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Readers' column

When the sarod enchants



Dr. Rajeeb Chakrabarty (right), the writer (c) and Reena at the programme. Samira Abbasi, Boca Raton, Florida

It was raining incessantly that evening, almost like *Malhar* in *Druta Ektaa!* I was torn between many things, many emotions. But somehow, as if by the sweet call of destiny, I heard a faint but enchanting tune calling me to the concert at the premises of Broward Public Library in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Dr Rajeeb Chakrabarty on *sarod* and his sister Reena on *sitar* accompanied by Pandit Subhen Chatterjee on *tabla*, that was the agenda for this special evening. The concert was recently arranged by Bharti Chokshi of the Indian Association of Performing Artists. As I arrive with my father, the esteemed music exponent Mustafa Zaman Abbasi and my son Armaan Sobhan, the budding musician, the mellifluous tunes of Rajeeb entice me. I thank my lucky stars I fought with the weather and other calamities to be there at that moment in time. It was pure bliss!

This was my first encounter with Rajeeb, and I must say I was pleasantly impressed. Standing six feet tall with a very pleasing smile adorning his face, Rajeeb appeared to be a musician with depth, understanding and compassion. He spoke very articulately to the Western audience explaining to them in simple yet poetic ways of how the Indian Ragas progress.

Being a self-proclaimed poet myself, I was quite mesmerised by his description of how Indian classical musicians discipline themselves in the cyclic orders of *taal* while enjoying enormous freedom of expression within the raga. He also explained adeptly how a *jugalbandi* works. He drew an analogy between three friends conversing; while one is talking the others are subdued, but still very much part of the conversation. As Rajeeb and Reena were taking turns in dominating the music, this was perfectly displayed as well, and was the same for Subhenda's incredible *tabla*.

The evening started with Raga *Yaman*. Reena's strokes on *sitar* were soft and sweet, almost heart breaking. Rajeeb's strokes were bold, expressive and he seemed to be deeply engrossed in a sort of *dhyaan* (meditation). He was totally into his raga to the point that he seemed oblivious of his surroundings... it could be the caves of Himalayas... it could be on a boat on the Nile... it could be the Miami Stadium packed with thousands of fans... but his intense concentration was admirable.

The brother and sister duo interacted well in taking turns to complement each other; many times Reena took the lead. After all, they are both well deserving children of Pandit Rabi Chakrabarty, a leading exponent of the *Maihar Gharana*.

Rajeeb trained under his father from an early age and started performing at nine. He is not only a talented performer but also a distinguished scholar and has his doctoral degree in music, exploring the role of computer in learning and teaching North Indian Classical Music. He has lectured and taught at some of the leading universities in the USA and Europe. He is also a composer and conductor.

Rajeeb's *sarod* sings more than just the ragas. It sings of humanity, it sings of love. He is deeply involved in various international philanthropic activities, helping disadvantaged children. This impresses me even more than music itself. That sublime evening ended with the sweet melodies of *Raga Jog*, enlightening my soul like a soft candle. As we started on our journey home, notes of his *sarod* were still playing in my mind. Just as I thought before, it was pure bliss!

The writer is a musician, poet and environmental engineer.

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