President's Note

Dear Sruti Members,

As we now prepare to wrap up this year's program with SRUTI Day on Dec 11, 2011, and I pen my last President's note for the year, I look back with pride, peace, happiness and a feeling of achievement, at all that the 2011 SRUTI Board of Directors was able to accomplish and present to our members in 2011. It has been a phenomenal year with a super abundance of stellar Indian performing arts programs, publications, grant awards, marketing and wide recognition from both our members and mainstream audiences and collaborators that are commensurate with our silver jubilee celebrations. We are also very happy & excited to share with you all, that we have elevated SRUTI to the Crown lights of the PECO building in Philadelphia (Nov 26-28, 2011) for everyone in the city to see and recognize our beloved organization - another fitting 25th anniversary tribute to SRUTI!!

To quote Vince Lombardi, ‘I firmly believe that in any man's finest hour, the greatest fulfillment of all that he holds dear, is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle - victorious’. The 2011 SRUTI BoD certainly feels victorious and exhausted, but also grateful to have had this opportunity to serve the members in this critical year. Although we had an unprecedented budget and several high-ticket items to contend with for this year, I am very pleased to share with you that we end the year with substantial surplus funds for our next Board.

My sincere thanks to all our members, supporters, grantors and advertisers for their generous monetary support and attendance at our concerts, our collaborators for the excellent team work and finally to all our esteemed artists for their superb performances. I also express my heartfelt thanks to my Board of Directors and members of all the subcommittees, including the Youth Committee, for all the hard work, dedication and unfailing commitment throughout the year - YOU FOLKS ARE SIMPLY THE BEST!!

Finally, I send my best wishes to the new 2012 SRUTI Board as they prepare to present yet another great year of exciting programs. I urge and request our members to continue to show their support as we now march towards SRUTI's next milestone event!

With warm regards,
Uma Prabhakar
on behalf of the SRUTI Board of Directors
From the Publications and Outreach Committee

Dear Friends,

This electronic issue of Sruti Notes comes to you as Sruti tries going green and saving on mailing costs. We keep our membership informed through our newsletters and would appreciate your feedback about communication through this format.

We provide information about the General Body meeting, elections and Sruti Day events scheduled for December 11, 2011. This newsletter has reviews of the music concerts and dance performances of the fall season. We also have information from the marketing committee about next year’s programs and season passes. Please visit our website www.sruti.org and Facebook page regularly for updates.

In the September Commemorative Souvenir released during Labor Day weekend celebrations the second paragraph of Dinakar Subramanian’s letter as past President was inadvertently omitted. We have included his letter in its entirety in this newsletter. We also have a letter of gratitude from Leela Samson, Director, Kalakshetra, for the support her troupe received from Sruti’s Board of Directors during their first US tour.

This is the last publication for this year and we would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to this year’s publications. We appreciate your support and hope for your continued participation in 2012.

Gayathri Rao (Chairperson)
Sundari Balakrishnan
Prabhakar Chitravu
Sunanda Gandham
Rungun Nathan
Lakshmi Radhakrishnan
M.M. Subramaniam
Kiranavali Vidyasankar
Raman Visweswaran

Letter from Past President

Dinakar Subramanian (President 1996-1997)

Having been involved with the organization since the early 90s it gives me great pleasure in congratulating Sruti as we celebrate its 25th year. It is indeed heartening to witness the growth from being a small organization founded by a few like-minded people to that which has grown slowly and steadily with good governance and strong volunteerism to become a notable presence in the area.

As we move forward to the future we are positioned in a musical era where we are able to avail ourselves of a growing crop of wonderful artists who are not only of very high quality but who are promoting and propagating Indian music and dance with great passion both in the US and in India. It is also clear that Sruti has grown to be a strong organization with such a track record that artists have fond memories of and are happy to perform for us. It is my earnest wish that Sruti continues its stellar work - not only to provide quality music and dance to the Greater Delaware Valley but also to continue its journey to build itself as a mainstream organization in the area for many more decades to come.

Editor: Part of this letter from Dinakar Subramanian was inadvertently omitted from the 25th Anniversary Commemorative Souvenir. It is being re-printed in its entirety.

Sruti hosts sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan in Philadelphia

by Hema Ramamurthy

Sruti, The India Music and Dance Society, Philadelphia, an organization dedicated to promoting Indian classical music (Hindustani and Karnatak) and dance, celebrated its 25th anniversary during Labor Day weekend (September 2-4) of 2011. As part of this celebration, Sruti hosted sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan on September 3, 2011 at the Seaport Museum in Philadelphia, PA.

Sarod is a fretless, stringed instrument, derived from the Afghani rabab. The rabab was brought into erstwhile India via the Islamic trading routes and several modifications later has resulted in the present day sarod. Sarod is traditionally used in the exposition of Hindustani classical music, with tabla as the rhythmic accompaniment.

Ustaad Amjad Ali Khan was born into the illustrious Bangash lineage, renowned for its tradition of sarod exponents, rooted in the Senia Bangash gharana of Hindustani classical music. Ustaad Khan shoulders this legendary inheritance as the sixth generation exponent. He learned to apply the vocal traditions of dhrupad and khayal singing to his instrument from his father, the great Hafiz Ali Khan of Gwalior. In this concert, Ustaad Khan was accompanied by his sons Amaan Ali Khan and Ayaan Ali Khan on the sarod, and Abhijit Banerjee and Salar Nader on the tabla.

The concert was presented in 3 segments, with Ustaad Khan performing solo in the first, his sons in the second, and all three (father and sons) in the third segment. The repertoire of Ustaad Khan’s sarod performance included an eclectic collection of musical genres, viz., rabindra sangeet, folk tune, taraana (akin to tillana of Karnatak music), and rendition of a raag. The rendition of a raag in the sarod performance included an alaap, a slow unfolding of notes, introducing the raag, jod, the start of a rhythmic pattern using short phrases, and gat, a fixed composition in the raag where the tabla is introduced to keep rhythm. An added component is the jhala, a fast paced rhythmic pattern, as conclusion to either jod or gat.

