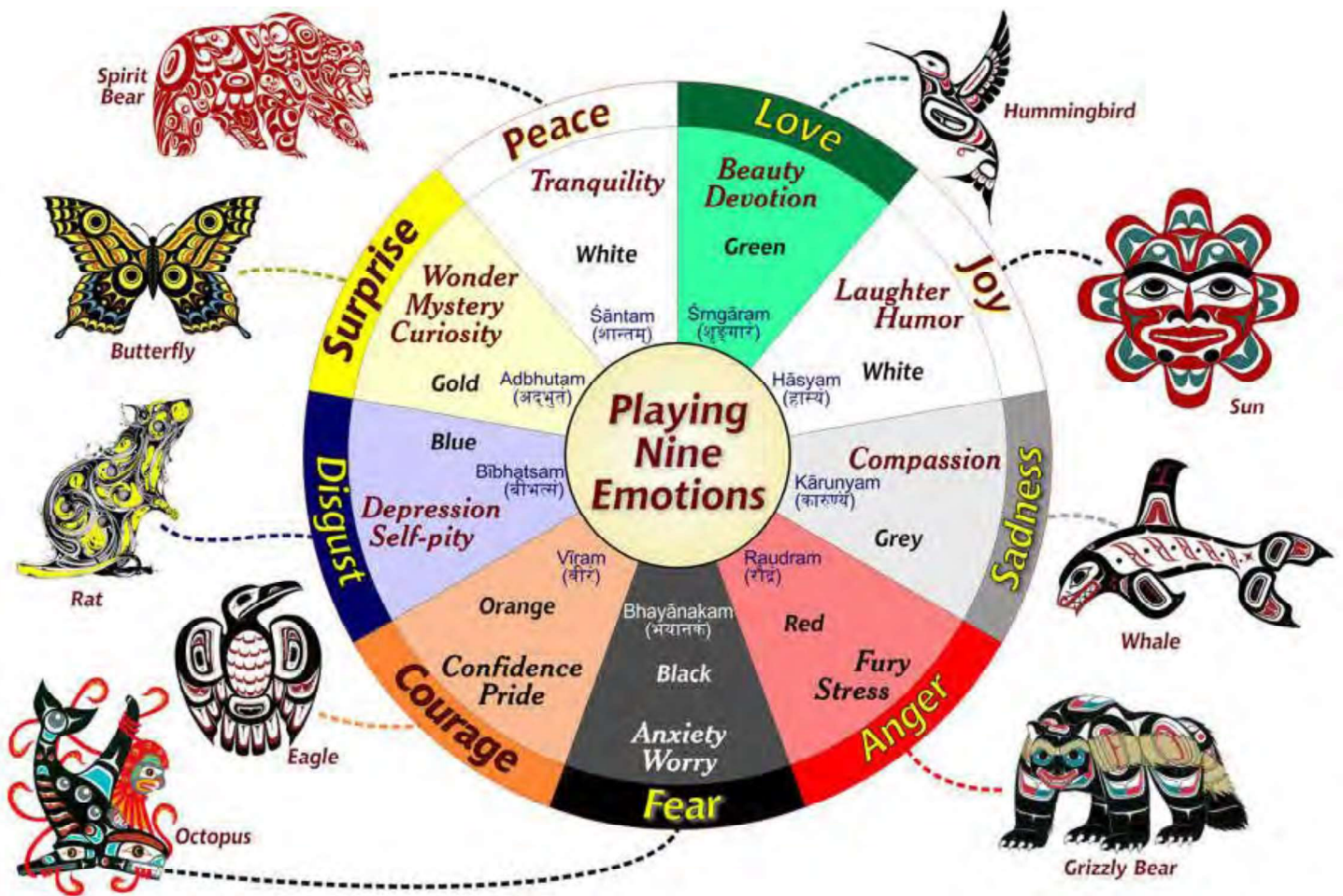
- Providing the participants with a written worksheet that listed some of the techniques used in each emotion in the recorded samples and live playing gave them a take-away that really helped players.
- Simply moving the focus away from a technique onto a goal (playing one particular emotion, for example) enabled players to play from the heart, rather than the anxious concentration associated with playing a particular technique.

