



SRUTI NOTES

SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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From The Editors

Dear friends

The Library Committee has been busy during the summer working on the publication for the 15th anniversary of SRUTI. We are very gratified by the enthusiastic responses we received from several prominent writers in the field of music and dance. The Board of Directors has been a great source of encouragement and support, while the Resource Committee is helping to raise funds to cover the cost of publication. With the Library Committee undertaking all aspects of bringing out the publication, we can always use some help from other volunteers. We request any professional copy editors and graphic designers in the SRUTI community to call us if you can help us with copy editing and design.

In addition to regular features, this issue of Sruti Notes consists of a review of the recent concert of P. Unni-krishnan by P. Swaminathan, news from the music world and our own Sruti community. This past summer, the Philadelphia area witnessed a number of *arangetrams* of students from the two schools of dance in the area, the Natya Academy of Indian Classical Dance and the Nardhana Academy of Arts. We present articles from many of these high-achieving young girls about their experiences of going through this major milestone in their dance careers. Archana Ram, Christina Chennat and Sushila Murthy have written eloquently about the process leading to their debut performances. We thank all those who have contributed to this issue.

As always, we welcome members to send us information about the milestones and achievements of your family members, that you would like to share with the SRUTI community.

Viji Swaminathan

Chairperson

For the Library Committee

UPCOMING SRUTI PROGRAMS IN 2001

A.K.C.Natarajan (Clarinet)

(September 22, See attached flyer for details)

Hyderabad Brothers — Vocal

(October 6, Gwynedd-Mercy College, Gwynedd Valley, PA)

Bombay Jayashree – Vocal

(November 10, Gwynedd-Mercy College, Gwynedd Valley, PA)

Bi-Annual General Body Meeting and Election

(Date and venue to be announced)

From the President's Desk

Dear friends,

It is the time of the year when the change of season is the most noticeable. We become more introspective but rev up our engines because before we know it, winter will be upon us. It is time to complete the projects we had started early in the year. It is also time for the concluding segment of Sruti Events 2001.

I would like to welcome Mr. S.G. Ramanathan to Sruti's Board. He fills the vacancy created by the departure to Connecticut of Mr. Siva Gopalnarayanan, and filled briefly by Mr. M.V. Shankar. Mr. Ramanathan is a longtime Sruti member and has served on Sruti's Board previously. He and his wife Uma are residents of Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

We will be bringing out a special issue of Sruti Ranjani to commemorate Sruti's 15th anniversary this year. More on that will be said in this issue of SrutiNotes by Mrs. Viji Swaminathan, Chairperson of the Library Committee.

The term of this board draws to a close this year. I would like to invite every one of you, our members, to consider serving on the board or one of the committees. It is a chance to give back to the community through Sruti. It is an organization that has served the community well and enjoys a well-deserved reputation for the way it is run.

Please feel free to email your interest to me at pauln@mcr2000.com so that I may forward it to the appropriate people charged with conducting the election.

On behalf of the Board of Directors,

P. Narayanan
President



Unnikrishnan's Concert

P. Swaminathan

SRUTI hosted a vocal music concert by P. Unnikrishnan on June 2, 2001. Unnikrishnan was accompanied by Vittal Ramamurthy on the violin and Tiruchur Narendran on the mridangam. This was one of the best concerts arranged in the new millennium by SRUTI.

Unnikrishnan started the concert with the crisp rendering of a varnam in Sahana followed by the Swathithirunal krithi *Deva Deva Kalayamithe*. This krithi rendered in Mayamalavagaula was popularized in the sixties by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and later by M.S. Subbalakshmi. Unnikrishnan rendered the krithi with *bhava*, followed by an impressive *niraval*. However, the ensuing kalpana swaras could have been rendered with better combination of swaras and long phrases (Mayamalavagaula gives abundant scope for creative kalpana swaras). This was followed by a detailed rendering of a krithi in Begada wherein he delineated the raga swarupam with clarity and precision.

After an elaborate rendering of Subbaraya Sastry's *Janani Ninnu Vina* in Ritigaula and a short and sweet Bhavapriya, Unnikrishnan recited the main encore of the concert in Todi. For this he chose Dikshitar's *Sri Krishnam Bhaja Manasa*. This is one of the gems of Dikshitar's compositions in Todi, and unlike most kritis of Dikshitar, lends itself to considerable improvisation (sangathis). Unnikrishnan rendered a detailed alapana in Todi building the raga like a skillful architect, ornamenting the alapana with a beautiful *grahabedam* in Sankarabharanam. After an elaborate *niraval* on the phrase *Shanka Chakra Gada Padma*, the ensuing kalpana swaras were adorned with a symphony of enchanting combination of swaras in a complex collection of long and short phrases.