The opinions expressed by the contributors of articles and reviews are published in a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Sruti's Board or its members.
In the first segment, Ustaad Khan began with a tribute to India's legendary poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore for his 150th birth anniversary, by playing his composition, set to a folk melody by Ustaad Khan himself. This was followed by a 'taraana', which is a combination of syllables, in raag Bahar set to teen tal (16 beats), played in madhya laya (medium pace). The tabla played basic theka (supportive rhythm) while Ustaad Khan elaborated and progressed gradually to druta laya (fast pace). He composed this taraana as a tribute to the sufii mystic Hazrat Amir Khusro, who invented this type of composition. The third piece was a folk tune in the popular raag Zila Kafi set to chachar taal (14 beats). Ustaad Khan then played a composition in raag Ganesh Kalyan, which he created, set to keherwa taal (8 beats).

In the second segment, Amaan and Ayaan Ali Khan performed a duet of 2 compositions in raag Bageshri. The first composition was set to pancham savari (15 beat cycle) and the second, set to teen taal (16 beats). The two sarods complemented each other, at times playing in tandem, and at others, in sync with a separation of one octave between them. The rendition started with an alaap reflecting the slow, yearning bhava (emotion) of raag Bageshri. It progressed to a race-like frenzy with the full force of the sound by the sarods developing towards the end in combination with the two tablas, reaching a crescendo of a faster and forceful jhala.

Ustaad Khan started the third segment with a solo of the soulful rendition of the ever popular and favorite bhajan of Mahatma Gandhi, 'vaishnav janato' composed by Narasinh Mehta, in raag Khamaj. Alternatively playing different strings in different octaves, he brought out the effect of two sarods playing together. This rendition was interspersed with meends (gliding between notes) and gamaks (forceful oscillation of notes). Ustaad Khan's expertise in eliciting a near-vocal tone from the instrument achieved the effect of lyrising the notes. This was indeed no mean feat since the strength of the bhajan lies in its lyrics. As the concluding piece, the trio performed a full exposition of raag Kirwani (an adaptation of the Karnataka raaga Keeravani). The meends in the alaap brought out the serenity and pensive mood of the raag. The transition to the fast yet gentle jod was seamless while maintaining the mood. Ustaad Khan's complex taans (structured combination of notes) were ably repeated by his sons. Tablas were given an opportunity to display their full virtuosity while maintaining the mood. Ustaad Khan's complex taans (structured combination of notes) were ably repeated by his sons. Tablas were given an opportunity to display their full virtuosity while maintaining the mood. The tabla played basic theka (supportive rhythm) while Ustaad Khan elaborated and progressed gradually to druta laya (fast pace). He composed this taraana as a tribute to the sufii mystic Hazrat Amir Khusro, who invented this type of composition. The third piece was a folk tune in the popular raag Zila Kafi set to chachar taal (14 beats). Ustaad Khan then played a composition in raag Ganesh Kalyan, which he created, set to keherwa taal (8 beats).

To the listener, a satisfying concert performance includes mastery of the artiste as well as a harmonious combination of accompaniments and presentation. In all aspects of music produced by the sarod, Ustaad Khan's mastery over controlling the mood and intensity of notes to capture the nuances of the raag and composition was immediately apparent. Being a good communicator that he is, Ustaad Khan explained and demonstrated the difference in the tonal quality between the techniques of using finger tips, which produces a duller sound, and his practice of using finger nails, which produces a clean and clear ringing note. The acoustics of Ustaad Khan's sarod and the two tablas were at near-perfect balance and this facilitated all round harmony of their performance. Ustaad Amjad Ali Khan's stature in the world of sarod is a testament to his dedication to music, and to upholding a lineage of a celebrated art form. Befittingly, Amaan and Ayaan are well on their way in the long journey to reach the expertise and scholarship of their esteemed father.

Hema Ramamurthy is a life member of Sruti, a music enthusiast and a frequent contributor to Sruti publications.

Gundecha and Malladi Brothers’ Concert - Innovative, Enlightening and Lilting Tapestry of Indian Classical Music
by Kamakshi Mallikarjun

Attending Sruti’s Indian Classical Music Appreciation Workshop, by the Malladi and Gundecha Brothers on the preceding Friday, deeply heightened my level of anticipation for this concert. The level of camaraderie and deep understanding that these eminent musicians had for each other’s style of music was evident in every facet of the workshop – from the extremely interesting explanations and counterpoints of the different musical styles to their friendly banter.

By presenting this innovative concert and accompanying workshop, Sruti gave us the opportunity to not only listen to a most enjoyable concert but also expand our horizons and learn about a new musical form. For some in the audience, it might have been their first exposure to Carnatic or South Indian classical music; for others it might have been their first time listening to Hindustani or North Indian classical music; and even for those familiar with both styles, the Dhrupad style was probably new.

On their website, Dhrupad.org, the Gundecha Brothers explain that “Dhrupad is the most ancient style of Hindustani classical music that has survived until today in its original form. The word Dhrupad is derived from DHRUVA (North Star) the steadfast evening star that moves through our galaxy and PADA meaning poetry. It is a form of devotional music that traces its origin to the ancient text of Sam Veda.”

And as the performers explained in the workshop, this also makes Dhrupad more allied with Carnatic music because both are predominantly devotional in nature. Also, the Dhrupad format has Sanskrit verses making it comparable in some ways to a South Indian kriti or song. Another interesting point is that the Pakhwaj accompanies Dhrupad singing and the Pakhwaj also seems more aligned with the South Indian drum – the mridangam from the way it is played to its rhythmic sound.

And so at the very outset, it became clear that a lot of careful thought was given by the musicians as they sought to bring together a “confluence of these two distinct styles” and every facet of the concert illuminated this even more.

Let’s delve into the concert. It was held in the lovely auditorium of the Independence Seaport Museum in Philadelphia.

