

“A time to relook and relish the music”

It is hard to fathom Bombay Jayashri, as she said once, “My music will tell you more about me than I ever could”. Indeed, her recent music says a lot about the diversity of her art, as well as the churning inside.

On the one hand is her hit song *Ororo novin kanalilum* from the film *Kolambi*; wistful and poignant. There is the soulful, spiritually uplifting Sanskrit Dhanvantari sloka she sang recently for a US-based charity, and the lullaby in Brajhasha, *Palnaa mein lalnaa*. There is also Dikshitar’s soul searing *Jambupatey*, which she sang along with her talented son Amrit, for an online offering in April 2020 at the age old Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh in Banaras, with no accompaniment other than her self-played tambura—the majesty and magic of that rendition is unforgettable.

Eager to please her audience, principled in her musical offerings, moored to maintaining the rigid confines of presentation in the Carnatic tradition, yet open to absorbing musical influences, Jayashri both bewilders and beguiles. An artist who has boldly soared in her musical experiments, Jayashri has perhaps not shown the same abandon in the classical arena as yet.

Her ability to absorb subtle nuances of music of different types has created a style of music which is uniquely her own. Her ability to surrender to the music to elicit the unexplored from within herself is clearly evident; her chosen path in her musical journey was by no means conventional, yet so successful, that you feel that her best years musically are yet to come.



HARIHARAN SANKARAN

Catching her in a reflective mood, the highly reserved Jayashri opened up about the months of the pandemic and the lockdown.

“This pandemic has literally brought us down to our knees, in the sense one is able to think of what mistakes we may have made regarding our behaviour to Earth, how insensitive we have been. I feel it is some kind of a lesson the Universe is trying to teach us and I really hope we learn.

“With the time at hand, I have been able to relook the compositions I learnt long ago—*Neelotpalambikaya* (Kannadagaula) is one, a varnam in Todi without the panchama, an extremely beautiful Khamas varnam

Bombay Jayashri in conversation with Shailaja Khanna

my father taught us—in fact some of these old compositions I have only heard in my family! Such prized possessions, when we all sing together, my eyes are moist with tears. I am so grateful that this pandemic has given me the time to relish and savour these blessings. Today, when I sing in front of my mother, who has been my support in every way, or my brother, who has been like my guru, they are able to point out a few changes.

“Another blessing is, leafing through the old books I have—one as old as 1921, one priced at Rs. 3, hand-written notes bound together—I marvel at these treasures. In all the hurry and

scurry of running from one concert to the other, thinking we were achieving something, I don’t really know what we were achieving! My gurus have written some compositions for me; they would say, ‘Give it to me, I’ll write the song for you, you won’t write it neatly’. Things like that which I had forgotten in the mad rush of life! *Jo zindagi ke raftaar mein, main bhool gayi thi*.

“In the past years I was perhaps thinking more of what to perform where! I have not been able to think of the music with the deep intensity I would have liked, to delve into the raga as much as I would have liked. I find, the more I go in depth, it’s never ending! Whether it is a raga or composition, or tala structure, there are so many things that suddenly hit me—Oh, my guru did say this to me, this is what I learnt then! What happens when we are caught in the normal race of life is that we forget to really think of what we learnt, we forget to internalise.