

Of Lullabies, Ragas, and Strings:

Adventures in music making

By Jayasri Srinivasan

“Good night, Atul!” Don’t stay up too late.” “Good night, Amma!”

At 13, Atula doesn’t need my help to fall asleep. How I miss our bedtime ritual when the boys were little! We had the perfect rhythm. I would tuck the boys in bed and then we’d read a book. Then I would sing a Sanskrit *shloka*, followed by a favorite *bhajan*, and then croon a final lullaby.

This routine was effective because next thing I knew, the lyrics were garbled, it was 6:00am, and I hadn’t changed into my pajamas. At some point, the kids must have fallen asleep, too. I would drag myself from bed, get ready for the day, and come back to wake the boys.

“Aw, look how soundly they’re sleeping! Like sweet little angels.” How exhausting it must be, resisting sleep and being so naughty!

When my husband Ram put Tharun to sleep, he had to read his favorite Curious George Counting book to him, every single night. By the time he counted to 43, he was fast asleep. As for Tharun, he was as bright eyed and bushy tailed as ever. Some evenings, he would even shake us awake.

“Amma, Appa, wake up!”

“No, baby. Go to sleep pleasezz!”

As the boys grew older, sleepy-time struggles gave way to trickier parenting problems.

“Just one more time, baby. Who’s my cello warrior? Sit tall and fix that bow hold.” I was coaxing a reluctant, seven-

year-old Atula to practice his cello.

“Remember *Bahubali*? What strong arms he had and how well he held the sword to fight the *Kalakeyas*! Imagine your bow is a sword. Hold it like this.” I tried to adjust the soft fingers that had suddenly turned to steel.

“Don’t make your fingers so stiff!”

The Indian movie *Bahubali* was all the rage then, and in addition to being first-rate entertainment it also revealed musical secrets. How clever of me to realize that!

Tharun wasn’t impressed. “Amma, you’re too soft on Atula. Remember that time you wouldn’t let me put my violin away until I’d practiced *Twinkle* 50 times?! And I was way younger than him, too! How come you were so strict with me?”

I was hoping he wouldn’t bring that up. Granted I was tough on him, but in my defense, I didn’t really know what I was doing and I just wanted him to be a very good violinist within a very short period of time. That doesn’t make me a bad mother, right? Right?

And then I hear my paternal grandmother’s voice in my ear, a flash of memory from nearly four decades ago. “Why don’t you sing the *varnam* in *Kahani raga*? Remember to emphasize the signature ‘Ma’ note.”

She would sit with my sister and me untiringly as we practiced our Carnatic singing, gently nudging us to overcome our stubborn resistance to musical progress. Why couldn’t I be as encouraging and patient as she was?

She had a wonderful ear for music despite having only a brief formal musical

education. She also had an impressive knowledge of various ragas and their nuances. Having grown up in the beautiful temple town of Kumbakonam, she had listened to many live performances by the Carnatic music icons of her time. Music was in the air!

She also offered feedback on our Carnatic violin playing – ensuring our fingering was precise, reminding us to apply coconut oil to our fingertips so they would glide easily on the strings, and encouraging us to practice just a little longer until she got our *tiffin* ready. Hey—that’s an idea! Maybe I should bribe Atula to practice by promising him a bowl of his favorite Maggi noodles...

He really did need to progress on his cello. After consulting his teacher, the wise and wonderful Mr. Z., we decided that having him start a daily practice streak might motivate him. We had an India trip coming up and Mr. Z. told Atula he could play air cello and also listen to the cello pieces in order to keep his streak active. The key requirement was that he still maintain good posture and simulate correct fingering and bowing technique.

A few days later, we started on our trip. Atula enthusiastically practiced air cello in the airport lounge, in the security lines, and on the plane. We reached India a day later, and that evening, Atula fell asleep without practicing his air cello. Oh no! A dormant switch somewhere in the depths of my brain flicked on, and I flipped out.

“WAKE UP, ATULI! WAKE UP!”

You forgot to practice air cello. Wake UP!” “What happened? Is Atula sick?”

