

The Year That Was...

CLASSICAL MUSIC: Quest for the Kolkata stamp

Priyanka Dasgupta
Times News Network

Indian classical musicians may be performing at the Carnegie Hall in New York or even enthralling Prince Charles at his Highgrove residence. But all of them harbour a dream of performing in front of the Kolkata audience. If the city gives them recognition, it is an achievement of a different order altogether. And not just that, maestros, many of whom have long shifted base from the city, still love to come back to play for Kolkata. And the maestros include the likes of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Pt Vilayat Khan, Pt Bhimsen Joshi, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Ustad Zakir Hussain, to name just a few.

One of the proud moments for the city was when Ustad Vilayat Khan chose Kolkata as the venue for handing over the first Ustad Inayat Khan Memorial Award to Pt Bhimsen Joshi and Ustad Bismillah Khan on March 23.

Another programme that deserves mention was Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's recital at the ITC Sangeet Sammelan in February. Sharing the stage with Ustad Ali Akbar Khan was ustadji's 18-year-old Alame Music Conference a couple of days before enthralled the audience again at Kalamandir.

All roads led to the Calcutta Club on December 7 when music lovers thronged to listen to Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Ustad Zakir Hussain's performance after a gap of some years. The *sitar* and *sarod jugalbandi* of Shahid Parvez and Tejendra Narayan Majumdar on the same day was also impressive. A week later, the Sabrang music conference brought together Ustad Raza Ali Khan, Jawad Ali Khan and Mazhar Ali Khan (the grandsons of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan) on stage for the first time in music history.

This year also saw many city based musicians performing all over India and abroad. The Bath music festival invited two musicians from the city. In fact, Tejendra Narayan Majumdar accompanied by Tanmoy Bose on the *tabla* were the only two Indian musicians performing at the festival on May

26. Bose also accompanied Pt Ravi Shankar and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan at concerts in Carnegie Hall. He performed at the CNN World beat show.

Pt Ajoy Chakraborty, along with his daughter Kausiki, was invited by the members of the Raja Radha Reddi to perform at the Kutum Parampara festival on September 13. It was the first occasion when the two were singing different *ragas* simultaneously and that too at two different scales. "We sang *Shudh Kalyan* on B flat and *Sampurna Malkaush* on D scale. While western musicians often attempt that while singing in a choir, this has never been done in classical music," Kausiki said. However, the WTC crash upset foreign tour schedules of many musicians of the city. Pt Ajoy Chakraborty's tour of England and the US and Tejendra Narayan Majumdar's US and Canada tour had to be cancelled.

While disappointments were there, there were moments of joy too when Pt Shankar Ghosh, Malabika Kanan and Pt Ajoy Chakraborty were awarded the Sangeet Natak Academy award. A landmark project with Pt Shankar Ghosh's Kolkata Raga Rhythm Band playing in unison with jazz supremo Dzango Bates' band was floated by the Asian Music Circuit, London, this year.

While senior artists continue to win critical acclaim, some promising youngsters performing in pure classical and semi-classical genres have also hogged the limelight. *Tabla* maestro Bikram Ghosh, who has become a familiar name, conceived a three part OM concert in the band format. His Cross Borders show, though a private do, had almost all music aficionados coming down to Poddar Lawns on December 16. Twenty five-year-old Purbayan Chatterjee was invited by Pt Kishen Maharaj and Pt Jasraj to perform at Varanasi and Hyderabad.

And as the year drew to a close, musicians gathered again and this time it was at Ustad Rashid Khan's residence. The occasion was the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Shakhri Begum Memorial Trust proving once again that for a just cause city musicians are always ready to lend a helping hand in unison.



TALKING POINTS

■ **USTAD IN'AYAT KHAN MEMORIAL AWARD WÁS CONFERRED ON PT BHIMSEN JOSHI AND USTAD BISMILLAH KHAN:** On receiving the award in Kolkata, Bhimsenji said, "This award means more than the Bharat Ratna".

■ **SANGEET NATAK AWARD:** Pt Shankar Ghosh, Ajoy Chakraborty and Malabika Kanan receive the award.

■ **USTAD RASHID KHAN'S TRUST:** Foundation stone of the Shakhri Begum Memorial Trust was

laid. Ustad Rashid Khan plans to set up a *gurukul* soon.

