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By M.Rajini

Lalita Sharma is an acclaimed Hindustani music singer and a star student of the Maestro Padma Bhushan Pandit Jasraj. Once, a proficient singer in Classical music, she made a seamless transition to Hindustani music. She immerses herself in the high octaves of Hindustani music while her heart revolves around the Divine. In her tete-a-tete with *Adyar Times*, she opens up her heart on music, music and music...

When did your journey start.

I was born and brought up in Calcutta; my parents however hailed from Tanjore. I did my B.A. in Music from University of Madras in 1990. I enjoyed Classical music till I was 27. Then I went back to Calcutta, where I happened to hear a Hindustani concert on the radio. The singer was weaving through the swaras so efficiently. It was gripping music and I found that the singer was Pt. Jasraj. Like love at first sight, it was love at first concert.

How did you manage to become his disciple.

I met him at a wedding and sought his blessings. At a second meeting he asked me to sing a krithi and his own song. I did. The next time we were at a wedding, he introduced me to his friends as his new student. I knew then what Cloud Nine feels like.

You have established schools in the USA. How was it possible.

Music enthusiasts from USA requested Pandit to set up classes there. He sent me to Tampa, Florida. I stay with the host and build up the class. When there are enough students we would find a space for the school and get it going. It was hard work and sometimes I would have classes for 5 hours. Similarly, I set up music schools in Atlanta and Los Angeles. I spent 10

years in the US.

What is the difference in Carnatic and Hindustani music

Music has no language. It is just what you hear and how it stirs your soul. Both have common ragas, but how you approach them is different. In Hindustani we can do an *alapana* for an hour. We dwell on the raga in low and medium speed and then gain momentum. We follow a pyramid structure and build up the raga to a crescendo. Singing slowly and holding a *sur* for long is difficult. But there lies the beauty of Hindustani music - melodious and meditative. We have the *padham*, *javali* and *thillana* here too. In place of *Mridangam* we use *Tabla*, in place of *Violin*, the *Sarangi*.

What is the instrument you hold in your hand during concerts.

That is the *Harp* or the *Swaramandal*. It has 36 strings and we set it to the raga we are going to elaborate on. Once we tune it, the raga flows and engulfs you and takes you and the audience to a different world.

I am curious to know why you made the transition to Hindustani.

It is a very personal experience. My mother was seriously ill and I had to run in and out of hospitals. I could not bear the thought of her leaving me. My parents were my best friends and were so understanding when I announced that there was no single atom in me which craved for marriage. My father just told me that God is there to guide me and I should follow my passion.

During that period I lost the urge to sing. I only listened to music. Hindustani filled that void and I lost myself in the fluid ragas. The *sarod* and *sitar* gave me solace and I gravitated towards it. I am happy that I have mastered both and I try to etch out the parallels between both the streams of music in my concerts.

LALITA SHARMA Singer



What is Swaraangan

That is my school for Hindustani Music, a Mewati Gurukul, where I hope to bring all the singers in one fold, hold workshops, and invite doyens to perform here. As of now we hear Hindustani only at *Jugalbandhis*. I want to create more space here for that style.

Lalita Sharma resides at Thiruvanniyur and can be contacted at 89390 95026, lalita.sharma@gmail.com.



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