

# We're nearing golden era of Carnatic music: Krishna

**H**e has something about him that make audiences come back for more. A quality that defines the singer and the person. He is able to make each one of the listeners feel that the concert is being done just for him/her. Meet T.M. Krishna who makes his performance more than just a concert. "We are definitely approaching the Golden Era of Carnatic music," he says with conviction and vehemence, "and I think we need to use this to further it and reach it to every strata of society in the country."

T.M. Krishna is your yuppie classical musician, who even as he is steeped in the glorious tradition, is moving ahead to do something to ensure this. Along with Bombay Jayshree, he has started Matrka, an organisation that works to spread the art form from schools to forums and from the rural grassroots to corporation schools. It is not just to create awareness, but to ensure that Indian culture and tradition are not forgotten in this whirl of development and westernisation.

"All this came about when we started on our book about some of the greats in Carnatic music, a coffee table book. We found that there was no publisher who was interested in this. We decided to bring it out ourselves and that is when we realized how much there is to be done in terms of popularising this art form," he says.

In the process, they found that there were not too many books or literature that addressed children – not just

music, but also about Indian art and culture. "Imagine there are no charts that talk about the veena or the mridangam — there are these random ones showing a piano or a xylophone. Where is the exposure at this basic level?" he says.

While schools are one place where the two musicians wish to make inroads, mediums such as films, television also need to be harnessed to achieve their goal. "How many such endeavors are there to create awareness about Carnatic music? While there are some documentaries about musicians, I don't think there are too many about the history and its progress. Even in terms of festivals and things like that, there is a need to reach as many people as possible, and not the niche audience we seem to be addressing year after year," he says.

In their rural outreach programme, T.M. Krishna and Jayshree are looking at schools outside the city in the districts and small towns. And apart from the high end schools they are seeking to interact with Corporation schools, where the need is to "be constantly doing something to keep the tradition alive".

Schools in Tamil Nadu, for instance, should set aside one day in a week – not just for the music, but for Indian culture, architecture, dance, theatre through lectures, demonstrations, field trips and film shows for one hour.

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## Quotables



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work around it. A thing like a traditional art form can never really hope to compete with cinema. But surely one can use

it to create awareness? If we are able to approach a 1,000 children and even if 15 of them take to this it is a process set in motion," he says.

As a child T.M. Krishna showed special talent, but it was not made out to be something special. His mother wanted to learn music and so he too sat around the classes with Seetharama Sharma and music became something he internalized unconsciously. He had his debut performance at 10 and it was only when he was in his second year of college that he started being recognized and applauded. That spurred him to take up music his career and with supportive father and others in the family, he has achieved success.

Vociferous, articulate and completely out of the mould of the image of a Carnatic music singer, T.M. Krishna is simply not afraid to speak his mind.

"We have to create an atmosphere so that it reaches all levels. This process is long and hard," he agrees. Especially with all our busy schedules. We have to work really hard and involve as many people as possible. We have to get the ball rolling and it is a process for the whole cultural community, he says.

On the lighter side he says, "TT boom is probably one good thing that has helped Carnatic music. Most of them must have grown up with their families, listening to Carnatic music. While they may not have really been interested in them then, now as they are more settled and probably more stressed,

they have sort of come back to the roots."

When he travels abroad, "Techies actually come up to me and discuss Darbari Kannada or Khamboji Plus Carnatic music is also considered rather fashionable, rather happening these days."

And Krishna has strong views about fusion music. "I don't have anything against fusion, provided it is intelligently done. And with honesty, I might add. But usually it is not always so—rhythm oriented and drama, they create an impression. That is not fusion. All these drums, cups and saucers and stuff — it feels like you are watching a circus. Music is more than about versatility. There needs to be a connect between forms and if that happens, then you can create a new genre of music."

The artiste and the person seem to complement each other. He knows one thing for sure and that is his music. "I know what my music is. More importantly, what it should be. I don't want to think what I'll be five years from now, but I know my music will take me where I should be," he says.

Integrity, honesty are two major things Krishna lives by. "That is why I cannot do some things. I cannot cheat myself, forget cheating the audience. I also believe that if one feels something is not right, it is important to react and say it outright. I have been doing this and while this may not make me the most popular human being, I think there is no room for apathy and necklessness," he says.