



# VIDYA *of* MUSIC

VIDYA SUBRAMANIAN  
Champion of Chennai - Education

Art can transform lives; it gives us the power to question, to confront, to explore and to challenge how we think about the world. It changes us; it gives us confidence, boosts our morale, uplifts us from mediocrity and pushes us to aspire for excellence. It gives us hope, something to retire into and find our peace. What then would we say of the one that inspires such an art in us?

Vidya Subramanian is one such person who believes art is not just for art's sake but one's too.

2020-21 and the pandemic have brought home to us the online form of learning and teaching. Many of us have become aware of zoom and google meet only because of the necessity imposed. Everything went online; be it school education, music classes, dance classes, instrumental or meetings. The pandemic necessitated it. But we are talking of a time period much before the pandemic, in 2003 and then formally in 2010, when Vidya Subramanian initiated music classes through Skype sessions.

A disciple of Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman, Vidya, an accomplished Carnatic vocalist now teaches music online for students of all levels and her brainchild the Vidya Subramanian Academy has been offering live, customised online classes in Carnatic vocal, instrumental – flute, veena, violin, percussion and Hindusthani classical vocal, Bharatnatyam dance, Yoga, Sanskrit language and slokas, Tamil and Telugu languages for all level of learners for more than a decade. Vidya heads a highly experienced team of highly motivated, trained team of instructors and has students all over the world. Vidya Subramanian Academy has established itself as a global

leader in student-focused online Carnatic music lessons. Vidya has successfully leveraged her in-depth knowledge of music and her business training to adapt traditional Carnatic music pedagogy to suit an online, culturally diverse student group. Students from all over the world reach out to Vidya to receive training in this art form in a technically sound manner in a customized, easy to follow format.

A Chartered Accountant and an MBA-Finance from Boston College, Vidya wanted to take a year off from work to be with her family and decided to teach music from home through Skype for fun. Encouraged by the feedback about her student-friendly approach and a lot of interest from students abroad, she started to think of the scope for pedagogical refinement in terms of carnatic music instructioning. She decided to put together her own learning from her Guru and the business school learning with scope for customized, quality dynamism to make for interesting personalized learning experience. Realising she cannot take on every aspect, she started building a team that has now fructified into a strong empowered Banyan tree.

Vidya says that initially there was a lot of skepticism about whether online classes for Carnatic music would be as effective

as face-to-face learning. But she says it's just that the teachers had not made the required pedagogical adaptations. Teaching online, she believes, cannot have the same methods of teaching face-to-face. So she started studying methods, to refine teaching, to train teachers and adapt to changes. She also realized this was a great way to give teachers a chance to find themselves. A good teacher was interviewed carefully after seeing the passion, tested, given intense skills training in soft skills, computer, communication and ethics and an orientation for 2 months before he/she was given a student to train independently. The teachers too gave continual feedback which gave her a chance to fine-tune her methodology. Vidya's eye for excellence in instructioning, widespread performance experience, international exposure and thoroughness make her one of the most sought after teachers of Carnatic music at the global level. Vidya Subramanian Academy welcomes students of all ages, locations and levels. Vidya heads a network of highly proficient teachers who help each student progress successfully towards their learning goals in a focused manner. Intrigued by her Raagarasika podcasts, music lovers from Indian as well as other cultural backgrounds reach out to Vidya to learn more about this divine art form. Online instrumental instruction is also given by experienced teachers in Vidya's group. This has helped build a good team organically where there is camaraderie, where self-esteem has been built and teachers are able to earn a good income.

She has also been able to reach special-needs students and through the years gradually has added classes based on feedback received. Feedback has been the main mode of improvising for them. Everything that has been added has been based on feedback from teachers, students and parents. Anything that has a traditional background has been the core focus of her academy. She has about 1500 students worldwide and it continues to grow.



She says her growth has been purely through word of mouth and nothing has been spent on advertising.



Vidya felt it would be good mission statement for herself to train and enable more students to find their voice and talents rather than embark on a path of music concerts and seasons for herself. She preferred to give her family stability and within that she has tried to do what she can. She says it has been more fulfilling to make a difference, create singers than to just sing and be famous. She says she has been able to create jobs for deserving candidates, women in particular, being in the comfort of their homes, giving them

the flexibility to work. She has trained teachers in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, who are now teaching from their homes with skill, passion and commitment to teach. She has also given them the freedom to structure and approach their classes based on the student's aptitude and goals. The transformation that this has brought about in their lives is what Vidya believes is her vision as a social entrepreneurship platform.

While her focus has been on the digital

platform, she has made a lot of free information/material available through Youtube to enable those lacking in digital connectivity to further their self-learning. The 500,000 views give her the encouragement to do more. While teaching music online has been her primary focus, making videos available for those who want to learn on their own, guiding people towards their goals, counsel students, have been her way of reaching out to those who probably do not have the wherewithal to be digitally connected regularly.

She says the pandemic has changed people's attitude and they are eager for avenues to learn. She has been as inclusive as possible in her approach and the diversity in the student body and that too from smaller towns is testimony to the fact.

Vidya has been conferred with the Women Transforming India Award 2021 by NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform for her contribution as a path-breaking woman social entrepreneur. Vidya's pioneering work in the field of online music teaching has won her significant honors including CA Entrepreneur Award (2019), Kalaimamani Award from State of Tamil Nadu (2018), Homepreneur Award (2018), recognition as an Inspiring Woman Entrepreneur in the prestigious Road to GES event (Chennai 2017), Award from Rotary Club of Chennai Spotlight (2016) and a special feature on BBC World News.

Vidya's vision for the future includes ideas in lines of putting proposals to the government or quasi-government agencies to collaborate with government schools or private schools to conduct online classes in music appreciation with local teachers as facilitators. She also wants to create options like Coursera and Swayam portals to give students opportunities to learn at their own pace. She hopes to be able to give her students an opportunity to perform in chamber settings or in an informal performance setting. Mandala art, madhubani paintings and Tanjore art are other areas she'd like to include in the Academy's repertoire. She also wants to be able to sustain folk arts, which in her opinion is fast disappearing. And finally whatever it is that she is doing, she wants to maintain quality, purity and a value in output. For wanting to put traditional art form on an international platform, Vidya and her academy are our true champions!

*Meera Shivashankar*