

Checks and balances between Carnatic and Kalaimamani

● Roshne Balsubramanian

come from a family of working professionals, who are also patrons of the fine arts. But, no one was a full-time musician. I grew up in a setting where we would go to *kutch-eris*, enjoy music, and have competitions among ourselves to identify *ragas*. But, no one said that I should look at it as a career path. I didn't have the pressure to succeed as an artist," says Carnatic vocalist-cum-mentor Vidya Subramanian, who was awarded the prestigious Kalaimamani award in 2018.

The disciple of Padma Bhushan Lalgudi Jayaraman, seated in her cosy TNagar residence, has successfully been running an online Carnatic music academy for over a decade, and walks us through her journey — from being a Chartered Accountant to an entrepreneur in the field of online music teaching.

Where it all started

Vidya's first brush with music was when she was three years

old. "Rukmini Rajagopalan, my first guru, was my paati's neighbour. Every day after school, I used to go there. I learned a lot of songs from her and she discovered a spark in me," she recalls.

At the age of 12, she was introduced to Lalgudi Jayaraman for a project, and Vidya was chosen from an open audition. "We went through intensive training on various aspects of a concert performance. It was an eye-opener," says Vidya, who later became a formal student of the maestro.

Reminiscing her times as a student under the tutelage of Lalgudi Jayaraman, the MBA-Finance graduate from Boston College says, "What I admire about him is that he had a crystal clear method of articulation. It was amazing, and I try to incorporate it into my classes. For every composition, he gave a detailed written notation, walked us through it, and would explain the salient aspects, and beauty of the *ragas*. It was a holistic learning experience rather than a parroting exercise."



Vidya Subramanian runs an online school for the arts ● Ashwin Prasath

An idea is born

After nearly a decade in a corporate set-up in the US, Vidya decided to do something entrepreneurial. "I was married and working, and it was getting difficult to pursue music. When I had my first child, I decided to take a year off and sketch a plan. My goal was to do something independently, and that's how the idea to start an online academy was born," she explains.

Music for all

An online platform for people of different age groups, skill sets, interests and geographic locations to learn not just Carnatic music, but a basket of other traditional arts was introduced. "The classes are customised to the individual strengths of the students. A student can even ask a question as basic as 'What is a *ragam* or *talam*'. No one will be discouraged," she smiles.

Currently, Vidya has 750 students under her umbrella, and offers live online classes in Carnatic and Light Classical vocal, Carnatic instrumental (flute, veena, violin, percussion-mridangam and konnakkol), Hindustani vocal, Bharatanatyam, Sanskrit, Tamil, *slokkas*, chants, and art appreciation. "About 13 years ago, online classes were in a nascent stage and technology wasn't as good as it is now. We adapted teaching methods to suit both, the medium and the students," says the artist, who moved to the city in 2010.

Guru-Shishya Parampara

Vidya blends the traditional *gurukulam* — *guru-shishya parampara* style with modern-day digital media aids to make learning easy. "Earlier, the student population used to be children of NRIs. But now, we have students of Non-Indian origin students to students from Indian metros. The age group also starts from preschoolers and goes up to senior citizens," says Vidya. Classes are inclusive for people with special needs.

For details, visit: vidyasubramanian.com