(Continued overleaf)
Once the performers were introduced, they sat in an arc on the spacious stage, flanked by Shri Neyveli Narayan (miridangam) on the left and Shri Akhilesh Gundecha (Pakwaj) on the right. Shri H.N. Bhaskar (violin) was next to the miridangist and next to him were the two Malladi Brothers (Shri Sree Ramaprasad and Shri Ravikumar) and next to them were the two Gundecha Brothers (Shri Ramakant and Shri Umakant). The vocalists also wore color-coordinated orange kurtas. Behind them were the two tanpura players. And there were also 3 electronic sruti boxes in front of the musicians. The acoustics were wonderful. Thankfully, the sound balancing was just right - particularly important that it was not too loud given the number of musicians on stage.

The concert began with an invocatory sloka Chaitanya Sarva Bhootanam sung by the Gundecha brothers in raga Bhupali, followed by the Malladi brothers singing a sloka which started with the words Brahmi Brahmasuthou (“sloka words composed by a Sanskrit scholar Srinivasasarma from Vizianagaram”) in the allied raga Mohanam. This was followed by the Malladi Brothers singing the Mohana Adi tala varnam meticiously in two speeds with each of the lines repeated twice. The Gundecha brothers then sang ShankaraSut Ganesh in Bhupali.

As the sloka Chaitanya Sarva Bhootanam enveloped the auditorium, it made my heart soar even more because I had learnt at the workshop from Shri Ramakant that this is the sloka that they had sung as the prayer when Smt M S Subbulakshmi was given theKalidas Samman award in 1988 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

The second item comprised of the allied ragas of Abheri or Kannataka DevaGandari and Bhimpalas. First the raga Alapa/Alapanai was explored alternately by the Gundecha and Malladi Brothers as well as by Shri H N Bhaskar on the violin. It was extremely interesting to see the contrasts in the two styles with Bhimpalas unfolding step by step gradually and leisurely from the lower octaves then mid and then higher scales while the holistic snapshot of Abheri was revealed in the first iteration itself. And when listening to the Bhimpalas alaap, some of the key points made in the workshop also became clearer - “that every movement of the note should be properly defined”; the minimalist Dhrupad approach that demands greater discipline because unnecessary embellishments and even certain type of gamakas are avoided, focusing on the ‘purity of sound’. On the other hand was the display of incredible vocal dexterity by the Gundecha brothers, the pristine sruthi sudham (adherence to pitch), the beautiful glides from one note to the other including their signatures, traversing effortlessly from the depths of the lower octave all the way to the top.

Melodic contrast was offered in the singing of the Abheri Raga and Thyagaraja’s composition Nagumomu by the Malladi brothers, highlighting the fact that very rarely is a note sung without oscillating it in Carnatic music. The key strengths of the Malladi brothers shone through as they sang this popular kriti - robust voices, their clear diction, depth of bhavam, solid musical foundation, imaginative improvisations. This was followed by the rendition of Kunjanme Ras Adbut Gut Liye Gopal by the Gundecha brothers.

The tempo continued to build with the next item, which focused on Kalyani and Yaman and followed the same pattern of the raga alaap followed by the song. This time it was the sparkling Amma Ravamma kriti and the Dhrupad Murat Man Bhaye. Amma Ravamma is usually sung to the tala Khandha Chapu which was slightly morphed to Khandha Ekam (5 beats). (Smt. Kiranavalli Vidyashankar clarified for me that Khandha Chapu is a more recent trend; that originally it was Khandha Ekam and two cycles of Khandha Chapu will fit in one cycle of Khandha Ekam). The Dhrupad was set to a matching cycle of 10 beats (Sool Taal). During the improvisation the Malladi Brothers did Neraval for the line “tāmarasa ḍaḷa mētru tyāgarājūmi mitru” while the Gundecha Brothers did improvisation alternately for multiple lines - ‘murat man bhaye’ as well as ‘tum bin a kaun rakh ka mero dhyān’. This helped to contrast the two styles again because neraval or improvisation is done only for a particular line and only in certain songs in a Carnatic music concert while the improvisation of each of the lines is a foundational element of Hindustani music. Kalvani and Yaman are themselves very lifting ragas and it was even more fascinating to hear the back and forth bhava laden explorations done with razor sharp precision by the artists. The crescendo came with a volley of swaras by the Malladi Brothers matched by the Hindustani alaap that uses certain Sanskrit syllables by the Gundecha brothers. (From the Dhrupad FAQ on dhrupad.org “Dhrupad alaap employs the following dhyān shlok: Hari om anantanarayana tu hi tarana taarana.”)

After a brief intermission, the Malladi brothers sang a short and sweet Vararagalaya in Chenchukambodi raga, followed by the Gundecha brothers singing Sandhya Sanjeevani in raag Sriyam. It was a very interesting line of syllables.

(Googling yielded the lyrics in the program notes of a Gundecha Brothers concert for the Asia Society ‘Sandhyasanjivantisuramadhurupini gayatririvarghatrisavitririlokyatri mahamantramahayantramahatantarini rahoayagkrimaradyahraystarpini omuluvmam ram rhym yan’).

This was followed by the piece de resistance of the evening - a Raga Tanam Pallavi in Mayamalavagowla and its allied Bhairav. After a more elaborate raga elaboration, came the Tanam by the Malladi brothers and the Gundecha brothers countered with Nom Tom improvisation. The musicians indicated that they were paying “obeisance” to their Gurus via the Tanam.

(Continued overleaf)
applause from the audience, culminating in a standing ovation before the Tani Avarthanam started.

The Pallavi was set to Adi tala. The mridangam and pakhwaj accompaniment, individually and together, embellished it even more. The Tani Avarthanam had the same level of contrast and balance just like the rest of the concert, with the pakhwaj having more of a bass or deep sound than the mridangam. The surprise was that the percussionists started with reciting the rhythmic syllables. Shri Neyveli Narayan demonstrated this first and played a pleasing tani and this was followed by Shri Akhilesh Gundecha whose intonations and modulation of the rhythmic syllables had a sweet ebb and flow, almost like singing.

The final item was a super fast Shankara Girijapat in Malkaus sung by all the vocalists and this was also set to Sool Taal. At the tail end the Malladi brothers sang the Mangalam sloka Shri Kanthaya.

