



Sruti

The India Music
& Dance Society,
Philadelphia

SRUTI RANJANI

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From the President's Desk

Welcome to the 2013 issue of Sruti Ranjani! The 2013 season has been phenomenally successful for Sruti not only from the quality of programming and audience development standpoint but also from a fund raising perspective. We received the coveted grant from Pew Center for Arts and Heritage through Dance Advance to present Malavika Sarukkai in 2014 and landed a multiyear grant from the Knight Foundation. We have been most fortunate this year to secure the largest amount of funding in Sruti's history.

It was a very busy year for Sruti, enriched with an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement due to an excellent and varied programming of music and dance presented by both well renowned and upcoming artists from around the globe. The artists of 2013 included: Ramakrishnan Murthy, Vijay Siva, Nrityagram dancers, Kunnakudi Balamuralikrishna, Malladi Brothers: SreeramPrasad and Ravi Kumar, U. Shrinivas and U. Rajesh, Roopa Mahadevan, Shujaat Khan, Kuchipudi dancers: Sasikala Penumarthi, Dr. Kamala Rajupet, Shoba Natarajan and Revathi Komanduri, all premier disciples of Padmabhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam. Programming, presented at well-suited venues, that is a nice blend of traditional and one that pushed the boundaries marked the season. We collaborated with premium organizations such as the Annenberg Center for Performing Arts, Montgomery County Community College and Hindu Temple, DE to attract mainstream and non-traditional segments of Indian audiences expanding our outreach and member base. The artists are highly complimentary of the knowledgeable, appreciative Sruti audience, the hospitality, and the ambience of the Sruti stage that is conducive to bringing out the best in performing artists. Our grantors and collaborators are highly complimentary of the amazing work carried out by our volunteer run Sruti organization and are eager to collaborate with us in future years.

I look back with pride at the magnitude and quality of the concerts that we presented the community events, outreach and educational programs that we organized. Sruti presented a master class by visiting artist at the University of Pennsylvania, a documentary at the Montgomery County Community College and two sessions of varnams and manodharma sangeetham in Audubon. These sessions were very well received by the academic communities, Sruti members and mainstream audiences. Sruti made strides in audience engagement with the artists conducting post concert question and answer sessions.

My colleagues on the Sruti Board and its committees have worked passionately in flawless execution of our events this year. The families of the Board members worked cheerfully and tirelessly to support Sruti activities. Our non-profit status this year is rewarding in many ways including securing free in-kind support from two leading vendors: Google AdWords and Vertical Response. We enjoyed strong support of our members through sponsorships. Your sponsorship combined with the grants enabled us to present the high quality programs this year. Further, the grants gave us a solid financial footing for next year.

This is a very exciting time in Sruti's growth, as it has emerged as a key player in the cultural scene of greater Philadelphia area. In closing, I urge the readers to become involved with Sruti, contribute your skills and time to continue to take this special organization to greater heights. Please consider a Sruti 2014 sponsorship and enjoy being part of this excellence.

With warm regards,
Ravi Pillutla

From the Publications & Outreach Committee

Dear Sruti Enthusiast,

Welcome to Sruti day and the final Sruti publication of 2013. It has indeed been a stellar year for the Sruti Community with a variety of programming and technological scaling that we have travelled through in 2013.

You will enjoy a variety of articles, interview, reviews and tributes in this publication – from artists and rasikas. We want to thank each one who contributed, including the photographers and catalysts of authors. You will have the opportunity to rewind and play 2013 with the pictorial walkthrough in this issue. Sruti steps into her dance year in 2014 – marked by the dance-focused articles.

It needs to be mentioned here that the POC Team is a Dream Team. Lakshmi Radhakrishnan is our anchor – always taking charge and serving the teams with her skills and willingness; constantly making a big impact across teams with her contribution. Keeping an eye on contents for blind-spots in classicism and authenticity of contents and constantly contributing is Vidya Jayaraman. Her scholastic ability is valuable to our team. Balaji Raghothaman – our new teamster – has already made an impact with his recipe of creativity and know-how rolled-in-one. Srikant Raghavachari, also a fresh POC member, is our ‘resident technology expert’ consistently collaborating within and outside of POC to make things happen. This team has been adaptive to the needs of Sruti at large and adoptive of new technology (e.g. Sruti Smrti – blog <http://srutipbila.tumblr.com>) in an effective way.

None of this is possible without the dedication and enthusiasm of the community of writers. They have carved out time from amidst their personal and work lives to eloquently share their opinions, thoughts and experiences with everyone and we are all richer because of that. We would like to express our attitude of gratitude to all who have authored articles in Sruti publications this year.

Thank you SYG (Sruti Youth Group), Kirena Manivannan, Priyanka Dinakar, Ashwin Pothukuchi, and Prashanth Arunapuram to mention a few.

We want to thank our President Ravi Pillutla and the Board of Directors for their consistent support, providing timely content, feedback, suggestions and comments. We want to thank Sunanda Gandham – our president-elect – for her proactivity in current planning and collaborating not only on the current tasks, but also for the forthcoming dance-centric year. Our thanks to Sundar for diligently taking care of the CDs department. Thanks to Nari for closely providing his leadership and management for molding our publication elements. Ramana and Venkat have been a great source of inspiration and support. Uma has consistently weighed in with her expertise and help in spite of her family commitments.

Please stay tuned in 2014 to unwrap more contributions from our team including technological aids that we have in store for avid rasikas like you. We are looking forward to serving you an exciting spread for 2014 that our President-Elect, Sunanda Gandham has brought together with the Board’s approval.

Thank you and we look forward to your valuable feedback through specific surveys as well as by email to [srutipbila@gmail.com](mailto:srutiphila@gmail.com).

On behalf of Sruti Publications & Outreach Committee,
Tyagarajan Suresh (‘Suresh’).

Please accept our apologies for any errors or omissions you may find.

The articles and reviews in this magazine are published with a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression and the opinions contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Sruti, its board, or its members.

Photographs will appear in color in the online version of this publication available at www.sruti.org after December 7, 2013.

Roopa Mahadevan at Sruti's composers' day - September 7, 2013

Dinakar Subramanian

After a mixed offering from local musician and music students, youngsters Roopa Mahadevan, Arun Ramamurthy and Rajna Swaminathan took the stage to offer Sruti's composer's day concert. Roopa at the outset thanked Sruti and announced that she would be performing songs from composers other than the Trinity.

Displaying a fresh approach to the concert, Roopa started with a brisk Mohanakalyani varnam 'vallabai nAyakA' by Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman that made me sit up with expectation. Roopa then sang the 'dhanyudevvado dAsarathE' in Malayamarutham by Patnam Subramania Iyer. Roopa completed this piece with a neraval at 'vara maddaLa' and kalpanaswarams. After a rItigowlai ragam, Roopa sang the traditional favorite Janani Ninnuvina by Subbaraya Shastri followed by Muthuswamy Dikshitar's AnandAmruthakarshini in Amruthavarshini.

The piece de resistance was sankarAbaranam. Roopa was at her bold and exploratory best in her exposition of this rAgam. She gave it an unbridled description including a few subtle *graha bedha* patterns. Arun Ramamurthy also excelled in a thoughtfully executed AlapanA. He was influenced well by Roopa's alapana that he too scaled the rAgA with different nuances. For the kriti, Roopa chose the 'dEvI jagajjanani' one of Maharaja Swati Tirunal's Navarathri kritis. After a very brief neraval at the anupallavi (dEvI makutamaNi), the ever-smiling Roopa took her adventurous self to new heights with some really exquisite kalpanaswara prastharas. Arun kept pace with her throughout and Rajna was her supreme self in her thani that added a beautiful shine to the main piece.

A rAgamalika by PurandaradAsA - AduhOdalle makkaLu and the thillana in Hamsanandi rounded up the wonderful concert. It is indeed laudable to note that these three young artists who grew up in this country have all decided to pursue music quite seriously. I gather Roopa is equally at home with R&B/soul music. I have always felt a deep respect for people who perform different forms of music as I feel that their knowledge of the different systems provides them the wherewithal to deliver the different forms of music better but with the awareness of the risk that neither system should get diluted.

Similarly, Arun also runs a 'Carnatic Sundays' program at one of NY city's jazz venues. In addition, Arun also plays with Hindustani musicians. Rajna of course is the stalwart of the younger generation in our midst; having performed with renowned Carnatic musicians and who always lends a quiet strength to any concert. She too has a western classical background and dabbles in jazz.

The rapport between the artists was more than palpable and it definitely seemed to me that they thoroughly enjoyed playing together. It was indeed unfortunate that the artists were delayed by traffic on their way to the concert and thus had to cut short its duration. Regardless I thoroughly enjoyed the concert and left the hall in high spirits.

Dinakar Subramanian is a musician, music lover and a long-time resident of the Philadelphia area.

Shujaat Khan – A Concert Review

Allyn Miner

Each fall the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts schedules an eclectic series of music, theater and dance events called Penn Presents. Celebrated performers of new jazz, contemporary dance and theater, and music from South Africa, Cuba, India, and Ireland are included in this year's offerings. It was special for supporters of Indian classical music that Sruti initiated this season with a concert by sitarist Shujaat Khan on September 28, 2013.

Shujaat Khan last appeared here in March 2004, less than a month after the passing of his father, the great Ustad Vilayat Khan. That concert was a celebration of his father's gift to sitar style, the melodious gayaki-ang, in which the sitar is made to sing like the voice. Vilayat Khan had surprised and delighted audiences when he broke with concert performance traditions by suspending his playing to sing the lines of the song with his heart-rending husky-sweet voice. The practice was carried on by many players of his lineage. By the time of his father's death Shujaat had built a special reputation for his own singing through a popular CD, *Lago Lago*, and other recordings. In the 2004 concert Shujaat demonstrated a winning virtuosity and personal touch on the sitar.

The Annenberg Center's Zellerbach Theater seats more than a thousand people. The audience filled two-thirds of the theater and was a mix of casually dressed students, Sruti members in family groups, and faculty, university community, and Philadelphia arts lovers. Those of us who attended the 2004 concert could not help but be interested in what direction Shujaat Khan has taken Indian sitar music between then and now.

Dressed in a simple cream-colored kurta, sleeves pushed up, Shujaat and tabla player Abhiman Kaushal had a modest presence, sitting on the small dais onstage by themselves. Performances in this family style usually do not include tambura accompanists, since their powerful chord-like sitar strokes provide all the drone necessary to the performance. Shujaat, a large man with a friendly demeanor, set a light mood with his introductory banter, making the audience laugh by asking them to note the exits 'in case anyone did not enjoy the music.' His engaging personality would pervade the concert and the music. Abhiman Kaushal, originally of Hyderabad and settled for many years now in Los Angeles, knows Shujaat Khan's playing well. Shujaat Khan taught sitar classes at UCLA for more than ten years while Abhiman taught tabla classes, and Abhiman continues there as director of the Hindustani music ensembles. His experience with Shujaat and with a range of other artists and in fusion projects make him a nimble and creative accompanist.

When Shujaat struck the sitar, a surprisingly strong sound filled the theater. As he checked his tuning he plucked most of the 18 strings of the instrument and in a trademark action picked out a short melodious tune on the sympathetic strings. The tarab (Persian "joy, emotion") strings run under the frets and across a small bridge. When tuned to the notes of the raga to be played, they ring out on their own like shimmering echoes as the sitarist plays on the main melody string.

Shujaat began his performance with an alap-jor-jhala in raga Yamani. This raga is not well known even to those familiar with the Hindustani repertoire. Before starting, Shujaat explained that it makes use of both the sharp fourth (Madhyam or Ma) of the well-known Yaman and the natural fourth as well. Two other ragas, Yamani Bilawal and Yaman Kalyan, also use these notes, but the weight given to the Ma differs in all three. As he began to play the alap one could hear that the lower Ma was used in descending phrases to add color and emotion to the notes of Yaman or Yaman Kalyan, so the raga evoked memories of both those ragas and added a modest newness of its own.

Shujaat's sitar tone was strong and mellow. Some would say that the amplification was very high, but it is important to contemporary instrumentalists that the audience be able to hear the full sustain of the instrument. In this family's style, a single stroke is often followed by a long sequence of notes pulled by the left hand along the fret, evoking the fluidity of the voice. Shujaat's style in the alap-jor was an extension of his earlier leanings, featuring quick bursts of vocal-like ornamentation, folk-like repetitive riffs and occasional shows of tricky fingering. Underlying an alap is always a structure of gradual movement up the raga scale, but in Shujaat Khan's style the primary intent seems to be to reach out to the general audience. In the later parts of jor and jhala he built such intensity with his fast repetitive stroking patterns that it became a mesmerizing, almost overwhelming field of sound. The alap-jor-jhala lasted for about forty-five minutes, and when it was over Shujaat explained that he wanted to give the audience an undiluted musical experience, as they would hear it in India.

For those who missed the concert, a sound recording of Shujaat playing an alap and jor in Yamani is to be found on Youtube.

He followed the alap with a bandish, a short pre-composed line, in Addha tal, also called Punjabi tintal. This lilting sixteen-beat tal is played in the middle speed and carries a feeling of sweetness and liveliness. He toyed with the line, coming back to a simple phrase over and over again, and he seemed to be saying “see, sitar music isn’t forbidding and complicated.” Abhiman filled in in appropriate and lively fashion, and he played a couple of solos which received audience applause. Throughout, Abhiman maintained a graceful demeanor. He matched Shujaat’s playfulness without indulging in distracting shows of virtuosity for its own sake. Soon, Shujaat leaned to the microphone and sang the lyrics in his smooth voice: “Darshan deho Shankara Mahadeva.” This composition is familiar to many as sung by the light classical and devotional singer Lalitya Munshaw in Raga Yaman Kalyan. The lyrics express longing to see the face of lord Shiva and the singer’s torment night and day. It carries, like many songs, messages of human and divine love. Hindustani musicians are famously non-sectarian and choose songs based on likely audience appeal. This bandish has an appeal that would cross the boundaries among classical, devotional and fusion music listeners, an appropriate expression of what seemed to be Shujaat Khan’s wider intentions.

