

Ravikiran To Compose For BBC Philharmonic Orchestra

By PRAKASH M SWAMY

NEW YORK: Noted Carnatic music composer and Chitravina player Ravikiran has been invited by the British Broadcasting Corporation Philharmonic orchestra to compose and conduct performances in London. He is the only musician to be invited by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra from India after Pandit Ravishankar.

Ravikiran, who was in New York last week for a concert sponsored by the World Music Institute, told News India-Times that he would start working with the orchestra in October to coincide with the millennium festival to be held in six cities all over Britain.

"I will be composing a couple of pieces and also conduct some of them. Of course, I will also be playing for the orchestra and I consider it a privilege," he said.

As cultural director of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, he has completed choreography for a dance drama "Shankara Dikvijayan" on how Bhagwan Adi Shankarar's toured all over to propagate his Advaita philosophy. The dance-drama will be held all over the US from July, he added. "It will propagate the greatness of Adi Shankarar."

He is also planning to take the dance drama on a world tour depending on the response. Talented dancers from different schools would be chosen to take part in the dance drama, he added.

Ravikiran commenced a month-long concert tour of the US Feb 8 in Portland, Oregon, by participating at the Reid College's annual festival known as Romp. Ravikiran completed recordings for a Santa Barbara company

known as Water Lilly Acoustics.

He completed an album "Treasures of Thyagaraja" a Carnatic music composition for the company and the recording was covered by CNN along with his interview.

He is now touring Philadelphia, Portland again to play at the Eugene University, fund raiser at Cincinnati and Columbus for Orissa cyclone victims, Chicago and Detroit.

He is returning to the US again in April for the famous Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana festival conducted by Toronto Venkataraman. He is slated to play the main concert with noted composer-singer Balamurali Krishna and Flutist N. Ramani.

"It will be a unique combination of chitravina, flute and viola," he added.

He also played for "Race Of Romance" a California based World music group and played for an album called Silver Dagger produced in Los Angeles. He is now cutting one more album for the Nimbus Records, a classical Carnatic number by the end of the year.

Ravikiran has brought out another fusion album "Mumtaz Mahef" a fusion number with Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Taj Mahal, a jazz musician of African American heritage.

"All these albums were in the top five list and tens of thousands of the albums were sold. My latest album released is called Horizons."

To take carnatic music to never heights he has started a classical ensemble "Vintage Virtuosos" or Surya. It's a pure classical ensemble to produce masterpieces of Indian music because



Chitravina Ravikiran

different ragas such as Begada, Mukari, Mohanam and Kambodhi."

Founder of International Institute For Carnatic Music in Chennai, he provides scholarship to young artists and financial aid to aged artists who have no income. Besides, he takes classes for students all over the world. "I teach vocal, flute and chitravina to countless students in person and through the Internet."

Chitraveena is the oldest slide instrument in the world as we do not use fingers at all. It was probably 2,000 years old and lying dormant for years and on till he brought it to limelight.

His grandfather Gottuvadhyam Narayana Iyengar is a pioneer in Chitravina and father-cum-guru Narasimhan has taught him the music when he was 12 months old.

"My father never gives public any performances and he plays for himself. Sometime he would play even for eight hours at a stretch. But he had a dream that I should be a top public performer."

Ravikiran specializes in tele-teaching - coaching students in US and Australia with the help of Internet and audio tapes. He would ask them to play and make the necessary corrections. "I teach through the Internet and plan to start a Website soon to teach students anywhere in the world."

Ravikiran began a career in music literally when he was in cradle.

The world's youngest artist stunned everyone by identifying over 325 ragas (melodic scales) and 175 thalas (rhythm cycles) when he was just 24 months old. For him music was literally a child's play. The child prodigy invited inter-

national attention by his knowl-

edge of Carnatic music prompting the great Sitar maestro Pandit Ravishankar to comment: "If you don't believe in God, look at Ravikiran."

Ravikiran made his first public appearance in 1969 when he was two years old in Chennai. As a baby, he answered various technical questions in Carnatic music thanks to training by his father Chitravina Narasimhan.

Ravikiran commenced his career as a vocalist at the age of five attracting huge crowds and receiving rave reviews internationally. Ravikiran discovered a new raga Choodamani, named after his mother at the age of two. Since then, he has discovered many such new scales. Respected as a master-composer, he has composed in excess of 325 pieces in five languages.

Ravikiran is the only composer who has created compositions in each one of the 35 talas of the Carnatic music system. He achieved this in less than 30 days in his 30th year.

Ravikiran set music for a Kuchipudi ballet when was 15. His creation "Lakshmi Prabhavam" a three-hour operatic ballet won great acclaim from sellout audiences in more than 20 major cities in the United States in April-June 1997. His "Saaivithri" featuring traditional music in the first act and wordless music in contemporary style in the second act was also equally successful at the National Theater, Melbourne.

He was honored with his first title at the age of six and has since been the first or youngest to receive awards like Kumar Gandharva, Sangeetha Choodamani, Sangeet Samrat, Isai Peroli, Kalaimamani and Star Of India.

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