

My Musical Journey – Priya Suresh Kanna

Music has become an eternal part of me and has played a major role in teaching me discipline, commitment, and humbleness.

Growing up, my grandmother and my mother always had an interest and passion for music but were never able to afford music lessons themselves. They would always sing lullaby songs to little toddler-me, hoping to instill their passion for music in me as well- and it turns out it worked! I received my first mini keyboard at the age of 3, and began to sparsely sing the swaras Sa Ri Ga Ma with my grandmother, who did not know much more music than that. Moving to St. Louis at the age of 6 gave my parents the opportunity to meet Guru Seema Kasthuri and enroll me as a music student under their coaching, given my peaked interest in singing and the keyboard. My true musical journey began.

I gave my first mini-katcheri (an hour long concert) in India when I was in 8th grade. I performed my first Alapana and Kalpana Swara in front of an audience of 150 people, and was a very transformative experience. My guru would always tell me that the stage is your best teacher- however, it was during this katcheri that I understood how much the stage taught me about perseverance, emotion-control, and devotion. I began to realize that the more I sing for *myself* and enjoy every second of singing and internalize this passion, the more I gained from the experience.



Throughout high school, I focused on improving my Kalpana swara and Alapana- but specifically, my skill of improvisation. In the beginning, I do admit that I was embarrassed whenever I would try to sing Alapana freestyle, delving through the ins and outs of a raga. I was embarrassed because I didn't think I was worthy of singing and making up my own Swara and Alapana, and I admit that this embarrassment prevented me from improving. I realized that in order to improve my Alapana and Swara, I had to listen. In the year leading up to my Arangetram (the summer after I graduated high school) I listened more than I sang. I listened to singers who inspired me- Sudha Raghunathan, Ranjani Gayathri, and Nithyashree. I would listen to Raagam Taanam Pallavi's on repeat with headphones on all throughout my day in school, on the bus, at home while doing homework.



Listening to these legendary singers is what I owe most of my successful performance at my Arangetram to. My mother and father also pushed my singing endurance to the maximum, encouraging me to sing around 6 hours every day in order to prepare

my voice for the big day. With my family's and my Guru's support, I was able to successfully complete a three-hour long Arangetram concert in June of 2016.

There was a point in the middle of my concert when I was singing the krithi Nagumomu that I felt an overwhelming sensation of happiness and devotion to God. To this day, I struggle with describing my emotions and sensation that I felt while singing that song, and to this day I don't quite know why it brought me to tears on stage while singing.

I would say that after my Arangetram, I expanded my singing to different varieties and genres of music. I started making Bollywood covers on Instagram, I started performing around the city at Indian functions and events. I had opportunities to perform for Diwali Dhamaaka Talent Competition and placing first in both the Bollywood and Carnatic categories. In my sophomore year of college at Saint Louis University, I joined the Astha A Capella group, with which I gained arranging and directing experience. Our A Capella group had the pleasure of performing at a National competition and placing third place- a first accomplishment for our group. Now, as Music Director of the A Capella team, I enjoy experimenting with fusing Western music with Carnatic and Bollywood music, as well as directing a team of singers with unique and diverse musical talents.



Recently, I began teaching violin lessons and Carnatic lessons to students on the weekends. Music is never ending, and my foundation in Carnatic music is what led me to expand my musical abilities and apply my skills towards various types of music. As a teacher, I am proud and grateful to be spreading my love of music to other students who have yet to explore all of what their musical journey has in store for them!



Priya Suresh Kanna is a Junior at Saint Louis University, and is a pre-medicine student studying Neuroscience and Bioethics, with minors in Biology and Sociology. Her graduate studies goals include attending Medical School and aspires to become a Physician someday.

She has 14 years of Carnatic classical music training from Guru Seema Kasthuri, and 7 years of western violin training from Mr. Ron Vince. In her free time, she enjoys singing Bollywood music and performing around the city at various Indian functions and events. She completed her Carnatic Music Arangetram the summer of 2016. She is currently Music Director of SLU's premier Indian-fusion "Astha A Capella" group.

On the weekends, she enjoys teaching violin lessons and Carnatic music lessons to students with a passion and drive for music as well. Fun fact, she is a big Rajini fan and loves to eat Pani Puri!