Shujaat continued with a few more songs in melodies of mixed semi-classical ragas. His songs were of the ghazal type, love poetry in the Urdu language. Ghazals have love and longing as their themes, and the culminating rhyme always has a bittersweet twist. I want to thank Amogh Halgeri for providing me with a selection from his memory of the songs that Shujaat sang and played. Shujaat spoke briefly before each song, but it would have been nice if he had translated at least fragments for the audience. Still, I believe that emotions of sweet nostalgia were felt by all, and his ability to replicate and even enhance vocal phrases on the sitar were a demonstration of this important aspect of sitar music.

***Aankhon se girte darte hain khwaab maula
Phir Bhi tamannaye karte hain khwaab maula***

I fear the tears that fall from my eyes while dreaming, o maula,
but still I keep on longing while dreaming, maula.

***Tumhare sheher ka mausam bada suhaana hai
Bura na maano to main ek shyaam churaloon
Jo doobana hai to itne sukoon se doobo
Ke aas paas ke leheron ko pata bhi na chale***

Your city has such a delightful atmosphere,
If you don’t mind, I will steal one evening for myself.
If I am to drown, then may I drown so quietly
that even the waves nearby won’t know.

Shujaat Khan ended the concert with a lullaby that he said he remembered from childhood. He returned to the stage and patiently spoke with members of the audience who stayed for the half-hour question-and-answer session. He exuded sincerity, good humor, and unpretentiousness as he gamely answered a range of questions.

I take the liberty to summarize Shujaat’s style as I perceived it in this concert. He used a free and relatively casual approach to raga development. We saw glimpses of classical rigor but for the most part his music communicated playfulness and sweet nostalgia. Some in the audience may have longed for the deeper explorations of raga and rhythm, but this visit by Shujaat Khan was a celebration of the contemporary sitar in the hands of one of our great players.

Allyn Miner is a concert performer on the North Indian sitar. She is a faculty member in the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania where she teaches South Asian music and performing arts. Her research and publications relate to the history of the sitar and sarod, Sanskrit, Hindi and Urdu musicological sources, and other Indological topics. She is also a teacher of batha yoga in the style of Sri Pattabhi Jois.

Vijay Siva in concert – A Review

Rajee Raman

Vijay Siva's concert in Sruti's fall lineup was a much-anticipated event, which began with a heartfelt apology from the artist for the slight delay in the start time. One sensed that the artist was going to make up for it in some way, and what followed was a most memorable concert from a team of artists, which could very well be the definition of synergy.

A varnam in Todi was sung as a warm up to the concert, followed by the Keeravani kriti, Ambavani Nannu. The artist did a round of nereval and swarams, replete with janta phrases. One noticed how supportive and elevating J. Vaidyanathan's mrudangam accompaniment was and that became one constant feature throughout the concert. Vijay Siva started an alapana in Hamirkalyani just as indicated in the program notes. The program notes listed every ragam to be sung and it was left to the rasikas to guess the composition the artist is going to choose, which made it interesting. R.K.Shriramkumar accompanying on the violin did a short, but sweet alapana return. Kalpana swarams in Chowka Kalam(slow) with M1 and M2 juxtaposed brought out the unique essence of Hamirkalyani.

The concert moved into top gear with the incomparable Shyama Shastri masterpiece: the swarajati in Yadukulakambodhi for which the artist prefixed a slokam. The languorous mood that this swarajati created was nicely transitioned into a faster tempo with a Kapinarayani piece - sarasasamadhana by Tyagaraja. Nereval was sung at Hitavu matalentho followed by Drutha kala swarams.

The Bhairavi raga alapana by Vijay Siva was a class of its own. His raga alapana is an edifice architected with traditional values, very appropriate raga-specific aesthetics and above all a perfection in sruthi, be it tara sthayi or mandra sthayi that makes for a most pleasing listening experience. The majestic Dikshitar kriti Shree Kamalambikayah param was received with much appreciation from the discerning audience. The true highlight of the concert was the nereval that Vijay Siva sang at Nadamaya in Mishra Jhampa's majestic gait.

(nAdamaya sUkSma rUpa sarva siddhipradAdi dasha shaktyArAdhita mUrte)

An artiste truly succeeds when the music can spotlight the composer's genius in both melody and rhythm and Vijay Siva was able to do that with the Neraval. True to the lyrics, good nadam pervaded the nereval; the slow tempo giving it a deep dignity followed by the faster tempo nereval showcasing the many possibilities of madhyama register of Bhairavi. R.K.Shriramkumar matched Vijay Siva toe to toe in the kalpanaswarams that followed. Slow swarams had a lot of base octave permutations. A koraippu brought a fitting end to a truly enjoyable journey through a sumptuous Bhairavi.

Darisanam kandarku, the Gopalakrishna Bharathi piece in Mohanam was the filler before the Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi in Begada set in Khanda Triputa talam in Chatushra nadai.

The pallavi *Ambe gadayantha shyame* || *Bega dayathore Trijagad* composed by Shriramkumar had the raga names cleverly woven into the lyrics. Ragamalika swarams were in Ahiri, Bilahari, Huseni and Kadanakutuhalam. J.Vaidyanathan's thani was great and one wished he had been given an additional opportunity during Bhairavi.

The concert included a few short compositions such as a tiruppugazh in Jaganmohini, an Oothukkadu tillana and concluded with Adisankara's dasasloki set to tune in ragamalika by R.K.Shriramkumar. A very memorable and satisfying performance indeed.

Rajee Raman is an avid rasika of Carnatic Music. She lives in Exton, PA with her husband and son.

Sri Krishna Parijatham – A Review

Anize Appel

On Saturday, November 16th 2013, an audience of about 300 hundred were delighted and enthralled by four senior disciples of Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam in a tribute performance in honor of his memory in Delaware. The legendary Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam transformed the once considered folk style of dance into the classical form with standards that are in alignment with the Natya Shastra. Although the Kuchipudi dance style originated in Kuchipudi village in Andra Pradesh, the place of Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam's birth, he was acclaimed for the successful revitalizing and popularizing of this classical Indian dance form globally. Master Garu choreographed 180 solo items, 15 dance dramas, and has influenced innumerable Dancers.



The four senior disciples, Revathi Komanduri, Sasikala Penumarthi, Dr. Kamala Rajupet, and Shoba Natarajan performed four Acts of Sri Krishna Parijatham choreographed by their Guru Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam in the 1960's. The musical accompaniment contained the recorded voice of Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam. The profound significance of the sound of Master Garu's voice transported the audience to the capital of the Anarta Kingdom, Dwarka where the events depicted took place. Although the performance was entirely in the Telugu language, the authenticity of the sound and vibrations of Telugu captivated the audience's ears, while the dancers' fluid

expressions, grace, and poise, elicited laughter, sighs, and surprise.

At times, the dancers seemed to float because of the fleet-footed, scintillating footwork. They appeared to be celestial beings providing a glimpse of their lives to mere mortals. We were lost in the complexity of the emotions that engaged and enthralled us, leaving us sitting on the edge of our seats. Saikala Penumarthi's "*Bhama Pravesa Daruvu*" was as if watching a portrait come to life for its veracity of confidence. Act two's tarangam with Krishna and Rukmini found audience members captivated by the movements of Shoba Natarajan and Dr. Kamala Rajupet. The movements were so smooth and appeared to be effortless. The dancers seemed to be inanimate statues that were gliding on air and were being propelled by some external force. Absolutely phenomenal! Sage Narada, who in addition to his wisdom is mischievous, portrayed by Revathi Komanduri, was dynamically playful. Any time Narada appeared, we held our breath waiting to see his antics.

If you were not present, you missed an excellent example of Kuchipudi Natyam by accomplished dancers whose connection, appreciation, and love of their Guru, Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam, was not only palpable, but it entered each of us and held us tight in its embrace. It is tremendously important to continue to support Indian classical arts not only for the beauty that surrounds you, but also for the continuity of a history, culture, and life. Indian dance and arts are in their own genre and like Western art, deserve appreciation, praise, and a population willing to learn about the contextual relevance of its dance dramas as is found in Kuchipudi. This performance was resoundingly successful in conveying meaning and emotion through exponents of Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam.

I will forever be grateful to Sruti for assuming its mission to educate and titillate the Philadelphia and the broader Pennsylvania and Delaware communities

Ms. Anize Appel is a Kuchipudi enthusiast from Bethlehem, PA.

My Guru Shri R.K.Venkatarama Shastry - A humble tribute

Mullaivasal G. Chandramouli

*Vande Gurunam Charanaaravinde Sandarshitha swaatma sukhaava bodhe
Janasyaye Jaangalikaayamaane Samsaara haalahala moha shaanthyai*

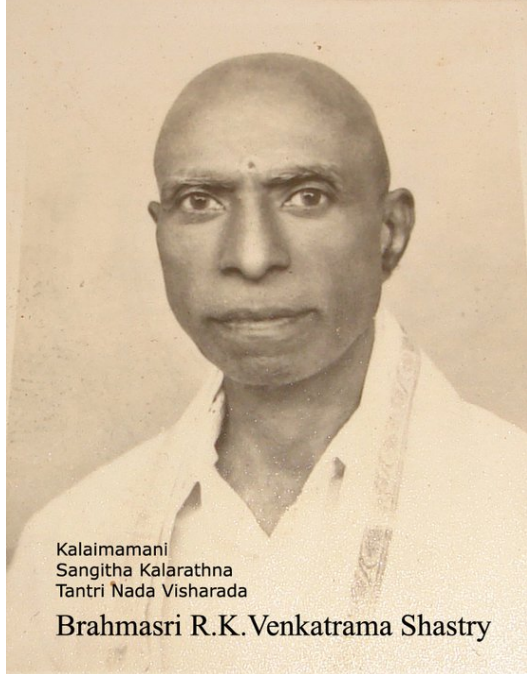
Obeisance to the lotus feet of the Teachers; who have revealed to me the joy that is mine; my refuge in the dark impenetrable thicket; who bring peace from the poison of the cycle of existence and illusion.

Birth

My Guru Brahmashri Rudrapattana Krishna Shastry Venkatarama Shastry was born on 10th November 1907 at Rudrapattana. Rudrapattana is a village on the banks of the Kaveri river near Mysore. Shri R.K.Venkatarama Shastry was born in the Sankhyeti sect of Brahmins. He was the eldest son of an erudite Sanskrit and Kannada scholar Shri R.K. Krishna Shastry, a greatly accomplished Harikatha vidwan.

Ancestry

Sankhyetis speak a unique language. It is a combination of Kannada, Tamil, and Sanskrit. The language as such does not have a written script. Sankhyetis are said to be descendants of a group of Brahmins from Sengottai [Shencottah], who came many generations ago to Mysore. They settled in Rudrapattana at the invitation of the



Kalaimamani
Sangitha Kalarathna
Tantri Nada Visharada

Brahmasri R.K.Venkatarama Shastry

Mysore Maharaja. The Sankhyetis were learned in the Vedas and Music. While Dikshitar and Somayajis performed Yajna and Yaga, others spent most of their time learning Shathaavadhaana, chanting of the Vedas, and music. Rudrapattana was a place of Ghanapaathi, Shathaavadhaani, Asthaavadhaani and musicians. The Channakeshava Temple of this village is said to be more than a thousand years old. This village has produced several musicians and scholars who have occupied the position of court musicians at the Mysore palace. Even today, many of the currently performing Carnatic musicians in Karnataka are from Rudrapattana.

R.K. Krishna Shastry, a noted vocalist and Harikatha Vidwan was also from Rudrapattana. His children: R.K. Venkatarama Shastry, R.K. Ramanathan, R.K. Shrikantan, and R.K. Narayanaswamy were trained by him. Each of them has attained a high degree of proficiency and popularity through their performances.

Musical Training

My Guru Shri R.K.Venkatarama Shastry studied music initially with Shri R.Venkata Rao, his father Shri R.K.Krishna Shastry, then from the illustrious Shri Veena Subbanna. Shri Veena Subbanna then took him to learn from the noted Vidwan Mysore Shri T. Chowdiah. He learnt both violin and vocal music from his various teachers.

Musical Career

My guru studied Intermediate from Mysore University, and then chose a lifetime career in violin. He was on the very first roll of Staff Artists as a violinist at Akashvani and served for 32 years. He retired from service around the year 1967.

My Guru had a long illustrious career as a violinist and accompanied many eminent Carnatic vocalists: Shri Tiger Varadachariar, Shri Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Shri Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer, Shri G.N. Balasubramaniam, Shri Musiri Subramania Iyer, Shri Semmangudi Shrinivasa Iyer, Smt M.S. Subbulakshmi, Smt T.Brinda and Smt T. Mukhta, the eminent flautist Shri T.R. Mahalingam etc. He also accompanied many of the

succeeding generations of vidwans, right up to the 1980s. He also accompanied his mentor Shri T. Chowdiah in many of the latter's violin recitals. As a soloist, he made tours across India. He was a solo Violinist and also played duet performances along with V.Sethuramiah, who was a disciple of Mysore Shri T. Chowdiah and a Staff Artist of All India Radio.