All of Dikshitar's krithis (I have listened to) are well structured, complete in all musical details. Thus the performing artists do not have much freedom other than following meticulously the route laid down by Dikshitar while rendering his krithis. The degree of excellence of the performance is measured by how well the artist follows the structure laid down by Dikshitar and reproduces the krithi in detail. However *Krishnam Bhaja Manasa* is an exception where Dikshitar has given some freedom for creativity in improvisation. Unnikrishnan took advantage of this opportunity and rendered the song brilliantly.

Next, the *Ragam Thanam Pallavi* in Bilahari was embellished with an impressive garland of kalpana swaras in different ragas (Kalyanavasantham, Mohanam and Kapi). I noticed a significant pause while switching between ragas during the kalpana swara rendering. This is unlike Unnikrishnan. He concluded the concert after a variety of short krithis including a movie song in Malayalam.

It is needless to mention the critical importance of the accompanists for the success of a vocal concert. Both Vittal Ramamurthy and Tiruchur Narendran provided wonderful support to Unnikrishnan's brilliant performance. There was a good rapport between the performing artists. This is in contrast to the concert by T.N. Seshagopalan (in 2000) where we witnessed the helplessness of the vocalist without good support from the accompanists. Interestingly, both Seshagopalan and Unnikrishnan chose Dikshitar's *Sri Krishnam Bhaja Manasa* for their main encore!!!

It was very pleasing to see an attentive and cooperative audience strictly adhering to the request by the SRUTI managing committee not to send chits to the artist during the course of the concert (which is quite annoying to the performing artist). Kudos to the patrons of SRUTI for their support and cooperation in making the concert a memorable one.

[Dr. P. Swaminathan (Ambler, PA), a former president of SRUTI, is a music enthusiast. He is a computational chemist by profession.]

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.

Community News

Graduations

Shilpa Narayan, daughter of Poornima and Badri Narayan (Newtown, PA), graduated from Pennsbury High School in Fairless Hills, PA. She was ranked no. 1 in her class. Her honors include President's Award for Educational Excellence, All American Scholar Award, Who's Who Among American High School Students and the College Board's AP scholar with Honor Award. Shilpa will attend Haverford College.

Sumanth Swaminathan, son of Viji and P. Swaminathan (Ambler, PA), graduated from Upper Dublin High School in Ambler, PA. A member of the Honor Society, Sumanth was awarded the Stillwell memorial scholarship for excellence in academics, athletics, music and outdoor education. He also received the award for excellence in Jazz Band. He will attend the Honors program at the University of Delaware.

Jennifer Chennat, daughter of Mariamma and Pomy Chennat (Newtown Square, PA), graduated from Jefferson Medical College with M.D. She will start her residency program at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, Philadelphia, this fall. Jennifer is also a Bharathanatyam dancer and a student of Smt. Ramaa Ramesh of Nardhana Academy of Arts.



Arangetrams

Anita Ranjani, daughter of Meena Pen-nathur (a former vice-president of Sruti), gave her Bharathanatyam debut performance on June 30 at Strath Haven High School, Wallingford, PA. Anita is a student of the Natya Academy of Indian Classical Dance founded by Mrs. Shoba Sharma.

Archana Pallavi Ram, daughter of Rajalakshmi and Subba Ram (Cherry Hill, PA), gave her Bharathanatyam debut performance on August 4 at the Lang Performing Arts Center, Swarthmore College. Archana is a student of the Nardhana Academy of Arts founded by Mrs. Ramaa Ramesh.

Christina Chennat, daughter of Mariamma and Pomy Chennat (Newtown Square, PA) gave her arangetram performance on July 21 at the Delaware County Christian School Auditorium. Christina is a student of the Nardhana Academy of Arts. Christina also graduated from Country Day High School of Sacred Heart in Bryn Mawr. She is a recipient of the Presidential award for academic excellence. She will undertake pre-law studies at Bryn Mawr College this fall.

Sushila Murthy, daughter of Krishna and Lakshmi Murthy (Maple Glen, PA) gave her Bharathanatyam arangetram performance on July 28 at the Delaware County Christian School Auditorium. Sushila is a student of the Nardhana Academy of Arts. She also graduated from Hatboro-Horsham High School as Valedictorian of her class. She received the Phi Beta Kappa award, is a National Merit Scholar, and will attend Stanford University in the fall.



