



Sruti
The India Music
& Dance Society,
Philadelphia



SRUTI RANJANI



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From the President's Desk

Dear Sruti supporter,

Welcome to the final publication of the year!

Sruti had a stellar 2014 season with a great blend of vocal, instrumental and dance events. The year began with the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana celebrations featuring Vidwan Madurai Sundar and which drew overwhelming participation from the community's blossoming talent who are destined to become future stars of the Carnatic world. We brought two Hindustani concerts this year performed by world-renowned artists. Concerts by Vidushi Amritha Murali, Vidushi Pantula Rama, and Ustad Zakir Hussain in partnership with Vidushi Jayanthi and Vidwan Kumares, and finally, Pt. Ajoy Chakraborty and Vidushi Kaushiki Chakraborty were not only presented for the first time ever on the Sruti platform but also received extremely well by our audience. The violin concert by the Lalgudi siblings and vocal concert by Vidushi Gayathri Venkataraghavan left the audience mesmerized and in awe of the beautiful and soulful renditions delivered by these artists. My note would be incomplete without mentioning the Malavika Sarukkai project, which shaped the year and elevated Sruti to newer heights within the Philadelphia arts arena.

As I reflect on the past year, here are some of our accomplishments that the 2014 board is immensely proud of:

- Bringing widespread awareness of Sruti and its mission in the Philadelphia cultural arena through the Malavika Project. Our gratitude and appreciation for the incredible support from PEW Charitable Trust, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts for helping us build new bridges of cultural alliances. The huge success of the Malavika project enhanced our standing among local organizations so much so that we are being highly encouraged to apply for major grants by the granting organizations themselves.
- Constitution of a special committee to review the by-laws of Sruti regarding our election procedures and bringing forth recommendations for changes aligned with current times. The ultimate decision to adopt these recommendations rests with the general body.

- Forging and strengthening our partnerships with other local presenting organizations such as Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts through not only the Malavika project but also, Zakir Hussain concert, and Kaushiki & Ajoy Chakraborty concert with Hindu Temple of Delaware. Neither of these concerts was financially viable for Sruti to undertake by ourselves but we were able to bring them to you only because of these collaborations.
- Fully achieving our aim to distribute Sruti notes electronically as part of our “Go Green” initiative.
- Provide an easier mechanism for making our concert audio to be distributed to our sponsors & patrons.

As acknowledged by many of you, it was a special year that required a tremendous amount of effort and the Sruti board not only rose to the occasion but exceeded expectations in making all the year’s events seamless and ultimately fruitful. Despite increasing responsibilities to handle the extraordinary growth and transformation that our organization is currently experiencing, and maintaining the sense of community among the members, my colleagues have taken on the challenge graciously and effectively. My heartfelt gratitude goes to them and their families for their invaluable time and effort spent for Sruti. I also thank all our members who helped with the Malavika project, which was no ordinary feat and would not have been executed to the granting organization’s expectations without their involvement and dedication.

Despite increasing costs resulting in bigger concert budgets, I applaud you, our members, supporters and dance & music enthusiasts, for your unwavering commitment to Sruti through your sponsorships, which continue to be the critical source of our ability to present eminent and upcoming artists and continue to promote Indian classical music and dance in our region.

They say time flies when things go well and that is certainly what I have realized about this year. It is truly hard to believe that 2014 went by so quickly. When I assumed the role of President of Sruti, I knew the work would be challenging but, what I didn’t realize is that it would be extremely rewarding; learnt many lessons, found new friends and above all, the privilege and opportunity to serve music and dance through Sruti.

Thank you and full speed ahead for another successful year in 2015!

Sunanda Gandham on behalf of the Sruti Board of Directors



From the Publications & Outreach Committee

Dear Readers,

The SRUTI Publications & Outreach Committee (POC) is proud and happy to present 'Sruti Ranjani', SRUTI's annual publication for the year 2014. Between tributes to legends, reviews of concerts, updates on various SRUTI activities, acknowledgements and the year in pictures, we hope you will be entranced, engaged and informed as you read through this magazine.

Please also visit the SRUTI blog, [SRUTI Smrti](#), where professional workshop participants discuss their collaboration with the dancer Malavika Sarukkai during her weeklong artistic residency in April.

We also have the SRUTI interview series, where POC members interview professional musicians. You can find these audio recordings in the [Recordings & Excerpts](#) section of the SRUTI web site.

Our grateful and heart-felt thanks and appreciation to all the contributors of the articles and photographs* that appear in this publication and other SRUTI publications this year.

We wish you a wonderful Holiday season and very happy & peaceful 2015.

Happy readings!

The Sruti Publications & Outreach Committee

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 6, 2014.

* Cover design by Sriram Radhakrishnan

* Pictures of Malavika Sarukkai events taken by Nan Melville of Nan Melville Photography and Video

* All other pictures taken by Priyanka Dinakar

SRUTI thanks the following granting agencies for their generous support this year

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Tribute to Vainika K.S.Narayanaswamy by Rama Varma

[Editor's note: To honor and celebrate the birth centenary of Veena Vidwan Shri K.S.Narayanaswamy, SRUTI has obtained permission from Prince Rama Varma to republish the following tribute to his Guru.]

My earliest memories related to classical music are the concerts I used to attend at the Navarathri Mandapam in Thiruvananthapuram when I was a child. The concerts would start at 6:00pm sharp and finish at 8:30pm sharp, after which there would be a short Aarati, followed by a really delicious meal. My great grandmother, the formidable Amma Maharani would see to it that members of our family were served the same fare that the artists were, so that she could keep an eye on the quality of the food. She would be physically present at the Mandapam a little before 6:00pm every day, so that she would not miss a single note performed by the musicians.



Other members of the family would reach the Mandapam closer and closer to 8:30pm in time for the meal, depending on their decreasing levels of interest in music. Until Amma Maharani's time, there were only male, vocal concerts at the Mandapam. She was the one who introduced (male) veena artists to the festival, with Venkatadri Bhagavathar, M.A.Kalyanakrishna Bhagavathar (who was one of the few artists to have given two concerts during the Same festival.....one vocal and one veena), M.K.Kalyanakrishna Bhagavathar and Prof. K.S.

Narayanaswamy. Over the years, usually more or less the same set of musicians were invited again and again and the audience behaviour remained more or less the same too. The biggest crowds came for concerts of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and for the concerts where Palghat Mani Iyer played the mridangam.....usually for Alathur Srinivasa Iyer and Palghat K.V.Narayanaswamy.

The veena concerts drew the minimum crowds. The sheer electricity and tension that was generated by the presence of Palghat Mani Iyer was just unbelievable and had to be experienced to be understood. As a striking contrast remained the tranquility generated by the veena concerts. I don't remember M.A.Kalyanakrishna Bhagavathar much. But M.K.Kalyanakrishna Bhagavathar used to play super fast phrases with minimal gamakams and shake his head vigourously too, which never ceased to make the children in the family burst out into fits of giggles. Amma Maharani had affectionately nick named him

"Thalayaattu." (Head shaker). K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir however, was a classic study in restraint, repose, poise and dignity. He initially used to give veena duets with his brother Sivaraman and later, with my first veena guru Trivandrum R.Venkataraman Sir.

Though my heart was always in violin, I started veena lessons with Venkataraman Sir who used to come to my house to teach my father. After a few months with Venkataraman Sir, I started understanding why many instrumentalists spoke of certain vocalists in a dismissive manner...that he or she "Was just a singer!" implying that the person in question did not have a deep and proper understanding of the placement of the notes and even more importantly, about the subtleties of the oscillations, ornamentations or Gamakams. (Many vocalists similarly laugh at instrumentalists who don't have a clue about the lyrics of the songs they play and say that they would play just the notes. Pa Dha Ni Paa Ma Gaa for Brova Bhaarama for example.)

Venkataraman Sir had absorbed a lot, from sources as varied as certain Naadaswaram giants, from Veena legend S.Balachander, from his association with Lalgudi Jayaraman and N.Ramani as part of the "Veena, Venu, Violin" trio, (called "Violin, Venu, Veena" by Lalgudi fans and "Venu, Veena Violin" by Ramani fans.) from his times at the Swathi Thirunal College of Music at Thiruvananthapuram, where he studied music from a host of legendary gurus, like Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, G.N.Balasubramaniam, K.R.Kumaraswamy and others....and finally from K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir.

During my lessons with him, various shades and colours and insights would be on display, but at the end of the day, it was mostly the points that he imbibed from K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir that would impress me and attract me the most. Because of this, I had already developed a great amount of respect and reverence for him from afar, even though I had not interacted with him directly at the time.

Once K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir had attended a private veena recital of mine in the morning, at the Navarathri Mandapam. When I met him somewhere, almost one year later, he asked me, without any preamble "Can you sing the charanam of Paripalaya Maam?" (In the raga Reethigowla) I was really surprised, but I started to sing "Thaamarasaayatha Lochana". Then he smiled and said "But this was not how you played it on the veena that day, at the Navarathri Mandapam!"

I was completely zapped! The thing is that, I have always been obsessed with M.D.Ramanathan and his music. My beloved Guru, Vechoor Hariharasubramania Iyer Sir would get exasperated from time to time and say "My shishya is singing well, but from time to time, he gets MD Attacks!"

M.D.Ramanathan would sing the same song differently every time....the tempo, the place where he put swarams....and sometimes even the lyrics would change a bit now and then! But he mostly sang the notes Dhaa Dha Ni Dhaa Ma Ma for Thaamarasaayatha, while ideally it should be Dhaa Dha Ni, Ni Dha-Dhaa Ma Ma, with a touch of Pa between the two Dhaas in Ni Dha-Dhaa. When I play veena, the MDR imitation is less obvious, because the vocal intonation is absent. But K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir had not only caught the single MDRLike phrase that I had played, but had also Remembered it more than half a year later! He

gently said "There is nothing Wrong if you play a plain Dha there, but that phrase Could be Sriranjini too, while if you play Dha Dha with a touch of Panchamam, it could Only be Reethigowla and there would be absolutely no room for ambiguity!" I grinned sheepishly and admitted that I was just playing an MDR phrase.

Though his personality was extremely gentle and mild, the points he made, never failed to make the deepest possible impact. I had the privilege of learning from him for a decade. Many many times, he would be sitting on his cot and I would be sitting on the floor and the hours would fly by so quickly that his daughter inlaw would come to the room, switch on the light and ask, "Why are you sitting in the dark?"....and neither of us would have realized that night had fallen, being so engrossed in our music related conversation. There is a saying in Latin, "Ars est celare artem" which means "Art lies in concealing art." I found a living example of this in K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir. The modern American policy is "If you got it, flaunt it!" These days this seems to have been stretched further, to "Even if you Haven't got it, try and make out as though you Have, and flaunt it!" During such times, K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir represented certain values that were hard even to Imagine, leave alone, to put into practice.

What came through during his concerts would be less than 1% of the vast, vast, Vast reservoirs of music that he embodied. He revealed a lot more during his truly phenomenal lecture demonstrations. We find people who express themselves forcefully, who shout and punch the air and so on.....and we find people who are so mild that they don't make much of an impact, even when they are saying something with a lot of content. K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir was one of those rare and blessed people whose talks would be unfailingly replete with content, who spoke softly and gently, always enveloped with a sheen of quiet self assurance and conviction that never went anywhere near aggression.

He treated the great compositions by the great masters as sacred. Ehi Annapoorne in Punnagavarali, Emani in Mukhari, Amba Neelayatakshi in Neelambari and so on, for example. On the one hand, he would lament about so many of these kind of songs getting performed less and less during concerts these days and on the other hand he was kind of possessive about sharing some of them too! But he was totally generous about sharing his insights about musical subtleties in general. When one asked him a really insightful question, he would be thrilled like a child and explain the point enthusiastically. When so many so called gurus are either stuck in deep rooted prejudices or are totally non committal, K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir was a rare exception.

If one were to ask him "Can one sing the Ga in Thodi like this?" he would not only say "Yes" or "No", but also back it up with dozens of illustrations of how Sri Thyagaraja used the note in question, from many of his compositions! All this was long before the internet was invented and his brain seemed to be even more powerful than google! Many people have the unfortunate habit of being dismissive about the greatness that others embody and I have often heard great artists being reduced to single line caricatures

M.D.Ramanathan - Sang slowly and at a very low pitch.

G.N.Balasubramaiah - Sang fast brikas

Madurai Mani Iyer - Sang swarams a lot.
Balamuralikrishna - Broke tradition and so on.

But K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir filtered out the best from Any musician he listened to.....be it a great veteran from the past or a young, upcoming musician...and enriched his music further.

They say that love is blind. At times love can be Deaf also and like most normal people, I would sing certain phrases the way some musicians I loved sang them, without caring much about whether they were correct, grammatically speaking, or not. It was K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir with his consistent and gentle observations who helped me shift my loyalty more to the truth in the music itself than to one singer or the other.....one of the many things I thank him for on a daily basis.

Though in the beginning, one might be advised to accept what one's guru says, as one progresses, a questioning mind is always encouraged and one does best by finding one's own individuality and identity rather than by being a clone of anybody else. One would be surprised by the number of musicians who sing a wrong phrase and say "I can't change a single line or a dot from what my teacher taught me!" While loyalty to one's guru is generally a good thing, it would be nice to invest some of this loyalty into the compositions of people like Sri Thyagaraja that one sings, as well as to the Ragas in which they are sung.

K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir had an incredibly rich life. He was one of the earliest South Indian Classical musicians to tour other countries. He cut a disc with Narayana Menon, Palghat Raghu and Yehudi Menuhin in England. He cut another disc with Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer for UNESCO.

