

Three Records

Shubha Jagannatha

The Artifact

Veena is a traditional Indian classical instrument. It is the instrument of divine knowledge, first depicted in the arms of goddess Saraswathi, the Hindu goddess of learning.

Veena is also a string of continuity which has run through my family's history. This particular rare mini-veena is roughly a century old, is built to be played by a child, and is the instrument with which three generations of women — my grandmother, my mother, and myself — have started our musical journeys.



Three Records

I've created three records — one for my grandmother, one for my mother, and one for myself.

Each record has three elements:

1. A front cover with a graphics and a color scheme which are symbolic to our individual stories.
2. An accompanying recording* representing the different cultural influences impacting each generation's expression of Indian classical music.
3. A back cover with a story of this artifact and a reflection on Indian classical music as related by each generation.



This is me playing the full-sized Veena in Livermore, CA

*All pieces are composed and performed by the members of Laya of Berkeley. I have performed Veena in the piece I've associated with my grandmother.

My Grandmother

1938



MADE IN INDIA

music



When my grandmother was eight years old, her father decided to introduce music to the household. My great-grandfather contacted his friend, Veena Venkatagiriappa, who was a palace musician in the royal court of Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar, the last king of Mysore. Veena Venkatagiriappa gave the small veena to my great-grandfather in hopes that my grandmother and her sisters would carry on the traditional art into the new age. My grandmother and her sisters studied veena for many years but as they grew older and transitioned to married life, the prevalence of music in my family began to wane. The veena was sold to my great-grandfather's friend for a mere 25 rupees and with the veena's departure, music took a back seat for a number of decades.

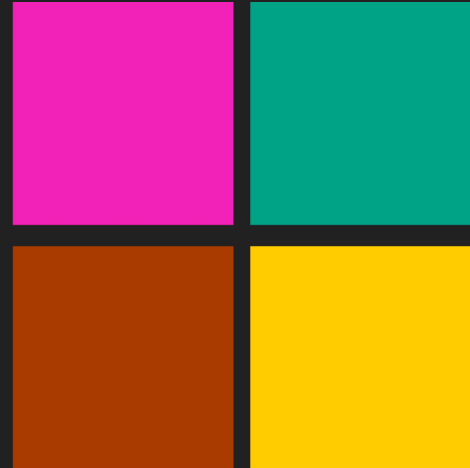
My grandmother currently lives with my family in the United States. She speaks English but struggles to fully express her complex thoughts and emotions with the limitations of her English knowledge. I parallel her language barrier with my inability to speak fluently in Kannada, her mother tongue. Instead, much of our connection and communication has been built around music. Music is a language which transcends all language barriers and by sharing favorite songs and attending concerts together, we communicate fluently through music. Veena and Indian classical music is also a means for my grandmother to maintain her memories of India and bring a piece of her homeland with her to the United States. My life is so starkly different from her's but through her music, I have been able to gain a better understanding of her world.



MADE IN INDIA

Front: Colors

- Pink and green is a common sari color combination which my grandmother often wears.
- Terracotta is the color of red Indian soil — a characteristic element of tropical climates.
- Gold is the color of turmeric, a spice which heavily defines traditional South Indian cooking.





MADE IN INDIA

Front: Symbolism

- Lotus is an symbol of divinity in Hindu beliefs. Traditional Indian classical music is rooted in religion and spirituality.
- The henna patterns and the particular veena graphic are threads of continuity on all three records, representing the foundation in veena and Indian music shared by all three generations.
- 1938 — the year my grandmother was born is the year of this record's release.
- Made in India — my grandmother was born and raised in India.

