

At the age of eight, you started learning vocal music without the knowledge of your wrestler father, who wanted you to become a wrestler. What made you take up music?

Music was my passion; therefore, I wished to pursue music with the desire to earnestly learn music. I still think I'm not a professional musician and just a student in my learning phase.

You popularised the bansuri (Indian flute) globally and are a renowned musician. Why do you consider yourself a student?

It's you people who've made me a legend, but I'm not (a legend). I aspire to play like Lord Krishna, and to reach to that level I might have to spend my next birth as well learning music.

Just the way most people have the urge to accumulate wealth and are never satisfied, I too feel unsatisfied with my limited knowledge of music and therefore make use of every opportunity to understand music. I still go to my guru to learn and I also learn from other musicians including the current generation—their techniques, composition and people's views about music.

Music is not about gaining mastery over any particular instrument or genre, but to know about other genres like jazz, folk, etc. and being able to fuse my Hindustani classical with them. Everybody's thinking and approach towards music and its composition will be very different. A lot depends on one's guru too. It's important to have a seeking spirit to live life to the fullest potential.

You heard your guru Pandit Bhola-nath Prasanna playing the flute on radio at the age of fifteen and decided to learn flute. What was so mesmerising about this instrument?

Flute is the oldest instrument and I was impressed by the deep notes of the flute—an instrument made from dry piece of bamboo. This wind instrument doesn't have any materials (like strings), yet its tone is very pleasing. Flute is the only instrument associated with nature and we go deep into the forests of Assam to find bamboo. We make flute by hand and it's quite a challenge to craft an accurately pitched instrument that played right notes.

How difficult was it to find the right guru?

It's very difficult to find a good guru and it's equally difficult for a guru to find a good shishya. The genuine bond between a guru and shishya can only be developed and nurtured in the Gurukul (education system). A true guru leads by example and a disciple follows the guru's shadow—watching his activities from morning until he goes to sleep at night. Inspired by the Gurukul, I wanted to start this system and have set-up two Gurukuls—Vrindavan Gurukul in Mumbai and Bhubaneswar.

I would also like to stress on the fact that music is treated as a serious subject in the West, whereas in our country most of the schools don't even have a dedicated class for music; parents too don't make efforts in recognising a child's potential. The thrust is always on education with preference to become either an engineer or a doctor—sadly the primary motive of education has become to earn great money, instead of seeking knowledge with a sense of purpose to contribute to society. Had Sachin Tendulkar's parents

RHYTHM OF THE WIND

Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia has a very different note towards music. He prefers to be known as a 'student' rather than a 'legend'.

The 77-year-old flautist believes that the continuous process of learning makes him enjoy music and regards a concert hall as sacred as a temple—where he plays for the devotees (audience).

The flute virtuoso recently performed at the Yamini dusk to dawn musical festival—organised by SPIC MACAY at IIM Bangalore's campus.