During the many years that he spent in Bombay, he got to mix and move with the cream of cream in Hindustani music and even got to listen to many recitals of popular musicians like the Great Kundan Lal Saigal. Being a hard core Saigal Devotee myself, talking about Saigal with K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir was sheer Paradise! We would take his songs, note by note, phrase by phrase....including the background music and discussions about what instruments were used.....and analyze them for hours together like two children going through a box of chocolates, delirious with joy!

Even after he shifted to South India, he would listen to the Hindustani Music related programme on All India Radio called Sangeet Sarita every single day and had an abiding interest and deep knowledge of this wonderful system of music; a love that I continue to nurture even today. I heard about so many unique and beautiful Hindustani ragas like Sree, Bhatiyar, Chayanat and so on for the first time, from him. Among all the musicians that he spoke about, when Surshri Kesarbai Kerkar's name popped up, his eyes would twinkle like stars and he would smile and giggle like a teenager! I never got to ask him what his equation with her was.

He spent his share of time with great Carnatic legends too. My M.D.Ramanathan love was treated affectionately and indulgently by him because he himself was very close to M.D.Ramanathan and his

guru, Tiger Varadachariar. There was hardly ever a conversation with him that didn't feature the names Tiger or Sabhesha Iyer, with whom he worked at Annamalai University.

Many who were associated with him just saw the little that he revealed during his concerts and had absolutely no idea about the sheer range and depth of his artistic vision. I remember an amusing incident that happened once. A lady who was very close to him, had given a concert the previous day, which I had attended. Among the many songs that she had played, she had played Ananda Natam Aaduvar in Purvi Kalyani by Neelakanta Sivan. But when Narayanaswamy Sir asked her what she played, she just said "Purvi Kalyani." Then he asked her "What song?" and she answered "Parama Pavana Rama!" I was really surprised and when I looked at her, she glared at me, indicating that I should shut up. Then he asked me "Have you heard a song called Ananda Natam Aaduvaar in Purvi Kalyani?" I nearly burst out laughing and answered "Yes! In fact I heard it very recently too!" Then he revealed the fact that he had set the music to this really beautiful and extremely popular song, during his project at Annamalai University, when he tuned several songs of Neelakanta Sivan and others. I hadn't known this until then and obviously the lady hadn't either and she apparently equated "Popular" to "Cheap"....and now it was too late to tell him that she had indeed, played Ananda Natam Aaduvaar!

Though he stuck to his sedate and low key style of music all his life, he was never critical of others who resorted to virtuoso techniques that were calculated to impress. He used to tell me "If you only sing or play the way I do, you will have an audience of a small group of really old people who would come and tell you after the concert that your music was very Sampradayam or Traditionalbut you would never be invited again to that place to sing or play!" He would add "When a great musician does certain things for popularity, we can allow a margin for that".....then he would pause and add gravely "It is not that we Can allow....we Must allow a margin for that!" The same went for fingering techniques too. He was happy if one could produce the correct notes using whatever way of fingering that suited one, unlike some gurus who insist that a particular phrase Had to be played only this way and not any other way.

The duration of his alapana, his thaanam playing, his swaram sessions.....the extent of oscillation of the gamakams he used.....everything was measured and in perfect proportion. One would never find an excess of any one thing in his music. His life followed the strange but familiar pattern that many other greats before him had gone through. One where he was showered with the highest honours to start with and one where in the end, very few people even knew that he was still alive. His wikipedia entry gives details about his birth and demise as follows - (27 September 1914 - 1999) This is because not many people knew when he passed away...and when the news slowly started to appear in the media, many people were surprised to know that he had still been around all these years. But it was a choice that he himself had consciously taken and he was completely at peace with the results too.

Rather like what K.S.Narayanaswamy Sir delivered during his concerts, this article on him too, reveals hardly 1% of what all I learned from him. If there is a life after our life here, then I am sure he must be up there with his beloved Tiger, Sabhesha Iyer, Musiri Subramania Iyer, Kesarbai and others, making music

that is fit for the Gods. I feel eternally grateful and blessed to have shared what I have shared, with this great, great, great, Great man!

Endaro Mahanubhavulu! Andariki vandanamulu!

Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma, also known as Prince Rama Varma, is a South Indian classical musician, a performing vocalist, veena player and writer. He is a member of the Royal Family of Travancore, and a direct descendant of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma and Raja Ravi Varma. . Rama Varma gave his maiden public performance in 1990 on the insistence of Prof T. V. Gopalakrishnan. For many years he had associated with the Rotterdam Conservatory of Music offering vocal classes in Indian Classical Music and also voice training sessions.

The Prince organises the Swathi Sangeethotsavam and the Navarathri Mandapam Concerts held every year in connection with the Navarathri Festival at Trivandrum. In 2006, he picked veteran Parasala Ponnammal to perform at the Navarathri Mandapam, breaking the 300-year-old tradition of not allowing women inside the Mandapam.

Zakir Hussain, R. Kumaresh and Jayanthi Kumaresh in Concert ***Review by Balaji Raghothaman***

The tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain gave a spellbinding concert for SRUTI rasikas at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia on October 2014. He was accompanied by the Carnatic and fusion power couple Kumaresh on the violin and Jayanthi on the veena. Together they created an other-worldly atmosphere with their performance. It is not often that the percussionist gets prime billing at a concert, but of course, Zakir sahib is not just any percussionist. While his stature more than justified his center-stage placement, throughout the concert he showed tremendous generosity in encouraging and allowing Kumaresh and Jayanthi to shine through with their own virtuosity. The overall vibe was that of a concert of equals in which each artist had their shining moments of glory.



The concert did not follow either a conventional kutcheri format or even a jugalbandi format, but did borrow many elements from both. There were four distinct pieces, each with a different flow and structure to them. The concert began with a Kalyani, which started off in a varnam style and ended with an exciting flourish of svaras delivered at a fast pace. One distinct feature we noticed is that the trio liked to end each number at a melodic crescendo with an abrupt stop, reminiscent of a western symphony, rather than the gradual unwinding that typically occurs in Indian music - the climbdown to the middle octave to end the piece, accompanied by a repetition of the pallavi or the neraval line. The other ragas explored during the concert included a mohanam, sahana, kapi, kalyana vasantham, to name a few. The mohanam was delivered with a folksy twist that left the audience mesmerized. There was an impeccable ragam-tanam-pallavi with the pallavi in ragamalika. Within these traditional formats, however, the artists, particularly Kumaresh on the violin, innovated and improvised tremendously, with many phrases that are

atypical of carnatic music. Ms Jayanthi showed off the virtuosity, both her own, and that of the veena. The extent to which the veena, considered a quintessential carnatic instrument, was able to blend and excel in this format, is a testament to her mastery.

Coming back to Mr. Hussain - his handling of the tabla showed that he has not lost a slight bit of his dexterity from his youth. He opened the concert with a heart-felt tribute to the recently departed Mandolin U.Srinivas, and exhorted the audience to feel his presence as they listen to the music. By the end of the concert, his description of Srinivas as “playing like a 1000-yr old god” seemed like an apt description of Zakir himself – such was his mastery. He effortlessly glided between different tempos, imposed layers of soft and hard beats, all the while keeping great company for the melody. At one point in the solo towards the end of the concert, he played a simultaneous *vilambit* (slow) beat superimposed on an *ati dhrut* (ultra fast) beat. He also entertained the audience with a segment of *bol* (*konnakol* in carnatic). By that point in time, Mr. Hussain had both the audience and his accompanying artists firmly in his pocket, and he was blowing stardust at them (both figuratively and at one point literally).

Balaji Raghothaman is a member of the Sruti Publications and Outreach Committee. He lives in Chester Springs, PA with his wife and two children.

Pantula Rama, MSN Murthy and Patri Satish Kumar
A Dikshithar Thematic Concert
Review by Rajee Raman

This concert, on October 18, for Sruti in Philadelphia was unlike any I have attended. At the outset, it was announced that Rama’s Guru, Ivaturi Vijayeswara Rao garu, had passed away the previous night. Pantula Rama walked onto the stage and the sorrow on her face was unmistakable.

Rama started with Sri guruna palitosmi in Paadi. Tears were streaming down her face and her voice was slightly quivering. Her partner in life and on stage, MSN Murthy with his strong, supportive bowing was musically egging her to go on. Patri played as only he can, lifting the krithi. It was so emotional as an audience member that I was wondering whether Rama would be able to continue. And then, she began kalpanaswarams for this krithi! Her voice got stronger and the PDPN pidis of Paadi brought out the raga beautifully. Any questions on its rakthiness were unequivocally answered.

Sri Guruguha tarayaasumam at a fast clip changed the pace. Rama’s pronunciation and clear enunciation ensures sahityam will make as much of an impact as the sangeetham.

Rama announced she was going to sing Ranganayakam next. She talked about how her Guru would highlight the appropriateness of the ragam (Nayaki admiring the Nayaka) and the composer’s intent in

beginning the krithi in the lower half as a way of bowing down to the Lord. She said she was singing all of her Guru's favorite Dikshitar kritis and that every note she sings is imbued with what he taught her.

Kanjadalayadakshi in Kamalamanohari, was a nice change of pace and a veritable playground for Patri. Subhapantuvarali was taken up for alapana next. The melancholy that pervaded was accentuated. Rama's voice has strength and mellifluousness in equal measure which makes her build up of alapana fantastic – there are these incredible flourishes at the end of phrases that spring up on you. MSN Murthy was at his emotive best in his alapana. Sri Satyanarayanam was sung with intensity. *Satyagnanaandamayam Sarvam Vishnumayam* was an excellent choice of Neraval. Rama's signature neraval singing is a class apart. She does not do the standard traversing of the octave. She sticks to the part of the octave of the line and explores those notes in such a way that we are left with a fully unfurled lotus at the end. MSN Murthy matched her at every step. Both slow and fast paced swarams were sung.

Kambhodi Alapana was up next. It was built up very well. The alapana on the violin was excellent eliciting appreciation from Rama. Rama took up tanam and signalled Patri to join in. It shows her confidence in layam to have Patri as the mridamgam artiste. Patri played so softly, but so effectively. Sri Subramanyaya Namaste, the majestic Kambhodi krithi was the main krithi of the evening. Neraval was at the pallavi line - *SriSubrahmanyaya namaste namaste manasijakotikoti lavanyaya dinasaranyaya*. An excellent round of swarams followed in both speeds. At the end of the piece, a smile finally showed up on Rama's face.

I cannot say much more than one word, exhilarating, about Patri's taniyavarthanam. His ability to play such intricate patterns effortlessly and literally predict the artist is beyond my grasp.

Mayetvam in Tarangini and Mamava Pattabhirama in Manirangu, both sung at madhyama sruthi were sung with the emotive accent they deserve. As a knowledgeable friend remarked, Rama's gamakas are exquisite – with just the right weight and vibratto. The concert concluded with Mangalam kosalandraya.

Pantula Rama is a consummate artiste with such high musical values. Her countenance on stage is as dignified as her music. She could not have paid a better tribute to her Guru. His soul was with her yesterday. Her teaming up with MSN Murthy and Patri Satish Kumar is such a terrific combination.

A Dikshitar thematic concert always leaves me humbled and in awe – of a man whose infinite musical intellect created masterpieces that stand before a listener like the great edifices of nature, a la Grand Canyon. It is up to the listener to absorb and appreciate as much as her limited faculties will let her. Don't miss Pantula Rama's concert if it happening in your neck of woods!

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

Mandolin Uppalapu Shrinivas (1969 – 2014): A Humble Tribute ***by Ragesh Rajan***

Oftentimes, the greatness of a person is realized only after he departs from this world – following the loss of the legendary U. Shrinivas, it is difficult to enumerate the contributions of this humble giant to the world of Carnatic music. For a significant part of my life, I had the fortune of knowing Mandolin U. Shrinivas (whom I refer to as Shrinivas Anna). During the summer of 1994, I attended one of Shrinivas Anna's concerts in Chennai, and immediately became a huge fan of him and his music. Little did I know then, that I would have the opportunity to learn from him in the future.



It is with great sadness I mourn the loss of Shrinivas Anna who attained the Lotus Feet of the Almighty on September 19th 2014 at the young age of 45. He was many things – a child prodigy, a consummate Carnatic musician, an unsurpassable mandolin artist, a pioneer who popularized an instrument foreign to Carnatic classical music scene, a great teacher, and above all, a modest human being.

Innovating the field of Carnatic music

Any radical innovation takes its time to reach the masses – by the age of 12, Shrinivas Anna modified a western instrument by adding a “5th string” to make it suitable to play the sustained notes which are the lifeblood of the ‘gamakam-intensive’ Carnatic music system. His ascension to legendary status was not

without his share of difficulties - during the initial years of his career, he was playing an instrument unknown to the musical fraternity, and was criticized for choosing it. As was his way, he answered them all by simply letting his mandolin do the talking and revolutionized the instrument to give it a permanent place in the classical art form.

Universal appeal

In my opinion, Shrinivas Anna's music had universal appeal; although he was first and foremost a Carnatic musician, he was skilled in other genres of music such as Hindustani and World music. His collaboration with several artists, both in India and across the globe, is a testimony to his breadth of skills and his unshakable conviction that anything can be played on the mandolin.

Although he was versatile in all genres of music, he considered Carnatic classical music as the foundation of his expression and he adhered to its purest form. Such was his skill at playing the mandolin, I felt as if I was listening to a vocalist perform at a traditional Carnatic concert. His emphasis on intricate sangatis of a krithi and in bringing out the lyrical beauty of the composer through the instrument is something that cannot be explained, but has to be experienced.