Titles and Honours

The following is a list of the main titles and honours my guru received:

- *Kalaimamani from the Tamil Nadu Iyal Isai Nataka Manram in 1970.*
- *The Bangalore Gayana Samaja conferred Sangeeta Kalaratna on him.*
- *Tantri Nada Visbarada conferred by Jagadguru Shri Kanchi Paramacharya.*
- *Asthana Vidwan of both Shringeri and Kanchi Shankara Matams.*

Some other honours and responsibilities vested on him were:

- *Member, Experts committee of the Music Academy.*
- *Member, Music Audition Board, All India Radio.*
- *An epitome of piety, simplicity, and lofty ideals, my Guru had the honour and the privilege of performing the Aradhana of Sadguru Shri Thyagarajaswami at Tiruvaiyyaru on the sacred day of Pushya Babula panchami for nearly fifty years.*

His disciples

My Guru imparted his wide experiences with the golden generations of music and musicians, his large repertoire of krithis, his deep passion for sangitha and sahithya to many that include

- His brothers: Late Shri R.K.Narayanaswamy,
- Late Shri R.K.Ramanathan,
- Sangitha Kalanidhi Shri R K Shrikantan.
- His nephews: Shri R.S.Ramakanth,
 - The Rudrapatnam Brothers - Shri R.N.Thyagarajan & Shri R.N. Taranathan,
- His niece Dr. Smt R.N Shrilatha,
- His grandson Shri R.K.Shriramkumar
- A host of other disciples including my older brother Shri G Janakiram and myself.

I came into my guru's fold in the year 1979. At the time, my guru was 71 years old and I was just 13. I do not know any details of his other shishyas. Please excuse me for any omissions in this list.

His music

Music wise, I have known my guru as a great master of the violin and as a great scholar. Particular mention must be made here of his excellent fingering and bowing techniques. His was not mere technique for technique's sake. They were always oriented to the actual vocalization of the music, and sometimes he would sing the phrase and also play it immediately afterwards, showing us the actual application of the fingering or bowing technique.

My guru's style was a very judicious blend of the power and the bold tones of Shri Mysore Chowdiah and the wholesome and nuanced raga expression of Shri Papa Venkatramiah. My guru laid emphasis on the learning of varnams, mainly in Adi tala as well as Ata tala. He helped us understand their importance in developing good technique and chaste raga bhava.

Whether it was a varnam or krithi, raga, neraval or swarakalpana, my guru's music brimmed with raga bhava and with chaste and unalloyed adherence to raga grammar too. His music created a deep feeling of reverence and happiness! He had a vast repertoire— so many were the popular and rare kritis that I learnt — if it was 'Koluvaiyunnaade' in Bhairavi raga one day, it was 'Chinna naadena' in Kalanidhi raga on another day. It would be the Ata tala varnam in Anandabhairavi raga another day and 'Shri Jalandhara' in Gambhira Nata, of the Mysore Maharaja on yet another day.

My guru kept himself abreast of all relevant musical developments - I remember how he once took Shri Shriramkumar and me to a demonstration at Music Academy by a Western violinist. He later showed us some important fingering and bow positions based on the techniques demonstrated by that violinist. He attended such conferences / demonstrations, and violin concerts by other vidwans. And later would point out to us the salient features of the various artistes and their performances.

Outlook in life

My guru's deep-rooted faith in the Hindu religion and pious life style prevented him from crossing the shores of India for concerts. He was a very serious student of the Vedas and Vedanta in particular and also had a great passion for mathematics, literature and linguistics.

Another well-known highlight of his personality was his pure as gold character. He was a Shastry in the true sense: He lived life as ordained in the Vedas: trikaala Sandhyaavandanam and study of Veda, observing all rituals as ordained in the shastras. He was also very strict in his food habits: he never included onion and garlic and never ate 'outside' foods like hotel food. No wonder, everywhere that he went, every person whom he met always treated him with due respect and humility.

He was utterly self-effacing and an epitome of humility, avoiding all ostentation, even though he was so learned and pious. "Nirai kudam thalumbaathu" is the saying in Tamil - he was the example. I have never known him to fall sick. I remember once there was a un-announced bus strike in Madras when he was returning from Bangalore to Madras by train. He walked all the way (he was 75 years or more then) from Madras Central station to Thirumalai Pillai Road in T Nagar, a distance of more than 7 km.

Musical Viewpoints

He was a traditionalist in the true sense ... He held the view that in music, tradition does not mean that one has to sing or play exactly like an imitation of the teacher. Innovation / new thought processes / originality were always welcome, according to him. 'Playing to the gallery' was not. More important, one cannot transgress the unwritten rules of raga bhava etc ... all innovation had to conform to these rules.

And one of the most important things that he taught me was to recognise that great composers and great musicians - all of them composed / sang / played with true humility and offered their music to the divine with utter self – effacement. For him, talent and humility always went together.

My guru himself drew inspiration from another great violinist Papa Venkatramiah, both in technique and musical outlook. Even though his Guru innovated with the violin and played a 7–stringed violin, he rarely played on the 7–string violin and continued playing on the regular 4–string version.

My Guru's style of playing was very chaste and measured. Every musical phrasing had to be complete in context and grammar. Even for his students. I discovered the same with the following incident:

I remember his gracious presence in a concert where I was playing as violin accompaniment. The turn came for me to essay Dhanyasi raga and I could sense his open-hearted appreciation with his nods and smiles. Then came a precarious moment when, out of ignorance and inexperience, I drifted away into an amateurish phrase. Immediately I could sense the pain in his facial expression, which alerted me and saved me from further slips. Somehow I managed to revert to the proper raga bhava and grammar and finish the alapana. That single look continued to trouble me for many days. From then on, whenever I listened to my Guru's playing or those by other vidwans, I started to observe the nuances and subtleties that are so essential to make the music complete. It also made me think and work much harder to equip myself both in terms of knowledge and technique.

My Guru's playing reflected the vocal style ... You could hear the sahitya when he played the violin. He also used to select the appropriate places in kritis for performing neraval or swarakalpana.

His accompaniment in concerts was always tuned to help the main artiste to the maximum extent. He was the favorite accompanist for many senior vidwans of the previous generations since he was the embodiment of both sangeetham (Music) and ingitham (cultured behaviour on or off stage).

He always followed the Pakkavaadya Dharma (unwritten codes for violin accompaniment in a concert). Moderation was the key ingredient in his accompaniment. The length and the depth of his raga alapanas was always tuned to the way in which the main artiste had handled the raga. So also with neraval and swara kalpanas. Also, during the kriti, even if his patanthara (his Guru's teaching) of the kriti was different from that of the main artiste, he always used to follow the main artiste like a shadow, so as to not mar the musical unison in the concert.

My tutelage under him

My elder brother Shri G. Janakiram was his student and he led me to my Guru's care. I remember vividly the first meeting with my Guru. He asked me to play some initial lessons I had learnt from my first guru Smt. Savithri Satyamurthy. My Guru had an awe-inspiring personality and I instantly could feel his keen scrutiny of my playing. It was my good fortune that he immediately accepted me as his student and my classes commenced with him soon after. Shri R.K. Shriramkumar and myself had the good fortune of having our classes together since 1979.

To Shri Shriramkumar, he was Thatha (Grandfather) in real life. From then on, he was Thatha for me too. We had classes almost everyday, excepting for the few days every month when he used to go to Bangalore, or outstation for a concert, or if I could not go due to family reasons etc. Similarly, Thatha always used to treat both Shri Shriramkumar and me as his grandchildren. His class happened only when both of us were present. Often I would arrive at class to find him playing the violin. The music that flowed from his instrument, the rich tone and the moving raga bhava, these would make me lost in wonderment. I would stand transfixed until he noticed me and asked me to sit and take out my violin and look for Shri Shriramkumar to join us.

Classes would go on for hours. Not for him the clock! He would actively teach by playing himself, and would be very patient with us. Similarly, not for him any limit to the number of classes in a week or a month. I remember going to his house just like I did to school. Only that I would come back home from school, leave my books and take the violin to go to his house.

Both Shri Shriramkumar and I were always keenly watched when we played in class. He would stop and correct our mistakes with care and patience, and would not proceed unless both of us had understood and played correctly.

He was such a great teacher ... The power of his playing was itself enough to enthuse me to stay glued to his playing and make me want to exert myself to learn the maximum from him.

He spoke very little while teaching. His playing, alert and keen guidance while I played was alone sufficient. I never had to keep a notebook or write the song notation, or record his lessons in order to remember them. I am not exaggerating in the least if I say that it was the power of his musical and personal stature that made the lesson enter my brain as a clear understanding, and enter my heart as a pure feeling. I am sure this would have been the experience of all his other students too.

He taught me many rare varnams and also many kritis of the Musical Trinity – Shri Thyagaraja, Shri Muthuswami Dikshithar and Shri Shyama Shastry, and also many other composers.

If I can remember clearly all that was taught to me thus by my Guru, it really makes sense when we hear of so many erudite vidwans in the past centuries who all became learned due to the excellence of their Gurus.

One day during the Gokulashtami Festival in 1983, when I had completed barely 4 years under his guidance, he asked me to come early the next day, and to come prepared to play a concert with him the next day. And on the following day, the three of us had a violin trio concert. It is my blessing that my 'arangetram' in music was very

successful. There was no feeling of stress, since we (Shri Shriramkumar and I) never felt musically insecure. Such was the power of our guru's presence!
His influence in my life

On a personal note, my guru encouraged me and blessed me when I made a decision to take up music as my profession and also did carefully monitor my progress.

Both Shri Shriramkumar and I had begun to take guidance from our present Guru Shri V.V.Subrahmanyam. Even today, Shri V.V.Subrahmanyam constantly tells me that I did come to him equipped in very excellent measure by my revered Guru Thatha!

I was very surprised and apprehensive when one day Thatha asked me to play Dhanyasi raga. What a coincidence – Shri V.V.Subrahmanyam, in his careful and kind guidance, had been teaching me to play the very same Dhanyasi raga – in my very first few lessons with him!!

Imagine the tension with which I began to play the raga Dhanyasi in front of Thatha! Somehow I steadied myself and began playing the raga. Forever etched in my memory are the tears of happiness he openly shed after hearing my Dhanyasi raga. Every time I think of this incident, I can feel Thatha's tears wash away my ignorance and lethargy, and take up my music with renewed vigour.

I cannot refrain from repeating myself. That sages existed in the past may be a matter of conjecture for many. But for me, the above incident always keeps reminding me of my good fortune in having come into contact with two eminent sages as my Gurus.

Obeisance to the lotus feet of the Teachers; who have revealed to me the joy that is mine; my refuge in the dark impenetrable thicket; who bring peace from the poison of the cycle of existence and illusion.

My last meeting with Thatha was his presence at my concert at the December Music Festival at Music Academy, Madras, in the year 1992.

After the concert, when I prostrated before him, he was so gracious as to shower his blessings on me with a benign smile and a few syllables. He indicated that my musical progress was on the correct path. Today as I am about to take up the violin on the stage before every concert, I look at his photo and I feel the power of his guidance and encouragement with me.

My Guru passed away in Mysore on the 15th of April 1993.

The music world remembers him as one of the most respected vidwans of all times, respected for his music and the strength of his character.

Violin Vidwan Sri Chandramouli initially received training from Smt. Savithri Sathyamurthy, and thereafter was groomed under the tutelage of the veteran violinist (Late) Sri R.K.Venkatrama Sastry and violin maestro Sri V.V. Subrahmanyam. Perfection in bowing technique, bringing out the melodic nuances with purity, and weaving intricate and dexterous laya patterns are among his fortes. This technocrat from IIT-Madras is also a committed music scholar and teacher who has trained many students.

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Shri Thiruvaidaimarudur Rajagopalan (TR) Subramanian (1929-2013)

Ashwin Iyer & Robin Iyer

There are moments in one's life whose true importance is revealed only through the passage of time. The circumstances leading up to them, though seeming unremarkable at the time, appear in retrospect, to have been artfully constructed with great purpose. The year was 1991 – as we had done for several years before, we embarked on our annual visit to Pittsburgh with our mother to spend time with our cousins and our Periamma and Periappa who lived in beautiful and hilly Allison Park.

Carnatic music was a fact of life in their household, and one that we hadn't paid close attention to until then. We spent much of our time during these trips at the famous Shri Venkateshwara (SV) Temple in Monroeville, where we would entertain ourselves with games of Frisbee, tag, and hide and seek. But our experience was different this time around, because we had recently begun learning music formally in Toronto. So, when we discovered that the SV Temple was offering music lessons under respected teachers and musicologists from India, our family jumped at the chance to enrol us. It was this set of circumstances that eventually led us to meet one of our first and most beloved music gurus -- Shri T. R. Subramaniam.

With great sadness, we mourn the loss of Shri T. R. Subramanian, one of our great and illustrious gurus. Shri TRS (or TRS mama as he was affectionately known) joined the almighty on October 4, 2013. He was a great musician, musicologist, an expert at presenting lec/dems and *pallavis*, and a wonderful human being who was loved by all. He revolutionized the art of *raagam-taanam-pallavi* (RTP) singing, composing hundreds of *pallavis* and simplified them in terms that any lay person or *vidwan* could appreciate, presenting lec-dems all over the world on this topic and other complex topics including *neraval* and *kalpana swaram* singing. He was also a proponent of the use of beautiful musical devices including *kannaku* (mathematical patterning and permutation of notes) and *swaraakshara* (sahitya and note syllables having the same sound) to create unique and magnificent *sangatis* and complex, yet aesthetically pleasing patterns.