Sathabhishekam celebration:

Family and friends of **Dr. V. Mahadevan** felicitated him on reaching an important milestone in his life: 80th birthday. The sathabhishekam celebration took place at The Palace of Asia Durbar Hall on July 29, 2001. Dr. Mahadevan has been a life member of SRUTI almost from its inception and has been a strong supporter ever since. Our best wishes to him and his family.

In Other News

Music Competition

Sangeet Rajani 2001

The children/youth music competition in Karnatak and Hindustani music sponsored by Marati Vishwa will be held on Oct 27th. Selected participants will have an opportunity to perform at Sangeet Rajani to be held on Nov 17th. Smt. Lakshmi Shankar a renowned Hindustani vocalist will be the main artiste for that evening's program. For details, please call Dr. Vivek Khadilkar at (215)-357-5383, Poorvi Vinchi at (732)-625-0964 or Hema Ramamurthy at (215)-295-1980.

International Conference on Indian Dance

Indian Dance in the Diaspora - Traditions and Innovations is being presented by **Samskriti** (Society for Indian Performing Arts - A non-profit cultural organization in Houston TX) in collaboration with Rathna Kumar and the **Anjali Center for Indian Performing Arts** on September 1 - 3, 2001 at Hamman Hall at the Rice University Campus, Houston, Texas. The conference will cover workshops, discussions, demonstrations, performances by eminent dance critics, dance historians, established gurus from India, Europe, Canada and the United States. The dance conference is designed to examine and explore the traditional practices as well as the exciting changes that are happening in the field of Indian dance globally.



SRUTI Concert Tapes

Recorded music tapes of SRUTI concerts are available for distribution among the patrons of Sruti. To receive any of these tapes and for a complete listing of tapes available, please contact Viji Swaminathan at 215-643-2145 or send an email to viji_swaminathan@hotmail.com.



Some recent CD and Book Releases:

A book '**Vidwan Tanjavur Shankara Iyer's Compositions**' has recently been released by the International Foundation for Carnatic Music (unit of Ravikiran foundation of India). This is the first time Sri Shankara Iyer's works are being made available as a book.

A multimedia interactive CD-ROM on **Papanasam sivan** was released last April. It contains about 55 songs of Sivan sung by stalwarts like Semmugudi, M.S. Subbalakshmi, D.K. Pattammal, G.N. Balasubramanyam, D.K. Jayaraman, K.V. Narayanaswami and young musicians like Sanjay, Nithyasree, Sowmya, Santhanagopalan, Vijaysiva and Ashok Ramani. It also has the biography of Sivan, video of film songs of Sivan,

Juniors' Corner

Editors: Samhita Bhargava
Soumya Menon

Chetan Ramamurthy
Sumanth Swaminathan

My Arangetram Experience

Archana Ram

My arangetram experience was definitely an occasion I will always remember. From the beginning until the end, I learned many things about not only Bharata Natyam, but about myself. This milestone in my dancing career will always remind me of my hard work, effort, and the encouragement my family and friends gave me.

The preparation took much time and effort. I had somewhat of a distance to travel to dance class each day at my guru's home and I had to take the train, which I had never done before. I also had to adjust to the daily schedule of rigorous dance practices. To prevent becoming too tired, I rested after practices and ate healthy meals. My guru, Ramaa Akka, reminded me how important eating and resting well were during these practices. I also enjoyed trying on all the jewelry and the beautiful costumes to make sure they all fit perfectly.

Preparing for the arangetram, I became much more familiarized with my culture. I learned more about the mythology, traditions, and customs of India, and also how Bharata Natyam incorporates all these elements into its beautiful and graceful dance form. For example, I performed a more traditional Tamil piece called *Aduvum Sholluval*, which described the emotions of a village woman disgruntled about her husband, who was having a relationship with another woman. Feeling the emotions of the woman, I learned much about the traditions of the village. With the Kannada piece *Nin Yaako Ranga*, I learned more mythology, such as the story behind Vishnu's Narasimha Avatar and Draupadi's Vasthrapaharana.

The week before the performance the musicians stayed at my house for daily rehearsals. Their kind wishes and compliments encouraged me to try harder every day.

The day before and the day of the performance I was very nervous. However, Ramaa Akka reassured me and I gained more confidence. I could not have done without her support and encouragement. My family and friends were a great help in making everything, especially the decorations, look beautiful and gave great help backstage. Before I went on stage, I prayed to Lord Nataraja for blessings.

From the beginning of the performance, I kept a very positive attitude. As each dance ended the momentum picked up and my confidence level increased. Performing on Swarthmore College's superb stage was like icing on the cake. One very encouraging item was the audience's response. Their positive reaction kept me confident. When I realized I had completed my arangetram, I felt like I could do it all over again. I was very proud of my accomplishment. At the end of the program, I was happy not only to see everyone who came that day, but also that they enjoyed my performance.