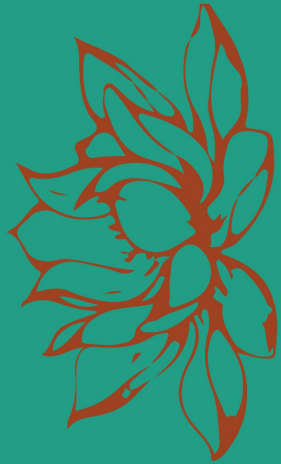
Music

(starts at 0:10)

Hindustani + Carnatic
Hamsadwani
Laya of Berkeley

To this day, my grandmother prefers the traditional beauty and spirituality which comes from pure Indian classical music over all else.

This piece is a mix of North Indian classical music (Hindustani) and South Indian classical music (Carnatic).



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Back

- Paragraph 1: How the veena came into my grandmother's family.
- Paragraph 2: The significance of veena in bridging the cultural gap between India and the United States as well as between my grandmother and I.

My Mother

1971



MADE IN INDIA

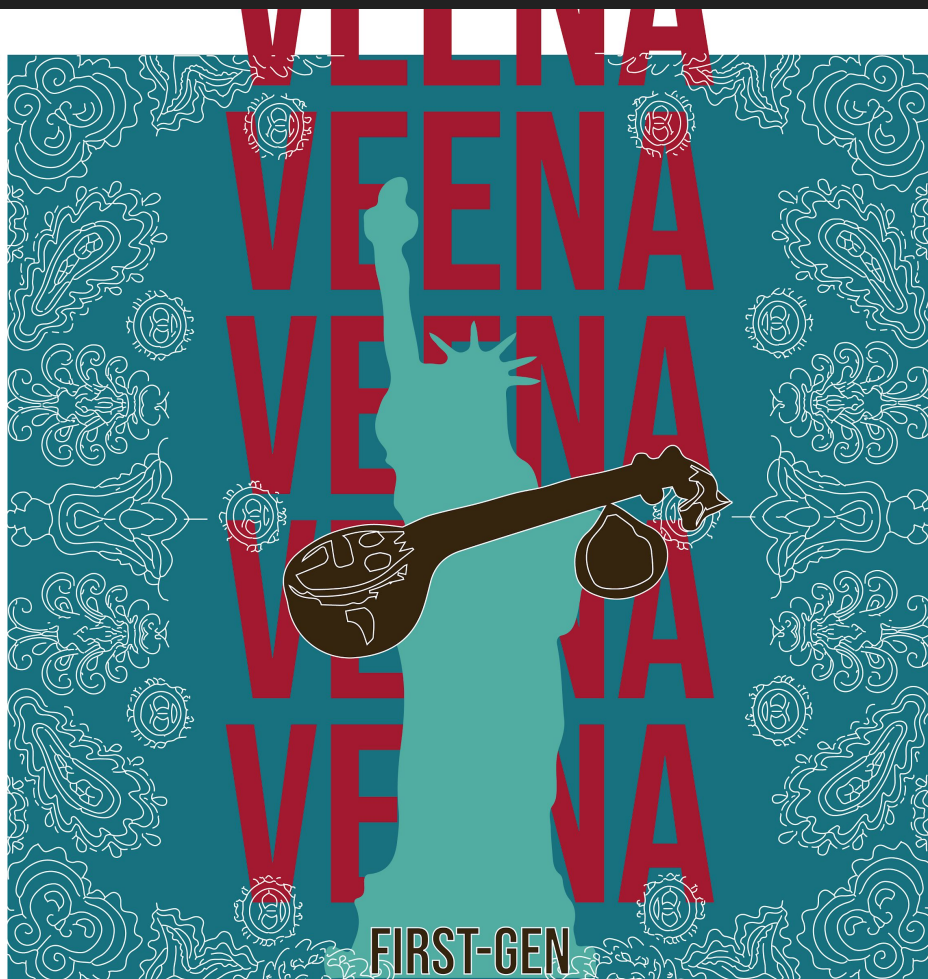
music



“I SEE MY GENERATION AS A BRIDGE.”