Are you ok?” My parents rushed into the room.

“He hasn’t practiced his cello!”

“That’s all?! No need to worry. Let him sleep. He can practice tomorrow.”

“NO! You don’t understand. There’s a streak. HE’LL HAVE TO START OVER! HE’LL NEVER PROGRESS PAST TWINKLE. It’s the time zones, it’s all my fault... I couldn’t keep track...”

“Don’t disturb him! What are you doing? Let him—”

“ATULI, PLEASE WAKE UP!”

You don’t even have to open your eyes, just sit on my lap and do air cello. Even one minute will do.”

I raised him to a sitting position, held his head, and rubbed his back. The poor boy cried and made some jabbing motions in the air which I wildly interpreted as a passable rendition of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. Phew—the streak was saved! A minute later, he lay back down and continued snoring.

“You really need to calm down,” my mother said to me later.

“I know, I know!”

That’s it for now, dear readers. As the days warm up, I hope there’s a song in your heart, a spring in your step, and a new rhythm to your days. As for me, I’ll be practicing deep breathing, driving Atula to cello lessons, and rewatching *Bahubali*.

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Camps & Programs

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fun and creative activities from the Tech and Media / Animation camps. This is a SINGLE-DAY, 3-hour program offered 11am - 2pm on Tuesdays or Thursdays for most weeks in July and Aug. Includes supervised outdoor lunch and recreation in our picnic area (bring lunch). Fee: \$60, one session.

PLAYHOUSE PUPPET & ANIMATION & ART CAMP Our youngest campers ages 4 - 9 enjoy their own special studio to explore video and animation and technology and art projects. Green screen puppet studio: Campers’ puppets appear in Outer Space, on the Moon, in front of the Eiffel Tower! Lego animation, flip books, claymation, sound effects and fun! One week fees vary from \$295 for Mornings or Afternoons (for \$174/wk for 10wks) to \$445 for school day (or \$545 (or \$325/wk for 10wks) for Full Day. (Our only program for 4-year olds!) Jun 29-Sep 4.

JUNIOR FILMMAKER CAMP Campers work creatively, in the morning making Lego animations and Claymation, and then in the afternoon it’s time for acting in short skits and puppet shows or TV news reports. We also go outside to play when the weather is good (usually), or play inside. Includes a supervised lunch period and morning and afternoon snack breaks. Weekly from June 29 - Sep 4. Full day, 9am - 4:00pm, for ages 5-8. Fee: \$545 for 1 week, or \$325/wk for 10 weeks. Optional early drop-off and late pick-up available.

ITHACA WALDORF SCHOOL – Summer Program ‘26

Ithaca Waldorf School is located at 20 Nelson Road,

Ithaca. Waldorf-style days include outdoor play in our fields, forests, and playgrounds; natural material arts & crafts; song and story; and farm animal care; all screen-free. Outdoor play, art & craft, and farm animal care, all screen-free. Gentle rhythm of imaginative play and teacher-directed activity for younger children; STEAM-themed weeks for older children: Printing & Weaving, Agricultural Arts, Theatre & Improv, Leather-working, Rhythm & Music, Visual Art. Focus on community building, enjoying nature in all weather, creativity, and the joy of childhood.

AGES: 4-12
SCHEDULE/FEES: Weekly sessions July 6 – Aug 14; 8:30am-3pm, full-and half-day 8:30 am-12:30 pm. Check website for fees.

CONTACT: Dolan Polglaze, (607) 256-2020, marketing@ithacawaldorf.org, www.ithacawaldorf.org/summer-program

ITHACA YACHT CLUB – YOUTH SAILING PROGRAM ‘26

The Youth Sailing program is a racing-oriented sport, training beginner sailors in the basics of sailing and working up to the IYC Youth Sailing Racing Team. The program focuses on small boat dinghy racing, priority is to enroll youth sailors with previous experience with youth sailing programs or a strong interest in working toward racing. All beginners are welcome.

