

## US Orchestra to perform Dikshitar Compositions

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Madison in USA has gained the unique distinction of hosting multi-cultural twin-composer festivals over the last few years which have brought together two immortal composers from two contrasting cultures. Following the resounding successes of the Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi (OVK)-Bach Festival (2013) and the Tyagaraja-Mozart Festival (2014), this year's Melharmony Festival on November 7 & 8 in will feature Muttuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835) and his Western Classical contemporary, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827).

While it is well known that both Dikshitar and Beethoven were highly admired and prolific composers in their respective systems, this festival will provide a huge opportunity to connoisseurs of both Western and Eastern cultures to gain a glimpse of both under one roof. The event is expected to draw scores of artistes, students, scholars as well as hundreds of listeners from Madison, Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis and other parts of USA.

**Historic significance:** The festival's crowning event will be the concert by the renowned Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra (<http://www.wcoconcerts.org/>), which will showcase three of Dikshitar's compositions along with Beethoven's works. Conductor of the WCO, maestro Andrew Sewell said, "Two great traditions of classical music converge through Melharmony. Come and experience the power of Beethoven and Dikshitar".

This is probably the first time that a prominent Western orchestra would be presenting repertoire of any Indian classical composer. The three pieces are Parvati patim (raga Hamsadhvani), Shree kantimateem (Hemavati) and Shree saraswati hite (Manji). The primary reason that Indian classical repertoire has not been handled by Western Classical Orchestra is that almost all of the music has been purely melodic and not composed for harmony-centric symphony orchestras.

However, thanks to the introduction of *Melharmony* ([www.melharmonymusic.com](http://www.melharmonymusic.com)) in world music, hundreds of Indian ragas can go truly global and be presented by even Western Classical orchestras over the coming years in a much deeper manner. Melharmony is defined as "*harmony based on rules of highly evolved melodic systems such as Indian classical*" and differs sharply or subtly from almost all other East-West fusion endeavours including contemporary and Bollywood music.

*Melharmony* is a creation of noted Indian musician-composer, Chitravina N Ravikiran, a celebrated prodigy even at age two who is known for his '*teasing precision and dazzling effects*' (**New York Times**). Ravikiran, hailed as the *Mozart of India* (**Wisconsin State Journal**) and acclaimed for '*bringing new audiences to Indian classical music*' (**CNN Television**) has arranged

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several traditional compositions of master composers like Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi, Tyagaraja, Dikshitar, Karur Brothers and others, several of which have been performed by both Western Classical and Jazz orchestras.

(Watch short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uwqfrt9DEI8>)

Ravikiran elaborated further, “Melharmony showcases *similarities* between diverse systems of music, which can enable their contrasts to be appreciated even more positively. I have always been passionate about projecting our immortal composers’ brilliant works on the global platform and making them a part of mainstream world repertoire. This will exponentially raise awareness of not just Indian concerts but also about Indian concepts.”

**World’s first:** Muttuswami Dikshitar, one of the most erudite composers that India has produced was probably the earliest composer to consciously attempt an East-West Fusion even in the late 1700s. Exposed to British Orchestras in Chennai, he composed about 40 ‘English Notes’ – short pieces in C Major with Sanskrit lyrics, some of which were based wholly or partially on well-known Western tunes. His *Santatam pahimam* is based on the British Anthem “God Save the Queen” and his *Shyamale meenakshi* bears resemblance to some variations to Mozart’s Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. His brother, Baluswami Dikshitar is credited with having introduced the violin to Indian classical.

**Comprehensive Event:** The 2-day festival also includes scholarly discussions on Dikshitar and Beethoven by Prof Robert Morris of the Eastman School of Music & Dikshitar scholar Kanniks Kannikeshwaran and music & dance recitals of the composers’ works by various artistes and ensembles.

As Vanitha Suresh, Director of Melharmony Foundation says, “The premiere of Dikshitar’s works by WCO is even more significant because of the timing, which is very close to Dikshitar’s aradhana since he attained immortality on Diwali day.”