When my mother was ten, it was decided that she and her brother would continue the musical thread which had begun in my grandmother's generation. The veena was a natural choice to for my mother to pursue as my grandparents, who have always been deeply influenced by religious ideals, knew the veena to be the divine instrument from which the Sama Veda was emitted by the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Saraswati. My great-grandfather had nothing but an old, almost certainly outdated address for the family which had bought the little veena decades before for 25 rupees, the modern equivalent of a third of a dollar. However, he repeatedly insisted my grandmother follow the clue and search for the veena. When the veena was found, it was in three separate pieces, but with the work of a masterful repairman, both the veena and Carnatic music looped its way back into my family's story once more through my mother's hands.

My mother is a first-generation Indian American who grew up in India and moved to the United States after marriage. Her experiences with music and veena are largely impacted by the arrival of technological advancements and her transition to the United States. The speed and ease with which she was able to acquire and listen to a wide variety of music meant she could relive the music of my grandmother's generation while connecting to artists living in a different world. By absorbing music as a child and carrying it with her to the United States, my mother took the role of both a carrier and a transmitter of Indian Classical music.



MADE IN INDIA

Front: Colors

- Dark blue represents the oceans which my mother crossed in moving from India to the United States.
- Light blue-green is a color sampled from the Statue of Liberty.
- Dark brown is the color of American soil.
- Red is my mother's favorite color as well as the color of kum kum, a deep red powder used in many Indian traditions. It is a symbol of the endurance of Indian culture amidst my mother's move to the United States.



- The Statue of Liberty is the token symbol of American liberty and of immigration due to Ellis Island.
- The words “VEENA” are placed behind the statue as the primary focus of her generation was in building a life and adapting to changes in a new country. Veena took a back seat in her life.
- Henna designs and the veena graphic maintain continuity between generations.
- 1971 — the year of my mother’s birth and the release of this record.
- Made in India — my mother was born and raised in India.

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Music

(starts at 0:10)

Indian Classical + Film

Laya of Berkeley, Spring 2019

My mother loves listening to and attending concerts for Indian classical music. However, she won't hesitate to put on the latest Bollywood hits and jam out!

Interestingly, most Indian film songs carry hints of their traditional Indian classical predecessors and they sometimes also carry western influences.

This piece mixes Indian classical music with popular songs from Indian movies.



FIRST-GEN
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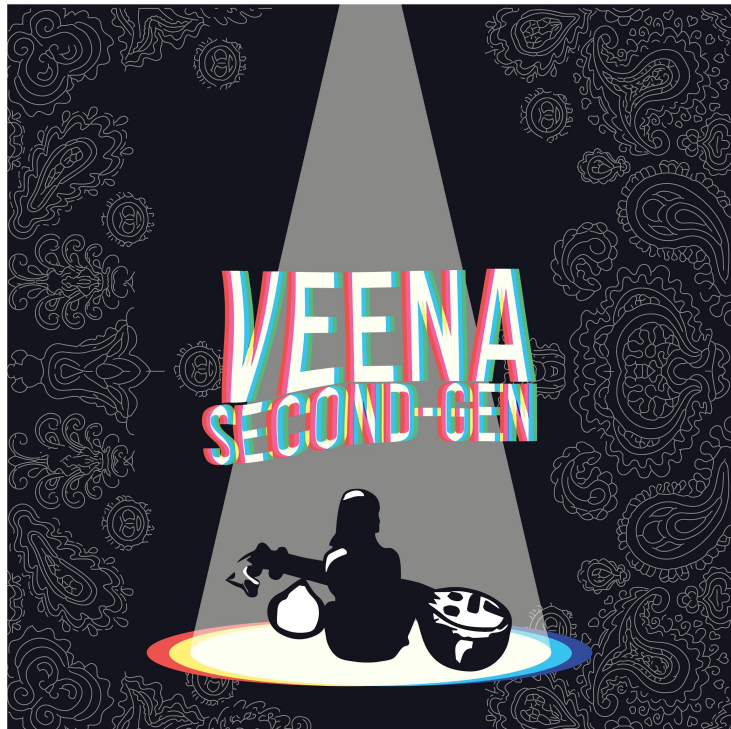
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Back

- Paragraph 1: How the veena came to my mother.
- Paragraph 2: The significance of veena in maintaining Indian roots in the United States.

