

Maestros Ravikiran & Shashank in Concert

Jugalbandi Concert: Lute (Chitraveena) and Flute (April 2, 2005)

A Review By Rangaprabhu Parthasarathy

“Kallal mayanguvadhu pole

Naangal Kanmoodi vay thirandhe kettiruppom”

(Like the intoxication of alcohol, we would listen to him, eyes closed, mouth agape)

- “Theeradhe Vilayattu Pillai” by Subramanya Bharati

That pretty much sums up the experience one had on the 2nd of April, listening to Carnatic music maestros, Ravikiran on the Chitraveena and S.Shashank on the flute. The concert, organized by Sruti almost got derailed; courtesy some torrential rains that lashed the area the day before and almost all day on the 2nd. But music fans were thankfully spared the agony of missing a wonderful concert and a full hall greeted the maestros at the Bharatiya Temple in Montgomeryville, PA.

The concert started late since the rain delayed many rasikas from getting to the venue on time. Given the many closed roads and persistent rain, it was indeed a welcome decision. The artists were introduced one by one, starting with the Mozart of Indian music, Ravikiran on the lute, Shashank on the flute, P. Satish Kumar on the mridangam and Parupalli S. Phalgun on the kanjira. One interesting person in the performing ensemble was Smt. Sukanya Ramgopal on the ghatam. A rarity in what has always been a male-dominated percussion instrument, the audience were enthusiastic in greeting the lady and curious to see if she could indeed make a significant mark.

The concert began with a Varnam in Raga Shri. It was evident from the beginning that the artists shared a tremendous amount of chemistry. After a simple yet effective start with Shri, the duo picked pace with the Dikshitar kriti, Swaminatha Paripalaya in Nattai. As the song progressed, Shashank first and then Ravikiran picked up the pace of the song and showed their control with their respective instruments. By the end of the piece, the artists had gotten settled into a comfortable pace and rhythm. The audience had also been served a good taste of what was to follow.

The third piece of the concert was the classic Subbaraya Sastri composition in Reethi Gowla, Janani Ninnuvina. The song was given the elaborate treatment that it deserved and it was a great experience for all concerned. If there was a sleepy one in the audience, although there was definitely none, he or she was woken up by a short and peppy rendering of Manavyala in Raga Nalinakanthi. At this juncture, the stage was set for a good Ragam Thanam Pallavi and Shashank, while promising the same, requested a short break since it was getting really hot, on stage. The audience got a chance to mingle with friends and also get to pick CDs and cassettes featuring the artists outside the auditorium.

With the break modalities completed, Ravikiran and Shashank started their piece-de- resistance, a Ragam, Thanam, and Pallavi in Raga Kalyani. The artists excellently put forth the texture of the Raga, patiently and elaborately. It was a connoisseurs delight and a true masterpiece. To ensure that the audience got their share of nuances, Shashank and Ravikiran took turns playing small snippets of Ragas Abheri, Keeravani, Kamboji and Ahiri. Ravikiran hummed a bit of the Pallavi and then let the percussionists take over with the Thaniyavardhanam. The mridangam, ghatam and kanjira artists took turns showing their wares and as the crescendo increased, so did their control of their instruments. It was a sight to behold, with the artists enthusiastically performing and the audience thoroughly enjoying the proceedings.

It was getting late and Ravikiran signaled the intent that there would be a few Thukkadas and they would be done with the concert. Ravikiran met an audience request for a Purandaradasar Kriti with a witty repartee by saying that his instrument could play in any language. This had the audience in splits. Nevertheless, the duo obliged and Shashank started playing the timeless classic “Krishna Nee Begane” in Raga Yaman Kalyani. What followed was the Tamil version of an audience favorite if ever there was one, Theeradha Vilayattu Pillai. Starting with a small introduction in Sindhu Bhairavi, this Ragamalika glorifying the antics of young Lord Krishna by Subramanya Bharati, was a pleasure coming from the flute and the lute.

All good things must come to an end. This wonderful concert came to a close with the traditional Mangalam. The audience had been transplanted en masse for the three hours into an enchanting world of music. It was an exhilarating experience and I only hope that the combo of Ravikiran and Shashank continue to enthrall audiences, the world over with their awesome music and amazing chemistry.

[Rangaprabhu Parthasarathy, or Prabhu to friends came to the US in 2000 for his Masters and now works as a Software Engineer at Interdigital Communications Corp in King of Prussia. From the wonderful lullabies in Neelambhari, Prabhu's childhood memories are filled with kutcheris, live and recorded. Prabhu believes that Carnatic music deserves much more recognition than it currently gets and is doing his best to see that it gets all that attention that it is truly worthy of.]
