

Different Sounds

Sid Sridhar's love of classical Indian music

Few have done more to promote classical Indian music in Vancouver than Sid Sridhar, P.Eng.

Growing up in Delhi, there were many opportunities to enjoy music, especially if your father was the director general of All India Radio, the equivalent of the CBC. His mother and sister were musicians, and Sid started going to concerts when he was six years old.

Sid explains that he had no formal training, only a few lessons on the bamboo flute when he was a teenager. He played harmonica in an orchestra at high school, and again in engineering school. In 1969 he moved to England to continue his studies. He would sit in on jam sessions in a neighbourhood pub in Bedford.

Shortly after he moved to Vancouver in 1979, he became the president of the India Music Society, a group devoted to bringing classical Indian music to the city. "We would organize concerts and bring musicians from India and the U.S." he says. "It was a lot of fun, but it was a lot of work too because we were a non-profit organization so we had to find places to billet the musicians. We were surprised and gratified at the number of non-Indian people who came and showed an interest in the music."

Indian classical music is taught in the oral tradition and therefore not written. Although the compositions are based on a theme, there are an infinite number of variations because the musicians are free to improvise and interpret the piece. Sid insists that the improvisational nature of classical Indian music is the reason jazz is so popular with Indian audiences. Many of the instruments can produce a quarter-note step (western instruments only produce a half-note step), which allows the intricate ornamentations often heard in the music. Because of its improvisational nature, Indian music is easily incorporated into other styles; most notably there is enormous interaction



between traditional Indian and traditional Jewish music.

Sid had a five-year stint hosting a popular monthly show for the University of British Columbia co-op radio where he played his collection of 600 tapes, performed Buddhist chants — afterwards comparing Buddhist and Gregorian chanting — and offered other gems of musical information. The University of B.C. and Simon Fraser University have also invited Sid to guest-lecture on Indian classical music; he has delivered about a dozen lectures.

Today Sid is busy with his company Seabulk Systems formed in 1989. He's the president and CEO. The company specializes in bulk movement of mostly non-food commodities; his firm

designs both the terminals and the ships that move the cargo. It holds six patents and has won numerous design awards. However, as business has flourished, Sid's time for music has declined. "I haven't done much lately other than recently at my 25th wedding anniversary where I played flute," Sid laments.

"I can't understand how some people can live without music," he says. "I'm more than just an appreciator; music really turns me on. I'm so busy now, but I still love listening. Music is unlike any other field; there are endless things to become interested in. I especially like listening to unusual instruments used in unusual ways. I enjoy all kinds of fusion and am interested in how instruments are used in different cultures. I still love going to live concerts, and the engineer in me can't help but analyze everything I hear."

Even though his involvement has wound down, on Saturdays after a quiet morning catching up in his office, Sid turns the seven minute drive to his home into a long scenic drive along the Fraser River, with the tunes cranked. **CCE**

Tonia Jurbin, P. Eng. is a Burnaby based freelance writer and engineer. She is also a musician and music appreciator. www.toniajurbin.com.