We believe that it is also a valuable experience – for a time, at least – to make conscious choices about the playing techniques we will use. It is wonderful to play from the heart. However, in the context of a playing exercise, we think there is a benefit to saying, “*I will incorporate some short staccato notes into my playing*” or “*I will play powerfully and use a lot of leaps in my melody*”.

This chapter describes the approach that we now use for this topic at Native flute workshops. We hope that it might be useful for facilitators in creating exercises and fun activities for flute circles, classes, and individual students.

Caveats

The goal of this chapter is to expand the palate of music techniques for Native American flute players by focusing on emotions. This approach draws on the



Carnatic and Hindustani musical and cultural traditions of India as well as some historical narratives of Pacific Northwest Coast and other North American cultures. While we do borrow elements from the cultures and music traditions, this chapter is not an authoritative source of information on those very rich cultures.

We have picked what we believe are the best elements from the sources that are listed at the end of this chapter. We have also developed new techniques and elements specific to playing the Native American flute that we believe serve the goal of developing a focus on emotions.

The Nine Emotions

The Carnatic Indian music tradition has made use of a set of emotions since about the second century CE, beginning with eight emotions and adding the ninth emotion (**Peace**) one or two centuries later ([KARUNA 2013], page 23). The emotions are integrated with and related to the use of Carnatic raga scales and composed ragas, and do not line up exactly with the various systems of emotions generally studied in Psychology.

For each of the emotions, we have also found corresponding graphics from Haida and other Northwest Coast traditions that represent the animals most closely

associated with each of the emotions. These animal images seem to be a valuable addition to the session, helping participants get into the spirit of the emotions before playing them.

From these basic elements, we created the “Wheel of Nine Emotions”, shown above.

In the Carnatic music tradition, the sequence of emotions begins with **Love** and works its way clockwise ending with **Peace**. For each emotion, we provide:

- Some of the alternate English-language names for the emotion. It is good to point out that any particular emotion can span a wide range. **Love**, for example, encompasses parental love, erotic love, devotion to a practice or a philosophy, or the general concept of beauty.
- The original Sanskrit word for the emotion. This can help if participants go deeper into this work, since there is often confusion from different English words used by different sources for each emotion.
- The color associated with the emotion, from Carnatic traditions.
- The animal that most closely matches the emotion, from Haida or Northwest coast traditions.

Elements of Music

What tools can we work with when conjuring up an emotional response? Here are some of the useful elements of music:

With rhythm or without rhythm. One of the basic decisions is whether we play in a free-flowing way, using phrases and pauses, or whether we play in some repeating rhythm.

Tempo and meter. If we are playing in a rhythm, what is the meter (a duple meter such as $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{2}{4}$, or a treble meter such as $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$ time) and what is the speed (tempo) of the rhythm.

Key of flute. Do we want a high-pitched flute, mid-range, or low-pitched flute? Is there a particular key that works best?

Specific flute. Is there a specific flute you have that conjures up the emotion? Maybe the timbre of the flute is particularly breathy or sharp. Maybe there is a specific effect or ornament you can produce on that flute, such as the warble.

Articulation. We have the choice of connecting all our notes (“legato”), or separating them with vocal articulation – an “attack” at the beginning of the note. There are many types of attacks that vary the sharpness of the beginning of the note – try beginning the note by saying “**Ta**”, “**Ka**”, “**Ra**”, and “**Ha**” which (for most players) produce gradually softer attacks. You can also incorporate double tonguing (“**TaKa**”) and triple tonguing (“**DaKaRa**”) on some notes. What is the emotional effect of each? How can these be used within the wheel of nine emotions?

Duration. You can hold a note for its full duration (up until it is time for the next

note) or you can shorten it, adding silence to the music. A note can be shortened all the way down until it is just a **“Dit”** – a “staccato” note.