We were fortunate to learn from him in 1991 in Pittsburgh, USA during his summer music teaching assignment at the Shri Venkateswara Temple, and also in 1996 in both New Delhi and Chennai during our visits to India. This was a chance occurrence and it is likely that we may have never known his greatness had it not been for a fateful meeting at a family gathering. He was a guest of honour and we were prompted by a few family members to seek his blessings and to perhaps sing a song for him at this gathering. Our first lesson in humility was when he asked us to sing a song we had previously learnt, as is often the case for new students seeking the guidance of a Guru. We chose to sing “baale baalendu bhooshani,” a composition of St. Thyagaraja in reethigowla raagam.

Knowing what we know now, it certainly took guts (and a bit of ignorance helped) to sing in front of a man of his stature, reputation, and knowledge, especially when we had only just begun learning music— we probably didn't realize how lucky and fortunate we were to have him lend a patient ear to nine- and twelve-year-old children, not grimacing once through all of our mistakes, *apaswarams*, and still providing the occasional encouraging *bale* or *saabhaash*. There was no shortage of ignorance on our part; in one funny incident, TRS Mama appreciated one of our sangatis with a hearty *bale bale*! After exchanging a quick, perplexed glance with each other, we promptly changed the words in the next sangati from “baale baalendu” to “bale balendu”. Though he surely noticed, TRS Mama responded only with a smile, and then agreed to teach us.

This led us on a journey of self-realization that continues to this day. Our first lesson at the SV Temple took place in a small carpeted room adjacent to the cafeteria, sporting a large conference table and wall mirror, not to mention the finicky tape recorder we used to record our lessons – all unremarkable on their own, but together, creating an indelible impression and an environment of absolute concentration, closeness, and bonding with the great teacher.

Having heard and understood our deficiencies, TRS Mama chose to teach us a small, but instructive *kriti* as our first song: “Parvati Pathim” in Hamsadhwani (a *kriti* of Muthuswamy Dikshitar). During this lesson, he opened our eyes to perfection and patience by spending nearly an hour beforehand correcting “Sa” and “Pa” -- the memory of which continues to teach us about the meaning of perfection and the value of pursuing it. Since the first note of the song begins on “Pa” and the *sahitya* also begins with the syllable “Pa,” it essentially meant that we were not going to get past the first syllable of the song until our “Pa” was correct. Whereas other teachers might have become frustrated with such novice students, TRS Mama did not -- he maintained a calm, gentle, and encouraging demeanour throughout. During this lesson, he also highlighted the use of *swarakshara* by Dikshitar, where the *sahitya* and *swaras* are one and the same.



They say that the mark of a great teacher is the ability to teach a subject as effectively to a novice as to an expert. To this day, his 45-minute *pallavi*-singing lec-dem during his visit to Cleveland in 1995 is remembered as one of the most educational and informative lec-dems on *pallavi* ever presented to North American audiences. It should be noted that this was an impromptu lec-dem, delivered at the request of Shri V. V. Sundaram, who asked TRS Mama to fill in due to a delay for another artist who could not make it to the stage on time. Of course, TRS Mama was ready and willing, despite having spent

the entire day sitting in the front row of Waetjen Auditorium listening to and encouraging young children rendering Tyagaraja kritis during the music competitions.

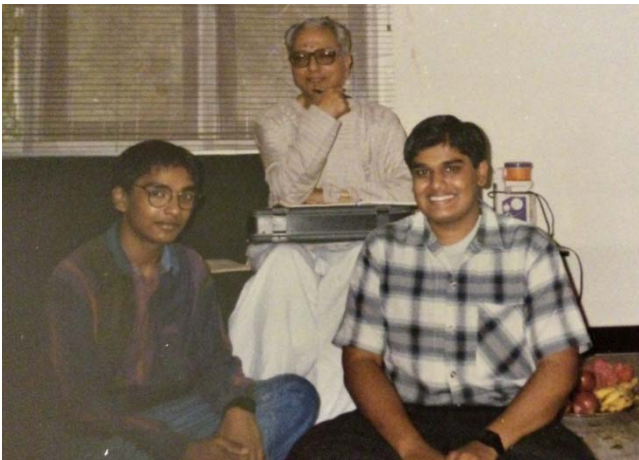
It was during this lec-dem that he managed to mesmerize the ears and minds of the Cleveland audience by distilling the essential aspects of *raagam*, *taanam* and *pallavi* down to their most basic forms. He began by delineating the essential features of the *pallavi* structure, with a *purvangam*, *uttarangam*, an *eduppu*, and the pleasant friction created by the *arudi* and *visranti*. In one example, he explained how *trikaalam*, normally done during the RTP segment of a concert, is an extremely simple task, even for a child, to perform. He likened it to the singing of *sarali varisai* in three speeds or the folding of a piece of paper into two halves, then four, then eight, and so on. By contrast, he noted, rendering the *pallavi* in *nadais* such as *trisram*, is a much more difficult task, akin to folding a piece of paper into 3 equal thirds. This, he endearingly explained, would pose difficulty even for an adult. The audience was led gently to the realization that *trikaalam*, in and of itself, is not a mark of any true musicianship -- rather musicianship lies in is the ability to understand the *nadais* and *kaalaas*, and to use them effectively to present aesthetic *neraval* which satisfies both the emotive and the technical aspects of *pallavi*.

In the summer of 1996, we followed TRS Mama back to New Delhi (and subsequently to Chennai) to undertake advanced lessons from him. During this session, TRS Mama's first task was to inform us that we were singing in completely the wrong *shruti* for our vocal range. After conducting a few tests, where he made us sing very low

and very high notes, he turned the dial on the *Shruti* box up from B (0.5) to C# (1.5) and informed us that ‘this is now your *Shruti*?’. To this day, we are grateful that he did this, because until that point, we were making the crucial mistake of tuning the *shruti* box to accommodate our adolescent voices rather than tuning our voices to a fixed shruti. He also began teaching more complex concepts through the compositions he gifted to us. He began with “meluko vayya” in *raga* bauli, introducing us to beautiful *swarakshara* possibilities like “lavvaarika paaducunnaaripudu” where the notes “**Sa Ri Ga Pa**” match almost exactly with the words. Over the next weeks he proceeded to teach us a selection of rare *kritis* including “saamodam cintayaami” in *raga* shuddha dhanyaasi, “venu gaana loluni” in *raga* kedaaragaula, “kani karambutu” in *raga* bhavaani and “arul tara venum ayyaa” in *raga* rasikapriya. He also introduced us to aesthetic ways of employing interesting musical devices, such as the use of *kannaku* in *manodharma sangita* (e.g. swara patterns such as nsgns,, mpnmp,, nsgn *Samodam*).

We can honestly say that his patient teaching provided us with the foundation and confidence to be able to learn from other great masters including Shri TK Govinda Rao and also Shri SR Janakiraman, our current *Guru* whom we also met at the SV Temple and under whose guidance we have remained for the last 15 years.

TRS Mama, TKG Mama, and SRJ Mama were always great friends, whose friendship began as batchmates in the first graduating class of the erstwhile Central College of Music, Madras, training under musical titans such as Musiri Sri Subramania Iyer, Smt. T. Brinda, Tirupaampuram Sri Swaminatha Pillai, and others. We fondly remember them occupying adjacent seats in the front row during the Music Academy morning sessions/paper presentations as members of the experts committee, where they would unfailingly be requested to offer their insights as veteran academicians and performing artists. SRJ Mama would refer to TRS Mama as his “chum” with the greatest respect and adoration, each maintaining correspondence with the other on all topics musical.



On one occasion, TRS Mama invited us to his home in Chennai after hearing that we had presented a rarely sung composition of St. Thyagaraja during one of our concerts: “kaaruvelpulu” in *kalyaani raagam*, remarking that he had not heard it sung since the Aalathoor Brothers. He asked us to sing it before him several times, providing running annotations on the meaning and praising SRJ Mama’s teaching. He was ever-encouraging with us, and even coined the term “Toronto Brothers” when we first met him in 1991 -- an endearing term that has stayed with us to this day.

To say that we are deeply saddened by his loss would be an understatement, but we are proud to have glimpsed some small portion of his legacy and will always remember him as being pivotal in beginning our never-ending musical journey. We convey our condolences to his family, his galaxy of students, and his many admirers.

Ashwin Iyer and Robin Iyer are students of Shri S. R. Janakiraman and currently live in Edmonton, Alberta and Toronto, Ontario, respectively. More information about them can be found at www.torontobrothers.com.

Sangita Kalanidhi Pinakapani Garu, M.D. (1913 - 2013)

Prabhakar Chitrapu



SripAda pinAkapANi gARu was an extraordinary man, who lived a full hundred years, ‘treating maladies’ as a Physician and ‘creating melodies’ as a Musician-cum-Musicologist. He had a deep admiration for the tanjAvUr bANi of Carnatic music and devoted his life to master it and propagate it within his home state of Andhra Pradesh. In fact, he is known to have said “If someone has mentioned me as the founder of the tanjAvUr bANi in Andhra, I will consider it my life’s very purpose accomplished’.

He was a musician par excellence, on hearing whose very first concert at the young age of 16, Mysore chowdiah remarked “You have been blessed with what many of us labored hard for years to acquire”. His creativity in music was so deep and intricate that lAlguDi jayarAman remarked about their first concert together that pinAkapANi gARu rendered a SankarAbharaNam pallavi like no one else ever did before!

pinAkapANi gARu considered himself as an ‘educated musician’, who had the intellectual capacity to ‘analyze the technical aspects of music and explain them’. He wrote extensively on good music and published several encyclopedic books: sangIta sourabham, a set of four books containing notations of over a thousand kritis; manOdharma sangItam, expounding the intricacies of swara kalpana, neraval, rAga and notation; and pallavi gAna sudha. This led him to be considered more as a musicologist and a teacher, who trained a rich lineage of accomplished students, chief among whom are: vOLETi venkatEswarlu, nEdunUri krishnamUrti, nUkala cina satyanArAyaNa, Srirangam gOpalaratnam, jaya SEkhar, etc.

The phrase ‘educated musician’ may be a poor translation of the original phrase he used in a Tamil interview, but it is a fact that pinAkapANi and pinAkapANi alone was among the few, if not the only, Carnatic musician who had advanced training in the science of medicine and the art of music. That rare combination of backgrounds must definitely have provided insights that few others have. So, it may be worth for us to carefully consider what he thought about good music: “What is not melodious is not music”; Good music consists of elements of good music and *their correct mixture*. Regarding the latter, his views were: “Every prayOga has an appropriate kAlapramANa.... Intervals between sangatIs is very very important..Whether in alApana, kriti, neraval or swaraprastAra, the sangatIs should ideally reflect the emotion of the lyrics of the song”. Alas, few Carnatic musicians, now and before, seem to show appreciation for this dimension.

The world of Carnatic music recognized his talents and contributions and richly rewarded him with many accolades. Chief among were the Noble Prize equivalent of Carnatic music - the sangIta kaLanidhi award, the

Indian national jewel - padma bhUshan award, and many others including sangIta kaLaSEkhara, kaLAprapUrNa etc.

Sri pinAkapANi garu was born on 3 August 1913 and breathed his last on 11 March 2013. His legacy continues with his three sons and a daughter.

SrIpAda pinAkapANi was born to SrIpAda kAmEswara rAo and jOgamma in a small village called priya agraHaram in SrIkAkULam district of Andhra Pradesh. He had three older brothers and an elder sister. Since his father was a Junior Professor in the Government Training College in Rajahmundry, pinAkapANi spent most of his childhood and youth there.

Musical Training:

His early exposure to Carnatic music was listening to music lessons of his sister taught by Sri P.S. lakshmaNa rAo. When pinAkapANi was offered to be taught Carnatic music, he refused, thinking that music for was girls only! Fortunately, that feeling passed and he took his first Carnatic music lesson on 9 Nov 1924 at the age of 11.

Sri P.S. lakshmaNa rAo was from the Mysore school of Carnatic music, and traced back to Saint tyAgaraja. His teacher was Mysore karigiri rAo, whose teacher was Mysore sadASiva rAo....mAnAmbucAvaDi venkaTasubbayya...Saint tyAgaraja. Over a period of 5 years, pinAkapANi learnt about 106 kritis and 20 tAna varNams from his first guru.

His next musical training was from the legendary Andhra musician dwAram venkaTaswAmi nAyuDu gAru, with whom he spent but a short period of two and half months. But this was to have a profound influence on pinAkapANi's musical growth, since he learnt the intricacies of alApana and swara kalpana from him. Apparently, dwAram gAru would, without fail, do two practice sessions every single day, with his evening session being as good as a full-fledged concert. He would let his students listen in and pinAkapANi was to be immensely influenced by these sessions.

When young, pinAkapANi would sing at weddings and small festivals. Later as a college student, he would sing on radio under the pseudo-name of vasant, for the fear of his true identity being discovered!

His first sabha concert was given in viSakhapaTnam in 1939 during his final year of medical college. The famed Mysore chowdiah was in the audience who apparently made the remark earlier alluded to: "You have been blessed with what many of us labored hard for years to acquire. dwAram venkaTaswAmy nAidu has made Andhra proud. So will you!"

Subsequently, chowdiah invited him to Mysore, where pinAkapANi imbibed the high culture and music of Mysore. As often life leads us in paths that result in unplanned secondary outcomes, this was where pinAkapANi met his would be wife, bAlAmba!

The next major factors and gurus in pinAkapANi garu's musical evolution were Sri T.S. vAsudEvan and ranga rAmAnuja iyengAr. These associations happened in Madras when pinAkapANi was completing his 'maternity training'. He learnt an enormous volume of kritis and music from these teachers. In fact, pinAkapANi were to acknowledge, "If I hadn't developed his (ranga rAmAnuja iyengAr's) collaborative relationship, I wonder if I would not have stagnated in some corner!"