An apt description of this wonderful concert would be that it was just like an aural ‘Samanvaya’, that I attended as part of the Maximum India Festival at the Kennedy Center in DC. The review of Samanvaya (‘Coming Together’) by Donald Hutera in the Times (Edinburgh) helps highlight this point.

"Indian classical dance genres rarely, if ever, meet and mingle on stage. Alaramel Valli and Madhavi Mudgal’s collaboration Samanvaya flew gracefully in the face of tradition by juxtaposing the respective performance styles of these two world-class dancers. The dancers, each radiating a mature beauty, danced together like spiritual sisters."

In this day and age of ubiquitous Indian music concerts in the Delaware valley, a big Kudos to Sruti for putting so much thought into the diversity of its 25th year programs and collaborating with the Philadelphia Music Project to arrange such a unique concert that similarly juxtaposed the beauty and grandeur of Carnatic Music and Dhrupad. As the pendulum swung back and forth, it helped the audience get a feel for the unique format of this concert where as part of the same item, the musicians were alternating between the two styles. On one hand, there was true synergy between the two evenly matched teams of artists who were listening to each other with such enjoyment and on the other hand the purity and distinct characteristics of each musical thread was also being preserved truly weaving an aural multi-hued tapestry of Indian Classical music right before us as we listened.

And ultimately, as the concert progressed and we were immersed in the dual melodies, all we saw and heard were “The Brothers” just as promised in the workshop!

Kamakshi Mallikarjun is a classical music and dance enthusiast, a member of Sruti and frequent contributor to Sruti Publications.

Sunanda Gandham brings the Audience to the Sanctum Sanctorum: Tirumala

by Bhargavi Ammu

On October 2, 2011 in Montgomery County Community College’s Auditorium, Sunanda Gandham wowed us all with an entrancing afternoon of Kuchipudi. Gandham is a disciple of Sri Pasumarthy Venkateswara Sarma, who is a senior disciple of the renowned and revered Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam, whom Gandham studied under later on in her training as well. Since 2003, Gandham has opened up the Nataraja Performing Arts and has been teaching Kuchipudi in the Philadelphia area. She hopes to continue making an impact within the community at large and will continue to teach, choreograph, perform and inspire others to do the same.

The afternoon consisted of five items, all gems composed by Sri Tallapaka Annamacharya. The continuity of composer from piece to piece made the program flow smoothly, gave the audience a taste of the beauty of his compositions and the scope of dancing capability there is with his devotional offerings and a sense of familiarity that is both comforting and rewarding.

The program started off with the well-known keertana, Bhavamulona, which was popularized by M.S. Subbulakshmi in her release of the Balaji Pancaratnamala series. Set to Adi tala and in Sudha Dhanayasi ragam, Gandham beautifully explored the intimate spiritual connection between the devotee and the Lord, with graceful, light movements and powerful abhinaya that conveyed the essence that ‘hari namamule anni mantramulu’; that all mantras, all Gods, all creation and the very jagat is Vishnu himself. Gandham captured this beautifully with the perfect combination of bhakti and adhutha rasas.

Next, Gandham brought home the sincere understanding of the Lord’s divine feet with such finesse in Brahma Kadigina in Adi tala set to Mukhari ragam. Interwoven beautifully with sanchari bhava to tell the stories of Rama’s ability to bring Ahalya back to life and the arrogance of Bali, Gandham displayed beautiful extensions, stiff angashuddhi, and captured the audience with her ability to delineate the saturated meaning associated with the Lord Venkateswara’s feet.

Following this item, Podagantimayya in Adi tala and Mohana ragam transported us all the way to the hills of Tirupati, to the footstep of the inner chambers of the temple. The way Gandham expresses her joy of catching a glimpse of the Lord, that Lord who she accurately describes with crisp and precise mudras, is all encompassing, wish fulfilling and sacred. Her subtle, yet graceful movements depict the meaning of the composition with striking clarity.

Penultimately, Narayana Te in Adi tala and Behag Ragam was executed most beautifully, and was an excellent addition to the repertoire. While it is often harder to choreograph and dance to a more adhyatmika composition such as this, Gandham effortlessly portrays the subtleties of the Lord’s sur-
Concluding the program with a keertanam beloved to all, Mud-bu-gaare Yashoda in Adi talam set to Kurinji ragam, brought about Gandham’s inimitable motherly affections towards the baby Krishna. In her subtle movements in playing with him or her perfectly poised mischievous portrayal of Krishna, Gandham effortlessly switched between characters, delving deep into their development within the stories. The depiction of Krishna’s fight with Kaliya was a technical beauty to behold and made it seem like we were watching from the banks of the river.

The mark of this performance could be measured by the audience’s feeling of literally being transported to the steps leading up to Tirumala. It was a pleasure to see Smt. Gandham perform, with her technical prowess, command over abhinaya, ability to relay complex story lines with ease and fluidity of movement. A performer and teacher, her precision and synchrony with the music and her ability to engage the audience through her portrayals, made the afternoon enjoyable and as a Philadelphia based performing arts organization, it is always a pleasure for members of SRUTI to support local performers and torch bearers of the great classical traditions. Overall, the journey through some of Annamacharya’s sublime keerthanas that Sunanda Gandham took us on was truly cathartic.

Bhargavi Ammu is a 3rd year student at the University of Pennsylvania studying Public/International Health and Sanskrit. She has learned Bharatantyam for over 14 years, has performed her arangetram and is an avid Carnatic music and Classical dance supporter.

A concert laden with youthful energy and brilliance by Abhishek Raghuram

by Dr. G. Sridhar

Abhishek Raghuram with the accompaniment of Shri Vittal Ramamurthy on the violin and Trivandrum Balaji provided an evening of enthralling music under the auspices of SRUTI. The concert was held at the Science Center Auditorium in the Montgomery Community College. The setting in the evening during the week of Navarathri helped set the ambience for the concert.

The concert began with the Sarasija varnam, which was sung at a brisk pace. It was amazing to see his voice get into pitch almost immediately. There was youthful mischief in the way he sang and interacted with the accompanying artistes and the audience.