Ornaments. Do the various ornaments and effects we can play on our instrument support a given emotion? Grace notes, turns, mordants, trills, runs, and flourishes are examples of ornaments.

Vibrato. One of the classic ways of evoking an emotion on Native American flutes is the use of vibrato – varying breath pressure to alter both pitch and volume. The speed and depth of the vibrato can be controlled, as well as the ability to bring in vibrato after holding a steady long tone.

Accompaniment. Should the emotion be played solo, or with an accompaniment. The accompaniment could be simply a drone note, a drum beat, a repeating pattern on a guitar or keyboard, or a full-blown background track.

Dynamics. How can volume be used in the service of the emotion?

Specific scales. Finally, which particular scale evokes the emotion?

Facilitation Techniques

This chapter is structured in the way that we facilitate sessions on Playing Nine Emotions at flute workshops. However, you will certainly want to vary your approach for your own setting.

Our general outline is to:

- Provide a short phrase that provides a mental image for the emotion. For example:

Disgust – A cockroach in your soup

The phrases we use are shown just beneath each of the emotions in the section below.

- Provide an initial looped video (as participants are arriving) that shows each of the emotions for 15–30 seconds each, with the recorded music we have selected corresponding to each emotion.
- Hand out a printout of the emotions shown above, and a worksheet that minimizes the need to take notes during the session.
- Go into each emotion in depth, showing all the elements related to that emotion.
- Let them hear the recorded music selection for each emotion as part of a video that conjures up that emotion.
- Discuss the specific musical techniques that might support playing that emotion.
- Demonstrate using those techniques live.
- Lead a few short group exercises throughout on a few of the techniques that might not be familiar to all the participants, such as a new scale, or an articulation such as double tonguing.
- After demonstrating all nine emotions, we ask them to go off and prepare a short “four-breath solo” centered on one of the emotions. We randomly assign the emotions, so that we get a good mix.

- After 10 or 20 minutes, we all rejoin the circle, with each participant first playing their solo, and then saying which emotion they were assigned.

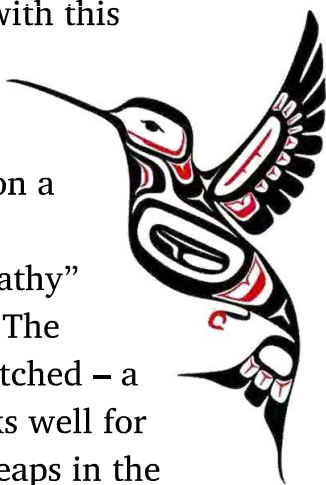
Participants seem to really enjoy hearing selections of recorded music (mostly from production albums) that we think really capture that emotion. In the descriptions below, we list the titles that we think demonstrate each emotion. However, if you have a large music library, you might search though it for selections that you think work best.

Love

You meet the love of your life

The recorded music example we use for **Love** is the *Omaha Song* by R. Carlos Nakai and Udi Bar-David on the *Voyagers* album, 2007.


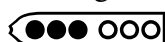
In our search of Haida and Northwest coast traditional narratives, the Hummingbird is the animal most often associated with **Love**. Joe Wilson created the graphic of the Hummingbird we use with this emotion.



We demonstrate **Love** with a parlando style, on a flute with a relatively “clean” voice (not “breathy” or “raspy” or “harsh”). The flute is typically low-pitched – a low A minor flute works well for us – and we use large leaps in the melody. The primary Native American

flute scale – pentatonic minor – works well for us and we play legato style most of the time.

One thing that does improve the demonstration is the use of a drone accompaniment – we often use a shruti box tuned to the notes on the flute that match these two flute fingerings:

  (the root and the fifth, in Western Classical music tradition).

We also find that it is helpful for the flute player to imagine a scene. The imagery we suggest is:


Imagine the face of a person you adore.

Joy

You dance with wild abandon

The recorded music example we use for **Joy** is the *Roundabout* track by Cornell Kinderknecht on the album *Returning Home*, 2005. Joe Wilson created the graphic of the Sun that we use with this emotion.



