



SRUTI NOTES

SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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FROM THE EDITORS

Dear members,

Another issue of Sruti Notes is here which includes reviews of the last two Sruti concerts, a write-up of the Aradhana celebrations and interview of the chief artists on the Aradhana day. Since our thought was to write about teachers and students in the next few issues, the interviews give a good introduction to the theme. We are giving the readers the perspectives of three teachers and three students of Indian Music and Dance in the area. We are hoping that more teachers and students will come forth to share their experiences that we could include in the future issues.

We have included some community news and an obituary of an outstanding artist who passed away recently. He will be remembered for the huge contribution he has made to Odissi dance in the twentieth century.

That brings us to another constant struggle that we face. We get vehement and almost passionate protests about our lack of coverage of important local community and cultural events when we cover news from India. We hope you appreciate the fact that covering all important events from India is quite difficult, if not impossible. If a reader or a member gives a piece of news and if it is of interest to the general readers, and if it comes in time for inclusion, we are happy to include it. We send four sheets of information four times a year and we do not pretend to be able to cover all cultural events, and we obviously cannot possibly do justice to all that is important. Also, we do not have dedicated or paid staff reporters covering the events. We have to beg and constantly hound volunteers to give reviews, reports or articles. This is true even for Sruti events.

So, once again, if anyone is interested in writing something for Sruti please contact us. We will be only too glad to include your information, review, impressions or articles.

Thank you.

The Library Committee

Upcoming Sruti Events

Kalaimamani A. Kanyakumari (violin)
June 6, 2004

Sanjay Subramanian (vocal)
September 11, 2004

Jayanthi Raman and Dance Ensemble (Gajamukha—A Bharatanatyam Dance Event)
October 9, 2004

Umayalpuram Sivaraman & group (Carnatic Rhythm Ensemble Event)
October 30, 2004

Mark your calendars!

From the President's Desk

Dear Sruti Friends:

I hope you have attended and enjoyed the four events that Sruti offered since the last Sruti Notes. These events were the Thyagaraja Aradhana, Hindusthani Concert of Ustad Shujaat Khan & Pandit Debashish Bhattacharya, Carnatic Vocal Concert by Vijaya Siva and Flute Workshop & Mini-Concert by Dr. N. Ramani. For those of you that attended, a big Thank you! For everyone, a warm invitation to attend the exciting line of upcoming events.

The upcoming Sruti events include a Carnatic Violin Concert by Smt. A. Kanyakumari on 6 June (see flyer), followed by a joint event we are planning with International House on 11 July (details to follow). During the Fall season, we are planning to bring to you a Carnatic Vocal Concert by Sanjay Subramanian on 11 September, Bharatanatyam Dance event Gajamukha on 9 October and a Carnatic Rhythm Ensemble event by Umayalpuram Sivaraman & group on 30 October. In addition, we are also planning an event to render T.N. Bala's new musical compositions and a Sruti Day that will provide a forum for local talent in both Indian Classical music and dance. In fact, we are even doing some initial work for a major concert by L. Shankar in Spring 2005!

I am glad to report that Sruti has received a \$25,000 grant from Philadelphia Music Project towards organizing the above mentioned events of L. Shankar, Umayalpuram Sivaraman and Sanjay Subramanian. Sruti also received a \$1,200 grant from Pennsylvania Council on the Arts towards general operating expenses.

In accordance with a resolution passed during the last Sruti General Body meeting (December 2003), an ad hoc committee has been formed with Sudhakar Rao as the Chair. Briefly, the scope of the ad hoc committee is to examine the Amendments to the Sruti Bylaws proposed during that General Body Meeting and also to extend the examination to the entire Bylaws as a whole. We thank the committee members for volunteering their time for this important task for Sruti.

Sruti has also been reaching out to local organizations by facilitating/contributing Indian Classical Music and Dance programs. Firstly, Sruti reached out to the International House who were celebrating the cultures of Commonwealth Nations (including India) on March 19 and we helped arrange a short Bharatanatyam performance by the students of Nardhana Academy of Dance. Sruti also reached out to a local celebration of Smt. Karunamayy by facilitating a short invocatory Bharatanatyam dance performance by the students of Naatya. We thank Shoba Sharma of Naatya and Ramaa Ramesh of Nardhana for making these out reach programs possible.

I conclude with an invitation to you all to attend the Sruti events, contribute to the Sruti Notes, purchase Sruti products (CDs/Cassettes/Book) and frequently visit our website. Please see the photos of recent Sruti events and also exchange news & views on the Discussion Forum.

With best wishes to all of you,

Prabhakar Chitrapu

By-Laws Committee

Dear Members,

The Board of Directors of SRUTI, 2002-2003, proposed amendments to the SRUTI by-laws in November / December, 2003. The amendments were discussed during the General Body meeting held in January 2004. A motion was passed during that meeting directing the Board of Directors to form an Ad hoc committee to review all the proposed amendments.

The Board of Directors of SRUTI has constituted an Ad Hoc committee to review its by-laws. The committee consists of Bala Balasubramaniam, H. Y. Rajagopal, T. S. Venkataraman and myself. Prabhakar Chitrapu, President of Sruti will be an ex-officio member of this committee. The committee has been tasked to review the amendments that were proposed in November/December 2003, as well as to review the complete document, and to present their recommendations by September 1, 2004. The current by-laws and the proposed amendments are available on our website.

