
SRUTI RANJANI 2009



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SRUTI- The India Music and Dance Society is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in the Philadelphia area and founded in 1986. Sruti's principal mission is to promote and present Indian classical music and dance. In addition Sruti also seeks to educate the Philadelphia community at large about Indian arts. Sruti is a volunteer-run organization. Its leadership comprises of an elected Board of Directors and several committees. Sruti publishes an annual magazine *Sruti Ranjani* and a periodical, *Sruti Notes*.

During the past twenty three years, SRUTI has grown from presenting three to four concerts a year to presenting eight to ten concerts a year. All this has been made possible with recognition and funding from many granting agencies and corporations in addition to a loyal and appreciative audience. SRUTI has received generous grants from private foundations and public organizations including the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Philadelphia Foundation, Dance Advance and Philadelphia Music Project (funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts), the Stockton-Rush Bartol Foundation, Sam Fels Foundation and the Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News

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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.

From the President's pen:

Welcome to the 2009 issue of Sruti Ranjani. As the year draws to a close, I look back with pride and pleasure on the variety of concerts and other activities that Sruti has organized. The annual Tyagaraja Aradhana and the Composer's Day events encourage music and dance students and their teachers residing in the Greater Philadelphia area to bring out their best. They serve to showcase the abundance of talent in our community, bolstered by the hard work that everybody puts into sustaining our classical art forms.

This year, Sruti has brought to you a good mix of vocal and instrumental music concerts, as well as two dance programs. In particular, we are fortunate to have had an opportunity to feature the veteran vocalist, Smt. Parassala Ponnammal, a fairly recent "find" in the Carnatic music concert circuit, while the best of the living maestros of instrumental music performed for us through the year. We were also able to showcase Mohiniyattam, the relatively rare dance form of Kerala, as well as Bharatanatyam, again by some of the topmost representatives of their respective genres. Behind the scenes, my compatriots on Sruti's board of directors and its sub-committees have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of every one of our activities. Our widened search for outside sources of funding has been fruitful, allowing us to avoid hiking membership dues and ticket rates! In tandem with this, our marketing efforts have also cast a wider net, seeking to reach out to residents of the city of Philadelphia, in addition to the suburbs where most of us live. New features have been implemented on our website and will be improved on an ongoing basis.

I would like to end this letter with an appeal to you, the reader, to get more intimately involved with the organization and ensure its longevity. If you love Indian music and dance, but have not been attending Sruti concerts regularly, you have been depriving yourself of remarkable opportunities. If you are not a member yet, but love the classical Indian performing arts, become a member today! This is your organization and it has emerged as a key player in the cultural scene of the Philadelphia region, providing patronage to your beloved art forms. The silver jubilee year (2011) of Sruti is not far off! The 2009 board, in consultation with the past presidents of Sruti, has already set the ball rolling, in terms of generating ideas on how to celebrate the coming of age of our organization in an appropriate fashion. A lot more will need to be done by the new board in 2010 and no detail will be too small to be overlooked. Please help us ensure that in a couple of years, a celebration of Sruti's 25th year will ring in another glorious innings in the life of the organization.

Vidyasankar Sundaresan

From the Publications and Outreach Committee:

Dear Friends,

SRUTI RANJANI 2009 is the final publication of the year as the events draw to a close with Sruti/Composers' Day, December 12, 2009. We take this opportunity to thank all that have contributed to this publication.

Included in this edition of SRUTI RANJANI is a center spread of photographs of events through the year. They provide a visual chronicle of SRUTI events and peripheral activities. 2009 witnessed some notable concerts. The Philadelphia area is endowed with a large and vibrant arts community. We hope to continue to further the appreciation for Indian classical music and dance in the Greater Philadelphia Region.

We would also like to remind you that SRUTI has now entered the world of Facebook. Look us up and become a fan to receive SRUTI updates on your FB homepage.

Please consider writing for the publications in 2010- The Thyagaraja Aradhana Souvenir, Sruti Notes and Sruti Ranjani 2010. We welcome your thoughts and ideas.

We wish you all a wonderful Holiday Season and a Happy New Year.

Sincerely,

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December 2009

WOMEN IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

Vidyasankar Sundaresan

July was a cruel month for Indian classical music this year. Two doyennes, D K Pattammal in the Carnatic tradition and Gangubai Hangal in the Hindustani tradition, were snatched away from this world, within a week of each other. The Indian national media, which usually pays attention only to politicians and film stars, carried obituaries and featured articles on both these great musicians. In both cases, almost every writer talked of how these grand old ladies struggled in their youth and overcame obstacles in the male dominated world of Indian music. This observation sparked off some rumination in my mind along historical, cultural and sociological lines, which I have attempted to capture in this article.

In this day and age, when it is accepted without question, at least theoretically, that women are equal to men, it seems very easy to talk of the professional struggles faced by Pattammal and Gangubai as if it were a gender issue of a bygone era. To me, this is only one part of a much more complex picture and does a great disservice to both these phenomenal musicians. It also completely glosses over the history of Indian classical music over the last century.

Gangubai Hangal was born in a Devadasi family in northern Karnataka. Her mother, Ambabai, was reputed to be a brilliant Carnatic musician herself and started training the young Gangubai in Carnatic music. However, realizing her daughter's talent and passion for Hindustani music, Ambabai is said to have stopped performing Carnatic music herself. Carnatic music's loss was Hindustani music's gain and Gangubai Hangal became famous all over India as an uncompromising and highly creative vocalist of the Kirana Gharana. As such, having taken birth in a family where women were expected to excel in the performing arts, one would think that Gangubai Hangal's chosen career as a musician and her professional success in it was destined to be. On the other hand, D K Pattammal was born in an ultra-conservative Brahmin family in Tamil Nadu, where women were expected to stay at home and not aspire to any independent professional success. So, one would think that Pattammal must have had bigger obstacles to overcome in order to establish herself as a Carnatic musician!



The early part of the 20th century was a time of enormous changes in India. Rising discontent with British rule was combined with a very publicly felt need for social reform. Indian intellectuals, many of whom hailed from very conservative Brahmin families, were actively debating what it meant to be free and gradually came to realize that freedom was a cherished value important for women as much as for men. Centuries of history and tradition clashed with new modes of thinking and behavior introduced by Europeans into India. It is important to remember that at this time, Western societies had still not granted equal freedoms to women in any appreciable manner. In the USA, women gained the right to vote only in 1920, when D K Pattammal was a one-year old infant, while Switzerland granted this right to women only in 1971.



The changes in Indian society and its overall attitude to women's roles emancipated some groups of women while imposing new restrictions on other groups of women. In the traditional social structure, women faced a mixed lot. By a curious reversal of social expectations, the Devadasi woman had a lot more independence and social presence than a high-caste woman. She was well schooled in the letters and the arts, and her patrons were the most affluent and influential members of society. Her life-partner was often a cultured Brahmin or rich landowner, but her sons could never get the same social status as their biological father nor inherit their father's property, while her daughters were expected to become Devadasis in their turn. On the other hand, a woman born in a high-caste family was often illiterate and married off at a very young age. Any literary or artistic accomplishments she may have had were to be expressed only within the confines of family and clan. Her children, of course, gained proper status and inherited property within the structures of respectable society! The intellectual ferment and social reform that took place along with

the Indian Independence movement changed all this. In the meantime, classical music became one vehicle among many, for raising the political consciousness of people against the British rule and the new technology of audio recording was put into full use for this purpose. While these changes opened up a broader field of activity for the high-caste woman, they left Devadasi women at a much greater disadvantage, while granting them a veneer of a new kind of respectability. The Devadasi Abolition Act, pioneered by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy in the Madras Presidency, and later adopted all over India, gave Devadasis the right to marry conventionally, but one of its unintended consequences was that it robbed the Devadasi of her traditional independence and livelihood. At the same time, the forms of musical patronage were shifting. The numerous kings of India no longer had the means to continue supporting the arts and public organizations, which collected ticket revenues to organize music and dance concerts, were on the rise. The new organizers of music concerts could make a statement by presenting a public concert by a Brahmin girl, but often shied away from facing the stigma associated with presenting a concert by a member of a Devadasi family! In one respect or the other, these newly created obstacles in the way of the Devadasi were faced by some of the best women musicians in south India, including M S Subbalakshmi, M L Vasantakumari, T Brinda and T Mukta.

It was in this milieu that Gangubai Hangal and D K Pattammal both found themselves making their musical careers. As a young girl, Pattammal sang and recorded the patriotic lyrics of Subramania Bharati and others. Her musical training, which was originally intended only for the occasional Puja at home and annual Navaratri celebrations became a public treasure in unprecedented ways. While the core of her strength in Carnatic music lay in the difficult Kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar and the rendition of complex Ragam Tanam Pallavis, she is remembered more popularly for her soulful rendition of Bharati's *Shanti nilava vendum*. If things had gone differently in her teenage years, and her father had been stubborn in sticking to the old ways, her trajectory in life could possibly have been very different. She would have probably ended up as one of those old grandmothers one often meets, who sing beautifully but never at a seasoned professional level. Or perhaps, she would have become reasonably well known as a good teacher in her neighborhood. It speaks volumes to her talent and perseverance that not only did her father allow her to pursue music at a very advanced level, but also very traditional men like Ambi Dikshitar (descendant of Muthuswami Dikshitar) and Justice T L Venkatarama Aiyar took her under their wings, taught her and encouraged her musical performing career at crucial junctures. Today, it is impossible to talk of Carnatic music in the 20th century without granting a place of primary importance to D K Pattammal.



Gangubai Hangal, on the other hand, was expected to have a professional career in music, but within the confines of her family background. One of her earliest public performances was as a schoolgirl, when she sang the invocation piece at a session of the Indian National Congress. Mahatma Gandhi was the president of that session. In keeping with the Devadasi tradition, she never got married conventionally. In fact, she is on record as having said that she was afraid a conventional marriage would destroy her family structure! She lived all her life in the little town of Hubli, near Dharwad, refusing to move even to Pune or Mumbai, where there was more activity in Hindustani music. Nevertheless, her status as one of the shining lights of the Kirana Gharana came to be accepted unquestioningly, thanks to the power of her high standards in musicianship. However, she did feel acutely the unfairness of the contemporary culture of recognition in Hindustani music. She remarked in a TV interview once that a male Hindustani musician easily becomes an Ustad or a Pundit, but the women remain Bai – Kesarbai Kerkar and Moghubai Kurdikar were the examples she quoted. Carnatic music seems to have steered clear of this gender bias in recognition, because it doesn't attach such labels as Pundit and Ustad to male musicians in the first place!

As the husband of a professional Carnatic musician, when I reflect back on the lives of these two iconic women in Indian classical music, I realize that a lot has changed in a century, but I also wonder, how much of this is a lasting and fundamental change in outlook? We may have loosened some of the traditional social strictures that used to govern the lives and families of our grandparents and great-grandparents, but have we really made it easier for talented women to shine as much as men in their chosen fields? What determines recognition in Indian classical music? Is it purely talent or do other factors such as branding and positioning play a role? What role does

a musician's hankering for public recognition play in the recognition that he or she eventually receives? Sruti presented the octogenarian Parassala Ponnammal earlier this year and many of us were left wondering how someone like her remained relatively unknown for such a long time in her life. Is it that she did not receive much recognition because she simply did not go about pursuing public name and fame? What would a man have done in her place? Is gender irrelevant? Does the woman artiste have a greater cross to bear, to successfully manage a stage presence and a professional career while also maintaining her family life and social standing? Doesn't the biology of childbearing and making a family itself impose more restrictions on women than on men? In addition to this, aren't there other cultural expectations from women? Unlike an earlier generation, we no longer ask ourselves whether a woman can sing Raga Alapanas or present Pallavis in complex Talas. However, don't we have other, different expectations of what a woman musician should sound like as compared to a man? More specifically, will it ever be possible for a woman version of a Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer or a Balamuralikrishna (with all their characteristic mannerisms and creativity) to become a successful performer of Carnatic music? Do such expectations put unreasonable bounds on creativity and artistry? These are tough questions, to which there are no easy answers. I suspect there are no universal answers to these questions either!