Though largely a self-taught musician, his formative years of development were under his father Sri. U Satyanarayana and Rudraraju Subbaraju (disciple of Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar). He derived his greatest source of inspiration from Carnatic doyens of the past – TR Mahalingam, Rajaratnam Pillai, MLV, DK Jayaraman and GNB. He played his first concert at the young age of nine and since then, performed at almost every prestigious music festival across the world.

Some of his popular recordings include the ‘Magic Mandolin’, ‘Raga Sangamam’, ‘Rama Sreerama’, and the ‘Trio Mandolin’. Of the main ragas, he liked playing Thodi, Shankarabharanam, Kambhoji, Kalyani, Keeravani, and Shanmugapriya. However, he had a unique penchant for rare ragas such as Bindumalini, Veeravasantham, Vakulabharanam, Manirangu, Bahudari, Manjari, Gangeya Bhushini, Chalanattai, Malayamarutham, and Dhenuka. His rendition of the Tyagaraja krithi ‘Entha Muddo Entha Sogaso’ in Bindumalini is inimitable and is one of my personal favourites. In the commercial recording, he plays a beautiful array of ragamalika swarams (Bindumalini-Nalinakanthi-Kalyanavasantham-Nagaswaraavali-Abheri-Vaasanthi-Nasikabhooshani) all within a span of a minute (two avarthanams at first, one avarthanam next and finally half avarthanam) leaving us spell-bound. Beyond the krithis of the Trinity, he popularized a lot of musical compositions of Papanasam Sivan, Swathi Thirunal, Annamacharya, Purandaradasar and Lalgudi Jayaraman. I marvelled at the fact that he never played a krithi the same way twice – this was especially true of his ‘Vatapi Ganapathim’ and ‘Maha Ganapathim’, which have unique kalpana swarams.

His concerts used to give me a wholesome experience; there were periods of beautiful melodies followed by his trademark lightning-quick swarams – something that could be enjoyed by both the Carnatic connoisseur as well as the layman rasika. The way he explored the entire spectrum of a melody, flirting his fingers with ease over the small instrument, was remarkable to watch and listen. He was also a composer – Anna’s own compositions in Sindhu Bhairavi (Srujana) and Keeravani (Sangamam) are testimony to the depth of his musical knowledge, where he created musical notes that not only explored the raga beautifully, but integrated lively ‘notes’ from western music.

Attending his classes

Shrinivas Anna not only contributed as a Carnatic musician, he also mentored and encouraged many children to pursue their interests in music through his established Shrinivas Institute of World Music. When I moved to Chennai in 2003, I was blessed with the opportunity to learn from him. Given the fact that I had never picked up a mandolin before, I was concerned about his potential reaction. However,

Shrinivas Anna was looking for one key thing – my genuine interest in the art form. Thus started a wonderful relationship between us, something I would cherish as years of wonderful memories.

I looked forward to meeting him every weekend at his home in Vadapazhani where he taught his students. Most weekends started with a quick quiz when he played short phrases of various ragas and we needed to identify them. I remember many instances when the learning experience was challenging yet fulfilling – he taught students by accompanying them in playing a raga in all three octaves in three speeds as a warm-up exercise before a real lesson. He would even personally record his lessons for me so I could listen to them while I was commuting to work.

Quintessential guru



When it came to teaching music, Anna was the quintessential guru - he practiced the concept that teaching should be driven primarily by passion for the art rather than monetary gain. To that end, he considered music as a service and imparted free knowledge to all his students. I admired the amount of patience, sensitivity, and attention he bestowed on each student – he tailored his lessons to suit the individual needs of his pupils. He relentlessly pursued perfection and in turn, ensured I played without mistakes, even if it meant spending extra time and repeating a lesson. Given the narrow frets of the mandolin, I was initially frustrated at my inability to precisely play certain notes when practicing a krithi. But when Anna had the patience to hold my fingers and teach me the right way, his infectious enthusiasm became the motivation to strive for excellence.

Shrinivas Anna always stressed that “anything can be played on the mandolin”, and asked me not to confine myself to just one form of music. To that end, he had a very open mind regarding the ‘classicism’ in Carnatic music and it translated into his teaching as well – he always encouraged students to try new things and was open to experimentation within the boundaries of tradition.

Though he was acknowledged as a child prodigy, he never underestimated the importance of practice. Once, when I asked him how long he practiced each day, he quipped that he no longer had the time to practice as he did in the initial stages of his career – an astounding 12-14 hours a day. He went on to say that if he did not practice for a day, no one would probably notice; if he were to not play the mandolin for two days, he would notice the difference, and if he did not play for more than two days, people around him would notice. As he once said, music was a divine gift that should touch the soul – by playing what one enjoys, one can make others enjoy as well.

Unheard Melody

As the poet John Keats said “heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter”, I think of Shrinivas Anna’s unheard melodies as the way he chose to live life beyond music. In many ways, I believe Shrinivas Anna achieved greatness without ever seeking it. He made no display of his talents though he was a celebrated artist. His character was entrenched in a beautiful veil of modesty – he taught me to remain humble, even if I reached the pinnacle of glory. During concerts, he had an uncanny knack for melding with his accompanists and was extremely appreciative and encouraging of his fellow musicians. It was no wonder that several legendary musicians chose to play with him given his courteous manner and rapport he had with them.

He was religious and had a deep-rooted faith in Anjaneyar, Satya Sai Baba and the Kanchi Mahaswamigal – he almost always concluded his concerts with a Sai Bhajan and a composition on the Paramacharya of Kanchi. He meditated before each performance to achieve the focus necessary to play in front of a live audience. To him every stage was the same, whether it was a sabha, a temple, or a free concert he was performing for one of the numerous social causes he was supporting.

The loss of his life is tragic, even more so knowing he passed away at such a young age. Many legendary musicians attain prominence after decades of performances, but Shrinivas Anna had already ascended to their ranks well before his death. To breakthrough as a child prodigy and gain acceptance into a well-established, yet highly critical system of music was nothing short of revolutionary. By his untimely death, the world has been deprived of an unparalleled musician and an extraordinary human being.

My life is truly blessed as a result of my acquaintance with Shrinivas Anna. My memories of him will always remain close to my heart – not only for the unforgettable musical delight I experienced in listening to him play, but also for having known him as a person. He was a selfless, humble and ever-smiling person who considered “good music” from his students as the best Gurudakshina. I firmly believe he set an example for us to follow; even though it may be difficult to imitate his music, it is certainly worth trying to live as he did - humble, kind, and persevering.

I am honoured to write about my experiences with Shrinivas Anna and I sincerely thank Sruti for the opportunity to share this with others. I join the millions of his rasikas all over the world in conveying my deepest condolences to his family.

Ragesh Rajan is a classical music enthusiast and learned Carnatic classical music from Shri. U. Shrinivas. He works for Bank of America as an analytical marketing professional and lives in Dublin, CA.

***When signal processing meets Carnatic music:
An interview with Dr. Hema Murthy
by Balaji Raghothaman***

Dr. Hema Murthy is a professor in the Dept of Computer Science and Engineering at IIT-Chennai (Madras). She is the lead investigator of the Carnatic sub-project within the larger CompMusic project funded by the EU, which is conducting in-depth research on Turkish, Chinese, Andalusian, Carnatic and Hindustani genres. Below is a gist of our conversation.

Dr. Hema Murthy describes herself as an electrical engineer masquerading as a computer scientist. She received her BE in Electronics and Communications, and after working in TIFR for a while, she pursued her M.S in Comp Eng in Canada, and then a PhD back in India. Her first passion was speech processing and analysis, with particular emphasis on Indic languages. Her introduction to the field of music information retrieval was a happy accident. A consortium of speech and audio scientists from the IITs and IISc conduct an annual winter school on speech and audio processing. At one such workshop Prof. Xavier Serra from Spain was a lead speaker. During his visit he also attended a lec dem on Hindustani music and was fascinated by the nuances of the genre. He recognized that none of the types of analysis done on western music will work per se, due to the underlying fundamental differences in the concepts of sruti and raga. He persuaded Profs Preeti Rao and Hema Murthy to work with him on studying the Indian styles of music. Hema Murthy, a lifelong and passionate rasika of Carnatic music, thus ended up as one of the lead investigators in CompMusic for analysis of Carnatic Music.

On the differences between the Western and Carnatic traditions

The biggest difference is the variability of sruti or the tonic in Carnatic. In the Western canon, every song or composition has a key and that cannot be violated, whereas in the Carnatic canon, each singer or player can pick a tonic. Moreover, this variability does not faze the listeners at all – even inexperienced ones can pick up on the tonic within a minute or two. The human mind is very agile – it can not only understand the sruti, but also perceive that this is the same song being sung in a different sruti, or that this is such and such raga.

Another difference is that in the Western tradition the score is fixed, and there is not really any significant variation between different renditions of the same piece. A conductor can create some variations but really change the rendition itself. The carnatic tradition however, is primarily oral, and the same song can be sung differently. There are different sangatis depending on the school one learned from.

The concept of gamakam is also another big deviation. The alphabetical svaras alone do not describe a raga (from T M Krishna) – there is more nuance in how those svaras are sung. For example, just going by the svaras, the only difference between sankarabaranam and Kalyani is the M (madyamam). But in fact, there is also a difference in the G (gandharam) – in sankarabharanam the G is steady, whereas in kalyani one would sing it with gamakam.

On the progress of the CompMusic-Carnatic project

Initially we were baffled on how to go about it. From the Western perspective, most of our music is all apasvaram. The first task we undertook was to be able to identify the sruti. It took us about a year, but we now have an algorithm that can do this accurately in about 1.5 minutes.

[BR Note: A paper describing this algorithm, called “Automatic Tonic Identification in Indian Art Music: Approaches and Evaluation” was published in the Journal of New Music Research in March 2014]

The next task we undertook was to identify motifs in different ragas. The majority of listeners are not ‘trained’. They are not identifying the notes, but they are able to look for and identify phraseology in ragas with a fair amount of ease. So we asked the question – are there typical motifs in each raga, and if so, can we identify them algorithmically? First we asked musicians for what they consider to be the motifs. We found that there is indeed a correlation across musicians on these motifs.

About this time, Prince Rama Varma had posted a quiz on youtube, wherein he sang very small snippets that were typical of ragas and asked listeners to identify them. The clips were noisy for our purposes, so one of our researchers, Vignesh, who is also a singer and a student of T.M.Krishna, recreated them for many of the ragas based on motifs that are from his school. Then we proceeded to analyze them. We are still at this problem, but we have found that there are indeed motifs. By being able to identify these motifs, we can enhance the listening experience in different ways.

For example, if we take the kriti Meenakshi in Purvi Kalyani, which somebody has sung, along with niraval svarams, etc. The question is, can one only listen to the alapana, and within those, can we listen to the transition from one typical motif to the another? CompMusic, Spain has now developed a software called Dunya which can do some tasks on Carnatic music. It is not yet publicly available, primarily because we are working out the issues with respect to artists’ streaming rights etc. It will track your melody, will tell you what your sruti is, what are the tones you are touching with respect to the raga you are singing.. The end goal would be whether one can easily step to a particular section one wants to practice or listen to.

On Summarization and Score

We can do summarization - aesthetic moments in concerts can be located by analysing the applause moments, and where the applause is longest/loudest... This will tell you which is the best part of the concert, or the biggest item. Renowned artists can get 30-40 applauses in a concert even if the number of items is only about 10.

The other idea is to come up with some kind of semblance of a score, but not necessarily a written score. These days, increasingly the written score is becoming irrelevant, since we can actually play the audio, listen and imitate. Using our methods, a listener can take a song sung by someone else, then convert it into his/her sruti and then sing along. That is a powerful method for learning.

On Schools and Composers

We are also looking at how we can identify schools of singing. Example: Kalyani, some will sing Ni flat, or some will sing it with undulations. Nowadays artists are exposed to a wide range of music. Many do borrow from other schools/other genres and adapt it to Carnatic Music. Every concert by the same artist is different during the season.

Carnatic Music is so tied to compositions – we would like to study the composers. Why did they compose the way they did. Tyagaraja is supposed to be very melodious, whereas Dikshitar pays a lot of attention to the rigor of his lyrics. For example, TM Krishna gave a lec dem where he showed that you can actually build a gopuram with the notes in a composition of Dikshitar.

On percussion

We are looking into Mridangam and ghatam – these are all pitched instruments (ganjira is not). Can we find the notes of the mridangam. From the notes can we find the school? Umayalpuram has 45 different notes.

General thoughts on the status of the work

The algorithms are still primitive, but from the last 3 years, I can say this: Carnatic music is not rocket science. There is a structure. Using machine learning and sig proc, we have found that there are new ways of looking at it. At IIT-Madras we believe in knowledge based signal processing. We know that there is structure in Carnatic music, and we direct the signal processing towards understanding this structure. It has opened up new ways of looking at this, and exciting new avenues.

On similarities between Carnatic and the other styles studied in CompMusic

Closest has been Turkish music – the ragas are called makams. It is also an oral tradition, instruments are similar to Hindustani, also has a variable tonic. But a lot of it is getting lost. In Hindustani, the notes are more steady. In Carnatic, the ragas start with a phraseology, while in Hindustani they start with the notes. The musician sings the notes with a lot of emphasis and then builds slowly to the motif of the raga in Hindustani music.

On artist collaboration

Carnatic artists have been wonderful in their cooperation. They are now committed to giving concerts for us, and to a deeper collaboration. We are working with Umayalpuram Sivaraman Sir, for example.. he is a true collaborator. If he doesn't hear from us for a while, he will call to find out what is happening.

