

Kiranavali Vidyasankar

Carnatic Vocal Concert (Sep 9, 2006)

A Review by Chithrai

The fall music season of SRUTI started off with a vocal recital by Kiranavali Vidyasankar who is none other than the sister of Ravikiran. SRUTI has presented concerts by Ravikiran and his brother Shashikiran in the past. With Kiranavali's concert SRUTI has hosted the entire Ravikiran's family of musicians.

Kiranavali was accompanied by K.V.S. Vinay on the violin and Rohan Krishnamurthy on the mridangam. The concert started with the varnam Chala Mela in *nattakurinchi* followed by an impressive rendering of a composition of Puliur Doraiswamy Ayenger in praise of Goddess Saraswati "Sarasiruhasana priye amba..." in the raga *nattai* set to adi tala. Normally, this raga is used as a short invocatory item but Kiranavali treated the raga with utmost reverence and considerable detail. This was followed by a crisp rendering of Shyama Shasthry's 'Sankari Neeve' in the raga *begada*. Kiranavali gave a good alapana of *begada* followed by a good rendering of the krithi. She went on to recite Thyagaraja's composition 'Nannavidachi' in *ritigowla* before the main number of the concert in *todi*. She chose to render Dikshitar's famous krithi 'Sri Krishnam Baja'. Dikshitar's compositions contain lot of references to mythology, astrology and the esoteric science of Sri Vidya. His krithi, especially the major one like *Sri Krishnam Bhaja Manasa* in *todi* is considered a benchmark to judge any other krithi composed in *todi*. This lyric has been set to music by Dikshitar so well that it lends itself to considerable improvisation (*sangathis*) unlike most compositions of Dikshitar. In contrast, Tyagaraja's kritis overflow with bhakti towards Sri Rama, and are characterized by a multitude of *sangathis* (lively cascades of musical variations on a single line of the song). Kiranavali rendered the krithi quite well. After rendering a short and brisk 'Bhogindrasayinam' in kuntalavarali, Kiranavali presented the RTP in the raga dharmavathi in a complex tala chathusrajathi jumpa (khanda nadai). The rest of the concert was filled with short pieces like 'Vellai Thamarai' in *bimplas*, 'Pahi Rama Dhutha' a rare krithi in *shadwidhamargini*, 'Theerada Vilayattu Pillai' in sindhubhairavi, thillana in *bindumalini*, a jawali in *behag* and finally 'Bhagyada Lakshmi' in *sri* raga. Hailing from a great musical family, having undergone good training by her father N. Narasimhan and later by Smt. T. Brinda, Kiranavali demonstrated her erudition in music by her choice of krithis by different composers in a variety of talas. She has remarkable knowledge and good control in her voice. However, what was lacking in her performance, if I may say so, is the absence of maturity that comes with experience in the overall presentation which I am sure she would build up with some years of experience as a performing artist.

Vinay had problems with his performance especially when Kiranavali was improvising *todi* and dharmavathi. I do not know what the problem was; however he was not able to hold on to the *sruti* and was constantly adjusting the *sruti* of his violin. He has a long way to go before becoming a seasoned violinist.

I have watched Rohan since he was 10 years old when he made his debut in mridangam during the Cleveland Aradhana festival. Since then I have seen him blossoming into a full fledged mridangam artist which he is today. He is truly a first generation American born carrying on the musical tradition of India here in USA. He used a modified mridangam (designed by him) where the pitch can be adjusted from 1 to 6 unlike the traditional mridangam. I noticed that the sound quality from his mridangam distinctly different from that of a traditional one. I prefer the traditional mridangam any day for its quality of sound. Keep up the good work Rohan!

Another interesting aspect of the concert is the format of the vote of thanks. This year, as remarked by the President Elect, SRUTI board honored the performing artists with a memento reminiscent of Philadelphia, the replica of the Liberty Bell. It would have been nice if the President Elect stopped at that; instead he went on to remark that the vote of thanks presented by the past boards were kind of stereotypical and boring; to make a change he adopted the different format on that day. This is my take on this. Vote of thanks is meant to express the appreciation of the presenting organization on the merits of the performing artists. It is mandatory that the vote of thanks be always positive and says nice words about the artists even if the reality is different. It has been followed as a tradition since time immemorial. Members of past SRUTI boards have adopted variations of this based on their creativity. It is a politically correct thing to

point out the good features of the current format, safely leaving out any comments on the past activities.
Let the audience decide whether they like the new format or not.

Chithrai is a connoisseur of music, dance and literature. He has served SRUTI in several capacities both as president as well as member of different committees