SRUTI's by-laws were originally constituted in 1986 and have seen some minor amendments over the years. The current by-laws have provided a good framework under which SRUTI has grown into its current stature. This review provides us an opportunity to consider the current state of the organization and recommend any changes to the by-laws to make the organization more effective in its operations. The amendments proposed last year reflect a request from the Board to provide a more effective organizational structure. We hope that this committee will be able to fulfill that need.

As part of the review process we would like to hear from you, our members. If you have any comments or suggestions related to the by-laws and the proposed amendments please write to us. Your input will go a long way in shaping the future of this organization. You can forward the comments to me at 20 Windermere Drive, Blue Bell, PA 19422 or email me at smrao@comcast.net.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sudhakar Rao
Chairman, By-laws Ad hoc committee

The opinions expressed by the contributors of articles and reviews are published in a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Sruti's Board or its members.

Classical Music in USA: Teacher Perspectives

Jayawant D. Bantwal

The age old and universal saying "Teaching is a noble occupation" is well known to everyone. I too am inclined to believe in this saying. However what makes it truly noble is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say, teaching is gratifying as well as challenging. My writing here is focused on teaching music. I gave up my engineering and management career to embrace music, which was until then a part time occupation.

Although I never had any ambition to teach Music, my revered Guruji (Pandit Taranathji) gave me an emphatic Directive to teach, about 26 years ago. However, being more interested in performing, which still is my first preference, I did not attempt to teach. A year later I acceded to the requests of two friends (a businessman and a surgeon) and took them under tutelage. Somehow, I was able to teach them a few Taals. But, matching the schedules of these two busy people was no fun. Finally, a year later or so, this class came to a grinding halt. I got busy with concert tours with visiting artists from India. Sometime later, a stream of students arrived from South Jersey. They wanted to play Tabla with Bhajans in the newly constructed Berlin Temple. Growth of Indian culture, temples, visiting artists and a tremendous desire on the part of parents to teach their children Indian culture and music went a long way in increasing the number of students. As a result some serious students started arriving. Then came requests from other towns and States, which led to setting up Centers in other areas as far as 100 miles, from Bucks County to Scranton, Pa and from South Jersey to Bergen County. The only limiting factor has been time.

Yes, teaching is indeed a gratifying experience. It is an indescribable joy to see a seed being transformed into a plant right before your eyes and growing and growing. The environment is provided by the loving parents, who have no reservation whatsoever in spending money and enormous amount of time, week after week, to facilitate the learning process of their beloved children. When I visit India for performances, one common question asked by the music lovers there is how American-born children fare in Indian Music. My answer is - when it comes to talent and learning, an American-born child is no different from an Indian-born child. Our children here have similar talent, dedication and ability. When it comes to competitiveness, it may even be stronger here.

As regards challenges, there certainly are a few. Tardiness, last minute changes and absenteeism present frustrating situations at times. However they are limited to about 5% of the students, in my experience. Majority of them provide 100% compliance. One of the reasons for these negative experiences may have to do with children's involvement in too many activities such as Karate, tennis, soccer, basketball, etc., all in the same week. However, these activities do not deserve criticism, as they are essential for personal well-rounded growth as well as admission into well-known Universities later. A good time management approach should be of help in sorting out the various activities.

In conclusion, I should like to acknowledge that teaching has been a very gratifying experience for me. Many children born in this

country have done very well with Tabla, keyboard and even vocal music. However, I cannot lose sight of adults. My oldest student is 63 years young and can sing on the stage comfortably in good harmony with the Tabla accompaniment. There are many other adults taking Tabla, vocal and keyboard lessons.

In many cases what started out as an escape from daily stress has been transformed into an earnest pursuit of Performing Arts at one's own level. May Indian Music, Dance and Culture continue to flourish in this land.

Prabha Subramaniam

Firstly, I really do not regard myself as a music teacher in the sense that I do not have a steady group of students who learn or have learnt from me, nor do I conduct classes on any regular basis. That said, a few children have learnt from me whom I can claim as my students.

It all started about ten years ago, when Ms. Meena Pennathur asked me to teach Carnatic music to her daughter Anita. She was agreeable to my conditions that I would go slowly. Meena said, she was in no hurry and it was okay with her even if I took a long time teaching one piece. So, Anita has been learning from me on and off. Apart from her, only Anil Chitrapu has learnt from me on any kind of regularity. I have had some other students like Sowmya Menon who have learnt a few pieces from me on a sporadic basis.

I have a rather conservative method of teaching. Starting from sarali and janta varisais, I proceed to geetham and varnams before teaching kritis. I introduce gamakams when I teach varnams. Some students would like to perform at the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana, for whom I also teach simple kritis.

In my interaction with the parents of my students I find that they are always very cooperative and understanding of my method of teaching. The children for their part show lots of interest and practice sincerely. Their main drawback seems to be a lack of sufficient exposure to music concerts. Children in Chennai get to hear classical music on the radio and TV apart from attending concerts on a more regular basis than in this country. However, I must admit that that the children here show great enthusiasm in learning despite having many other diversions. For some children American accent seems to be a problem. However, once they get past that difficulty, they sound really good.