The arangetram experience, which I will always treas-

ure, was truly memorable. It is only a small stepping stone in my dancing career, but a major accomplishment. I am so fortunate to have had this wonderful experience and I hope to have continued success in Bharata Natyam.

[Archana, a student of Smt. Ramaa Ramesh, is a junior at the Cherry Hill High School East. She is the daughter of Rajalakshmi and Subba Ram of Cherry Hill, PA.]

My Arangetram

Christina Chennat

I had been learning dance since the age of four, and having an arangetram seemed to be a distant dream. However, within the last one year, that dream turned into a reality. Once the date for the arangetram was finalized for July 21, preparations such as costume fittings and the booking of a hall were made. Then the vigorous rehearsals began. The intensity and frequency of the practices grew by the week. The rehearsals were challenging, but my dancing style developed into a much higher level than I had expected. I was not alone in my experiences, as there were three other girls going through the same training that I was undergoing. Our guru, Smt. Ramaa Ramesh, affectionately called us the "arangetram girls." Practices were difficult, but my guru guided me every step of the way. The rehearsals were a good bonding experience for me, because I share the unique experience of arangetram preparation with them. I also enjoyed learning the new dances, especially the Malayalam songs, which were specially choreographed for my arangetram as a tribute to my Malayalee heritage. I could now truly identify with the dances and express myself in my dancing. Before the arangetram, I had rehearsals with the live orchestra. The musicians stayed at my home and during this time, I had early morning practices starting at 6 a.m. Although I would sometimes be tired from waking up at such an early hour, once I heard the musicians playing music, I would instantly get energized and become immersed in my dancing. My parents were extremely supportive during the rehearsals. My mother would see to every detail of the practices. Whether it was giving me a glass of cold water to drink or encouraging me to dance harder, she was always there. When the big day finally arrived, I was so excited. The day that I had been eagerly anticipating was here at last. When the curtain was raised, I was ready to go out on stage and dance. I felt like I was communicating my emotions to the audience during the performance. When the performance was finally over, I was in disbelief. I felt as though everything had gone by so fast. Reflecting back, I would say that the greatest experience of my arangetram was being able to express my love and appreciation for Bharata Natyam to others while dancing on stage.

[Christina Chennat, a student of Smt. Ramaa Ramesh, recently graduated from high school. She is the daughter of Mariamma and Tomy Chennat of Newtown Square, PA.]

Confi-DANCE: My Experience with Bharatha Natyam (as of yet)

-- by, Sushila Murthy

A humorous 'Congratulations' card at my Bharatha Natya Arangetram stated the five stages of accomplishment:

1. Denial -- "I can't do it!"
2. Uncertainty -- "Maybe I can do it!"
3. Resistance -- "There's no way I can do it!"
4. Panic -- "AAAARGH! What if I can't do it!"
5. Acceptance -- "All right! I did it! Let's PARTY!"

While amusing, the greeting card contained much truth relating to the advancement of my dance career. Confident and bold in other areas of accomplishment, I felt an almost suffocating insecurity about my talent and ability in the ancient art of Bharatha Natyam. The inhibitions were erased by years of hard work and a love for the dance.

When I began Bharatha Natyam in late 1996, under the tutelage of my guru Smt. Ramaa Ramesh, my immediate reaction was denial. Amid jumbled emotions were floating equal parts of dislike and insecurity. I felt both that I could not do it and that I abhorred doing it. The fact that my mother admired Bharatha Natyam surely did not facilitate matters. To me, it seemed as though she was vicariously experiencing pleasure in classes which I detested attending, and I grew increasingly irritated. However, when I began to completely ignore all people around me and look solely toward the art, an admiration and affection were kindled within me, taking me to the next stage of accomplishment.

When, in the summer of 1999, I participated in the "Three Generations of Indian Classical Dancers" workshop, I grasped my first taste of accomplishment. A voice whispering "Maybe I can do it!" emerged. The workshop was organized by my guru and conducted by her guru Padmashri Smt. Chitra Visweswaran. Spending the daily rehearsals working as a team with the other girls was enlightening and I gained more concrete insight on my individual strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, I began to really have *fun*. Thus, the performance that concluded the workshop proved to be both exhilarating and gratifying. The combination of a positive work ethic, a splendid audience, gorgeous costumes, a live orchestra, and a beautiful stage served to enhance the wondrous spirit of the dance.

