

# John Mayer's "Pawitra Naukari" (A Sacred Service): In God's Eyes, We Are All Equal

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**G**ROWING up in an incredibly poor family in the slums of Calcutta, Indian composer John Mayer (1929–2004) should have had absolutely no opportunity for a career in music—yet he did, eventually having a distinguished career as a professional violinist and intercultural composer based in London. Mayer's family itself was rather intercultural, since his father Wilfred Anthony Mayer (1902–1972) was from an Anglo-Indian family who probably intermarried with Indians, while his mother Mary Antonia Michael (1905–1989) was a Madrasi woman from South India. Although a kind British family gave their unused violin to the Mayer household, there was never any chance of being able to pay for violin lessons, but through Mayer's talent, determination, and mother's continuous help, he was able to find several people to teach him the violin, and one who taught him Indian traditional music—all for free to give a boy from such an impoverished family a chance for a better life.<sup>1</sup> His three violin teachers were Horace Farren (a street musician), Philippe Sandré (head of the Calcutta Conservatory), and Mehli Mehta (father of conductor Zubin Mehta). Mayer's Indian traditional music guru in Calcutta was Sanathan Mukherjee, whom he studied with from approximately 1942–1952.

[2] Mayer won the Bombay Madrigal Singers young artist competition in 1951, with the scholarship prize being the opportunity to study violin at the Royal Academy of Music. Arriving in London, England in August 1952, he progressed rapidly and enjoyed a twenty-year career as a professional violinist with the best orchestras in London (1953–1972). Eventually, he gave up his professional orchestral career in order to be taken more seriously as a composer. This career helped him to make much-needed connections with many professional musicians in the UK, resulting in numerous commissioned works beginning in the 1970s for such artists as violinist

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1. For a detailed biography of Mayer, see Robison (2019, 1–25).

Eric Gruenberg, cellist Rohan de Saram, flutist James Galway, and major orchestras in the UK. His remarkable development as an intercultural composer integrating Indian with Western styles led to an invitation to join the composition faculty at the Birmingham Conservatoire, where he taught from 1990 until his accidental death in 2004.

### COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES

[3] Mayer's melody-writing techniques includes rāgas, twelve-tone rows, and freely chromatic passages. To him a rāga was analogous to a twelve-tone row, an organization of pitches to be treated in an abstract and objective manner, without the emotional states, melodic gestures, specific times of day, and other factors associated with rāgas by traditional Indian musicians. Mayer used rāgas in both strict and more unorthodox ways, to the extent that there may be ambiguity regarding his intentions. The utilization of several rāgas within one movement of a composition or within a composition of moderate length is common, and his rhythmically free ālāp sections incorporate written-out ornaments derived from standard improvised ornaments known as gamakas, without necessarily setting the proper mood expected for that rāga. Droning is used colorfully in many of Mayer's compositions, and his harmonic structures, when used, were derived from his selected ragas. Tālas—the rhythmic cycles in Indian music—will be limited in Mayer's music to those having anywhere from six to sixteen beats, each subdivided into subsections known as vibhāgs. In Mayer's compositions, the tāla patterns may be used strictly, and at other times freely regrouping the subsections (vibhāgs) into new patterns while keeping the same number of overall beats. Shifting from one tāla pattern to another is sometimes found, with polymetric and polyrhythmic writing also characterizing some of Mayer's music.

**MAYER, COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS, AND PAWITRA NAUKARI**

[4] Mayer was raised by his mother as a Roman Catholic, and he was very interested in world religions.<sup>2</sup> After moving to London, he studied comparative religions in his spare time, reading copious amounts of material on Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and other religions at the British Library. Mayer had many books on world religions in his home, including translations of the 423 Buddhist verses known as the Dhammapada, which served as the inspiration for his composition *Dhammapada* (1976), which uses a combination of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Western instruments to convey the path of Buddhism from its Indian origins into East Asian cultures. On one of my visits to London, I brought him a copy of a book comparing the sayings of Buddha and Christ, which he found quite fascinating. It is understandable, therefore, that Mayer would have been excited when commissioned by his Birmingham Conservatoire musicology colleague Stephen Daw to write a lengthy piece in honor of Daw's deceased parents. After considering the nature of the commission, Mayer contacted Daw to propose a composition based on the concept of a fusion of world religions—Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. Mayer and Daw both agreed that this theme would be a most fitting tribute to Daw's parents.

