



Celebrating 30 years

Sruti

The India Music
& Dance Society,
Philadelphia

www.sruti.org

SRUTI RANJANI



Volume 26

December 2016

Table of Contents

From the Publications & Outreach Committee	<i>Lakshmi Radhakrishnan</i>	1
From the President's Desk.....	<i>Balaji Raghothaman</i>	2
Connect with SRUTI.....		4
SRUTI at 30 – Some reflections.....	<i>Mani, Dinakar, Uma & Balaji</i> ..	5
A Mellifluous Ode to Devi by Sikkil Gurucharan & Anil Srinivasan.....	<i>Kamakshi Mallikarjun</i>	11
Concert – Sanjay Subrahmanyam.....	<i>Revathi Subramony & Sanjana Narayanan</i>	14
A Grand Violin Trio Concert.....	<i>Sneha Ramesh Mani</i>	16
What is in a raga's identity – label or the notes??	<i>P. Swaminathan</i>	18
Saayujya by T.M.Krishna & Priyadarsini Govind.....	<i>Toni Shapiro-Phim</i>	20
And the Oscar goes to Kaapi – Bombay Jayashree Concert	<i>P. Sivakumar</i>	24
Saarangi – Harsh Narayan	<i>Allyn Miner</i>	26
Lec-Dem on Bharat Ratna MS Subbulakshmi by RK Shriramkumar....	<i>Prabhakar Chitrapu</i>	28
Bala Bhavam – Bharatanatyam by Rumya Venkateshwaran	<i>Roopa Nayak</i>	33
Dr. M. Balamurali Krishna.....	<i>Uma Prabhakar</i>	36
Special Thanks to the Sponsors of the SRUTI 2016 Concert Season		39
Survey Feedback from SRUTI Concert Attendees		40

From the Publications & Outreach Committee

Dear Sruti Ranjani Readers,

The SRUTI Publications & Outreach Committee (POC) is pleased to present to you the 'Sruti Ranjani', SRUTI's annual publication for the year 2016. As we conclude our 30th year, a few of our founding members take us down memory lane all the way back to the early years giving an inside view of the phenomenal growth of the organization. You can also enjoy looking back at all the events this year by reading the reviews penned by our erudite rasikas.

This year, we are introducing a new reader friendly digital format of this magazine, created and designed by Sruti Youth Group alum, Anil Chitrapu. We welcome you to browse the site and send us your feedback at srutiphila@gmail.com.

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

We wish you a wonderful Holiday season and very happy, peaceful and prosperous 2017.

The Sruti Publications & Outreach Committee

Please accept our apologies for any errors or omissions you may find. The articles and reviews in this magazine are published with a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression and the opinions contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of SRUTI, its board, or its members.

**Cover design by Balaji Raghothaman*

**Saayujya pictures by Mark Garvin*

**Pictures of Dr. Balamurali Krishna taken from newspaper archives*

**All other pictures taken by Srikant Raghavachari and Srinivasan Raghavan.*

SRUTI thanks the following grantors for their generous support this year

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Established in 1986, SRUTI is dedicated to bringing Indian Classical Music and Dance to communities in the Delaware Valley. SRUTI is a registered tax-exempt not-for-profit organization under IRS section 501(c)(3).

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From the President's Desk

Dear Sruti Member,

Welcome to the 2016 issue of Sruti Ranjani, our yearly publication. As we look back on this landmark year, namely the 30th year of Sruti's founding, I am happy to report that we have had many successful accomplishments. At this juncture, it is quite clear that Sruti has matured into a premier organization that not only takes a central place in the arts fabric of the Indian diaspora, but a prominent place in the overall Philadelphia arts scene as well.

We presented a wide variety of events this year that reached into some very different audiences, while at the same time weaving a thread of classicism and quality through them all. It was a mixture of youth and experience, of tradition and innovation.

I would like to highlight a few aspects that stand out this year.

- The M.S. Subbulakshmi Centenary celebration event was a labor of love, both for Sruti as well as for R.K. Shriramkumar, and was personally the most satisfying event of the year for me. RKS made additional trips to Philadelphia during his spring concert season, and taught a select group of area youth the kritis and slokas dear to MS amma. The outcome was a grand event, a fitting tribute to the legend. We thank all who contributed to the success, especially the parents of the participating youth.
- The flagship event of the spring season, Saayujya, funded in part by the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, was large in scale and scope. It was the very first time that Sruti commissioned a new artistic piece. There were also very fruitful outreach activities by T.M. Krishna and Priyadarsini Govind at the Curtis Institute and the University of the Arts. Additionally, with some diligent PR work, Sruti was able to obtain interviews for the artists with WHYY, as well as a review in the Philadelphia Inquirer, where Sruti was mentioned in the headline. The week-long event involved a tremendous amount of planning and work by the Sruti team.
- The community support for Sruti's activities continues to be very strong, and we are grateful. This year, we had significant increase in the sponsor base. In addition, we had concert patron support from Smt. Bharathi & Dr. Sumathi Sena for the TN.Krishnan violin trio concert, and Smt. Vasantha Nagarajan support us at the patron level. We are indebted to them for their generous support, without which it would not be possible to run Sruti in a successful manner.

- Under the guidance of Santi Kanumalla as treasurer, we made several moves towards bringing our accounting system to an all-electronic basis. The primary vehicle was the use of Quicken for our financial record-keeping, assisted by the use of electronic copies of receipts and invoices as much as possible. These set of measures have been instrumental in making us substantially more efficient as an organization, and will save us a lot of time going forward.
- Pursuant to the decision taken in the last general body meeting in Dec 2015, we formed a committee of eminent community members to pursue the possibility of investing a portion of our cash balance. Based on their recommendation, such an investment was made in May 2016.
- We continued the Bala Bhavam initiative started last year, with the first dance event in November, followed by two vocal recitals on Sruti Day. This initiative, along with the MS Centenary, has continued and expanded on Sruti's goal of providing opportunities for our own home-grown talent to shine on the big stage, in a long concert format, where they can amply demonstrate their mettle as well as gain experience.
- Over the past several years, there has been an increase in Sruti's reach into the community, and one of the reasons has been the quality of our online efforts. We have especially attained a reputation, among the rasikas and other organizations, as well as from the artists themselves, for the quality of photographs we post online. Due to the power of social media, these photographs and hence our name spreads far and wide instantly. I would like to call out the efforts of the talented Srinivasan Raghavan and Srikant Raghavachari, for their excellent photography and diligent followup. These photographs, along with the innovative artist sketches we used this year, have given a nice boost to our image and brand.

In order to bring together such a wide array of programming and the various duties that come with it, we needed a dedicated group of volunteers. In this aspect, we were blessed with a highly driven group of board members who put their heart and soul into the organization. I would like to thank Nari Narayanan (President-Elect), Srikant Raghavachari (Secretary), Santi Kanumalla (Treasurer), Shankar Muthuswami (Director, Resources), Srinivas Rao Donthineni (Director, Marketing), Lakshmi Radhakrishnan (Director, Publications and Outreach), Uma Sivakumar (Director 1) and Srinivasan Raghavan (Director 2). None of our achievements would have been possible without their valiant efforts. I would like to thank all of them for their hard work and unstinting support. Thanks are also due to Subha Narayanan, Mira Srikant, Ramana Kanumalla, Anu Donthineni, Gita Shankar and Pitchumani Sivakumar, for their involvement in various Sruti activities and for their support. I'd also like to thank the members of the board for opening their homes and helping in hosting and transportation of artists.

In addition to the board of directors, I would also like to thank a number of people without whom this year would not have been successful. With regard to the Saayujya event, I would like to thank Raji Venkatesan for her help in the planning, preparation and execution phases. Thanks are due to Kishore Pochiraju, who was instrumental in the successful proposal to the Pew Center, with able assistance from Ramana Kanumalla, Rajee Padmanabhan and Renuka Adiraju, among others. I would like to offer a special thanks to Ramana Kanumalla, Dinakar Subramanian and others for their invaluable assistance during the week of the event. Thanks are also due to Raji and Dinakar for hosting artists, particularly R.K. Shriramkumar, during his multiple trips to the city on behalf of Sruti.

The Sruti board would like to thank the Sruti Youth Group for all their contributions this year. In addition to taking advantage of the various opportunities to perform on the Sruti stage, they have helped out with website and document preparation, introductions of Bala Bhavam participants and several other tasks.

I would be remiss if I did not place a note of appreciation for MRS, our audio engineering contractor, and to Joe Baldino in particular. We have thrown a lot of different challenges at them, in terms of venue acoustics, artist temperament etc., and they have come through with flying colors each time, providing a consistently high audio quality, while all the while maintaining a smiling face and a good rapport with the artists.

Finally, before concluding, I would like to thank my wife Nandini, who has been a bedrock of support for me throughout the year. She has put up with the taxing schedules and long days, taken care of hosting many of the artists, their food needs, and providing them company in a discrete but gracious manner. Without her unflinching support, I am very sure I could not have done this job.