*About the author: **Vidyasankar Sundaresan** is a chemical engineer by profession and an avid music enthusiast and musicologist. Since moving to the Philadelphia area, he has been involved with Sruti in different capacities. He is the outgoing president of Sruti.*

Editor's note:

Moghubai Kurdikar referenced in the article is the mother of Kishori Amonkar the well known Hindustani music vocalist.

PARASSALA PONNAMMAL - TREASURE UNEARTHED

KiranaVali Vidyasankar

It was sometime late in 2005 that a pretty thrilled Prince Rama Varma, who happens to be one of the musicians that I exchange musical notes with, called me. The cause for his excitement was his victory in convincing the concerned authorities to let a woman musician sing at the hallowed Navaratri Mandapam in Tiruvananthapuram, during their Navaratri festival. In its nearly 200 year history, a woman had never been featured in this festival. And who was the woman who was destined to break that tradition? Was it the then sole surviving woman musician from the Golden Era, Smt. D K Pattammal? Or was it one of the reigning super-stars? Neither. It was the hitherto unheard (at least in the mainstream concert circuits) 82-year old veteran, Smt. Parassala Ponnammal.

A few months thereafter, I happened to view some video clips of this concert on Youtube. My excitement knew no bounds for it is not often that one hears music of such royal vintage. It was deeply classical, and was executed to perfection with ridiculous ease. I immediately shared these Youtube links with my family. The next thing I knew, my brother Shashikiran, being another true champion of classicism and in a position to do something about it, invited her to perform at Carnatica (an organization founded by him) during the December season. I am not exaggerating when I say that that was one of the things I looked forward to during my visit to India in December 2007.

Smt. Ponnammal's concert at Carnatica was a thematic one, covering Kerala composers, most of whom are not known to the average (or even above-average!) Carnatic lover. Save for Swati Tirunal and a few other composers like Palghat Parameswara Bhagavatar, most others' works are perhaps known only in the Kerala region. However, Smt. Ponnammal not only did justice to her theme by choosing genuinely good compositions by credible composers, but brought in a lot of freshness to even beaten-to-death ragas like Purvikalyani and Todi. As a musician I can tell you how hard it is to hold the attention of listeners even with one or two rare songs in a concert. Smt. Ponnammal's song list pretty much contained only 2-3 known compositions, but she kept the audience riveted. Everyone felt like they'd discovered a big potful of the most precious gems!

Two days later, Smt. Ponnammal performed a non-thematic concert at Naada Inbam. By then word had spread like wildfire in Chennai and a large number of people showed up for this concert. The list here was a classic Semmangudi one, featuring items like *Lokavana chatura* (Begada), *Gajavadana* (Todi), *Taruni* (Dwijavanti) and *Paripalinchu* (Suddhasaveri). From the word go, Smt. Ponnammal imparted such vibrancy and vigor to the

performance that one could easily see that she had truly imbibed the best qualities of her guru, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer's music. One didn't have to make any concessions for her age, but on the other hand, it compelled awe. Her voice possessed such steadiness and mobility that it would arouse admiration (and perhaps envy) in any musician! Later that day, I was lucky to be able to spend sometime with this great lady and talk to her about Carnatic music in general and her music in particular.

Smt. Ponnammal had her initial training under Paramu Pillai Bhagavatar and thereafter under Vaidyanatha Iyer. After winning the first place at a competition that was judged by vidwans like Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and receiving the medal from the renowned Harikesanallur Muttayya Bhagavatar, the 14-year old Ponnammal's family moved to Trivandrum on the latter's advice. There she enrolled in the Swati Tirunal Music Academy and received training from several top-class teachers such as C S Krishna Iyer, K R Kumarasamy Iyer, K S Narayanaswamy, M A Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. The genuine and generous rasika of good music that he was, Sri Muttayya Bhagavatar himself recommended Ponnammal to various organisations for concerts and also got her several teaching positions. Thus Ponnammal's concert and teaching careers grew side-by-side. She has pretty much sung at all the major organisations all over India and also held teaching positions at prestigious institutions like the Swati Tirunal Music Academy. Her last stint was as the Principal of the RLV College of Music in Trivandrum.

With sustained hard work and meticulous attention to details, Smt. Ponnammal cultivated a voice that contained all the important Carnatic values such as *sruti*, *sthana* and *gamaka shuddham*, viz. perfection in pitch and placement of swaras. Without doubt, she retains all these values in her music even today. Her repertoire, acquired diligently over the years from a number of sources, is simply phenomenal. She recalls being inspired as a little girl by her senior contemporary, Smt. M S Subbulakshmi at a concert by her at Tenkasi. The little Ponnammal confessed to being as enraptured by the Todi and Kambhoji that MS sang that day as by the diamond studs that she wore!

Though Smt. Ponnammal's success was not visible to a large share of Carnatic music lovers, her services to music have been recognised steadily over the years. In 1965 she received the title of *Gayakaratnam* from the royal family of Travancore. The Kerala State government also conferred on her the State Academy Award and Fellowship. In 2008, Sri Krishna Gana Sabha of Chennai conferred the title of *Acharya Choodamani* on her. The latest feather in her cap is the *Chembai Puraskaram* conferred by the Sri Krishna temple in Guruvayur.

A few months ago, I heard the wonderful news that the Cleveland Tyagaraja Aradhana committee was planning to feature her in the Cleveland festival. Having missed the music season in Chennai last year, especially Smt. Ponnammal's concerts, I was thrilled that I would have the opportunity to listen to her music again. As circumstances would have it, I couldn't travel to Cleveland, but instead Smt. Ponnammal herself traveled all the way to perform at our Sruti and give us a glimpse of her greatness. I feel that it would be highly presumptuous on my part to review a concert by any senior musician, especially someone of her seniority and caliber, so I'm going to content myself with just sharing some thoughts that passed my mind as I listened to her that day.

It was obvious to those present that Smt. Ponnammal was nursing a bad cold and a cough on the day of the Sruti concert (April 18, 2009). However the quality that stood out was her will to overcome it using the right methods. One of the things she did was to choose her items in such a way that it would gradually open up her voice. Even during the creative forays, she initially restricted herself to singing mostly in the *mandra* and *madhya sthayi* (lower and middle octaves) and only occasionally went to the *tara sthayi* (higher octave). Amazingly even during this phase, there was not a single sruti lapse, unsteadiness or immobility of the voice, or any musical incompleteness whatsoever. On a bad voice day, any musician is susceptible to some or all of the above! This was a clear indication of good practice methods over the decades as also of her musical wisdom. In about 30-40 minutes, Smt. Ponnammal's voice settled



beautifully and there was no trace of any cold or cough. From that point on, music of the highest class flowed in every note and phrase she sang.

I also felt there was a lesson to be emulated in the way she was completely focused on the concert that whole week. It was almost like it was her maiden concert! This doesn't mean lack of confidence on her part, but instead reflects her commitment to the art and her profession. I have seen the same quality in my guru, the late Smt. T Brinda and other musicians of the past generation.

Coming back to the concert, she took care to feature a good mix of popular and rare compositions, peppering them with the different aspects of *manodharma*. Here is the list:

1. *Swami nan undan* (Varnam) - Nattaikurinji - Adi - Papanasam Sivan
2. *Muladharasthita* - Mayamalavagowla - Rupaka - Swati Tirunal
3. *Paripalinchu* - Shuddhasaveri - Khanda Chapu - Venkatarama Iyer
4. *Manasaguruguha* - Anandabhairavi - Tisra Eka - Muttuswami Dikshitar
5. *Mantrini* - Hemavati - Adi - Harikesanallur Muttayya Bhagavatar
6. *Bhajare re manasa* - Bhimplas - Adi - Mysore Vasudevachar
7. *Shankaracharyam* - Shankarabharanam - Adi - Subbarama Dikshitar
8. *Taruni* (Padam) - Dwijavanti - Misra Chapu - Swati Tirunal
9. *Neekedayaraka* - Neelambari - Misra Chapu - Tyagaraja
10. *Ennasolli azhaittal* - Kanada - Adi - Ambujam Krishna
11. *Sanandam kamalamanohari* - Ragamalika - Adi - Swati Tirunal
12. *Aliveni* (Padam) - Kurinji - Misra Chapu - Swati Tirunal
13. *Bhujagashayino* (Mangalam) - Yadukulakambhoji - Rupaka - Swati Tirunal

Smt. Ponnammal received excellent support from her senior disciple from India, Bhama Krishnan as well as the violinist K V S Vinay and mridangam player, T S Nandakumar from Bombay. Not only did all of them shine in their solo essays but also shadowed her with immense understanding, respect and admiration throughout the concert.

I think quite a number of listeners who were present that day were lovers of a traditional style like Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer's, and would have gone home with a sense of having had a brush with genuine greatness just like I did the first time I heard her music. I'm sure a lot of us also mulled on several nagging questions like why such great music was not heard by the vast majority of Carnatic music lovers for so many years. How would Smt. Ponnammal have sung in her prime if she sings so energetically at this age? Is it essential for a Carnatic musician to live in Madras to be known to the outside world? Should society play a greater role in recognizing and nurturing genuine merit instead of just going for mere showmanship? Or should one just reconcile to the ultimate truth that human thinking will never change and instead just chalk these things to a bigger power called Destiny?

About the author: Kiranavali Vidyasankar is a Carnatic vocalist, Chitravina artist, writer and teacher. At age 2, she was able to identify over 200 ragas, demonstrate the 175 talas, answer numerous other technical questions pertaining to Carnatic music, and was hailed a child prodigy. She is the grand-daughter of the famous Gottuvadyam Narayana Iyengar and has studied with three distinguished musicians-- her father Chitravina Narasimhan, her brother Chitravina Ravikiran, and the late T. Brinda.

Editor's Note:

The Sree Guruvayurappan Chembai Puraskaram instituted by Sree Krishna temple, Guruvayur was presented to Carnatic vocalist Parassala Ponnammal on November 13, 2009. The award comprising a cash prize of Rs 50,001, a gold locket of Sree Guruvayurappan, a citation and Ponnada was presented to Ponnammal on the inaugural day of the Chembai Sangeetholsavam at Melpathur auditorium in Guruvayur. The award was instituted in memory of the late Carnatic music maestro Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar.

D.K. PATTAMMAL (1919-2009)-The end of an era

A tribute by Rasikan

Many regard the period from about 1930 to about 1960 as the modern golden era of Carnatic music. The period saw a glittering array of stars who set paths for the next generations. One of the brightest stars in that galaxy was Damal Krishnaswamy Pattammal; DKP, as she was fondly known to her numerous admirers.

She was a true path setter in many ways: she was among the first women from the so-called upper castes to grace the music platform. Women of those days were heard more during marriages, festivals etc. and not on stage. Not that there were no women performers. But the few who did were expected to only render kritis with may be a few short alapanas. Neravals and swara prastarams were rare and of course no RTP. DKP broke that barrier also. She indulged in involved pallavis sometimes in some rare ragas too and complicated thalams. Long before it became fashionable to sing Tamizh songs in the main part of a concert, DKP would regularly include them in her concerts. In fact she learned quite a few Papanasam Sivan songs from the composer himself and was partly instrumental in popularizing many of them. During the Indian independence movement she regularly used to sing the stirring patriotic songs of Mahakavi Bharathiyar.

Along with the great M.S. Subbulakshmi and M.L. Vasanthakumari, D.K. Pattammal (the women trinity of Carnatic music), gave a great fillip for women musicians to come forward and perform at the same level as the men, thus breaking the male domination in the Carnatic music world.

Pattammal's music can be characterized by the Tamizh word *Azhutham* which roughly translates to depth and strength. Her music was absolutely pure. The enunciations whether Tamizh, Telugu, Kannada or Sanskrit were distinct with no slurring over words. Her rendering of kritis were deceptively simple.

A well known violinist once described his concept of 'sarva laghu' (the phrase implies certain simplicity) as a way of playing or singing phrases such that one hearing it would feel like saying "Oh, it sounds so simple, let me try it;" but try as one may, one would find it very difficult to reproduce the nuances. DKP's music has that characteristic.