[5] *Pawitra Naukari*, the resulting product, was a lengthy, ten-movement work for chorus and orchestra, one of Mayer's finest and most varied compositions. After completing the work, Mayer stated that the composition was neither a Mass, an Oratorio nor a Requiem. He said that it was written for Daw's parents with one underlying theme—that in the eyes of God, all people are equal. There is in fact only one supreme being, with each religion worshipping that deity or deities in their own way. The ten movements of the work rely on texts and ideas taken from Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and other religions, with the intricate mixture of Indian and Western styles often making it difficult to determine if the melodic material is indeed derived from *rāgas*.

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2. Mayer's Madras mother converted from Hinduism to Christianity since it removed the stigma of belonging to the shudra caste; it did not, however, alter their impoverished lives.

[6] The opening movement of Pawitra Naukari is essentially a Buddhist text, although at the end of the movement Mayer arrives at the main point of the entire composition—which is that all religions are only one religion:

Mere suffering exists, but no sufferer is found. The deed is, but no doer of the deed is there.

Nirvana is, but not the man that enters it. The Path is, but no traveler on it is seen.

“May the light of Sacred Knowledge illumine us, and may we attain the glory of Wisdom.”

Man is made by his belief. As he believes so he is.

“In the adorations and benedictions of righteous men, the praises of all the prophets are kneaded together, because he that is praised is in fact only one. In this respect all religions are only one religion.”<sup>3</sup>

[7] The movement begins in an exciting manner with a seventeen-beat rhythmic pattern, organized as 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 2 + 3, that is not based on any tāla pattern. Further interest is added by the multiple rhythmic layers and use of syncopation; the crotales part, for example is syncopated in a 17/8 meter, with the tubular bells entering on offbeats while the temple block part is in a conflicting 4/8 meter. The overall combination of tubular bells, temple block, and cymbals suggests a connection with Buddhist temple music. Soon the orchestra and choir enter with an animated melodic idea characterized by frequent pitch repetitions, with the choir repeating the single word “Dhammapada.” In Example 1, the voices enter from bottom to top on three pitches a perfect fourth apart, providing quartal harmonies beginning on G, C and F.<sup>4</sup>

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3. While Mayer does not specify his text sources, the first lines of text through “the glory of wisdom” were apparently derived from the Theravada Buddhist book *Visuddhimagga*, and the text beginning with “In the adorations and benedictions of righteous men” is probably taken from a saying by the Persian Muslim Rumi (1207–1273); See Buddhaghosa (2010). For Rumi, see Ondich (2018).

4. This opening portion of the movement in 17/16 meter was previously used for the opening of *Dhammapada* (1976), Mayer’s lengthy work inspired by the path of Buddhism from India into East Asia.



