

My Guru Sarma Mama

Writing about my Guru Sarma Mama (as I call him) is a great honour and privilege. My relationship with him goes far beyond that of a student and teacher. He is more like my father. He has known me from the time I was born and has been part of our family from the time he was introduced to my mother and father by my uncle T.T. Vasu.

Initially, he used to teach my mother and later, noticing my interest in music, he started teaching me. I was very fortunate to have him as my mentor and guru. As a teacher he is a tough task master. He believes very strongly in laying a solid foundation for anyone who comes to him. His commitment to the student is 100% and therefore he expects the same from the student. This has given all the people who have learnt from him a great perspective of, and road map to, the musical world. He never looks at the clock while teaching and takes a lot of care in the student's music. Right from the beginning, he made sure that the basics in my music were very strong and I developed the discipline of practice. Initially our classes used to be at our home in the evening after my school hours. Later he, along with my mother, started a music institution Kala Peetham, and my classes were held in its premises from then on. He is a great

believer in the importance of both sangeeta and sahitya in Carnatic music. He has always made sure that both the musical and lyrical aspects were perfect while teaching.

I have learnt from him numerous varnam-s, kriti-s, padam-s and javali-s. Many of them are extremely rare. He was the one who made me perform for the first time when nobody in my family thought that it could be happening. This was the turning point in my life. Even after my debut, he made sure that I did not sing too many concerts but used the next four to five years to develop the manodharma aspects of my music and at the same time learn many more compositions. This to me was the best thing that could have happened because this period of learning helped me a great deal once I started performing. It was due to his vision and foresight that today I am a musician.

All through my musical growth and development, he has been a pillar of strength and a conscience keeper. He is always there to make sure that I am on the right track. At the same time he allowed me to imbibe from various styles and let me identify my strengths and develop my own musical space.