

## Flute Concert by Shashank A Showman Performance

A Review (March 23, 2002)

By Rasikan

Showmanship dominated the performance by young Shashank at his SRUTI flute concert at the Gwynedd-Mercy college auditorium on March 23. A fairly large audience was treated to a masterly display of technical prowess on the bamboo flute. As if to whet the audience's expectations his father set up a video (DVD) display of one his recent performances at the lobby even as the guests were arriving.

This is the third time Shashank has performed for SRUTI. Many of us remember the first time, almost ten years ago, when as a lad of fourteen he mesmerized us with an unbelievably mature performance. His performance a few years later was more sedate. This time it was mastery of the instrument or should I say instruments of varying lengths that dominated. He used a long flute to play in the lower (anumandara) octaves, choosing a piccolo type of short flute for playing in the higher octaves (tara). While the mandara sthayi sounded serenely sublime and very mellow, the higher octaves produced screeching sounds with a pronounced hiss. (I saw a young girl sitting in front of me closing her ears every time Shashank used the short flute.)

The accompanying artists were: U. Ganesh Prasad (violin), Satish Kumar (mridangam), Radhakrishnanan (ghatam), and M. Gururaj (morsing).

Shashank played only three pieces (excluding the varnam) before the RTP, a welcome change compared to many other artists who typically pack the program with kriti after kriti with nary an alapana or swara kalpana.

The showmanship was evident with the very first piece, the *Viriboni* varnam in Bhairavi which was played in four speeds including a *tisram*. After a sedate *Pranamamyaham* of Mysore Vasudevacharya in Gowla, Shashank played an elaborate Ranjani and Thyagaraja's *Durmargachara*.

Ranjani was followed by a rare Swati Tirunal composition in Karnataka Kapi, *Suma sayaka*. This is an interesting composition. It has the structure of a varnam in Rupakam talam, with a pallavi, anupallavi, chittaswaram, charanam followed by ettugada swarams, the last one in ragamalika. Perhaps because of the complexities built in the composition, many include this piece in the middle of a concert instead of the beginning as with other varnams. The late K.V. Narayanaswami would even preface the composition with a small alapana.

After this, Shashank chose Natakurinji for *ragam tanam pallavi* and included a rather elaborate Keeravani in the thanam as well as kalpana swarams. The ragamalika kalpana swarams was another piece of showmanship with ragams following in rapid succession, most of them for just one avarthanam. I don't know how many in the audience identified all the ragams; I didn't.

The delectable percussion *thani* that followed the RTP was a treat in itself. Three percussionists played five instruments; yes, you read that right. Satish Kumar, the multi talented percussionist who played the mridangam for most of the concert, included Kanjira and Konnakol (voicing of the solkattus) for the thani. Quite a feat indeed!

After a brief interval, Shashank played *Eppo varuvaro* (Jonpuri, Gopalakrishna Bharathy), the evergreen *Krishna nee begane* (Yamuna Kayani, Vyasraya) and a Brahmananda bhajan in Sindhu Bhairavi. Answering to requests from the audience, he then played Bharathiyar's *Chinnan chiru kiliye*, Patnam Subramania iyer's *Raghuvamsa*, which he began in the anupallavi, playing at break neck speed and a Khamas tillana of Patnam Subramania Iyer before concluding with the traditional mangalam.

All in all, it was quite an enjoyable concert although I would have preferred that Shashank did not constantly change from one flute to the other thus jumping the octaves. I wish he had spent more time on elaborating Natakurinji which was supposed to have been the main ragam of the evening.