**Example 1a.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 1, letter A, one 17-beat crotales cycle.

Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass

[with oboes]  
Dha-ma-pa-da pa-da pa-da Dha-ma-pa pa-da pa-da pa-da

[with trumpets]  
Dha-ma-pa-da pa-da pa-da Dha-ma-pa pa-da pa-da pa-da

[with flutes/piccolo]  
Dha-ma-pa-da pa-da pa-da Dha-ma-pa pa-da pa-da pa-da

[with flutes]  
Dha-ma-pa-da pa-da pa-da Dha-ma-pa pa-da pa-da pa-da

[with oboes]  
Dha-ma-pa-da pa-da pa-da Dha-ma-pa pa-da pa-da pa-da

[with trumpets]  
Dha-ma-pa-da pa-da pa-da Dha-ma-pa pa-da pa-da pa-da

8 + 3 + 6

**Example 1b.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 1, letters A to D (mm. 7-14).

[8] Much of the earlier portion of the Buddhist-inspired text is spoken to the accompaniment of percussion instruments or a tanpura drone: the big surprise, though, comes during the last section of the movement, where along with the narrator's spoken text, Mayer writes four-part, Renaissance style imitative counterpoint for the SATB choir, along with the stylistically-appropriate, careful dissonance treatment (Example 2). This represents a significant change in style from the rest of the movement, and is the only time that Mayer incorporated Renaissance

The image displays a musical score for a vocal piece with piano accompaniment. It consists of three systems of staves. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The first system contains the lyrics: "In the a-do-ra-tions and be-ne-dic-tions of right-eous men the prai-ses of all the". The second system contains: "pro-phets are knea-ded to-ge-ther be-cause he that is praised is in". The third system contains: "fact only one In this res-pect all re-li-gions are but one re-li-gion." The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "Ha ---".

**Example 2.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 1, letter H (mm. 45–60).

style counterpoint into his compositions, perhaps reflecting his upbringing as a Roman Catholic.

[9] “Karuna” (“Pure compassion”), the second movement, begins with a lengthy, ālāp–style melody in the solo bassoon and cello that is supported by several droning tanpuras. The melodic material appears to be a mixture of elements taken from several different rāgas, with the opening measures borrowing concepts from shri rāga, then rāga madhuvanti, and possibly some influences of rāga pilu as well. The melody begins with a dual emphasis on A and A $\flat$ , continues by rising to F before descending to A, and then ascends to a climax on E:

**Example 3.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 2, possible ragas and opening bassoon/cello melody, mm. 1–15.

Oh God show me where you are and I will become your servant. I will clean your shoes, comb your hair, sew your clothes,

and fetch your mile. The prophet rebuked him saying "How dare you speak to the Almighty on such equal terms."

**Example 4.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 2, letter E (mm. 79–89).

[10] An English horn melody, along with the tāblas, supports the narrator's message that there is only one true, eternal God. The central portion of the movement, however, focuses on the poor man calling out to God, the prophet rebuking him, and God's angry response to the prophet. Mayer illustrates this with two radically different styles of music: For the poor man's call and the prophet's rebuke, (Example 4), the text is spoken with the wind instruments playing a twelve-tone row.

[11] And then when God speaks, the droning tanpuras return, and, along with God's spoken voice, the prophet and the English horn sing and play melodic ideas based on the rāga jaunpuri. God's narrated criticism of the prophet concludes with a key point

from the Beatitudes, a concept dear to Mayer who grew up in such incredible poverty:

“Wherefore hast thou driven away that good man? Your office is to reconcile my people with me, not to drive them from me. I have given the poor of every race, color and creed, different ways of approaching me. I regard not the words that are spoken, but the heart that offers them. Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

[12] The concluding portion of the movement relies on both Christian, Muslim, and Zoroastrian texts. The Latin text “*Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum*” (“The peace of the Lord be always with you”) is set as a tenor solo accompanied only by tanpuras, with the word “Allah” sung at the conclusion of this section. The narrator then concludes the movement with a Zoroastrian plea to the chief god of purity (Ahura Mazda) to reveal the path of righteousness, a plea that is accompanied by a decorative clarinet melody and sustained harmonies in the bassoons and cellos (“Now may I call upon thee oh Ahura-Mazda, Lord of life and wisdom, to reveal to us by the powers of your mind what is your divine purpose for all this creation, and show us the path to righteousness so that we may choose it”).

[13] Movement three is primarily a Latin text, one mixing portions of the Christian Kyrie and Gloria texts. There are three central ideas that recur throughout the movement. The first idea is sung a capella and written in a melodic style, and is always assigned to the Kyrie text, with additions that amplify their meaning (Example 5):

Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy).

