

Hyderabad Brothers' Concert

A Review (October 6, 2001)

By Rasikan

The Hyderabad brothers, Raghavachary and Seshachary, ever since they shot into fame little more than a decade ago, are among the most popular Carnatic musicians of today. The strong points of their music include classicism in their rendering of alapana and kriti, adherence to sruti, and a good grasp of layam; indeed, one of the brothers is a mridangam vidwan also. With the young and talented Delhi Sundararajan for violin and the veteran (though still quite young) Raja Rao for mridangam as accompanists, one could expect a high level of music from the Brothers. I went with such expectation to the SRUTI concert of the group on October 6 at Gwennyd Mercy College auditorium. But I have to confess that my expectations were not met fully. There appeared to be a lackadaisical atmosphere during a good part of the concert. The Brothers' frequent reference to books and notes in front of them did not help much. More about that later. However, I do not want to give the impression that the concert was not above average. Far from it.

The highlight of the concert was a very good RTP in Keeravani. Keeravani is one of those ragas which we probably hear more as RTP than during the earlier part of a concert. The reason may be that there are very few major kritis in this ragam other than *Kaligiyunte* of Thyagaraja. The purvangam for the pallavi set to misra jati tripata talam, was an interesting play on words: *Ra Ragam, Tha Thanam, Pal Pallavi*.

The concert itself started on a sedate note with the navaraga varnam *Valachi* followed by a quick *Dasaratha nandana*, a kriti of Thyagaraja in Asaveri. The Brothers followed this with Patnam Subramania Iyer's *Manasu karuga* in Hamsadhwani and Thyagaraja's *Shri Narasimha* in Phalamanjari. Both the kritis were preceded by fairly elaborate alapanas of the respective ragas by the younger brother, Seshachari. In fact, it was he who dominated the rendering of various ragas throughout the concert almost relegating the elder brother's role to providing vocal support rather than as a near equal partner.

Chitravina Ravikiran, during the workshop conducted by SRUTI a few years ago, had argued that Hamsadhwani should be regarded as a janya of Kalyani and not that of Sankarabharanam as many authorities had. Seshachari seemed to agree with Ravikiran's thesis. The alapana had a liberal mixture of Kalyani prayogams.

It is not unusual for musicians to exhibit their vidwat by rendering elaborate alapanas in relatively rare ragams. Phalamanjari is one such ragam. But the avarohanam of this ragam is so close to that of Kanada that inevitably comparisons were made to the latter more popular ragam.

The Brothers then rendered Begada and Thyagaraja's kriti *Lokavana chatura*. The suite included alpana, neraval and kalpana swara.

Raja Rao was in his elements during the thani that followed.

Upto this time there was no prati madhyama ragam (except the short Kalyani chittaswaram as part of the varnam). So I was expecting the RTP to be in a prati madhyama ragam. However, after a crisp *Chinna nadena* of Thyagaraja in Kalanidhi, the Brothers sailed into RTP in Keeravani. The ragam was rendered in three sthayis in the classic mold. Sundararajan who up until now was rather subdued came into his own and played a delectable Keeravani, both the alapana and thanam.

In the post Pallavi segment, the Brothers started off with two javalis in Khamas and Saveri, followed by *Challare*, a Thyagaraja kriti in Ahiri. This last song rendered with great bhavam is bound to have touched the hearts of many in the audience. At the request of a member of the audience, the Brothers sang the Annamacharya keertana *Garudaga* in Hindolam. The final piece before the mangalam was a Purandaradasa composition in Durga. For some reason Seshachari sang elaborate alapanas for both Hindolam and Durga. I felt that they were rather out of place considering that they were at the tail end of the concert.

Over all, although not an outstanding performance, a reasonably satisfying one.

The Hyderabad Brothers were referring to books or notes during a good part of the performance. This disconcerting habit seems to be a recent trend in Carnatic music concerts. Although it may not be true, it gives the impression that the musician was not fully organized for the concert and also that he/she had not fully mastered the kriti(s) they were rendering. I would like to allude to how an earlier generation of musicians approached their profession with a story about Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar which goes as follows: One of his close friends had observed that the great vidwan was assiduously practicing for months the Varali kriti of Dikshitar, *Seshacala nayakam*. But he did not sing it in any of the concerts during that period. Asked by the friend ‘why not’, Ariyakudi is supposed to have responded: “Even after months of *sadakam* (practice), I haven’t been able to master the kriti. Until I totally personalize the kriti and am absolutely confident that I can render it without faults, I won’t sing it in a concert”!