■ **BATH MUSIC FESTIVAL:** Tejendra Narayan Majumdar and Tanmoy Bose are the only two Indian musicians to perform at this prestigious concert.

THE FIRST NOTE



Pandit Swapan Chakraborty (left) in conversation with Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty after the launch of Kaushiki Chakraborty's album *A Journey Begins* at MusicWorld on Tuesday. Picture by Aranya Sen

Calcutta Times

Solo Kaushiki's sterling show

KAUSHIKI got to know that she would be performing solo at RABINDRA SADAN just four days before Wednesday. The 20 something daughter of Pt Ajoy Chakraborty rushed back from Durgapur to prepare herself for a four-hour-long solo recital. And when Kaushiki's programme ended late on Wednesday evening, there were few who could refrain from praising her.

"The programme was organised for raising funds for Gujarat. Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and my father had also performed for the same cause. I feel lucky to be chosen to sing for such a concert," she said.

Kaushiki's mature presentation left the audience spellbound. She sang compositions in *raag Imran*, *Hariswadhani* and *Rageshri*. Not for a moment did the audience get an inkling that she was performing solo for the first time. "During the first 10 minutes, I was very conscious. That's the time when the tempo had to be set. That done, I was completely at ease," she said.

Her father had taught her a

Subrata Kr. Mondal



PROFESSIONAL: Kaushiki Chakraborty with Ajoy Chakraborty

thumri based on *Maajhi Kharraj* on Tuesday evening. "Initially, *Baba* had taught me *Aaye na baitari*. But I decided to sing another *thumri* of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan *saab*. I was really tense before I sang that *thumri*."

Kaushiki presented *taans* at lightning speed and aptly modulated her voice to express the subtle nuances of the lyrics. It was a delightful experience, listening to her father playing the harmonium while she sang in full-throated ease.

"This is a very common exercise for us at home. It's fun trying to match what *Baba* plays on the harmonium," she said. Samar Saha, who had also accompanied her father at the Nandan concert, gave a sterling performance on Wednesday.

Veteran stage personality Ketaki Dutta and author Joy Goswami, who attended the concert, were visibly pleased with the recital. Kaushiki concluded her recital with two *bhajans* — a Tulsidas composition and another set to tune by her father.

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Music flows in her veins

NAVIEN NAMBOODIRI

Billed as the singer-to-be of the 21st century by Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Kaushiki Chakraborty has already hit big time both here and abroad. However unassuming she is, Kaushiki makes no effort to glori: "Being the daughter of a prominent musician gave me the initially-needed platform. This is the prerogative of a few." Daughter of Pandit Ajay Chakraborty, 20-year-old Kaushiki has managed to carry on her father's legacy and do him proud.

Lineage is not, however, Kaushiki's only claim to fame, those who have attended her concerts will tell

memorable. There she shared the stage with her father, as did other maestros of classical music like Ravi Shankar and Shiv Kumar Sharma.

Some of her home concerts include those for the ITC Sangeet Sammelan, Salt Lake Cultural Association, Dover Lane Music Conference, and Sur Singur, Bangalore. She has also released Footsteps, an album of khayals, by Music Today.

Kaushiki is aware of the expectations that hinge on her. "I have had to live with unfair comparisons all my life. But, now I have learnt to take them in my stride." The clue to her success, she says, is a grueling daily six-hour session of *riyaz*.



Kaushiki Chakraborty, daughter of Pandit Ajay Chakraborty, is making her mark in the world of music

you. They would not have given her a patient listening if it were not for her extraordinary talent and her honeyed voice.

Kaushiki struck out on her own as a child. "I have sung very few concerts along with my father," she says. And unlike many child prodigies who wane away like shifting sand, Kaushiki matured with time and developed into a front-ranking performer. She began formal training under her mother Chandna Chakraborty. Later, she honed her skills under Guru Jnan Prakash Ghosh and Pandit Ajay Chakraborty, while studying at the Sangeet Research Academy.

International recognition came her way during the late eighties when she made trips to USA, Canada, and Europe. One such concert in Los Angeles was

One of the central tenets of Kaushiki's music is voice culture. "It is not right to typecast one into groves like classical or light musician. An ideal voice should be capable of adapting to any style. This is one of the reasons why I decided to try popular music," she says.

Kaushiki has sung for A. R. Rahman's *Vande Mataram* and the yet-to-be released *Water* of Deepa Mehta. Rahman provided her with no background music, but asked her to sing different variations for the given tune. "I sang all the variations I could conceive of. It was like rediscovering myself," she smiles.