[Bach's music in Western classical music genre also has that elusive quality.]

DKP's music was different from the fast briga based music of GNB/MLV, she did not possess the captivating voice of MS nor did her music involve the heavy gamaka usages of a Brinda/Muktha. She developed a serene middle ground which suited her voice well. The music flowed at a leisurely pace with minimal frills.

A firm grip on thalam was a strength of DKP's music. In fact in an interview¹ she tells of a concert, in which she presented a complicated pallavi in sankeerna jati Dhruva thalam of 29 (9+2+9+9) matras. At the end of the concert GNB, who was in the audience, after complimenting DKP, is supposed have commented that she should not have ventured into such a complicated pallavi since, even a slight distraction (e.g. acknowledging some dignitary in the front row) could play havoc with the thalam. DKP is said to have kept quiet thinking to herself "how could I falter when I am so completely absorbed in my music".

We sometimes associate specific kritis with particular musicians, but DKP is associated with a whole corpus of compositions of Dikshitar. [A wit opined that DK should stand for Dikshitar Kritis.] She had the advantage of learning many of these kritis directly from Ambi Dikshtitar, a descendant of Muthuswami Dikshitar family, and from T.L. Venkatarama Iyer, an authority on Dikshitar kritis.

Some of the Dikshitar kritis that we identify with DKP are Soundararajam (Brindavana Saranga), Mamava Pattabhi Rama (Manirangu), Ranganayakam (Nayaki), Chintayamam (Bhairavi).

During her long career, DKP received many titles and awards. Gana Saraswathi was one of the titles given to her in her young age. In 1970, The Madras Music Academy selected DKP for its prestigious Sangita Kalanidhi award. She was the second woman to receive this award - M.S. Subbulakshmi was the first.

DKP had a number of disciples. Easily the most prominent of them was her late brother D.K.Jayaraman (DKJ) also a Sangita Kalanidhi. He not only learnt from her but also accompanied her in many concerts forming perhaps the only sister-brother tandem singers. Vijay Shiva (who originally learnt from DKJ) is perhaps the most popular standard bearer of DKP bani. DKP's grand daughter Nityashri Mahadevan is currently making waves in the musical world. Although she learnt from her illustrious grand mother, she has struck a separate path not easily

identifiable with DKP style. Incidentally, the well known violinist R.K. Shriramkumar (an accomplished vocalist too) also learnt from DKP.

For a musician who had scaled great heights, it is interesting to note that she could be quite nervous before a concert. Her nephew, the mridangist J. Vaidyanathan (son of D.K.J) narrates of an occasion when DKP was to perform in a concert (accompanied by JV) arranged by the redoubtable Brinda in honor of Kancheepuraum Naina pillai. When JV visited his aunt before the concert to get her blessing he found her somewhat nervous. The concert itself went off very well. The next day, JV relates, he visited Brinda amma who told him that DKP was the embodiment of goddess Saraswathi!²

Very high praise indeed from another great musician who was also known to be very difficult to please.

I would like end my humble tribute to the great musician with the opening line of a Bharathiyar song she would often include in her concerts:

Shanti nilava vendum, engum, Shanti nilava vendum

[Let peace prevail, everywhere, Let peace prevail]

References:

1. Sruti magazine (India), Issue 299, August 2009, page 12
2. Sruti magazine (India), Issue 300 September 2009, page 2

*About the author: An ardent admirer and lover of Carnatic music, **Rasikan** has been a regular contributor to Sruti Notes and other publications of Sruti.*

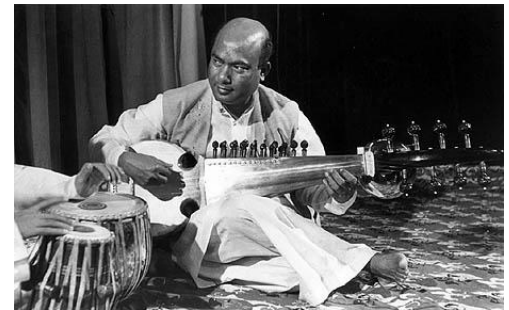
REMEMBRANCES: USTAD ALI AKBAR KHAN

Allyn Miner

Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, one of the great stylists of Hindustani instrumental music, died on June 18th of this year after six decades of worldwide acclaim. This is a short collection of personal remembrances of him as a person, teacher, and performer.

When studying sitar in Banaras I had very briefly been introduced to Khansahab in Calcutta by my teacher, Thakur Raj Bhan Singh who admired him above all the instrumentalists of the time. In 1984 I was back home in Philadelphia when Ali Akbar Khansahab gave a concert at the Painted Bride. After the performance I gathered the courage to go backstage to pay my respects. Khansahab was gracious and said, "Come to California!" I was thrilled to feel that I had received a personal invitation. Of course, he said that to everyone! But the next summer I made the trip to Marin County where Khansahab lived and had his school.

The Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael was the musical home of several generations of students of sarod, sitar, other instruments, and voice. Some of the most senior students had been with Khansahab for 30 years. The stories of their sacrifices and devotion were astonishing and touching. Very soon I came to feel for myself the magnetic draw of this small, quiet, brilliant man. Like many of the other students, I attended all levels of classes and we sat astounded and humbled as Khansahab consistently produced the most surprising melodies and confounding rhythms for us on his sarod or with his rough-edged beautiful voice. Even ragas which I had studied and performed for years seemed new and challenging. The speed and accuracy with which the best students picked up the fiendishly difficult phrases that Khansahab produced were amazing. His idiosyncratic explanations or piercing reprimands had us all alternately laughing and suffering. All of us did our best to remember and absorb the music, yet our renditions rarely seemed to have the life that they had had from his hands. We felt elated and inspired to be the recipients of the music pouring from him, but often felt overwhelmed by the impossibility of measuring up to his standard. The Ali Akbar School has been a site of intense effort, hopes, and devotional zeal



on the part of hundreds of students who dedicated years of their lives to this difficult music and this charismatic teacher. The volumes of material that he gave students will remain a musical legacy. The hundreds who passed through or studied briefly will surely always remember Khansahab sitting in his chair at the top of the stairs greeting each student and visitor with a warm smile and individualized conversation.

During my time in Marin County each summer I would anxiously await the phone calls in which I would be invited to Khansahab's home with my sitar. There would usually be another senior student there. We would go upstairs and quietly watch Khansahab finish his evening puja, passing incense before photos of his parents and elders, his spiritual guides, images of Hindu deities, Muslim saints, and other precious mementos. Then we would nervously tune, and he would lead us through the delicate phrases of an alap. We would have to produce the timing and nuances of each meend and ornament with complete accuracy. Often a minute discrepancy would result in an expression of displeasure and the phrase would have to be worked over and over again. By insisting on the precision of the phrases, pauses, tones, he taught us how to listen and feel deeply. I can never forget how the ati-komal, mobile Dha and Ga of the formidable Darbari Kanara, took on more and more profound levels of meaning. The phrasings of Durgesvari unfolded like a fascinating story. The beautiful Shuddh Kalyan took on touching depth and seriousness that I had never experienced before. The mellow Bagesri Kanada felt serious but warm and comforting.

Khansahab was a marvelous cook and a friendly and gracious host. Most who visited Khansahab's home also joined him for meals. Having heard that I spent so much time in Banaras, he asked me to make dal in the Banaras style. His comment at my first attempt was that I had made a "pandit's dal." a considerate way of saying it was bland. Under his guidance I learned to make a more flavorful dal and a very good khichari as well. Many of his dishes were legendary among his family and friends, and some students learned to replicate them almost perfectly. One of my special culinary contributions came to be making roti, since I had had practice in Banaras. Thick, "moti roti" in the rural style was his particular favorite.

I had the privilege of playing the tanpura in a number of Khansahab's concerts. The thrill of experiencing performances from just behind his left shoulder is unforgettable. The vibrations of the sarod and tabla carried through the platform and the heat became palpable as the energy of the performers built. The unpredictable nature of Khansahab's performances was part of their magic. No musician can plot the exact path of a concert, and a Hindustani musician is particularly spontaneous. Khansahab's concerts were always a thrilling adventure. He seemed to pluck phrases and rhythms direct from some heavenly source. Though he appeared to be introspective during a concert, he was also very sensitive to the audience and the environment. He made us laugh once when he told us that glimpsing an audience member looking away or talking caused him to lose 10% of his mood. He always arrived very early for a concert. An experience that I still recall is a tuning session before a concert in San Francisco. As he worked over the 25 strings of his sarod, the notes seemed to take on a life of their own. He asked me to lean close so he could hear the tanpura drone and I was mesmerized by the gleam of the shiny fingerboard and the beautiful tones. Tuning felt like a full concert experience.

Khansahab's wife Mary was always cheerful and welcoming to the students and visitors who appeared at their door. She chatted with us as a friend and told us details about her busy family life. She managed the household and carried on the business of Khansahab's recording archive label. Their three beautiful children grew into friendly, talented young adults. I watched as the eldest son, Alam, turned to the sarod in earnest during his high school years. The pressure on a son of a great artist can be severe. To everyone's delight Alam began to produce from the sarod the most marvelous music. As Khansahab turned his full attention on him during his last years, Alam began to manifest some of the otherworldly magic of his father's touch. He is an exciting young artist. If there is any wish shared by all the students and admirers of the great Ali Akbar Khan, it is that his music continue to live.

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CREATIVE PROGRESS IN CARNATIC MUSIC

Prabhakar Chitrapu & Uma Prabhakar

We had recently bought a CD from Starbucks or Kitchen Capers on 'World Music' and were listening to it on our drive home. One of the songs in that CD, 'Nagumomu Galaleni' in raga Abheri, composed by St Thyagaraja was rendered by a singer named Susheela Raman, in a style that was not only modern and non-traditional, but also very distortive from the original piece (both in the pronunciation of the lyrics and the raga). The rendering not only annoyed and saddened us but also made us reflect on the following: is Carnatic Music (CM) so rigid and unwilling to evolve? Are its practitioners and patrons dogmatically sticking to the so-called tradition and thwarting new creative forms?

The response to these questions really depends on who is answering, i.e. whether they already are CM fans or not. Views of the former may likely be driven by self-defense and the latter by the ease of criticizing that which one is not. Of course, objective responses are also likely in both camps. To quote the dancer, Yamini Krishnamurthy, *'the three 'T's'- tradition, transition and transformation- are integral to the creative arts, one needs a lot of courage to bring about transformation'*.

Rather than arguing on what the right answer is, we will attempt to paint a broad brush stroke of the scene. Let us rewind time a few hundred years back to when the CM Trinity did not exist. Current wisdom suggests that CM at that time consisted of kirtanas of composers such as, Purandara Dasa, Annamacharya etc., and that it was poetic and had simple meter. However, the theory of CM was already developed, in terms of the Melakarta Raga schemes, etc. Classical CM concerts were probably highly technical and elaborate, in which a single raga would be rendered for several hours at a stretch! Then came the Trinity (~1750-1850) and transformed the CM landscape in terms of musical enrichment and sophistication in the Kirtana-style compositions, leading to the Kriti form. The emotional appeal was preserved, but a solid core of precisely defined musical structure gave the compositions strength, longevity and immutability. Just as with strong steel reinforced cores, one can build sky-scrapers, so were monuments of CM built with solid internal structures and exterior facades of exquisite beauty. Perhaps the purely technical and extraordinarily elaborate renderings were done with, during these times.

No CM fan would argue that this was not creative progress. In fact, this progress is what liberated CM from the extremes of musical simplicity and musical extravagance to the middle stream of aesthetic and intellectual balance. How would people on each extreme position have viewed this development? Would the simple people that enjoyed Devara-Namas of Purandara Dasa or Desi-Padas of Annamacharya have lamented that their simple songs now were stolen by scholars and taken away from them? Would the vidwans that sang a raga for 10 to 12 hours have expressed sighs of diluting their music? We do not know and are quite free to guess.

The Trinity has left their tracks behind them, and paved roads that many generations of musicians have traveled with gratitude for the creations as well as for the livelihoods they provided. Such beneficiaries include not only musicians, but also music patrons, people who arrange musical concerts and sabhas, people who produce records, cassettes, CDs and so on. They celebrated the music of the Trinity, which now was the CM itself, by preserving it as faithfully as possible.

