

The Agra Style Finds a New Voice
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In the India International Centre's newly initiated concert series, which takes place in its Annexe Auditorium, there is now an opportunity for us to listen to exciting new voices. In Delhi, there is an uninterrupted stream of concerts in any case. But, day after day, one sees only the faces of hand-picked, star performers. The IIC concerts offer a completely different flavour, by presenting well-chosen new talent.

Priya Purushothaman was the freshest discovery of these concerts. In her classical concert at the IIC Annexe Auditorium, the very first thing that attracted our attention was her trained and tuneful voice, which held her audience spellbound for the entire duration of her admirable concert. Immersed in Music from her childhood, Priya was fortunate in having had an opportunity to listen to and learn both Western and Indian Classical Music. Raised in New York State, Priya graduated from Columbia University with a degree in Economics and Creative Arts. But she was always connected to Music. She always remained focused on the task of promoting the understanding and appreciation of the classical Music of India among Western audiences. After coming to India, she started formal training in the traditional manner of the Guru-Shishya Parampara, with Pt. Dinkar Kaikini of the Agra gharana, and his daughter Smt. Aditi Kaikini Upadhyaya. At present, she continues her studies under the tutelage of Aditi.

That evening, Priya made a felicitous start for her concert, opening with the sunset raga Puriya Kalyan. The bada khayal composition was by Pt. Dinkar Kaikini, with the opening words "Milana Bhayo", set to a slow Teental. She expounded the characteristics of the two constituents - Puriya and Kalyan –with such composure that the rendering was seamless. The ease and facility with which she sang the raga, with a gradual badhat that compromised nothing of the grammar, belied her young age. And remarkably, this ease and facility of expression remained evident even in her taans. The final piece in that raga, a composition of Pt. Ratanjankar with the words "Dhana Dhana Bhaaga" continued with the same pattern of treatment.

As her second item, she chose to present raga Megh, in which she sang the well-known composition "Garaje Ghata Ghana" as a sadra. Here, her way of developing the bandish was replete with hallmarks of Agra gayaki. Using the patterns of sadra at double and triple speeds, and interspersing them with tans with gamak, she evoked the looming atmosphere suggested by the lyric. The next bandish in this raga, with the words "Ata Dhooma Dhaama Aayo" was set in fast ektal. Here too, in following the bandish from its development to its conclusion, she displayed complete control of raga and tala. The next bandish, "Dhooma Dhooma Dhooma Aaye Garaja" was set to in teental, but the persona of this wonderful narrative bandish was very different indeed.

Priya concluded her concert with Bhairavi, and from the very beginning of her alap, she managed to present a very unusual facet of this raga. In the piece, a bandish ki thumri

with the text "Ab na Maro Phulagendawa", set to addha theka, she brought to life the full characteristics of the Agra heritage. Joined to this bandish was a beautiful tarana, in whose final stanza, the composer prays to the Ragini Bhairavi (personalised in the lyric as "Bhairavi Priyadarshini, Ranjani Ragini...") to grant his wish and enable him to keep serving the cause of Music and Dance. Presenting this piece with great devotion, Priya concluded her very tasteful concert.

Harmonium accompaniment was provided by Sumit Mishra, and tabla accompaniment was provided by Prasun Bannerji.

The emergence of such tuneful phenomena as Priya Purushothaman reassures us about the next generation of classical vocalists.