It has been an absolute privilege to serve the organization and the community. Few things in life can come close to the satisfaction of a well organized concert, when everything else falls into place, and everything else also falls into insignificance, as the divine sounds of the stage take over, and we are wrapped in unmitigated bliss. In the end, that is what it is all about.

I would like to thank you all for this opportunity to serve. A strong programming lineup is taking shape for the next year under Nari's able guidance, with the likes of Amritha Murali, Shashank Subramaniam, Lavanya Ananth, O.S. Thyagarajan, Shijith and Parvati Nambiar slated to perform, among others. I would like to congratulate the incoming board and wish them the very best for a successful 2017.

Balaji Raghothaman, President



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SRUTI at 30 – Some Reflections

M.M. Subramaniam, Dinakar Subramanian, Uma Prabhakar, Balaji Ragbothaman

SRUTI turned thirty on September 14, 2016. In this article, we share some of our reflections on the organization from its humble beginnings to its current stature as the premier institution presenting classical Indian music and dance forms in the Greater Delaware Valley region. Mani, one of the founders and the first president of Sruti, traces the origins of the organization from the formative period. We highlight the two major milestones on the way. The first was the tenth year (1996) gala. Dinakar, who presided over the celebrations, describes the showcase star-studded event. Uma describes 2011, the banner year for SRUTI, marking the silver jubilee year for the organization, during which we were treated to yearlong programs and events of classical music and dance. Finally, Balaji, the current president, brings us up to date with a state of the organization and a sneak peek into the future.

Mani

Usually in early spring of each year Carnatic Music (CM) aficionados in U.S.A think about and organize Thyagaraja Aradhana (TA). So did a small group of enthusiasts who met in March 1986 at a community center in Havertown, Delaware County to celebrate the Aradhana. As they gathered around for lunch after the festivities the burning question among them was: big names in CM and Bharathanatyam world like Lalgudi Jayaraman, T.N. Seshagopalan, Padma Subrahmanyam had previously performed in New York/New Jersey, Washington D.C. areas but had skipped Philadelphia that is right smack in the middle of these regions; why and what can be done about it?

A sub group among these enthusiasts decided to meet more formally and brainstorm these and related issues. The invitees included some who in their individual capacities had occasionally organized CM programs in this area. The consensus was that the lack of a structured and formal organization with a set of byelaws and elected Board was the primary reason for these and other leading artistes to bypass the Greater Philadelphia area. The group then resolved to take steps to organize such a society and elected five members to take suitable action. (A complete list of the composition of this and all other committees is available on SRUTI's website: Sruti.org.) The official name of the organization was adopted as The India Music and Dance Society; however, it has always been popularly and affectionately known by the moniker SRUTI.

As the committee went about initiating the organizational activities, they were also looking for a highly reputed artist to perform for the inaugural program. And who was on a concert tour of the country but the great M.L. Vasanthakumari! The group jumped at the opportunity. The concert took place on 14 September 1986. Since then 14 September has been accepted as the anniversary date for SRUTI. The large audience of nearly 200 (a very big number those days) who attended the concert confirmed that the organization was on the way to fulfill a keenly felt need of the region. Some of the events that followed and put SRUTI firmly on the cultural map of the region were the Krishnam Vande Jagat Gurum—bharathanrityam program by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam (1988), grand CM concert by the great Balamurali Krishna (MBK) (1989), and the highly successful jugal bhandi by MBK and the legendary Bhimsen Joshi (1990). These programs also attracted very large crowds.

While the concerts referred to above were financially successful, the real financial stability was obtained by generous grants from different sources that SRUTI applied to after SRUTI was recognized by the IRS as a not for profit organization (1992). Starting with the Pennsylvania State Council on the Arts, Philadelphia Foundation, SRUTI has been the recipient of grants from many agencies including the prestigious Pew charities, Philadelphia

Music Project, Dance Academy.

From its inception SRUTI has strictly maintained firm traditions like starting programs on or close to advertised time, pricing tickets at a reasonable rate, promptly producing and distributing at cost recorded cassettes/CD's (whenever possible) of the concerts. The committee deliberations were always conducted in a collegial atmosphere with the issues discussed thoroughly until a consensus emerged. Once an issue was resolved, the entire committee worked for its success.

The early days featured many top artistes, flute N. Ramani, Maharajapuram Santhanam etc. Then came 1996, the tenth anniversary of SRUTI.

Dinakar

Early in 1996 we realized that Sruti would complete its 10th year of existence in September. We started discussing various options for a suitable celebration. Clearly we wanted to make it a big bash. Our ideas included multi-day or multi-weekend affairs involving big name artist(s). We even toyed with the possibility of getting the legend M. S. Subbulakshmi do a 'live' feed from India to a local screen to include her lighting a light.

We formed a 'gala committee' to continue with the discussions and arrangements. This committee dove into the project with gusto meeting multiple times a week during certain phases. We were thrilled when we found that Pandit Ravishankar, yes the legendary sitarist, with his talented daughter Anoushka, would be available in September. We jumped at the opportunity to show case one of the greatest names in Indian classical music. With the encouragement and help of Panditji's wife Sukanya we firmed up Swapan Chaudhari for tabla. We also firmed up Siva Sakti, a dance drama in the Bharatanatyam style choreographed by Guru Radha to be performed by Sridevi Thirumalai (a dance teacher from Boston) with her students.

By decentralizing and delegating, we had individuals handling the contact with Sukanya and with Ajay Tirumalai from the dance school. Soon things started falling in place and by June of 1996, we had a signed contract from Sukanya agreeing to Panditji performing for us on September 14, the very day of the tenth anniversary! This was indeed a great and lucky break for Sruti. The contract itself was an interesting read especially on the requirements and exceptions, certainly the first of its kind that we had seen in Sruti.

As negotiations were getting finalized, we started looking for auditoriums. The Valley Forge Music Fair (VFMF) in Berwyn presented itself as a choice. This circular auditorium was unique as it presented the option of a rotating stage. Attractive as this option was, we decided to keep the stage static, just take a portion of the auditorium just beyond a semi-circle and cordon off the rest. For our Sruti members, who have moved to this area after the mid 1990s, this auditorium was razed to the ground in December of 1996 to build a shopping complex.

I feel that the whole experience was a classic case for project management. We had to handle the financial aspect of this program—matching the artists' fees with the appropriate venue, ticketing structure, the logistics like lodging/transportation for the artists, venue food, and the marketing all of which were intertwined.

We knew that an artist of the preeminence of Pt. Ravishankar would strain our finances considerably. So we approached many members to underwrite part of the expenses in case things did not go as expected. Looking back, I am amazed at the foresight that our treasurer had to seek such guarantee.

There was a proposal to honor Shri T. N. Bala, a well-known Carnatic musician and teacher in the area. After much discussion as to whether honoring anyone would fit into the plan, it was voted to present a plaque to Shri Bala praising his services. The gala committee recommended that we reach out to the founders and other well-wishers of Sruti. In particular, we decided to recognize all the past board members.

We decided to go with tiered seating at VFMF. There was no online purchasing at that time. So a select set of team members was tasked with managing the sale of tickets by geographical region. The master seating chart was constantly updated manually with seats being blocked off—quite a far cry from the automated seating charts of today. We created several versions of the marketing collateral including large and small posters for different needs—grocery stores, music related places such as theaters, record stores. Trips were made to downtown Philadelphia with posters to be left at many of those places. One record shop owner actually said—“Oh Pandit, I saw him during the 70’s.” We were able to get Air India and Devon consulting as major sponsors for the event. The many local organizations such as Triveni, Telugu association, Tamil association helped us promote the event. The library committee brought out a special edition of Sruti Ranjani as a souvenir containing many interesting articles and nostalgic photos from personal collections.

September 14th finally dawned. We showed up in the morning at the Valley Forge Music Fair. The VFMF came to life with a whole bunch of people, volunteers and union workers setting up everything. Later Pandit Ravishankar remarked in the green rooms that he felt transported to the Music Academy when he saw so many Kanchipuram saris. The circular stage though novel was not a very good fit for the dance program but all credit for the dancers who adjusted extremely well to it. Catering was outsourced to Rajbhog restaurant. Mr. Modi, the owner efficiently managed all logistics related to food.

The morning session was the Siva Sakthi program that was well received. The evening program started with a rousing speech by Chief Guest C.V. Narasimhan (former Under Secretary-General of the UN) who came from the DC area. A short history of Sruti was provided and all the committee members who had served Sruti until then were recognized on stage. Panditji was brought to the stage to rousing ovation. He, with his daughter Anoushka, gave a fantastic performance including many South Indian ragas. Swapan Chaudhari’s tabla accompaniment was superb as well. The packed hall of nearly 1400 attendees, the largest ever for Sruti, thoroughly enjoyed the concerts.