The weight and vastness of the creativity of the Trinity possibly dwarfed the intellect and creativity of lesser known prodigies. No doubt a few composers and musicians did emerge, but they too have in some ways mimicked the music of the Trinity. Great as they were, their musical works probably represented smaller variations and minor accomplishments in the realm of CM. Can the post-Trinity era then be considered as a period representing little creative progress? Again, we leave you to reflect on the answer.

The structure of CM concerts as we know of today said to date back only to the beginning of the 20th century. The concert typically begins with a **Varnam**, and is followed by *Krithis* with the main piece including *Alapana*, *Niraval* and *Swara Prasthanas*, *Ragam Tanam Pallavi*, *Tukudas* (miscellaneous items), *Tillana* (exposition of rhythm) and finally *Mangalam* (auspicious ending). This structure is credited to Ariyakudi Ramanuja Aiyengar. Does this development of a concert structure qualify for creative progress? Perhaps so, as the overall concert structure portrays a sense of proportion, progression and appeal.

In the past 30 years, we have witnessed several different directions along which CM has meandered. For example, new instruments have been introduced, new compositions (lyrics) and new ragas have been created, old compositions and old ragas have been rendered differently. The concert format itself has eased itself from the

original structure. Different genres of music have been brought together. And then there are simpler versions of Carnatic ragas in film music, the popular musical wave of the silver-screen era appealing to the mass media.

Several pioneers have introduced new musical instruments to the CM scene. For example, U. Srinivas modified and popularized the Western/Greek instrument, the Mandolin; Kadri Gopalnath the Jazz instrument, Saxophone; and R. Prasanna the Western Country & Folk Music Guitar to name just a few. *Gamakas*, which are integral to CM, is not intrinsic to these instruments. Therefore, these pioneers either modified the instruments or developed innovative new techniques of playing them so as to produce the full suite of sounds of CM. These adaptations most certainly demonstrate steps in creative progress and innovation.

With regard to the creation of new compositions, there is probably more consensus here, because CM has always been predominantly lyrics based. Arguably, the challenges and aesthetics of blending of lyrics and structured music are under-appreciated and less understood. These are essentially two perpendicular dimensions and to bring them together while preserving the aesthetics and exposing the various structural aspects of the underlying raga is the challenge. If the lyrics and the music are developed sequentially, the latter aspect generally gets compromised and results in mediocre quality. For example, if one starts with a poem or a composition and then tries to set music to it, the music sometimes gets to be artificial. Starting with music and setting new words to it appears to be less risky, and more people have had success using this approach. Even some of Saint Thyagaraja's well known students have followed this approach successfully for their creations. However, one who is skilled in both the music and the lyrics (i.e. *vaggeyakaras*) and whose creativity is driven by a powerful inner emotional force is perhaps best positioned to produce the best blend of the two. The Trinity comprises the undisputed proof of this thesis, while the recent times have seen composers such as M. Balamuralikrishna, Lalgudi Jayaraman, and Ravi Kiran etc.

Creation of new ragas has been more challenging and consequently resulted in fewer artists experimenting in this direction. Saint Thyagaraja has given us several new ragas and new shapes of primitively defined archaic ragas. In recent times, M Balamuralikrishna has created new ragas, such as Lavangi etc. The challenge in such creativity is not only technical, but also one of public acceptance. The technical difficulty is easier to comment about. A raga is, defined by a set of rules, that are deliberately not precise, allowing the artist greater flexibility to express his or her emotions and feelings. Public acceptance on the other hand is a more complex issue. Does the public have to appreciate a new raga, for it to be beautiful? Is not beauty in the eyes of the beholder? New music takes time to 'grow into' and only time can tell whether the recent ragas will share the shelf space with other popular CM ragas.

Trickier is the matter of newer renderings and interpretations of old traditional CM compositions. Since music needs time for public acceptance and appreciation, a variation in the rendering of an established music would trigger a critical reaction initially for the traditionalist. As mentioned earlier, CM has seen smaller variations in the music of Trinity, while there is more divergence in the renderings of Purandara Dasa and Annamacharya. Interestingly, discerning public appears to be more forgiving to variations to the earlier music than to the music of the Trinity. But is it creative progress to re-interpret the music of the Trinity? While there can be many opinions here, our view is that it could. But, musicians should be cautious of the initial negative public reaction, which could be softened by acknowledging and taking responsibility for the experiment, instead of attributing to the original composer him or herself.

More recently, there have been serious attempts by various artists to fuse CM with other genres of music. Most frequent and popular is the fusion of CM with Hindusthani music. Both styles of classical music shared a common identity until about 11th century AD and, share some common ragas (e.g. Kalyani vs. Yaman etc). There have been varied combinations of duets, for example, two vocalists (Balamuralikrishna and Bhimsen Joshi), vocalist and an instrumentalist (Balamuralikrishna and Flute Hari Prasad Chaurasia) and two instrumentalists (Flute Shashank and Sitar Shaheed Parvez). Often a raga common to both genres, such as Hindolam and Malkauns, is selected and rendered in the two styles. The scope in such innovations is rather small. Perhaps, experimenting with different ragas which are structurally close to or far apart from each other may be a more fruitful avenue to explore. CM has also been fused with Jazz and Western Classical music. For example, U Srinivas and Prasanna experimented with Jazz, while Ravikiran attempted a melding of Indian melodic principles with Western harmonic ones. The latter experiment underscores another interesting aspect of fusion, which is challenging and may open up new vistas. Perhaps, akin to *vaggeyakaras*, we may call such artists who can bring together melody and harmony as *melonkaras*. Another example of creativity!

From our analysis, which we admit represents an incomplete list of evolutionary steps that have affected CM, it doesn't feel as if CM is an inflexible art form, does it? But why do some feel the opposite? In cataloging the topics in this article, we may have missed other important ones suggesting the opposite. In any case, an in-depth study with inputs from experts in the field will certainly contribute to a richer and fuller understanding of this topic.

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Encyclopedia Britannica Entry: Indian music

Carnatic also spelled **Karnatic** or **Karnatak**

music of southern India (generally south of the city of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh state) that evolved from ancient Hindu traditions and was relatively unaffected by the Arabic and Iranian influences that, since the late 12th and early 13th centuries, as a result of the Islamic conquest of the north, have characterized the Hindustani music of northern India. In contrast to northern styles, Carnatic music is more thoroughly oriented to the voice. Even when instruments are used alone, they are played somewhat in imitation of singing, generally within a vocal range, and with embellishments that are characteristic of vocal music. Fewer instruments are used in Carnatic than in northern Indian music, and there are no exclusively instrumental forms.

The basic principles of raga (melody type, or framework for improvisation) and tala (cyclical rhythmic pattern) are the same in the south and north, but each musical tradition has its own repertoire of actual ragas and talas, and there are many stylistic differences as well. Carnatic music, with its more homogeneous Indian tradition, has evolved far more orderly and uniform systems for the classification of ragas and talas. Although improvisation plays a major role in Carnatic music, the repertory also consists of a vast number of composed pieces, particularly the *kriti* or *kirtana*, complex devotional songs by composers from the 16th through the 20th centuries, particularly the so-called "trinity" of great composers of the early 19th century, Tyagaraja, MuthuswamiDikshitar, and Syama Sastri.

To many listeners, the music of the south has a restrained and intellectual character as compared with the music of the more secular Hindustani traditions. The chief centres for present-day Carnatic music include Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala states. The greatest concentration of Carnatic musicians, and the most outstanding performances, are found in the city of Chennai (formerly Madras).

Editor's Note:

The following is an excerpt from a posting on **The Clothing Manufacturer's Association of India's** website regarding the recurring theme of the textile used in the design of the Sruti Fall brochure and further used in a number of the fall season mailings and the SRUTI RANJANI 2009 cover images:

"The Forgotten Craft - Kodali Karuppur Sari

The Kodali Karuppur or Karuppur sari, which evolved under the patronage of the Maratha rulers, has a unique place among textiles. These saris were exclusively made for the Maratha queens of Tanjore till the end of the nineteenth century. The Kodali Karuppur sari, a combination of wax resist hand painting, block printing and intricate weaving, was used exclusively for royal weddings. The rareness of the Karuppur sari lies in its perfect combination of three distinct techniques that is painting, weaving and printing.

During the 19th century, Karuppur traditional saris were made at Kodali Karuppur village, about 30 km from Kumbakonam of Tanjore district in Tamil Nadu. The Kodali Karuppur saris were a favorite with the Maratha rulers of Tanjore and therefore flourished in the State under their patronage. The uniqueness of the Karuppur saris was that they were created on brocaded fabrics with the print and brocade butas matched together perfectly to create a glittery effect."

Images 2009 Thyagaraga Aradhana Day



Group rendering of Utsava Sampradaya Kritis and Pancharatna Kritis



Concert: Nisha Rajagopal- Vocal, Mysore K. Srikanth-violin, Trivandrum.V. Balaji- Mridangam

Images 2009 Spring Concert Series



Vadya Sunada Sangam



With Sruti Board of Directors



Rajna Swaminathan Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi Jayashri Jayaraj Bagyalakshmi Muralikrishna



Senior Artist Parassala Ponnammal in concert



Neyveli Santhanagopalan in concert



Sruti Members with Bharati Shivaji & Group



Mohiniyattam group

Images 2009 Fall Concert Series



Maharajapuram Ramachandran accompanied by V.V.S. Murari-violin, Vijay Ganesh- mridangam



Jugalbandi Concert cosponsored by the Painted Bride Arts Center
Shashank-flute & Shahid Parvez Khan-sitar accompanied by Anand Ananthakrishnan-mridangam & Shubajyoti Guha- tabla



Alarmel Valli



Orchestra accompanying Alarmel Valli



Sruti Board of Directors with Alarmel Valli

Images 2009 Fall Concert Series (continued)



Kadri Gopalnath- saxophone accompanied by A.Kanyakumari- violin, B.Harikumar- mridangam



Chitravina Ravikiran accompanied by Ranjani Ramakrishnan- violin, Trichy Sankaran- mridangam



Some concert venues



Sruti members with Alarmel Valli



This is a game.....

MOHAN KHOKAR: PIONEERING SCHOLAR-COLLECTOR-HISTORIAN

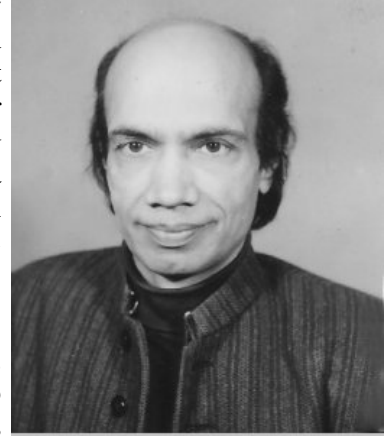
- Ashish Mohan Khokar, Bangalore

Based on archival materials from The Mohan Khokar Dance Collection

Sept 17th being Mohan Khokar's tenth death anniversary, we recall his work and worth, especially for internet readers who were born after his era. In Indian dance, there are very few original, pioneering, scholars who are pan-Indian and have intrinsic knowledge of each dance form.

Early 19th century writers were region bound. Thus an E Krishna Iyer knew much about Bharatanatyam or southern traditions but may not have been exposed to Manipuri, Chhau, Kathak, Bhangra, Rauf, Gidda or Tappa. Thus, such great writers were bound by the state or region they hailed from. Dance writing or research as a discipline was very personal and by most early accounts, G Venkatachalam or Sambhamoorthy's were moored to their settings. Kerala writers wrote on reviving Kerala arts; Tamil writers would write on Bharatanatyam or Andhra traditions. There was no one from the north or anyone who were aware of the traditional forms of the west and east equally well. History gave this role to Mohan Khokar.

The first truly pan-Indian writer on dance, someone who knew all folk forms, someone who was at home with details of each classical form and someone who first-hand documented (when the word was not even invented and who did this equally for all forms of dance, weddings and funerals) rituals like Teyyam or Bhagavata Mela Natakam, was Mohan Khokar. History and several hundred articles in several magazines, newspapers and journals worldwide in the last 60 years provide the evidence of this scholarship.