As I said earlier, although I am not a regular teacher of classical music, the few forays I have made in that direction have been real fun and also very rewarding.

Classical Music in USA: Teacher Perspectives

Dinakar Subramanian

I learnt music as a boy for about 7 or 8 years till my voice cracked and I had to wait a few years before I started learning again when I was an undergraduate. I was learning Carnatic music for most of my undergraduate after which I came to Penn State for my graduate study when another fellow graduate student (many Sruti members would remember Jagadisan Shivakumar who lived in the Philadelphia area in the early 1980's) and I started a music group that used to meet every Friday evening. I continue to be a student of Carnatic music.

I have been teaching vocal Carnatic music for approximately 3 years to children ranging from 6 to 12. I am teaching pieces starting from the basics (Dhattu, Upper Sthayi) to simple Kirthanams and Bhajans. I started teaching after a chance phone call that one of our friends made asking if there were any vocal music teachers in the area. Coming from a friend, I thought, "*Why not give it a shot myself?*" Since then I have been teaching music.

I start with the traditional sequence and style with the Sarali varasai in Mayamalavagowlai, though I find that it is a bit difficult for the beginner student to sing in Mayamalavagowlai than, say, an Audava ragam such as Mohanam. There is a popular opinion that Mayavalagowlai is not an easy ragam to learn and to teach which I can attest to from personal teaching experience. The attainment of the swarasthana (position of the note), for Ri, Dha and Ni is problematic for many children. The closeness of the above notes to either their preceding or succeeding notes in the note progression is the cause of the problem.

For this reason, I would prefer to have taught beginner music in an (apparently) easier ragam such as any from the list of audava (5 note) ragams – Mohanam, Shuddha Saveri or Gambheera Nattai. Many of you may have listened to Smt. Seetha Rajan's Bodhana CD where she introduces a novel approach of teaching Carnatic music. I have experimented with Mohanam a little bit and I have found that the child finds it easier to grasp these 5-note ragams than Mayamalavagowlai.

Theory is explained by explaining the different types of Ri's, Ga's, Ma's, Dha's and Ni's in different ragams. At a minimum, we compare ragams, for example, the difference between the Ri in Mayamalavagowlai and the Ri in Sankarabaranam, etc. When a new song is introduced through their Aarohanam and Avarohanam, we discuss how different or similar each note is from the other ragams they have learnt. The Melakarta scheme is also introduced much after the beginner stage on a simple level, to show how ragams are formed – for example, what you get if you change the Ma (dhyamam) in Shankarabaranam to the Prati Ma (dhyamam). The patterns in the different chakras are also introduced.

The electronic keyboard is used in our classes to demonstrate a given ragam or a passage of swarams that is causing a bit of

trouble in comprehension. In fact, some children respond favorably to the keyboard by repeating a note correctly after listening to the keyboard. The keyboard can also help get the student's sruti re-aligned during the course of a given song. The keyboard is thus an invaluable instrument in my teaching method. I also have aural quizzes by asking the students what a given note or a sequence of notes is by playing them on the keyboard.

Some children have innate talent and some can cultivate the talent, some swara passages come instinctively to some and demand effort from some others, but there is no substitute for continuous practice. But with children in this country indulging in multiple activities, practicing Carnatic music is one of many things they need to keep up with, and it is a challenge. Many of us including myself will note that in India, we used to have music class several times a week, but music class was also the only extra-curricular activity that we indulged in. Also, in India, music tuition was much more accessible that you could walk/bike to class which is not the case here. Parents have to juggle their busy schedules to bring their children to class.

The biggest aspect of the Carnatic music tuition in my personal opinion is the ability of the student to maintain Sruti. I find that this is the one aspect that all students need to concentrate on a continuous basis. The first step in maintaining Sruti is to identify that one is singing off-Sruti. This identification can be a tricky task by itself and is one of the most difficult aspects of the learning experience. There are other difficult aspects, such as keeping the Talam (tempo) correctly, proper enunciation especially while singing in the second speed, ability to maintain sruti while going below that madhya sthayi or above the tara sthayi, etc.

In addition to regular practice, there is no substitute for listening to great music when there is a chance. This is easily attainable since most of children who learn Carnatic music have a household milieu that possesses and promotes our glorious Carnatic music.

I try to provide students with an introduction to Carnatic music, so that they can not only sing songs but also be able to differentiate ragams, correlate songs of the same ragam, and a few other steps that will help them enrich their own appreciation of this wonderful art form.

Rukmini Devi Arundale Anniversary Celebrations

The 100th birth anniversary of Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale was recently celebrated by Naatyaa with a whole-day event including panel discussions, workshops, slide presentations, and a dance performance by Naatyaa as well as a special Kathakali performance by Kunhiramans. It was a fitting tribute to a woman who made so many contributions to continuing the tradition of the arts in India, particularly music and dance.

Classical Music in USA: Student Perspectives

Please note that these perspectives of children are presented unedited in order to preserve the candor which seems to come naturally to young people.

Rochitha Nathan

I got interested in Carnatic music by listening to Sudha Raghunathan and in Bharathanatyam by seeing it on stage. This is my first year taking music classes from Bala Mama (Sri. T.N. Bala). Before that, I learnt a few songs by listening to Sudha Raghunathan's CDs. I am also completing my second year learning dance from Shilpa Akka (Shilpa Narayan, student of Shoba Sharma).