An MA Philosophy student, she is also keen on writing. But for now it is music that her world revolves around.



Rare gems unearthed

MUSIC

Anshuman Bhowmick

Kaushiki Chakraborty's delineation of raga Malkauns was the high point of Uttarpada Sangeet Chakra's 46th annual session on the Jaikrishna Public Library ground. She opened the second night-long session on January 26 with *Koelia bole* in vilambit ektal. The *bhava* of the mid-night raga was articulated in the delicately woven *bol-alaap* section. Melancholy strains of the summer bird found ample treatment in the restrained use of *gamaks* and every utterance of *biraha* was meshed with a tinge of sorrow thanks to effective use of glides. She unleashed a flurry of crooked phrases to elevate the aesthetic appeal of Malkauns in the drut kheyal. The memorable recital concluded with a soul-stirring dadra celebrating Holi.

The conference began on January 25 with Ustad Ali Ahmed Hussain and Pandit Barun Pal playing a rare jugalbandi between shehnai and hansa-veena. Their 90-minute long delineation of raga Maru Behag was remarkable for a spell-binding exchange which ended the *alaap*.

Raga Darbari Kanara came alive vividly in Pandit Manas Chakraborty's imaginative recital, notable for his crooked *tankari*. Pandit Buddhadeb Dasgupta's elaboration of raga Bhairon-Bahar was remarkable for a prolonged *alaap* that brought out the intricacies of the compound raga. These rarely heard *rugas* made the session a treat for the ears. Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar came up with another rare gem, raga Komal Rishav Ashavari.

The sole dance performance was by Dr Malavika Mitra. Her technical brilliance and academic approach in tracing the origins of Kathak kept the connoisseurs riveted.

Teenage prodigy's dazzling recital

Kaushiki Chakravarty sings in a voice that slices through every kind of musical situation, one that seeks to build a tonal arch on near or distant notes that scampers in through a host of swaras in a twinkle, writes Prakash Wadhwa.



What is a miracle — the occurrence of an unusual phenomenon, contrary to one's expectations, norms and experience like the night bird (owl) hooting in the day? It is more common to hear of a miracle than to see it. But when in reality a miracle happens, you are likely to rub your eyes in disbelief. If the miracle persists, you look aghast and bewildered at its occurrence. In the past few days art-lovers in the Capital went through a veritable musical miracle when a chit of a Calcutta girl in her mid-teens played havoc with the credulity of an audience of connoisseurs and keen listeners of music by putting up a recital of vocal music which was too good to be true and which they are not likely to forget for a long time. This was 16-year-old Kaushiki Chakravarty who provided the curtain-raiser to the three-day 27th annual ITC Sangeet Sammelan at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

If there is something in a name, that of Kaushiki has enough music in it. The name seems to ring like one of the 22 shrutis or microtones of the musical octave all of which conjure up the vision of a bevy of young damsels of enchanting beauty. Kaushiki Chakravarty is born of no ordinary parents. Both of them are musicians of renown and eminence. She is the daughter of the accomplished Ajoy Chakravarty. I had heard tidings of her exceptional talent. However, to face her music in person was an altogether different experience.

As the puny thing sat on the stage, one was struck by her innocence, a kind of unmindfulness of the importance of the forum on which she preceded stars like Zakir Husain, Hart Prasad Chaurasia, Rashid Khan, Veena Sahasrabudhe, N. Rajam and Tejendra Narayan — an instance of unconscious wearing of genius. Shortly after her 75-minute-long recital I chanced to see Kaushiki in the corridor in a half-playful demure. Spontaneously, I kept my distance and eyed her as one eyes a celebrity. How small a role did age seem to play in the recognition and size of one's talent! Did not her sweet innocence make her music sound sweeter?

For the past 12 years she has been learning from her father, Ajoy, while earlier Kaushiki received lessons from the late Gyan Ghosh and her own mother Chandra. One could as well say, she was born with a 'musical spoon' in her mouth. Accompanied by Ajoy Chakravarty on the harmonium and Samar Saha on the tabla, Kaushiki initiated her dazzling recital with none too yielding a raga — Kedar. If she cared for softer options she could have easily chosen straighter, more commodious ragas like Purviya Kalyan or Baram. Maybe she wanted to prove a point by

An exceptional talent... Kaushiki Chakravarty, who can create a musical miracle.

opting for a 'Vakra' raga that follows the 'one step forward and one backward' rule. And this she did most conclusively. She sings in a voice that, as if, butters through every kind of musical situation, the one that seeks to build a one-piece tonal arch on near or distant notes or the other that scampers through a whole host of swaras in a twinkle. Her use of the grace-notes (Kana swaras) lazily or with a whiff-like alacrity is of the daintiest.