Mohan Khokar



Ram Gopal

Photo not posed but natural, by Mohan Khokar

Mohan Khokar was born on 30th Dec 1924 in Quetta, now in Pakistan. He always joked (he had a very subtle sense of humour and joked only with those he felt close to or trusted) that if only he had waited two days, he would be a year younger because just being born on the second last day of the year meant his age got advanced by a year! He was the Dev Anand of dance - forever young of heart - with healthy glowing skin and well preserved body, until the one time he fell ill was one final call when cancer claimed him in September 1999.

His father, Sardar Bhagat Ram Khokar, was the Commissioner of Defence, at that time posted in Quetta, where Mohan Khokar was born. Quetta was the capital of Baluchistan province, now in Pakistan. A Sikh by religion, he was brought up to respect all dharmas. After Quetta was destroyed in a massive 7.1 Richter scale earthquake on May 31, 1935, Mohan Khokar, then only ten, lost many relatives and close friends and could never understand how Nature

could be so furious. Even as a youngster, those days, he documented the earthquake with his camera and these albums remain historical material.

A good student, he was put in the most prestigious college run by American missionaries, the Foreman's Christian College, Lahore, where his father was posted after the earthquake. Lahore was the Paris of the East; Delhi was just a village. He fell in love with one beauty called Rani, who was learning Kathak of the Punjab Gharana. Yes, we know only of two major gharanas, the Lucknow and Jaipur, but long before Jaipur, Kharairgarh or Benaras was the Punjab Gharana. We are talking of 1930s and the 40s. Rani (sister of famous dancer Tara Chaudhari, who partnered Ram Gopal) however did not return his feelings he has noted in his book on Uday Shankar (by way of humour again) and thus to make an impression on her, Mohan Khokar set out to learn dance! By the time he found a good teacher, Pt. Pyarelal, he had lost interest in Rani (who in any case had not returned his feelings for her!) and fell for a new and more lasting love - dance itself!

Uday Shankar was a major influence on him, thus he shortened his name to Khokar to match and rhyme with Shankar! The original family name was most sardars are known as Khokar. It is a brave, fearsome group of supremely loyal sardars that stopped Mohammed Ghori from invading India and were the chief reason Alexander

the Great too could not reach far. History books speak about the Khokars. There is still a village by the name of Khokarapura in undivided Punjab. And all history textbooks mention Khokars as frontier people to be feared! Tales of their bravery and loyalty to Mother India are too many to recount here.

Mohan Khokar's father was in the British army and in charge of the biggest garrison in Asia, Quetta, then Lahore Ambala and finally Meerut. The family lost two houses, one in the Quetta earthquake because though the house survived the earthquake, thanks to blessings of a Sufi Pir, the town had to be completely evacuated. Lahore was left behind in partition of India and the last house was built in Chandigarh.

Seeing Ram Gopal and his troupe in Lahore made Mohan Khokar awaken to the beauty of Bharatanatyam. He left Lahore for Madras to learn the art. Sounds simple but imagine traveling for weeks in trains in 1945 India to reach a totally alien place wherein he knew not a soul! All to learn dance! He knew he had to somehow reach a dance school called Kalakshetra.

Fortunately, he hailed from a sturdy stock that could not be discouraged easily and thus plodded along. He was greatly supported and looked after like a son by a lady called Rukmini Arundale, who ran the dance school, then located in the Theosophical Society. Mohan Khokar came to Madras in Dec of 1945, and other than love for Bharatanatyam, he had only one name that he knew in Madras, that of Baby Saroja who had come with Ram Gopal to perform and stayed at his family home with Tara Choudhari. But Mohan Khokar got so immersed in learning Bharatanatyam that he forgot to look the Saroja family up until one day he saw a huge film hoarding in Myalpore and read the name MK Saroja in a Lux soap advertisement! He could not believe that Baby Saroja had blossomed into a beautiful maiden, all of 16 and a famous dancer to boot!

Kalakshetra kept him busy and Athai (as matronly Rukmini Arundale, the founder-director was fondly called by all) took special care of him as he was the first male student from north India. She instructed the canteen to make chappathis for the boy from Punjab for how could he eat rice in various forms all the time? Rukmini athai remained his primary teacher as did Periya Sarada, who was barely 5 years older than him. Thus when she had to teach him the inner meaning of padams she sent him to the Adyar library, thinking this lad from north had best be left to learn meanings of padams from dull, dry books. That is how Mohan Khokar got hooked on to books, library, research, and documentation. He copied most of the books in the library in pencil and these remain very useful as the library later burnt down and the photocopier machine had not been invented.

This love for the written word made him hungry for more material on dance. In the 1940s there was hardly any literature on Indian dance. Visiting foreigners wrote either in glowing terms of anything exotic or they wrote disparagingly due to a lack of understanding! Stray articles with beautiful costumes but no clues decorated dance writings. Mohan Khokar took upon himself first to learn more and then to share that knowledge with all, through his writings. That he took his own photos helped a lot because those days few had cameras and fewer took dance photos as it was too expensive a proposition, since films were imported from abroad. This winning combination of a qualified writer who took his own photos stood him in good stead and thus he contributed significantly to our understanding of dance in 1950s to 1990s. There was just no one even remotely comparable to his in depth scholarship of dance, command of English language and exemplary documentary proof or visual support. Mohan Khokar thus remains a pioneer without parallel and his lifetime work speaks for it.

At age 20, he was writing for national magazines and journals and as he took his own pictures he was welcomed by all. Soon, many prestigious magazines and papers like the Free Press, The Illustrated Weekly of India, Pushpanjali and Marg sought his contributions and the bulk of writing in 50s to 80s is done by him. Definitive Marg issues till date are relevant on Orissi, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Chhau and Manipuri.



Yamini Krishnamurti
Photo not posed but natural, by Mohan Khokar

He married the star Bharatanatyam dancer MK Saroja on Dec. 14, 1949 and the same day he received a telegram asking him to appear for an interview at a faraway place called Baroda. He was not keen to leave his wife but his mother-in-law convinced him to go. He was appointed without hesitation because there was no one else in India at that time who had the necessary qualifications, plus the background of extensive field work. He joined the MS University Baroda in 1950 and stayed there for 12 years. At 24, he was the head of dance dept, the country's first, teaching dance at graduate level and his colleagues in other faculties were all equally known names like Bendre sahib for Painting; Sankho Choudhury for Sculpture and NC Mehta for Drama.

Mohan Khokar set the Course still in use 50 years later and emulated by other universities! He helped old masters and musicians be gainfully employed as regular staff and they retired as government staff with full benefits. He did much for artists and many can vouch for that. It was no wonder that with his standing and outreach, the Education Ministry in Delhi, sought his services as Special Officer for Dance and took him on loan from the Baroda University, a loan they never returned! He was a Special officer for Dance and reported directly to the Education Minister. He was placed at the Sangeet Natak Akademi, where he served for 18 years, the last five as its acting Secretary. He was the only pan-Indian dance scholar and after him, Kapila Vatsyayan. His chairmen, KPS Menon senior, Vice Chair PL (Pula) Deshpande were all men of great eminence and standing and supported his work and worth. Under them, lots of artists and rare forms, then facing near-extinction, like Koodiyattam, Ottan Thullal, Chhau, were supported. Thanks to that support, children of these gurus learnt the form and the art was sustained. Along with Charles Fabri, he helped project Orissi when it was not established, accepted or nationally known. He personally looked after the welfare of gurus and senior artists and juniors could always walk into his office for help, advice or guidance. While he was authoritative, and respected for his scholarship and standing, he was never autocratic. His own wife neither got any shows at the Akademi functions or even an award. She got it 15 years AFTER he had left the Akademi, so strict was he. GS Rajan, a former Deputy Secretary and full-time flautist and composer par excellence recalls that he has seen files where Mohan Khokar has noted that "since MK Saroja is his wife, she should not get any programs or favorable treatment." Such integrity and honesty is hard to come by, especially today when all caution is thrown to winds in many ways.

As a serious documenter/photographer of dance, who shot live, while a performance was on (and never posed) his photos were celebrated world over. When the Indian Postal Dept wished to release a set of 6 photos showing 6 prime classical forms (not 7, when Orissi was added or 8 when Sattriya was added), they asked Mohan Khokar to provide the photos. When UNESCO wanted a bibliography of Indian dance created, they turned to Mohan Khokar. When Stockholm Dance Museum was set up, they turned to Mohan Khokar for the material.



Zohra Sehgal and Mohan Khokar (Guru and shishya)
Photo: Ashish Khokar

When the Lincoln Centre in New York City was looking for dance materials from India, no one guided the founder-curator to Mohan Khokar because the Delhi lobby was jealous he would get more importance! She traced him on the last day of her 2 week visit and when she went home and saw his priceless materials, she cried out of joy and cancelled her flight later that night to New York, to stay and study some of the materials. She offered him a fortune to take the materials to USA to be placed at the world's best dance facility - the Lincoln Centre. Mohan Khokar, in retrospect felt he should have gifted the Collection to her/Lincoln Centre because India did not care for true treasures. The Indian government or its dance-related agencies till date, has done nothing.

He offered the Collection as donation to many dance related institutions like the NCPA, IGNCA, National Archives, but each had a special situation: museums wanted artifacts from the Collection and not paper materials and Archives wanted paper materials (photos, books, memorabilia) but not artifacts! He desired to travel to enhance, update and augment the Collection but while they wanted this Collection worth crores, few wished to spend a penny on the Collector. Mohan Khokar tried various combinations and then gave up, assured in the fact that universe and nature had conspired to send someone to look after it and make its proper use, in keeping with the wishes of its creator. It fell on yours truly to undertake that historical responsibility.

What is the importance or relevance of the Mohan Khokar Dance Collection?

No book on last 100 years of Indian dance history can be completed without this material. Why books? Even Ph.D students need reference materials and critics, if they chose to write in depth, or with historical proof. Many biographies have been done, based on this Collection. The national agencies don't have much material before 1960s. Documentation as a word was invented only in the late seventies. Mohan Khokar was far ahead of his times. The Mohan Khokar Dance Collection is known and celebrated and sought after by many. The Collection (www.dancearchivesofindia.com) continues to look for a suitable home as it has grown many fold, with more additions done by yours truly, its inheritor, in the last 20 years. Many precious materials come the Khokars' way as natural gifts from many dancers and gurus. Veterans and seniors who know that between two Khokars their histories are safe and secure, wish to donate all they possess but the limitations of space and resources stop the Khokars from accommodating all. Between two individuals, The Mohan Khokar Dance Collection, is priceless and the only direct record of dance history in last hundred years. Mohan Khokar's vision was for the glory of art, for dance itself. He felt his work was his award and he was happy it would continue after him.



Mohan Khokar and Ashish Khokar

Mohan Khokar's end years got him Emeritus Fellowship from the Dept of Culture to continue his research work and he used the time to contribute slice of history to various specialized journals like Sruti and The Statesman. He wrote 5 definitive books, all out of print and very much sought after. His writings alone need to be digitized and preserved.

He remained devoted to dance till his end on 17th Sept 1999 and his spirit continues to serve dance.....



As successor and inheritor of Mohan Khokar's work, Ashish continues to serve dance. Thanks to the wealth of materials left, he has been able to do 35 books and edit-publish 'attendance,' India's only yearbook on dance and its history. He also served the Sahitya Kala Parishad; Festivals of India in France, Sweden, Germany and China and Martand Singh Consultants before becoming a full-time dance writer serving the Times of India as their dance critic for two decades and many magazines and journals, including narthaki. See www.attendance-india.com

This article was first published in www.narthaki.com and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the author. Photos courtesy Ashish Mohan Khokar.

ADUVOME PALLU PADUVOME : DANCE AND SING WITH JOY !