We demonstrate **Joy** on a mid-range or slightly higher-pitched flute (such as G, A, or B \flat), with a light, rhythmic melody in a duple or treble meter ($\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ time). The scale is pentatonic major – very similar to pentatonic minor, but rooting the melody by beginning and ending on . We get a lighter feel on the melody by mixing

articulations and using some short staccato notes, and various light ornaments.

Sadness

You lose the one you love

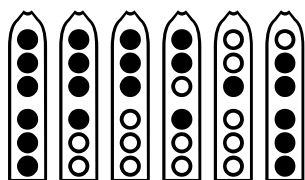
The recorded music example we use for

Sadness is the track *I Will Not Be Sad* in this

World, which is track #4 from the 1983 album of the same name by Djivan Gasparyan. The Killer Whale is most often associated with **Sadness** in the narratives we surveyed, and Clarence Mills created the Whale graphic that we use.



We demonstrate **Sadness** using a parlendo style with a very slow tempo on a flute pitched several steps below mid-range – a D minor or E minor. We usually do this accompanied by a slow, steady rhythm on a tamboura, tuned to g-d-d-D (for a D minor flute). The melody is played legato with no ornaments, and we typically play in a Miyako-Bushi scale, which is fingered on most contemporary Native American flutes with the fingerings:



Also, as with **Love** – we suggest using imagery when playing **Sadness**:

Imagine the face of someone you adore, who is no longer with us.

This suggested imagery can potentially bring up strong emotional responses in participants, so care is needed here. If people become visibly emotional, we try to get them to channel their feelings into their music, which can be a powerful experience.

Anger

Someone cuts you off on the highway

The recorded music example we use for **Anger** is Kevin Locke's *I Sing for the Animals* track from the album *Earth Gift*. Richard Shorty created the graphic of the Grizzly Bear – the animal that is most often associated with

Anger in the narratives we found.



We demonstrate this emotion without specific rhythm, but with lots of repetition of heavily ornamented phrases on a mid-range flute. But beyond specific playing techniques, we think the key to this emotion is to play powerfully – a style that may be new to flute players who have played predominantly in the New Age genre. After observing participants at six recent workshop sessions, this emotion seems to be one of the most valuable, because of its ability to introduce players to the feel of powerful solos.

Fear

It's dark. You hear a noise.

The recorded music example we use for **Fear** is a recording made by Cornell Kinderknecht at the Armadillo Flute Retreat on November 18, 2004, recorded and mastered by Butch Hall. This recording is available, courtesy of Cornell, at:

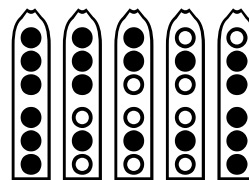


<http://www.ClintGoss.com/pne.html>

John A. Sharkey created the graphic of the Octopus – the animal that we use with this emotion because of the association in one Haida legend that we found.

There is not a lot of Carnatic music that focuses exclusively on the emotion of **Fear**, and we could not identify a scale specifically oriented to this emotion, but as Native American flute players we have another possible direction. We can take the opportunity to depart from the pitches typically used in modern music. It is possible to play 64 pitches if we use all the possible combinations of open and closed finger holes on a six-hole flute, but modern music only uses 12 pitches in an octave. As flute players, we typically bypass 52 pitch possibilities. In working with the emotion of **Fear**, we have found that some of those unplayed pitches can be valuable.

Try this sequence of fingerings on a 6-hole flute:



The first and second fingerings form an interval on most flutes called the “tritone”, often called the “devil’s interval”. It is the first two notes of songs such as Maria from West Side Story as well as the theme of The Simpsons. The next two fingerings typically produce pitches outside the 12-note scale typically used in Western classical music, and can evoke an unsettling feeling. The last fingering generates a pitch on most flutes that is a half-step sharp of the octave note, and can also be unsettling.

We combine the fingerings above on a mid-range or higher flute. We add trills, deep vibrato, and exaggerated changes in volume.

