

# twice as TALENTED

INVESTMENT BANKER AND CARNATIC VOCALIST, MANASI PRASAD WEARS BOTH TITLES WITH EASE AND ÉLAN

**T**here are heroes and there are heroes. Those who win a World Cup, and those who live their everyday lives through their convictions. Manasi Prasad had the courage to follow her dream, and in living life with no regrets, she is a source of inspiration to us all.

After a 14-hour workday that is perfectly normal for investment bankers, Prasad goes home, not to unwind and watch TV, but to rigorous *riyaaz* till late in the night. “You don’t have to give up on one thing to excel in the other,” says the 27-year-old, who effortlessly juggles her job with being a Carnatic music vocalist and Bharatanatyam dancer.

There are not many like Prasad. She was one of the few selected by banking giant Goldman Sachs for a summer job in New York in 2006. The firm was impressed enough to offer her a permanent post when she graduated from IIM Bangalore, but Prasad turned down the offer because she didn’t want her music to be affected. Taking up the offer would not only have meant a “dream job in the US” as per pre-meltdown yuppie standards, but also an escape from the rigours and stress of exhaustive campus interviews the following year. “But I chose to go through that, because I was clear that I wanted a job in Bangalore.” Last year, Prasad took up a relatively modest job at Standard Chartered Bank.

Born into a family that loved classical music, Prasad’s early childhood was spent in Kuwait, where she would wake up to the melody of her mother, Carnatic vocalist Tara Prasad, teaching her students. Her mother was her first guru and music came naturally to her.

But it was only after 1990, when the first Gulf War forced the family to come back home, that Prasad discovered a whole new world. She had the opportunity to be trained by the best gurus, and developed a love for Bharatanatyam. She gave her first dance performance at age 13, her first vocal concert at age 14 and has since performed in over 500 concerts and released four albums.

Throughout that time, Prasad excelled at academics. After she completed her secondary certificate, won a prestigious Singapore Airlines scholarship—given to 30 students nationwide every year—to study for a higher



# city hero

secondary degree in Singapore. At the end of her course, she was given the choice of staying back in Singapore to study further. But two years had taught her something—she couldn't be apart from her music and dance. Prasad returned and enrolled in a local engineering college. Even later, her priorities were clear: she would study only in IIM Bangalore, so she could touch base with music whenever she wanted.

In college, Prasad had become cultural ambassador and delivered performance in Chile, talking to audiences about Carnatic music, an alien concept in the Spanish-speaking country. "I had to take the help of a translator to communicate with them," she says. Prasad has recently returned from similar a tour of the US, where she talked about Carnatic music at four universities. Putting her B-school education to use, she made PowerPoint presentations before her concerts, to connect with the audiences. Even in her productions, Prasad tries to merge the traditional with the modern. "In Chennai, where there is a strong appreciation for purely classical forms of music, I can stick to the traditional. But in Bangalore, which is a lot more cosmopolitan, I need to add modern elements to draw in audiences, especially younger people," she says.

One of her popular productions on Meera Bai combines Carnatic and Bharatanatyam in talking about the princess who had every luxury, but chose to follow an ideal that would take her to an exalted level. At some level, Prasad relates to Meera. So, she feels, do many in her audience.

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"Meera Bai's story could just as well be a modern-day story about the choices we have to make in our own lives."  
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"It could just as well be a modern story about the choices we have to make in life," she says.

For Prasad, the choice is clear. Music will eventually be a full-time career, which is why when her MBA classmates were reeling under the pressures of daily presentations, projects and lectures, Prasad took a train to Chennai for a performance, came back, and headed straight for the exam hall. Despite this, in her first year, she

received the Aditya Birla Award, given to only 10 students in all the IIMs in the country. Last year, she was selected as one of the city's young achievers by the Rotary Club, and not without reason.

At a time when people her age want nothing more than to follow the American Dream, Manasi Prasad can't dream of leaving Bangalore. In an age when money is the biggest mantra, she has found happiness elsewhere. Is this what you call an urban hero?

■ by Swagata Sen

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