



# The Sound of MUSIC

SUCCESS COMES WITH EXPERIENCE. WHILE THE STATEMENT HOLDS TRUE FOR MOST PEOPLE, THERE ARE A FEW WHO DEFY THE RULES. SUSHMITA MURTHY IN A TETE-A-TETE WITH YOUNG AND TALENTED MRIDANGAM PLAYER RAJNA SWAMINATHAN, WHO TALKS ABOUT LIFE, SUCCESS AND MUSIC

At first glance, Rajna is just another NRI kid—dressed in casual jeans and t-shirt, sporting chic short hair and speaking crisp English with a heavy American accent. Take a closer look and you realise this kid is closer to her roots than most of her Indian counterparts. Having learnt Bharat natyam, playing the piano and mridangam, she's a versatile little girl. What's more, she's mastered the art of playing the *mridangam*. One of the youngest *mridangam* artists in the country, 17-year-old Rajna started playing the instrument at the tender age of five and trained under her guru Sri Sivaraman since the age of eight. At this tender age, she shoulders the credit of having performed in numerous concerts across the country, and is the first and youngest female to have won the Vaikom Krishna Iyer award in the Junior Category.

## MUSIC CALLING

How did she know that this is where she was meant to be? It was her father PK Swaminathan's dream to train under Sri Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman. So the maestro made six visits of two months each to his residence in the US, between summer 1999 and spring 2001. Seeing her father practise, Rajna realised her true calling and started training under the Guru. She hasn't looked back

since. Last year, she performed in 20 different concerts in Chennai alone. Her dream performance? "I don't fantasise about any stage or performance with any particular artist. For me, every performance is special. You might perform on the biggest stage and not get as much satisfaction or perform in a small temple and be the happiest about it."

## ART WITH ACADEMICS

Being good in music didn't come at the cost of studies. Apart from pursuing her first love—the *mridangam*, the young musician has big academic plans as well. Her interest lies in political science and international diplomacy which she wants to pursue later. And just how does she manage to juggle between school and music? "I take leave from school for about 20 days and take the tests and quizzes via email. My principal grants me leave on the condition that my grades don't drop. I have managed pretty well so far," she chuckles.

## FUTURE FOCUS

When asked about her dreams and future plans, she points out enthusiastically, "I would like to introduce Carnatic music to the West. People there are very receptive to new things but they relate Indian music to Hindustani. I want to show them the other side of it. It would be great to explore Carnatic music there." With such courage and confidence, this new star on the horizon is sure to fulfil her dreams soon.