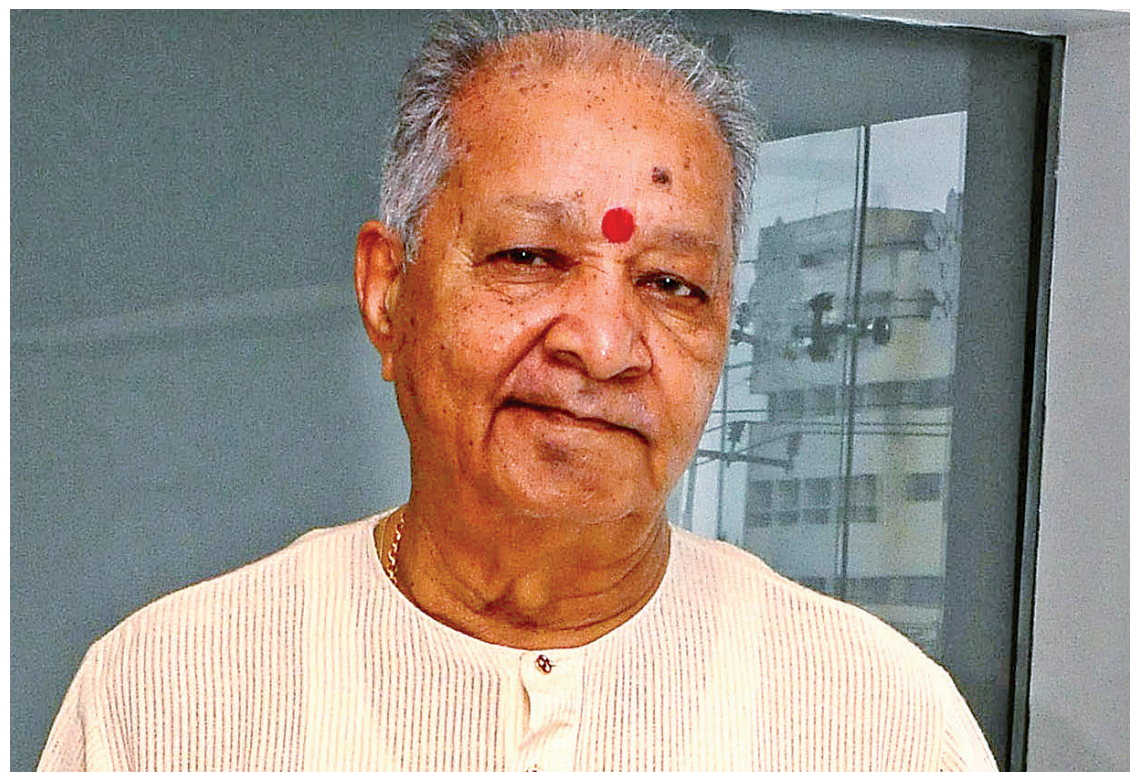
Shivani Venugopal caught up with the humble and humorous Chaurasia who spoke about the melodious tone of the bansuri and his belief in the age-old Gurukul. The proponent of Hindustani classical states: 'I'm still a student and the best is yet to come.'

Edited excerpts:

not noticed his talent, would he have become the world's greatest batsman?

Don't you think a strong academic background is important—it's like a backup when things don't work in one's favour while pursuing a passion; don't students in your Gurukul have pressure from their families to complete studies?

Students complete their studies and come to me. I've engineers in my



PICS: JOE LOUIS



I would like to share few lines from Kabir's couplets on guru-shishya relationship: Guru gobind dou khade, (Both Guru and Lord Krishna are standing) kaake lagoon paay (whose feet do I touch first) So Guru is equivalent to God—while God gives us life, Guru helps in building our personality by giving us knowledge. Today, I'm a flautist because of my guru's teachings.

A guru-shishya relationship is about faith. He will love students who impose trust in him/her and will love them more than his/her own children. This is the environment in a Gurukul—absolute trust in each and every word of a mentor. It's like the story of Ekalavya (As guru dakshina, on his guru Drona's command, Ekalavya cut off his right thumb and presented it to Drona). Though I love my children, it's my students in the Gurukul who will keep my name and not my children who're not involved in music. Therefore, I love my students more than my children.

Was there acceptance for Indian classical in the West?

(Laughs) I didn't make Indian classical famous, it's God who did it. It was a struggle, but was easily accepted as music has its melodious rhythm of bridging the gap and bringing people together. Building a brand is easy, but to maintain the image of a brand is difficult.

Similarly, to make the bansuri popular as an Indian classical instrument was a struggle, but it's a greater struggle to conserve its identity as an Indian classical instrument for eternity.

Which concert is closest to your heart?

Every concert is an opportunity to learn and grow; therefore, all concerts are close to my heart. To me every concert hall is a temple and I play with an earnest prayer to make the devotees (audience) happy.

Your best performance.

I'm still a student and my best is yet to come.

How was it to play at the Yamini musical festival?

It was a perfect ambience to play amidst students and music lovers. Music was in the air; it was a splendid experience.

What's your vision and expectations from your students?

They should have their own identity and shouldn't be tagged as Hariprasad's shishyas. I expect them to surpass my achievements.

Gurukul, while at the same time I've students from poor background who discontinued studies due to financial reasons and had a passion for music. So it's a mix of students in my Gurukul.

What is the key for a guru to allow a talent to grow?

To learn music you need to have the blessings of goddess Saraswati. A person inclined towards music must be blessed with Sur and Laya (tempo), which can't be bought or studied from books. The rhythm for music comes naturally and is goddess Saraswati's gift—only when a person has Sur and Laya can he or she learn music.

What does the guru-shishya relationship mean to you?