We are working with everyone who will give us the time. T M Krishna is one of early advisors. He is pretty amazing at understanding the technicalities. We try to schedule regular meetings with him to showcase our progress. Recently we also had Sangeetha Sivakumar participate in the review meeting. My students and I really learnt a lot. We show them what the technology can do. We have discussion and they

give us some interesting ideas to pursue. Many suggestions are a challenge but that is what research is all about.

[BR: You said there is a method which your algorithms can find. So can you still find ‘magic’ in a concert or is it very predictable to you?]

Yes. When I go to a concert now, I listen a little more intelligently now. But when Abishek Raghuram sang a kamas, it is mostly traditional kamas, and sometimes it is mesmerizing in terms of new phrases. When T.M.Krishna sang phalamanjari at Narada gana sabha last year, it was truly amazing. So, yes, the magic still exists for me.

On the current state of Carnatic music

Compared to 1930-40s to now, there are a lot more gamakams. Due to microphoiness, they can sing softly and include many more timbrel variations. Current day artists – do not hesitate to explore, and this is a fundamental difference from yesteryear. In the old days, there were a few experimenters. Today I feel Carnatic music is at its pinnacle, each artist trying something different in their own way. I used to not go to concerts in the 90’s (maybe only KVN), now I can and do listen to many more.

Balaji Raghothaman is a member of the Sruti Publications and Outreach Committee. He lives in Chester Springs, PA with his wife and two children.

Verily, A Veena Pustaka Dharini ***by Ravi & Sridhar***

[Editor’s note: In honor of the centenary year of Vidushi T.Mukta, we publish the following tribute by her students, Ravi and Sridhar. They are regular contributors to Sruti Magazine and sangeetham.com under the name ‘RaviSri’]

It might seem paradoxical that a life long vocalist who neither played the veena nor consult textbooks or note books during either her childhood days as a music student or during her long and illustrious musical career, should be hailed as a Veena Pustaka Dharini. If pustaka denotes knowledge, T.Muktha was a veritable storehouse of musical knowledge. Her singing was in the veena bhani. As a grand daughter of the Queen Bee of Carnatic music, Veena Dhanammal, Muktha’s singing echoed the subliminal depths of Goddess Saraswati’s instrument.

Born to Kamakshi, the fourth and youngest daughter of Veena Dhanammal in Madras in 1914, Muktha had her initial lessons in music from her mother. At the age of seven she, along with her elder sister T.Brinda was sent to Kanchipuram Naina Pillai to enhance their repertoire. After four years of rigorous learning of about 350 Thyagaraja kritis, Tevaram and Tiruppugazh, both Brinda and Muktha returned to Madras, to their grandmother’s home in Georgetown. Here, they were placed under the tutelage of their aunt, Lakshmiratnam, the second daughter of Dhanammal. Lakshmiratnam was an expert in Shyama Sastri, Muthuswami Dikshitar, Subbaraya Sastri and Gopalakrishna Bharati kritis, besides being

an authority in padams and javalis. She was also an accomplished pianist. For ten long years, the sisters learnt from their aunt. Grandmother Dhanammal also pitched in to teach the girls a few kritis, padams and javalis until she passed away in 1938. Even when Muktha was ten years old, and Brinda twelve, their mother was keen that the sisters gain concert experience. At that tender age the sisters started performing. After their tutelage with Dhanammal and Lakshmiratnam, they were ready for the wider world. Concert opportunities were aplenty in the houses of the cognoscenti of Madras. The sisters made their debut at the Music Academy in 1938. Thereafter there was no looking back.

Their music was hailed by the cream of Carnatic music rasikas as well as fellow musicians as being pure and authentic. How could it not be when their guru Kanchipuram Naina Pillai had studied under Wallajapet Krishnaswami Bhagavatar, the son of Venkataramana Bhagavatar who was Thyagaraja's direct disciple, or when their grandmother Dhanammal's grandmother Kamakshi was a disciple of Subbaraya Sastri, the son of Shyama Sastri and when Dhanammal herself had learnt a lot of Dikshitar compositions from Sattanur Panchanada Iyer, a grand disciple of Dikshitar himself?



The sublime works of the Trinity had come to Brinda and Muktha without much of distortion and they, through their strict adherence to sampradaya maintained the purity of the songs. The Dhanammal family could boast of several artists including her four daughters, another grand daughter, Bharatanatyam dancer T.Balasaraswati who became world famous and her brothers, mridangist T.Ranganathan and flautist T.Viswanathan. Brinda-Muktha's younger sister, violinist T.Abiramasundari, a disciple of Papa Venkataramiah accompanied her sisters for many years.

Shyama Sastri's works like Marivere Gati and Pahi Sri Grirajasute (both Ananda Bhairavi), Durusuga (Saveri), Palinchu Kamakshi (Madhyamavati), Karuna Joodu (Sri), Parvati Ninu (Kalgada), Ninne Namminanu (Todi), all acquired a unique sheen in their hands, in keeping with the emotional majesty of his compositions. Subbaraya Sastri's Ninu Sevinchina (Yadukulakambhoji), Venkata Shaila Vihara (Hamir Kalyani), Sri Kamalambike (Todi), Janani Ninuvina (Reetigaula), Ema Ninne (Mukhari) were sung with the same feeling of grandeur. Compositions of the father and son which had chitta swara-sahitya were thrillingly sung by Brinda-Muktha, with one singing the swaras and the other singing the sahitya simultaneously and vice-versa.

Apart from the well known compositions of Thyagaraja, Brinda-Muktha had an enviable repertoire of the saint's rare compositions like Karubaru and Elavataramu in Mukhari, Mamava Satatam in

Jaganmohini, Mummoorthulu and E Papamu in Atana, Munnu Ravana, Tappi Bratiki and Kotinadulu in Todi, Mariyadagadura and Buddhi Radu in Sankarabharanam among many others, besides innumerable small songs of the bard in rare ragas like Chayanata, Chayatarangini, Vardhini, Vivardhini, Pratapavarali, Suryakantam, Supradeepam, Ganavaridhi etc.

Of Dikshitar, they knew rare songs like Veena Pustaka Dharini in Vegavauhini, Shankaram Abhirami in (Kamala) Manohari, Thyagaraja Palaya in Gaula, Thyagarajam Bhajeham in Neelambari, Brihannayaki in Andhali among others. Songs like Dakshinamurte in Sankarabharanam, Sri Rajagopala in Saveri and Chetasri in Dwijavanti acquired a rare finesse at their hands and it would be no exaggeration to say that these compositions were first brought to the Carnatic stage by Brinda and Muktha. This was the case with the seven kritis in the Navagraha series too.

Padams and javalis were their forte and these songs of madhura bhakti gained a special glow in the hands of the sisters. Padams in Gaulipantu, Ghanta, Surutti, Sahana, Begada, Mukhari, Nadanamakriya etc., were their favourites as also their rasikas' besides those in Sankarabharanam, Bhairavi, Kalyani, Kambhoji and Todi. Javalis, in Cenjurutti, Paras, Yamuna Kalyani and Kanada among others were the delight of rasikas.

After making music together for more than four decades Brinda and Muktha started giving concerts individually in 1969. Muktha's music was characterised by sruti shuddham, which she maintained throughout, even in her last concert at the Musiri residence in January 2003, when she was almost 89. Her tonal and swara perfection in higher octaves was noted by rasikas and other vidvans as being exemplary and inimitable. Muktha's alapanas were crisp and yet contained the essence of the raga. The important moorchanas and sangatis of the raga were brought out perfectly. Her memory was razor sharp and till the last she never missed singing any sangati that was part of a song that she had learnt from her gurus.

Muktha's teaching career took a major course when in 1970, the Sangeet Natak Akademi awarded a scholarship to musician R. Vedavalli to study padams and javalis. Muktha's name was recommended by Dr.V. Raghavan, then a committee member of the Akademi. Thus began a fruitful guru-sishya relationship. In course of time, Muktha came to acquire a large number of disciples, among them several dancers including Abhinaya guru Kalanidhi Narayanan, who had decades earlier learnt from Muktha's mother Kamakshi, and Alarmel Valli, Swapnasundari etc. Other disciples included Rama Ravi, Bombay Ramachandran, Nirmala Sundararajan, vainika Nirmala Parthasarathy who learnt on the veena whilst Muktha sang and taught her, S.Sowmya and many others. To all of them she was a mother, their Mukthamma, always caring for their personal welfare besides their musical progress. For a few years Mukthamma also taught at the Teacher's college of the Music Academy in the 1970s.

We started learning from Mukthamma in 1988. We had never learnt music formally before that. At first, she demurred, saying that she had not taught males in a long time and that with the natural differences in sruti, between male and female voices, both she and we would find the going difficult. She

suggested that she would recommend a good male teacher for us. After some good progress, we could come to her for specific songs. Thoroughly disappointed, we told her that we wanted to learn only from her in order to understand the Dhanammal bhani and if she were unwilling to teach, then we would remain as we were, just listening to her music. Convinced by our sincerity and adamant enthusiasm, Mukthamma agreed to teach us.

We learnt a lot from her. We were most interested in the songs of the Trinity, as she had a very vast repertoire of their songs, all authentic. She was most forthcoming and taught us all we asked. Thus flew three years. Circumstances took us to another place in 1991 and that, we surmised was the end of our tutelage. That was not to be. We approached her after a hiatus of five years in 1996 and requested her to teach us again. We had settled down in Tiruvannamalai, serving Sri Ramanasramam. She was extremely happy that we were pursuing a spiritual life. From 1996 to 2003, we learnt from her, travelling to Madras once in two months. She bade us stay at her house itself for the duration of our stay in Madras. For us it was a modern kind of gurukulavasam.

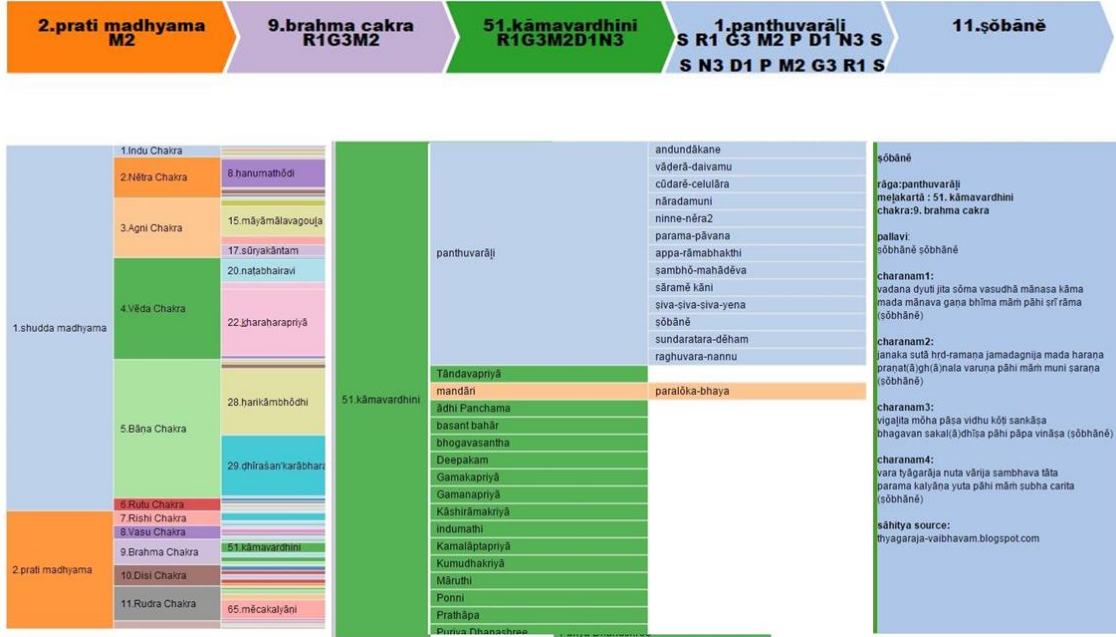
Veena Pustaka Dharini, Sri Rajagopala, Dakshinamurte, Ehi Annapurne, Sri Marubhutam, Thyagaraja Yoga Vaibhavam, Chetasri, all of Dikshitar, O Jagadamba, Durusuga, Marivere Gati, all of Shyama Sastri, Ninu Sevinchina, Venkata Shaila, Janani Ninuvina, of Subbaraya Sastri, a number of major and minor Thyagaraja compositions, a few Gopalakrishna Bharati songs and a few padams and javalis were a few major pieces that we learnt from Mukthamma among several others. More than the pieces, we learnt a unique bhani that gave the utmost importance to slow paced singing, that intoned all the various gamakas, that emphasised on good voice culture and that which emphasised the aesthetic and the sublime in music. Learning from Mukthamma taught us a lot about life. In October 2003, Mukthamma had a fall and stopped teaching thereafter. She was nearing 90.

Brinda and Mukthamma had had darshan of Ramana Maharshi several decades earlier and had sung before him. Thereafter, when we were there, Mukthamma came to the ashram thrice and stayed for a few days each.

Our spiritual growth benefitted a lot from our musical tutelage with Mukthamma as also from personal interactions with her. As with all other disciples, she was very much interested in our personal welfare and would enquire after our progress in our profession when we lived in Madras. She was like an elderly grandmother to us and though she was 93 when she passed into eternity in March 2007, we along with several of her disciples felt orphaned.