Nobody forced me to learn music. I got the idea by listening to Sudha Raghunathan. I would like to keep learning music for a long, long time. Also, nobody forced me to learn dance. I wanted to learn dance from when I was 3 years old. I would like to continue for a long time till I can dance like Shoba Akka and Shilpa Akka.

I enjoy music a lot. I love listening to Carnatic music, Hindi movie songs and to jazz. I also love watching Bharathanatyam, some Hindi movie dances, all types of Indian dances and ballet. And, YES! I LOVE being on stage. I like to see my friends sing during the different Aradhanas. I enjoy coming to Carnatic Music and Hindi song concerts. I really like Indian music better. Whenever my mom puts western music sometimes, I tell her to turn it off and I put on Indian music.

I go every Thursday to Bala mama's house for music class and I go every Sunday to dance class. Wednesdays is my normal practice time but I boom out singing at other times too. Sometimes, in music class, my Dad asks my music teacher to teach me a specific piece. Usually, I learn whatever my teachers teach.

I speak two Indian languages (Tamil & Kannada). That makes it very easy for me to pronounce all Indian words correctly very easily.

Rochitha Nathan is a seven year old second grader at Cynwyd Elementary School in Bala Cynwyd, PA. Her extra-curricular activities include learning Carnatic music, Bharathanatyam, and gymnastics.

Chiraag M. Nataraj

I have had exposure to a wide variety of music due to the interest of my parents and their involvement at various Indian cultural events. We listen to a lot of music at home and they have been taking me to a lot of concerts since I was very young. I always enjoyed it very much and that is what interested me in learning. I have been learning to play the Tabla for about three years. I spend about seven hours on this every week, including my lessons. I have been singing for a long time, may be since I was three years old. I have also been

learning to play the piano for about two years. I spend about three to four hours every week on vocal music and the piano. Learning the Tabla and Karnataka Sangeetha make me feel unique and special because very few people I know can do these. I plan to continue learning and practising all of these as long as possible. I believe that it is better for my teachers to decide what they think is appropriate to teach me at this stage of my learning. I don't know what to ask Mr. Bantwal to teach me, but I love what he teaches and enjoy his classes very much. I sometimes ask my mom to teach me a certain song and she does, if she thinks it is not too hard for me.

I love the sound of the Tabla. My favorite part is when I get to play the very fast "Bols" (long phrases of rhythmic patterns). I love singing the swaras in "Eradanae kaala" (second speed) in the 'Varnas'. I enjoy it very much when I get to participate in events like Purandara Jayanthi and Thyagaraja Aradhana. On the piano, I like playing the calmer, slower songs. I have a lot of fun playing my favorite Hindi songs too. What I like in Indian music is all the "gliding" between the notes. I think that it makes Indian music sound very melodious. With the piano, I like the concept of chords. I think they can be very effectively used to control the mood of the song being played. I love performing on stage. It makes me very happy. I have been enjoying it since I was four years old. I was never afraid of going on stage. I also love to see my friends performing on stage because it feels good to see others learning and being interested in some of the same things that I am.

I am very comfortable in an Indian atmosphere. I feel like I fit in right away. I know this from experience; from my visits to India and also at Indian gatherings and concerts. I love different languages. I like learning the Hindi terms used in my Tabla lessons. While singing, I care a lot about how words must be pronounced. I think it is very important. I am very comfortable with the pronunciation of words in all the Hindi songs as well as the Kannada, Telugu and Samskrutha classical compositions that I sing. This is due to the fact that I am fluent in Kannada (Thanks to Pappa and Amma!).

My teachers are great; I don't have any suggestions for them. My suggestions to other students would be:

1. Keep practising till you get it.
2. For people learning vocal music, please pay a lot of attention to the pronunciation of the words in different languages.

Chiraag is eleven years old, studying in fifth grade at Valley Forge Middle School. He learns to play Tabla from Mr. J. D. Bantwal. He is also getting vocal lessons in Karnataka Sangeetha from his mom and learning western classical music on the piano. He loves to read, draw and build robots with different construction kits.

Classical Music in USA: Student Perspectives **(continued)**

Neha Mahalakshmi Nataraj

I listen to a lot of different kinds of music at home all the time. My parents have been taking me to many concerts and dance recitals since I was about three years old. I have always enjoyed them very much and think they are beautiful. That is why I want to learn. I have been learning Bharatanaatya since I was six years old. I must have been learning to sing for a very long time; my first music lesson (pappa has recorded it!) was when I was about a year and a half old! Every week, I spend about five hours practising dance and about three to four hours on music. I have also had some training to play the piano but I have now decided to learn to play the violin, instead. I play violin at my school orchestra and I like it very much. I am going to continue to learn and practise as long as I can. I feel very proud that I am learning something that is Indian and something that is so different from what I usually see or listen. My teachers are very nice. I think they know what is appropriate to teach me. I do tell my mom when I want to learn a specific song; she will let me try and if she thinks it is not too hard for me, she teaches me the whole song; if not, she tells me she will teach me when I'm a little older.

