

Thyagaraja Aradhana 2005
by Sujata Kumar

It was a rare event for me. I say so because after leaving my beloved India to reside in foreign soils more than 30 years ago, this is the first and only time I had the opportunity to witness a function such as this! This is because we lived in Europe and such an occasion is unimaginable there. In America, Indians are fortunate to be able to indulge in the fests of music and dance from our country, the huge Indian immigrant population of India making it possible. It is also a reflection on their zealous attempt to keep our culture alive through propagating our great music by encouraging the progeny with such concerts and teaching our invaluable fine arts to them.

The recent Thyagaraja Aradhana that took place in Berlin, New Jersey on the 19th Feb 2005 is an excellent example. I was fortunate enough to be able to attend it. It was a feast for both my ears and eyes. There were these young children, all dressed in Indian colorful garments and singing away beautifully the great Thyagaraja's Kritis! I, for a moment, forgot that I was in America and felt like I sat at a concert in India. The hustle and the bustle of the proud parents and anxious teachers, and an appreciative audience added to the aura of such an Aradhana. The temple ambience lent it the necessary authenticity. It took me back to my own childhood and my music lessons and our annual music concert. I could feel the nervous tinge in me even as I sat listening to those children, making me feel like it was my turn next! It was heart warming to see these kids who were born and brought up in America, singing so well with attention to the ragam and talam and pronouncing the words without any trace of accent. It goes to show how much hard work has gone behind all that from all sides: children, their parents and the teachers.

As the concert slowly gave way to the older participants, the enjoyment grew with it. Young aspirants enthralled everyone with their various musical attributes. There is so much talent and so much enthusiasm that infected all listeners with sheer joy. Added to the sensations our ears enjoyed, the palate too was tingled as the aromas of the culinary variety wafted into the air kindling the appetites of everyone! All of us were treated to a sumptuous lunch of various rice preparations of the South India and later a high tea with pakodas. This was then followed by the concerts of professional singers which unfortunately I could not witness as other engagements encroached on my time. But after this experience, I shall make it a point to keep my day absolutely free, to attend the Thyagaraja Aradhana next year!

[We moved about an year ago to US after my husband took an early retirement from his profession as an Aneesthesiologist in Germany. Indians or Indian cultural activities was nil in the part of Germany that we lived. My whole family loves music. But for me, without doubt, it was our unique Indian classical music that gave the much needed spiritual guidance and support. I am an ardent admirer of Smt MSSubbalakshmi and thankful for her many recitals and slokams.]

Savita Rao's Concert - Thyagaraja Aradhana 2005

By P. Swaminathan

SRUTI, The India Music and Dance Society, organized the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana for this year on Feb 19, 2005. Due to scheduling conflicts, SRUTI decided to organize this event earlier than usual. The venue for this year's celebration was the Berlin Hindu Temple, South Jersey. This year's aradhana featured quite a few talented junior artists. I was very impressed with the incredible musical skills displayed by the second generation Indian immigrants, all acquired here, living away from India. As for the adult participation I noticed quite a few *no shows* among those who gave their names in advance.

The main artist for the occasion, Savita Rao, a seasoned vocalist from Boston, Massachusetts, gave an impressive performance. The accompaniments for the performance were members of her family, sister Sandhya Srinath on the violin and brother-in-law Srinath Balasubramaniam on the mridangam. This served as a great another example of family participation.

Savita started her concert with a crisp rendering of Sogasu Juda Tharama (*rupa-mahima*) in Kannada Gowla followed by the krithi Ninne Bhajana in Nattai (*visvasa-abhaya*). As far as my memory serves me, this was the second time this particular song was rendered for the SRUTI audience after 17 years, when the Bombay Sisters rendered it for the first time in 1988.

Savita went on to render Chala Kallaladu (*amarsa-rosarosokti*) in Arabhi. The story goes that the late Sri Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer popularized this krithi. I guess every vidwan has some favorite raga as well as krithis which they sing in most of their performances. After rendering arabhi, Savita gave an elaborate alapana of Purvikalyani and rendered Paripurna Kama (*amarsa-rosa-rosokti*). The violin accompaniment for this piece was remarkably great. Both the alapana and the ensuing kalpana swaras were brilliant. Srinath provided good support on the mridangam. After a brisk rendering of Vidajaladura (*sthayi-bhava-sthira-bhakti*) in Janaranjani and Marugelara (*dainya, dainyokti*) in Jayanthasri, Savita rendered the main piece of the concert in Madhyamavathi. After a good alapana, she chose the famous Rama Katha Sudha (*kirtana*) for the krithi. Sandhya's violin support was remarkable which was evident from assembled the audience appreciation. It was noticeable that Savita had difficulty with the words of the krithi. This probably discouraged her from attempting a detailed niraval. Srinath gave a short and crisp thani on the mridangam following Madhyamavathi. After rendering Mivalla Guna (*bhagavad guna-daya ksamagrace*) in kapi, Narayana Hari (*artha-kama-garhana*) in Yamuna kalyani and Rama Rama Ra Ra in senchurati, Savita concluded the concert with a mangalam in Nadanamakriya.

Overall Savita's performance was short, sweet and enjoyable. It is important to note that she presented krithis, some of which are not frequently heard in other music concerts by established musicians. Another observation is worth mentioning here. Thyagaraja krithis have been classified into three major groups based on their spiritual and philosophical appeal, viz: *Sadhana Sampath, Bhakthi Yoga* and *Nada Yoga*. These have further been subdivided into sub-groups like *vairagya, nitya-anitya-viveka, sama-dama* etc (Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja, by Prof. V. Raghavan 1966). The names of the classification of the krithis rendered by Savita are given within parentheses. It is interesting to observe, that the krithis rendered during the concert spanned all aspects of the classification described by Prof. Raghavan.

[P. Swaminathan is a member of long standing and a frequent contributor to Sruti publications.]