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"Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes. "A magic beyond all we do here!"

## A Conversation with Bhargavi Balasubramanian



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Lavanya Gopinath (LG): Hello Bhargavi. We have worked together for a while but I don't think I have asked you any of the questions that I am going to ask now in the many casual conversations we have had in the past. In fact I am now thinking we should do a rapid fire session first. What do you say?

Bhargavi Balasubramanian (BB): Okay!

LG: Bhargavi the vocalist or the Chitravina player?

BB: Chitravina artiste who also sings!

LG: More challenging: performing or teaching?

BB: Both are equally enjoyable challenges.

LG: Most productive time: morning or night?

BB: Try to be productive 18x7, except for sleep time of 6 hours!

LG: Most cherished gadget: smartphone or laptop?

BB: laptop

LG: Great. Thanks for indulging me. You wear a lot of hats and one of my enduring images of you is that of a very proficient juggler. You sing, teach, play the Chitravina, edit, coordinate many music related events and travel a great deal. How does your typical day look like?

BB: Music performing/practice, teaching, editing and coordinating music events. These are the order of priorities I try to follow on a typical day. The proportion may change depending on the priority of certain projects that come up from time to time.

LG: How did your interest in Carnatic music come about? When and under whom did you start learning?

BB: I started as an observer, at the age of 5, in my elder sister's music class, when she was learning from Smt Kokila Sundaram. Soon, I started singing all the compositions that my sister practised at home and in class through observation and used to identify many ragas during the concerts that I attended with my parents. Soon after, Smt Kokila decided to train me formally. We both learned under her for 8 years and used to do some local performances as a duo. Later, when my sister wanted to pursue MBA and discontinued her training, I used to practice on my own and learn some compositions from audio CDs. I [Follow musiguru](#) in 1996 and he put me under the guidance of Vidushi Savita Narasimhan till 2000, after which I started taking advanced training under him for vocal and he also initiated me to Chitravina in 2002.

LG: You continue to train with the Chitravina legend Shri Ravikiran. Tell me a bit about your learning and practising process with him.

BB: Learning from Shri Chitravina Ravikiran is the most enriching experience any student can have. For me, it has been a very intellectually and artistically stimulating experience and my understanding of the nuances of music has undergone a sea change under his training. He inspires me to practice with a lot of focus, since he himself works at least 8 hours a day on his music practice and keeps the bars high thereby making me work harder all the time.

LG: You teach a number of students. If I understand it right, a lot of your teaching is via Skype. How does your typical class proceed?

BB: Yes I do. I teach each student depending on their capability and level of grasping. So the pace or duration of the class is dependent on the student. I try to revise the songs taught to them during the previous class and work on corrections and revisions and also teach them new compositions or simple geetams depending upon the level in which the student is.

LG: What are your thoughts on how learning Carnatic music has changed over the years from when you were a student to the students that you teach now?

BB: The current generation is very quick to learn due to advanced technology and easy access to learning sources. But the quicker they learn, the faster they tend to forget. The main difference in learning is that while the earlier generation depended more on their observation to learn, the current generation depends more on recordings or electronic sources and hence their attention span is short.

LG: How did your interest in Ootukkaadu Venkata Kavi come about?

BB: The main reason for my interest in Venkata Kavi is due to the compositions that I've learned from my Guru Shri Chitravina Ravikiran and the projects I have worked with him and under him for researching on several works of Venkata Kavi. That inspired me to create a new website dedicated to this brilliant composer - [Ootukkaadu Venkatakavi](#). This site aims to popularize Venkata Kavi's compositions through audios/videos, lyrics/notations.

LG: Your family is very musical and you are married to another Chitravina player Ganesh. Is regular conversation in the house filled with musical references?

BB: We have healthy and intellectual discussions about music at home and Ganesh and I also spend time practising Chitravina together.

LG: How many concerts are you performing in this music season?

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BB: I am performing around eight concerts - 7 Chitravina concerts and 1 vocal.

LG: Thanks for talking to me Bhargavi. Best wishes for the season.

BB: Thanks and it was a pleasure.

Image courtesy: [Bhargavi's Facebook page](#)

For more on Bhargavi's [Oottukaadu Venkata Kavi](#) project.

Bhargavi is also performing (vocal) OVK compositions at Arkay Convention Centre today, 22-12-2013 from 3:30 - 5:00pm. Live webcast of the performance can be viewed [here](#) (free registration)

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