

Multitalented Harsh to play Carnegie Hall

ARTHUR J PAIS

As he prepares for his concert at the Carnegie Hall, 34-year-old Anurag Harsh says he will be remembering his first concert three decades ago.

"I plan to go back to when I was 4 years old and I sang *khayals*, *bhajans*, *geets*, *ghazals* and *shayri* to offer an eclectic mix of my music," says Harsh, a management consultant at Deloitte and Touche in New York.

At the March 18 event, he will be accompanied by Nitin Mitta, who Harsh says is "one of the most respected young tabla players in North America now."

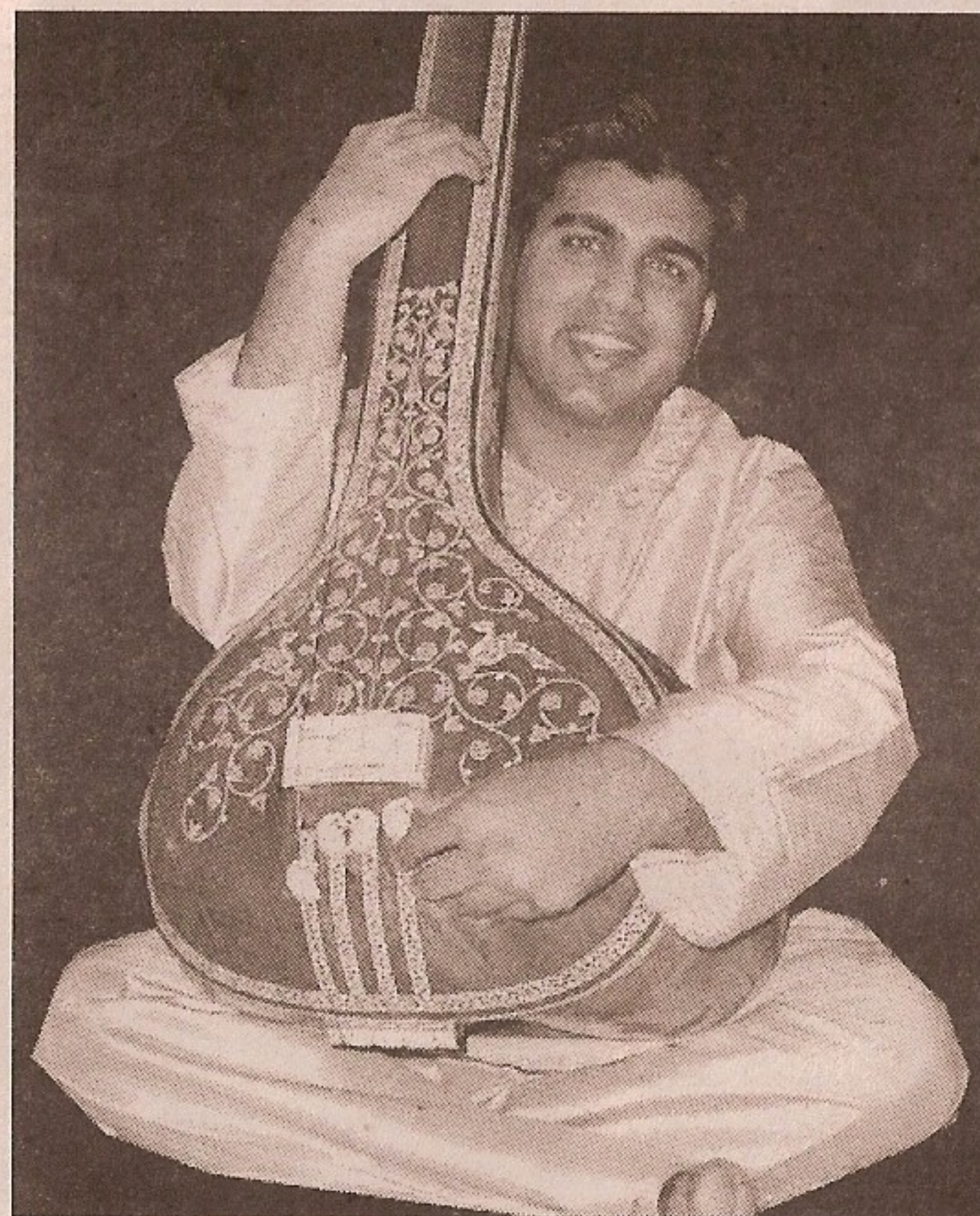
"I enjoy performing with him as we can really go wild with the rhythms and it's a lot of fun on stage," Harsh adds. Joining them is Kedar Naphade, a harmonium player who has accompanied acclaimed artists like Lakshmi Shankar.

Harsh, who was trained by his mother singer Asha Kaul and went on to learn from other established singers, admits that despite the recognition he received very early in his life and a raft of stories in magazines and newspapers, he decided to go for management studies because he felt a professional musical life would not be financially viable.

His Carnegie Hall concert is meant to attract younger Indian Americans to Indian classical music, he says.

"We will show them that traditional and classical music can be anything but boring," he says.

He would also emphasize the purity of music. "There has



■ Anurag Harsh

been a tremendous recent surge of music created, supported by, edited or entirely composed using computers and electronic media," he explains. "While that's great in essence and I equally enjoy modern music, people have always appreciated the innate quality of something that's truly human – something that may have errors – and yet is difficult. It just touches the heart. It is the difference between listening to a real guitar versus a simulated one. I feel music has come down to depend on the efficiency of the sound engineers, the computer wizards who know how to use musical software packages.

"The younger generation tends to find traditional musician events stuffy, 'limiting,' 'boxed' and to some extent 'boring,'" he says. "I want to take away these stigmas and encourage the young to come listen to music that is traditional yet contemporary, universal, human and amazingly exciting."

He remembers his parents telling him that when he was 2 years old he could recite the full octave (*saptak*) with complete rhythm and beat. Two years later he was able to recite a *bhajan* in raag Bhairavi sung by Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan. He offers the recording of his 45 minute-long first concert on his web site www.anuragharsh.com

After training under Pandit Chandrakant Apte for a number of years, he prepared for classical music exams through

the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Mumbai and received his Sangeet Alankar advanced degree at the age of 17.

He was in the United Kingdom, having received a Duke of Edinburgh scholarship, and did his bachelor's in computer science from Sheffield University.

"Those years also influenced my thinking and music musical evolution in a big way," he continues. "During my college years I started working for the BBC in London as a broadcaster of current affairs and science programs producing news bulletins and anchoring programs related to European and Asian affairs."

He also broadcast in Hindi for the BBC world Service. "The BBC Hindi service had some great scholars who worked there or who visited from India regularly. Their company and conversations with them helped shape my thoughts and influenced my musical writing."

After a few years at the BBC, he joined a tech company in California, and went on to write, with Kapil Raina, *mCommerce Security: A Beginners Guide* for McGraw-Hill five years ago.

Harsh, who has an MSE in management from Wharton and an MBA from MIT Sloan, says wherever he studied or worked, he made sure performed several times a year.

"The music scene in New York is tremendous," he says, "and with time I started to collaborate with many good musicians. It was hard to maintain an active weekend concert schedule while working a Monday to Thursday travel schedule and a full-time consulting job. But I balanced it well and I realised that my music helped me focus on my consulting work."

The Carnegie Hall event should also be a humbling experience, he muses.

"To think of sitting on the same stage and coming up with something that the audience might like knowing fully well that Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, or Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia and Ustad Zakir Hussain had blessed that stage not too long ago, is a daunting task to say the least," he says.