On her last journey, Mukthamma's face shone like the sun, but on that day the sun had set on the exquisite Dhanammal empire. For us, her guidance in matters musical as also personal, is always available and shall be cherished forever. For both of us, Mukthamma verily remains, Goddess Saraswati Veena Pustaka Dharini Herself. ■

Update on the 4S tool by Balaji Raghothaman



SRUTI launched a carnatic sahitya visualization tool called 4S (SRUTI Sangita Sahitya Sangraha) in early 2014. The tool, available at www.sruti.org/4S, is an easy way to access lyrics for compositions within a few clicks on a single page. The kirtanas can be accessed alphabetically, but raga, or by melakarta classification. In the first edition, we published all of Saint Tyagaraja's kritis. We are currently working on compositions of Purandara Dasa, and plan to continue with Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastrigal and others. The choice of Purandara Dasa's kritis as the next step was partly in anticipation of his 450th anniversary, which falls in 2015.

We are looking for volunteers on several fronts of this project. We have a streamlined process by which sahitya from different reference sources is converted to a format ready to be inserted into the tool, so that each volunteer can take a set of kritis and perform the task independently at her leisure. We are also looking to enhance the capabilities of the tool. It currently works best on the Chrome browser, passably well in Safari, Firefox, and poorly on Internet Explorer. We would like to stabilize its performance across browsers, and ultimately to provide it as a mobile-compatible tool, perhaps as an app on iOS and Andriod. We are looking for people with expertise on these platforms for help on these issues. Finally, it would be great if we could link the kritis to audio from Sruti concerts, or to get local music teachers and practitioners to sing snippets that can be embedded.

The response to the tool has been lukewarm until now. We attribute this partly to its limitations as discussed above. But there is a lot of potential for it to become a model of a crowd-sourced reference library. We invite SRUTI rasikas to participate as well as support it wholeheartedly. ☺

2014 Spring & Fall Concerts



*Master classes with Ms. Malavika Sarukkai
at Montgomery County Community College (April 2014)*



*Lecture Demonstration by Ms. Malavika Sarukkai
at the Temple Room of the Philadelphia Art Museum (April 2014)*



*Professional Workshop at the Painted Bride, Philadelphia
(April 2014)*



*'Ganga Nitya Vahini' by Malavika Sarukkai at the Annenberg Center
(April 2014)*



2014 Spring & Fall concerts



Sruti Youth Group Update

by Priyanka Dinakar

Thanks to the great lineup of artists performing for Sruti, the Sruti Youth Group (SYG) was able to interview a great selection of musicians. SYG interviewed Shri Madurai R. Sundar, Smt. Sandhya Anand, Vidushi Amritha Murali, and Smt. Gayathri Venkataraghavan, Shri Murugaboopathy and Shri Mysore Srikanth. Each of these very accomplished artists enjoyed highlighting their own personal journeys through the medium of interviews, as they all spoke vibrantly about different facets to music.

Each artist added his or her own personal piece of advice to learning music. Shri Madurai Sundar stressed the importance of memorization of lyrics when singing, as this was a value his gurus instilled in him. Smt. Sandhya sings as well as plays the violin because her mother believed that learning vocal music and an instrument simultaneously was a must.



Vidushi Amritha Murali focused on her journey through Carnatic music by speaking of how she approaches concert planning and how important personal interaction with the guru is. Similarly, the common thread throughout the interview of Smt. Gayathri Venkataraghavan and company was that Carnatic music is an art form that “pulls you in” and that though it may start as an extracurricular activity, the more one practices, the more interested one becomes.

I hope the greater community gained valuable advice and enjoyed the various anecdotes from these interviews. We certainly did! These interviews can be found at the [Sruti Youth Group YouTube Channel](#).



Sruti Youth Group supports the Board in various ways. In addition to interviewing the artists and publishing the recordings on YouTube, we also provide track information for all audio recordings of Sruti concerts; take photographs at events (*some of the pictures appear in this magazine*), as well as emcee the Thyagaraja Aradhana celebrations in March. Two SYG members also helped with the Thyagaraja Chakra Visualization project [*also known as the 4S*] by collecting lyrics of Thyagaraja compositions and grouping them under their respective melakarta janaka ragas.

We look forward to more high schoolers getting involved in SYG in the upcoming year.

Priyanka Dinakar is a high school senior at The Agnes Irwin School in Rosemont, PA. She learns Carnatic Music from Smt. Kiranavali Vidyasankar.

My experiences with Bharatanatyam

Zoe Dana

Zoe Dana, a connoisseur of Indian dance and music, lives in a retirement community in Pennsylvania. She received a Fulbright grant in 1954-55 to study at Kalakshetra for a year. She wrote an article titled 'Hindu dance: A key to ancient India' for the Institute of International Education on her experiences living and studying Bharatanatyam and Kathakali during her year at Kalakshetra. Upon her return from India, she taught dance at the Louisville Collegiate School at Louisville, Kentucky. She also lived for 16 years in Israel. Now, at age 85, she writes poetry and is currently writing a novel based on her life but with a mysterious twist.

Here she shares with SRUTI some of her thoughts and experiences.

When I was nine years old, my mother took me to see the Indian dancer, Uday Shankar, with his entire company. I was entranced! So much so that I decided I must go to India to learn this beautiful dance.

I finally got there at age twenty-five in 1954. I had received a Fulbright Grant for one year, to study Bharata Natyam at Kalakshetra, when Rukmini Devi was still in charge and very active. I was there for one year and became a devotee of Bharata Natyam and of Kathakali, which I did not learn, but spent many hours watching at the Kathakali Hut, a part of Kalakshetra.

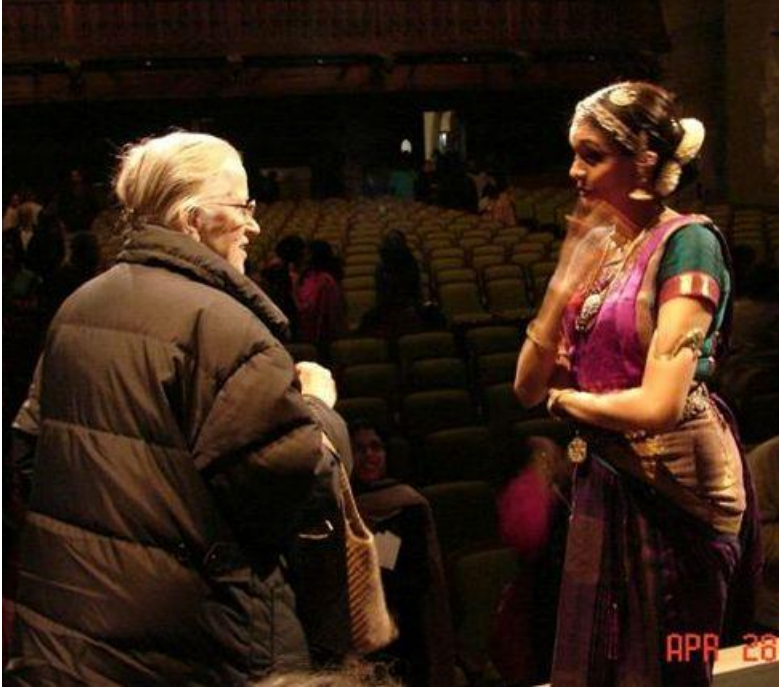


[Excerpt from Hindu Dance: A key to ancient India:

Ashan in the language of Malabar means Guru. It was through the Ashan of Kalashetra, Chandu Pannikar that I came to get a deep feeling of the past and the reality of Indian culture. Ashan reached his eightieth birthday while I was there. He taught a dance for men from the Malabar Coast so I really only observed his classes. Although he spoke no English, when I came to know him a little, it seemed to me that he more than anyone else there had given himself up completely to his art and religion. He was in a sense a symbol of classic belief and dedication and therefore absolutely humble.

I know now that I was not wrong in my feeling that if I wanted to understand the art of India I must live in India. The whole pace of Indian life is different from ours. I lived with a Hindu family not far from the school. Each day I would arise at five-thirty, practice Kathakali eye exercises (the early morning is an auspicious time in India), then join the family for breakfast. At seven-fifteen, I bicycled to Kalakshetra and began my first class, a private lesson in Bharata natyam. At eight-fifteen all the students and faculty met in the central college for prayers. The classes were all held in small, thatched-roof huts with stone or hard composition floors. The regular classes began at 8.30 when I joined the beginners dance class for the next hour and a half. My last morning lesson was in either vocal music or natyam theory, a study of the hand positions and their meanings. After this, I went home to lunch. In the afternoon I would return to school for a language class or to observe the kathakali classes...]

Many years later, when I had moved to the Philadelphia area, I went to a dance program in Upper Darby, given by Shoba Sharma and her pupils. I was delighted since this was the same technique I had



Zoe Dana with dancer Priyadarsini Govind in 2012

learned at Kalakshetra. I got in touch with Shoba that same evening. She invited me to attend a special all day program of Beginnings. This included all of her students of all ages, starting with the beginners. I met many mothers there, and later one mother, Sundari Balakrishnan.

She and I became close friends. She told me of this organization SRUTI that presented music and dance concerts in the Philadelphia area. She took me to many performances of Bharata Natyam despite her having to get there early to help with the arrangements, tickets, etc., when the performance was under the auspices of SRUTI. Sundari also took me to many dance classes, which I loved watching.

Now, Sundari and her husband, Balu, have returned to India, and I really miss them. Nevertheless, I found a new friend, Raji, who helps me find rides to SRUTI dance performances.

Since I am now eighty-five, I cannot always attend performances, but when I can, I am in Heaven!



Malavika Sarukkai – Excerpts from
‘The Unseen Sequence’ (Prepared for SRUTI)

Ganga: Nitya Vaahini (The Eternal River) Review by Carolyn Merritt

The culmination of Malavika Sarukkai's Philadelphia residency, *Ganga: Nitya Vaahini (The Eternal River)* was a magnificent union of tradition and modernity, the sacred and the profane, body and spirit. While the traditional themes of Bharatanatyam center on Hindu myths, Sarukkai famously extends the form to treat current topics like environmental degradation. In *Ganga*, the river is symbol, image, and metaphor – the site where earthly concerns of ecological stewardship meet eternal questions of Hindu philosophy.

Two shimmering swaths of fabric hung vertically, a moving backdrop that framed center stage. White at the outset, they changed color throughout the piece as water would, under light, pollution, human intervention. Band members sat stage left, warming their instruments and the black space until a voiceover softly conjured devotees, acts of praise, two rivers meeting. As the darkness subsided, Sarukkai appeared between the fabric – in chemise, pants, and pleated skirt blue as the ocean, arms raised like soccer posts, left hip jut sideways, seated in a deep plié, back erect – weighted as the stone sculptures she danced to life just days earlier. The music's call set her hips to motion in a gentle sway, circled out wrists, set fingers



twirling until they released amidst a frenzied flutter. Rippling arms became the two rivers, their paths a curving serpent as hands rolled from chest out into to space, suggesting infinity with each side stretch.

A master shapeshifter, Sarukkai transformed before our eyes, evoking eternal waters, a courtesan's amorous reverie, a river's lament, the ecstasy of union. For those less familiar with the form, these characterizations were aided by voiceover introductions preceding each of the four sections. The courtesan's memories incarnate, she awoke in a pool whose scent we inhaled with her luxurious breath, stroked arms through undulating currents, splashed her face with sacred waters. Sweet guitar sounds arose from her strumming fingers, enticing the audience like a lover. As the river lamenting her modern degradation, she hid her face in shame, wiped tears and denounced forces of contamination, shook her head in memory.

Marrying sections of narrative and “pure” dance, Sarukkai linked the earthly and the sacred. Like the river's journey across landscapes to meet the ocean, life is a journey in search of the spiritual – a movement towards the eternal. The river and the seeker, she plunged into the waters, dropped to knees in offering, burrowed in the fabric, beseeched their cleansing powers. Lights turned her turquoise form to shimmering

rain, arms shifted like tectonic plates to prayer position overhead, her eyes wide in fervor, a smile of disbelief. That smile turned ecstatic as Sarukkai devolved into ever softer rotating ball changes, her being slowly folding into union.

Residency advisor Hari Krishnan (World Dance Artist-in-Residence at Wesleyan University) prefaced the post-performance Q&A by positioning Malavika Sarukkai within the broader history of Bharatanatyam. Describing Sarukkai as “a conduit between multiple timelines” and a “dancer with deep reverence for the past who dances for the present,” he opposed her to Bharatanatyam’s “postcolonial body” of the 1930s and 1940s, when the form was reinvented for global consumption, heavily influenced by the Bolshoi Ballet. “A new global dancing body,” she strips, deconstructs, and realigns the form’s alphabet, creating works that are at once accessible and contemporary yet grounded in the traditional vocabulary.

In response to questions by Krishnan and curator Lisa Kraus, Sarukkai spoke of dance as relationship, both with the musicians and with the art form, where mastery gives way to play. Responding to audience comments, she clarified the intensity of Bharatanatyam – grounded less in active energy than meditative power, and reflected on the meaning of deep practice, through which the dancer internalizes the form so fully the body becomes a vessel for something more profound than the physical. Rejecting the label “hybrid,” Sarukkai reiterated her commitment to the traditional vocabulary of Bharatanatyam; her works might feature new words, but the integral grammar and central goal remain. “I am a dancing monk,” she said, “stripping away the decorative, to reach the essential.”

Carolyn holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from Temple University and a B.A. in French and Spanish from Trinity College (CT). She is currently Lecturer in Anthropology at Bryn Mawr College. Carolyn Merritt assisted with written documentation for SRUTI’s Malavika Sarukkai events this year.



“...The mesmerizing magic of Malavika that transported me to a different place. What an amazing opportunity for the students to learn from a stalwart and an equally amazing opportunity to watch her teach. A wonderful way to inspire the next generation of dancers...”