Qui peccatores vocare venisti (You came to call sinners).

[14] The second thematic idea is always assigned to the Gloria text, and is entirely stepwise using parallel motion, along with instrumental accompaniment. During its first occurrence in mm. 17–23, the parallel motion occurs simultaneously at the fourth and at the fifth, thus creating dissonant sevenths (Example 6). The third unifying melodic idea is a rather repetitive one found only in the woodwinds and glockenspiel, as shown in Example 7. It tends to remain the same for each occurrence,



SAT voices, mm. 1-7:

Ky - ri - e - - - lei - son. Qui pec-ca-to-res vo-ca - re. \_\_\_\_\_



Ky - ri - e e - lei - son Qui pec - ca - tor ve - ni - 3 - - - ti.  
es vo - ca re - ve - nis - ti.

**Example 5.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 3, thematic idea no. 1, mm. 1–8.

SA voices, mm. 17-23:

sopranos



Glo - - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o De - o. \_\_\_\_\_

altos

**Example 6.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 3, thematic idea no. 2, mm. 17–23.

piccolo



flute 1

flute 2

**Example 7.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 3, thematic idea no. 3, letter A (mm. 24–29).

although there is one point later in the movement where the voices sing an augmented variant of this Example 7 theme.

[15] Throughout the movement, Mayer alters the first and second themes in terms of melody, rhythm, and texture. In the recurrence of the first theme shown below in Example 8, the original soprano melody is extended, the tenor doubles most of the soprano part, and a bass line is added. The second thematic idea shown in Example 9 that is assigned to the Gloria text is particularly crucial, since on its third occurrence it

SATB voices, letter J:

**Example 8.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 3, altered version of thematic idea no. 1, letter J (mm. 111–118).

Climax at letter L:

sopranos/altos

tenors/basses

**Example 9.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 3, altered version of thematic idea no. 2, letter L (mm. 140–147)

is used to reach the climax of the movement, where there are now six voice parts moving in parallel thirds and sixths.

[16] Interspersed between these three main thematic ideas are other distinctive passages, such as this highly chromatic tenor solo accompanied only by the tanpuras (Example 10).

**Example 10.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 3, tenor solo, letter B (mm. 31–37).

Glo - ri glo - ri - a - glo - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o et in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus

bo - nae - vo - lun - ta - tis. Lau - da - mus te - be - ne - dici - mus pa - tris pa - tris glo - ri - a

**Example 11.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 3, bass solo, letter H (mm. 85–104).

Do - mi - nus vo - bis - cum Et cum spi - ri - ti tu - o Sur - sum co - or - da Ha - be - mus ad Do - mi - num.

**Example 12.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 4, opening tenor melody, mm. 1–11.

[17] Another chromatic solo passage, with the melody doubled by the baritone voice and trombone over the droning tanpuras, is based on the first phrases of the Gloria text (Example 11).

[18] The movement concludes with a new section that combines choral statements of the Gloria text sung on repeated pitches using open fifths, an Indian-style melody for solo bass voice reiterating the Buddhist word “Namu” (“Devotion”) and droning tanpura-like ideas in the Western instruments.

[19] The fourth movement mixes several English and Latin texts, beginning with the first four lines of the Christian sursum corda that is sung by the tenors with sustained wind harmonies in the background (Example 12). This melody is based on a twelve-tone row (Eb-G-Bb-F#-D-C#-F-B-A-G#-C-E) that is treated freely after its initial statements in original and inverted forms. The sopranos, accompanied by vibraphone, glockenspiel and crotales, take over the melodic material on the “Gratias agamus” text:

Dominus vobiscum (The Lord be with you).

Et cum spiritu tuo (And with your spirit).

Sursum corda (Lift up your hearts).

Habemus ad Dominum (We lift them to the Lord).

Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro (Let us give thanks to the Lord our God).

[20] The ensuing English and Latin texts are each distinguished by different styles of writing and combinations of voices/instruments:

Narrator/sustained strings:

Behold the Universe in the glory of God; and all that lives and moves on earth.

