

MUSIC >>

ARTISTE Extraordinaire!

A TORCHBEARER OF ONE OF THE OLDEST TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC, THE RAMPUR SENIA GHARANA, SAHANA BANERJEE, A SITARIST, TAKES AHEAD THE LEGACY OF HER PARENTS. CITADEL CHATS WITH THE IMMENSELY TALENTED ARTISTE TO UNRAVEL HER MUSICAL JOURNEY.

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Born and brought up in a culture steeped with the influence of Indian classical music, Sahana Banerjee, a sitarist by profession and a great admirer of music, has learned the ropes of Indian classical music at a very young age. Belonging to a family of musicians, Sahana's father, Pt Santosh Banerjee is a living legend himself (sitar and surbahar exponent) and mother Smt Chabbi Banerjee is a prominent vocalists of the Rampur Sahaswan Gharana.

Talking animatedly, Sahana says, "I am highly inspired from my parents. They both have inculcated in me the great virtues of music, which has encouraged me to be the torch bearer of our musical heritage."

Continuing on, she adds, 'My family members, especially my mother and father, have played a crucial role in sharpening my skills. I have learned from them that sheer discipline can take you ahead in life, irrespective of your career. Moreover, my parents are sticklers for accuracy, and hence made me practice for hours, which helped me evolve as a sitarist.'



Sahana has always been an amiable human being besides being a good musician. Her parents have always taught her to respect people, worship music and not boast of her talent. Being a humble human being, she has no airs about her being recognized as one of the most talented sitarists in the country and abroad.

On being asked what made her choose the sitar over other musical instruments, she explains, "It was very spontaneous, because my father is a sitarist. I started with vocal music, as it is considered important and gives a better understanding of Indian classical music. In spite of having received extensive training in vocal music from my mother, I have never followed it with the intent of becoming a professional singer."

She shares with us the different challenges that she had to face over the years. "Every concert is a new challenge. For a woman sitarist or an instrumentalist, it is always a challenge to get an opportunity in the male dominated society. Over the years, I have realized that there is no shortcut in method, style and the process of presenting this art," adds Sahana.

To elaborate, she emphasizes on three vital things that are very much essential for learning any form of music. "They are riyaz, respect for the art, and dedication to learn and practice the art. It is very unfortunate



that we are part of a conservative society, which restrains women from pursuing this art as their profession,” dwells Banerjee.

Being associated with Rampur Senia Gharana for many years, one of the oldest, traditional schools of Indian classical music, Sahana feels privileged to take her parents’ legacy ahead. She wishes to be an important member of one of the most respected and revered music schools in the country. The Rampur Senia Gharana dates back to the era of legends such as Mian Tansen (court musician of Mughal King Akbar), Ustad Wazir Khan, Ustad Dabir Khan, who made this Gharana an institution in itself. Besides, Sahana’s father, Pt Santosh Banerjee is the only musician of the Rampur Senia Gharana, who currently holds the authentic Baj (playing style) and purest Veenkar Dhrupadya style of the Rampur Senia Gharana.

As for vocal music, Sahana stated that her mother is her first guru and has always advised and trained her to create Gayaki Baj in her sitar presentation. Blessed to have been born in a family where music is treated as God, Sahana’s mother, Chhabi Banerjee, a vocalist by profession, has always worked hard towards developing Sahana’s voice to perfection.

In spite of having received extensive training in vocal music, becoming a professional singer was something Sahana never imagined. Her immense love for the art of singing attracted her towards vocal music as an accompaniment to sitar. Moreover, having learned both the art forms gave her an edge over other sitarists.

Sahana details information on her initiative, Swarasudha, a musical baithak, which aims to organise baithaki concerts in Pune to provide a platform for young budding artistes. When asked to explain in detail about this brainchild of hers in the field of music she says, “Through Swarasudha, I would like to organise seminars and concerts to develop awareness amongst the common people, since they are away from this art form. In addition, I would like to encourage people to learn Indian classical music. Having started the venture with a small group of 40 people, I am hopeful that the number will increase gradually in the near future.”

Continuing the conversation, Sahana shares her opinion about the growing popularity of Indian music abroad. “There is an acceptance of Indian classical music even outside India. Many foreigners visit India every year to learn Indian Classical music, a sign of encouragement and a proud moment for our music industry. Nevertheless, at the same time, we must not ignore the fact that a very few people in India can correctly recognise the sitar and the sarod, which is very unfortunate for our future generation. So, to create more awareness, there is a requirement of a proper channel, which can help us spread the vast knowledge about our Indian music amongst our fellow Indians,” opines, Banerjee.

On winning many awards and accolades, Sahana is proud and more than content with her past performances. “For me, music is God...a sadhana... Moreover, I am always praying to attain more perfection in my (sitar) playing style. Also, I always try to develop soul touching elements to present gimmick-free music with pure Raagdari and authenticity. My gurus (parents) have always taught me to be humble and respect music as a precious gift of God,” says a proud Banerjee.

As the conversation ends, Sahana speaks about her prospects. “I dream to create an establishment where people will be able to learn this unique art form. I believe classical music is not merely a source of entertainment, but it is a divine energy that uplifts the body, mind and soul of a person,” concludes Sahana. ◀