Courage

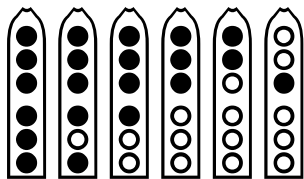
Playing flute at Carnegie Hall

The recorded music example we use for **Courage** is not a Native American flute, but rather a simple fife that, for us, immediately elicits the feeling of **Courage**.

It is a live track by Otha Turner called *Shimmy She Wobble* that is on the album *Live: 1989 Memphis Music & Heritage Festival*.

The Eagle is the animal that is most often associated with **Courage** in the narratives we surveyed. Clarence Mills created the Eagle graphic.

When playing this emotion, we try to emulate that feel of that drum-and-fife track using live percussion and an upper mid-range flute in the key of B or C \sharp . We play rhythmically, in a stately $\frac{4}{4}$ time, at a fairly loud volume (“forte” in classical music terms), and using a particular scale called the Mand scale. On most contemporary Native American flutes, these fingerings will produce the Mand scale:



Disgust

A cockroach in your soup

The recorded music example we use for **Disgust** is the *Wolf In Dream* track by Mark Holland from the album *Songs from Within*.



We looked for a long time for an animal that embodied **Disgust** in Haida and other Northwest coast traditional narratives, but came up empty. Then we found Si Scott’s amazing graphic of a Rat that we use with this emotion – perfect!

We demonstrate **Disgust** with a non-rhythmic melody, using out of tune intervals (similar to **Fear**), adding extreme slide techniques, large volume changes, and allowing the flute to overblow into the upper register.

Surprise

You win the lottery!

The recorded music example we use for **Surprise** is a



beautiful emulation of a bird singing using a high-pitched flute: the *Bird Song* track by Hawk Henries from his album *Keeping the Fire*. Clarence Mills created the graphic of the Butterfly we use with this emotion – the

animal we have found that is most often associated with **Surprise**.

For us, this is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the use of space and silence. In the style of a bird song, we use short phrases on a high flute with trills, short staccato notes, fast runs and flourishes, and random, extended pauses. Adding some **Avant Garde** percussion in occasional bursts adds to this surprise.

Peace

Sitting in meditation

The recorded music example we use for **Peace** is the *Returning Home* track by Cornell Kinderknecht from the 2005 album of the same name.

The animal we have found in Northwest Coast tradition narratives that is most often associated with **Peace** is called the Spirit Bear. This animal was thought to exist only in those traditional narratives until it was identified in 1905 as an American Black Bear subspecies found in remote areas of British Columbia ([**SACHS 2010**]). Jon Erickson created the graphic of the Spirit Bear we use with this emotion.

We like to demonstrate this over the background of a flowing, repeated pattern on a piano. Peter Kater's track *Grace* provides an excellent example. We use long tones on a flute somewhat below a mid-range, and add occasional percussion on a Ting-Sha to punctuate the music.

Other Systems of Emotions

The Carnatic system is certainly not the only system of organizing emotions. A psychologist in one of our workshops noted that a key emotion important in therapeutic settings – Shame – is not represented in the Carnatic tradition. Also, the degree of intensity of each emotion is not represented.

One system that does represent emotional intensity is known as the Plutchik's Wheel ([**PLUTCHIK 2001**]).

motions on opposite sides of the circle are opposites or counterbalance each other, and

this wheel also has combinations of neighboring emotions. You might experiment with this version of the landscape of emotions and see if it suits flute players better.



References

[**BALKWILL 1999**] Laura-Lee Balkwill and William Forde Thompson, *A Cross-Cultural Investigation of the Perception of Emotion in Music: Psychophysical and Cultural Cues*, *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Fall, 1999), pages 43–64, published by the University of California Press, JSTOR ID: 40285811.

[**PLUTCHIK 2001**] Robert Plutchik, *The Nature of Emotions*, *American Scientist*, July–August 2001, Volume 89, Number 4, pages 344–350.

[SACHS 2010] Jessica Snyder Sachs, *Icon for an Endangered Ecosystem*, National Wildlife, February–March 2010, Volume 48, Issue 2, pages 30–35.

