



■ A full-length concert by Ravi Kiran at the age of six

terms as well. He could also identify more than 400 ragas and 175 talas with effortless ease.

The toddler wowed a packed gathering in Bangalore, answering questions from critics, musicians and connoisseurs and was soon featured at the Music Academy of Madras. The academy gave equal billing to the prodigy and maestros M.L. Vasantha Kumari and Balamurali Krishna in its advertisements. After his sensational debut, the academy announced a monthly allowance of Rs 50 for three years for Ravi Kiran.

At four, Ravi Kiran sent a packed audience in Bombay's Shanmukhananda Hall into raptures by identifying choice Carnatic ragas and talas. At six, the Brahma Gana Sabha featured Ravi Kiran at a prime time concert in 1973. The music critic of *The Hindu* wrote..."His command of laya was extraordinary for his age as his exposition of the Bhairavi ata tala varnam movements in misra and tisra nadai amply proved. Of course, the boy is totally uninhibited and

Ravi Kiran gets the same billing as Bismillah Khan or Ravi Shankar. Ravi Shankar once said: "If you do not believe in God, look at Ravi Kiran".



■ Ravi Kiran with his father Narasimhan

makes a very interesting and natural showman throwing his arms about and finger counting in the air in the manner of some old-time vidwans."

Talking about Ravi Kiran today, the same critic, N.M. Narayanan, who had expressed anxiety at the kind of publicity the child was getting, says: "Ravi Kiran is the greatest musical phenomenon in south India...Identification of ragas at the age of a year and a half and two was certainly an amazing phenomenon. If the gift had stopped with just recognising ragas and naming them, the phenomenon could have been named a musical freak. At six, Ravi Kiran gave full-length music concerts with stalwarts accompanying him. At the music academy, in a concert presented by Brahma Gana Sabha, he was accompanied by Madurai Krishna Iyengar on mridangam and Dwaram Mangathayaru on violin."

NMN was very much impressed by his performance and recalls that in that concert, "Ravi Kiran's swara singing was good as also his enunciation of sahitya. It was credible that the child showed mastery in vocal music. Generally child prodigies revel and thrive in instrumental music".

After the initial publicity blitz, Ravi Kiran's father decided to pull the reins. Narasimhan made his son devote all his time to music, a rigorous schedule of 5

a.m. to 10 p.m. Ravi Kiran was taught Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Sanskrit and the puranas and epics. He was also given lessons in mathematics. Ravi Kiran's all other waking hours were devoted to music. But because of severe criticism and an acute sense of guilt that his son was not having a normal childhood, Narasimhan sent Ravi Kiran to school at the age of 10.

"Oh! I had a normal childhood," says Ravi. "I played cricket, had many friends but my natural interest has always been music." Ravi