Her honeyed voice maintains a broad open 'aakar' giving no quarter to any kind of curb or repression without ever lessening its euphony or appeal. The management of the voice and the manner of articulation, as in the case of her father and guru Ajoy take after the Patiala style. But in Kaushiki's gayaki, the Patiala style, which is so exclusively dominant in Ajoy, seems to be rather subservient, succinct and if at all, incidental. Traces of other styles as, for instance, of the Shehaswan Rampur of Nisar Husain Khan in a usage like Pa Dha Pa, Sa Ri Sa, Pa Dha Pa are visible. Maybe with the benefit of hindsight, Ajoy's wisecounsel prevailed in deciding Kaushiki's style.

Personally I would have liked her to grab as much of the Patiala gayaki as possible and to expound it in its pure form not only to give it an added lease of life but also to regale the music lovers of his country in the form of a second Meera Banerjee (the great exponent of yesteryears of Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's gayaki).

All this, however, in no way detracts from Kaushiki's tremendous achievement, appeal and potential. While the swaras and their avowedly accurate tonalities are the same in all artistes who attain a certain level of competence of the efficacy of the swaras which is inter-related with the quality and kind of the voice, its manoeuvrability, range and 'Riyaz', the urge and intensity of expression, the nature of musical idioms vis-a-vis the raga, varies. The appeal of Kaushiki's swaras with their unerring tune in all octaves accrues from a sum total of all these factors.

The treatment of Kedar was replete with many gems of smart execution. A saturated Tar Shadja attained through one single swoop from Ma Pa was hurled back to the point of its origin in a winsome flash from

Sa Dha Pa Ma. A movement of considerable lyrical beauty emerged when the vocalist thrice went over a finely spaced Ma Pa. Ma Pa like one peering down and assessing before venturing out into the neighbourhood. Another resulted from her descending down to the base Pancham and in a smart fling, linking it with the Madhya Pancham — a dart-like movement with the same Pancham note at both ends in perfect tune. Tarrying over the Shuddh Nishada in idioms like Ma Pa Dha Ni was quite arresting besides reminding of Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's well-loved ways.

One remembers having heard a subtler, more implied use of Komal Nishada in Kedar than the one made by Kaushiki. I must as well confess to a feeling of a conscious attempt on the part of the singer to tether the raga to the Madhyama Pancham region to buy the small raga more space and time. The vilambit thus far had furnished a conclusive peep into Kaushiki's beautiful, sentient mind. But what followed — sargams and tanas — displaying an admirable hug and jostle with the laya, revealed the other side of her extraordinary gifts and technical acumen. Tanas with a lightning speed whizzing past the octaves, some even soaring beyond Tar Pancham mesmerised the entire audience which was unanimous in its view that they had never heard anything like this before from one so tender of age.

Among the happiest persons was Samar Saha, Kaushiki's tabla player — one of the most graceful and best — who revelled in the young vocalist's uncanny rhythmic sense and was inspired to elegant solo improvisations.

MUSIC

Any tune in a raga like Kedar is a tough job, ever more so the arohi tana which has to abide by the irregular gait of the raga.

Kaushiki's one such superfast tana taking off with Sa Sa Ma Ga Pa Ma Dha Pa was a marvel of her executional ability. It looked like a rosary of fine beads. The fluency and finesse of tanas and sargams, the immaculate and precise 'Aamads' and the flawless use of laya foretold of the shape of things to come and the heights Kaushiki Chakravarty is destined to gain. A slow composition in Jhap tala was followed by two in Teen tala. And these paved the way for a thumri in Khamaj concealed in the garb of Gara. In rhythm as in its temper, it was midway between a thumri and a dadra. But it was adorned with all the traditional usages of Khamaj. The influence of Girja Devi was clearly visible in many of them especially those employing 'Tappa ornamentations. More importantly, it showed that her imagination was not wanting in imagery, colour and lyricism.

