

**M**y association with Veenatai and her family dates back to my childhood as I grew up in IIT Kanpur. I had my initial training in music from her late brother Kashinath Shankar Bodas. When I moved to Pune for further studies after school, Veenatai became a natural choice for me as a guru. I have had the privilege of spending countless hours in one to one training sessions from her everyday and also travelling with her and providing vocal support in many of her concerts in India, in itself a great learning experience for me.

Her father was a performer of high calibre and yet he devoted his life to teaching and propagating music. Veenatai inherited this devotion of teaching from him. She taught at the institutional level as Head of the Music Department at SNTD Women's University in Pune in the late 1980s and also imparted training to a chosen few in her home. I recall a lecture demonstration session organised by Gaanvardhan in Pune where she beautifully explained the concepts of raga, alap, bandish and vistar with great clarity.

Her voice was unmatched. She was gifted with a powerful and captivating voice which traversed easily in the mandra, madhya and tara saptak. I was also witness to, how well she used her voice, her attention to the minute details of voice projection and her ability to employ modulation, which contributed in a big way into making her music expressive and emotionally rich. Her brother Kashinath Bodas or Tatyta to all of us, was an exceptional

Ranjani with her guru



Accompanying Veena

vocalist and composer. Fourteen years older to Veenatai, he was almost a father figure to her. Musically, they shared a special bond. She would go on to sing and popularise many of his compositions in both classical and semi-classical genres including bhajans and slokas.

Kumar Gandharva was a regular visitor in the Bodas household in Kanpur as he was very respectful of Veenatai's father Shankar Sripad Bodas. Veenatai and her brother were greatly attracted to the gayaki of Kumar Gandharva. Her voice throw, understanding the subtlety of sur and singing of nirguni bhajans in her inimitable style, were attributes of this influence. Through her familial lineage Veenatai belonged to the Gwalior gharana, especially the Paluskar style of vocalism, but she had a distinctive gayaki because of the myriad influences of other musicians. She also briefly learnt from Gajananbua Joshi and had great admiration for Kishori Amonkar's gayaki. Veenatai sang in a laya which was slower in tempo than the traditional Gwalior laya because, as she often said, this would allow her to explore a raga in a more leisurely manner.

Veenatai had a strong grasp of Hindi and Sanskrit. She had a masters degree in Sanskrit. While singing, understanding the lyrics of the bandish and clarity in pronunciation helped her in establishing an instant rapport with her listeners. Although she sang traditional compositions, Veenatai had a penchant for collecting bandishes of different contemporary composers, studying and then singing them, or rather making them her own. She enjoyed the process of interpreting a bandish from its notated form. She rendered bandishes by Balwantrao Bhatt, Vasant Thakar, Shankar Abhyankar and Kumar Gandharva amongst many others. She herself composed

many bandishes (vilambit and drut khayals), taranas (she was especially attracted to this genre) and a few bhajans. Her brother was a prolific composer of many genres including khayal, tarana, bhajan and geet. Veenatai published a book named *Nad-Ninad* which is a compilation of all the bandishes (khayal and tarana) composed by her father, brother and herself.

As a performer, Veenatai was very meticulous and would prepare well in advance for her concerts. Right from choosing the raga and bandish (including vilambit and drut khayal) and tarana, everything was well thought out. There would always be a keenness to sing something new in every performance be it a raga (which she had not rendered before) or a bandish. Her renditions of taranas in the rarely heard tala Adachoutala, have been greatly appreciated. For her Sangeet Praveen from the Gandharva Maha Vidyalaya, her thesis was on tarana, of which she was one of the finest exponents. Oonce, she was preparing to sing the raga Kaunsi Kanada for a concert in Mumbai. She sang a beautiful drut bandish *Sochata kaahe manavaa* composed by Ramashreya Jha. She composed and also sang a vilambit khayal and a tarana in drut Teental in the same raga. To this day, I recall how both of us practised a set of taans which Veenatai had especially written for the tarana. This was in the late 1990s when she was already a very successful concert performer and yet, there was no casualness in her approach. While being so thoroughly prepared for her concerts, she did not lose the spontaneity in her music.

Veenatai was equally sought after for her soulful bhajan renditions – both sagun and nirgun bhajans. Apart from solo performances, she also successfully conducted group productions of which she wrote the script and selected appropriate compositions: *Ritu Sangeet* (included slokas and compositions based on each of the six seasons) and *Krishna Sandhya* (songs on the life of

Lord Krishna composed by her father). I enjoyed being a part of both these productions and will always cherish the memories of the long rehearsals before the performance and wonderful response from the audience.

As a teacher, she was totally dedicated. On most occasions during the period I learnt from Veenatai between 1993 till 2001, I would be invariably learning the raga that she was preparing for her forthcoming concert. In many of these concerts since I was providing vocal support, this method of training helped me in building up a large repertoire of both ragas and compositions. Since she herself adopted such an eclectic mode of training, whether direct or indirect, she always encouraged me to listen and appreciate the music of other musicians. While teaching, Veenatai was a hard taskmaster and it would not be rare to find her make us repeat a single musical phrase or a taan pattern numerous times till she thought it was perfect. She was a generous guru who took a keen interest in the progress of her students.

As a person, she was affectionate (always with a ready smile on her face), had a positive approach towards everything in life and I particularly admired her will power; she was a perfectionist in every sense. It will always remain an unforgettable memory for me to be conferred the Ramkrishnabua Vaze Yuva Gayak Puraskar on the same day in December 2013 when my guru vidushi Veena Sahasrabudde was awarded the Vinayakbua Patwardhan Jeevan Gaurav Puraskar by Gandharva Maha Vidyalaya in Pune.

She will be missed immensely but her music lives on as a huge body of music publications are available, and also through many of her students, admirers and connoisseurs.

(The author, a Hindustani vocalist, has a doctorate in vocal music and teaches at Sangit Bhavana, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan)



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AUG 20 J Productions and Dur Se Brothers

THE GOD OF CARNAGE

AUG 21 QTP

VENUE  
Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall,  
Harrington Road, Chelpet  
TIME 7.30pm

AAYIRATHIRU IRAVUGAL

AUG 25 Theatre Zero

MUNDHIRIKOTTE

AUG 27 Guduguduppakari

VANDI CHODAI

AUG 28 Koothupattarai

VENUE  
Museum Theatre,  
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AUG 19 QTP

12 ANGRY JURORS

AUG 20 Rage Productions

DEAR LIAR

AUG 21 Motley

VENUE  
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TIME 7.30pm

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YATAGARASU

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VENUE  
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