I love Bharatanaatya because the dancers look so beautiful in their colorful costumes and sparkling jewelry. I love Indian music because it sounds so beautiful and melodious. I really enjoy singing the hard Thyagaraja krithis and the cute "Krishna songs" by Purandaradaasa. I also love to sing a lot of old Hindi songs by Lata Mangeshkar. I think she has the most beautiful voice. I love performing on stage. It makes me proud of my efforts. I have never been shy or afraid of going on stage. I have been enjoying singing at Thyagaraja Aradhana and Purandara Jayanthi since I was three years old. I also enjoyed the Krishna dance I performed with Rochitha in the middle of our "Tenaali Raama" play that we performed with many children at the Triveni Yugaadi celebrations. I feel proud of my friends when I see them performing on stage too.

I feel very comfortable in an Indian atmosphere. I love it when I visit India. I feel like an Indian. Whenever I am in India or in an event like Thyagaraja Aradhana, Purandara Jayanthi or Indian concerts, surrounded by a lot of Indians, I just feel like I belong there. Also, I find it very easy to deal with the pronunciations in all the Kannada, Samskrutha, Telugu and Hindi songs that I learn because I am very comfortable speaking in Kannada; I speak in Kannada to everyone in my family. I think that helps me very much.

Neha is nine years old, studying in third grade at New Eagle Elementary school. She is a student of "Naatya Academy of Indian Classical Dance," learning Bharatanaatya. She is also learning vocal Karnataka Sangeetha from her mother. She loves reading, drawing, arts and crafts, science experiments and writing stories and poems.

Thyagaraja Aradhana: An Impression

Meena Pennathur

As I walked in to attend the Thyagaraja Aradhana day of Sruti, Sadimchane in Arabi was pervading the auditorium. I made a quick stop at the front desk manned (I guess I should say womaned) by the treasurer of Sruti, bought the season ticket for 2004 and walked in. Looking around for a comfortable seat, I settled on a seat in the 3rd row where I had a perfect view of the performers who were singing with reverence. The stage was full with vocalists and instrumentalists. An aura of obeisance and veneration filled the saba. I had missed the Utsava Samprdhaya keerthanas by the children and the first two of the Pancharathna krithis. I was told that this event was commenced with Vuncha Vridhi, where the musicians walked on to the stage in a procession singing the Utsava Sampradaya keerthanas. Oh well, 8:30 a.m on a Saturday morning was a tough sell for me and I knew it was going to be a long day. Devotion filled my heart as I received the Prasadam that was distributed after the Pancharantnam.

The individual participation segment was now in progress. The children one after another sang with a lot of enthusiasm - some with twinkle in their eyes, some obviously shy to be on stage, some stealing a glance at their teacher and parents for appreciation and approval, some wanting to impress and some blissfully indifferent to everything around them. The thought did cross my mind - do these children really know what this day was about? Should the participating children be asked to write a sentence or two on Thyagaraja or the meaning of the song, as a prerequisite? This would achieve many things, children would understand the significance of the celebration, the teachers would be forced to teach also the meaning of the song and the greatness of the composer, SRUTI, in the process, may end up with some material for the newsletter written by the children.

On a different note - I failed to see the connection between solo mridangam and tabla rendering at Thyagaraja Aradhana. I believe it undermines the significance of paying homage to a great composer and ends up being talent show. This is my personal opinion - though I heard, a few in the audience share my view. While children should be encouraged to perform and parents given an opportunity to see their children perform, it should be at a different event and not under the banner of aradhana day.

The adult participation followed. I was amazed at how many good musicians we have amongst us not to mention the ocean of songs written by one composer. In an attempt to best use the available time, SRUTI was preparing for the next artist as one was singing - with two sets of microphones on stage. As a result, the center of the stage was not used, this appearing more like an assembly line set up. I have seen this technique adopted by many organizations but leaves something lacking in spirit.

The day came to a conclusion with the concert of Professor Subbulekshmi. She was accompanied by Kalyani Ramani and was supported on the violin by Radhika Mani and on mridangam by Suresh Ramachandran. This day was well spent, I thought to myself, as I was leaving the auditorium. I extend my congratulations to the new SRUTI committee for organizing an enjoyable day.

A Chat with the Thyagaraja Aradhana Concert Artists

Latha Nataraj

It was a beautiful afternoon. At Sruti, we were celebrating our annual Thyagaraja Aradhana in honor of one of the greatest composers in Karnataka Sangeetha. After participating in the traditional “Utsava” of Sri Thyagaraja and listening to the beautiful renderings of Utsava Sampradaya Krithis by our juniors and Pancharatna Krithis by our own Sruti artists, we were close to the end of individual presentations by almost a hundred, very enthusiastic participants. The artists arrived; they were to be performing in the evening concert, which was the highlight of the day’s events. Professor Subbulekshmi and her daughter Smt. Kalyani Raman along with her two, very energetic sons and their patient father, the violinist, Smt. Radhika Mani and mridangist, Sri Suresh Ramachandran were all in very good spirits and a delight to talk to.

The artists were individually requested to talk a little about themselves, their prime motivation factors for learning music, their formal training, their careers as performers, and their advice to students of music.

Professor Subbulekshmi:

My father’s encouragement was the prime motivating factor for me to learn music. He was very enthusiastic about music. He was a music critic, an astrologer and a Sanskrit scholar. My brother, Veena Venkataraman is a very well known Veena player. He is a part of the Veena-Venu-Violin trio with Sri. Lalgudi G. Jayaraman and Dr. N. Ramani.