This was followed by Rama Ni Pai Tanaku in Kedaram which followed the same brisk pace of the opening varnam. The kalpana swaras were amazing with stops at various notes sung with fluidity. The violinist did an admirable job keeping up with the tempo and the thunderous applause that followed was thoroughly deserved.

He followed this with Sree Rama Jaya Rama in Madhyamavati which is part of the Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam of Thyagaraja. This was sung at just the right pace with a lot of poise and devotion.

The concert then entered what I would consider a technically challenging phase. A very moving alapana of Hindolam with a very crisp response by Vittal ramamurthi was followed by the evergreen favorite of Papanasam Sivan Ma ramana Uma ramana. There were a lot of fast sangathis and Kalpana swaras across all octaves. The Mridangist appeared like he played non-stop through the whole Kalpana swaram stage as the notes flowed between the vocalist and violinist with no pause.

As if sensing the audience's desire for things to slow down Abhishek started a slow and deliberate alapana in Ananda bhairavi, which had phrases of, various Syama Sastri Kritis intermingled as if trying to lure the audience into a guessing game. It turned out to be O Jagadamba, which was again sung with the appropriate tempo and emotion. Sensibly he opted not to add Kalpana swaras, as his forte appears to be fast paced, imaginative phrases, which would not suit the tempo and mood of the song.

Next was Enta Muddo Enta Sogaso of Thyagaraja in Bindumalini. There was a brief alapana with a very suitable response by the violinist. The song itself was sung with suitable embellishment but no additional manodharma was attempted perhaps trying to save energy for the very grand Todi that was to come next.

The alapana in Todi was very different with a profusion of fast brighas, which went against the grain of usual alapanas in this ragam, which tend to be more deliberate and Bhava laden. This seems to be his trademark style where he tries to squeeze in as many notes into a certain interval and usually is able to pull this off with tremendous ease and effectiveness. The piece was Karunanidhi Ilalo and kalpana swaras were sung at multiple speeds with good clarity and imagination to the phrase at Paamarapalini. This was followed by a very classical tani avarthanam by Shri Balaji, which both Abhishek and Ramamurthi seemed to enjoy a lot. Balaji is a disciple of his grandfather Shri Palghat Raghu and the respect and rapport was clearly evident.

He started singing a very beautiful alapanai in Behag and this was to be grandmother’s inimitable motherly affections towards the baby Krishna. In her subtle movements in playing with him or her perfectly poised mischievous portrayal of Krishna, Gandham effortlessly switched between characters, delving deep into their development within the stories. The depiction of Krishna’s fight with Kaliya was a technical beauty to behold and made it seem like we were watching from the banks of the river.

The concert lasted slightly under 3 hours, which is under-
standable as this was his third concert in 3 days. A few post-concert mutterings about the absence of Neraval or Muthuswammi Dikshitar compositions were easily compensated for by the overall perfection of the concert.

Abhishek is certainly going to enthral us all for many decades to come given his talent and knowledge at such a young age. As time progresses, he is certain to structure his concerts to give a larger variety of songs.

His singing style contrasted with the violin playing of Shri Vital Ramamurthi of the Lalgudi School, which was very traditional. Trivandrum Balaji also provided suitable accompaniment and kept up with the pace of singing admirably.

Overall one left the hall struck with awe at the virtuosity and left wondering how he can get any better with time

Dr. G. Sridhar is a Pediatrician based in Reading, PA. He plays the violin for pleasure and is a disciple of Kovai Balu. He is also an ardent carnatic music rasika.

Heartbeat in Philly
by Dinakar Subramanian

Artists:
Vocal
Vidwan Dr. Ghatam Karthick – Ghatam, Konnakol,
Vidwan Embar Kannan - Silent Violin
Vidwan Poongulam Subramaniam – Mridangam
Vidwan Sundarkumar – Kanjira
Vidwan B.S. Arunkumar - Rhythm Pads
Master K. Sathyanarayana – Keyboard

It was a warm evening Saturday the 8th of October when we entered the auditorium at the Painted Bride in Philadelphia. The Heartbeat Ensemble led by Ghatam Karthick was going to perform. There was the usual anticipatory buzz in the waiting area aided by the fact that Embar Kannan was interacting with the audience even before the concert began.

Soon we were all in the auditorium eagerly awaiting what was in store knowing very well that this was not a traditional Carnatic concert. Since the program said that Embar Kannan’s violin was a ‘silent violin’, everyone was curious about what it actually meant. (I found later that it simply means that it needs to be electrified to derive any meaningful sound out of it). The artists were sitting in a semi-circle with Ghatam Karthick and Embar Kannan directly facing the audience. Karthick did an introduction of the artists after each song and completed the roster soon after.

The first piece was a mallAri in the rAgam gambIra nAttai in Khanda Triputa tAlam. What immediately captivated the audience was the uniquely mellifluous sound of the ‘silent violin’. Kannan was absolutely marvelous playing it. The electric violin sound was distinctly different that the acoustic violin. What was also a fascinating discovery was the drum pad. The drum pad was capable of mimicking hundreds of in-instrument sounds and for this piece took the sound of the tavil which was apt for the piece. The traditional “tad dhit nam” phrases in the mallAri in several speeds gave us all a feeling of grandness and pomp.

Next was the piece called Pulse in praise of Goddess Bhavani. It involved Embar Kannan doing a very melodious AlapanA in the relatively rare rAgam ratipatipriyA (it is a derivative of kharaharapriyA rAgam). Young Sathya, Embar Kannan’s nephew, provided beautiful chords to this piece. Karthick sang the words to this song whose lyrics went mangaLa kArini mAtAm bhavAnI and also included the phrase jagat janani, which incidentally is the title of a popular kriti in this rAgam. The drum-pad demonstrated sounds like the Morsing (similar to a Jew’s harp), a temple bell and also chimes.