Musical Influences & tanjAvUr bANi:

pinAkapANi garu had immense regard and admiration for the tanjAvUr bANi of Carnatic music. He was profoundly influenced by the music of several stalwarts of that bANi and imbibed into his own music different aspects from different musicians. Thus was formed the burnished golden core of pure and superlative amalgam of the best of the best Carnatic music in Sri pinAkapANi garu.

Musiri subramania iyer's soulful renderings haunted pinAkapANi, including in particular his neraval "cinta tIrcuTakenta mODi rA" of the tyAgarAja kriti 'enta vEDukondu rAghava' and "akalamka nIvE AdhAramani" of the pushpalatika kriti 'ikanaina nA mora vinarAda'. From musiri's music, he learnt the art of singing kritis in vilambita kAla and render neraval.

He was an ardent devotee of ariakuDi's music, and "the beauty of his kriti rendering, sangatis in the AlApana, gamakAs, delicacy of his neraval & swaraprastAra, compactness of his concerts" had a huge impact on him. In particular, he was deeply impressed by ariakuDi's neravals of pUrvi kalyANi (parama pAvana), bilahari (paridAnamiccitE) and sAvEri (e'Tla namminAvO manasA).

Other stalwarts whose music had a lasting influence on pinAkapANi included: Tiger varadAcAri, cembai vaidyanatha iyer, vINa dhanammAl, kancIpuram naina pillai, malaiko'TTai gOvindaswami pillai, kumbakONam rAjamanikkam pillai etc.

Conclusion:

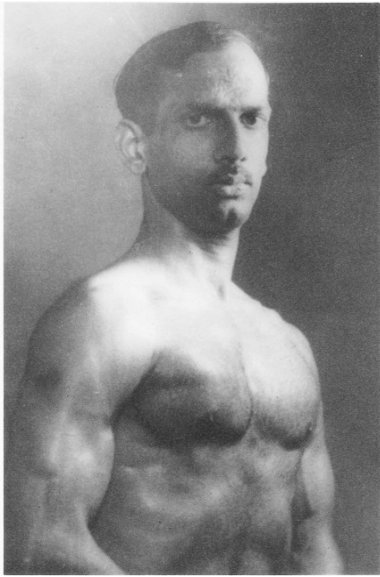
There used to be a small Telugu poem that declared that a single tree of sandalwood was enough to spread its fragrance through an entire forest. A single man, through his hard work, dedication and creativity, could have lasting effect on generations of people and an entire population. Clearly here was a shining example of such an individual to whom the entire state of Andhra and Carnatic music itself owes much gratitude.

He was....
pinAka pANi...
sangIta vANi...
tanjavUr bANi.

Sources:

Autobiography "nA sangIta yAtra", pinAkapANi, originally published in Andhra Prabha weekly serially in 30 issues starting from Aug 1994 and later as a book in 2001 by Prabhala publishers, Guntur, AP.

"Interview with Dr. S. Pinakapani", by Lalita Ram, Sruti Magazine, Aug 2010, pp. 22-28.



Interesting tidbit: pinAkapANi gAru was also a body builder and a professional wrestler, as this picture speaks for itself -☺

Prabhakar is a long time supporter of SRUTI and has served the organization in various capacities since its inception. An engineer by profession, Prabhakar has a deep interest in classical music and literature and contributes his views frequently to Sruti publications.

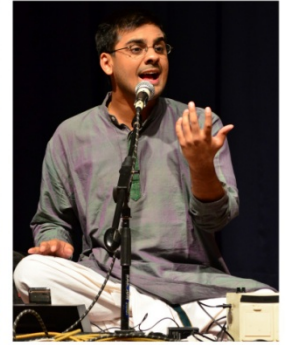
Images from the 2013 season



Images from the 2013 season



Images from the 2013 season



Images from the 2013 season



Colossus of Carnatic Music - Lalgudi Jayaraman (1930 - 2013)

A tribute by Rasikan



Lalgudi Jayaraman, simply known as Lalgudi to his aficionados, was a legend in his own times. He strode the Carnatic music world like a colossus for over five decades. Together with T.N. Krishnan and M.S. Gopalakrishnan (MSG) - the triumvirate of violin -Lalgudi elevated the status of the violin in Carnatic music from just being an accompaniment to one of independent importance.

Lalgudi belonged to a remarkable musical family. His musical lineage went directly to the great saint composer Thyagaraja himself. One of his ancestors, Rama Iyer was a direct disciple of Thyagaraja. At the request of Rama Iyer, Thyagaraja visited the village of Lalgudi where he composed five gems. These kritis, in Bhairavi, Kambhodhi, Madhyamavathy, Kalyani, and Todi are referred to as Lalgudi pancharatnams.

Gopala Iyer, Lalgudi's father was himself a composer. And he had a very talented offspring: son Jayaraman and daughters, Rajalakshmi, Padmavathi, Srimathi all accomplished players on the veena and violin. Jayaraman's son Krishnan, and daughter Vijayalakshmi are shining stars of the current Carnatic music circuit. And niece, Jayanthi, is a leading veena artist.

Lalgudi had his first public performance at the tender age of just twelve when he played with his father. From a very early age he was a regular accompanist for concerts in and around his village.

His big break came early when after a program he felt a tap on his shoulder. Standing near was none other than G. N. BalaSubramanian (GNB) who had heard Lalgudi's performance and asked whether he would be available on a specific later date to accompany GNB! Lalgudi relates that he was flabbergasted, felt a thrill pass through his spine. He couldn't believe his ears. Here was a musician, nearly twenty years older with a following like a rock star of today asking him to be an accompanist! On another occasion the great Ariyakudi, nearly forty years senior, when his regular accompanist Papa Venkataramiah was unavailable, asked for "the boy from Lalgudi with the kudumi (tuft) and kadukkan (ear studs)"! Yes, Lalgudi sported an orthodox kudumi and kadukkan as a young man - he mentions that it was GNB who suggested the change to the western crop, when Lalgudi moved to Madras.

From the 1950s, Lalgudi was one of the most sought after violin accompanists. Musicians very much senior to him in age as well as experience including Ariyakudi, Semmangudi, GNB, Alathoor Brothers, Madurai Mani iyer, enthusiastically opted to have Lalgudi accompany them. His contemporaries, K.V. Narayanasway, Nedunuri Krishnamoorthy, Ramnad Krishnan, Voleti Venkateswarulu, (Veena) S. Balachandar, (flute) N. Ramani and others considered it a privilege to have him as an accompanist.

Lalgudi started performing solo concerts beginning in the 1960s. Rather, not strictly solo, since his sister Srimathi invariably played with him. The redoubtable Palghat Mani Iyer was among those who accompanied this duo. This also helped break the gender barrier of male mridangam players not accompanying female artists.

Whether the fast brigas of GNB, kanakkus of the Alathoor Brothers, gamaka laden music of Semmangudi, or the 'sukha bhavam' music of Madurai Mani iyer, Lalgudi with an unique instinct for the individual styles, enhanced each musician's performance. Lalgudi's accompaniment invariably elevated the caliber of the performance and

assured its success. It was said that when his turn came to play an alapana, Lalgudi would split it in two parts, the first one being faithful to the main artist's style and the second one bringing in his own ideas.

Lalgudi's mastery over layam is legendary. Other violinists accompanying Alathoor Brothers, famous for presenting complex pallavis, would ascertain before the concert from the brothers the pallavi structure. But, according to MSG, Lalgudi was an exception. He would figure out the complications on the stage and fully support the vocalists.

Although Lalgudi was a classicist to the core, he was also an inveterate romanticist. He developed a style of violin playing, popularly known as the Lalgudi *bani*. The characteristic feature of this bani is best described as *nalina*, kind of feminine grace and sophistication. Critics sometimes decry it as a form of dilution. The criticism was perhaps unwarranted.

Many artists owe their prominence in part to Lalgudi's encouragement. Prominent among them are Nedunuri and Ramani, both Sangeetha Kalanidhis. The well known violinist T. Rukmimi studied with Lalgudi.

Lalgudi trained many top ranking violinists. The list includes his children and Vittal Ramamurthy. His other disciples include the leading vocalists Bombay Jayashree, Saketharaman and the well known Harikatha exponent Visakha Hari.

Apart from being a great violinist, Lalgudi is also known for his compositions, primarily varnams and tillanas. They are part of the repertoire of both musicians and dance artists.

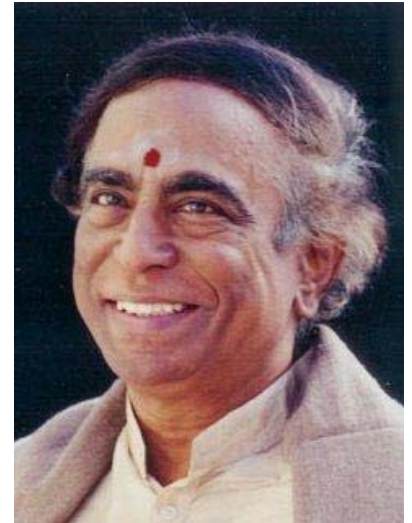
Lalgudi with Krishnan and Vijayalakshmi gave a memorable concert for SRUTI on 9 September 1993. That concert remains fresh in this writer's memory. A galaxy of percussion artistes accompanied them: Trichy Sankaran, Vicku Vinayakaraman and V. Nagarajan. If you do not have a copy of the concert, it is worth buying one. It is a collector's item.

Alas, *the voice of the violin*, as the Hindu paper put it, is no more. Nevertheless, his legacy lives in the numerous recordings of his solo performances and accompaniments of great musicians.

I join the legions of admirers of Lalgudi in paying this humble tribute to the great maestro.

References: Sruti magazine (Chennai, India) - September 2010, October 2010, November 2010, June 2013.

An ardent admirer and lover of Carnatic Music, Rasikan has been a regular contributor and supporter of Sruti.



A rasika's musical journey with M.S.Gopalakrishnan

Shivakumar Jagadisan

The musical journey and experience is unique to every single rasika, much like the DNA. It is a mix of rational, reasoned set of preferences and emotional, inexplicable strains of reactions that seem to bypass the brain. The idea of a favorite musician may be indefensible but adds a special dimension to the rasika's consciousness. There is a sense of kinship, or, dare I say, ownership, and a paradoxical desire that everyone should like your favorite and yet you want his/her fan club to be a cozy little group.

It was my sophomore year in college. After illness had kept me indoors for a couple of weeks, I had to get out. I wandered aimlessly around Luz corner in Madras, after some street food and used book shopping, taking in all the noise and activity around me. When I passed Sastri Hall, I noticed the blackboard that announced "All are

Welcome” to a violin concert by M.S.Gopalakrishnan (MSG)! Recalling how my sister used to rave about him, I was curious and went upstairs to the cramped concert hall. I could recognize the kriti Manasa yetulo as I walked in. I saw the violinist, dressed in a simple dhoti and white shirt. With a pleasant smile and a nod that seemed to gesture “take it !”, he played a sangati “gpdndp gpgrsr” - the lightning speed, the stunning precision and a sweetness of tone that I never thought was possible on the violin – it was love at first sight or should I say sound byte ?. More than three decades have gone by and I have evolved and expanded as a rasika and throughout, the mesmerizing effect of the acronym MSG has persisted!



Carnatic music (CM) was all around me when I grew up. My sisters were serious students of music. Opinions floated around at home; my father sharing stories from ‘40s and ‘50s. Whenever my uncle (and now, my guru, the eminent Prof. S.R.Janakiraman) visited Madras, we were treated to some lively discussions. I had learnt to play the veena and knew some basics too. I could instantly give the swaras for a musical phrase. Still, I was not really interested in Carnatic Music. Film songs were more than enough for me - until that magical evening!

There was no looking back after that. My other interests, films, film music, cricket, took a back seat. I started attending concerts regularly and followed AIR schedules. In addition to MSG solos and duets with his daughter Narmadha, I started listening to other artists as long as they had MSG accompanying them. If the maestro’s enchanting swaraprastharam for Sri Valli Devasenapathe got me hooked to DKJ, it was his amazing tanam accompaniment that added TVS to my list of favorite musicians; Ramani, Kalyanaraman, Nedunuri, Voleti and Santhanam followed soon. MSG was taking me on a guided tour! I started growing as a rasika and I thanked these artists for showcasing the different facets of the genius. I still laugh as I recall getting mad at Ramani for choosing Ranjani ragam for RTP in a concert. I was going to be deprived of the special treat during MSG’s tanam where he plays mandara stayi ‘pa’ along with madhyama stayi ri or ga for a stunning effect ! When his turn came, he proved that that was not the only ace up his sleeve. The raga earned its name! When I first came across the LP recording of Balamurali with MSG, my joy knew no bounds since I was already a big fan of “Oru naaL pOdhumaa ?”. The legends had stopped performing together by then and I was jealous of the older rasikas who recounted the on-stage magic they had witnessed.

IIT Madras, my alma mater, was a great environment to grow as a rasika. I missed all that after I moved to the US in 1982. At a gathering, a gentleman approached this lonely stranger and found that I was a CM rasika and asked me who my favorite artist was. For a fleeting moment, I thought I should mention a popular vocalist’s name but blurted out “MSG the violinist”. He said he was a fan too. Thanks to my hero, I spent several weekends during my student days at this rasika’s place (who, incidentally, is one of the founders of Sruti). I heard from another friend that this gentleman and his wife wanted to get to know me more primarily because I said MSG was my favorite. Those days, when face-to-face interaction was the only way to connect with other rasikas, I didn’t have a grasp of MSG’s reach and influence and I was naïve enough to think that I belonged to this rather small club of die-hard MSG fans.

Today the CM rasikas form a global community with access to thousands of recordings spanning decades, articles, analysis and so on.

