

Theorizing *Trikāla*: a Generalized Intervallic Approach to Pulse Transformation in South Indian Carnatic Music

Robert Wells

University of South Carolina Upstate, USA

The rich rhythmic-metric construction of South Indian Carnatic music is characterized, in large part, by intricate interplay between an internalized metric cycle called the *tāla* and performed phrases that may generate expressive tension with this *tāla*. Thus, informed listeners, who track the *tāla* using standardized hand gestures (*krīyās*), may experience substantial internal conflict. A common source of such conflict is *trikāla* technique, in which the performed pulse unit expands or contracts over constant *tāla*. While *trikāla* has been thoroughly described by ethnomusicologists, it has received little attention within the music-theoretic realm.

Thus, this paper seeks to approach *trikāla* technique from the perspective of Lewin's (1987) transformation theory, applying the metric generalized interval system Met developed by Wells (2013; 2015a; 2015b) to the problem of representing and quantifying this technique. Part One will introduce the notions of intervallic expansion and contraction in the context of Met and demonstrate how these principles can represent *trikāla* technique. Part Two will then apply these ideas to a new analysis of a *rāgam-tānam-pallavi* performance previously investigated by Widdess (1977). This Met-based analysis will reveal hidden aspects of the performance's metric workings while suggesting new possibilities for rhythmic-metric analysis of Carnatic music.