Original Article written in Tamil by Smt. Anandhi Ramachandran, published in Kalki Magazine, and can be accessed at <http://www.msstribute.org/people/aduvome-paduvome.php>

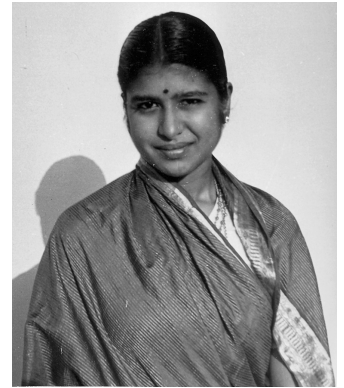
Translated by Kamakshi Mallikarjun

We did our abhinaya to the singing by MS (Smt M.S.Subbulakshmi). The celebrated photographer Nagaraja Rao snapped the photos of Radha (Smt Radha Viswanathan) and me individually, as well as together.

Until now, we had both learned all our dance items together in class. But, for the past week, our teacher Ramiah Pillai made us each dance separately. If both of us did the abhinaya together, Shri T K C felt the audience would be perpetually torn about who to look at and so this will make the experience less cohesive for them. (TKC is 'Rasikamani' T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar "famous in his days as the 'Sage of Kuttralam' for his dedicated service to the cause of Tamil literature in general and Kamban's Ramayana in particular."). Since everyone felt his opinion was valid, it was decided that we would do the Nritha portion together and do the abhinaya separately.

A Singer sewing machine, an assortment of fabric pieces, borders with zari, books with varying designs all started accumulating upstairs at Kalki Gardens and they also arranged for a tailor to stay in house. We can never forget Ananthanarayanan (Sadasivam's nephew-in-law) who toiled night and day to resolve the multiple logistics around getting the costumes ready on time and with quality. Sadasivam Mama gave the imperious command of "Try to make the costume like Rukmini Devi's" and walked away. The innocent tailor was perplexed and asked "Who is that and where is her shop?" I still remember how I shared that with everyone and laughed.

Given the additional criteria, that the costume should adorn us like a sari but also have a pajama, the tailor painstakingly first tried the pattern on paper, then on throw away cloth that we used to call "ceeti". Eventually, he made it out of a green satin cloth with a gold zari. Radha and I loved its soft feel to the touch. However, when Sadasivam and MS saw it, they vetoed it, saying "It is too bright and shiny. It is not nice". Then, MS brought out a beautiful blue and gold sari that she had worn in Meera and gave it to the tailor. The tailor was so reluctant to cut that resplendent tissue sari.



Once we tried out the costumes that were stitched with this sari, they were approved. Jewels were scrutinized carefully, next. We would be wearing the borrowed Manga Malai (necklace with mango like patterns) through the Varnam; for the abhinaya pieces, we would wear the necklace with a pendant anchored by a long string of pearls; a garland of flowers was the innovation for the song Aduvome Pallu Paduvome.

The program booklet was also very creatively done. Every page had the details about one song along with a picture with the pose for that song. The tiny booklet was stitched together by a string with two anklet bells. It also had pictures of our teacher

Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai and MS.

Thirupugazh Mani T M Krishnaswami Iyer was invited to be the Chief Guest for the Arangetram. When the first bell rang, the screen was opened and a special backdrop with the picture of Nandi was revealed. There was a slight delay in the arrival of the Chief Guest. Some of the audience who lost their patience in a matter of just 10 minutes started singing the song '*Satre vilagi irum pillai sannidhanam marikudaam*'— pleading with Nandi to not block the view! This caused a lot of rustle and bustle amongst the audience.

A lot of amazement was expressed about the teeming crowds for the event. We were just children. We thought the overflowing audience had to come to see our dance! We only realized later that the catalyst was the padam singing by MS.

Our dancing to the patriotic song Bharathiyaar's *Aduvome Pallu Paduvome*, wearing the garland of flowers diagonally across our shoulder, was greeted with tremendous cheering by the audience. First, the intensity of feeling expressed in the song, remember it was before we got Independence. Then it was the attractive tune, the singer's breathtaking voice, the dance choreography all contributed to the enthusiastic reception for that song. They applauded for each line, culminating in a thrilling finale imploring freedom and independence. Dancing to a patriotic song was not only a novelty but something that was entirely befitting those times.

Kalki's composition of Malai Pozhuthinile was also a novel experience for the audience. This was also set to music by S V Venkatraman. I played the role of the nayika while Radha played the role of Lord Muruga. In those days that was a new technique. We danced with our usual costumes; the varying roles were apparent in our abhinaya. It set a new trend. When Radha gave an impish smile for the lines- "*Pulli Mayil Veeran Punnagai Thaan Purindaan*" (Astride a peacock, the valiant one gave a beautiful smile) the audience laughed along happily.

A Bharatanatyam arangetram. The dancers who performed for around 3 hours were about twelve years old. Traditional yet innovative costumes, understated makeup, good dance, incredible music, carefully selected repertoire, Mylai Sangeetha sabha's great rasikas. All these factors contributed to the event's success.

A little later, the Bharathi Vizha occurred at Ettayapuram. Shri T KC requested that there should be a dance recital by Anandhi-Radha at that event. There was also a music concert by MS. My father selected a new song by the poet for Bharathi Vizha- ‘*Vetri Ettu Dikku Metta Kottu Murase*’ (To herald the imminent victory in 8 directions, beat the drums with joy) and S V Venkatraman tuned it to raga mohanam,

After a shortened alarippu and varnam, when MS started singing *Aduvome*, the rousing cheers seemed to reach the heavens. And the victorious claps from the audience truly seemed to reach all 8 directions! The dancing to such patriotic songs was appreciated by many of the elders of those times. These two songs, set to the same tunes, danced by Kumari Kamala in AVM’s movie Naam Iruvar became well known throughout the land and for the movie, the songs were sung by Smt D.K.Pattammaal.

Then the Kambar Vizha took place in Chennai at Rajaji Hall. Shri T KC painstakingly selected songs for this occasion, one of them being “*Thol Kandaar Thole Kandaar*”. This describes how the young girls in Mithila were smitten by the handsome Lord Rama. This simple pretext helped underscore the element of bhakti as well. This song was also tuned by S V Venkatraman. Before the dance commenced, Shri T K C explained the meaning of the song in his inimitable style.

It became tedious to keep doing the same varnam ‘Karunai Seididalada’. Sadasivam requested Shri Papanasam Sivan to compose a Pada Varnam in Tamil. Sivan composed Nee Inda Mayam in Dhanyasi and sent it together with the svara and tala notations. Though it was Sringara Rasa, it was still suitable for us and was full of wonderful bhavam. Ramiah Pillai strung together Azvaar Pasurams like varnams and taught them to us. Like this, Tamil compositions were prominent in our recitals. In those days, these were all very new concepts. Their intent was to help ensure a positive reception for the art of Bharatanatyam in Tamilnadu and to enable it to be easily understood. We also danced to Madhura Nagarilo, and the sabdam Sarasijakshulu .

Kalki Krishnamurthy, Rasikamani T K C, MS, Sadasivam joined together to do a devoted service to the art of Bharatanatyam. When Kalki started writing Sivakamiyin Sapatham, Bharatanatyam became even more popular. We cannot deny or forget the fact that they were responsible for the clinking of ankle bells and the melody of Tamil songs all across Tamilnadu. Via their words, deeds and actions, their writing and musical talents, they helped bring about a renaissance. The fact that we participated in this revival even without realizing it is still amazing to ponder!

Postscript

Here is a relevant passage written by Gowri Ramnarayan (Anandhi Ramachandran’s daughter) in her book MS & Radha: A Saga of Steadfast Devotion

“The 1940s also saw MS in a new role. Ten year old Radha and Kalki’s 12 year old daughter Anandhi were being groomed in Bharatanatyam by Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai. The girls had the privilege of MS singing at their rehearsals and performances. The girls’ enjoyment doubled when MS donned her red dance costume and joined them as they practiced adavus. Having watched Balasaraswathi from her youth, MS instinctively knew abhinaya. Ramiah Pillai would teach the gestures for the padams and say “Ask Amma to show you how to do the abhinaya.” ...

Bharatanatyam revivalist E Krishna Iyer reviewed their recital in the Free Press Journal, acknowledging the talent of the young dancers, their guru’s fine choreography and training skills, and paid tribute to the aesthetic sense, involvement and maturity of MS that he discerned in every aspect of the presentation. The young dancers acknowledged the truth of this deduction on the part of the writer. Radha recalled: “Amma did everything for us backstage, helped us don costumes, jewelry, flowers, and plaited our hair with kunjalam. Then she went onstage and sang for us”.

Kamakshi Mallikarjun is a classical music and dance enthusiast. She owes her interest in and appreciation of dance to her aunt Anandhi Ramachandran, who was a member of the faculty of Kalakshetra. Photographs courtesy Zoe Dana.

CONCERT REVIEWS

Shashank and Shahid Parvez
October 3, 2009 at the Painted Bride
Allyn Miner

Regular listeners of Carnatic or Hindustani music would probably agree that the jugalbandi experience is different from that of a standard concert. The format differs from the norm; ragas may share svaras, but vary in their phrasings; and the way in which the musicians interact is very variable. The listener hardly knows what expectations to bring. But this can be good, and the ideal of course is to discover appealing communication between the systems. I remember the jugalbandi by the great vocalists Balamuralikrishna and Bhimsen Joshi some years ago, a Sruti-sponsored concert, in an auditorium in the Philadelphia suburbs. My impression at first was that Balamuralikrishna was the more flexible performer, reaching out with his music toward his Hindustani counterpart. I remember wondering whether this was a reflection of his Carnatic training or his personality, as he is famously open to experimentation. In another section, however, the two performers sang a composition, each in his own tradition, and the two alternated with congenial playfulness, exploring many ways in which each could respond to the other.

A few years ago I had the pleasure of collaborating with the fine violinist Sandhya Srinath. Over a number of weeks we talked about how we might create a performance that would do justice to both traditions. We laid out the concert with a number of pieces, alternating Carnatic and Hindustani styles. I learned a tremendous amount about Carnatic music, especially how intricate the lines of a kriti are, and how detailed the improvised sections in a ragam-tanam-pallavi. I was awed by the highly structured nature of Carnatic pieces and by the discipline required of performers to control the material. I imagine that Sandhya was unnerved by the freedom of the Hindustani pieces and the necessity to choose one's melodic and rhythmic directions on the fly. We certainly agreed that many of the components of the music were shared.

So I came to the Shashank-Shahid Parvez jugalbandi with my own set of experiences. Basically, I was curious to see how these fine instrumentalists would find a way to interact. The Painted Bride Art Center was filled nearly to capacity by concert start time. With its high warehouse-like ceiling, art-lined walls, dim lighting, and seating on folded chairs, the hall had an appealing contemporary feel. The audience was an even mix of Sruti members and Painted Bride regulars. Behind the raised stage the concert notes were projected on a screen, creating a theater-like atmosphere.



Shahid Parvez and the tabla player Subhajyoti Guha settled onstage to one side and Shashank and the young mrdangam player Anand Ananthkrishnan to the other. Shashank adjusted the sruti drone on a laptop computer behind him. The performers announced an alap / ragam-tanam in raga Panthuvrali / Puriya Dhanasri. In Carnatic music a concert begins with relatively short pieces, but a concert of Hindustani music typically begins with a long performance in one raga. It turned out that the performers had chosen an overall format more typical of Hindustani music: the main part of the performance consisted of the one raga played in several long sections.

The ragam-tanam was a showcase for the two instrumentalists. The nearly hour-long performance was an exhaustive display of technique and musical expression in contrasting styles. The dense gamakas and lively pace of Carnatic phrasing made for a very different kind of alap from that of the languid meends and long sustain normal to Hindustani instrumental alap. As the players began, the sound of the instruments was a pleasing contrast. The sitar was loud, however, and I wished throughout the concert that it had been softer. Shahid Parvez also strummed the drone string of his sitar frequently behind Shashank's flute, which was distracting.

Shashank began with minute subtle movements and grew quickly into elaborate turns, stops, and surprising flights. The phrasing of Panthuvrali is quite distinct from that of Puriya Dhanasri, so to a Hindustani music listener the phrasings sounded interesting and novel. Shashank sometimes ended his sections softly, but often built into a surprising flutter of hammered-like notes that seems to have been one of his signature sounds. His repertoire of sounds and his imagination appeared to grow over the course of the performance. When Shahid Parvez took his turn Shashank listened amiably, with a hint of eagerness to resume his own performance.

