

A review of the Music Concert by Yesudas and Party

By S.Sankaran

Yesudas began his concert not with a Varnam or Krithi, but with an apologetic speech. After that he went on to sing a rare Varnam in the raga *Sarasangi*. This was followed by the Krithi 'Vathapi Ganapathim' by Dikshithar. At this point, Yesudas requested the members of the audience to applaud, a bit unusual for such a popular artist. The only other artist who asked the audience to applaud (in a Sruti concert) was the popular Veena player Chittibabu. He then went on to sing on another Krithi on Lord Ganesh, by Thyagaraja, (not heard often) in the raga *Kanakangi*, preceded by a small speech explaining the Raga. This Krithi was rendered well with feeling.

It was evident that he had a powerful vibrant voice. However, when he tried to demonstrate the 3-octave range of his voice, it was powerful in the lowest octave, but sounded somewhat shrill (like a falsetto voice) at the upper end of that range. At the least he sings comfortably with a range of 2.5 octaves, which is more than needed for Carnatic Music. But he sang in an affected way, making his music sound somewhat theatrical. His sonorous voice enabled him to use volume expansion & contraction, but then he overdid it. For example he tried to make a point in the krithi 'Kshira sagara' by singing the first line very loudly and then coming down to a normal level. I think that the meaning and feeling in that Krithi could be brought out, without that level of loudness.

Two ragas which he sang in some detail were *Kiravani* and *Kalyani*. The alapana in *Kirvani* was impressive. After the alapana, instead of letting the violinist play the raga, he started a little speech which was distracting to an intent listener like me. However the Krithi was rendered well. The best piece was probably the Ragam-Thanam-Pallavi in *Kalyani*. His alapana was well structured. The pallavi part showed his mastery of 'Thalam'. However he sang the Niraval after doing the Anulomam & Prathilomam thus reversing the conventional order. The kalpana swaras which followed were notable, and well accompanied by the violinist.

In the last part of the concert, Yesudas sang some popular pieces in various languages. One of them, which 'Bade' Gulam Ali Khan used to sing, begins with the words 'Kah kar sajani aye na baalam'. However Yesudas sang it thus: 'Kaa Karum sajani aye na baalam'. Another composition attributed to 'Thansen' was interesting & intriguing. It described how ragas (in Hindusthani music) get transformed to other ragas when one note is changed to its 'sharp' or 'flat' counterpart, or when the tonic is shifted to a different note. To appreciate the content of this composition however, one needs to know Hindusthani music deeply. A song on the deity 'Ayyapa' set to a simple melody was appealing. Finally the ragamalika slokam 'Agre pasyami' was a fitting end to the concert.

On the whole it was an enjoyable performance (to the majority of the audience at least), though it did not adhere to conventional concert traditions followed by an artist such as O.S.Thyagarajan or T.M.Krishna. After all Yesudas does perform occasionally at the Madras Music Academy, and every year at the Naradha Gana Sabha, Madras.

[Sankaran, a music enthusiast, is an active volunteer and Life member of Sruti.]