I started my formal training when I was ten years old. I learned at the Music Academy in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. I went on to work at the Swati Tirunal College of Music (earlier known as the Music Academy) and retired in 1992 as the Head of the Department of Veena after thirty-two years of service. I have performed on National Television and National Radio. My first concert was at the age of fifteen. I have been performing since 1951 in several places in South India as well as in Bombay. I have performed live on Malaysian Radio in 1997; it was a one-hour vocal concert immediately followed by a one-hour Veena concert. I enjoyed that very much.

My advice to youngsters learning music: Learn the concepts of Raga, Bhaava, TaaLa and Gamakas well. Face to face learning from a good Guru is very important to achieve this. Get good training and make sure you keep up regular practice.

Smt. Kalyani Ramani:

My prime motivation factor for learning music was my mother. I always watched and listened when my mother was teaching. I decided on a career in music at a very young age. I started my formal training at the age of seven. I am a gold medalist and have a Master’s degree in Music from Kerala University. I later continued my training with Smt. Neela Ramgopal after 1992. I have performed as a ‘B’ grade artist at All-India-Radio Bangalore and Thiruvananthapuram and also on the Thiruvananthapuram Doordarshan.

My advice to students of music: Start young. Learn to focus. Responsibility, respect and discipline are very important. It is very important to learn about our culture and heritage. Practice is extremely important; it should never be time-bound, just practise till it is perfect. Another thing I would like to emphasize is ‘Listen and learn’; listen to a lot of music, go to concerts.

Smt. Radhika Mani:

My parents were the prime motivating factor for me to learn music. My mother is a well-trained vocalist and extremely enthusiastic about music. I have had the honor of performing at several concerts in India, USA and Australia and at several prestigious institutions. I have also enjoyed performing with many well known musicians.

My advice to students: Listen to lots of music. Keep up regular practice; it is very important.

Sri. Suresh Ramachandran:

I am actually a mathematician. My parents’ enthusiasm for music motivated me to learn the Mridangam. Both my parents are musicians. I grew up with my two sisters who are also vocal artists. I trained under the tutelage of Sri. T.V.Gurumurthy at the Palani School of Mridangam. I feel honored, having played with several well known artists. I am also a graded artist of All-India-Radio. I have enjoyed performing in AIR, Doordarshan and several sabhas.

My advice to students learning music: Listen to a lot of music. Listen to other students as well as professional artists. It is very motivating.



Concert Review: Prof. Subbalekshmi & Smt. Kalyani Ramani

Rajee Raman

Being a native of Thiruvananthapuram, I was naturally excited at the prospect of listening to Smt. R. Subbalekshmi, along with her daughter Smt. Kalyani Ramani, on the Thyagaraja Aradhana day. Having regularly listened to her Veena recitals on All India Radio, I was eager to attend her vocal concert.

On the Aradhana day, following enthusiastic performances from promising youngsters in vibrant costumes, the stage was set for the concert to begin. A concert on a Thyagaraja Aradhana is unique in a couple of respects; for one, usually all the items rendered are the Saint’s compositions; it’s a reverential tribute, as the word Aradhana denotes. Smt. Subbalekshmi’s concert was just that- a tribute that brought out both the beauty and Bhakthi Bhava inherent in Thyagaraja krithis.

What better way to flag off a concert than with a soothing Mayamalavagoula, the krithi being Meru Samana? A nice Neraval sequence followed by Kalpanaswaras rounded off this piece. A brief sketch of Begada preceded Samiki Sari. Maragathamivanar in Varali was well rendered after a short alapana by Smt.Kalyani. Kalyani Ramani, who is a well-known music teacher in New Jersey, is proof for the fact that the fruit does not fall far from the tree. Her succinct Arabhi alapana, peppered with sancharas that brought out the essence of the raga, was well received. Radhika Mani's response on the violin was equally good. O Rajeevaksha, a Thyagaraja gem was rendered in all its splendor.

Smt. Subbalekshmi, who was the Principal of Sri Swati Thirunal College of Music, has had the good fortune of learning from both Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and K.S.Narayanawamy. In my humble opinion, this was apparent in the high quality of the sangathis rendered and the raga bhava in the alapanas. Smt. Subbalekshmi should also be commended for the choice of raga and tala mix.

The Saranaga krithi, Mamava Raghurama, enlivened the concert with its tempo. The main piece for the day, the Thodi masterpiece, Emi Chesite Nemi, in Mishra Chappu was given all the attention it deserved. Thodi is a raga that is almost inexhaustible in its charm. Smt.Subbalekshmi's voice was in some discomfort, but that did not dampen the raga lakshana to shine through. A Thani Avartanam by Sri.Suresh Ramachandran capped the Neraval and Kalpanaswaras. I am no expert in layam, but I thoroughly enjoyed the Thani. The fast paced Kiranavali piece, Etiyojanalu, provided the right setting for the rare krithi in Neelambari, Neeke dayarada. I must mention here about the SrutiRanjini booklet brought out for the occasion. The lyrics and meaning of four or five songs from the concert were provided in there. I found this neat - for once, the audience could relate to the lyrical beauty of the composition.