All this world is in the glory of the Lord. Praise be to God, Lord of creation.

Solo bass voice/contrabassoon:

Gratia vobis et pax Deo patre nostro

(The grace and peace of God the Father to you).

[21] The central thought of the movement is then stated by the narrator; this falls into two parts, a text describing temptation that is accompanied by piccolo/flutes, metal percussion and tanpuras, and the narrator's unaccompanied statement showing his familiarity with poverty (reflecting Mayer's own life experiences).

Narrator with instruments:

“Come look at this world. It is a world painted like a glittering royal chariot. The wise are not imprisoned in this chariot; only fools are immersed in it, wherein they sink into oblivion. A poor man once said:

Unaccompanied narrator:

My best respects to Poverty, the Master who has set me free,  
for I can look at all the world, and no one looks at me.<sup>5</sup>

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5. The text referring to the “glittering royal chariot” is possibly derived from Chapter 13, Verse 171 of the Dhammapada (ebook version translated by Ānandajoti Bikkhu (2017) at <https://www.ancient->

[22] Moving in parallel thirds and sixths, the fourth movement ends with the subdued statement of thanks to God shown in Example 13.



**Example 13.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 4, letter G (mm. 50–55).

[23] Movement five is the Credo movement of the composition, with the level of excitement serving as a testament to Mayer's strong faith in God. Only selected statements from the traditional Credo text are included, and during the opening portion of the movement, these are spoken by the tenors, supported by string harmonics, droning tantras, and florid lines in the oboe and English horn. To ensure that the text is more applicable to all religions and not just Christianity, Mayer also omits the word "unum" ("one") from the text, so that the statement is "I believe in God" rather than "I believe in one God."

Credo in Deo (I believe in God)

Patrem omnipotentem (the Father Almighty)

Factorem caeli et terra (Creator of Heaven and Earth)

Credo in Spiritum Sanctum (I believe in the Holy Spirit)

E Sanctam Catholicam Ecclesiam (the Holy Catholic church)

Remissionem peccatorum (the forgiveness of sins)

Et resurrectionem mortuorum (the resurrection of the dead)

Et vitam aeternam (and life everlasting)

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[buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Dhammapada/index.htm](http://buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Dhammapada/index.htm)). The text beginning with "My best respects to Poverty . . ." could possibly be Mayer's own words since he liked to write rhyming poems, but one cannot be sure.

[24] This declaration of eternal life generates a new section employing multiple melodic and rhythmic layers in contrary motion, along with the cymbals and *tābla* playing different rhythmic patterns. One of Mayer's favorite techniques is to have each layer of activity entering separately, eventually leading to a climax with as many as four to six layers of material heard simultaneously. In movement five Mayer begins with the second bassoon, contrabassoon, and basses, soon adding the second layer in the clarinets and violas; the third layer of instrumental activity is introduced in the first bassoon and cellos, while the fourth layer is stated by the violins. To this, Mayer adds a simple but powerful statement of faith by having the chorus sing the word "Credo," forming the fifth layer of activity. In addition, the *tāblas* enter with the choir, with *tābla bols* used to create Mayer's own ostinato rhythm that are not based on any *tāla* pattern. Example 14 shows the full texture after all layers of activity have entered, with the order of entries shown by numbers in the example.

(5) sopranos/altos  
Cre - do cre - do in De - o Cre - e - do

(4) violins

(2) clarinets/violas

(3) bassoon 1/cellos

(1) bassoon 2/basses

Cre - do cre - do in De - o Cre - - - - - do

**Example 14.** *Pawitra Naukari*, movement 5, layers of activity introduced at letters C and D (mm. 56–67).

[25] Mayer then surprises the listener by having the tenors and basses speak six different rhythmic patterns at the same time, and while none of these are actual *tāla* patterns, they are all based on the *kaidas* or rhythmic variations that *tābla* players would do as a part of any *tāla* pattern.<sup>6</sup> These patterns are also introduced one at a time, with the order shown in numbers as before (Example 15).

