Perfecting the pitch online

Lakshmi Anand

Every Thursday, chemical engineer and Bharatanatyam dancer Srividvatha Sridhar in Houston, Texas, logs in to her computer at 7:30pm. Continents away in Chennai, her music teacher Vidya Subramanian is online at 6am (IST). What follows is a class devoted to learning kritis, reviewing previously taught ragas and an insight into compositions. As e-learning transforms the education system, music lessons too are undergoing a change.

Traditionally, the guru-shishya parampara (teacher-disciple system) has been the bedrock of Indian classical music, but issues such as time, distance and access make it unfeasible for many. From YouTube lessons, to apps with pre-recorded music lessons, a number of online options are available for the eager learner. The personalized online music classes made their appearance a few years ago, but with more tech-savvy teachers, customized modules for students and better internet connectivity, these seem as seamless as learning it in person and are more than just an amateur’s guide to ragas.

“Vidya is totally student-focused and extremely prepared, sending notes and recordings, as needed. My sister, who had learned Carnatic music face-to-face, and online from others, now learns from Vidya and sees a world of difference,” says Srividvatha, a student since 2014.

A disciple of Laligudi G Jayaraman, Vidya is the recipient of the 2018 Kalaimamani award conferred by the Tamil Nadu government. Her online teaching platform is the Vidya Subramanian Academy (vidyasubramanian.com). My foray into music teaching began in 2004-2005 when I took a break from my corporate job in the USA. I began teaching music to students locally and also started getting queries from students across the country who were interested in online and phone classes,” says Vidya who, as an artist with an MBA, could see the potential of the online medium. She now oversees 40 trained teachers from across the country, who give lessons to nearly 750 students. She also uses digital notations and podcasts to explain theories and supplement the hour-long live sessions.

Despite the advancements, singing together simultaneously is not yet possible online and momentary lags can make keeping of talam tricky. While these are but minor hitches, it is instrumental training which is still considered challenging, since it involves correct posture and handling as well as the techniques. Keeping this in mind, senior veena vidwan, Karaiakudi S Subramanian’s pedagogic training method, Correlated Operation of Music Education and Training (COMET) has proved to be a good rule book.

COMET is an inclusive system, empowering learners by incorporating rhythm and detailed notation, including ‘aneswarans’ (microtones). Subramanian and teachers trained by him use the COMET method to teach students online and offline.

As a further aid to students learning advanced music, he has made another platform patantara.com, which is a repository of musical references to aid self-learning.

Carnatic vocalist Vidya Subramanian, a disciple of Laligudi G Jayaraman teaches music live online.

Hitting the Right Note

Karaikudi S Subramanian, senior veena artist has developed his own system of music training as explained by contact Sang in the US.

> Her website vidyasubramanian.com has 40 trained teachers, who train around 750 students worldwide.

Music teachers on the Internet Bridge

Gap of Distance

And Accessibility

TUNE IN FOR HINDUSTANI RAGAS TOO

In the tiny US town of State College in Pennsylvania, vocalists Arjith Mahalanabis and Kishan Patel of the Society for Indian Music and Arts (societyforindianmusicarts.org) offer instruction in Hindustani music, in person and online. SIMA, started in 2008, uses a uniform methodology of instruction handholding a beginner from basics to individualistic performance of ragas.

Their students are uninitiated children as well as senior citizens nursing a life-long desire to train in music. Musicians who aspire to perform are given a rigorous routine and feedback to help them become effective on stage.

Mumbai-based Rishabh Jhunjhunwala is a student of Mahalanabis for more than two years. An aspiring sand artist, he is also a student of Arnav Chakrabarty. “Mahalanabis’s clarity and articulation are impeccable and I feel no difference in learning online from that of doing it in person,” says Jhunjhunwala.