

Being popular as Mandolin Sisters, both sisters would look similar one might mistake them as twins, elder is Sreusha, and Siresha is one and half years younger. But the music emanating from them is similar. It all started when sisters got interested in guitar when their father Threeemurthulu, was playing. When he was out of the home, the sisters used to try playing the instrument, observing their interest towards the music, their father decided to teach the basic lessons. Sreusha says, 'Though my father is not thorough professional, he used to play guitar whenever he gets time. On seeing him play the instrument, I began to pluck the string, while he went to office. Observing my interest towards the guitar, he taught me the basic lessons on how to play guitar, and later Siresha also joined me. After some time, he choose mandolin for us.'

And from the age of five, they started their training, the new instrument, Mandolin under the guidance of Vidwan Rudraraju Subbaraju who is one of the disciples of 'Chembhai' Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar and he happens to be the teacher of mandolin U Srinivas. Sreusha says, 'Rudraraju Subbaraju was not very strict. He taught us the art in very simple manner. Currently and for the past fifteen years we have been under the guidance of Vidwan Sengalipuram S V Ramamurthy Iyer (a disciple of Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer). He also taught the music in a gentle manner, besides the skill, he also elaborately the history behind ragas, keerthanas, composers.

Sreusha and Siresha have practised the mandolin with lot of dedication and devotion, they made their debut in Tiruvaiyaru Tiyagaraja Aradana festival at Tanjore. Siresha says, 'Since we had already learned the fingering techniques and basic lessons of music, from our father it was easy for us to play the music. Moreover, it helped us to make debut at very younger age (six).'

When it comes to practice, the sisters have followed a rigorous discipline. 'We used to get up at 4 am and practice for atleast 2 hours. After completing the daily lessons, we go to school. At the evening, once again we used to practice for two hours. We never get anytime to play outside. Sometimes, we would pick a paper and play kirithana written on it, which would be interesting like a game for us'. Apart from Mandolin, the sisters also have their hobbies to follow, while Sreusha is good at drawing, Siresha is very much interested dress design and interior decoration. Born and brought in Chennai, the sisters have completed their schooling and graduation in the city.

Having playing the instruments for more than 15 years, the sisters so far have complete around



2,500 concerts throughout the world including Singapore, Muscat and Europe. They feel that European people show more interest in music. 'Recently we went for European tour travelling to countries like France, Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden. We were very surprised that European people are showing deep interest in Carnatic music, despite having no knowledge regarding our musical form. In many concerts, they ask us to repeat the session'. Moreover, the sisters have performed with Belgian musical band consisting of flutist, cello player and drummer last year at Alliance Francaise Chennai.

Explaining the strengths of Carnatic music when compared to other system, 'Once we learn Carnatic music and instrument, we can play kind of music. Lessons and structures of carnatic music give us the foundation to play any kinds of musical notes or forms.'

Recalling the memories of Mandolin legend U Srinivas, they say he was the inspiration for us when it comes to Mandolin. We used to listen and observe his performance in various events and solo concerts. Moreover, our guru Vidwan Rudraraju Subbaraju is also the guru for Srinivas. He knew us very well and appreciated and encouraged our performance. When we heard the news about his death, we were very sad. Their mother says, 'Both of them cried after watching the news in the television channels about the death of U Srinivas'

The sisters are so tuned in together that they wear matching outfits, share the same circle of friends and even play as one. Having a close bond with sisters, they complement and help each other

during concerts, Sreusha says, 'Sometimes during performance, fingers might get pain after playing for a long time. During such moments, one could notice a slight change in the sound, though it is not a mistake, we immediately try to help one and another through mutual understanding. When she faces trouble or pain, I used to help. When I'm in need of help, she rescues me.'

Having released two musical albums (2006, 2015), they feel stage performance is better than closed room playing in a recording studio. 'In a stage, we have the option to improvise the music and prolong the session for longer period of time. But in a recording session, we are limited by time. For example they allot, 5 minutes for 'Ragam', 5 minutes for 'Keerthana' 5 minutes for 'Niraval', which provide limited scope for improvisation. But when it comes to public concerts there is complete freedom for performance, both the performers and audience can enjoy the session'.

Having getting favourably reviewed by all leading news papers and their concerts telecast in Doordarshan (Podhigai), Sun TV, Raj TV, Kalaignar TV, and Jaya TV, they are also recipients of various awards like the Best Performance Award (2010), KV Mahadevan Endowment Award (2013), Probus Award of Excellence (2004), National Cultural Scholarship, CCRT, in the field of Carnatic Mandolin, (New Delhi) and Ugadi Purashkar by the Madras Telugu Academy, 1997. With the music season starting, Mandolin Sisters will be performing in Chennai Cultural Academy, Brahma Gana Sabha, Bharat Kalachar and many more sabbas. ♦