

A Personal Story – Internet Singing Lessons

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Having immigrated to the US from India at an early age, I have always had a problem mastering the fine melodic nuances required to sing traditional Hindi songs. This problem has limited my singing repertoire.

Last winter, during a religious meeting of Indian immigrants living in the Ann Arbor area, I was struck with how well a young Indian man sang a haunting Hindu chant. Later that evening I asked him to help me improve how I sang Hindu chants, which he did willingly. However, he soon informed me that he was returning to India the following week as he was in the US on a temporary work visa.

Because I was disappointed in losing such a willing teacher, my friend suggested a technological solution. He suggested that I set up an account with Yahoo! Messenger, and to buy a stereo headset through which we could continue our music interaction. Yahoo! Messenger is an instant messaging system that enables logged-in users to exchange text messages, and to talk free of charge on the Internet.

When my friend returned to India, we had to deal with two problems. First, we had to deal with the time-difference -- India is 10.5 hours ahead of the US. Second, we had to deal with the problem that my friend only had access to an Internet connection at the office where he worked. This is because computers and Internet connections are still quite expensive for the average Indian. We therefore decided that the best time for undisturbed instant voice messaging would be at 7:30 AM Indian Standard Time when other employees had not yet arrived in my friend's office. This time also work out well for me because it would be 9:00 PM EST, the time when I liked to pluck on my guitar and sing.

The above plan worked well – on February 8th, 2004, I had my first Transcontinental Singing Lesson. Despite a slight delay in sound transmission due to the Internet bandwidth problem, my friend was able to correct the fine melodic nuances that I missed when I sang my favorite Hindu chant. I can now sing a Hindu chant with nuances approved by a singing teacher sitting in front of a computer many oceans away.