AGES: 8 - 17
SCHEDULE/FEES: 9 weekly sessions offered Monday to Friday June 22 – August 21; Members: \$380/week (discount after 4+ weeks), Non-members: \$420/week.

CONTACT: David Filiberto, (607) 592-5906, dmfiliberto@gmail.com, youthsailing@ithacayc.org, <https://ithacayachtclub.wildapricot.org/Youth-Sailing-Overview>

JYC SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAMS ‘26

Engaging, fun, and educational summer programs for middle school youth who live in the Towns of Caroline or Ithaca (not City), and Villages of Cayuga Heights or Lansing. Free with donations welcome. Middle-school age youth programs offered on a variety of topics such as photography, volunteering, art, cooking and camping/outdoor exploration. Our popular Sky’s the Limit Program explores flight, birding, space and rocketry. Lake Life, our Cayuga Lake discovery program, is offered with a cruise with the Floating Classroom. Other programs this summer include a collaborative Art and Plant Exploration program with Cornell Botanic Gardens staff, DIY Summer Edition, and Outdoor Adventures.

AGES: 10-14; Middle School age
CONTACT: Beth Bannister, (607) 227-9532, bab47@cornell.edu, <http://ccetompkins.org/4-h-youth/rural-youth-services/rys-program-sites/joint-youth-commission>

KING MONTESSORI ACADEMY SUMMER NATURE CAMP ‘26

King Montessori Academy Summer Nature Camp Inspiring your child’s creativity and thirst for learning through safe, fun exploration of nature and daily science activities in our school. 320 E. King Rd. Ithaca, NY 14850

SCHEDULE/FEES:
7/6-10: Rocks Rock!
7/13-17: Dinosaur Dynasty!
7/20-24: Our Amazing Oceans! 1
7/27-31: Our Amazing Oceans! 2
8/3-7 Water is Life!
8/10-14: Reptiles & Amphibians!
8/17-21: Small Mammals of the Cayuga Basin,
8/24-28: Beneficial Birds & Bugs!
\$375/wk. Multiple-week discount
See website for details

CONTACT: James Semp, (607) 227-4727, kingmontessoriacademy@gmail.com, <http://www.kingmontessoriacademy.com>

LANSING RURAL YOUTH SERVICES – SUMMER SKIES ‘26

2026 Lansing Rural Youth Services offers programs of varying of topics such as cardboard boat building, Cornell Botanical Gardens program, art, cooking and outdoor exploration. Programs also explore flight and the local historical connection of soaring and flight, birding, space and rocketry. Our Cayuga Lake exploration program, includes a cruise on the Floating Classroom. Other programs include iron chef, outdoor cooking, a trip to a minor league METS baseball game, and a DIY program.

AGES: 10-15
CONTACT: Travis Judd, (845)551-9075, ttj22@cornell.edu, <https://ccetompkins.org/4-h-youth/rural-youth-services/rys-program-sites/lansing-town>

LANSING PARKS & RECREATION ‘26

CONTACT: Meggie Conley, (607) 533-7388, mconley@lansingtown.com, <https://lansingrec.com>

Adam Heck Soccer Camp

This year’s staff will consist of highly qualified coaches and players who have coached and played at the high school and collegiate level. Many of these coaches return year after year to deliver consistent, high-quality instruction! We’ve included goalkeeping training and some of the area’s collegiate coaches will also be in attendance to provide technical and tactical sessions.

The camp offers young players the chance to improve their overall game in an environment suitable

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JILLIAN'S & mama goose
DRAWERS

Get ready for summer!
We buy and sell everything kids need for summer fun, from sandals & swimsuits to sunscreen & bug spray!

Seeking something specific?
Send us a text to let us know what you're looking for!

Jillian's Drawer (607) 272-1237
Mama Goose (607) 216-7851

609 W Clinton Street
Mon - Sat 10am-6pm & Sun 11am-5pm

Garden Fair & Plant Sale

1-7 pm, Friday, May 15
Ithaca Farmers Market

Fill your home & garden with plants from dozens of local vendors!

CCETompkins.org/PlantSale

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Tompkins County