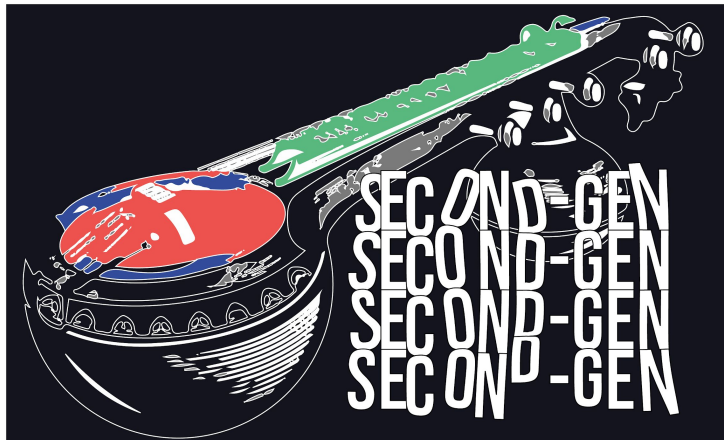
Myself

1999



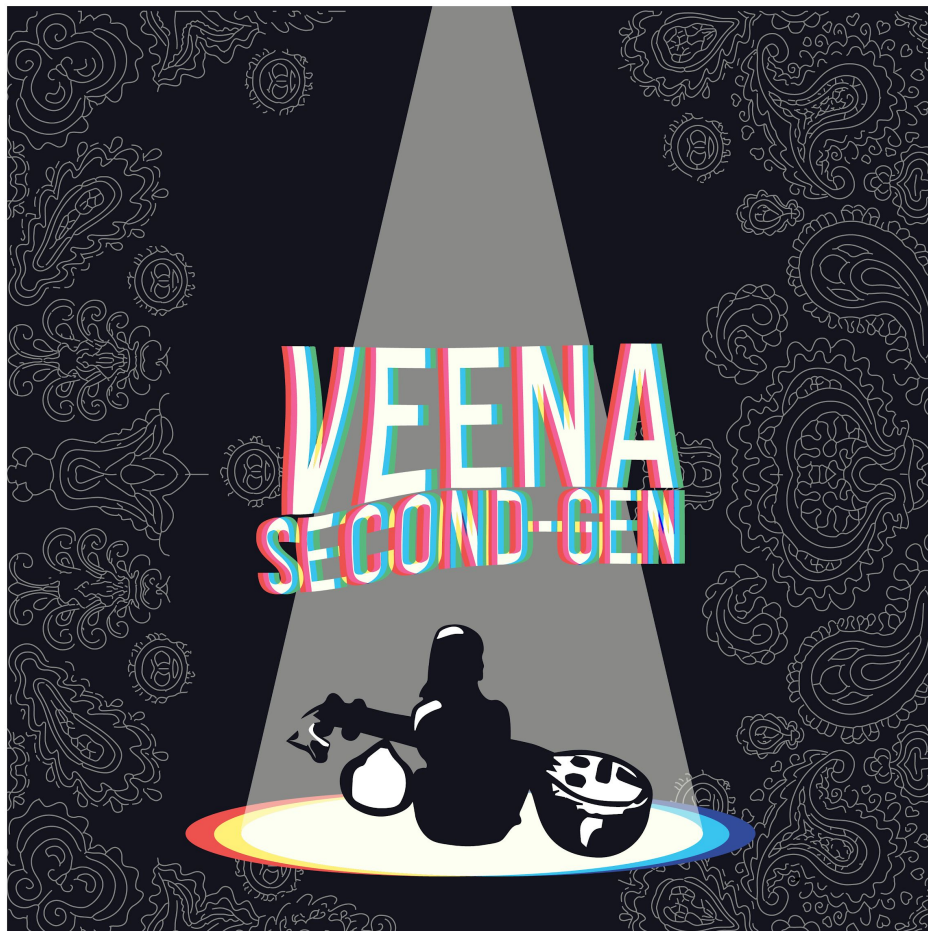
MADE IN THE U.S.A.