32 Ragas *by K. V. Ramaprasad*

Whenever I listen to certain Indian flautists like Hariprasad Chaurasia or S.Shashank, I hear a thur-thur-thur sound in the way they blow. This normally happens at the drut – or fast phrases. I have no better way of describing it! Listen to this short recording of Hariprasad Chaurasia on youtube titled, “Hariprasad Chaurasia in France”. You can distinctly hear the sound I am indicating by the phrase thur-thur-thur at several places. As just couple of examples, I would mark around the the 2 min 25 second, and 5 min 6 second mark, just to tell you what I am talking about.

I was thinking this was a novelty of some flautists (because I do not think every flautist uses such a technique). That was only until I came across a song that was written more than five centuries ago! Oh boy, how wrong our inferences could be!

This is a song written by Purandara Dasa, acknowledged as a pioneer in Karnataka Sangeetha. The title of this blog happens to be the opening line (pallavi) of one of his songs. It goes like this:

Tutturu toorendu battisa raagagaLannu chittaja janaka tanna koLalallUdidanu

"Krishna, the father of Manmatha, played 32 raagas on his flute with a sound of 'thur-thur-thur' "

Now do you see why I said this technique could not be all that new? Krishna is described by Purandara as playing his flute this way. Nobody has seen Krishna playing his flute. But Purandara must have seen other flautists around his time (1480 AD – 1564 AD) producing such sounds on their flutes, and this of course, he has attributed to Krishna. So far so good.

This song is also significant in other ways. Purandara dasa is said to have composed hundreds of thousands of compositions. Now, we have just over a thousand of his compositions available. Although Purandara Dasa is called as the “pitamaha of Karnataka sangIta”, most of his original tunes are lost. There is little information available on how many of his compositions were sung. However, being the musician he was, some of his compositions talk about various musical aspects, although indirectly. And this song, *tutturu toorendu*, is one of them.

For a long time, Indian music was supposed to have 32 major rAgas. This has showed up even prior to Purandara dAsa. Basavanna, a social reformer from Karnataka (1134-1196 AD) has this in one of his vachanas (saying):

ಎನ್ನ ಕಾಯವ ದಂಡಿಗೈಯ ಮಾಡಯ್ಯ
ಎನ್ನ ಶಿರವ ಸೋರೆಯ ಮಾಡಯ್ಯ
ಎನ್ನ ನರಗಳ ತಂತಿಯ ಮಾಡಯ್ಯ
ಬತ್ತೀಸ ರಾಗವ ಹಾಡಯ್ಯ
ಉರದಲೊತ್ತಿ ಬಾರಿಸು ಕೂಡಲಸಂಗಮದೇವ!

Here is the text transliterated:

enna kAyava daMDigeya mADayya
enna shirava sOreya mADayya
enna naragaLa tantiya mADayya
battIsa rAgava hADayya
uradalotti bArisu kUDalasangama dEva

And here it is translated:

Make my body the fretboard,
Make my head resonator
Make my nerves into the strings
Sing thirtytwo rAgas
Play intensely, Oh koodalasangama dEva!

It is the same 32 raagas which Purandara dasa refers to in this song “tutturu toorendu’ too. – “Krishna played 32 rAgas”. (battIs = 32). However, he does not list out all the 32 raagas in this song. How unfortunate for us?

(Koodala sangama – A place at the confluence of Krishna and Malaprabha rivers in Karnataka)

First, let us see what he says in one of the stanzas of tutturu toorendu:

ಗೌಳ ನಾಟಿ ಆಹೇರಿ ಗುರ್ಜರಿ ಮಾಳವಿ ಸಾರಂಗ ರಾಗ ಕೇಳಿ ರಮಣಿಯರತಿ ದೂರದಿಂದ
ಫಲಮಂಜರಿ ಗೌಳಿ ದೇಶಾಕ್ಷಿ ರಾಗಗಳನು ನಳಿನನಾಭನು ತನ್ನ ಕೊಳಲಲೂದಿದನು
gouLa nATi AhEri gurjari mALavi sAranga rAga kELi ramaNiyarati dUradinda
phalamanjari gauLi dEshAkSi rAgangaLanu naLinanAbhanu tanna koLalalUdidanu

“When the maidens from listening from afar, the one with a lotus in his navel, played raagas like gouLa, nATi, AhEri, gurjari, mALavi, sAranga, phalamanjari, gouLi and dEshAkShi”

So, we have the following 9 distinct rAgas listed in this song. However, it falls short of the required 32!

1. gouLa	6. sAranga
2. nATi	7. phalamanjari
3. AhEri	8. gouLi
4. gurjari	9. dEshakshi
5. mALavi	

Luckily for us, there are at least two other songs (that I know of) in which he lists out some of the raagas (melodies) that were vogue in his time.

Here is a stanza from another song that starts as ನಳಿನಜಾಂಡ ತಲೆಯ ತೂಗಿ – “naLinajANDa taleya toogi”:

ಮಾರವಿ ದೇಶಿ ಗುರ್ಜರಿ ಭೈರವಿ ಗೌಳಿ ನಾಟಿ ಸಾವೇರಿ ಆಹೇರಿ ಪೂರ್ವಿ
ಕಾಂಭೋಜಿ ಪಾಡಿ ದೇಶಾಕ್ಷೀ ಶಂಕರಾಭರಣ ಮಾಳವ
ವರಾಳಿ ಕಲ್ಯಾಣಿ ತೋಡಿ ಮುಖಾರಿಯರಳಿ ವಸಂತ ಬೌಳಿ ಧನ್ಯಾಸಿ
ಸೌರಾಷ್ಟ್ರ ಗುಂಡಕ್ರಿಯ ರಾಮಕ್ರಿಯ ಮೇಘ ಕುರಂಜಿಯು ಪಾಡಲು ನೋಡಿ!
mAravi dEshi gurjari bhairavi gauLi nATi sAvEri AhEri pUrvi
kAmbhOji pADi dEshAkSi shankarAbharaNa mALava
varALi kalyANi tODi mukhAriyaraLi vasanta bauLi dhanyAsi
saurASTra guMDakriya rAmakriya mEgha kuranjiyu pADalu nODi

Now, let me list out the rAgas from here, discounting the ones that have been listed before:

10. mAravi	15. kAmbhOji	23. vasanta
11. dEshi	16. pADi	24. bouLi
<i>gurjari</i>	<i>dEshAkshi</i>	25. dhanyAsi
12. bhairavi	17. shankarAbharaNa	26. sourAShTra
<i>gauLi</i>	18. mALava	27. guMDakriya
<i>nATi</i>	19. varALi	28. rAmakriya
13. sAvEri	20. kalyANi	29. mEgha
<i>AhEri</i>	21. tODi	30. kuranji
14. pUrvi	22. mukhAri	

Whew! We are so close to the magical number 32!

Now, to conclude, here is a stanza from the last song – which starts as ಅಂಗನೆಯರೆಲ್ಲರು ನೆರೆದು –
‘anganeyarellaru neredu’

ಪಾಡಿ ಮಲಹರಿ ಭೈರವಿ ಸಾರಂಗ ದೇಶಿ ಗುಂಡಕ್ರಿಯ ಗುರ್ಜರಿ ಕಲ್ಯಾಣಿ ರಾಗದಿ ತಂಡ
ತಂಡದಲಿ ನೆರೆದು ರಂಗನ ಉಡಿಯ ಘಂಟೆ ಘಣ್ ಘಣ್ ಘಣಿರೆಂದು ಹಿಡಿದು ಕುಣಿಸುವರು

pADi malhAri bhairavi sAranga dEsi guMDakriya gurjari kalyANi rAgadi taMDa
taMadali neredu rangana uDiya ghaNTe ghaN ghaN ghaN ghNirendu hiDidu kuNisuvuru

If you look carefully, you will notice there is only one name that has not appeared before:

31. Malahari

So, the internal evidence from these compositions is giving a list of 31 rAgas (probably out of the legendary 32 – this is but my speculation) that were in vogue in the 15th-16th centuries. The set of 32 rAgas was not a static list, and over the centuries, new rAgas gained popularity, and some went outdated. The evidence from these three compositions also shows that the rAga kalyANi, was adopted by composers like Purandara Dasa, although the text writers continued to shoo it away because of its foreign origins, and kept saying that the rAga is not fit for compositions for another two centuries!

But the golden rule in Music is “*If it is melodious, it stays*“. Kalyani has passed the test of time. Composers who came in the 18th-19th centuries explored all facets of this rAga, and today it has become one of the major rAgas of Karnataka Sangeetha.

K.V. Ramaprasad is a blogger and writes on topics musical and non-musical under his assumed names 'Hamsanandi' and 'Neelanjana'. He has a publication, "Hamsanada", a collection of translated verses from Samskrta to his credit. He has written and staged a few Kannada plays in the San Francisco Bay Area.

An Ode to my Guru – Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai by Meenakshi Chitharanjan

“To Meenakshi capturing the essence of the Pandanallur style perpetuating & preserving its unique grandeur & beauty, has become a mission, a passion – a way of life”



How did this happen? As a 4 year old I was taken to the illustrious Pandanallur Guru Chockalingam Pillai and his son Guru Subbaraya Pillai to learn Bharatanatyam by my mother Smt Savithri Sabanayagam. Their dance school was in a Corporation scholl beneath the Egmore bridge. My first memory is holding my nose when I entered as the school toilets were at the entrance – shutting my ears as the sound of the trains passing by created a racket, but my eyes were wide open watching many children dancing. Like the lotus that blooms radiant in muddy waters one of the most purest and beautiful styles of Bharatanatyam was being taught here by very simple and yet great masters belonging to the illustrious lineage of the Tanjore Quartet.

As soon as the Corporation School gave over at 3.30 pm, the main classroom benches would be piled to the side, the masters would supervise the Sweeping and class would start at 4 pm. Chockalingam Pillai was known as Peria (Big)

Master & Subbarayan Pillai as Chinna (Small) Master.

When we entered the school at 4 pm we had to first pass Big Master who would be seated on a Bench (Thinnai) outside the classroom – with his walking stick and chewing betel leaves. He would greet every chile – tick them off if they were late – enquire, if they had eaten idlis & drank their milk etc. Small Master would be taking the adaivu classes and big Master would come in a little later and both would conduct

classes which would go on until 8 pm as the seniors came in. They taught with great dedication and commitment to the art – gave it with so much generosity laced with the choicest of abuses & witty remarks.

After 5 years of training under them my father, P Sabanayagam was transferred to Delhi. He approached Chockalingam Pillai and requested him to conduct my Arangetram before I left Madras. Chockalingam Pillai agreed on the condition I be left behind for 6 months for rigorous training before the Arangetram. My parents agreed and I stayed back with my grand mother Smt Padmavathy Ammal. Classes were both morning and evening 7days a week. My grand mother armed with chocolates for me and coffee for the masters took me religiously to the intensive classes. Very soon Chockalingam Pillai fell ill and wanted to rest in Pandanallur. Before leaving he entrusted me in the hands of Subbaraya Pillai and said “I have given my word to Mr P Sabanayagam to have her ready in 6 months; make sure I can honour my commitment”

In this context I am truly the 1st independent charge of Subbaraya Pillai. The responsibility of being entrusted solely with a student, the want to prove his ability to his father and gain his approval and the enthusiasm to create his own choreography made Subbaraya Pillai work on me with great **fervour**. When **the D day** was approaching Chockalingam Pillai came from Pandanallur and after witnessing my rehearsals nodded his head in approval and beamed with his toothless grin and china Master and student heaved a sigh of relief at having passed the test.

He was active for a few more years and passed away and I came under the tutelage of Subbaraya Pillai for the next 25 years of my life.

He learnt directly under his grandfather Meenakshisundaram Pillai and his father Chockalingam Pillai. Along with his forefathers he taught and conducted the performances of great dancers like Pandanallur Jayalakshmi, Rukmani Devi, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Ramgopal, Indrani Rehman. Subbaraya Pillai was extremely tradition bound and reluctant to make any changes. He believed small changes lead to big changes and very soon the form will be lost. However he never tired of creating many new versions of old composition which helped in maintaining novelty and freshness to the items.

His unique talent was in composing Nritta patterns. In this area his creativity flowed with so many complex, intricate and interwoven patterns of movement. He never composed by working arithmetically with the tala. He would just sing the melody, while wielding the stick and simultaneously created patterns which would just fall into place with the music. Music and movement merged effortlessly which was a joy to watch. He always remarked that music and movement should walk together hand in hand like lovers in a park.

In the field of abhinaya he strongly advocated minimalist approach – clarity in thought and subtlety in expression - do little to convey a lot effectively. No frills – fancies – story telling and drama. When questioned they would always say “the art form had seen bad times and just been revived and children

from good backgrounds were coming forward to learn. It is the duty of teacher to maintain high level of dignity and restraint. However he also believed with age & experience the dancer could then explore & develop ideas with certain maturity.

As a person he was very simple in habit and disciplined in his diet which I think was responsible for his good health, well-being until the age of 94. He was never commercial and the fee structure was just nominal for him to lead an adequate life. The only thing they insisted was being treated with respect, insist on their name being bolder and bigger than the student! And make sure of a reserved seat on the train when travelling!

He had strong principles and would never accept a another guru's student or take back a student who had gone to any other nattuvanar or guru. He taught me all that he knew and all that I know today and took pride in my progress. When I started my dance school 'Kaladiksha' he inaugurated and blessed and wished me success - when I conducted my first arangetram he attended and blessed me by handing me the talam (cymbals). He was a proud teacher when I got the Kalaimamani and Nritya Choodamani awards. My last visit to see him was when I got the Padmashri early this year and went to honour him and take his blessings. He was very happy and kept talking of the past and my coming to him when I was 9 yrs old with my grandmother!