Shahid Parvez for his part displayed the formidable techniques of his school, a branch of the gharana developed by the late Ustad Vilayat Khan. This style features dramatic and difficult left hand pulls (meend) and forceful right hand strokes. At their best these pulls produce marvelous voice-like phrases and a great range of lyrical effect. It seemed to me that Shahid Parvez moved relatively quickly to the more forceful aspects of his technique without building up the gradual phrases of his gharana's style. It is certainly possible that his normal pacing was affected by the quicker phrasings of the flute. Compared to Shashank's imaginative phrasings, the Parvez approach to the material seemed predictable.

In the pallavi / gat section, the Carnatic and Hindustani styles contrasted in other ways. The composition in aditala / tintal had a catchy refrain and both musicians skillfully brought their improvisations back to catch it. The compositions of Hindustani music are expanded on the spot in a performance in a way that depends very much on the mood of the performer. Musicians have a repertoire of melodic lines and rhythmic variations at their command of course, but they apply them spontaneously as they build the performance anew each time. Thus Hindustani compositions often have a spacious quality that allows the musician plenty of creative leisure. The closely structured sections of Carnatic repertoire give Carnatic rhythmic performance a much denser, propelled pace. The mrdangam player played in amazing sync with Shashank's precise rhythms as he built increasingly complex patterns. The tight interaction of the two was really thrilling. They proved over and over how successful the Carnatic system is in allowing controlled flexibility within its structures.

The sitar and tabla players followed Hindustani style in which the tabla responds to the sitar in alternating sections. Shahid Parvez's technical skill is undeniable. Like other players of his gharana, Parvez is known for his speed, especially his fast tans (melodic runs), which are difficult on the sitar. The flute, however, can play phrases at almost unlimited speed. Perhaps because the rhythms of flute and mrdangam were novel to me, the flute and mrdangam sections dominate my recollections of the concert.



Toward the end of the pallavi the percussionists took a solo alternating in the manner of tani avartanam, a section always welcomed by the audience. I was struck by the excellence of the mrdangam player overall, and especially in the section that a Hindustani musician would call chegun, six-time. The exuberant energy of the

player and his amazing control of the material remain in my mind today. The excitement of fine drumming is really in a category of its own. The tabla player was very good as well. The tani avartanam format is more akin to a tabla solo concert than to the tabla's function in an instrumental concert. In a solo, a tabla player chooses a progression of pre-composed and newly elaborated material that display the specialities of his gharana. In an instrumental concert, the tabla player responds in kind to the instrumentalist's improvisations. Like in Hindustani instrumental music, the pacing of a tabla solo tends to be spacious, with the player deciding the direction of the solo at leisure after resolving back to the theka. Thus the short tabla solo here left an impression of sparseness.

The final piece of the concert was a light piece in raga Abhogi. During the skillful back and forth among the musicians I could not help but hear confirmation of the points that I noted throughout the concert: the amazing flights of imagination from Shashank; the tight synchronization of flute and mrdangam; the extempore alternating of sitar and tabla; the dense and skillfully calculated Carnatic patterns; and the loose spontaneity of the Hindustani. At the end of the concert I found myself wondering if the Carnatic music listening audience felt satisfied, or if they longed for the kritis and other composition types that give substance to a complete Carnatic concert. It occurred to me that the choice to play long abstract pieces might have been made to reach out to the world music listeners and perhaps to the Hindustani listeners, who are accustomed to abstract music. For my part, I enjoyed the displays of skill by the fine instrumentalists and the chance to discover another way that Carnatic and Hindustani musicians can interact. A jugalbandi is a tricky exercise. It is difficult to do full musical justice to both systems in a joint performance.

About the author: 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.

A Soaring Sangamam of Raga, Bhava and Tala !

October 24, 2009 at the Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia

Kamakshi Mallikarjun

In the Dec '97 issue of Folio (a special supplement published by The Hindu), Alarmel Valli writes “*Bharatanatyam is not only the dance form in which I can best express myself, but it has also proved to be a source of the greatest joy and fulfillment. The strength, power and beauty of this dance form lies in its ability to integrate the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of man, so that at its most intense level, Bharatanatyam becomes a prayer, with one's very Being. Besides, no dancer whose body has instinctively responded to the cadences and nuances of music, who thrills to the power, elegance and richness of word, image and metaphor of poetry, who savours the interplay of the myriad emotions of Abhinaya, can remain unaware of the 'ageless magic' of Bharatanatyam.*” And on Oct 24, '09, we were also enveloped by that magic in Valli's soulful performance for Sruti.

As we were driving to the event that was being held in the Independence Seaport museum auditorium in Philadelphia, stuck in the traffic jam on the Schuylkill in the ‘pralayam’ like pouring rain, I was reminded of how Anandhi mami (my aunt Smt Anandhi Ramachandran) and I had gone to Valli's performance at the Krishna Gana Sabha during the December season in 2000 and how we had to prevail past some horrendous traffic jams as a result of processions because some one was starting a new political party in Chennai ! Once we thankfully made it on time here as well, I observed that the Independence Seaport museum's auditorium was charming and, just like Krishna Gana Sabha, offered not only a great view but also proximity to the stage enabling the audience to clearly see both the footwork as well as the abhinaya. The acoustics in the auditorium and Sruti's sound balancing were also top-notch, again both critical to the enjoyment of dance: ensuring that we could clearly hear all aspects from the anklets to the singer, the mridangam, the nattuvangam and the violinist.

Every aspect of Valli's performance was thoughtful and beautiful – from her articulate and evocative description of each item, the level of attention to detail paid to each composition from the lyrics to the music to the ragas chosen, the caliber of the orchestra, the lovely costumes, to the soaring Sangamam of Raga, Bhava and Tala in her mastery of dance. She was also the epitome of grace in thanking every member of her orchestra, for the pivotal role they play in the success of the concert, as well as Sruti and its board members for their gracious hospitality.

The *Aditya Namastubhyam* was a most appropriate opening item to uplift our spirits amidst the current economic doldrums. There were numerous verses linked together both in Sanskrit and Tamil that touted the ‘*Glory of the Sun that dispels darkness*’. Soorya was depicted riding his majestic chariot driven by his horses (Wikipedia says “He is said to drive through the heaven in his triumphal chariot harnessed by seven horses or one horse with seven heads, which represent the seven colors of the rainbow or the seven chakras”). He was also portrayed as ‘*sprinkling the entire world with vermillion*’ with his red mane as dawn emerges, the lotus blooms, the bees frolic,,,

The central piece was the Varnam – Kaana Aavalaanen, a ragamalika composition by Valli and Smt Prema Ramamurthy that explored the parallel themes of the nayika longing to see the Lord of Dance – Nataraja, eventually transforming to the devotee that prays at Chidambaram. The jatis for the Varnam had the hallmark of the Pandanallur bani with Valli's unique stamp as well -- the ‘vallinum mellinum’ (ebb and flow), the beautiful contrast between the sharp precision and firmness of the natyarambham or diagonal of the alapadma hands and the grace and flow of the interim korvais; the amazing coverage of space on the stage for adavus, the leaps and the feather soft landings, the movements blending seamlessly with the music. (In Gowri Ramnarayan's article ‘Guardian of Pandanallur tradition’ in the Hindu: when she asks Valli's guru Shri Subbaraya Pillai, ‘*Clean lines, crisp jatis and classic understatement are features of the Pandanallur style. But what makes it distinct?*’, he replies “*We don't compose adavu sequences with merely the tala in mind and fit them into the varnam or tillana. We are always guided by the music. In choreography, only the swaras can stimulate the imagination.*”)



Valli's explanation of the Varnam was as lyrical as the piece where she described the dancer as a ‘*poet, singer painter ..*’ as someone who brings “*the painting to life .. the dancer adds the hues and colors*’ to the

composition so that the audience can ‘*See the Music and hear the Dance*’. This really resonated with me because I have always felt that when I watch Valli dancing that the scene just comes alive in front of me. In this varnam, during the sanchari that described the rains and the blooming spring to the lilting shades of Vasanta raga -- the change from the slight drizzle to the pouring rains, I could almost feel the rain drops and as the scene unfolded experience the onset of spring and ‘see’ the rich tapestry of flowers and birds unveiled before my eyes. This was accentuated even more in the next couple of items that featured Sangam poetry.

The first Sangam piece titled the “Forgotten Seed” (music composed by Smt Prema Ramamurthy) depicted the story of a young girl who is engaging in dalliance with a young man under a laurel tree. When her friend finds her, she is taken aback to discover it is the same laurel tree that grew from the seed that they had found when they were young and planted. So, ‘*with the utmost delicacy*’ she approaches them and reminds her of this incident and of how her mother had told them that the Laurel tree was like their sister and they should not only care for it but have respect for it because Nature is much greater than them. So, she suggests with a touch of mischief, that there are plenty of other trees in the forest, for them to indulge elsewhere! The piece started with a sprightly Mohanam and Valli’s abhinaya was superlative ..with just a glance, so many varying emotions from the smug satisfaction of spotting her friend in ‘*amorous dalliance*’ to discovering it is their laurel tree ... The ragas in the song were also so lilting ..the behag is still ringing in my ears .. so appropriate for the sanchari describing how they played various games as children and happened to find the seed, plant it and take care of it and the dual transformation from the ragas behag to valaji and from childhood to the present.

The second Sangam piece ‘Lament for a Fallen Warrior’ (Music Composition – Prema Ramamoorthy) was so dramatically dissimilar in the distress that it evoked around the aching sorrow of loss. As indicated in the Program notes, “*This composition, weaves together two elegies from the Sangam anthology, the Purananooru, which evoke the pathos and tragedy of the death in battle, of a youthful chieftan of a clan. Lamenting over his fallen body, a woman of the clan agonizes about the fate of his adoring and proud mother when she comes to hear these terrible tidings. Addressing a jasmine creeper in full bloom, the grieving woman says, ‘None will wear your fragrant blossoms, nor enjoy your beauty – for our valiant lord is dead. Why then, O jasmine, do you bloom in vain, in this bereaved domain?!’*” It was a beautiful creative touch going from the laments of the *subapantuvarali* raga to the flashback in *bilahari* when the woman remembers how she used to play with this young man when he was a child (pulling a branch from the tree to use as a sword and engaging in mock sword play, tenderly pulling the covers over him when he fell asleep) .. Here the violinist Sigamani (Sangeetha Kalanidhi S Ramanathan’s nephew) shone in how sensitively he played, really having a feel for the nuances of the abhinaya and thereby helping to embellish it. It was a great proof point for why dance is not the same when performed to recorded music – this rapport between the dancer and the live orchestra and the resulting spontaneity of improvisation is such a fundamental element of a dance recital.

As always, Valli had a wonderful live orchestra. C K Vasudevan, a student of Umayalpuram Sivaraman and Valli was excellent on Nattuvangam. The vocalist Nandini Sharma Anand, a student of Smt D K Pattammal and Suguna Purushottaman, sang with great feeling, but I do wish that she had taken a cue from the rest of the orchestra and not needed her distracting notebook. Violinist Sigamani and Mridangist Saktivel were exemplary in their level of involvement and skill in playing for dance.

The final item was a Swaralaya in Abhogi composed by Smt Prema Ramamurthy and Valli said she had asked for it to be in ‘Usi’ (offbeat rhythm) and it still gave that illusion even though it starts in samam! With the different cross rhythms and changing nadais and lively sequences, it was a wonderful upbeat finale.

About the author: Kamakshi Mallikarjun is a classical music and dance enthusiast. She owes her interest in and appreciation of dance to her aunt Anandhi Ramachandran, who was a member of the faculty of Kalakshetra.

What is in a name whether it is Abheri or Karnataka Devagandhari?