A Piece in Peace in the rAgam gaurimanOhari in Misra Chapu tAlam came next where Sathya played a beautiful alapa-nana. The keyboard that Sathya was using though short in length was clearly a top-of-the-line instrument that had the pitch-blend wheel and other capabilities such as the ability to switch octaves with ease. The pitch-blend wheel is what is used to mimic a gamakam or the slide from one note to another. Sathya, just 16 years old, was spellbinding in his alapana. Embar Kannan and Sathya then played the composition doing full justice to the rAgam.

mAyA in raga mAyAmalavagoula in Adi tAlam was the main instrument where the AlapanA by Embar Kannan brought out the essence of the rAgam. The alapana included the percussion where each of the percussionists took turns in accompaniment. Sathya also accompanied in the alapana with a santoor like sound from the keyboard. This piece was capped by a taniavarthanam (percussion solo) that included the mrudangam, the kanjira, the ghatam and the drumpad. This tani lasted about 40 minutes. Arun Kumar showed his versatility on the drumpad by using different sounds including a tAyampAKA (a drum from Kerala, a South Indian state). The audience also participated in this part with rhythmic clapping. The piece also ended with the Karthick throwing the Ghatam in the air and catching it 3 times much to the delight of the audience.

The next piece was uniquely called 7 butter in rAgam vanaspati. Vanaspati is the 4th melakartA rAgam but the reference to butter is through the fact that ‘vanaspati’ is a butter substitute used in India that will be familiar only to Indian immigrants. This piece had little Carnatic flavor and assumed more of a jazz complexion that Kannan played beautifully.

kAvadi chindu was the folk piece that was rendered next that included a small variation in the rAgam punAgA varALi that is usually connected with snake dances.

The final piece was a medley by Embar Kannan that included excerpts from Western classical pieces such as fuer Elise (by Beethoven), Mozart’s 40th symphony and Muthuswamy Dikshitar’s Nottuswara kritis, pallavis from Thyagaraja kritis, be-

(Continued overleaf)
ginner pieces such as vArA vEm. Embar Kannan and Sathyaa concluded by playing a few refrains from the Indian patriotic piece vande mAtaram, the Indian national anthem and capped it with the Star Spangled Banner for which the audience stood up and sang along.

The synergy between the artists was truly remarkable. The Painted Bride is special in that the distance between the audience and the artists seems familiarly close. This proximity and coziness enhanced the overall enjoyment of this unique concert.

Dinakar Subramanian is an avid listener, teacher and fan of Carnatic music. He also enjoys other forms of music including Hindustani, film and classic rock. He lives in Audubon, PA.

Dance review: Kalakshetra
by Anwesa Dutta

Spanda - the classic evolution of Bharatanatyam

Leela Samson and the Kalakshetra Repertory Company presented their scintillating group and solo works on October 9th 2011 at Pearson Hall Theatre, Lang Performing Arts Center of Swarthmore College. The Kalakshetra foundation does not need an introduction. Founder Rukminidevi Arundale, a world-renowned Bharatnatyam dancer and choreographer, a true reviver of this art form, not only established the Kalakshetra Foundation and Academy, but also formalized Bharatnatyam as a popular stage art form and a disciplined curriculum to pass onto future generations.

Nothing is permanent but change. As an ardent fan of studying the language of dance in its evolutionary form, I have to say that in every single presentation by Kalakshetra, the unique way of continuing the tradition in a metamorphic way continues to renew the spirit of dance all over the world.

As described by this thought provoking group, "Spanda", 'a vibration' is symbolic of the enduring and perpetual energy that is the life force of the universe. It incorporates the philosophical concept of Prithvi as the centre and source of energy in the universe and equates it with the nabham, the womb as the origin of energy in the human body. The rediscovery of the basic movements of Bharatanatyam and the need for a reinterpretation of its traditional vocabulary challenges Spanda. Spanda seeks to establish a more relevant dialogue between dance, music and stagecraft.

Spanda-Matrika was the inaugural item which brought to life the unity of the abstract form of energy with origin of movement. This was an elegant and slow entrance to Hindusthani classical music in very creative formation, very pleasing to the eye. It showcased some delightful lighting by celebrity technician Murugan Krishnan. A pure nritta item followed presented by the male dancers of the company further displayed the perfect synchronization to fast movements in complex circular formations. The next couple of items showcased very clear execution of complex jathis through very creative formations, entries, and exits.

Leela Samson then delighted the audience with a few solos including Shiva Stuti - Shankara Giri Giri - the true ananda in this Ananda thanadam was felt by the audience. Jayadeva's Ashtapadi also presented by a Leela Samson brought out Radha's depression as she watched Krishna play with other girls-this beautiful song was composed by famous Hindusthani classical musician, Madhup Mudgal. Another presentation by the male dancers "Kalinga nartanam" - Leelas of Krishna enlightened the theater through a perfect depiction of Lord Krishna's victory. All of the group dances were absolutely brilliant in presentation, creativity, Leela's unparalleled choreography as seen through the depth of novel movements/execution and technique. However, some more "natya" items presented by the group as a whole would have quenched the audience's thirst for watching the dancers' dance forever.

The group ended with a mesmerizing and highly energetic piece "Charishnu" that truly did justice to the phrase "grand finale." This Thillana-like item was set to Hindusthani music as well, similar to the structure of the Hindusthani Teen taal (16 beats) based Tarana, yet the sollukattu used Carnatic vocabulary, an exemplary composition by Madhu Mudgal showcasing true blend of Hindusthani and Carnatic music from the album "Vaishnava janato." The perfect footwork, unusual formations, lighter costumes, brilliant lighting yet again combined with clean lines and technique, brought about the best of the Kalakshetra style.

Most importantly, in this age of a dwindling audience for the classical arts, the exclusivity of this group lies in the exceptionally contemporary way they touch the heart of every type of audience, whether or not one has knowledge in or appetite for the classical arts. As we continue to pass on our core values and traditions to the next generation while elevating the Western and Indian American audience at large, Kalakshetra has proven that ultimately it's the art's evolution with time in addition to the creativity in movement, music and contemporary presentation that will keep our arts alive.

Anwesh Dutta is the Artistic Director of Nava Nritya Dance Academy.