My life as a dancer under him had come a full circle with only enriching memorable and grateful memories.

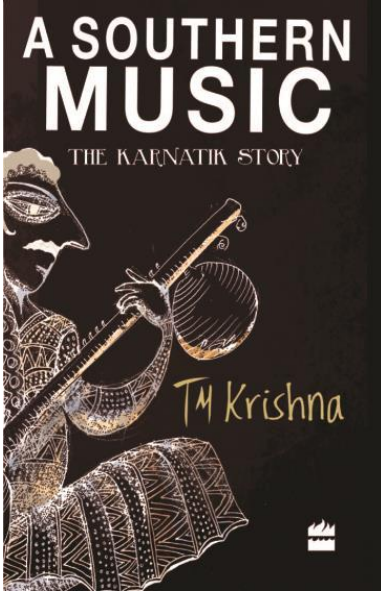
He gave me my roots in dance
Equipped me with wings to fly
And rejoiced to see me soar high
What more can a student seek from a Guru
I am indeed blessed.

Meenakshi Chitharanjan is a renowned Bharatanatyam dancer, teacher and a choreographer of Pandanallur style at Chennai and a recipient of many prestigious awards including NrityaChoodamani, Kalaimamani, Natya Selvam, Natya Ilavarasi and the "Padma Shri", which she received from the President of India in January 2008.



“A Southern Music – The Karnatic Story” by T.M. Krishna ***Book Review by Balaji Raghothaman***

[Editor’s note: Shri T.M. Krishna has been declared the winner of the Tata Literature Live! First Book Award in the non-fiction category for this book. This was announced on November 2, 2014.]



Over the past two decades, Sri T.M.Krishna has emerged as one of Carnatic music’s most talented exponents as well as one of its pre-eminent scholars, indeed one of the standard bearers of the art. It is gratifying that he has chosen to pour his ruminations on the art form into a book. In writing *A Southern Music – The Karnatic Story*, Mr. Krishna has put on many different hats – a philosopher, historian, musicologist, social anthropologist, critic and commentator. The result is a work of great importance. In this age of instant publishing, few works rise above the level of noise, but this one does that and more, and qualifies as a landmark.

T.M.Krishna has sought to provide a few different things in his book – a detailed primer on the ingredients that go into creating carnatic music, a thoroughly researched treatise on the origins and evolution of carnatic music, and an unrelenting and heartfelt critique on the current state of the art. Krishna manages to weave these distinct threads together, but we need to separate them out for the purpose of the review.

The first two aspects of the book show an extraordinary amount of scholarship as well as hard work expended in the pursuit of the same. One can easily foresee these portions of his book becoming standard textbook and reference material for many years to come. Krishna brings an academician’s rigor to his writing. He states his assumptions, provides his analysis and his conclusions with great clarity. He begins at the beginning, by asking questions such as “what is music”, “what is art”, and attempts to find carnatic music’s place in this framework. He then goes on to enunciate the building blocks of the art form. His explanations of the *svara* vs. *svarasthana*, of the centrality of *gamaka*, and his treatment of the importance of organic phraseology in *ragas* vs a synthetic cobbling of *svaras*, are worth the time spent reading, even for those already knowledgeable. He talks at length about the deficiencies of looking at *ragas* through a *melakarta* lens, and of trying to understand them through just their *arohanam* /*avarohanam*. There is also a detailed description of *tala* and *laya*, of the interplay between *matu* and *dhatu*, the role of *sahitya*, the interaction between the pre-composed and the *manodharma* aspects of the rendering, etc.

One quality of his writing bears mention here, which is my opinion is its greatest strength in contrast to many other tutorial works - he never assumes any prior knowledge on the part of the reader, and explains carnatic terms in a fashion that is understandable by someone not familiar with the art. It is not written in an insider’s language. That is not to say that it is written in layman’s terms – far from it. He deals in

sophisticated concepts that cannot be written in a *Carnatic for Dummies* format. But it is written so that it can be grasped by an intelligent and musically curious person, but someone unfamiliar with this particular art, or with the cultural aspects that inform it. If carnatic music wants to appeal to a broader audience and attract the attention of critical and discerning music-lovers from other genres, books like these could serve as important ambassadors. One drawback I felt while reading through this section however, is that the textual descriptions, however illustrative, could be aided a great deal by an accompanying audio track, a feature that is easily within the grasp of current technology.

The section on the history of carnatic music presents a detailed study of the origins of the raga and the tala as we know it today, taking us on a walk through gandharva, gana, deshi music of the north and the Tamil Pann tradition from the south, with extensive references to Sangita Ratnakara, Dattilam, Natya Sashtra, Silappadigaram, Chaturdandi Prakashika and other literary sources. Based on his reading of these texts, he makes several illuminating inferences regarding the evolution of the sruti and svara concepts, as well as the change in meanings of several carnatic terms. The bottomline is that the carnatic musical form as it is recognizable today, has existed only for about 400 years, and the occurrence of many of the same or similar terminology in 1000-year old texts should not be construed as proof of its antiquity. There is a clear traceable evolutionary path, but what exists today is very distinct from what existed a millennium ago.



T.M.Krishna also delves into the sociological and other aspects connected with the history of carnatic music, including the role of Bharatanatyam, the connection to Hindustani music (though this part would have been better placed in the purely musicological section), the role of religion, and modern developments such as fusion and film music.

The last, but by no means the least, interspersed throughout the book are the author's opinions on many of the facets of carnatic music – the kutcheri format, the role of accompaniments, the religious nature of sahitya, to name a few. His views on these subjects have caused controversy, as is expected, but he himself has stated in various interviews that his intention was to start this debate. The author clearly takes his role as a steward of the art form seriously, and I take most of his opinions as being in pursuit of that role.

With regard to the kutcheri format, his main contention is that we do not need such a rigid format and should allow for flexibility that enables the underlying music to shine. Another of his important contentions is that a carnatic concert is a serious art-music affair, and it is not necessary to 'lighten' the mood of the rasika with 'filler' music in the form of under-developed renderings and so-called tukkadas adjacent to the heavy pieces.

However, perhaps the most provocative of his opinions are the ones regarding the role of religiosity, which is tied to the role of sahitya in carnatic music. There is some element of contradiction here, which

I feel is unresolvable, and the author explains his struggles on this front with admirable honesty. On the one hand, it is true that art music must stand by itself and be able to connect emotionally without the aid of the meaning of the sahitya - for example, the raga alapana can (the author would say should) evoke as deep an emotional chord as the kriti rendering that follows, as both are different manifestations of the same raga. But at the same time the lyrics are not just phonetic devices - they do carry meaning, poetic beauty and mysticism. The music is the product of the cultural milieu, and whether we like it or not, bhakti was the prime driver being all the major composers who advanced the art form.

T.M.Krishna's stated desire to "seek bhakti, but to the aesthetics of the music and not to Gods and goddesses" might cause (indeed, have caused) much criticism, but it gets to one of the root questions that many of us have asked with respect to our relation to this art. Moreover, it is an especially relevant question for the younger generation of musicians growing up outside of India, who do not necessarily possess the cultural or religious context, but still create fabulous carnatic music.

Balaji Raghothaman is a member of the Sruti Publications and Outreach Committee. He lives in Chester Springs, PA with his wife and two children.

Concert Review of Smt. Gayathri Venkatraghavan for SRUTI by P. Sivakumar

Smt. Gayathri Venkatraghavan gave an entertaining concert for SRUTI on the evening of Nov 1, 2014. She was accompanied on the violin by Mysore Sri Srikant, on the Mridangam by Tanjore Sri Murugaboopathi and on the Kanjira by Sri Sriram Natarajan.



Gayathri is blessed with a vibrant and resonant voice and her concert truly showcased her ability to seamlessly traverse through the low and high octaves. She started off with a Slokam in Bhairavi (Shree Kantho) that forayed into a wonderfully rendered "Viribhoni" varnam setting the tone for the concert.

Murugaboopathi's anticipatory touches and deft arithis after the anupallavi and charanam in the varnam were noteworthy. This was followed by Bhadrachala Ramadasa's Saveri krithi, Amma Nannu Brovave. Gayathri then chose Devamanohari for a raga exposition that drew ample appreciation from the crowd. The kriti chosen was "Evarikai" in misra chappu, where Thyagaraja salutes the person responsible

for Sri Rama's incarnation (the great Harikatha exponent TS Balakrishna Sastrigal describes that the Saint implies Ravana as the main reason for the incarnation of the Supreme Lord).

Following this was a sedate rendition of Shyama Shastri's Thodi Swarajathi, "Rave Himagiri". Nenarunchi in "Malavi" was a refreshing change of pace and provided a joyful playing field for the percussionists. "Rama Rama" in Simhendra Madhyamam came next, where the tantalizing neraval and swaram at "Muni Manasa" had the audience captivated. Gayathri's handling of Papanasam Sivan's evergreen number, "Nambi Kettavar" in Hindolam was quite splendid and well aligned with the bhava of the ragam/lyrics.

The main piece of the concert was a Ragam Tanam Pallavi in Arabhi – a connoisseur's delight! The ragam and tanam were rendered at a leisurely pace and it was interesting to note Srikant trying to up the ante by responding with a faster tempo. The pallavi (Kadhir Vadivela Unadhu Padam Thunaiye) was as complex as it could get – set to khanda thiriputai thalam in khanda nadai with eduppu 4 after – Gayathri mentioned that the pallavi was inspired by the famous duo of yesteryears, the Alathur Brothers.

In an attempt to innovate, Gayathri and Srikant took up different ragas during the ragamaliga swaram exchange – the former going with Varamu and Vaasanthi and the latter responding with Saramathi and Abheri. The tani in such a complex talam did not seem to intimidate Murugaboopathi one bit, as he responded with some wonderfully structured solkattus and korvais. Sriram Natarajan provided able support on the Kanjira, inspired by the presence of his Guru by his side. Mysore Srikant shadowed Gayathri effectively and was impressive in his raga expositions and swaram responses. The "thukkadas" portion of the concert was equally enthralling – "Kandu Dhanyana" in Behag was sung soulfully followed by a virutham in Ranjani and Khamas. This was a nice segue into "Idathu Padam" with the percussionists providing some nice vibes at the "thiruvadi chathangaigal" thisram phrase. Upon audience request, Gayathri sang a bhajan "Jo achuthananda" in Kapi before concluding with a mangalam. All in all, it was a finely packaged and fulfilling concert.

Dr. Pitchumani Sivakumar is an ardent classical music lover and mridangam teacher in King of Prussia, PA.

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An Interview with Vidwan Tiruvarur Vaidyanathan
by P. Sivakumar & Balaji Raghothaman



Tiruvarur Vaidyanathan is one of the pre-eminent mridangam players of this generation. He has been playing from a very young age and has accompanied a wide cross-section of Carnatic stalwarts, including Smt. M.L. Vasanthakumari, Sri Balamuralikrishna, Sri N. Ramani, Sri T.N. Krishnan, Sudha Raghunathan etc., the list goes on. He is also a very passionate teacher, who is intent on passing on the art. Pitchumani Sivakumar and Balaji Raghothaman spoke at length to Sri Vaidyanathan on behalf of SRUTI. Here is a lightly edited transcript of the interview, translated from Tamil. The audio can be accessed using the QR code at the end of the article.

Q: Can you tell us about your early upbringing, introduction to music, especially the mridangam?

A: When I was 6 years old, my grandfather Tiruvarur Kunju Iyer Rajagopala Iyer taught me Adi talam and I was able to repeat it correctly. Impressed, he started teaching me regularly. Within 6 months, I was playing Adi, Misrachapu, Kandacapu, Rupaka, and other talas. In those days, there was no media, no distractions, only a mridangam and someone always at hand to sing, so I was able to focus. I had my arangetram at the Sengalipuram Temple's Dattatreya Jayanti Utsavam. I received a sambhavane (remuneration) of Rs.2/. My thatha (grandfather) was my moola guru. In 1971, on Vaikunta Ekadasi day, I accompanied him as he played for a Radha kalyanam, and after the deeparadhana, he breathed his last right there on stage on his mridangam, with others singing namasankeertanam around him.

Q: You have accompanied a couple of generations of artists – MLV, BMK, Aruna Sairam, Sudha Raghunathan, TMKrishna, Sanjay Subramaniam, etc. How has the mridangam technique evolved over this time? Do you do anything different for the artists of today?

A: After my initial training, I learnt under Sri Karaikudi Mani in Madras. Then I joined Smt. Kanyakumari's Vadya Lahari, where I played with Sri Srimushnam Raja Rao and Mannargudi Easwaran. These three great people have helped me a lot. I took a lot of techniques from them and adapted them to my hands.

I have played for Trichur Ramachandran and Charumani Ramachandran, then for MLV, then Sudha Raghunathan, also D.K. Pattammal. In general, during the tani avartanam, I used Karaikudi Mani's style, and during the kirtanas, I drew inspiration from S. Raja Rao and M. Easwaran's techniques. Each artist has his or her own pace of singing. Smt. Pattammal sang at a medium speed, while MLV, Sudha, Trichur

Ramachandran was fast paced. One had to adapt to their pace. K. Mani gave me good advice about the need to think about whom I will be playing for that day, and practice at the anticipated speed of the concert.

I use a lot of Sarvalaghu (repeat phrases such as “thath dhin dhin na” or “thakathadhimi thadhimi” used to follow the song). It usually requires some discipline and control of mind to play sarvalaghu, and curb the desire to play more solkattus. For example, after a pallavi, at the start of anupallavi (sings marugelara as example), if we play fast solkattus in a G/G# pitch, then the sound is kind of grating, whereas if we play sarvalaghu there, it is pleasing to the ears and comfortable to the artist too. Over the years, I have earned the name “Sarvalaghu Vaithi” for this characteristic of my mridangam play.

