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MUSIC | Chitra Mahesh

How the West was won by Chitra Veena

Chennai: Eleven-year-old Aditya Kanukurthy sits in nervous anticipation of his maiden performance in front of a seasoned audience at the Raga Sudha Hall, Mylapore.

In front of him sits his guru who has trained him to handle a solo concert. Even as the seasoned accompanying artists nod their heads in encouragement to start, Aditya steps into the world of unforgettable performers.

And right through the concert, the child sought approval from his guru who provided silent sustenance and made Aditya a little star for that evening — the guru being none other than Chitra Veena N. Ravikiran.

A child prodigy himself, Ravikiran is to the Chitra Veena what Srinivas is to the mandolin.

The occasion also provided a reason to reminiscence on the progress and growth of this remarkable young man who has utilised his incredible talent not just for

movement has gained impetus. Perceptions are changing in countries like the US, Europe, Australia and those who listen to it find it very attractive — the compositions, melody, creativity, lyrics and rhythm. They, too, are discovering that it is one of the best in terms of its scientific nature, its emotive overtures and its spiritual appeal."

Ravikiran did not start as an instrumentalist. From the time he was two, he could identify ragas but it was his father's genius and powers of channelling that he grew into an instrumentalist.

"My father made sure that



Veena. The Music Academy even passed a resolution to this effect." Ravikiran started giving Chitra Veena performances at the age of 12, even as he thought of himself as a

only vocals and Chitra Veena but at an advanced level, students should be able to reproduce what I play or sing on other instruments as well."

"I try to do justice to all

the things I am passionate about. And it so happens that these are the things that matter to me. I have come up with a new concept — Melharmony — a new approach to compositions and aesthetics that I initiated at the Millennium festival in UK in 2000."

Melharmony is a concept that weaves melody, chords and harmony to conform to the pattern of the raga system in Indian classical forms. "It is very useful to the Westerners," he says.

Ravikiran has premiered some of his compositions applying this concept along with the members of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and presented in other places in the UK winning a lot of appreciation and accolades.

Since then, he has composed and presented several concerts featuring the melharmony with top artists and groups from many parts of the world.

Ravikiran's family is originally from Tirunelveli and his grandfather, Narayana Kanukurthy in Chennai and has been set up to propagate and popularise Indian music and culture among the younger lot who have settled in the US.

"Music is everything," says Ravikiran. "You can see it as a means to other things or as an end in itself. It can be the path to spiritualism or god or whatever you can call it. And at another level, it is also a mean to spread harmony, peace, good will and all things positive. My role is that of someone who tries to communicate to others what he enjoys immensely — it is just a small drop in the ocean."

'I want to spread the best of our music everywhere in the world. That ambition drives me. Carnatic music has still a lot of reaching out to do. Perceptions are changing in countries like the US, Europe, Australia and those who listen to it find it very attractive.'