

# Crossing boundaries

**TÊTE-À-TÊTE** Read on to know what musical outings and confluences mean to vocalist Bombay Jayashri as she talks to

CHITRA SWAMINATHAN



**OPENING UP NEW VISTAS:** *Raga and rasa with Western orchestra.*

She gladly launches into a few melodic verses, talks excitedly about the bold and honest queries of young aficionados of Carnatic music and casually strikes some hasta mudras. Bombay Jayashri is flush with the experience of singing Sangam poetry to the accompaniment of a chamber orchestra in Lapland, organising the second edition of Svanubhava successfully and jamming with Bharatanatyam artists.

Skeptics may look at such involvements as diverting attention from kutcheris but Jayashri is not one to live her art with blinkers on. "It's not simple as doing something out-of-the-routine or for effect," says Jayashri. "You have to delve deeper into the system, trust your confidence and push your endurance level. Finally, what you get is what you feel...refreshed, open-minded and energised for more creative challenges." So, how was it to sing Sangam poetry amidst snow-capped mountains in faraway Lapland? And how was it to indulge in raga and rasa expositions in the Reindeer land?

manent performer.

Set in a deep ravine formed by a glacial river, the stage is at the bottom of the valley, surrounded by pine trees and majestic mountains while the audience is seated on stone seats.

"It was more like being part of a canvas. But what made me more emotional was seeing the audience enjoy listening to Tamil poetry penned more than 2,000 years ago and the ability of our ragas to be heard loud and clear against a formidable 40-member chamber orchestra. There were several moments when the Carnatic swaras stood their own, while at others they delightfully merged with the Western notes. There was visual proof of this cultural confluence too. Finns coming to the concert wearing T-shirts imprinted with Sangam verses in Finnish along with the meaning," recalls Jayashri. Along with her were Poongulam Subramaniam and ghatam Karthick, whose tani avartanam received rounds of applause.

Ask her how she became part of Avanti! (a well-established Helsinki-based cham-

ber orchestra) for the past 20 years. And to enjoy the music better, he studied classical Tamil under Professor E. Sundaramurti, former vice-chancellor of the Thanjavur Tamil University.

From her early concert days, Jayashri remembers seeing him sit in the first few rows and wondering who he was. One day he went up to her and expressed his desire to work with her. He was keen to do a larger project based on the wonderful poems from Kurunthogai (Sangam literature), Carnatic music and Western orchestra and perform it in Finland. "His ability to recite and comprehend the meaning of the classic verses stunned me," says Jayashri.

Eero diligently chose the five poems, 'Mazhai Vilaiyayadum Mazhai,' 'Malai Idar Itta,' 'Yaayum Nyaayum,' 'Nilaitinum Peridhey' and 'Kaamam Kaamam,' and wove them into a love story with shades of longing, disappointment, etc. He wanted to convey their emotions through a mix of Carnatic vocal and instrumental and Western orchestra. So he brought together Jayashri,

conductor of the orchestra, was so taken in by the experience that he wanted a repeat performance at the famous Luosto Summer Festival in Lapland.

What do such musical outings and confluences mean to the soft-spoken vocalist?

"They are extremely humbling. They open your eyes and mind to new and fascinating aspects of the art. For instance, while rehearsing with Avanti! I learnt to follow a conductor's language and perform accordingly. So was it at Svanubhava. I never thought such a rapport could be established between young listeners and learners and established artists.

"A girl asked Birju Maharaj how practical it is to train in classical dance and make it your vocation in today's success-driven world? As for the collaborative performances with Bharatanatyam artists such as Leela Samson and Priyadarsini Govind, they are a way to express my love for the dance form that I learnt as a young girl. It is interesting to see how dancers lend a

## Beautiful setting

"I can still feel the goosebumps," says the acclaimed vocalist. She performed in an incredibly beautiful setting at the Aittakuru amphitheatre in Luosto (capital city of Lapland), where Nature is a per-

lished Helsinki-based chamber orchestra) and Jayshri says, "the credit goes to Finnish composer, writer and pianist Eero Hmeenniemi, an admirer of her singing. A lover of Carnatic music, Eero has been visiting India every December

brought together Jayashri, Ghatam S. Karthick and Poongulam Subramaniam and Avanti! chamber orchestra.

Eero's dream was unveiled at Helsinki last year. It was well-received by the audience. John Storgards,

to see how dancers lend a physical form to words, swaras and ragas. What's more amazing is to see how they interpret them in their individual ways. One never ceases to be a student. There's so much to learn," signs off Jayashri with a smile.