music



When I was five years old, my parents decided it was about time for me to begin following the musical pathway which they and generations of my family had traversed over several lifetimes. Even in the face of enormous physical barriers and cultural differences, my parents were determined to cultivate my Indian roots in American soil. My sister and I were promptly placed in weekly Saturday morning Carnatic vocal lessons, our family road trips were exclusively laced with the mathematical drumbeats of Indian classical percussionists, and a call was made to my ancestral hometown, Bangalore to cart a small, dark-stained wooden veena across an ocean and into my eager arms. I remember toying around with the instrument as a child and attempting to coax a few rusty notes from its withered strings. My enthusiasm for the little veena was quickly noted by my parents and soon, veena alongside music became the most important things in my life.

This record represents how I have come to understand my place in the world as a second-generation Indian American, as a musician, and as a daughter. I am not from here and not from there. I work to embody and embrace all the diverse elements which work additively to construct beautiful, harmonious music from a life which is often simply cultural chaos.

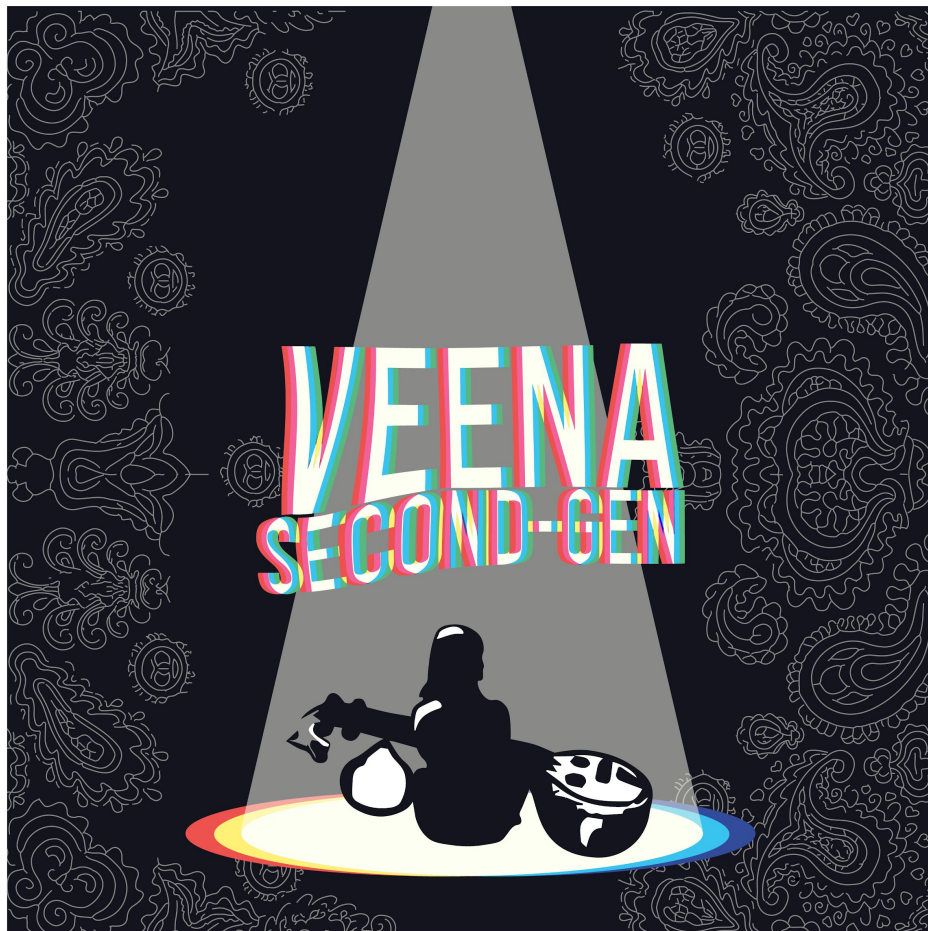


MADE IN THE U.S.A.