I recall waiting outside the VFMF with the team after the event as a student of Panditji’s rushed towards us asking for the master tape of the concert. All in all, the celebration was a resounding success. We exceeded our financial expectations. Actually we made a sizable profit providing Sruti the seed for several years to come. Further, it also gave all of us confidence that as a volunteer run organization we can pull off such grand events.

Uma

For 25 long years, SRUTI had not only helped our family develop stronger and deep appreciation of classical music and dance, but it also gave us glimpses of the stalwart artists as real people in non-concert settings and helped us develop bonds and friendships with so many of them. Further, our relationships within our community also matured into meaningful and lifelong friendships and interactions. With such history and background with SRUTI and our community, I was thrilled to have the honor and privilege to lead the organization into her 25th - silver jubilee 2011 year and am grateful to our members and previous office bearers to have given me that opportunity. I now look back to those days fondly as I narrate how the year’s events were planned, how they were funded and how they were executed.

Before delving into the details of the silver jubilee celebrations, I must mention that the years leading to this milestone of SRUTI, embraced numerous and significant advances including surveys to gauge patrons feedback from concerts, electronic and disciplined publicity campaigns to advertise Sruti events, efforts to enhance and diversify audience base and outreach, initiation of workshop events to enhance appreciation of the arts and interactions with the artists, identification of funding mechanisms to support the programming and organizing programs that reflected classical music and dance forms from all over India. During the year, the programming was taken to the next level in the number of events presented, the funding raised, the recognition the organization received within the cultural community both in the US and in India and in the participation by the local youth.

During the 25th year, an incredible board comprising a team of dynamic, experienced and a go-getter attitude and, an enthusiastic SRUTI youth group helped plan and execute the year-long events. An ambitious programming plan was initiated way back in the 2010 of May/June. I had envisioned presenting what seemed incredible and perhaps even unreasonable programming to mark the special year for SRUTI. Indeed, rather than having one single special program to mark the event, we went with several special events (25 to be accurate) throughout the year featuring some of the best artists representing the Indian classical music and dance scene today. We also wanted to use this opportunity to showcase the Indian heritage to a diverse audience by having the events in well-known performing centers in Philadelphia and the suburbs. We also recognized local talent that SRUTI had nurtured over the years.

Consequently, we lined up a sensational repertoire of artists such as, Dr. Balamuralikrishna- Ravikiran jugalbandi, Amjad Ali Khan and his sons, Kalakshetra Dance Troupe, T.M.Krishna, Viji Rao, Priya Sisters, T.N.Seshagopalan, Abhishek Raghuram, Kiranavali Vidyasankar, Malladi/Gundecha brothers jugalbandhi, Shantala Shivalingappa, Ragamala, and several others. The Kalakshetra dance and the Malladi-Gundecha jugalbandi performances were presented in North American for the first time.

Of course events of such caliber and magnitude come with unprecedented budgets, something SRUTI has not undertaken previously. Our members, supporters, grantors and advertisers stepped up and gave generously to make the planned events happen and we also ended the year with surplus funds- something we really never even dreamed of doing!

Two very high quality publications, the Thyagaraja Aradhana Souvenir and Memorial Day souvenir, 'Great composers of India', and the release of a 25th year anniversary CD pack featuring select musical compositions of each and every artist that had performed for SRUTI over the 25 years were accomplishments worthy of mention here. The dedication to the completion of one the publications in a timely manner was exemplified by the overnight drive from Detroit to Philadelphia by the chairperson of the Publication committee just so the publication could reach the printers in time!

The fitting tribute to SRUTI and the silver jubilee landmark year came when the PECO building in Philadelphia flashed 'SRUTI, The India Music and Dance Society celebrates 25 years' on their Crown lights for all in the city to see (Nov 26–28, 2011) and recognize our beloved organization!

Balaji

It is debatable as to whether organizations grow up at the same rate as people, but Sruti, at 30, has certainly reached the status and maturity of an adult in her prime condition. We have crossed many a hurdle, and forded many a river, to a point where we are undisputedly recognized as one of the premier cultural organizations in the Philadelphia area. For local cultural beacons like the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, we have become one of

the go-to organizations they rely on for dependable execution.

The year's line-up was a mixture of established star power and new emerging lights. We started the year with the talented Amrutha Venkatesh at the Tyagaraja Aradhana, and followed up with an unusual vocal-piano combination of Sikkil Gurucharan and Anil Srinivasan.

The biggest event of the year in terms of scope and breadth of activities was Saayujya, by Priyadarsini Govind and T.M.Krishna. Saayujya was indeed a complex effort, spanning a week, and including many outreach events, rehearsals, and interviews, culminating in the final performance at the Annenberg Center that was attended by 835 people. This was the first time Sruti had been involved in commissioning a new piece.

A magnificent concert by Sanjay Subrahmanyam followed, where he kept the audience spell-bound for three and a half hours. A moving performance by the 86-year-old doyen, Dr. T.N. Krishnan, rounded out the spring calendar. The sights and sounds of TNK mama performing non-stop for 2 hours, with such grace and ease and a smile, will be one of the unforgettable aspects of the year for me personally.

The fall line-up included the uber-traditional Vijay Siva, followed by Bombay Jayashri. We then went back to the marvelous St. Mary's Church once again, this time for a Sarangi recital by Harsh Narayan. The last big event of the year was a tour-de-force lecture demonstration by R.K. Shriramkumar, on the life and art of Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi, as a celebration of her birth centenary.

One of the heart-warming aspects of my association with Sruti has been the increase in emphasis on nurturing the local talent base. As part of the MS centenary lec-dem, we arranged for two groups of kids to be taught by Shri RKS to render MS amma's favorite numbers. In addition to this, the Bala Bhavam series, started last year (2015) under the initiative of the then President, continued apace this year. This unique concept provides opportunities for talented local youth to give long-format concerts/performances on the Sruti stage. We had a Bharatanatyam performance (Rumya Venkateswaran), and there will also be two vocal concerts (Akshaya Raman and Shreya Srinivasan) on Sruti Day.

As we continue our growth, we make inroads into the collective consciousness of the wider population. Our outreach activities clearly show the trajectory of this growth. The Penn museum requested us to an outreach to their summer camp kids, and Madhavi Ratnagiri rose to the occasion. During the Saayuja week we had dance and music outreach events at U of Arts and at Curtis, that were packed with students and with scintillating discussions. The Harsh Narayan concert also had the feel of an outreach event, with almost 100 people of non-Indian origin attending.

One of the developments that provide a stark contrast from the prior major anniversaries, has been the rapid invasion of social media into our lives. Sruti has done a reasonable job of keeping up with the times. Facebook and Twitter are both used as major platforms to propagate our information, in addition to the website and email. A blog, Sruti Smrti, was started a couple of years ago, but is now dormant. One of the ongoing tasks at Sruti will be to continue this evolution into digital online media effectively, while at the same time retaining our identity as a classical arts organization.

Another aspect that the organization has to come to terms with, is that, with the growth and maturity of the Indian diaspora in this region, the number of avenues of cultural activity are also growing, and so are the demands on people's time and money. Sruti will need to keep its stamp of excellent quality, and continue innovating, in order to retain its position in the long term. I am sure that we are up to the task, and that the future is bright.

M.M. Subramaniam is an ardent admirer and lover of Carnatic Music and has been a regular contributor and supporter of Sruti.

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

Uma Prabhakar is a long time supporter of SRUTI with a deep interest in classical music and literature.

Balaji Raghothaman is the current Sruti president and lives in Chester Springs, PA with his wife and two children.

2016 SRUTI Board of Directors with artists Sikkil Gurucharan, Anil Srinivasan & Aditya Srinivasan at the St. Mary's Episcopal Church, University of Pennsylvania



L-R

Srinivas Rao Donthineni - Shankar Muthuswami - Balaji Raghothaman

Aditya Srinivasan - Anil Srinivasan - Sikkil Gurucharan

Srinivasan Raghavan - Nari Narayanan - Lakshmi Radhakrishnan

Santi Kanumalla - Srikant Raghavachari - Uma Sivakumar

A Mellifluous Ode to Devi by Sikkil Gurucharan & Anil Srinivasan

Concert Review by Kamakshi Mallikarjun

For the past several years, SRUTI has had at least one concert that helps us expand our aesthetic boundaries and I am particularly grateful for that. This wonderful concert accomplished that in multi-faceted ways. An aligned collaboration with CrossRoads Music, Philadelphia whose mission is “Concerts in West Philadelphia. Music from all over the world”; an ideal venue – the majestic St Mary's Episcopal Church in the heart of U Penn campus. Excellent acoustics, quintessential to be enveloped by the reverberating nadam of the piano. And initial incredulity from connoisseurs of Western Classical and Carnatic music about Indian classical music on the piano ?!