P. Swaminathan, Ph.D.

‘Bhajare Re Manasa’ one of the scholarly and soulful compositions of Sri Vasudevachar was the main theme of Kadri Gopalnath’s saxophone concert on November 7, 2009 presented by Sruti, the India Music and Dance Society. He was accompanied by Kanya Kumari on the violin and Harikumar on the mridangam. Kadri started his concert with an impressive rendering of Thulasi Vanam’s varnam in *bhahudhari*. Both Kanya and Harikumar

impressively supported this beautifully rendered varnam. After rendering a Thyagaraja krithi Sri Raghuvara in *panthuvrali*, Kadri rendered his favorite swarajathi of Syama Sastry “Amba Kamakshi” in bhairavi. The right keys were used to unlock the inherent beauty of this swarajathi to the enchantment of the assembled audience. This classical swarajathi of Syama Sastry has become one of Kadri’s signature performance pieces in almost all of his concerts. Kadri went on to render “manavyala kinchara” in *nalinkanthi*. This particular krithi by Thyagaraja is very well suited for instrumental rendering and Kadri did his full justice in improvising this piece at different speed and all possible permutation and combination of swaras and justifiably the audience expressed their rejoice with a loud applause. Kadri went on to render the *piece de resistance* of the concert ‘Bhajare Re Manasa’ in the raga *karnataka devagandhari* (devegandharam in Dikshitar’s sampradayam). The raga swarupa of *karnataka devagandhari* (many may call it *abheri*) stood out in the array of musical notes displaying the artistry of the performer. Kadri displayed his intuition and delicate musical instincts from the start to finish. Against such lofty level of interpretive finesse violinist Kanyakumari and mridangist Harikumar rose up to the occasion and embellished the concert with their superb support.

Kadri announced the raga as *karnataka devagandhari* for this krithi even though many artists may prefer to associate this krithi with the raga *abheri*. At this point it is worth while to dwell on the differences between *abheri* and *karnataka devagandhari* for the benefit of the readers**. *Abheri* is rendered with *shudha dhaivatam D1* in the *avarohanam*. In this form, it closely resembles the Hindustani raga *abhir*. *Abheri* is a *janya* of the 20th *melakarta*, *natabhairavi*. The following is the arohana and avarohana of *abheri* as it is originally known.

Aarohanam: S G2 M1 P N2 S.

Avarohanam: S. N2 D1 P M1 G2 R2 S

There are two familiar krithis in *abheri* viz. the ever popular ‘Nagumomu Ganaleni’ of Thyagaraja and scholarly composition ‘Bhajare Re Manasa’ of Vasudevachar in addition to a whole lot of other krithis. For some reason when these krithis are rendered by artists this *shudha dhaivatam* is replaced by *chatusruti dhaivatam D2* a few decades ago. This made *abheri* extremely pleasing to the ears. Initially there were objections by orthodox adherents of classical music to the replacement of D1 by D2 in *avarohanam*. The new form of *abheri* with *chatusruti dhaivatam* is now recognized as a *janya* of *kharaharapriya*, the 22nd *melakarta*.

Aarohanam: S G2 M1 P N2 S.

Avarohanam: S. N2 D2 P M1 G2 R2 S

In its present form *abheri* is very similar to *karnataka devagandhari* (devegandharam in Dikshitar’s nomenclature) in its scale but with a microtone of a difference. The popular krithi of Dikshitar “Panchasat Peetarupani” is rendered in *karnataka devagandhari* (devagandharam as is evident from the mudra). It is important to note that Dikshitar has also composed a krithi ‘Vinabheri’ in the raga *abheri*.

Over the years, the *abheri-karnataka devagandhari* discussion has formed several factions among performing artists. One group wants to legitimize the name *abheri* the way it has been presented for the past several decades and does not want to change the name to *karnataka devagandhari*. But then there are artists like Kadri who want to correctly assign the raga to *karnataka devagandhari*. There is also a third group who wants to render the krithi ‘Bhajare Re Manasa’ in the original scale of *abheri* as the composer intended it. There is no reason to pledge loyalty to any one of these groups. The listeners can choose what pleases their ears. As for me, I like the way the krithis are rendered today. I would not want to change it. After all, what is in a name whether it is *abheri* or *karnataka devagandhari*?

** The information presented here was derived from personal discussions with performing artists, newspaper articles and internet discussion forums.

Chitravina Ravikiran's concert – A Classical Treat
November 14, 2009 at the Calvary Vision Center, Bluebell, PA
Dinakar Subramanian

It was a breezy and cool evening on November 14, 2009 in Blue Bell where people were gathering for the final concert presented by SRUTI for the year. As the artists were tuning their instruments in the Calvary Vision Center auditorium, a sizeable crowd waited in the lobby eager for a musical treat featuring two geniuses in the

musical world. On stage were Chitravina Ravikiran, and the living legend (as described by Ravikiran) – Trichy Sankaran (TS) on the mridangam. Accompanying them on the violin was Ranjani Ramakrishnan, a relative newcomer.

The concert started with the varnam in SahAnA composed by TiruvOtriyur TyAgayyA - karunimpa. What was obvious from the first few lines of the varnam was how involved TS was going to be for the rest of the concert. He followed the varnam meticulously and added a different dimension to it.

Next was a very brisk and familiar ThyagarAja kriti - manasAyetulOrthunE in MalayamArutham. Ravikiran played a very pleasing set of kalpanaswarams and concluded with one mammoth flourish. Ranjani was warming up very nicely with this song. Ravikiran then played Daya jucuta in Ragam GAnavArithi which is a janya rAgA of melakarta 35 (sUlini). It was an interesting Eka rAgA kriti. Such exotic rAgA kritis need to be listened to many times before they actually make an impact.

Ravikiran then jumped headlong into a serious thOdI alApanA. In a few short minutes, we were all enjoying the solid and classical prayogams of thOdI. Ravi showed his virtuosity on the Chitravina by using the slider in an extended fashion with the minimum of plucking. What resulted was a sublime rendering of the rAgA. Ranjani also excelled in the alApanA and this led to the wonderful SyAmA SAstri's swarajati masterpiece - rAvE himagiri kumAri.

After giving the audience a few seconds to let the thOdI sink in, Ravikiran played an alApanA in pUrvikalyANI and presented padmAvatI ramaNam - a composition of OothukkAdu Venkata Subbaiyer in praise of JayadevA - the great Sanskrit poet and author of the Gita Govinda. Ravikiran, explaining that Oothukkadu had great reverence for Jayadeva, even sang the madhyamakAlam of the charanam demonstrating the reference to the Gita Govindam in the song.

After two consecutive rakthi rAgam offerings, Ravikiran decided to bathe us even more with pure classical music as he took up an elaborate alapana of kAmbOji. I could sense that the audience was literally basking in the glow of such pure and wonderful music. Ravikiran showed us that such rakthi rAgams could provide so much joy and satisfaction every time they are rendered. After Ranjani's measured alapana, Ravikiran started the ThyagarAja kriti - O RangasAyI which sent the audience into a happy and contented state. I am sure this rendering brought out the humming qualities of many people who knew this song. With the usual neraval at bhUIOka vaikuNtam and a very creative kalpanaswaram where he built a wonderful and pleasing crescendo, Ravikiran ended the song and beseeched the audience to enjoy the thaniAvarthanam from TS whom he considered a living legend. Ravikiran noted that there is a current trend for musicians to descend into exhibitionism to evoke applause and that we would not see it with TS. True to his observation, TS of course gave a phenomenal thani that pretty much took many people back to TS of the yesteryears where he has performed with great stalwarts. It was a fitting end to a great kriti.

Ranjani demonstrated very smooth bowing and shruti-shuddham and played well to support the two maestros on stage with her.

As a fan of Dikshitar, I noticed that there were no compositions of his presented. After a Javali in Misra Mukhari composed by Dharmapuri Subbarayar, Ravikiran played the ranjanI mAlA. Composed by Tanjavur Sankara Iyer, this composition in ranjanI has charanams each in sriranjani, megharanjanI and janaranjanI. Then came a thillAnA in sindhubhairavi by OothukkAdu Venkatasubbaiyer and after a Tiruppugazh, the concert concluded.

Everyone in the auditorium must have tottered home intoxicated from the pure classical music offered by Ravikiran. What a high note on which to end the SRUTI 2009 season!

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



NEWS AND NOTES.....

Awards and Celebrations

-The year 2009 marks Chitravina N Ravikiran's 40 years of contributions to the field of Carnatic music. The significance of this milestone is that it has been accomplished in 42 years. To celebrate this achievement, the disciples of Ravikiran came together to felicitate him on 1 December 2009, at Sivagami Pethachi Auditorium, Mylapore, Chennai. Photo Gallery of the event may be viewed at:

<http://www.kutcheribuzz.com/decseason2009/photogallery/Ravikiranmusic/Ravi-kiran%20music.html>.

- Neyveli Santhanagopalan's shishyas put together a grand celebration in Chennai November 21 and 22 to mark the 25 years of what was billed as 'Sangeetha Gnana Dhanam' of Neyveli Santhanagopalan's gurukulam.

<http://www.kutcheribuzz.com/news/20091128/album/index.html>

-Soorya International Singapore chapter honored the Dhananjayans with the Lifetime Achievement Award and plaque of honor on November 8, 2009 at Singapore Conference Hall on the occasion of commemorating the 60th Anniversary of Singapore Indian Fine arts Society.

-ABHAI (Association of Bharata Natyam Artistes of India), founded in 1987 by late Guru KN Pakkirisamy Pillai, has been honoring two renowned Gurus/artistes in the field of Bharatanatyam each year. This year's recipients of the prestigious Natya Kala Nidhi award are Bharatanatyam Guru Jayalakshmi Alva and Melattur S Natarajan- in recognition of his long service to Bhagavata Mela, a ritualistic art form and his proficiency in the field of dance and theatre.

-Bharatanatyam dancer Narthaki Nataraj, a direct disciple of Guru Kittappa Pillai, received the Nritya Choodamani award on November 12, 2009 at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai.

Obituary Notes

-After a long illness, Bharatanatyam guru Peria Sarada (born Sept 1, 1915) passed away November 4, 2009 at Chennai. She was 94. S Sarada came to Kalakshetra (Chennai) in 1939, a young woman of 24, well acquainted with various works of art and advaita but still unknown. When she retired from Kalakshetra in 1985, her reputation as a scholar and a fine teacher was well established, her name synonymous with the institution next only to Rukmini Devi and Sankara Menon. Please go to the following link for an in depth report by Gowri Ramnarayan:

<http://beta.thehindu.com/arts/dance/article47390.ece>

-American choreographer / dancer Merce Cunningham (April 16, 1919 - July 26, 2009) died in New York at age 90. He is credited by many with revolutionizing the visual and performing arts. He formed the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1953 and choreographed nearly 200 works for the company, as well as over 800 site-specific choreographic works. He continued to dance with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company into the early 1990s when he was into his 80s. Subsequent to numerous awards Cunningham was named a "Living Legend" by the Library of Congress, Washington DC.

The Chennai Music Season 2009:

The season is on full swing! Some of us get to immerse ourselves in the Chennai "season" in person- sabha hopping with the best of the Chennai-ites. Then there are a few of us that end up participating in the "season" vicariously from a great distance. There are a number of resources for the folks in the second category. Some of these are listed below:

<http://www.musicacademymadras.in/home.php>

<http://www.kalakshetra.in/>

<http://www.kutcheribuzz.com/decseason2009/>

<http://www.hindu.com/ms/index.htm>

<http://narthaki.com/index.html>

<http://indian-heritage.org/musicseason/index.html>

<http://artindia.net/madras09/news.html>

Saint Thyagaraja Aradhana in Thiruvaiyaru; Jan 2010

The 2010 aradhana will begin on Jan.2 and go on till Jan.6. Bahula panchami falls on Jan.5, the day the saint composer is said to have attained mukti. On that day, artists join in to sing the Pancharatna kritis at the samadhi in the morning.

Some of the 2010 Thyagaraja Aradhana events in North America:

January 17-18 Sri Shiva Vishnu Temple, Lanham, Maryland www.ssvt.org

March 13 Sruti- The India Music and Dance Society, the Greater Philadelphia Region.

April 1-11 Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana www.aradhana.org



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The India Music & Dance Society
123 Meadow View Lane,
Lansdale, PA 19446



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