

Of idols, classical music and popularity charts

noteworthy Dr Vasumathi Badrinathan



LAST EVENING, I saw a huge hoarding about a live concert by the recently-crowned, Indian idol. There has been so much attention and publicity over the Indian Idol show that I could not desist watching several episodes. Over high voltage songs, moments of high tension, melodramatic scenes of tears, laughter, rejoicing and mourning, the show moved on as most of you would know.

If you were selected for the next round, you shed tears of joy; if not, you were distraught and grieved and shed tears nevertheless. There were extremes in all reactions — from prostrating in front of the judges who seemingly assumed a god-like status, to utter shock and disbelief, to jumping, shouting and hugging fellow participants. Judges were generous in their comments, a wee bit more refined than the last edition I thought. In any case, there was little decorum in feelings expressed.

Nevertheless, I sense the transformation that music is undergoing transformation, even if it is film music. From the sedate (today it definitely feels that way) *Chhaya Geet and Chitra*

Geet of the seventies, television today propels popular music forward, giving singers, composers, music makers a space to themselves. As a musician, I would only like it that way, but there's the flip side too. Too much attention makes people judgemental. Rahman's anthem for the Commonwealth Games for example. The poor man, summoned by destiny to the highest pedestal and by the very nature of this status, was beleaguered for his new song. Music is an art. Creativity cannot be measured, pre-planned, organized wholly. It is slave to the Muse and has its moments of high and dismal lows. Who can deny that?

However, coming back to the *Indian Idol* phenomenon, though the focus was on film music, one could see and happily so, the huge role of classical music. Singers proudly said that they learn classical music to strengthen their foundation and bearings, to work on their voice.

Classical music is the trump card that opens doors to other pastures. In fact, Sreeram, the young man who won the *Indian Idol* trophy was a cut above the rest for the flourishes and easy flow in his voice that revealed his Carnatic training. In fact many of the participants of this edition had a strong classical base as compared to the previous years. I read an article about the rush for learning classical music subsequent to the Idol show, because it holds the key to many a success! Classical music gurus seem to have suddenly found a filip with ambitious students

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rushing to them to "tune them up". The status of classical music is revitalised, but need we say, that it was never ever questioned?

The undeniable power of that music can never be undermined nor ever debated. Walking back home from music class one day, many years back, as young adolescents, Shankar Mahadevan shared with me his dream of wanting to study Oracle and work in that field. Music however, beckoned him somewhere down the line and changed the course of his life. How grateful he must be for all those years of Carnatic training!

I have seen Carnatic Idol programmes and far more, happening on television. I am not a fan of such shows and especially those, portraying children as precocious adults, subjecting them to needless stress to perform, to outshine and exceed themselves, to outwit harsh judges.

But classical music is living its days of glory in some ways today, especially with our media finding new perspectives to age-old light.

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