Many decades ago, in one of the first lecdeems arranged by SRUTI, Chitravina Ravikiran said that as our listening repertoire grows, it helps us broaden initial perceptions – for example, our long held viewpoint of Subapantuvavali is that it is a raga full of pathos; but, are we aware that Muthiah Bhagavathar has composed a joyous song in the same raga? As we learn more about Anil's musical journey, we realize there are similar eye-opening discoveries. Guess who was one of Anil's earliest piano teachers? Meena Radhakrishnan (Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer's daughter-in-law)!

In an interview with Rediff, Anil shares: *“Perhaps I am the only person in the history of music to have gone to Semmangudi's house to learn western classical music. I still remember the swing in front of Semmangudi's house and the easy-chair in the portico. After I finished my class, I used to see him sitting there with his coffee tumbler. The moment he saw me he would ask, “What did you learn today?” Whatever I said, he would say, “Very good”. When I was 12 years old I met Lalgudi Jayaraman in Kodaikanal where his family and my family*



were on vacation. He taught me how to play three thillanas on the piano. He took me on as a student. The greatest thing about these two legends is that never once did they say, don't play the piano. They have been open and encouraging.”

The deep collaboration by Anil Srinivasan (piano) and Sikkil Gurucharan(voice) results in a fusion genre that is indeed ‘devastatingly beautiful’ as John McLaughlin (Shakti) termed it. My own partiality for listening to Indian classical music on the piano is because my mother Thangam used to play ragas like Poorya Dhanasri (Hindustani variant of Pantuvarali), Sohini (Hamsanandi) so melodiously on the piano; and where was this mini grand piano that she frequently played? In Ammupatti’s (M S Subbulakshmi’s) music room at Kalki Gardens. And decades later, Anil Srinivasan helped Leela Samson restore this very same piano which currently sits next to Rukmini Devi’s piano in Kalakshetra!



Anil said that the evening’s performance was devoted to Devi – celebration of the feminine divine. He acknowledged that it was perhaps not the happiest start to begin with Naan Oru Vilaiyattu Bommaiya which is about the lament of being helplessly caught in the endless cycles of rebirth and its associated travails and torments. The next composition featured was more reflective – Piravaa Varum Tarum in Raga Lathangi prefaced with the verses Thayum Thanthaiyum Sadgurunadanum nee. After the song, Anil explained that there were five variations on the line Padara Vindum(lotus feet) ; Gurucharan’s improvisations seemed more on the lighter side of Latangi; instead, retaining the raga gamakas would perhaps have been more impactful, including providing a more distinct contrast to the harmonic notes emanating from the piano.

Anil provided additional context after each composition. On one hand, it greatly helps the audience get a better understanding, especially of a new genre, but on the other hand, it also breaks the flow of the music (especially when the explanations are verbose). Anil joked he was the upperclassman on stage that evening. Anil, Gurucharan and Aditya Srinivasan who accompanied them on the tabla, all went to the same school Vidya Mandir in Chennai.

Next composition was the padam Theruvil Varano in Khamas which describes the nayika eagerly waiting for a glimpse of her Lord, with a mix of happiness, joy, anticipation and angst. This composition was one of my Aunt Anandhi Ramachandran's absolute favorites. During the Bharatanatyam performances of Radha- Anandhi, MS would sing this padam to Anandhi's abhinaya. Most of the songs began with a piano prelude. The improvisations to this song Included free form swara patterns, sargam for the line Theruvil Varano.

The main RTP beautifully showcased the germane aspects of this unique fusion genre and the imagination, collaboration and creativity of the artists. Definitely a highlight of the evening's performance! Raga volleys went back and forth seamlessly between the piano (Anil) and voice (Gurucharan). It was a ragamalika elaboration – multiple ragas (Nasikabhooshani, Mohanam, Kalyani, Mohana Kalyani, Saramati, Charukeshi, Sankarabaranam) as part of the ragam, the tanam and swara based pallavi (variations of G M P D N S - N D P M G M – Pa M Ma G N R Ga) were in the major scale (Sankarabaranam scale) ; garland of ragas for the swaras (Malkauns, Madhukauns, Jogkauns, Chandrakauns) and a final reversing of all the ragams followed by the tabla rhythmic solo. Anil's improvisation of the ragamalika swarams was spell-binding.

I only realized later that there was so much more to the ragas that were so thoughtfully selected (or perhaps it was a spur of the moment foray).

Malkauns (equivalent to Hindolam) has the Small or Komal Ni: S g M d n

Chandrakauns, starts like Malkauns but has the big or Shudh Ni: S g M d

Googling yielded these additional insights from Rajan Parrikar's Music Archive,

Madhukauns: "A graha-bheda on the madhyam of the modern Chandrakauns yields the five swaras of this raga: S g m P n."

Jogkauns has both Ni's. Rajan Parrikar says "Komal(small) nishad comes along occasionally, bringing a frisson of delight, in a phrase of the type: P d n d (P)M"

Isn't that so cool ? Hats off to their creativity and mastery!

Anil Srinivasan has founded Rhapsody with 'a mission to take music into the curriculum of schools serving all strata of society. Rhapsody Music Foundation now reaches nearly 80,000 children across South India.' The next piece Kamalasana Vandita Padbje, one of Dikshithar's nottu swaras and the whimsical analogy of a cat and mouse game with the mouse finally running away (cat vocal, piano mouse) gave us a glimpse of the outreach to young students.

The piano accompaniment to Chinnanchiru Kiliye emphasized more of the main melody and not just harmony. (Melody and Harmony explained in Quora: "**Melody** is the main series of notes that stand out enabling you to remember the particular song or the section of the song. **Harmony** arises where there are extra notes alongside the **melody** of a song. In a way it is said to complement the **melody** of a song.")

It was back to pathos with Asai Mugham; at first glance this song can be mistaken for a nayika forgetting her beloved's face; but it is not. The only photo that the poet Bharati had of his mother, whom he lost when he was just a child, got destroyed in a fire and that is the anguish the poet poignantly expresses in this song. A very moving song that Gurucharan sang with a lot of feeling.

Lalgudi's Mand thillana was lively and lovely. The recital culminated with meditative Madurashtakam verses Adharam Maduram (same tune sung by MS) followed by multiple verses from Pasuram.

*Kamakshi Mallikarjun is a classical music and dance enthusiast
a longtime supporter of Sruti.*

and

Concert – Sanjay Subrahmanyam

A review by Revathi Subramony & Sanjana Narayanan

On May 7 this year, Sanjay Subrahmanyam gave his first concert for Sruti since receiving the prestigious Sangita Kalanidhi award from the Music Academy. We had been looking forward to his concert for months. As usual, with impeccable accompaniment from Sri S. Varadarajan and Sri Neyveli Venkatesh, Sanjay did not disappoint.

Sanjay started his concert with a rare Ata tala varnam in Vachaspati, a beautiful composition of Tiger Varadachari in praise of Rukmini Devi Arundale. A bhavam-filled Tamil krithi, Poomel valarum annaye in Anandabhairavi, came next, rounded off with a brilliant round of kalpanaswarams by Sanjay and Varadarajan. It is always amazing how quickly Sanjay settles down during a concert and captivates his audience from the get-go!

A crisp and soulful Nattakurunji alapana preceded Swathi Tirunal's Mamava sadaa varade. Venkatesh's sensitive mridangam accompaniment subtly embellished Sanjay's beautiful nereval in the charanam line. A round of Sanjay-esque swarams followed.

The main ragam of the evening was Thodi. Sanjay is never afraid to innovate, and his Thodi showed it. The alapana was moving and decidedly out-of-the-box, full of gliding sangathis in panchama and varjam phrases in the mel sthayi. While Varadarajan followed

Sanjay's lead brilliantly, his own prowess came through in his beautiful alapana, dripping with bhavam and *sowkhyam*. After a lilting rendition of Thyagaraja's masterpiece Kaddanu variki, Sanjay began a series of kalpanaswarams at *Baddu tappaka bhajiyinche*. Each of his swarams was unorthodox but pleasing; Varadarajan matched him at every turn, often taking Sanjay's inventive motifs one step further. In the koraippu at Pa, Sanjay sang several recurring swara patterns in his trademark style. The animated exchange between Sanjay and Varadarajan, with Venkatesh accentuating all the kanakkus, made for an exhilarating climax.



Up next was a delightfully fast-paced Narasimhodu in Kamalamanohari. Sanjay's sprightly sketch of Kannada and cheerful rendition of Dikshitar's Sri Mathrubootham provided a nice change of mood.

The highlight of Sanjay's concert was his Ragam Tanam Pallavi in Lathangi. In his alapana, he sang plenty of remarkably swift sangathis, especially at mel Ga. Varadarajan continued in the same rapid-fire vein, incorporating extensive phrases without Pa and Sa. Sanjay and Varadarajan's thanam was equally brisk; ideas simply poured out of both of them, with every phrase building on the next, climbing to a beautiful climax at mel Sa. The meaningful Pallavi line (*Tham tham thamadena mamadhai illamale sathiya thondu seivom*) in Khanda Triputa talam was the icing on the cake, with ragamalika swarams in Bageshri, Kadanakuduhalam, Hamsanandi, Valaji and Sri. Not only did every kalpanaswaram bring out the traditional flavor of the ragam, but Sanjay and Varadarajan also added their own unconventional twist to each one.