A Managalam in Surutti, Maakulabrochuta, was the penultimate piece followed by a viruttam praising the singular devotion of Thyagaraja towards Rama, in Madhyamavathi. Thus the curtain came down on a concert, even though plagued by microphone troubles, was marked by the dedication and sincerity of the artists in showcasing one of the greatest composer's legacy. Indeed, a very satisfying concert.

Kritis rendered at the concert are listed below for your reference.

Merusamana – Mayamalavagoula- Adi; Samiki Sari- Begada-Rupakam; Maragathamivanar- Varali- Adi; O Rajeevaksha-Arabhi – Mishra Chappu; Mamavaraghurama- Saranga – Rupakam; Emi Chesite Nemi- Thodi – Mishra Chappu ; Etiyojanalu – Kiranavali- Adi; Neeke dayarada- Neelambari – Mishra Chappu; Maakula brochuta- Surutti – Mishra Chappu; Thyagaraja- Madhyamavathi.

Rajee is an ardent student and rasika of Carnatic Music. She lives with her family in the Exton area and works as a Software Engineer for Unisys.

Concert Review

Shujaat Hussain Khan with Shubhankar Banerjee Debashish Bhattacharya with Shubashish Bhattacharya

Allyn Miner

A performance in Philadelphia on April 9, 2004 by Shujaat Hussain Khan was a fitting way to celebrate the life and mark the passing of India's legendary sitarist Ustad Vilayat Khan, whose death in Mumbai in March was a major event for the world of Hindustani music. The contributions of Ustad Vilayat Khan to sitar style and to the aesthetics of North Indian instrumental music are deep and pervasive. The innovative techniques that brought the lyrical sounds of vocal music to the instrument, and the power and speed that thrilled the audiences were his gifts to twentieth century music. Thus it was with particular excitement that Philadelphia welcomed his eldest son, Shujaat, who had not performed in the Philadelphia area in the recent past.

The Prince auditorium was full to capacity with a mix of seasoned Indian music listeners and the curious from the university community. After a brief welcome and introduction, the performers walked on stage followed by several disciples who sat to the sides as the musicians settled themselves on the low dais. The sitar looked small in the hands of Shujaat. At the age of 44, he cuts an impressive figure, and is well established as one of the most powerful and inventive sitar players of his generation. He spoke a few words to the audience, announcing that he would play raga Vachaspati, and that he would deviate from the norm of a sitar performance to follow a vocal format, playing most of the alap in the context of the bandish, the composition, set to tintal.

The powerful right hand strokes with their chord-like sound, and the intricate left-hand pulling were marks of his father's style, but the whimsical progression in his exploration of the raga was entirely his own. He would play a phrase, then pull out of it an unpredictable series of skillful reiterations, drawing the audience in with his fanciful ideas. He would burst into sudden fast-speed runs that surprised and pleased the audience, perhaps puzzling those who were used to the chaste conventions of a traditional alap. With his unconventional style, Shujaat made the music and the instrument his own. He often chose to bring out a sweet, folk-like melody in this rag, centering on the phrase Komal Ni Sa Re Ga, and only occasionally emphasizing the relative dissonance of the tivra Ma. The percussive force of his strokes were pleasing to many in the audience and startling to some. In his rhythmic work, Shujaat chose to surprise and delight the audience by returning to the mukhra of the gat, the leading phrase, in unpredictable and difficult ways. In his medium-speed gat in tintal, the mukhra came at a particularly subtle place in the tal cycle. Shubhankar Banerjee matched Shujaat's brilliant technique with strong and nearly show-stopping virtuosity on the tabla. His displays of incredible speed and intricate tihais were a suitably dazzling counterpart to Shujaat's playing.

In the second piece, the melodious raga Tilak Kamod, Shujaat sang in interludes between his playing. This is a new aspect of sitar performance done by others in the family as well, but for which Shujaat has become particularly well known. His CD, Lajo Lajo was a hit, and indeed, a request for this song was heard from the audience. He has a sweet voice reminiscent of that of a film or pop ghazal singer. The blend of classical and light music which he brings to this part of a performance is loved by many in the audience, while traditionalists may be concerned at the non-classical direction this seems to be taking sitar performance. In any case, Shujaat Hussain's concert was a revelation to many who had never heard him before, and a treat to the entire audience.

The second half of the concert was a performance by Debashish Bhattacharya. Brought up in music from childhood, Debashish is another one of the brilliant younger instrumentalists in Hindustani music today. As he came to the platform, many in the audience who had not heard him must have wondered if anyone could give a successful performance following on Shujaat Khan. Debashish began with a spoken introduction, explaining that though derived from the western guitar, the instrument has now become entirely Indian. From the very first notes of his alap in raga Jog it became clear that he would indeed be able to draw the audience into his performance. He began on the low strings of the guitar, using a glass egg-shaped slide in his left hand and three metal picks on his right. The deep, rich tones of the instrument were immediately appealing. He changed to a metal cylindrical-shaped slide as he moved to the upper strings. His alap, though conventional in layout, was strikingly imaginative. Though it moved methodically up the scale, it took surprising loops and sweeps. The variety of sounds and the musical feeling that he pulled out of the instrument was really amazing. As he moved through the alap, a quality of novelty continually held the attention. Like Shujaat, Debashish appears admirably free to follow his own imagination without having to imitate an elder's style. This is the sign of both good musicianship and a healthy music. As he began the rhythmic sections of his performance, Debashish's skill and inventiveness only seemed to increase. The gat in a mid-tempo jhaptal (ten beats), conveyed at the same time a sense of leisure and razor-sharp precision. The natural quality he brought to the fast and difficult rhythms and tihais was really impressive. His brother, Shubashish on tabla, was a fine match, answering Debashish's exhilarating tans with equally dazzling compositions and multiple tihais. His animated playing style made him a pleasure to watch.