MSG’s tonal perfection, his sadhakam, the unique Parur style that he further refined, his mastery over both the systems, Carnatic and Hindustani, his technique, the single string varnam playing – all these and more have been very well documented by musicians and musicologists. (e.g. N.Ramanathan’s article in the Sruti magazine, March 2013). For me, MSG’s simplest swaras, the way he develops a raga, his unique handling of vivadi ragas, the crescendo followed by his signature sa-pa-sa pause that underlines the theme thus far, his madhyamakala sarvalaghu kalapanaswaras, the stylized rendition of rare ragas such as Amritavahini, Rudrapriya, Jingala etc., sketches of Behag and Bhageshri, the methodic construction of an elaborate raga alapana, the Shehnai like sounds he produced in Nalinakanti, Kapi, crossing genres, his tanams have all captivated me and continue to do

so after three decades. Even today, as I browse sangeethapriya.org, I look at new uploads to see if there are any featuring MSG.

As I started my journey as a rasika, looking at CM through the MSG lens, I used to get an earful from his critics (notably, my father). He mixed Hindustani, his superfast swaras were gimmicks that are better avoided, he had limited mastery over layam, his raga development was swara oriented – these were the typical brickbats. I furiously rejected them then but have pondered over these a lot, resulting in a stronger connection with the man and the music and a better appreciation of his art. His blending of the two styles in the raga construction only underscores what Balamurali calls Bharateeya Sangeetam. The new hue and color of ragas coming from MSG's violin have expanded the scope of music, what were mere scales are now full of life, drawing from two great streams of music. He never deviated from the Carnatic tradition when he accompanied artists like KVN and MDR or when he played Dhanyasi, Begada or Varali. His so-called gimmicks (straight-jacketed formations, as N.Ramanathan refers to them) illustrated the importance and the power of sadhakam, they raised the bar to the subsequent generation of violinists; Executed to perfection, they draw the attention of the casual and the uninitiated newbie to CM.

Once I was listening to his Manavyalakinchu in Nalinakanti when my uncle walked in. I braced myself for some critical remarks from the scholar. Instead he enjoyed the sangati progression with a child-like enthusiasm, exclaiming, at one point, “wait.. the next one is going to be even more brilliant !”. On another occasion, he pointed out to me the speeding up of the tempo by the vocalist while MSG maintained perfect kalapramanam. I reckoned that layam mastery is not all about korvais. My uncle's endorsement made me realize that his appeal spanned the entire spectrum of listeners.

I had the good fortune of playing the sruti box for him on January 1, 1980 at Krishnagana Sabha. I had shown up early for the 8 AM concert and was speechless when he made that request to me when I ran into him outside the auditorium. It was providential indeed. The attendance was poor but the smiling presence of the legendary Smt. T.Brinda in the first row made up for that. I witnessed Balamurali, while conferring the title Nadasudharnava, claiming that MSG can instantly reproduce anything he hears from any violinist in the world but the reverse is not true! I have seen T.N.Krishnan's spontaneous standing ovation after MSG responded to Voleti Venkateswarulu's Kalyani swaras rendered in Hindustani style. Nothing pleases a rasika more than his idol receiving accolades from other greats.

I got *janma saphalyam* when we hosted him and Narmadha during their 2000 US tour. He was simplicity personified. When Narmadha told him about a pallavi I had composed about our local temple, he remarked without any reservation that they would have played that pallavi, had I told them before the concert! The way he said it, I had no doubt it came from his heart. I was humbled. (Narmadha played it in 2011 at her solo concert in DC). Unlike some of the artists that we have hosted, who were least interested in any conversation, as if they were staying at a hotel, MSG enquired about our families, our native place etc. When I said that we hail from Lalgudi, there was a pause, followed by a one word question “Uravaa ?” (“Related?”). He was very informal and obliged us by playing a few ragas. I saw my wife wiping her tears when he played Subhapantuvarali.

Being a big fan of the other legend that left us this year, I mustered up some courage and shared my fantasy with MSG - a jugalbandhi featuring him and Lalgudi. I took his smile as an approval! Who knows? Perhaps the celestial beings are treated to a Kafi/Kharaharapriya or a Durga/Sudhasaveri feast, just as I write this! (in my fantasy world, there is a ban on Yaman/Kalyani and Malkauns/Hindolam :)

Shivakumar Jagadisan lives in the DC area and is one of the earliest life members of Sruti. He is a carnatic vocalist who also likes to dabble in other areas giving lecdems and Carnatic quizzes.

SRUTI Presents Malavika Sarukkai



SRUTI is proud to announce an exciting start to the 2014 spring season with a week of dance culminating in a grand bharatanatyam solo ballet by the noted dance exponent Malavika Sarukkai. This will be Malavika Sarukkai's debut engagement in the Philadelphia area.

Ms. Sarukkai will perform her production **Ganga - Nitya Vaahini - The Eternal River** at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts. This ballet, choreographed by Ms. Sarukkai, celebrates the historic River Ganga.

Having created this work over the course of a decade, Malavika combines technical brilliance with an intense depiction of emotions in paying homage to the sacred river and its importance in Indian culture, history, the environment, and spirituality.

The production journeys from the geographical confluence of the two great rivers, Bhagirathi and Alakananda, at Devprayag, high in the Himalaya mountains and traverses physical terrain and metaphysical spaces. 'Ganga' is at once the mythic river emerging from Lord Siva's matted locks as it is also the river of life coursing through the plains of India. She is the Eternal River – a silent witness to the relentless cycle of birth and death, to the sacred and profane, to purity and pollution. And now, in our times, she laments about the pollution and its environmental implications while moving finally towards the ocean. As the river surrenders her identity to the ocean she reflects the profound philosophic Indian truth of *Advaita* (a philosophy that self, *Atman*, is nothing but Brahman or the supreme. The separate self dissolves in the sea of pure consciousness, infinite and immortal.).

As a lead-in to this performance, Malavika Sarukkai will conduct and participate in a series of events over the course of the week from Sunday, April 6, 2014 to Saturday, April 12, 2014.

'Classes with a Master and Conversations between Colleagues' includes public master classes, a lecture demonstration and a day long workshop.

- **Sunday April 6th** at Montgomery County Community College - Three Master classes open to the public
- **Wednesday April 9th** at the Philadelphia Museum of Art – Lecture demonstration that will explore the deep connection between Bharatanatyam and the visual arts of South India and will be held in the Museum's South Indian Temple Hall
- **Thursday April 10th** at the Painted Bride Arts Center – Dance Professionals Workshop where Malavika will be joined by leading professional dance artists to explore topics of mutual interest:
 - Kun-Yang Lin to explore the idea of dance as devotion and dance and meditation
 - Germain Ingram to explore the idea of Rhythm and Musicality
 - Valda Setterfield to explore the craft of acting in dance
 - Professor Hari Krishnan from Wesleyan University will be facilitating this workshop

More details will be forthcoming in the coming months.



This program has been made possible by a generous grant from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage.

Creativity and Devotion in Art

Prathibha Prahlad

I have often met people, who in their professions do things they do not enjoy. They go through their work in a mundane manner and wait for that opportune minute, when they are released from it to do something they are drawn to. I have been somewhat lucky. I love what I do and am able to make a decent living of it. I have often been asked whether dance is my life. When younger, I would immediately say 'yes', it is! However, older and several experiences later, I say dance is my devotion, my prayer.



Prathibha Prahlad

Just as creativity is written about in many hues, devotion too is experienced and expressed differently and severally, depending on your own mental, physical and physiological state. Creativity is that impulse that keeps you in that moment of reality, that wondrous realization that is truth; and in that realization, it pre-empts derailing you into your dreams and fantasies. Creativity is a dip into truth; not the logical, perceived truth, but the illogical, irrational madness of an "individual's truth". It is that magical 'encounter with a moment in time' for the creative artiste.

How this fits into dance as devotion, you may ask. While creativity stems from the head, devotion stems from the heart. Most dancers are creative artistes. They work in

a logical, progressive manner to master the fundamentals. Thereafter, they have the urge to experiment. With cautious experimentation, they advance step by step, at first creating pieces that they are already familiar with. After several years of caution and toe stepping, some are lucky to abandon caution and venture into the unknown, into void, re-energize, and re-invent themselves. As they step forward, they offer something new, something exciting, something hitherto unimaginable. Creativity, therefore, at this level is individuality. It offers something different, something the individual believes is truth and wants others to believe is truth. Creativity is therefore the future of dance. It stems from the mind.

Creativity is a reality that does not exist in the generally perceived reality, but just because it does not exist, it does not mean, it is not real. This is the paradox of creativity. You must have noticed that when creative artistes perform, all known formulae are thrown to the wind. They are on a different path. Now and then, they may touch the already existing path known to everyone, but that only shows that they are not really derailed or pushing themselves left or right because they have a compulsive urge to be different. They are just pushing the envelope by not following the formula rigorously practiced for decades, not sticking too closely to what they have been taught or experienced, not being deluded by successes, nor paying attention to what other people are saying about their art.

Nevertheless, one cannot create in a void. This is because an artiste/dancer is essentially a communicator. They are story tellers, however different their stories maybe. When one tells a story, there has to be a human response to it. There has to be mutual resonance - that is the only way you can take creativity to the next level.

Since creativity stems from the mind, the mind goes on weaving and spinning its own theories, its own ideas and tries to make reality fit into that ideology or idea. Is creativity talking mind to mind? There lies the problem. In the traditional Indian performing context, one was performing to a "rasika" (the aware, cognizant, discriminating viewer). The general heterogeneous audience today are not "rasikas". While a rasika's response is one dimensional- through the mind, the others in the audience respond through the heart.

Several times, you must have experienced utter exasperation at a raving review that a dull, uninspiring performance elicits. You must have wondered why and how far from the experiential truth the critic and you are. This is exactly what happens when art flows purely from the mind.

Then suddenly, there is this raw, mad artiste. An artiste who is so consumed by the art that nothing else matters. There is no intellect at play here; no sophistication; no thought out plan; no realization of who is in the audience or it's profile; no explanations, no justifications; simply, no intellectual display...and you think at first, 'is this for real?'

As the performance advances, you are transported into another realm where nothing matters and the art resonates in you and you become alive and throbbing. An ordinary madness happens from the failure of the mind, but an extraordinary madness, such as this happens from the success of the heart- this is the madness of a devoted artiste, not a mere performer. The performer is in love- in love with himself or herself, in love with the art form and madly in love with what he or she is doing. Where logic fails, devotion succeeds.

Head and heart, say some, are the farthest poles of reality. Head and heart, reason and love, logic and life split one person into two. Therefore the conflict and the mismatch. If an artiste is completely devoted and oblivious of everything else, he/she has conquered this duality. Through their art, they have already bridged with life. Whatever the performance, it is beyond the comprehension of reason and appeals to the heart. The Sufi singers are a case in point. They are completely, madly in love with their music. For them, no other music exists.



For a creative artiste, the energy is outgoing, not ingoing. For a devotional artiste, the energy is ingoing, and only after it is totally absorbed in the delight of the self does it suddenly overflow and gives delight to all around. The devotional artiste is so immersed in the music and the dance that he/she is not even aware of who is watching them and where they are.

Now and then, you come across some of them- musicians/dancers and others, who appeal to your heart, who resonates with your being and who leave a deep, lasting impression on your mind. This does not happen because you have analyzed the art form and /or are conversant with it. It happens because you have suspended logic and reason and the artiste has embraced you with his/her devotion to the art form.

To me, or to anyone who has learnt to look at life through the heart, this is profoundly meaningful. That is why a discordant note is struck, when some, out of ignorance or maybe guileless say they do not watch traditional, classical performances because they do not understand what is being performed. The heart celebrates, relishes, loves. It does not understand. It does not need to understand. It just reveres perfection and joins in, in the prayer of creation.

Prathibha Prahlad is a celebrated Indian Bharatanatyam dancer whose contribution to the arts field goes much beyond her own dance. She is a performer, teacher, choreographer, researcher, cultural organizer, arts administrator and media person. She has produced, directed and acted in television serials. Prathibha Prahlad has also authored a book on Bharatanatyam.

Do you enjoy music and dance?

Do you have a unique perspective on the music ecosystem that is the Chennai December season?

Are you planning to attend any of the music & dance concerts in Chennai this year?

The SRUTI publications committee would love to hear from you. Please consider submitting one or more articles for the various publications in 2014

Classical Dance and its Audience – Through the Sands of Time

Sangita Raghunathan

Bharatanatyam, as we know dates back 5000 years. It has gone through its fair share of changes to cater to the evolving audience through generations. It is common knowledge that this art form was considered to be the celestial dance of the gods, which was in turn performed at the temples to honor the reigning deity during daily Sevas (worship). This classical dance form was then taken to be performed at palaces where Kings, Queens and Courtiers admired and encouraged the art of Bharatanatyam. It has evolved through generations and its modern rebirth was popularized by the Tanjavur Quartet – Chinnayya Pillai, Ponnayya Pillai, Sivanandam Pillai and

Vadivelu Pillai, who made it possible to take Bharatanatyam beyond the palaces to be enjoyed by the common man. Through the years, it has remained a constant source of creative expression for the dancer and recognition for that has depended on how the audience interpreted the presentation.



Sangita Raghunathan

When I was approached to write an article on Bharatanatyam, I was exploring topics that I could write about based on my observation and experience of being in the field of dance for the past 30 years. In these past years, I have observed that people attend classical dance performances mainly for the following reasons - they are obligated to do so; they see it as a source of entertainment; they are patrons who truly appreciate the dance form. So, I decided to pen down my views of how dance and its audience have evolved over the years, and how a dancer could engage the audience today.