Venkatesh's thani avarthanam was excellent, to say the least. His pleasing *sarvalaghu* as well as his *trikalakorvai* clearly reflected his mastery over rhythm.



Sanjay's intelligence and sense of humor always shine through during his concerts. His apt rendition of Ini enna pechu in Sahana got the whole audience laughing. After such a thani, what more was there to say?

A variety of *thukudas* followed, including Kandena govindana in Chandrakauns, Urile kaaniyillai and Brindavanam idhuvo, and Akilacharachara in Kamas. Sanjay concluded this memorable concert by paying homage to goddess Mahalakshmi of Delaware temple with *Ni ninaithal ahadum undo nirajadala nayana mahalakshmi*, a beautiful composition in Darbari Kanada.

What makes Sanjay unique is his ability to journey into uncharted waters and explore unknown realms of manodharmam: a hallmark that requires both courage and creative genius. The result is an intellectually and emotionally satisfying concert experience.

*Revathi Subramony is a Carnatic vocalist and music enthusiast and lives in Exton, Pennsylvania.
Sanjana Narayanan is a senior at Great Valley High School and an avid student of music.*

A Grand Violin Trio Concert

Review by Sneha Ramesh Mani



Carnatic music is, for today's millennial audiences, often hard to appreciate and enjoy. Professor T.N. Krishnan is undoubtedly a maestro and a living legend, but his genius lies in his ability to communicate the complexity and beauty of this art form to everyone - from the most accomplished artists to little children who know nothing about it.

As a six year old attending violin class for the first time, everything about the instrument was really hard - balancing it precariously on my foot, coordinating the bow and my fingers, and finding the right note without any positioning guidelines. What sustained me through two decades of playing the violin, however, was that I had the music of T.N. Krishnan to admire, enjoy, and aspire to. My personal relationship with his music began with my 'Maestro's Choice Series One - T.N. Krishnan' cassette, my one constant through moving schools, music teachers, and countries.

The Violin Trio concert on May 21st was special to me because my cassette essentially came to life. Professor T.N. Krishnan - playing alongside his children Viji Krishnan-Natarajan and Sriram Krishnan, and accompanied by Sri. Trichy Sankaran on Mridangam and Ravi Balasubramanian on Ghatam - delivered a concert that was crisp, elegant, and memorable from beginning to end.

What really made the experience delightful was the care with which the songs were chosen. All the kritis were quickly recognizable and familiar, leaving the listener free to enjoy the unique aspects brought out by the artists in each song: surprising sangathis that provided interesting flavour to popular krithis, succinct ragams, and fast-paced kalpana swaram accompanying select pieces.



The concert opened with Vatapi Ganapathim, followed by Evarani and Brova Barama before leading into the main piece of the afternoon - Raghuvara in Pantuvarali.

After a masterful Thani Avarthanam, the trio finished the concert with a succession of old favourites: Jagadodharana, Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma, and Madhava Mamava, among others.

While each piece was kept short and to the point, none of the

beauty or intricacy was lost. This was in part due to each artist's skill, but also due to the coordination and collaboration between all of them which helped bring out the best in every song.

Carnatic music in today's world is often considered overly complicated, stodgy, and dull - music reminiscent of a time when people had the patience, training, and energy to understand complex technicalities and subtle nuances. In a bid to make this art form more palatable to modern listeners, younger artists often tend toward experimental and fusion forms, often losing the essence of Carnatic music along the way.

This concert was a powerful reminder that despite being one of the oldest performers in the fray, T.N. Krishnan has an alternative approach, one that will ensure that Carnatic music stays alive and flourishes, without losing its soul. Seventy-nine years after his debut concert, T.N. Krishnan isn't focused on picking overly complex songs or displaying highly mathematical patterns. He is, instead, making music that is approachable, memorable, and deeply inspiring to all listeners.

This is why my personal relationship with T.N. Krishnan's music has sustained through the years. It started off as beautiful music that inspired a six-year-old. As I became a serious student of the violin, it became music I imbibed deeply to learn subtle technicalities from. With post-doctoral research and marriage now occupying the bulk of my time, it has become the music my husband and I live our lives around - his rendition of Vatapi Ganapathim serves as our Suprabhatam, and a recording of his Madhava Mamava lulls us to sleep every night.

Throughout the concert on the 21st of May, Professor T.N. Krishnan let his violin do most of the talking. He spoke a few words in conclusion, though, thanking the audience and ending with, "God bless you all." That was superfluous, of course. As those of us who had listened to him perform for the past two hours knew - we were blessed indeed.

Sneha Ramesh Mani lives with her husband in Philadelphia, where she spends her time doing two things she loves - researching the effects of IVF on placental development, and playing the violin with Sargam, Penn's fusion music group.

What is in a raga's identity – label or the notes??

Concert Review by P. Swaminathan

SRUTI's fall music season started with a grand music concert by none other than Vijay Siva on October 1, 2016. This is not the first time he performed for Sruti and I am sure, given his pandithyam and repertoire we will hear many more of his concerts in the future. That day happened to be during the navarathri celebrations we were all expecting a rendering of Dikshitar's navavarna krithi. After invoking the blessing of Lord Ganesa through Sankaracharya's Ganesa Pancharatnam, Siva started his concert with a brisk rendering of Janaki Ramana in shuddha simanthini raga composed by Saint Thyagaraja.



Following this he rendered a detailed rendering of Mysore Vasudeva Rao's 'saketha nagara natha ...' in harikambhoji. This raga is among the oldest known raga since the ancient Tamil Sangam period. Many of the Tamil devotional songs (tevaram, tiruvembavai etc.) were composed and rendered in this raga (under a different name) even though the name harikambhoji seem to be recent following Venkatamaki's classification. However, this raga was called harikedaragaula following Dikshitar's school. Harikambhoji is a sampoorana raga with all the seven notes in the arohana and avarohana. It is 28th melakarta raga under Venkatamaki's nomenclature with all the notes equally spaced. All the notes in harikambhoji are jeeva swaras. This musical scale seems to have existed in other musical genre from ancient times. Surprisingly harikambhoji went into oblivion until the later part of 19th century when Carnatic music underwent a revolution with the advent of Saint Thyagaraja. He made harikambhoji popular by his master pieces like 'dhinamani vamsa...' undedi Ramudu...' enduku nirddaya ...' Rama nannu brovara ..' And the list goes on. Following his footsteps quite few other composers composed great krithis in this raga of which the composition Saketha nagara natha by Mysore Vasudeva Rao is noteworthy.

Following this Siva rendered another classical composition (kshetra krithi) of Sri. Muthuswami Dikshitar "Ramanatham Bhajeham ..." in kashiramakriya (kamavardhani). Dikshitar, a composer par excellence, had the remarkable ability of weaving the name of the raga into his lyrics without sacrificing the beauty of the lyrics (popularly called raga mudra) in most of his krithis. However, this krithi seems to be an exception where he has not indicated the name of the raga, other than the phrase 'sadā parvata vardhanī' in the caranam. Many of the performing artists have labeled the raga of this krithi as "pantuvarali", "kashiramakriya", "ramakriya" or "kamavardhani". The current day pantuvarali we know is really kamavardhani which is 51st melakarta. This name came into existence after the publication of the kanakangi scheme of classification in 19th century. Before

that it was labelled as Ramakriya (or kashiramakriya according asampurna paddadhi). This raises the question what was pantuvarali? According to Venkatamaki's scheme it belongs to 45th Mela which is shubapantuvarali as we know today. So the current situation is ramakriya has disappeared and its identity is assumed by kamavardhani and pantuvarali as aliases. Shubapantuvarali assumed the identity of pantuvarali. So what if a raga steals the identity of the other ragas? Interesting discussions on this have been published by various scholars as recently as by Sangita Kalanidi Sanjay Subramanyam.

51 Pantuvarāli (Kā mavardhani)	S R1 G3 M2 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M2 G3 R1 S
Kāshirāmakriyā	S G3 R1 G3 M2 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M2 G3 R1 S
45 Shubhapantuvarāli	S R1 G2 M2 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M2 G2 R1 S

Following this Siva rendered another master piece of Syama Sastry, the swara jati in Todi (Rave himagiri kumari). He preceded the swara jati with a sloka in Todi setting up the mood for what turned to be a flawless rendering of the flawless swara jati of Syama Sastry in flawless todi which is a delightful melody in melakartha-8. It is called Hanumatodi (following sampurna paddahti) or janatodi (Dikshitar School). This raga has symmetrical arohanam and avarohanam characterized by majestic movement laden with appealing bhava. Siva gave a full justice to this gahana raga with his scintillating voice rich with melodic harmony.