Vocals at heart of Indian music

By Elijah Wald
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Americans, and Westerners in general, have had a problem accepting or understanding Indian classical music. The style received some popular attention in the 1960s, but largely as an exotic sound, the jangle of a sitar playing long, drawn-out improvisations that most non-Indians found formless and obscure. Part of the problem is that the music has usually been heard only on recordings, robbing listeners of the passionate immediacy of a live Indian concert.

Another is that the music has almost always been played on strange instruments, further distancing Western listeners even as it fascinates them. To go to the heart of Indian music, one should hear not only the instrumentalists but the singers, yet few have toured the United States. Fortunately, the next weeks bring two fine vocal concerts: Sunday evening, Pandit Ajay Chakrabarty and his 17-year-old daughter, Koushiki, are at Harvard's Sackler Auditorium (508-468-2289), and on Nov. 2, Laxmi Shankar is at MIT's Wong Auditorium (258-7971).

Chakrabarty, who is an acclaimed soloist and a member of the music faculty at the Sangeet Research Academy in Calcutta, is quick to stress the importance of the vocal tradition. "All Indian music is essentially vocal music," he says. "Because all the instrumentalists you are listening to in this time, they have all learned by singing. Their gurus start them by singing, not by playing. First, you are singing within yourself, and then you are trying to transmit it through your instrument."

"Also, in Indian music, or in any music, you have three important things. One is the rhythm, one is note, melody—in Indian music this is raga—and third the lyric. And all these elements together are available only in vocal music."

Of course, the constraints of delivering a lyric can limit the ornate improvisation that is so notable in Indian instrumental music, but Chakrabarty says that there are ways around this. "When you are doing the ornamental part, you will try a very general type of lyric, and then when you are doing the slower tempo, the alap, then you should have the feeling and the pulse of the composition you are singing."

"Actually, with the vocal you can



emphasize more than with instrumental performance, because you have the help of the lyric also. Whereas the instrumentalist can just play 'Da dee dec da da,' I have a lyric, saying 'Where my friend has gone, I don't know, I am trying to find him.' I can correlate this with the raga multani, and that helps in singing multani, which is full of sorrows and pathos."

Chakrabarty started his musical studies at age 3 and has become the principal transmitter of the style of Bade Gulam Ali Khan, perhaps the most respected singer of the previous generation. Chakrabarty explains that Khan, and most of the other great vocalists of his time, were terrified of flying and thus refused all offers to tour the West. As a result, their work was overshadowed outside India by that of instrumentalists like Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan.

"Instrumental music started taking the most prestigious place," he says. "And then, I must say that the standard of vocalists was a little bit declined. Indian music is essentially a solo music. In every performer, your own thinking, your personal contribution is always added to what you have learned and the way you have been taught. And the basic and fundamental education you need, maybe you don't find in everybody in any time."

The 1950s and '60s, he feels, were an age of instrumentalists, inspired by Ali Akbar Khan's father, Allaudin Khan. However, he believes, this generation of virtuoso soloists is leaving few heirs. "Normally our musicians are very busy with their own performance and they are not much interested in making the next



Koushiki Chakrabarty (above), 17, sings classical Indian music with her father, Pandit Ajay Chakrabarty (left), at Harvard.

generation," he says. "And that is the most important part of Indian music. If you want to be a master [teacher], then you will have to sacrifice your playing or singing. And this is the most difficult job in the Indian music scenario."

Chakrabarty, though a well-known concert soloist, has devoted most of his time to teaching. He has recently inaugurated a sort of musical elementary school, where some 560 children from 5 to 12 years old are learning the basics of the classical style. He also has a half-dozen close disciples, among whom the most prominent is daughter Koushiki.

"She is coming to sing with me," he says. "And when you will listen to her, you will be able to understand what kind of rigorous practice is necessary, from the very, very early age. I started teaching her at the age of 2. Because, if you don't start at a very early age, you will not get the result until you are very old. Rigorous practice of at least 25 to 30 years is needed to become a high standard of performer."

Koushiki is the first to agree, saying that she does not yet consider herself a mature singer. Nonetheless, at 17, she has already received awards and good reviews from Indian critics. On the phone, she is shy, and responds to interview questions with the fewest possible words. However, she leaves no doubt about her aims in life. "From my childhood," she says, "I have only wanted to be a singer. I don't have any other subject which I love more than music."