6. For information on *kaidas*, see Kippen (2000, 154–155), Leake (1993, 82–113), and Dutta (1995, 43–65, 88–102, 117–125, 139–147.).

Example 15 is a musical score for six parts: T1, T2, T3, B1, B2, and B3. Each staff contains rhythmic notation and lyrics in Devanagari script. The lyrics are: T1: (3) Ti - ri - ki - ta Dhay Dhay Tak Dhin Ti - ri - ki - ta Dhay Dhay Tak Dhin; T2: (1) Dhay Dhay Dha Ti - ri - ki - ta Dhay Dhay Dha; T3: (2) Dhin Dhin Dhay Tak Dhin Dhin Tak Dhay; B1: (6) Dha - gay Na Tak - ka Ti - ri - ki - ta Dha - gay Na Tak - ka Ti - ri - ki - ta; B2: (4) Dhay Tak - ka Ti - ri - ki - ta Dhay Dhay Dhay Tak - ka Ti - ri - ki - ta Dhay Dhay; B3: (5) Ta - ka Dhin Dhin Tak Dhin Ta - ka Dhin Dhin Tak Dhin.

**Example 15.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 5, letters E through G (mm. 72–83).

Example 16 is a musical score for three parts. Each staff contains rhythmic notation and Latin lyrics. The lyrics are: Staff 1: Cre - do in u - no De - o Pa - trem om - ni - po - ten - tem Fa - cto - rem cae - li et ter - ra Cre - do in spi - ri - tu - um san - ctum et san - ctam; Staff 2: et san - ctam ca - tho - li - ci - am Ec - cle - lei - si - am Re - mis - si - o - nem pec - ca - to - rum Et re - sur - rec - ti - o - nem mor - tu - or - um et vi - tam ae - ter - nam; Staff 3: Cre - do in u - no De - o Pa - trem om - ni - po - ten - tem Fa - cto - rem cae - li et ter - ra Cre - do Cre - do in u - no De - o A - men.

**Example 16.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 5, letter G (mm. 84–99).

[26] The sopranos and altos eventually join in with a seventh layer of activity, distinguished from the others by its return to the Credo text (Example 16).

[27] The full orchestra and the choir then return for a restatement of the Credo material, using the layers shown in Example 14. Interestingly, the movement concludes with a lengthy tābla solo in teentāl as shown in Example 17. Mayer then varies this rhythmic theme (kayda), concluding with a cadential pattern stated three times (tihai) which in turn is then repeated twice more for a total of three times (chakradhar tihai).<sup>7</sup>

7. Source: Email consultation with Jonathan Mayer (a London-based professional sitar player and composer who is John Mayer's younger son) on February 10, 2023.



Dha Gay Na Dha Gay Na - Dhay Ti Ri Ki Ta Dha Gay Na Dha Gay Na - Dhay Ti Ri Ki Ta

**Example 17.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 5, after letter H (mm. 108–110).

**Example 18.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 6, mm. 1–27.

[28] Movement six is one of the purely instrumental movements. The melodic material shown in Example 18, which is doubled by the solo clarinet and solo viola, places particular emphasis on the pitches A and D, and favors certain intervals such as A-B $\flat$  and F-D. While the melody has decorative gestures resembling Indian melodies, it is unclear if it is in a particular *rāga*, since the melody includes every note of the chromatic scale except for E. Color is added to the movement through the use of three tanpuras on the A2-D3-D3-D2 drone, two bowed cymbals, and another percussionist alternating between crotales, glockenspiel, and gong.