Front: Colors

- RGB is an additive color space where light and color is created by adding together different amounts of red, green, and blue. This represents how many different cultural and musical influences have come together to construct the color of my sound.





MADE IN THE U. S. A.

Front: Symbolism

- The spotlight represents how the focus and pressure is placed on my generation of second-gen Americans to carry on the traditions and culture of our family despite living in a different place and time.
- The same henna designs and veena graphic are here as well to represent the continuity and commonalities between generations.
- 1999 — the year I was born and the year this record was released.
- Made in the U. S. A. — I was born and raised in the United States.

Music

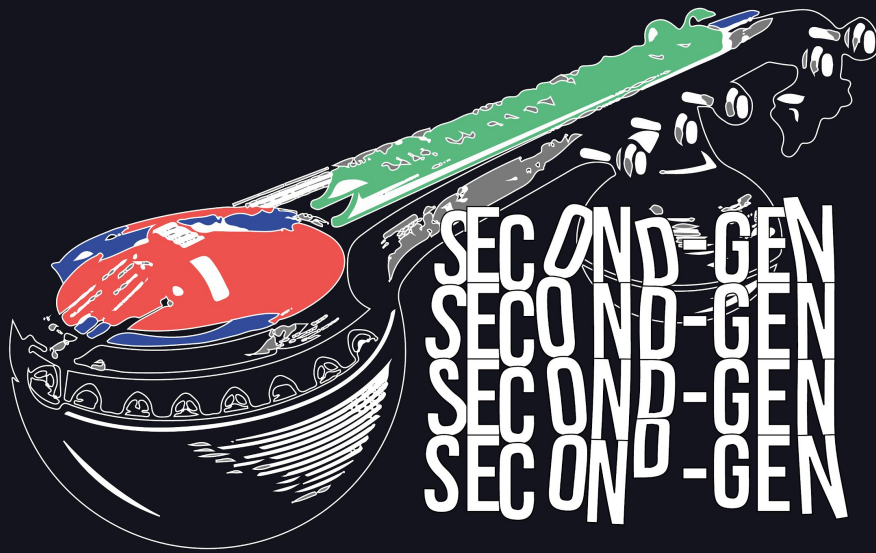
(starts at 0:15)

Marvin Gaye
+
Mohana Kalyani Thillana
Laya of Berkeley

Growing up in the United States and in the age of the internet has exposed me to many different cultures and expressions of art. I draw inspiration from every genre I listen to and thrive when I can express the medley of cultures which define my being through the arts.

I can often be found testing out my favorite Varnams (Indian classical pieces) on the piano and attempting to play my favorite pop songs on the Veena.

This piece mixes Lalgudi G. Jayaraman's Mohana Kalyani Thillana with Charlie Puth and Meghan Trainor's recent hit, *Marvin Gaye*.



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- Paragraph 1: How the veena came to me.
- Paragraph 2: The significance of veena in allowing me to connect back with my mother and grandmother as well as maintain my Indian heritage.

Three Records

With change comes the need to adapt.

Over three generations and across several oceans, this Veena artifact has given my grandmother, mother, and I a means to explore the changing world around us while maintaining a strong connection to the cultures and traditions of our family.

This project consists of not only three musical records but also of three historical records documenting the challenges, adaptations, and triumphs of my family's journey to sustain Indian culture throughout our shift to the United States.