



Pandit Manohar Chimote

Harmonium Soloist Par Excellence

(By A Staff Reporter)

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The fingers that deftly move on the "samvadini" keys produce melody that either transports you into an indefinable ecstasy or throws you into sullen, doleful mood, depending on the scales they are interpreting.

To draw it mild, there is inherent magic, some hidden quintessence in those nimble, uncalled-for fingers whose sheer movement along the keys, cast a spell for a long time.

The man who wields those magical fingers is Manohar Chimote, a Nagpur-born artiste, now 47 staying in Bombay for the last 25 years and is popularly known as Pandit Chimote, the maestro soloist. He has the uncanny power over your moods and temperament as soon as you come within the cadenza of samvadini.

And the instrument he plumes himself on, so intensely and plays with technical brilliance, is a harmonium and some thing more. With a fixture resembling swar mandal atop the instrument with 21 strings, it becomes one sonorous, resonant wind instrument soughing out even the microtonal vibrations which slowly expand, pervade and linger on.

INNOVATION

This is his own innovation—a harmonium with basic structural alterations and the long, hollow swar mandal affixed atop which helps him to bring out the melody and "mind" work as effectively and powerfully as a vocalist does.

Within the wide range of scales, Pandit Chimote gets a creative scope for endless improvisations to weave fine shades of musical expression. By sheer naivete of style and total concentration, he gradually concentrates on sentiment or definitive mood of the structural theme of a raga and embroiders it to the limits of originality.

Panditji has come to his home

town after a gap of several years to participate in Datta Jayanti which his brothers here near Chitra Talkies, celebrated today. Panditji is likely to stay here for a couple of days more.

A disciple of Bhisima Dev Veda, the wizard of harmonium, Panditji has carved a permanent niche for himself in the world of instrumental music, and today he ranks among the few top harmonium soloists of the country, which is indicated by the fact that he has so far given over 100 solo performances in Gujarat, MP, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, UP etc.

MEMORABLE

It was Panditji who opened the first solo samvadini performance in the Bombay division of the All India Radio recently. It was half-an-hour programme but the one which would be remembered long. He also appeared on the Bombay T.V., got "once more" requests through letters from the music fans. His programme was therefore once more televised for 45 minutes.

After Chimote passed his matric grade, he had his initial training from Bhisima Dev Veda in vocal and harmonium. Unfortunately, Nagpur did not give him the scope to widen his expertise in the field. He left for Bombay around 1950 for good.

Learning classical music from the famed exponents like Guni Gandharv Laxman Prasad Jaipurwale, late Amir Khan, and establishing himself as a reputed artiste, Panditji started his own music school in Goregaon to propagate and promote India's ancient art. This provided him the necessary financial support and some method to take the "meend" defect from the harmonium and make it an adaptable medium of expression of 'gayaki and gut' with a vocalist's clarity of the tone and sargam.

Panditji broke new ground when he succeeded in his experiment. He made some basic structural changes in the instrument to make its sound soft and muffled and yet melodious and fixed a long hollow swar mandal atop the instrument. The effect was simply magical. Naming it as "samvadini", it provided the necessary resonance, modulation and continuity and made it a perfect instrument for solo performance.

During his early days, he had accompanied top artistes like Nazakat Ali and Sahamat Ali, Bhimsen Joshi, Laxmi Shankar, Jaipurwale and several others. That seemed to limit the range of harmonium.

How can artists give a solo performance on the harmonium? How can "gayaki and gut" be played for hours in modals without creating a sort of boredom generally experienced during such performance? Chimote himself is surprised why he picked up the samvadini for his risky experiments. Today, he plays on the instrument for hours.

UNCEASING RIYAZ

Does he regret it? After 17 years of arduous and unceasing riyaz, he has shown that his samvadini can equally be as enthralling and captivating as any other instruments like sitar, shahansai, sarod etc.

Panditji has not taken to any known Gharana. He is a loner, having formulated his own style and bandish. He was offered a sumptuous job in cine industry by no less than the legendary Raj Kapoor recently. But Panditji politely refused it.

Hindustani classical music, he told Nagpur Times, is purely an individualist art, aiming not at personal brilliance but at personal harmony with other souls. This rapport between the performer and listeners, has its own unalloyed joy. So he stays with his mission, preferring a rugged life to glamour and opulence.