When I look back at my own path of performances, traditional “Maargams” were the preferred format. A few years later thematic dance dramas gained popularity among the audience as they were presented with a visual treat of colorful dances based on vibrant group choreography. The audience that came to watch these performances was familiar with the classical art form for the most part and was able to enjoy the traditional nuances. Today, classical dance performances find it challenging to attract a sizeable audience. With the passage of time, the knowledge and interest to stay connected with the classical arts seem to have slowly shifted or diminished.

What may have influenced this shift in audience interest, not only towards Bharatanatyam, but classical dance in general? In my opinion, media has played a significant role in this shift. Many years back, people heard classical music wherever they went. Radio channels had highly regarded classical musicians who performed regularly to entertain the listeners. Film songs in those days were based on classical ragas and the choreography to those songs was set based on classical dance. Most Indian movies featured at least one classical dance number. My mother often mentioned that her role model was Kumari Kamala (aka Ms Kamala Lakshman). She inspired many young women with her amazing dance sequences in the movies, to take up Bharatanatyam, just so that they could dance as beautifully as her. With the influence of such content in the media, most recitals that happened around town or school cultural events were based on classical music and dance.

In the recent years, with exposure to other dance and music styles introduced in films and TV shows, interest in classical dance has taken a backseat. People find that it is faster to learn and perform film music and dance without having to go through the traditional training of classical arts. Yes, there is some time investment needed to learn classical dance and music because of the structure that is in place. But not many realize that this training provides a very strong base and foundation to be able to execute other forms of dance and music with ease, comfort and a better aesthetic appeal.

Is today’s classical dancer at a disadvantage of being in the competitive scene of non-classical dance forms and the popular Bollywood dance genre? Getting a good audience to watch a creative classical dance presentation

with a theme, though contemporary, is becoming a challenge. The audience wants something new with each performance. Today, dancers are exploring other ways to take classical dance beyond the traditional audience. For example, we can see various styles of dance being combined in a presentation, some dancers executing their concept set to non-traditional music or even try and get creative with their costumes. While some people welcome the change, purists question this approach. They feel that the traditional art should be preserved without being influenced by current trends.

Dance is a powerful mode of communication and to reach a globally diverse audience, I believe that a dancer with a strong classical training is at an advantage today. Why? Because she can explore beyond traditional boundaries, by leveraging music that appeals to all, a concept that most can relate to and by using visual tools, thanks to technology – as we have an audience who is waiting for that “something new”. This can be achieved while still keeping the execution of the dance traditional and classical without compromise.

A traditionalist may question this approach. Keeping in mind that dance is a medium for expression of thought, a dancer has the complete freedom to execute the performance as he has conceptualized it. For example, if we take a traditional concept like Navarasa, we can share stories not only from our rich cultural heritage and mythology, but also from contemporary times; the music used for the performance can have enhanced rhythm and a rich selection of instruments to compliment the storyline; projections and slide shows can be leveraged to help the audience understand the story; and effective execution of both Nritya (intricate footwork) and Abhinaya (facial expressions) by the dancer will then complete the storytelling. The audience will stay connected with what the dancer is trying to convey versus a purely traditional performance where the audience is expected to know the story to appreciate the dancer’s effort.

Bharatanatyam is a performing art and it is essential for the dancer to engage the audience for the duration of the performance. Variations from traditional rendition should be experimented upon to attract the future generation to help keep the appreciation of this ancient art alive. We live in a world that is seeing a lot of changes in a short span of time. Classical dance and its audience will continue to evolve keeping with the changing times. A decade or two from now, we will have a brand new audience to cater to. Classical dancers will find the creative niche to keep the audience engaged and enthralled for many years to come in the future like they have these past 5000 years.

Sangita Raghunathan began her tutelage under Smt K.J Sarasa of Madras and continued under Smt.Padmini Ravi of Bangalore. She is a graded artist from Doordarshan, Chennai and a recipient of a national dance scholarship. She also participates in dance productions in the U.S. and takes pleasure in teaching dance to interested youngsters through her dance school - Sanskruthi. She works for the University of New Hampshire.

Divinity in Dance

Sasikala Penumarthy

Famous words by our Beloved Guru, Padmabhushan Vempati Chinna Satyam:

“My Guru Sri Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastry garu said that dance should be revered as an Art because it takes you closer to God. It cannot be used for commercial gains. I admire his principle and endeavor to follow it.”

The above message is a guiding principle to follow. The ability to perform, teach, promote, propagate the Art is a means of worship to God.

*Rg-Yaju-Saama-Vedebhyo Vedaacha-Atharvana kramaat
Paathyamcha-Abhinayam Geetam Rasaan Samgruhya Padmajah
Vyareeracha- Sastramidam Dharma Kamaartha Mokshadam*

It is said that when Gods and Demons fought against each other and got tired and went to Lord Brahma, the creator, asking Him to provide something that gives pleasure and peace, Lord Brahma created the fifth Veda (or epic) called the Natya-Veda. Dance was originally created to give pleasure to mankind, lead them in the path of righteousness, teach them the values of life, and keep them away from misery and sorrow.

The adoption of this gift from God on Earth is through Bharata Muni's Natyasastra. Kuchipudi is one of the seven classical dance forms of India based on Natyasastra. Bhagavatars' from Kuchipudi village travelled to different parts of India to promote Madhura Bhakthi via Kuchipudi Performances. The themes were based on Bhagavata Puranas, stories from religious text that spread the dance and the message of good over evil. Subsequent adoption of social themes also revolved around exposing evil practices plaguing the society and putting an end such practices.

Dance is described as a *Samahara Kala*, meaning an Art that encompasses everything, as described in the *Sloka* (Verse)

*Na tat gnanam, Na tat Chilpam, Na saa Vidya, Na saa Kalaa,
Naason Yogona Tat Karma, Natyesmin Yanna Drisyathe*

Dance as described in the Natyasastra includes Music, Knowledge, Sculpture, Education, Art, Duty, Yoga, and Theater. Performances are woven around these elements and the spectators witness one or more of these elements during the performances. Natyasastra is wide in scope and deals with issues related to literary construction, structure of the stage, detailed analysis of the musical scales, detailed analysis of several categories of body movements that are used in different dance forms, their impact on the viewer, educating the spectator in correct behavior when watching a dance form, and theory of *Rasa*.

Bhakti or Devotion is an Integral part of the Natya tradition. It is important that the Artist experiences the divinity within himself or herself. The Artist must embody the knowledge of the stories and intricacies of the dance form and train every part of his or her body to convey this knowledge and divinity to the viewer. This allows the spectators to experience it themselves.



As a teacher of the Art form, it is important for the Artist to maintain a proper stature, posture, self discipline, continued training, choreograph new works that include new literature, new music, dance choreography, costume design, stage design, ability to involve a large audience, so that the student learning this art form can see the grandness of various elements outlined in the Natyasastra.

The embodiment of all elements results in Siddhi (enlightenment) and enables the Artist to convey this Siddhi to the Student and the Spectators. Maintaining the beauty, grace and divinity is very important in these presentations. Our Guru's works are exemplary in this context. For example, in one of his popular dance drama Srinivasa Kalyanam, when Lord Vishnu dances with Goddess Lakshmi, the *sringara rasa* is depicted with such divinity that the spectators witness and are transported to the Deva Loka or the Land of the Gods. Our Guru's ability to follow the principles enunciated in the Natyasastra, maintain divinity in his presentations and attract the modern spectator is his legacy that he laid down for his students to follow. His spectacular performances in North America and others parts of the world is indeed responsible for the popularization and creation of a modern era for Kuchipudi Dance.

*Aangikam Bhuvanam Yasya, Vaachikam Sarva Vangmayam
Aabaaryam Chandra Tharadi, Tam Vande Saatvikam Sivam*

His bodily movement represents the movement of the entire universe
His speech represents the sounds of the entire universe
His Ornaments are the Moon and the Stars
To such Almighty I salute!

The photograph accompanying this article was taken in 1984. It depicts a scene from 'Srinivasa Kalyanam' with Shoba Natarajan & Sasikala Penumarthy as Vishnu & Lakshmi. They were direct disciples of Master Garu Sri Vempat Chinn Satyam. The highlight of each of Master Garu's productions, besides the grandeur and amazing choreography, was his immaculate attention to even the smallest details in music, artists' selection, costume, jewelry, and props.

Sasikala Penumarthy founded the Academy of Kuchipudi Dance, a non-profit organization in 1997. She received the Master Artist award from the Georgia Arts Council and the National Foundation for the Advancement of Arts. Sasikala serves as an Artist Affiliate at Emory University where she is pursuing her Academic interests.

Thoughts on Dance

Sahasra Sambamoorthi

Indian classical dancers and musicians are faced with a particularly unusual task, which is to both preserve what is considered an extremely traditional art form, and let it grow, change, and adapt into the 21st century. Due to our own ideas of history and depth of the form, it oft becomes a question littered with problematics.



Sahasra Sambamoorthi

We start with one undeniable fact: change within art – ritual – *natya* – however you choose to note its existence – is a force of nature all its own and cannot be stopped. The questions in turn become about the quality of the change itself: what stays, what goes? Where can we alter without altering the soul of the form? What are the principles of the “soul” and how do we define them?

Then, scratching through the surface with more insistence: what changes are due to cultural hegemony; the globalization of culture and our desires to westernize? What desires are remnants of deeply ingrained behaviors from colonialism? Does it matter that the origination of the change comes from “Western” versus “Eastern” thought processes? Does it matter if the change is initiated by a desire to stay relevant and become more accessible to the world around us?

These are the questions that spin through my head daily, all spin offs of the key here: “*Why on earth do I bother with this??*”

As far as my own work goes, there is one thing I believe in (as an addition to what most artists believe in: the value of classicism and its worth for every layman) is the intelligence and desires of the audience.

The audience rules what is popular, what is not, what is effectual, and what disappears. Art is a living thing that connects the observer and the observed, and if you cannot find an audience for your art, the art itself is at risk of becoming extinct.

There are many who lament that the vast majority of audiences do not appreciate Indian classical dance and music as it stands, which is true from my observations. But the question instead to ask is *why*?

The easy response is that Bollywood is taking over the youth, or that we do not have educated audiences; or perhaps the rigor of a concert is not meant for the uninitiated. All are true, and perhaps there is a gamut more

like this that can be addressed, but responses like these are a crutch that keeps the Indian classical arts from changing. Blaming others allows a reprieve from our own responsibility to the art form.

So the question transforms: “If audiences are the most important thing, and they are watching less and less, *why* does it matter if classical arts endure?” If we have Bollywood, fusion, or other things that are more preferable to work within, why do we work with a form that could just disappear?”

Again, it is because of the audience: they do look for entertainment, but they also look to be inspired, to discover, to feel. They look for technical prowess and to be amazed by the human potential of energy and control. They look for something to relate to on an emotional level as much as to marvel at. To fulfill just one or two of these is to be ethereal, transient. To fulfill all three is to touch the innermost aspects of the soul – that of the human capacity to feel, to create, to shape; and therein is the power of classical dance and music.

Teachers give us the raw materials, materials that have been handed down, perfected, shaped, and reshaped over an enormous number of years into the ultimate toolkit to bring audiences into the most poignant parts of movement. But our alarippus, our sabdams, our javalis, our slokas come from a time with a different context. To only work within them is to ignore our audiences now who have different needs than those in the 50’s who were looking to band together or those two hundred years back who were drawing on the bhakti movement in India.

So my job is more than maintaining what was given to me. It is to analyze, discover, and add to in order to enthrall an audience. A gymnast not only does the same movements as fifty years ago, but adds more to the game: taking one twist to two, jumping higher, moving faster, pushing more limits. What was considered a perfect 10 is no longer achievable through the same movements. And so to is dance. What could enthrall fifty years ago has become raw material to create and further now.

So at Navatman, our goal is to make audiences question, to make their jaw drop, to create permanent etchings in their soul. (Let me just say: this may be the goal, but I myself have only experienced it once - maybe, a few times, in my life. But the intention from which you create is what I comment on.) So for us, at some level, all questions we can answer about change can be fielded by this primary intention alone:

We focus so much on the thing that is being observed, about our own rules and regulations as artists. But the observers are just as important to our process. Otherwise, what is the point?

Sahasra Sambamoorthi is the co-founder and co-president of Navatman, Inc. along with Sridhar Shanmugam. Sahasra Sambamoorthi's passion is to reignite the fire of the South Asian performing arts, particularly within the U.S. Sahasra's knowledge started from her violin training under Ranjani Swamy and Bharatanatyam training under guru Smt. Kalaimamani Ramya Ramnarayan and continues on under Taniya Panda/ Kamini Dandapani (vocals), Bijayini Satpathy/ Nrityagram (odissi), Kishore Mosalikanti (kuchipudi) and Joe Daly (body technique and understanding).

An Interview with Sumantra Ghosal

Film director Sumantra Ghosal is known for his films “The Speaking Hand”, a documentary on Ustad Zakir Hussain and “The Unseen Sequence – Exploring Bharatanatyam Through the Art of Malavika Sarukkai” which offers a glimpse into the talent and journey of one of India’s leading Bharatanatyam choreographer and dancer.

A trailer of this film can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eloZpWq0bqU>.

Read on as he talks to Balaji Raghothaman and Vidya Jayaraman about his journeys and impressions as a filmmaker and his experience in documenting the art and his interactions with Malavika Sarukkai. Vidya and Balaji are members of the Sruti Publications and Outreach committee and conducted this dialogue with director Sumantra Ghosal on behalf of SRUTI.

Q: Did you choose your subjects - first Zakir Hussain and then Malavika Sarukkai? Was this a conscious effort at attempting to document art forms or did it just happen?



Sumantra Ghosal

A: I think the first happened in a way different to the second. And there was a great interval between the two decisions.

