

Shyamal Randeria-leonard

# Festival of Indian Music

In an era of head banging Bollywood remixes the profound, transcendental nuances offered by Hindustani classical music can never fade away. Audiences eager to experience the doyens of Indian classical music will not be disappointed with the upcoming and one of a kind all day festival entitled Raga Spirit 2012.

Film maker Gita Desai who won acclaim for her comprehensive documentaries *Raga Unveiled* and *Yoga Unveiled* along with Irvine based Ektaa Center's President and Executive Director Harish Murthy are fusing arts with academia as they unify their efforts with the support of the Department of Ethnomusicology within the Herb Alpert School of Music at the University of California, Los Angles (UCLA).

Honorary coordinator Vijay Kichlu who has committed his life to preserving the traditions of classical music will inaugurate the festival. Now in his 80s, Kichlu is traveling a great distance to simply support the purist ideology and "love for an



Pandit Vijay Kichlu

authentic cause" he shares with Desai.

The first presentation of the morning begins with *Thumri Ki Kahani*, a lecture-demonstration symposium by Kichlu who will guide the audience through the style's romantic and evolutionary journey. In terms of classical vocal forms, thumri has been labeled as semi-classical by orthodox followers of classical styles, as the beauty of the composition often overrides the mechanic perfection of ragas.

Kichlu will also present rare recordings of the earliest *thumri* composers and the "greatest *thumri* performances." He serves as executive director of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy, a classical music academy that possesses a rich and priceless collection of music in its archives built up

over half a century.

With ease and grace, Kichlu has laced together the presentation of two *gharanas* of *thumri* called *Poorab Ang* and *Punjab Ang*. Live recitals of the different schools will be contrasted and interspersed during the lecture which will be presented by accomplished vocalists Sanjukta Biswas and Shantanu Bhattacharyya who are accompanied by Durba Bhattacharyya (harmonium).

Each session's design and musician selection by Kichlu is likened by Desai as a work of art "where every flower grows in the right place, with lots of love and humor." Kichlu afforded the same reverence for each performer he personally selected with Desai's consultation, categorizing them as the "finest that our country has."

In the afternoon session, an array of instruments and vocal choices representing Hindustani styles are synthesized with tabla artists Samar Saha and Calcutta's Arup Chatterjee, Durba Bhattacharyya (harmonium) and Debashish Bath (slide guitar).

The evening performances feature a *juglabandi* duet with Tejendra Majumdar (sarod) and Kushal Das (sitar) and Subhanker Banerjee (tabla). Karnatik vocalist Aruna Sairam will be accompanied by H.N. Bhaskar (violin) and Patri Satish Kumar (mridangam). The evening will end with vocalist brothers Rajan and Sajan Mishra and their accompanists.

Thoughts on the state of Indian classical music were expanded by Kichlu, who called it a "marvelous blend of academics, science and artistry." He is wary of modern tendencies in music that seeks thrill and excitement created by skill. "Our music is not skill only, it has a deep academic background we call it Raga music, which is not just a scale, it is rules, melodic notes, and the artist's inner condition."

On the idea for the festival, Desai was partly inspired by the total immersion festivals people experience in India which are "common" in Indian pockets such as Madras and Calcutta and often stretch as long as 10 days." Attendees "soak themselves till late night as the festivals begin with new comers and end with the very best." Such an experience is like a "yatra and pilgrimage of the arts" says Desai.

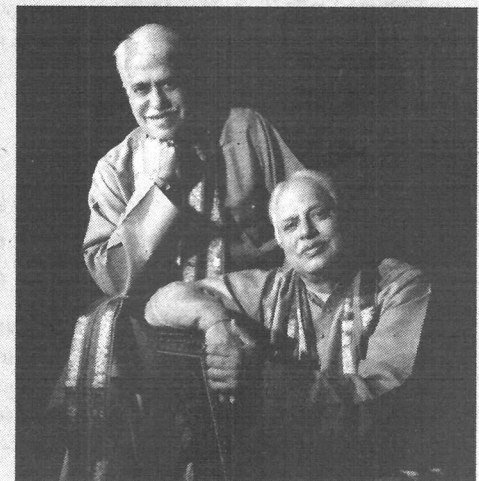
Murthy, who is also keen on establishing



Aruna Sairam

the festival as a tradition in Los Angeles understands the complexities, "this is an introductory effort in Los Angeles, and we must take into consideration, the audience here." Murthy encourages lovers of world and Indian music to come and enjoy "the finest exposition of Indian classical music, vocal and instrumental where one can garner awareness and understanding of the different styles and genres of Indian music." ■

Saturday October 20. 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 a.m. UCLA Schoenberg Hall, 445 Charles E. Young Drive East, Los Angeles. Tickets: All Day Concert Series Passes: \$60-\$125, Individual Concerts: \$15-\$35. [www.ragaspirit.com](http://www.ragaspirit.com), [ektaacenter.org](http://ektaacenter.org).



Rajan and Sajan Mishra