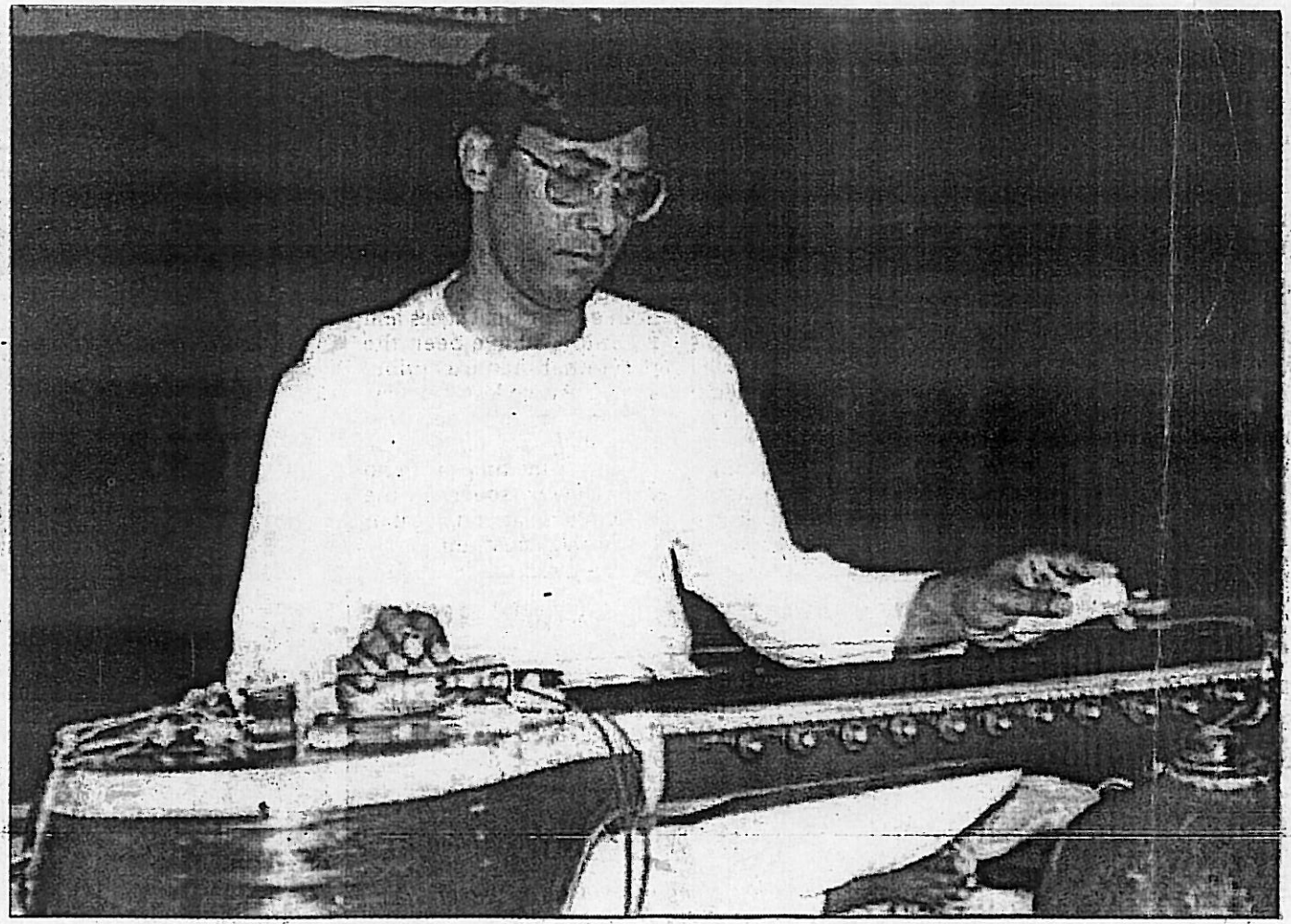
At the Millennium Music Festival, *Global Echoes*, in UK, Chitravina Ravikiran and his troupe were rated as this year's best performers



Strumming harmony

NATHALIA JONES

It is his childlike joviality and unsophisticated candour, that strikes you first when you meet Chitravina Ravikiran. Labelled a musical prodigy at the tender age of two (when he identified the *Choodamani* raaga, named after his mother), Ravikiran's genius captured audiences far and wide. His initiation into Indian Classical music began under the inspiring influence and guidance of his father, Narasimhan. Imbibing the teachings of his guru and developing a style born out of inherent talent, Ravikiran soon became one of India's best when it came to Carnatic music.

Initially, Ravikiran started as a vocalist (he gave his first performance when he was five years old). It was only when he was 12 years old, that he had taken up the Chitravina, which has now become his recognised sphere of excellence. Not confining himself to the sabhas in India, Kiran's mastery and his desire to take Carnatic music beyond the frontier, has had him featured in global events like, *Autumn Festival of France* (1985), *Cleveland Festival*, USA (1994 and 1997), *Brisbane International Festival*, Australia (1996) and others. But what was probably most rewarding in terms of his genius and the future of Carnatic music outside India was his recent achievement at the United Kingdom. At the millennium music festival, *Global Echoes*, organised jointly by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra group and Kalasangam, a South Asian Arts organisation in Bradford, overcoming the BBC artistes' initial apprehension, Ravikiran won their unanimous vote to render a fusion performance. Impressing audiences there too, like he did back home, Kiran and his troupe, were rated the best of this year's performers. "The BBC artists were so inspired by our music, that they wanted me to teach them some of the raagas. During such performances, you get a greater individuality, which is the essence of a unified effort. Moreover, this is a boon for classical music. The west are so enamoured by our Carnatic raagas that they grab opportunities like this." Reflecting on enriching classical cadences in our own homes, Ravikiran feels that, "sabhas need to attract new audiences".

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"Carnatic music, projects India's century old liberalism and it is through these ideals that we should open people's minds, to this rich music tradition, and rid them of misconceptions."

The fact that music is more a passion than just a profession is proved by his latest venture — he has started the Musician's Benevolent Fund, which provides incentives to aspiring and deserving musicians. Ravikiran has also authored two books, *Appreciating Carnatic Music* and *Perfecting Carnatic Music*, that provide an insight into the world of Carnatic music so that the layman can gain a better understanding and appreciation of this rich tradition.