With Zakir, I chose him because we were making an advertising film together. I have spent my life making commercials and we were shooting together at the Taj Mahal for a tea brand. And so, we spent a couple of days together in Agra and it was then that I realized that he had not been documented at all. He was in his forties at that point.

In India, artistes need to be more or less doddering or close to their graves for anyone to consider them senior enough or important enough or worthy enough to be recorded. And we both felt that was a shame particularly when we agreed that his art was at a very accomplished stage. Therefore, we decided to go ahead and document it and I proceeded to film him over the next couple of years.

What happened with Malavika is that she chose me. You see, I knew nothing about Bharatanatyam and was not really interested in that art form not having been exposed to it; whereas with Zakir I was hugely interested because I had been listening to Hindustani Classical music from the age of about eight or nine myself.

Malavika and I happened to share common friends who had seen the Zakir film and they were rather hoping that we would get together. The problem was that I had not seen her dance because she doesn't dance too much in Bombay and, of course, she didn't know my work at all.

I finally went and watched her dance about three years ago and I was quite mesmerized not only by the sheer passion and intensity of her art but also by her ability to communicate that art. There are many artistes who are very great; but, often, there is a wall between someone like me and someone talented like them. Malavika was able to break that wall quite easily with that first performance I saw and that sort of pushed me into taking the idea further.

When we finally met, we found that we could talk to each other about our individual ways of interpreting things and that we respected each other's opinions. It was that connection between us that prompted us to take the risk of working together on the project despite knowing that it was not going to be something that would happen quickly.

You see, I take a long time to make a film because I need to plunge deep into all sorts of things before I can decide where I am headed.

Q: Documentaries on classical art forms especially coming from India, we have seen typically static images and linear sequences. How do you think you have gone about in breaking that kind of mould? What was your philosophy in making the documentary?

A: I think the problem all of us face is with translating ideas and philosophies into a final piece of work. That is really what you struggle with. Most people start with very good intentions and end up with not such good films. I can just hope that my film has been able to live up to the intention that I started with.

But, to answer your question, I wanted not to do several things. I did not want it to be a biopic. I definitely did not want it to be one of those in-and-out projects. Unfortunately, in earlier days, many of these type of documentaries were made for Films Division and they were made for a pittance. So, people didn't have the resources/time to thoroughly investigate the subject.

Another thing I was very clear on that I did not want to do (since I thought it got in the way of many of the dance films I watched) is to stage dance specifically for camera. I decided that I was not going to do camera movements - crane ins and track ins and the like - because I felt that it would come in the way of the contact that

is created between a piece of work and its audience. I did not want my little choreographic number to distract from Malavika's intentions.

Of course we have all seen wonderful films from the West - for example "Pina" - where the director has done amazing things with dancers but I didn't feel personally equipped to pull it off particularly with solo performances which is what Malavika dances.

So, we shot the dances as live performances in front of an audience. All of them (except for one - "Iccha/Thimmakka" - which was done specifically for me) are stage shows and have that electricity that a live performance brings.

Because a lot of the dances that I saw in earlier films were set-pieces - in temples and the like - I could sense the fact that it was staged in bits and then edited together. As a result, I felt that the emotion did not flow in quite the same way as when you excerpt from a very long, unbroken sequence that you have shot without asking for re-takes or by breaking it up into manageable bits of filmmaking.

I don't even have cut-aways to musicians or singers or the audience precisely because I felt that they would distract from the dance itself into something that underlies the dance, something that abets the dance, but that is not the dance itself.

Also, I wanted very much to contextualize the dance. The more I read the more I realized that Bharatanatyam was not a static art. I wanted to contextualize those changes from the ritual into the performative. As Lakshmi Viswanathan says in the film "The dance changed from being a cult to being a passion." I wanted to understand the historical forces that led from "chinna melam" and "sadir" to "Bharatanatyam".

To put it simply, I wanted to engage with an audience that was, in a sense, *me* before I began this project. Could I take them on the same journey that I had undertaken? And could I share my sense of excitement and wonder at the discoveries I had made along the way?

So, there are three strands to the film: (a) the story of Bharatanatyam and how it transformed over the centuries, (b) the interplay between Malavika and her art form - how does she deal with something that is so forbidding and formidable and yet so liberating, and (c) my journey and how I react to the unfolding story - perhaps in naïve and uninformed ways but with some amount of emotion and sensitivity.

Q: When Satyajit Ray made Bala, there was this criticism that the film failed Bala's dance with regard to the decision to use the beach as a setting and that the waves and the sea were completely out of place. Did you ever run into any situations like this where you felt the dynamics of the medium and choices such as lighting and other settings interfered with the dynamics of the art form presented?

A: Well, the lighting in my film was set for live stage performances. Satyajit Ray actually got Bala to dance specifically for his camera and, as a result, he came up against some of the same problems I have mentioned that I wished to avoid. When you do "Krishna Nee Begane Baro" on a beach with your sari billowing and your left hand constrained to contain that, you are at a disadvantage. Shifting sands are not the best ground on which to dance Bharatanatyam.

I regard Ray to be a personal God, and yet I think, in this particular case, God made a mistake. Ray wanted to create a set-piece but, in doing so, he forgot about the needs of the dance itself. I was very conscious of exactly these shortcomings; these are the learnings you have from other people who have come before you and tried out various things.

I was not looking for the scenic. I did not place her in temples which is again a very common thing and can look very pretty. But, the problem of placing a dancer in a temple is that temples are large affairs and the person is small in comparison. Therefore, to show the dance you either lose out on the temple or you have to intercut (which is terrible) between the temple sculpture - or temple grandeur - and your dancer. And that, unless it has been handled well and, I must say, I had no idea how to do it, begins to obfuscate the dance itself; it obstructs

the dance and says nothing about the temple because you just don't have the time (or the composition) to dwell on either effectively.

Also, I wanted to step away from an excess of craft in the shooting of dance. I think you can see the film-maker at work in other ways - in structure, in narrative, in his attitude to what he is seeing.

Naturally, there are problems with shooting dance that is neither staged nor lit specifically for the camera. Also, the fact that the dance (and the make-up) is exaggerated for an audience that is watching from a distance whereas the film-maker is, very often, watching from up close (for example, during *abhinaya*).

But one lived with those problems because what one gained from the exercise was a *frisson*, a sort of electricity that happens when the dancer feels and reacts to the immediacy of an emotional response which is neither the mechanical response of the camera, nor the individual response of the director, but the collective response of an audience that is moved by what she and they are sharing.

Q: How was the experience working with Malavika over the course of the two years you made the film?

A: With Malavika there was no background; we met and the film started. One of the things I said to her was that if we wait for finance, it will not be made and we will go our separate ways because we are not good at raising money. So, we leapt into it with a kind of joint faith and trust in each other.

For me, personally, the journey was very exciting because when I had no premeditated route, and I was discovering new countryside along the way.

Coming, as I did, from Bengal and having lived and worked in Bombay for most of my life, I had no clue about Tamil culture or history. I was forced to delve into areas I would not have dreamt of; for example, reading Sangam literature and the *Cilappatikaram*! So, in that sense, perhaps it was more exciting for me than it was for Malavika. Thankfully, I had gained the trust of my fellow traveler. So, she allowed me to shoot her performances (and her rehearsals) and had long conversations with me without ever attempting to interfere or influence how I was shaping the material.

Coming to the interviews themselves, I have a very strong view on how to conduct these. I don't ask prepared questions; instead, I have ideas that I wish to pursue. We would have long, leisurely talks about a wide range of things. In this way of conducting "interviews" one has to be prepared to listen very carefully because the questions emerge from the conversation and what it sparks off in us. So, these are very intense sessions and can be unexpectedly illuminating.

It is, of course, a help that Malavika is hugely articulate. She has been a public performer and a teacher and done lecture-demonstrations for large groups. And, she takes her art very seriously. She can talk with depth and with substance. You don't end up with some cliché about "Art is big ocean and I hold but a few drops in my hand". We would talk investigatively, and in depth, and analytically, about her dance.

But, despite the fact that we had several very illuminating conversations - and I had similar conversations with her colleagues - I didn't want to turn it into a Talking Heads film. I had already gone down that route with the Zakir documentary. "The Speaking Hand" has no commentary at all. I had allowed Zakir (and his fellow musicians) to tell his story and that of the *tabla*.

But, with this film, I felt my presence was necessary. So, the connections I make are intrinsic to the narrative. I edited the film over 8 or 9 months and, after each stint, I would come back to Bombay and review the progress. This gradual, laborious putting together of the film led to new questions both of the art form and of the dancer. The answers in turn led me to fresh connections and allowed to me to change course if I needed to. It was a terrific learning experience and I loved it.

Q: When you film an artiste - there is this challenge of permanence and continuity and in creating the impression for the viewer that they have spent time with the artiste and lived with them within the short time you have. How did you achieve this?

I think film brings its own limitations. How do you encapsulate a dance form like Bharatanatyam, how do you entrap an artiste like Malavika. You don't. Both are free agents and will live on long after your film is over. So there was no futile attempt to distill all into 98 minutes. There was, instead, an attempt to excite, to illuminate and, very importantly, to emotionally connect with the audience.

Very often I find that there is a distance between an artiste and the audience particularly if the audience is not knowledgeable. I didn't want that to happen. I wanted my film to be a bridge.

Also, I wanted to be able to weave together the three strands I have talked about but in a way that was not boring, that was not emotionally distancing. So, the film is constantly attempting to share my own sense of wonderment at the grace and power and complexity of the dance form. I wanted to retain the excitement of discovery. I wanted to illuminate little areas of darkness rather than the entire playing field. Well, it seems to be working in the few screenings we have had till now and that is a great reward.

Q: Your movie focuses on choices a Bharatanatyam dancer makes between tradition and contemporary sensibility. Now, As a film maker, how did you deal with your own choices on issues such as how much of the director's presence you wanted for the viewer in the film versus allowing the art form to speak for itself and recede into the background.

I think these are choices you very often make instinctively. I must tell you that, out of economic necessity (and, also because I hugely enjoy it!), I do a lot of the work myself. I shoot, I write, I narrate, I produce, I edit, I direct. I think the most important of those activities (particularly while answering your question on choices) is editing. And, because I have edited this film over a long time it gave me the opportunity of continuously evaluating and re-evaluating the narrative.

I can only hope that I have a strong critical mind that allows me to be brutal during the process of editing. Eventually it is an hour and a half out of the many, many hours that I shot. But, whether there's too much of me, too little of me, whether there is balance between history and tradition and individual talent is something I can't say. Only time and the audience will tell you whether what you have done works or doesn't work.

Q: Bharatanatyam is a complex and composite art form with music, movement and rhythm. Were there any significant differences in the way with respect to how you handled a documentary on rhythm versus such a complex art form?

A: I think I handled some of the complexity by simply opting out of certain areas of the dance form and hoping that people would not miss it. For example, strangely, I don't deal with rhythm at all in the film. If you are somebody who has watched a lot of dance, you will begin to see and hear for yourself how the rhythm is interplaying with the dance; but it is not something that I have investigated in this particular film, because I didn't find a way of doing it.

One of the very important things for a film is structure - how it holds together; is the narrative episodic or is it seamlessly connected? I usually follow a very Western classical structure because I've been educated in that tradition. So, I tend to look at things in terms of exposition, development, complication, denouement etc. And, I used that kind of structure while I was editing Zakir. But, in this film, I was searching for a more internal structure because Malavika's story is very different from Zakir's.

Rhythm did not fit seamlessly into that structure; so I gave it up. Then again, I did not explore *margam* at all. There is allusion to the fact that she moves away from the traditional repertoire, but there is no illumination of what that traditional repertoire is. So, there are many things that don't find their way into my film because they don't fit the narrative either structurally or emotionally. But, I think the great thing about a dance form like this

is that there are so many stories left to tell and there are so many story-tellers out there that it will be told at some point.

Q: Your film has been screened at the NCPA. How has the reception been?

It has been screened at the NCPA in Bombay and at the Music Academy in Chennai and at the IIC in Delhi. The reactions have been uniformly heart-warming – an artist even wrote a poem about the experience after the Chennai screening. What I find particularly invigorating is that people seem to be appropriating the film as something that they have a stake in; something they wish to share with others. Many have come forward on their own with fresh ideas of how and where the film can be screened. We now await reactions from our first non-Indian audience. The film has its New York premiere in January 2014 at the Lincoln Center where it will be shown in an abridged version.

Scenes from “The Unseen Sequence”

Director Ghosal says that Malavika is an artiste rooted in tradition but with a unique, contemporary sensibility. “The film is not about her: it deliberates upon the valuable connections and departures that the artiste makes from a hallowed, and often, unforgiving tradition.”

Today, even as she impresses her footprint on the world stage as a celebrated Bharatanatyam dancer, Malavika finds herself making increasingly personal choices about how she wishes to lead that life.

The questions she asks are essential and they have no easy answers in the re-iterations of craft. It is this co-existence of consummate artistry with a deeper, spiritual quest that makes her dance so exciting.

Dance for her is not entertainment. “It is a moment of transcendence that fills my soul.”



Malavika Sarukkai at the Chidambaram Temple celebrating 40 years of public performance in 2012



Explaining the importance of hastas in Bharatanatyam



Credits: http://www.cinematixfilms.com/The_Unseen_Sequence.html

**The following members of the community have written for the various
SRUTI publications in 2013**

****Thank You****

Aditi Suresh

Allyn Miner

Anika

Anize Appel

Anwesh Dutta

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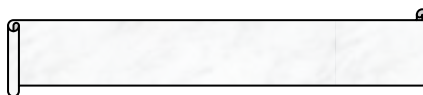
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