Gen Z and Indian Classical Music

Can a centuries-old tradition find a new voice in a generation of reels, algorithms and instant gratification?

Indian classical music has survived centuries of social, cultural and technological transformations. From royal courts to concert halls, from the intimate Guru–Shishya Parampara to institutional learning, and from gramophone records to today's digital streaming platforms, this extraordinary musical tradition has continuously evolved while preserving its fundamental values.

But perhaps one of its most fascinating encounters is unfolding today—with **Generation Z**.

Born into a world of smartphones, social media, algorithms and instant access to information, Gen Z represents a generation whose relationship with music, learning, entertainment and professional aspirations is significantly different from that of its predecessors.

For generations, Indian classical music has been nurtured through years of dedicated Riyaz, patient exploration of ragas, deep respect for the Guru and an unwavering commitment to musical excellence. Recognition often followed decades of perseverance, and the journey itself was considered as important as the destination.

But does Gen Z view this journey through the same lens?

Tradition Meets a New Generation

Today, a young musician can access thousands of recordings of legendary maestros, learn compositions through online tutorials, explore different Gharanas and even experiment with AI-assisted musical tools—all without leaving home.

Does this unprecedented access to musical knowledge strengthen the traditional Guru–Shishya Parampara, or does it gradually change the relationship between the Guru and the Shishya?

Does freely available musical material encourage deeper exploration, or does it sometimes tempt young learners to acquire compositions without fully understanding the nuances of a raga?

And what about Riyaz? In a world accustomed to quick results and instant recognition, how does a young musician approach the demanding discipline of practising for years before achieving artistic maturity?

These are not questions intended to challenge the commitment of young musicians. Rather, they seek to understand how a new generation negotiates the relationship between tradition and contemporary realities.

Is Classical Music Becoming a Visual Experience?

Another interesting transformation is taking place in the presentation of Indian classical music.

Traditionally, the music itself occupied centre stage. The artist's musical depth, command over the raga and ability to establish an emotional connection with the audience were the principal measures of a successful performance.

Today, stage aesthetics, lighting, attire, artist personality, digital storytelling and social media visibility increasingly influence how music is discovered and experienced.

A beautifully produced short reel can introduce a young musician to thousands of listeners. An aesthetically presented concert can attract audiences who might otherwise hesitate to attend a traditional classical performance.

But where does presentation end and musical substance begin?

Can a short digital performance communicate the depth of a raga? Are speed, technical brilliance and visually engaging performances gaining greater attention than the unhurried development of musical ideas?

Or could these new forms of presentation become valuable gateways through which younger audiences discover the deeper beauty of Indian classical music?

Passion, Profession and the Pursuit of Recognition

There is also the important question of professional sustainability.

For a Gen Z musician, choosing Indian classical music as a full-time career involves considerations that extend beyond artistic commitment.

Performance opportunities, financial security, digital visibility, teaching, collaborations, independent content creation and audience development are increasingly interconnected.

Does the younger generation believe that excellence in classical music alone can sustain a professional career? Or does today's musician need to become an entrepreneur, content creator and self-promoter alongside being a performing artist?

How do young musicians balance the demands of Riyaz with the equally pressing need to remain visible and relevant?

And perhaps most importantly, **what does success mean to a Gen Z classical musician—artistic mastery, recognition, financial independence, social media popularity or a combination of these?**

But What About the Gen Z Audience?

The discussion would remain incomplete without understanding the generation sitting on the other side of the stage.

Do young listeners genuinely have shorter attention spans, as is often assumed? Or have we simply failed to present classical music in ways that connect with their experiences?

Would they prefer a traditional, extended raga recital or a shorter, thoughtfully curated musical experience? Does understanding the technical structure of a raga matter to them, or can emotional engagement alone create a lasting connection?

What attracts them to a concert? The reputation of the artist? The musical content? The venue, ambience and visual presentation? Or perhaps a personal connection established through digital platforms?

And when extraordinary musical performances are freely available online, what motivates a young listener to purchase a ticket and experience classical music live?

Are we truly listening to what young audiences want, or are we merely making assumptions about them?

Classical GupShup Wants to Hear Gen Z!

For an upcoming special feature of *Classical GupShup* in *Classical Clap*, we intend to explore these questions through conversations with **Gen Z Indian classical musicians and young music enthusiasts**.

The objective is not to judge one generation against another, nor to suggest that tradition must surrender to modernity.

Instead, we wish to understand the aspirations, contradictions, challenges and fresh perspectives of a generation that will play a significant role in shaping the future of Indian classical music.

We are particularly interested in candid and independent opinions. Young musicians need not be established performers, and listeners need not possess technical knowledge of classical music. In fact, perspectives from occasional listeners and those newly discovering classical music may be equally revealing.

An Invitation to Our Readers

Do you know a promising Gen Z Indian classical musician—vocalist or instrumentalist—who has an interesting perspective on the future of our music?

Or a young music enthusiast whose listening habits, expectations and experiences could help us better understand the next generation of classical music audiences?

We invite you to recommend such individuals for this special feature.

Please share their names, a brief introduction and, where possible, their musical interests through the comments or a direct message.

We hope these conversations will offer insights not only to musicians and audiences but also to Gurus, concert organizers, cultural institutions and everyone working towards the preservation and promotion of Indian classical music.

Because preservation does not necessarily mean resisting change, just as innovation does not necessarily mean abandoning tradition.

Perhaps the real question is not whether Gen Z will adapt to Indian classical music, but how Indian classical music and Gen Z will influence each other.

And who better to answer that question than Gen Z itself?

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Classical GupShup | Classical Clap

#GenZ #IndianClassicalMusic #ClassicalGupShup #ClassicalClap #GuruShishyaParampara #Riyaz #YoungMusicians #FutureOfClassicalMusic