After this Vijay Siva rendered the beautiful krithi 'adigi sukhamu...' by Saint Thyagaraja in madyamavathi. In this krti Saint Thyagaraja makes a 'ninda stuti' of the Lord about His compassion. This is the first time this is performed for Sruti audience. This krithi has four caranams and Siva rendered only the fourth caranam containing Thyagaraja's mudra. It is worth mentioning that Saint Thyagaraja took the musical world by storm by introducing the pallavi/anupallavi/carnam structure for all his krithis. In many popular krithis he purposely composed several caranams including the master piece 'adigi sukhamu'. However, almost all of the performers I have listened to, choose to render only one of the caranams and ignore the rest with the excuse that the similarity of musical content of the other caranams does not warrant separate rendering. This in my opinion a partial rendering of the krithi.

After a brisk rendering of banturithi in hamsanadam, Vijay Siva performed the piece-de-resistance of the concert in the raga kambodhi. He chose a composition by Papanasam Sivan 'Kadir Kama Kandan ...' which was one of the krithis popularized by Smt. M.S. Subbalakshmi. [This piece was specifically composed for MS Amma for her concert tour of Sri Lanka]. For this krithi Siva gave opportunity to his senior disciples who also shared the stage with him during alapana and then the kalpana swaras.

Siva rendered an RTP in kapi followed by several short pieces. He concluded the concert with a rendering of all the ragas of Kamalamba Navavarna krithi as raga malika followed with the lyrical rendering of the krithi in Sri raga. That day being the seventh day of Navaratri, I was anxiously hoping that Siva would render at least one of Dikshitar's navavarna krithis. Till the last minute I did not see it happening. At the end he pleasantly surprised all the eagerly awaiting listeners with his masterful short and sweet rendering of all the ragas and the Sri Raga krithi.

Both Sri R.K. Sriramkumar and Sri. J. Vaidyanathan provided excellent support to Siva's excellent concert. Without their able accompaniment the concert wouldn't have been such great performance. Kudos to Sriramkumar and Vaidyanathan. The disciples of Sivas proved their skills ably well. Thanks to Mallika for providing uninterrupted support on tambura. In essence, this was an excellent concert.

Dr. P. Swaminathan is connoisseur of carnatic music and a long time supporter of Sruti. He is a past president of Sruti and frequently contributes to Sruti Ranjani and other Sruti publications.

Saayujya by T.M. Krishna & Priyadarsini Govind

Concert Review by Toni Shapiro-Phim

Human freedom is ... indivisible: if it is denied to anyone in the world, it is therefore denied, indirectly, to all people. -- Vaclav Havel (writer, dissident and former president of both Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic)

April, 2016, brought a performance of *Saayujya* (The Merging), by composer and vocalist T.M. Krishna and choreographer and dancer Priyadarsini Govind to Philadelphia. The notions of "freedom" and "liberty" as reflected in Philadelphia's history and mythology served as inspiration for *Voices*, a prominent section of this evening-length presentation. *Voices*, indeed, was a world premiere, commissioned by Sruti. Emanating from a core concern with liberation from and evolution beyond the individual to encourage consideration of a larger collective and of more inclusive realms of meaning, *Saayujya* as a whole, and "Voices" in particular, offered an opportunity to delve into these aspects of Hindu philosophy through the experiencing of Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam dance.

Scholar of Indian music Dr. Bonnie Wade has written that the "voice is the vehicle for sacred chant from which Indian music evolved." Much, though not all, Carnatic music has developed as a means to express *bhakti*, devotion to a deity. T. M. Krishna explains that, "The act of singing is also about the act of thinking," and, further, "The act of thinking is also an emotional act," thus revealing links between spirituality, the intellect and emotions, and the practice of this art, and hinting at some of the breadth of *Saayujya*.

The music, and the dance, look to the word as potent source: "The body of poetry that has been created by our [ancient Indian] poets is stunning, is staggering," according to Priyadarsini Govind, "to say the least. In different languages, every possible emotion, nuance of emotion felt by man, has been dealt with, with great detail, understanding and empathy by our poets, and reproduced in music, in song and dance."

Saayujya, as both a collaboration between renowned artists of India and an exploration of the relationship between Carnatic music, Bharatanatyam and humanity, invites audience members to share in spectacular visual and sonic traditions and innovations. And it is not only the compelling aesthetics that serve as inspiration: questions are posed about perception and about responsibility for all on this planet. *Saayujya* is "a collaboration to discover the beauty of another art form through the practitioner of that style," says Govind. "Being exposed to the beauty within art forms, being exposed to even ... expressions of violence within art forms, makes you think, makes you realize, makes you empathize. It creates a community ... with aesthetics and values... When that is done, peace is ... an extension."

Voices

Voices was the first piece ever commissioned by Sruti, and the organization's first venture into a thematic focus outside the art forms themselves. They took these steps, according to Sruti president Balaji Raghothaman, after extensive conversations with the artists and with members of the staff of the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. Krishna and Govind eventually proposed, explains Raghothaman, an exploration of the ways in which, as a musician or dancer, "you use the freedom you have to improvise, to help the other artist on stage with you." And this area of concern broadened to include additional features and forms of "freedom."



Voices pairs the words of remarkable women and men – poets, singers, statesmen, philosophers, everyday activists – from numerous eras and myriad geographical and cultural origins with one another, and interprets them through music and movement. A multi-tiered dialogue across boundaries of all sorts, the focus is on both ideals of freedom and liberty and the very real struggles waged in pursuit of those ideals centuries or decades ago, as well as ongoing struggles for justice. Here we have the brilliance of 20th-century African American civil rights activist Rosa Parks, 16th-century Indian mystic poet Mira Bai, South African icon Nelson Mandela and Indian poet and independence activist Subramanya Bharathi, among others, set against percussive dance and mellifluous music. Together, the stories and messages remind us of the complexity of notions and experiences of freedom and liberty. Perspective matters. Position matters. No stark dichotomies are proposed; no claims of resolution are made. Rather, the piece plants seeds of empathy, seeds for further contemplation and, perhaps, action.

Improvisation

Beyond the consideration of societal or political freedom, or the freedom associated with a climb to spiritual heights, the evening included a focused journey into experimentation with aesthetic freedom. We were treated to musicians and dancer responding to one another, and to one another's art, in-the-moment. In the piece, *Pratyaksha*, for example, the music is seen, represented in abstract patterns and colors, electronically signaled and projected on a screen. The music composition is created with its visual representation in mind. The dance evolves in response to both the music and its visual counterpart.

Improvisation in this context does not mean complete abandon. On the contrary, working creatively in the traditions of Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam, each of which celebrates improvisation in its practice, requires superb mastery of technique so as to be able to compose on-the-spot. What emerges as new does so upon a base of what is already understood as central to these particular expressive forms – basic postures, ragas and relationships between singer, instrumentalists and dancer. As *Pratyaksha*’s music and glorious cascading vocals appeared as mesmerizing lines, waves, bands, squiggles and squirts of green, red, yellow, blue and brown, Govind answered with restraint and vigor, tremulousness and fluidity, her footwork’s syncopation heightened by the jangling of bells that adorned her ankles.

Workshops



Prior to the Saturday evening performance, the Curtis Institute of Music hosted workshops presented by Krishna and Govind for musicians, dancers and other aficionados. Participants brought with them a range of familiarity with Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam. Inviting those present into the “why” and “how” behind-the-scenes of some of the compositions to be performed at the concert, Krishna and Govind, as one example, de-constructed an emotive exploration of the love of a mother for her son.



Part of a trilogy covering a woman’s loss of her father, then husband, then son in war, this piece finds the woman preparing her young child for battle, placing a sword in his tiny hand. Learning that he was felled at the front, she is mortified when told that he was killed from behind, signaling cowardice on his part: he must have been running away. She vows to recover his body and seek the truth about his final moments, risking her life to make her way through the battlefield. As she holds her child’s lifeless body, she sees that indeed he was attacked from the front: he perished a hero. In the afternoon workshop, Govind explained the careful passage from tenderness and pride to devastation, resolve and vindication through the potent use of gesture, body posture, travel across space and facial expression.

Toni Shapiro-Phim is a cultural anthropologist with a specialization in the arts of Southeast Asia. She is currently program specialist at the Philadelphia Folklore Project, where she conducts research about urban expressive culture and coordinates an arts and social change education program.

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Group participants at the 2016 Thyagaraja Aradhana



And the Oscar goes to Kaapi – Bombay Jayashree Concert

Concert Review by Pitchumani Sivakumar

After some tantalizingly close calls and near-misses in the past due to scheduling conflicts, music lovers in greater Philadelphia were treated to a wonderful concert by Bombay Jayashree (BJ) under the auspices of Sruti during the fall of 2016. She was accompanied by Embar Kannan on the violin, V.V. Ramanamurthy on the Mridangam and K.V. Gopalakrishnan (KVG) on the Kanjira.



