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Tech savvy teams up with traditional music—far away from India, kids of Indian origin take to Karnatic music, learning through Skype, downloadable lessons, recordings for revisions, Whatsapp and Telegram. Alongside, there are face-to-face sessions in the US and summer sessions in India with their gurus. These novel methods transform the classical music world into one of shishyakulams, global gurus and shishyakulam portals, writes PRIYA SUBRAMANIAN

At 7 p.m. every Tuesday, all activities in my friend Rupa Iyer's household in Houston

come to a staggering halt. Dinner is cooking. Her children, Varsha (15), and Sanjeev (10), are still finishing up homework. But everything is shoved aside to get online. Time for their weekly music class with their teacher in Trichy, India. Rupa finds this the most convenient way to have her kids learn Karnatic music. No commuting involved! She is able to supervise their practice and even coordinates with other students in the suburb, to perform together at the nearby temple.

In Milwaukee, my cousin Srivathsan, believes his kids need face-to-face interaction with their music teacher, and drives them 45 minutes to violin lessons. Whatever the variety, teaching and learning Karnatic music in the US is here to stay. In fact, somewhere between spending hours online and vacations in India, US Karnatic idols are born. Today, the Indian American community has an abundance of talent, while also having the means to afford specialised training in any field. Fortunately for them, Karnatic teachers reciprocate with fiery passion in furthering the age-old art. It is not easy, given how different life is in the two continents. Add to that the pressures of academics and extracurricular activities. But once the music seeps into their lives and more importantly, mindsets, these children perfect the juggling act.

Chitravina Ravikiran, who back in 1996 conceptualised acharya.net (personalised lessons for students globally), says, "There is no dearth of talent, each generation is smarter than the previous. What is important is to provide direction to that talent." Today, his portal boasts of downloadable lessons from several stalwarts, and he supplements the technological advancements by traveling globally to spend one-on-one time with his promising students. Such personalised mentoring is a must, agrees Madurai Sundar, musician-teacher in Detroit. He believes music should not have any agenda and must completely be soaked in, and not just be viewed as an exercise in reading notations and reproducing sounds. He emphasises on the essence (bhavam) of music and encourages students to align to his style (bani), while at the same time, creating an individual identity.

That is how Vivrd Prasanna, the 13-year-old winner of Carnatic Music Idol 2014, emerged. Having started lessons at age 4, Vivrd moved around several California-based teachers. When he won the runner-up award for Idol 2013, Neyveli Santhanagopalan took him under his wing, offering online and phone lessons. Vivrd's father, Prasanna Ranganathan, feels his son was blessed to have also been able to spend time with the guru in India, which helped him imbibe subtle nuances.

Such rising stars are featured in the annual Cleveland Thyagaraja aradhana as well as the Chennai season, and several have taken to music as a profession. Los Angeles-based Karnatic vocalist Aditya Prakash launched his own ensemble, comprising jazz and other western musicians. While not performing at a Chennai sabha, Aditya composes and performs with his ensemble in the US. He feels that his still-ongoing Karnatic training, provides firm grounding and helps recognise the beauty of other genres. Aditya also trained in Hindustani music and toured with Pandit Ravishankar a few years ago.

The rising exposure to travelling artists and burgeoning of popular platforms like Cleveland, are in fact, huge contributors to US students getting a deeper understanding of the music, especially theory aspects. California-based violinist Anuradha Sridhar, from the Lalgudi family, feels she holds a very responsible position of transferring her lineage and continuing the guru-shishya legacy. To this extent, she is constantly improvising her teaching techniques to best retain tradition, and yet, customise it for her students. Having started out in a small studio 28 years ago, her Trinity Center of Music is now being converted into an online music university, to meet the rising demand for Karnatic music. Many of her senior students learn from recordings and send them back to her for revisions. Anu tops those with intense one-on-one sessions before key competitions and performances. Some students also proceed to India to take lessons from her mother Lalgudi Srimathi Brahmanandam.

The more serious pursuers spend all their vacations in India with their gurus. "Summer is the best part of the year as I don't have to worry about academics and all my time is spent in music which I absolutely love," chimes violinist Pavani Anupindi, a 9th grader, from New Jersey. A student of Vittal Ramamurthy, Pavani and other senior students are hosted by their guru in Chennai every summer. They spend 8-10 hours a day learning, teaching and performing in temples and sabhas. By interacting with teachers and local students, overseas kids get a true flavour of the music and enjoy a healthy exchange of ideas. For many who