


'I'll pick an obedient student, to talented one'

By Priyanka S Rao | Express News Service | Published: 26th December 2017 11:04 PM |

Last Updated: 27th December 2017 08:23 AM | **A+ A A-** | 

BENGALURU:A mellifluous raga fills the room. The baritone of a man flows in rhythm with the poignant notes from a harmonium. Beats from the tabla join in, and then the violin. Your spirit lifts with the music, and for a while there is only music, music, music.



Meet one such voice – Pandit Sanjoy Banerjee. Sanjoy is one of the leading young musicians and composers of Hindustani classical music in the Kirana Gharana. A regular artist of All India Radio and Doordarshan, Sanjoy also enjoys being a successful teacher, with students in India, Bangladesh, Germany, the UK and the US. A well-known student of his is Grammy-nominated singer Chandrika Krishnamurthy Tandon, an NYU trustee and PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi's sister.

With a previous stint as a guru at the American Academy of Indian Classical Music in New York, Sanjoy currently teaches at his institution, Kolkata Suromurchhana and also at the Chhandayan Center of Indian Music in New York. He will soon be performing at Byrathi House in Namma Bengaluru. In a chat with City Express, Sanjoy shares his journey.

Having been born into a family of musicians, Sanjoy started showing signs of exceptional talent at the tender age of six. His aunt was an AIR light music singer and initiated him into music. Growing up listening to light music on the radio and television, Sanjoy soon started imitating the singers. It came naturally to him, he says. His talent blossomed despite not having a teacher. Soon, he started getting offers to sing for AIR and television.

Once, while at the AIR, he happened to listen to two maestros of Hindustani classical music – late Pandit A Kanan and late Sangeet Vidushi Malabika Kanan. It was a turning point in his life. Sanjoy had found his calling and, in 1989, he began his formal training under them. In 1995, he joined the prestigious ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata, to study in the guru-shisya parampara method. The secret to his success, he says, is being charged like a battery – ready to perform anywhere, anytime. What has been his biggest inspiration? “Getting to interact with and seek the blessings of musical stalwarts such as Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Ustad Allah Rakha, Ustad Rashid Khan, Gangubai Hangal and Pandit Jasraj,” he says.

Kirana Gharana and fusion

Talking about the genre then and now, he says though the standard of performances has not changed, the process has. “We must adapt,” he says. “Thanks to social media, there is a wider audience for our music and it is more appreciated now.” “The Gharana survives because of the popularity of its musicians (among them Bhimsen Joshi, Amjad Ali Khan and Gangubhai Hangal) and its melody. People connect to it,” he adds. “India is known for music and spirituality. I wish the government did more to promote classical music. It should be a part of the education syllabus, like in the west. There are scores of musicians who don’t get their due,” he says.

On fusion, he says: “When the emotions of one genre connect with the emotions of the other, it results in true fusion. I also enjoy ghazals and western music. I spent a lot of time listening to musicians in New York’s subway stations. They are highly talented and I enjoy it a lot.” “The audience in the west is well-informed. I like performing for them. They even request for ragas. Here, those who attend Hindustani music concerts are few,” he says with a touch of regret.

‘A good student is a good performer’

“Talent is not everything. My Guru used to say don’t give me talented students, give me obedient ones. They fare much better. They practice a thousand times and hence become successful. Be a good student, then you will be a good performer, my guru used to say,” he shares. “Today, there are a lot of diversions. You need talent, patience and perseverance to excel. Also, earlier, the guru just had 3-4 students. During my time, it was just me and one other student scholar learning at ITC SRA. Today, there are 400-500 students so attention does get divided,” he adds. “Bengaluru is a multi-cultural city that has a lot of good musicians. Hindustani music is well-received here. I am looking forward to performing in the city,” he signs off.

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