The concert started with Puliur Doraisami Iyer's Sarasirugasana in Nattai, which was rendered at an ambient tempo to set the tone for the concert. Swara exchanges for the piece were crisp and executed very well. BJ then chose Thaaye Tripurasundari, rendering the prominent Suddha Saveri krithi at a brilliant pace. The chittaswarams were well punctuated and brought out the exquisite beauty of the raga. BJ then gave a mellifluous elaboration of Purvikalyani before launching into Sri Thyagaraja's Paripurna Kama and culminating with some delectable neraval and swaraprastharams. This was followed by a fast rendition of the popular Manavyala Kinchara in Nalinakanthi rounded up with a short swara exchange.

Up until this point, although the accompanists followed the flow of the songs quite effectively, there appeared to be a queasy feeling of a subtle lack of sync. One wondered if that could possibly be due to an overdose of the thisra-chathusra switches that the mridangist resorted to during the song and the theermanas. However, this feeling soon disappeared during the second half of the concert starting with the Thodi main piece and into the Ragam-Thanam-Pallavi (RTP) and the thukkadas in the end – the mojo rediscovered. Ninne Nammi in misra chappu followed a fulfilling alapana of Thodi, which Embar Kannan shadowed and responded extremely well. Neraval was done at customary caranam line of "Kamakshi". Ramanamurthy and KVG were in their element during the thani avarthanam – some nice solkattus from the mridangist and wonderful response on the Kanjira. The thani could have been a tad longer.

The stand-out piece of the concert was definitely the RTP in Kaapi – a degree kaapi by South Indian standards. BJ was completely absorbed in bringing out the bhava of the raga. By then, I had an opportunity to move closer

to the stage in the front row and was entranced instantly. The palindromic ragamalika swaras in Kaapi-Sunadavinodini-Rageshree was an absolute delight and spoke volumes about BJ's mastery of music.



Subramanya Bharathi's evergreen number, Chinnanchiru Kiliye was refreshing and soothing as ever. The concert concluded with a Meera bhajan in Yaman (Gopala Govinda) and a thillana in Desh, both rendered in inimitable BJ style and ensured the concert ended on a high. Ramanamurthy, as I hear, has excelled in adopting the pakhawaj playing style and it was very evident in the way he accompanied the concluding pieces. All in all, an enthralling concert by BJ. Kudos to Sruti for presenting such good quality programs.

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

“Soulful, meditative, soothing music. Jayashri sang with a lot of focus, bhakti and bhavam. Accompaniments were superb. Nice to see a new face on the stage in the mridangam artist who was brilliant.....”

Saarangi – Harsh Narayan

Concert Review by Allyn Miner

Sruti in collaboration with Crossroads and the University of Pennsylvania presented a Hindustani classical concert by sarangi player Harsh Narayan at St. Mary's Church on the Penn campus on October 29. Harsh, grandson of the great Ram Narayan of Mumbai, was on his first U.S. tour. Those familiar with the music of Ram Narayan and that of Harsh's father, sarod player Brij Narayan, were eager to hear a member of the family's next generation. The sarangi, north India's famous bowed instrument, is cherished for its soulful sound, but solo concerts are relatively rare so this concert was a special treat for various reasons.



The high arched ceilings of the church interior along with the ornate woodwork and soft lighting made for a unique atmosphere. A sizeable audience of Carnatic music fans, Penn students, and the west Philadelphia community sat in the wooden pews.

The young musicians came on and were seated on a low platform. The tabla accompanist was Mike Lukshis, a tabla performer and teacher from New Jersey. Harsh spoke briefly about the sarangi, which has a skin-covered wooden body, four melody strings and more than thirty sympathetic strings. The strings are stopped with the back of the fingernails instead of the tips of the fingers. As he drew the bow across the strings, we could hear the sarangi's distinctive beautiful echoing ring.

He announced that he would begin with Rag Sri (also spelled Shree). It might have helped prepare the audience if he had mentioned that Sri is a serious rag suited to the sunset. Hindustani rag Sri has a very different scale from Carnatic Rag Sri:

Hindustani Rag Sri

S R1 M2 P N3 S, S N3 D1 P M2 G3 R1 S

Emphasis on the flat Ri (R1) and dramatic jumps from Ri to Ma and Pa (R1 - M3 P) are special features of the rag. Descending phrases often skip over Sa and Pa and give the rag an unsettled mood. Harsh played a slow alap with beautiful flow and expression. It was satisfying to hear a style and sensibility that reflected his family's legacy. In the jor, the rhythmic section of the alap, comparable to Carnatic tanam, Harsh soon moved on to tans – fast runs up and down the raga scale. Here he showcased another aspect of his grandfather's style.



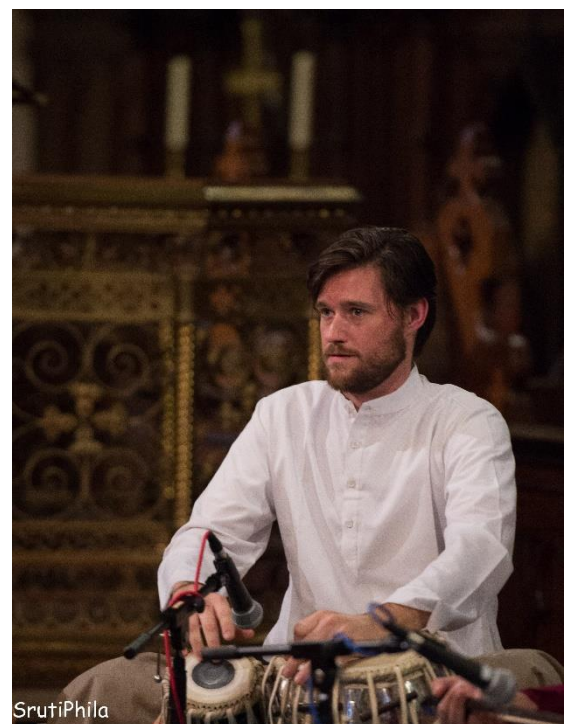
Ram Narayan awed audiences with his imaginative phrasings followed by dramatic, lightening-fast tans. His tans soared from low to high and high to low with an intensity that made a lasting impression on listeners. As Harsh played his fast tans he inserted a sort of demonstration, playing a phrase first in medium then in fast speed. He made it clear that every note was being produced with precise intonation, a skill that requires relentless practice. After the alap Harsh continued with a bandish (composition) in middle-speed jhaptal, a ten-beat tala cycle. Mike Lukshish came in with supportive and skilled tabla accompaniment. His solos were appropriate answers to Harsh's improvisations. His phrasings were impressive without being showy. We all enjoyed a balance of rhythmic and melodic exchanges.

For the second piece Harsh chose Rag Yaman (also called Eman). This famous evening raga has a sweet,

romantic mood. It is typical in a Hindustani concert to play the most serious raga first and at the greatest length, with lighter and shorter pieces following. Yaman is often given long treatment in Hindustani concerts, but in this case Harsh played a delicate short alap followed by a composition and tans in jhaptal, then a fast composition in 16-beat tintal. Some of my students who were in the audience later told me they appreciated the lighter mood of Yaman.

The final piece was a Ragamala in Mishra ('mixed') Pilu. In a ragamala the performer begins with the main raga then brings other ragas into the improvisations. Sometimes the choice of ragas is made on the spot and sometimes the performer has thought out a sequence beforehand. In this performance Harsh clearly drew on the Mishra Pilu of Ram Narayan, of which recordings are available. But Harsh also made the piece his own.

In Hindustani music one's style is formed on the model of the teacher, but a performance is never entirely memorized or duplicated. Harsh began by touching on ragas Malhar and Basant as his grandfather did. But he soon moved on to other ragas. I believe I heard Kirwani and Bhairavi among them.



The changing scale intervals were catchy to the ear, and several audience members mentioned to me that they enjoyed this aspect of the piece.

The sound amplification was excellent, on which the organizers should be commended. I am sure Philadelphia listeners would agree with me that Harsh's dedication, aesthetic touch, and appealing personality all make him an excellent representative of his family legacy. Readers who would like to explore this legacy might want to seek out recordings of Ram Narayan's "Raag Shree" and "Mishra Pilu."

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

Lec-Dem on Bharat Ratna MS Subbulakshmi by RK Shriramkumar

An Appreciation by Prabhakar Chitrapu

On Nov 12, 2016, Sruti audience was treated to a **highly informative and educational lecture demonstration (lec-dem)** on the legendary MS Subbulakshmi (MS), on the occasion of her 100th birth anniversary, by the vidwan Sri RK Shriramkumar (RKS). The lec-dem lasted about 3 hours and kept the audience spell-bound.