[29] The text of the Christian Sanctus forms the basis for the seventh movement, although an English text is interspersed between the Latin one. The “Sanctus” portion of the Latin text is based on a twelve-tone row (F $\sharp$ -D-B-F-C $\sharp$ -G $\sharp$ -C-A-B $\flat$ -E $\flat$ -G-E) that is presented in two six-note segments and treated somewhat freely, with certain pitches being repeated or re-ordered. With the tone row appearing in the vocal parts, the slower-moving cellos, basses, and bassoons play notes extracted from the tone row while the tubular bells and vibraphones play sustained pitches, as shown in Example 19.

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is divided into four sections, each with a different time signature: 6/8, 3/4, 6/8, and 3/4. The bottom staff is a single bass line with a 6/8 time signature. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves.

**Example 19.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 7, mm. 1–8.

[30] Over string harmonics and droning tanpuras, Mayer then intersperses the following text spoken by the narrator. Mayer most likely took the imagery of the “bee gathering honey” from Verse 49 of the Dhammapada, with his own emphasis on the goodness inherent in all religions.

Like the bee gathering honey from different flowers,  
The wise man accepts the essence of different scriptures,  
And sees only the good in all religions.<sup>8</sup>

[31] The “Pleni sunt,” “Hosanna,” and “Benedictus” portions of the Sanctus text are set as an expressive duet between solo bass voice and flute, one using all twelve notes of the chromatic scale with ornamental figurations suggesting the gamakas found in Indian music (Example 20). This is supported by the droning tanpuras, sustained chords in the violins and violas, and the occasional colorful sound of the bell tree.

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8. See Dhammapada, Bikkhu translation, Chapter 4, Verse 49.

Ple - ni sunt cae - li et ter - ra glo - ri - a

glo - ri - a glo - ri - a tu - a Ho - sa - a - na

in ex - cel - sis Ho - sa - a - na Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - e

nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni.

**Example 20.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 7, letter B (mm. 17–48).

[32] The movement concludes with a reprise of the opening twelve-tone section reiterating the “Sanctus” text, followed by the sustained pitch F heard in four octaves on the word “Amen,” accompanied by dissonant harmonies in the wind instruments. The tranquil eighth movement uses another Latin text of uncertain origin, and while we cannot be sure what Mayer was thinking of, it appears to be derived from selected Eucharistic texts with possible reference to the Canticle of Zechariah. In offering praise to God while asking for deliverance from our sins, Mayer uses “Deus Universi” rather than “Deus Israel” or “Christe,” which makes the text appropriate to all religions:

Benedictus Dominus, Deus Universi (Blessed be the Lord, God of all creation)

Benedictus Dominus, In saecula saeculorum (Blessed be the Lord for ever and ever)

Laus tibi Dominus, Gloria tibi Deo (Praise to you Lord, glory to you God)

Libera nos Dominus, Ab omnibus malis (Deliver us Lord, from all evil)

Benedictus Dominus, Deus Universi (Blessed be the Lord, God of all creation)

In saecula, Amen (Forever, Amen)

Dominus Vobiscum, Et cum spirito tuo (The Lord be with you, and also with you)

[33] Over slow-moving string and bassoon sounds, the chorus generally moves in even half notes, with more emphasis on harmony (especially triads or seventh chords) than is usually found in Mayer's music (Example 21).

[34] "Shanti" ("Peace"), the ninth movement, is a lightly scored instrumental movement and the shortest movement of Pawitra Naukari. Lively and dancelike in character, it uses the eight-beat kahervā tāla , and alternates the melodic material between the darker English horn/solo viola and the brighter sonority of the oboe/solo violins. While the rāga is not entirely clear, the combination of minor second, augmented second, and major second in the lower portion of the scale indicates that the rāga belongs to the Mārvā thaat (Example 22).

**Example 21.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 8, letter D (mm. 36–49).

The image shows three staves of musical notation. The first staff is labeled 'English horn/viola' and contains a melodic line with various intervals and accidentals. The second staff is labeled 'oboe/violins' and contains a similar melodic line. The third staff continues the musical notation with more complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals. The notation is in a 2/4 time signature and uses a key signature with one flat (B-flat).

**Example 22.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 9, letters A and B (mm. 9–45), English horn/viola and oboe/violin solos.