Saxophone Concert of Sumanth Swaminathan:
An Appreciation
by Prabhakar Chitrapu

Sumanth Swaminathan is well known to our Sruti community in the Philadelphia area ever since he was a child. As a youngster, Sumanth took part in various Sruti activities, including the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana celebrations. His first guru in Carnatic vocal music was Sri T.N. Balasubrahmaniam. He subsequently, he selected the saxophone as his choice instrument on which to focus his musical developments. He trained from none other than Sri KadriGopalnath, who pioneered the introduction of saxophone in Carnatic music. Through many years of dedicat-
ed study and hard work, Sumanth reached a mature stage in his musical career when he began to accompany his guru and give full length concerts in the US and in India, and has since released commercial CDs of his music.

It was a special event to see Sumanth give a full-length concert for Sruti, as part of the organization’s 25th anniversary celebrations. The event took place on Saturday, October 22nd, 2011 at the Great Valley High School in Malvern, PA. He was accompanied by L. Ramakrishnan on violin and Vijay Ganesh on mridangam. The violin was of an interesting type, referred to by the artist as a ‘silent violin’. He explained that it is called ‘silent’ because it does not produce any sounds without an electric amplifier. The clear advantage is that the instrument no longer has the weight due to the resonant body, although it does take some getting used to, Ramakrishnan confessed.

Sumanth began his concert with an acknowledgement of Sruti and a short discussion about Sruti’s pivotal role in his musical development. He composed his concert with delightful musical pieces of varying emotional colors and energetic tempos. He started with a padavaNam in nAtakurunjirAgam and Aditalam. varNamams are brisk introductory musical pieces and nAtakurunjirAgam is quite a majestic one, setting a mood of gamakhatvam in the auditorium. Of course, the haunting sounds of the saxophone only added to such a climate.

This piece was followed by the ever popular composition on Lord Ganesha by MuthuswamiDikshitar, namely vAtApi-gaNapatimabhjE in hamsadhwaniAgam. Sumanth did a brief alapana of the rAgam and neralav on the phrase ‘vltarAginavinutayOginam’. The swarakalpana was enjoyable with soft notes and smooth transitions, filled with nice bhavam. As most of you must have, I had heard this kriti many times before and used to wonder what the adjective ‘vAtApi’ referred to. Thanks to writing this review, I did some searching and found this interesting explanation by Sri P.P. Narayanaswami at this webpage: [http://www.carnatic.net/special/vatapi-ppn-sept2004.htm](http://www.carnatic.net/special/vatapi-ppn-sept2004.htm)

The word ‘vAtApi’ is a corrupt form of the name of a place called “bAdAmi”, which is located in the present day bJiApUr district in karNAtaka state. It was the capital of the chALukya ruler, pulakESi. After the pallava king narasiMhavarma (630-668 AD) conquered bAdAmi, an image of lord gaNapati was brought from there to the location of tiruceEnkaTTanGuDi, near tAnjOre. This gaNapati was formally called “vAtApi-gaNapati”, since it originated in bAdAmi. At some later period, this served as an inspiration for a “vAtApi-gaNapati” idol in the tiruvArUr temple complex. This is the idol that dIkSitar sings in his haMsadhvani composition.

The temple at tiruvArUr is often known as “mUlthIrakSEtram”, and this phrase occurs in the caraNam line of the kriti. There is a triangular shaped frame surrounding the figure of gaNEsa, which might have prompted dIkSitar to use the phrase “trikONamadhyagatam”.

Sumanth continued with a short alapana in rTlgowlarAga followed by a rendition of the kriti “janaNIninuva” by sub-

barAyAstra in misrachAputalam. It is well known that the composer was the son of the famous SyamaSastri and is noted to be the only person to have been taught by each of the Carnatic Trinity – Thyagaraja, Dikkshitar&SyamaSastri. This was followed by a composition of Sumanth’s guru Sri T.N. Bala in the rAgamindhOLam, “mAmavajanani”. Sumanth elaborated on the kriti by delivering a highly calculated swarakalpana in rUpakatalam.

The main composition that Sumanth chose for his concert was the celebrated kriti of Thyagaraja in kAmmbojirAgam, namely ‘O rangaSAYi’. This is a majestic composition offering the artist scope to demonstrate his/her skills, as well as creativity. Indeed, Sumanth and his team made the best of this opportunity and did more than justice to its rendering. Sumanth sketched out and developed the rAgam in an elaborate alapana, followed by the kriti. The elaborate swarakalpana was energetic and brisk and swayed the audience with multiple nadais and highly creative constructions. ThethAniAvartanam by Vijay was masterful and enjoyable.

kAmmbOjiraga is a derived rAgam from its parent hari-kambhbOjiragam, with an incomplete ascending-scale ‘s-r-g-m-p-d-S’ (‘ab’ni’) and a complete descending-scale ‘n-d-p-m-g-r-s’. The ‘ni’ appearing in this rAgam is the kaishiki-ni, although the adjacent kAkalim is used sparingly as an extraneous note.

The kriti itself is one of the so-called ‘Sri RangamPancharatnam’, referring to the set of five kritis that Thyagaraja composed when he visited Srirangam during his rather uncommon travels. The charanam is reflective and auto-biographical, since Thyagaraja refers to the mental torture felt from people jealous of his well being. Likely, he is talking about the property dispute his brother, japESa, had with him, which led to a split of their joint home and a subsequent pilgrimage tour that was prompted by his students at various places. He says “mElOrvalEppinuLa0, nEmigulanogili, divyanUpamunu, mutyAlasarulayuramunu, ganavachiti”, meaning “having suffered greatly amidst people who could not tolerate my well being, I came to see Your divine form with pearl laden chest’. With this song, the concert ended somewhat abruptly due to Sumanth’s strict adherence to the time allocated for his concert. With standing ovation and long applause, it was clear that with this song, the concert ended somewhat abruptly due to Sumanth’s strict adherence to the time allocated for his concert. With standing ovation and long applause, it was clear that the entire Sruti audience felt proud that one of our own has now reached these heights in Carnatic music – a feeling that was deeply satisfying to all those who toiled over the past 25 years to nurture Sruti, which in turn nurtured artists such as Sumanth Swaminanthan. We sincerely wish that Sumanth scales ever higher peaks in this art form, and passes the cultural beacon onwards into the distant future.

