

Calcutta Staterman  
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**H**E has been driven to Indian shores on a quest. Michael Braudy, a computer engineer by profession and a violinist by passion, came to India in search of a guru to guide him in his love for Indian classical music, and finally, the labours of his love are going to bear fruit when he performs live at New York next month.

Two things are natural to Michael — mathematics and music. Young Michael had thought that he would grow up to be a mathematician, but his history teacher's sigh, "But what about your music, Michael?" changed the tone of his life.

Michael began taking violin lessons at the age of nine. By the time he had completed his master's in computer science, along with teaching computers at Pace University, New York, and doing programming work, he was giving the odd solo performance and hearing improvisational music of distinct Indian strain from a group named Maha Vishnu Orchestra. It was at this time that the strums of the contemplative sitarist Roop Verma, a disciple of Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar for over 20 years, awoke in him the desire to come to India. He contacted Pt VG Jog for a discipleship. Not that this was something new to the great master. For as he says, "I am constantly meeting Western violinists who are curious about playing Indian music on the violin, and would like to learn how." The first telephonic conversation which lasted exactly three minutes, was according to both "mutually satisfactory". And Michael found himself in Calcutta in December, 1997.

In Calcutta, instead of being an exception, Michael seemed to merge with a band on a musical pilgrimage. As Michael says, "In Calcutta, I met several Americans and some Japanese students studying with Indian masters. One was Steve Landsburg, who lives in New Mexico and plays both the sitar and the surbahar." But foremost among them is perhaps George Lindenmayer, who has been

*Michael Braudy came to India in search of a guru who would guide him in his love for Indian classical music. Back in the USA, he continues to experiment with sound and pitch, and imparting lessons to students interested in a fusion of eastern and western music, finds out Parama Ray*

studying with Pt Jog for nearly two decades and prior to that had been taking music lessons from L Subramaniam's father in Madras.

Michael began his *talim* in the true gurukul tradition. He stayed with his master, accompanied him to his various programmes and when the master deemed it necessary imparted lessons. After a few weeks Pt Jog complimented Michael by saying, "You no longer sound like you are playing Western violin." Reflects Michael, "All my waking hours became an exercise in soaking up the music, there was no break." One of VG Jog's guiding advice was that, "Taans will be easier for you than the 'slow music' (*alaap*) because our music is very emotional, you will have to learn to feel the slow music by listening to artists, both recordings and live, though live is best."

This routine continued till the stipulated three months were over. At the end of the training Pt Jog was stated frankly, "You will play this music very well. You will see the difference after months' practice. However, it is up to you, not the guru, for you have to practice."

Once back in New York the connection with India and Indian music did not snap. Lessons continued to be relayed across the oceans. In April 1998, when Pt Jog visited USA on a musical tour, contact classes were resumed forthright. But most importantly, even while working as a computer engineer, Michael squeezed out time to practice and taking to heart his Guru's words he says, "When I practice of course I see the results more clearly." Finally, On 13 December, 1998, after being for nearly a year under the guidance of Pt Jog, Michael will be performing raagas live in New York. But again, he is not the only one. Steve Gorn, recognised as the foremost American player of the bamboo flute regularly renders raagas live and on radio.

The West has been nurturing the Indian classical music tradition for quite a while. The effort gained conscious boost during the mid-eighties, when at the invitation of the government of India, the Department of Music and the Asian Studies Programme, University of Pittsburgh, served as the principal sponsors of the Indian Classical Music Programme of the Festival of India in the United States. The ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Calcutta, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) were the Indian co-sponsors and played a pivotal part in the project. As an extension of this venture, a bilateral exchange programme between the University of Pittsburgh and the



ICCR was established in 1988. In 1992, at the request of the ICCR the programme was reorganised to expand its activities into the Centre for the Performing Arts of India.

On a commercial level Kunal Sen in Queens, New York, has become a renowned host of Indian masters. He presents a galaxy of Indian stars including Rashid Khan, VG Jog and Birju Maharaj, on his label Mantra Music, which he describes, "Was conceptualised with the sole intention to share the treasure of Indian music with an international audience." Sen has a homepage at <http://www.musicnet.com>.

While most of us are torn between our profession and interest, Michael has succeeded in fusing the two in a remarkable fashion that has enriched both. Along with Yang-Ho Kim of Ultimate Music Software, Michael has designed a computer programme named Ultimate Pitch, available at <http://www.mind-spring.com/mbraudy/>, that improves intonation. The programme comes with its own synthesiser that plugs into the parallel port on your PC, and the sound emerges out of your own stereo. You can play and experiment, then store the files and reload them for use later. With Ultimate Pitch, you may change the pitch of any note up or down by as little as a cent — 1/100 of a half step! Paul Wolfe, conductor of the Sarasota Symphony, Florida, uses the software while auditioning students to assess them. Responding to the various aspects of the program, Yehudi Menuhin says, "It is a good vehicle to store raagas."

Music is one of the most powerful means of expression of the soul. To fine tune to it Michael wishes to follow his guru's words, "Teach Indian violin to Westerners, including professionals, in the Western classical tradition. Start a school, coach students in Indian classical violin." Michael has already taken on two students of which one is extremely interested in Indian music. And this is how the chain remains unbroken, as music continues to enrich the soul, crossing all barriers of language, caste and creed.