As a second piece, Debashish brought out an instrument of his own modification, the slide ukulele. The ukulele, a four-stringed instrument shaped like a small guitar, had a humble history of providing simple rhythmic background to Hawaiian song. Debashish produced beautiful rich sounds from this modest instrument, and in his very original rendition of raga Bhairavi, guitar players and observant listeners in the audience could hear shades of western music such as blues, jazz, and experimental riffs, used with taste and originality. It is no surprise that he is in demand for collaborations and guitar workshops in the west as well as in India.

This fine concert of two Hindustani instrumentalists playing so well so early in their careers was a reason for listeners to have full confidence in the future of this music.

Allyn Miner is a concert performer on the North Indian sitar. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania where she teaches South Asian music and performing arts. Her research, publications and teaching interests include the history of performance, music in history and medieval and early modern textual studies.

Kelucharan Mohapatra

Viji Swaminathan

The world of Indian dance mourns the loss of Kelucharan Mohapatra, a pioneer who enriched and perfected the art of Odissi during his incredible career spanning more than six decades. The legendary Odissi dancer and guru, passed away on April 7, 2004 at the age of 78. He is survived by his wife Laxmipriya, his son Ratikanta and daughter-in-law Sujatha Mohanty.

Born into a family of Patachitrakars (painters of traditional Pata-Chitra) on January 8, 1926 at Raghurajpur on the coastal district of Puri, Kelucharan lived a life of unending dedication to the arts of dance and music. His love for dance and music took him on an incredible artistic journey, from humble beginnings as a Gotipua (boy dancer dressed like a girl and dancing like the maharis or temple dancers) in his childhood, to a globally respected dancer, percussionist, composer, choreographer and teacher. Credited with elevating Odissi to the status of a classical art form, Kelucharan Mohapatra, in association with the Odissi Research Center in Bhubaneswar, made invaluable contributions to the codification and systemization of the Odissi style.

Kelucharan Mohapatra was a highly revered guru. He trained hundreds of students many of whom went on to become highly distinguished dancers and teachers themselves – Sonal Mansingh, the Late Sanjukta Panigrahi, the Late Protima Bedi, Madhavi Mudgal and Kumkum Mohanty, to name a few.

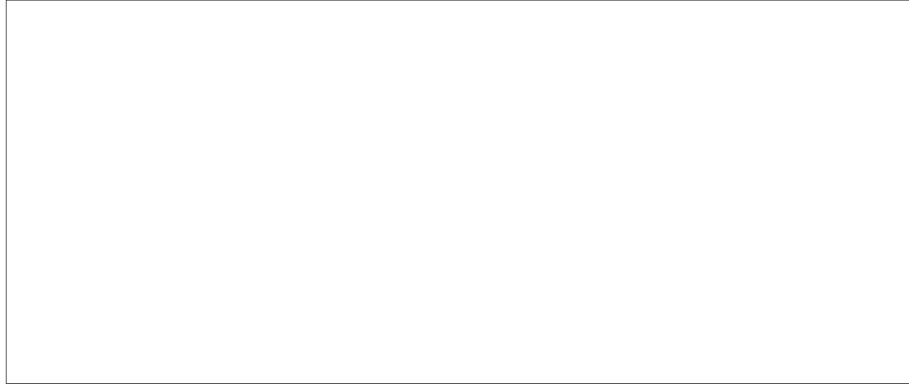
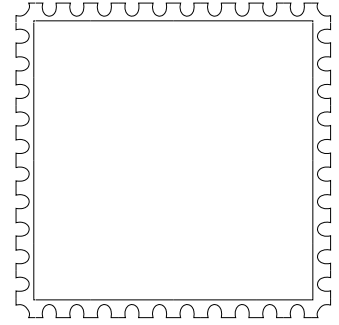
Mohapatra's artistic creativity and extraordinary sense of form and technique are evident in the more than fifty dance ballets he choreographed and produced. He also has to his credit, more than two hundred solo compositions including pallavis and ashtapadis from Gita Govinda (though not fortunate enough to see the great artist in action at Sruti, our audiences have been treated to some of his compositions and choreography: "Lalita Lavanga Lata", "Dhira Samire" and "Yahi Madhava" in the two mesmerizing performances by Sanjukta Panigrahi and the more recent presentation of the Arabhi pallavi by the Nrityagram dance ensemble.)

For his invaluable contributions to the Odissi dance form, Mohapatra received many honors and awards – Sangeet Natak Academy Award reached him in 1966, Padma Shri in 1972, Kalidas award by the Madhya Pradesh Government in 1987, Padma Bhushan in 1989 and Padma Vibhushan in 2000.



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