

MAESTRO WHO HELPED ESTABLISH SARANGI AS A SOLO INSTRUMENT

By Sumana Ramanan, Mumbai Mirror | Updated: Jul 11, 2017, 06.27 AM

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The musician, son of illustrious tabla player Nikhil Ghosh, was also part of an ensemble that won a Grammy in 2011.

Dhruba Ghosh, one of India's finest sarangi players and its international face, passed away unexpectedly on Monday after suffering a heart attack early on Monday morning in his flat in Juhu. He was 59.

The son of the illustrious tabla player Nikhil Ghosh, he played an important role in cementing the sarangi as a solo instrument, especially on the world stage, a process that Ram Narayan, 89, had started.

A broad-minded intellectual, he collaborated with musicians from other countries; with one project he was part of winning a Grammy Award in 2011. The prize was for the best album in the New Age category, which included musicians brought together by the American saxophonist and environmental activist Paul Winter.

The sarangi has a long history as an accompaniment to vocal music, and did not traditionally have its own compositional forms, something that Ram Narayan began to change by playing gats meant for plucked instruments such as the sitar and sarod, explained musicologist Deepak Raja.

Ghosh took this further by incorporating some of these instruments' playing techniques, said Raja, who had spent much of Sunday afternoon with Ghosh at the sitar player Arvind Parikh's Guru Purnima function.

"We had tea together," said Raja. "I even invited him to play at my home. The next day he was gone. It is a great loss. He contributed to the revival of the sarangi that Ram Narayan had begun."

Ghosh had suffered a stroke a few years ago, but had recovered well, and apart from a chronic back ache that most instrumentalists endure, he seemed to be in good health, Raja said. His family — the tabla and sitar player Nayan Ghosh, a year his senior, and his sister, the singer Tulika Ghosh — performed the last rites on Monday afternoon.

Ghosh grew up in a household that was musically immensely rich, learning both vocal music and tabla as a child. He later briefly learnt sarangi from Mohammed Sagiruddin Khan, the outstanding sarangiya and thumri singer from Kolkata, but was largely self-taught. In his solo playing, Ghosh was heavily influenced by both Ram Narayan and Bundu Khan, Sagiruddin Khan's teacher, who many consider to be among the greatest sarangiya of all time.

“He [Dhruba Ghosh] is someone who thinks creatively and philosophically about music. Like Bundu Khan, he is a lover of paltas, note-permutation melodic exercises,” writes Nicolas Magriel, a sarangi player and musicologist, on his website, sangirangi.net.

Ghosh split his time between Europe and Mumbai, where he was the principal of the music and dance school of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in the Gamdevi locality near Girgaon Chowpatty.

Many musicians and friends expressed their shock and grief on Facebook.

“Nitu Dada...was amazingly talented as a sarangi player and known as a composer too,” wrote tabla artiste Aneesh Pradhan, who trained under the sarangi maestro’s father, Nikhil Ghosh.

Sarod musician Arnab Chakrabarty knew him closely. “Dhruba Dada was a shining beacon of humanity and decency in the dog-eatdog world of Hindustani music and one of the finest sarangi players of the past few decades,” he wrote. “Although chronologically my senior by 20 years or more, he was a sincere and loving friend to my wife Tiksha and me, and played a mentoring role in several aspects of my life. I will miss him.”

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