



Perfecting the pitch online

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Every Thursday, chemical engineer and Bharatanatyam dancer Srividya 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 Srividya, a student since 2014.

A disciple of Lalgudi 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 time 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, Karaikudi S Subramanian's pedagogic training method, Correlated Objective Music Education and Training (COMET) has proved to be good rule book. COMET is an inclusive system, empowering learners by incorporating rhythm and detailed notation, including 'anuswarams' (micronotes). Subramanian and teachers trained by him use the COMET method to

Music Teachers On The Internet Bridge Gap Of Distance And Accessibility

teach students online and offline.

As a further aid, online platform atan-tara.com, created by Subramanian's son Srikumar, is a repository of content, annotated and notated and transferable into different Indian languages. It also allows teachers to share resources to be used by students for practice and self-learning. The more than 180 documents cover lessons for all levels — from basic 'sarali varisais' to complex 'pallavis'. There is a recording facility too for students to send in their work for evaluation.

Veena performers Thenuga and Ma-thuriga Thevupalan of Denmark found Subramanian's methods revelatory. "Under the COMET methodology we understood the smallest movement on the instrument. And because of the importance given to deconstruction, we were able to grasp any *sangatis* (even complex ones) with ease," says Thenuga, who also takes regular lessons from Subramanian online.

Online accessibility has also initiated social change. In Manachanallur, a small town in Trichy district, 15 students of varying ages gather to learn the veena online from Subramanian. "We belong to the merchant community and have no exposure or scope to dream about music. Now, online learning gives us a chance," says Gayathri Jagannathan, a student.

As online music education improves, it has opened up vistas of possibility in the classical arts, unhindered by geography on a scale not conceivable earlier.

(The author is a freelancer)

HITTING THE RIGHT NOTE

From amateurs to aspiring performers, e-learning music today is customized for all



Karaikudi S Subramanian, senior veena artist has developed his own system of music training called COMET, details available at brhaddhvan.org/comet/

> 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 Lalgudi G Jayaraman teaches music live online

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



Arijit Mahalanabis and Kishan Patel (left) of the Society for Indian Music and Arts societyforindianmusicandarts.org in the US teach Hindustani classical music in person and online

> They have more than 70 students in India and abroad

TUNE IN FOR HINDUSTANI RAGAS TOO

In the tiny US town of State College in Pennsylvania, vocalists Arijit Mahalanabis and Kishan Patel of the Society for Indian Music and Arts (societyforindianmusicandarts.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 Jhurjunwala is a student of Mahalanabis for more than two years. An aspiring sarod player, he is also a student of Arnab Chakrabarty. "Mahalanabis's clarity and articulation are impeccable and I feel no difference in learning online from that of doing it in person," says Jhurjunwala.