[35] Movement ten brings Pawitra Naukari to a fitting conclusion by emphasizing the message of the entire composition, which is peace to all of the world’s peoples.

The narrator begins the movement with the following spoken text:

If there is justice in the heart  
 There will be beauty in the character  
 If there is beauty in the character  
 There will be harmony in the home  
 If there is harmony in the home  
 There will be calm in the nation  
 If there is calm in the nation  
 There will be peace on earth.

[36] After this narration, the violins introduce a motoric idea in constant sixteenth notes that continues in various string parts underneath the tranquil and slower-moving voice parts. While a connection to a rāga from within the Āsavari that is conceivable (C-D-E $\flat$ -F-G-A $\flat$ -B $\flat$ -C), the chromatic alterations suggest something closer to a C minor scale. In Example 23, the Latin “Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum, Et cum spiritu tuo, Offerte vobis pacem” (“The peace of the Lord be always with you, and also with you. Let us offer each other the word of peace.”) is treated appropriately with gentle triadic harmonies. The final word “Amen” provides a peaceful conclusion, with the pitch C sung in several octaves, while the soft and sustained eight-note chord in the orchestra (F-F $\sharp$ -G-A-B $\flat$ -B-C-E $\flat$ ) gives the impression that there

sopranos/altos (doubled by flute/oboe/clarinet)

Pax Do - mi - ni sit sem - per vo - bi - is - cum.

violins (doubled by cellos)

Pax Do - mi - ni sit sem - per vo - bi - is - cum.

Pax Do - mi - ni sit sem - per vo - bi - is - cum.

**Example 23.** Pawitra Naukari, movement 10, letter A (mm. 22–37).

are indeed multiple ways of worshipping the same God, which the peoples of the world need to accept.

#### PERFORMANCE AND CRITICAL RECEPTION

[37] Stephen Daw first presented the idea of a memorial tribute to his deceased parents towards the end of 1990, and Mayer probably did not complete the work until late 1994 or early 1995. Mayer's other compositions written during this period include *The Flames of Lanka* for chorus and orchestra (1990), *Kriti* for woodwind quintet and piano (1991), and *Calcutta Nagar* for solo piano (1992). *Pawitra Naukari* was premiered on July 7, 1995, at an end of the year concert featuring the Birmingham Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra and University Chorus, with Andrew Mogrelia conducting. To the best of my knowledge, this has been the only performance of the composition. A Birmingham Post review (1995) described the piece as “a moving unification of many world religions, [with] elements flowing into each other even within a single musical thought.” The private commissioner Stephen

Daw expressed his deep appreciation to Mayer in a letter written less than two days after the concert:

Both Gillian and I—also brother John Daw—identify closely with the stance as well as the wonderful music of your most admirable—as well as lovely—music Pawitra Naukari. When I commissioned this music, although I had high hopes, I had no idea how privileged I was to be in being partly the instigator of something so special, so precious and so personally rewarding. I am delighted that the student performers and our colleagues have mostly found the experience deeply rewarding.<sup>9</sup>

[38] Mayer realized, of course, that some people would reject the concept that all religions were one and equal, preferring to follow the belief that their chosen religion was the true path for everyone.<sup>10</sup> Yet Mayer, a Roman Catholic growing up within a Hindu society who later studied comparative religions in London, has done an incredible job in Pawitra Naukari of showing that we are truly one religion, worshipping the same God in somewhat different ways. While the religious sects of our world may never appreciate what Mayer is trying to say, Pawitra Naukari deserves recognition as a remarkable composition having a vast array of musical styles, and a profound message that is still relevant to the peoples of our world more than two decades after its creation.

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9. Letter from Stephen Daw to John Mayer, dated Sunday morning, July 9, 1995.

10. According to Gillian Mayer, several students in the Birmingham Conservatoire Orchestra did not wish to play Pawitra Naukari due to its representation of other religions (email dated November 16, 2023).

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