Prabhakar ChitraPuu is a communications engineer. He is deeply interested in Indian Philosophy and Indian classical music and maintains a website [www.thyagaraja.org](http://www.thyagaraja.org). He has served on Sruti board in various capacities for several years. 

(Continued overleaf)
Violin concert by Kalaimamani A. Kanyakumari  
by Lata Suresh

We had the pleasure of experiencing Kalaimamani A. Kanyakumari’s violin performance on 22 October 2011. As expected, it was a perfect combination of classicism and contemporary flavor. In every movement and execution of hers, one could see her command over the instrument. The rendition was a judicious combination of speed and authenticity.

Kanyakumari opened her concert with Kanada Varnam followed by Mahaganapathim (NAttai) studded with koraippu-oriented kalpana swaras for Mahakavya natakadhipriyam.

Dharini in Sudha Saveri ragam with some awesome kalpana swara patterns helped enhance the momentum of the concert. This was followed by Sri Viswanatham - Chathurdasa ragamalika (Dikshitar). The raga essay had swift transitions between the respective ragas.

We were treated to a flash of Vasantha ragam before Rama Nama was rendered. We experienced exquisite Sahana ragam as a prelude to Evasudha.

A Bhadrachala Ramadas kriti in Khamas and Srikrishnam Bha- je in Thodi which was the main piece of the evening were a treat to our ears. This was followed by a plethora of ragas in the ragamalika. We enjoyed the flavor of an Annamacharya krithi in Dwijavanthi. Alaipayudhey and Koovi Azhaithal got the audience rocking in resonance. Following this was another Annamacharya’s krithi in Bhujangini ragam. Venkathachala Nilayam (Sindhu Bhairavi) and Bhagyathara Lakshmi Baramma lead us to the consummation of the kucheri.

Kanyakumari’s disciple Sri L. Ramakrishnan provided a competent combination.

Patri Satish Kumar on mridangam blended sweetly without saturation. His crisp Thani Avarthanam was a special treat to our ears. The nadham of his playing had a long lasting impression in our minds and hearts.

Looking back at the concert, one would have a tough time deciding which would be the dominant factor - Kanyakumari’s ability to bring out the vocal quality music through violin or her ability to enhance the value of violin as an instrument through her technique.

Sunanda Gandhan is a well known Kuchipudi artist based in the Philadelphia region where she continues her service to Kuchipudi through her group: Nataraja Performing Arts

A Study in Grace - A review of Shantala Shivalingappa’s presentation  
by Sunanda Gandham

Shantala Shivalingappa's Kuchipudi presentation is yet another feather in Sruti's cap! The curtain opened to the traditional invocatory song of Kuchipudi "Vani Paraku", a tribute to the primary deity of the village of Kuchipudi, Saraswathi. The first item performed by Shantala was "Surya Stuthi", followed by Oothukadu Kavi's "Ananda Narthana Ganapathi", where Vinayaka playing various intruments was very well depicted. The complex postures and movements were carried out with poise and precision. The show of Krishna with the Gopikas was aptly portrayed by Shantala in the following piece "Rasa Lila". The mischievous moods and actions salient to the image of Lord Krishna and the emotional mood of the gopikas shown in every movement of Shantala's performance was very delightful. This was followed by "Tala Melam", a demonstration of the accompanying orchestra that showed the relationship between the sound & the beat. At the end of the demonstration, Shantala continued to showcase her agility and great sense of balance by performing the traditional Kuchipudi tarangam, on the brass plate.

The main and concluding piece was "Shiva Ganga", a short story based performance depicting how Ganga, the powerful and once unruly holy river, went into the bounds of Lord Shiva. Shantala performed this piece with utmost grace, quickly switching between the masculine "Tandava" movements personifying Lord Shiva and the graceful "Laasya" movements depicting the feminine, Ganga. Her movements, very light, yet very precise and controlled were further highlighted by the finale where she spun the entire stage in a circle with utmost ease- movements that are still fresh in the minds of the audience.

In all, Shantala delivered an excellent performance which highlighted precision, grace, vibrance and unique thus getting accolades, not surprisingly and well deserved, from an audience new and familiar to Indian classical dance.

Sunanda Gandhan is a well known Kuchipudi artist based in the Philadelphia region where she continues her service to Kuchipudi through her group: Nataraja Performing Arts"
Ms. Uma Prabhakar,  
President,  
Sruti,  
135, Brochant Drive,  
Blue Bell,  
PA 19422  
USA

Dear Ms. Prabhakar,

On behalf of Kalakshetra Foundation I would like to express our gratitude for the support extended by you and your organisation during our tour to the United States of America. Your enthusiasm and belief in us, has helped us make this tour a grand success. The dancers join me in thanking you for being part of an experience they will not forget. They were very comfortable and enjoyed every moment of their stay in your city.

As you are aware, this was the first time Kalakshetra performed in the United States. This makes it extremely special to us. Your role in making this happen will always be remembered. We look forward to collaborating with you on our next tour to the US in 2012/2013. We hope to make it longer and cover more cities the next time.

with warm regards

[Signature]

Leela Samson  
Director
Dear Amazing Members of Sruti,

Thank you all for your support, guidance, and kindness! We deeply valued the opportunity to work with you this year and look forward to future opportunities.

Thank you!
Sincerely,
Molly & Dan & Robin
SRUTI DAY

Date: Sunday, December 11 2011

10:00 AM- 12:00 noon: General Body Meeting and Elections

Lunch Break

1:30 PM- 4: 30 PM: Music and Dance Presentations

Violin concert: Kamalakiran Vinjamuri

Dance performance: Ratipriya Suresh

Venue: Montgomery County Community College Science Center Auditorium,
340 DeKalb Pike, Blue Bell, PA 19422

Look out for the announcement on Sruti Day for details of
an exciting 2012 Music and Dance Season

### Sruti 2012 Annual Pass Value Packages

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**(3-18 years of age) – Available only along with any sponsor category purchase

“CD(s) where available and recordings are permitted by the respective artists