The workshop both boosted my confidence toward my dancing and fortified my resolve to move forward. Two years later, after having the choice between a vacation in Greece and Turkey or an arangetram, I chose the latter. (After all, I have my entire life to travel.) However, as I pondered the details, resistance began to sink in. My dance rehearsals over the past five years had been far from continuous as I juggled violin lessons, flute lessons, homework, exams, college applications, vacations, the prom, Marching Band, and a slew of other activities. Also, my guru wanted to approach the four arangetrams of the year in a slightly unorthodox manner, omitting the traditional *Allaripu*, *Jathiswaram*, and *Shabdham* and replacing them with more intricate, mature pieces indicative of those constituting a

professional performance. She also wanted each girl to have a unique *Varnam* and *Thillana*. Thus, each piece would be new and the words "There's no way I can do it!" raged through my head.

The process began with deliberate, hard work. I first concentrated on learning and memorizing my pieces, listening to the songs in my free time so they would become a part of me. I worked on each aspect of the dance -- footwork, hand gestures, expressions -- separately in order to approach complete perfection. Instead of relaxing with my friends or reading a good book, I spent Spring Break in dance class. Classes increased in frequency as summer and the date of my arangetram approached. When June arrived I began to focus completely on the performance ahead. Previously, during the school year, I had conflicting priorities, but as my high school graduation flew into the winds of the past, I had no other task but to achieve perfection in the challenge I chose. The task was far from easy. Everyday, in the five weeks prior to the performance, there was a class in the morning and I practiced at home in the evening. Whenever I rose to one level of expertise, my guru would push me further. Consequently, given my initial insecurities toward Bharatha Natyam, I gave into lapses of panic. Will I keep my spine erect? Will I turn out my knees enough during half-sitting? Will I look in the correct direction? Will I keep my elbows up? Will I smile? AAAARGH! What if I can't do it!

The final rehearsals, despite my apprehensions, soon passed and the day of the performance arrived. There was so much to be done! As I adjusted the final details of my costume, I could hear the audience entering the hall and the musicians tuning their instruments and adjusting their microphones. All the people whose opinions and esteem I respected were coming, my friends, my teachers, acquaintances of my parents, and of course my family. However, I forced myself to block them out. As I walked on stage for the Anjali, there was nothing to do but to enjoy the moment, to simply have FUN! I had invested an enormous amount of work, and it was time to reap the rewards. There was no need for frenzied questioning. What will happen, will happen. I had earned it. By the time the Thillana and the concluding Mangalam arrived, I was riding high. I did it! I succeeded! Instead of working under weight of apprehension, I was flying on top of the wings of achievement. It was time to party!

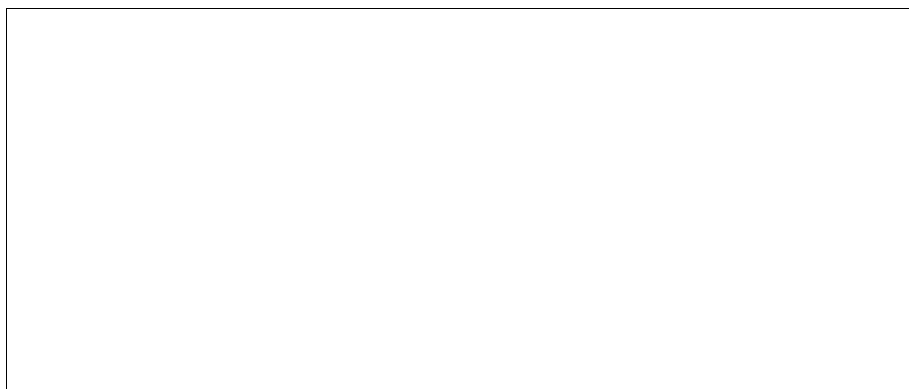
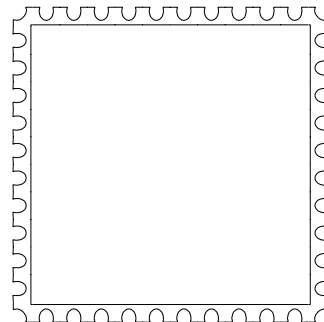
Thus, my arangetram marked a meaningful milestone and chapter in my life. I have succeeded in many areas of my life. However, I have always had a significant amount of confidence when approaching these subjects, a confidence that was absent in the beginning of my journey with Bharatha Natyam. Consequently, my arangetram is all the more an achievement. It helped me further discover that with faith and focus, I am able to satisfy even my most demanding critic -- myself.

[While celebrating Bharatha Natyam, Sushila is also interested in music, mathematics, the sciences, and international relations. She graduated from Hatboro-Horsham High School as Valedictorian of her class.]



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