Q: Should mridangam players stick to one bani, or is it ok to mix styles?

A: Banis used to exist in the old times, but there has been a lot of mixture within the banis. My view is that we should play in whichever style that is suited to our hands, and makes for a pleasing experience. I will not dare to say which bani is better. There is a ‘kai-vagu’ (felicity of the hand), and also there is a ‘mridanga-vagu’ (felicity of the instrument), and they should come together. Let the listener decide which bani. As far as I am concerned, pleasing the listener is the key.

Q: How do you develop the skill of anticipation during a song rendition? Should the mridangam player know the song beforehand?

A: I advise my students to listen to many concerts. You listen to different singers sing the same song, and put it together with the techniques they have learned and come up with the best technique. Students today seem to be adept at this. Parents play a key role by making sure the kids listen to a lot of music, at home, in the car, etc. In our days, we used to go to venues to listen to kutcheris. This is not given to kids in America in general, but the Cleveland festival is an exception – Kids get a chance to listen to a lot of vidwans in one place. Live is best, if not, listen to a lot of audio, video. Be indiscriminate in listening, then you can grasp lots of techniques. I am very impressed with the kids in America in this respect.

Q: RTPs are a tough test of skill. They involve complicated nadai, eduppu, korvai. Do you rehearse for these ahead of time or play spontaneously?

A: First, I will describe an episode. In 1992, in Singapore Sivan Koil Kumbabhishekam, I played the mridangam for all the concerts, two days in a row. Nedunuri Krishnamurthi Mama was one of them. In preparatory conversations he had told me he would give me the tani for a misrachapu number with eduppu 4-after, and I had prepared accordingly, but then during the kutcheri, he changed his mind, and asked me to play for a new and complicated number. The pallavi was in tisrajati jhampa talam, kanda nadai with eduppu 4-after. He asked me to play tani for that. The reason I was able to manage was my long period of interactions with Palghat Raghu and mannargudi easwaran – both were excellent in the math surrounding percussion, and during our long train rides to various concerts, we used to talk about techniques and the math. I gained the ability to come up with solkattus for any tala. I try to teach the same kind of technique

to my students. I make them self-sufficient that way, so they can handle any situation. In terms of RTP, my advice again is to listen to a lot of such numbers. You can make solkattus ahead of time after listening to the pallavi. Once you learn a few, then you can respond to any situation.

Another important skill is the ability to play ‘mohara/korvai’ for any talam. Whichever tala we are given, (chatusra jati jhampa talam misra nadai for example...), we need to calculate in our mind and come up with the mohara korvai for the talam. Once we develop this skill, playing RTP becomes easier.

Chengalpattu Ranganathan was once giving a lec dem, and Sri Lalgudi Jayaraman was in front row. For a particular number, the artist was not displaying his tala explicitly, so I had to understand by myself. I guessed correctly that it was a sankeernam he was aiming for. Lalgudi complimented me, and then I felt the pressure on me easing. Such anticipation and understanding comes with experience.

Q: Hindustani, jugalbandi, fusion – does mridangam adapt, or is it mainly a carnatic instrument?

A: I have a band called ‘vibrations’, where we play fusion. I have also played many jugalbandis. When one plays alongside a tabla, there is a lot of give and take. When the tabla artist plays a sarvalaghu, the mridangam artist can improvise, and vice versa. As long as you know your surroundings and what is being played, you can do well. I am currently playing with a western artist percussion along with Sudha raghunathan for an album. I think Mridngam is suited ideally for several genres of music, not just for carnatic. Cinema music has a lot of mridngam. The mridanga’s nadam is very much liked around the world – especially the chappu. It is Lord Nandikeshwarar’s instrument. If used correctly it can be suited for many situations.

Q: Is there more importance for the main artist in kutcheri and not enough for the mridangam vidwan? If so, how do you retain the interest of the audience?

A: I do not agree that mridangam is sidelined. Nowadays there is a lot of importance for us. Moreover, it is up to the artist to attract the audience. We need to start at a high quality and level of playing right at the beginning of the concert, at the varnam stage – then the audience feels compelled to pay attention. I feel that in my concert, people in fact stay especially for the tani avartanam.

Q: You conduct a lot of Skype classes – do you feel that a lack of physical interaction reduces the effectiveness of these classes and affects the students?

A: I expect that the student have learned the basics in person from a teacher already. If not, then I would make sure that I start the student’s training in person when I travel to the US, and then continue over Skype. I have developed several technology-oriented tools and materials that enable students to learn through Skype, including documents, recordings etc., which makes it easier for them to grasp and put things in perspective.

Q: How would you rate the quality of students outside India, in the US, UK, etc.?

A: I would say that kids outside India are equally if not more involved in music. The Cleveland festival is an example. The number of students in competition has gone from 250 to more than 600. There are youth festivals all over the US in various cities. Special mention needs to be made of personalities like Sri V.V. Sundaram at the Cleveland aradhana, for his ‘Sustaining Sampradaya’ program. Big name artists come and teach the kids there. P.S. Narayanaswamy, Suguna Varadachary, R.K. Srikantan etc. have come there to teach. This motivates the kids to get involved in the music and develop their abilities. The dedication and ability of the kids in the US has to be recognized, as also that of the parents. They have to support the kids in their quest, in the middle of their busy schedules. Teachers in the US are also very good, so the art is in good hands.

Q: Can you describe some unforgettable moments in your concert career?

A: Once, I played for D.K. Pattammal at Tambaram Sanatorium. I had only half a day’s notice, but I played well. She really liked and appreciated me publicly. When I was awarded the All India Radio’s gold medal, I received the prize from Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi. I can relate two other concert moments – Once I played for Balamuralikrishna in Vellingiri Malai during Sivaratri, where the crowd was almost 2 lakh people. I was to be followed by big names like the drum maestro Sivamani etc., so I wanted to impress the audience. I had a spirited tani, and was sweating a lot after that. Sri BMK gracefully paused before the next number, offered me his coffee and waited till I finished.

In Muscat, I played for Sudha Raghunathan. I played a tani for 45 minutes. The audience support was fantastic, and it propelled me to play faster and better. That was an unforgettable moment for me.

Dr. Pitchumani Sivakumar is an ardent classical music lover and mridangam teacher in King of Prussia, PA. Balaji Raghothaman is a member of the Sruti Publications and Outreach Committee. He lives in Chester Springs, PA with his wife and two children.

**Audio of the interview with
Vidwan Tiruvarur Vaidyanathan**



Guru Ivaturi Vijayeswara Rao – A Tribute *by Pantula Rama*

[Editor's note: Vidushi Pantula Rama pays tribute to her Guru, the legendary violin vidwan who passed away on October 18, 2014 in Vishakapatnam, India. This article was published in 'The Hindu' and is being reproduced here with permission from the Author.]

“A swift stroke of the bow... a vivacious vibrato of the finger... a poised pause here and there ... the musical journey of my Guru, Ivaturi Vijayeswara Rao, is all of 75 years now.

The word ‘Guru’ in the Indian context of learning refers to someone on a par or even higher than God. There might be those who do not believe in God but seldom those who do not believe in the powers of a guru.

My guru belongs to a great gurusishya parampara from Andhra Pradesh - the legendary Dwaram tradition of Carnatic music. A disciple of Dwaram Narasinga Rao Naidu, he imbibed the signature traits such as a mystic and enigmatic tonal quality, absolute note purity and unostentatious yet mind-boggling innovation, which mark this style of violin playing. My guru inevitably chokes with ineffable emotion whenever he recalls his relationship with his guru.



Born on May 29, 1938, in Visakhapatnam, Vijayeswara Rao went on to pursue his music education at Vizianagaram. A child prodigy even by the rigid old standards, he started performing and teaching very early in life. He shouldered the responsibility of his family even as a young boy, after the untimely death of his father. His guru Narasinga Rao, who became a father figure, also passed away a few years later.

Guided only by his inner vision, the violinist started a music school in his guru's memory at Vizianagaram. Later, on the insistence of a disciple (incidentally my father and first guru Pantula Gopala Rao), he joined All India Radio as a Staff Artist and offered his services at Calicut and Visakhapatnam, till 1992 and opted for voluntary retirement.

Ivaturi Vijayeswara Rao can be hailed as the architect of the rich music scenario of modern Visakhapatnam, now considered the music capital of Andhra Pradesh. His relentless academic pursuits have been fruitful in archiving a treasure of audio recordings and books on music.

For many decades now, in the cool evenings in Vizag, one has experienced the ethereal music of Vijayeswara Rao accompanied by his disciples in the celebrated sangeetam gadi (music room). They

include vocalists, violinists, veena players, flautists and also young percussionists. It is a treat to watch him take the mridangam and demonstrate.

Great musicians such as Chembai have remarked that his violin accompaniment would align even an out-of-tune singer. His technical perfection, wide and authentic repertoire and the most complex of pallavis have always been packaged in a seemingly effortless, aesthetic manner.

Vijayeswara Rao is today a living example of a maestro who fought against several odds with the sheer strength of his brilliance, genius, hard work and commitment. His manifold contribution as a violinist, vocalist and teacher can only be saluted with utmost humility.

Sruti presented Vidushi Pantula Rama on October 18 as part of the fall slate of concerts. The review of the concert appears in this magazine.

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Vidya Jayaraman & Ramji Janakiraman
Viji Murali
Viji Swaminathan & Panchanadam Swaminathan

What you said



Survey Feedback from SRUTI Concert Attendees

SRUTI thanks all who responded to the surveys after each concert. We appreciate your feedback and comments.

Children are singing better and better. The group singing was very good as well

Everything! The Utsava Sampradaya Keertanas, the Pancharatna Keertanas, the violin and mrudangam accompaniments, the individual performers, the beautiful and traditional dresses that the participants wore (more respectful), the Tyagaraja mangalam song, the main concert, the lunch, the generous breakfast and snacks, and the two stalls (one of which was providing wholesale rates). Thank you.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam - Sruti presented him 2 years ago. He is at the top and it would be nice to have the opportunity to listen to him more frequently than the token once in 4 years. He has been making 2 week tours every spring and fall and I hope Sruti will pick him next year. I attended his concert at CMANA 2 weeks back. It was phenomenal and the great thing to see was the number of teenagers in the audience. One artist that is making Carnatic music popular amongst the younger generation. More upcoming promising stars – Ramakrishna Murthy (although Sruti presented him as Aradhana artist, please bring him back on a main concert stage like you did with Amritha Murali), Sandeep Narayan, Trichur brothers. Chitravina Ravikiran in a traditional concert with top accompanists. Please, no fusion.

Excellent music depicting honest musical and classical values. Great job by Board for organizing this concert of Amritha Murali, despite the lack of big name recognition yet. Organizations like Sruti should encourage and showcase artists like her on prime slots, like Sruti has done now. This is easily among the top couple of concerts over the last 2 years. Good accompanists too. Amrita will be a big name in the next 10 years and Sruti can feel happy to have presented her now.

The concert was excellent. Amritha and her accompanists had a mesmerizing effect. Her voice, diction, musicality all just shone. There is no doubt she will become among the best known musicians soon.

The auditorium [Upper Merion High School] was a bit too big for the concert. There was too much distance from the audience to the stage -thus the interaction was lacking. Risers would have helped with a better view of the artists.

It is a wonderful concert and the renditions were fantastic. She [Gayathri Venkataraghavan] has excellent voice control and accompanied by outstanding violinist.

Sponsors must be urged to attend all these concerts. Their good seats are going begging while rasikas who did not sponsor the whole season would like to have those seats but feel guilty occupying the reserved seating.

Everything. From the way the artists introduced until the end. Dr. Rama renditions were very unique. The 'gurubhakthi' just flowed in her music. And greatly supported by Murthy and Satish Kumar.

What a concert! She [Pantula Rama] worked the theme of Dikshitar beautifully. Great voice, great scholarship, and the entire package.

Great concert! I hope to listen to more of Krishnan and Viji in future. They are very able torchbearers of their father's legacy.

Phenomenal music! The best instrumental concert [G.J.R.Krishnan & Lalgudi Vijaylakshmi] in some time! Brought Shri Lalgudi J's music to life. Trichy Sankaran elevated the experience many-fold! Sruti honors itself by presenting him again. Good venue, good acoustics, good audience!

Amazing concert. Zakir Hussain's hand movements were unbelievable. Jayanthi and Kumaresh were also very impressive in keeping with the pace of the fast tabla. Overall a great performance by all three artists.

Children attending the concert. As much as well meaning parents want to expose their kids to our culture, kids don't have the attention span or the interest in these programs. It was very distracting both for the artistes as well as the rest of us without kids to have the seats and the doors banging throughout the concert as children ran in and out of the auditorium. Either provide for other distraction for the children at the venue or ban kids from coming altogether.

Thank you very much for having Ms Sarukkai have a master class, the girls can really learn from a master and to see how humble and kind she is was amazing. Malavika is dance, very knowledgeable about dance and was able to share that with the young dancers. Being there was tons better than going to see a show, more of an intimate setting, here she interacted with the audience, the girls and was more approachable versus going to performance, we would not get this all at a show, could see more of her and her approach to dance. And I especially liked her comment about "Perfect" practice, I happen to tell my daughter the same thing and for her to hear a world renowned dancer say the same thing resonated with her...

The opportunity to experience that level of mastery in such an intimate setting, the simple but infinitely important tools and techniques that she[Ms.Sarukkai] gave us to better our dancing and just spending the entire day surrounded by the art and art lovers was priceless. Thank you!! We look forward to many more such events by Sruti.