Sri RKS was closely associated with MS, as her sishya, her accompanist and her family friend. As such, he had the unique opportunity to observe her at close quarters and learn from her, not only music but also valuable life-lessons, which he shared with us on that evening. In a comprehensive manner, he covered all aspects of her music, life and personality, intelligently weaving in the academic as well as the informal aspects.

RKS's lec-dem was comprehensive and academic, because it covered all these aspects in a systematic and organized manner: **Her history** consisting of her early exposure to music, her first gramophone record, her first concert, her introduction to films, her marriage, her humbleness in learning from so many stalwarts, her national and international fame, her appeal to people from all languages, etc. **Her music** in terms of her dedication to details of sruti & laya, her concert preparation, her AlApanas, her musical ornamentations, her neravals, her svarakalpanas, her tAnam, her pallavis, her bhajans, her favorite songs, etc. **Her personality** as a teacher/mentor, as a devotee, as a philanthropist, etc. And **her simplicity** as a woman that loved coffee, glass bangles, jasmines, perfumes, silk sarees etc.

It is easy to idolize a personality such as MS, and it is easy to paint an ideal, perfect, almost super-human portrait of her, sacrificing in that process the individual's human-ness. RK Shriramkumar beautifully avoided this, by recalling her simple human qualities as well as the fact the even she was not infallible.

The Lec-Dem itself was cleverly constructed by interspersing his own speech, which included pictures, videos & music of MS with live music by **two groups of youngsters** from our own area. The groups sang melodious compositions, that were delight to the ears and that were put together seamlessly.



It was also clever that the Lec-Dem started with a projected image of the **Madurai Meenakshi temple** in the background with the inscription “SrI guru gaNEsa SARadA krupA SrI mInAkshi dEvyai namah” and the Dikshitar kriti “mInAkshi mE mudam dEhi” celebrating Goddess mInAkshi, perhaps since MS was born in Madurai and carries the word in her name!

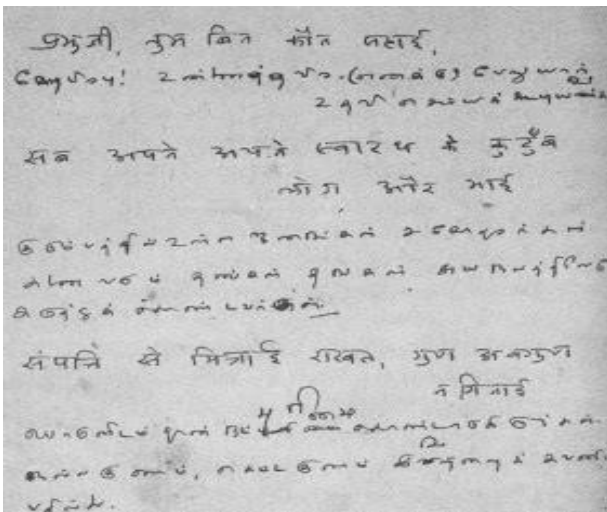
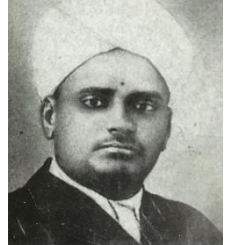


Recollections from the Lec-Dem:

Much has been written about MS and more will be written during this, her centenary year, and surely beyond. Rather than repeating well known information, I would like to recapitulate some of the **lesser known facts** of MS that RKS shared with us.

In addition to being the great vocalist that she is, MS was also an **accomplished Veena player!** She apparently learnt it first from her mother (who was a reputed Veena player herself) and later from K.S. Narayanaswamy. And she actually gave a full Veena concert at the Madras Music Academy! And that her Veena training (i.e. vaiNika bANi) revealed itself (or should I say, “concealed itself”) in her rendering of tAnam in rAgam-tAnam-pallavis.

In contrast to the influence of MS’s mother, as a Vainika, the influence that **her father, Subramania Iyer**, had is probably less known. He was an advocate and conducted SrI rAma navami festivals regularly. Young MS apparently was very impressed by the rathOtsava celebrations, during which the seeds of her deep religious devotion probably sprouted.



MS maintained meticulous **music notebooks** and RKS gave us a rare glimpse of one of the pages. You can see how she wrote beautifully in dEvanAgari and Tamil scripts.

MS had **two tamburas**, one named Lakshmi and the other Saraswati. If we were to visualize her as an embodiment of pArvati – the musical energy, the audience then was treated to the three divine mothers of Hinduism.





MS's **first gramophone record** was released by 'The Twin' record company at her tender age of 10 and consisted of a Tamil song (Tirupugal).

It is well known that MS acted as **Meera** in the film "Meera". Perhaps less known is the fact that the film was produced by her husband, T. Sadasivam, written by the well known Kalki Krishnamurthy and directed by an Englishman Ellis Dungan. Perhaps even less known is the fact that MS became so immersed in her role and perhaps identified herself with Meera, that in the last scene where Meera is shown as merging into the idol of her lover-God Lord Krishna, MS actually swooned unconscious on the stage!



It is well known that MS sang the bhajan '**Hari tum harO**' for Mahatma Gandhi, at his request. Apparently, the request came at a short notice and MS initially declined the offer. When Gandhi insisted that he would rather have MS even simply "recite" the song, MS had the song set to music (by one Sri Vaidyanathan) overnight and sang it for the Mahatma!

Almost every household in South India probably knows the **Venkateswara Suprabhatam and Vishnu Sahasram** recited by MS. These were recorded in 1963 and the preparation MS did, in terms of pronunciation and diction was immaculate. A less observed fact is how these renderings reveal the strict adherence to kAla-pramANam (time scale). Normally, the mridangam helps the artist keep the tempo through extended musical renderings. On the other hand, Vishnu Sahasram is rendered without any such timing assistance and therefore it is easy for the time scale to drift. (Those of us who recite it know how the pace speeds up towards the latter parts of the Sahasram – either due to the genuine difficulty of keeping time for a long time or simply impatience -☺). In MS's rendering, one can observe that the kAla pramANam is identical throughout the 30 min recitation of Vishnu Sahasram.

Even after MS's fame spread wide and far, she had the humility to **learn from many other musicians**. For example, she learnt the Bhairavi swarajati - Kamakshi, of Syama Sastry- from Musiri Subramania Iyer, the Sourashtra kriti - Sri Ganapatini of Thyagaraja- from Brinda, several compositions from Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, etc. Yet, after learning from others, she made them entirely her own, placing her indelible stamp on them and often making them even more lovable and appealing from the teachers' versions!

Of special mention here is her bringing to the audience of classical music connoisseurs the **compositions of Annamacharya**. These were laying hidden for centuries in the sealed vaults of the Venkateswara temple in Tirupati, and were re-discovered only in the early part of the 20th Century. Under the sponsorship of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, MS released 5 albums, containing several compositions of Annamacharya. Although the music was set by many other musicians & musicologists, such as rALLapalli anantakrishna Sarma, pinAkapANi, vOIEti, nEdunUri etc., MS poured life into these musical structures and impregnated them deep in the hearts of lovers of Carnatic music and Annamacharya's compositions. RKS mentioned an interesting fact that MS's favorite among these was the 'entamAtramuna' kriti, whose meaning is universal. It says that God reveals Himself/Herself in whatever measure or way the seeker pursues Him/Her.

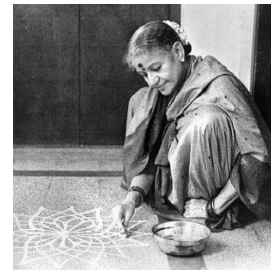


Such things have been said of Thyagaraja too, and they apply equally to MS's music. There have been other musicians who possibly surpassed MS individually in different dimensions of Carnatic music, namely **bhAvam, sangItam and sAhityam**. But, what MS excelled in was blending these in a perfect manner, and produced a balance, that was optimal for each particular composition. Such blending requires the mastery of each individual dimension and determining the right mix for the composition being rendered and controlling oneself to not to over-emphasize any one dimension at the expense of the quality of the entire musical edifice. Like Thyagaraja, she was unique and superlative at such balance.

MS was a fine human being, exhibiting many great qualities, such as being **a caring mentor**. RKS illustrated this aspect of MS from two of his personal examples. In the early 90's, MS was giving a concert at IIT Madras, with RKS accompanying on the violin. The piece being rendered was in rAga kalyANi and it was RKS's turn to perform the AlApana. At one point, MS apparently looked at him questioningly, which immediately conveyed to RKS that something in his rendering at that time was not right. After the concert, MS gently told him that 'too many oscillations around the rishabham 'Ri' can drag the rendering into SankarAbharaNam! At another time, RKS was giving a solo violin concert on the radio, and MS, as his mentor, was listening to it attentively at her home. He was playing the madhyamavati kriti 'pAlincu kAmAkshi' of Syama Sastry. RKS played one of the sangatis differently, but quickly recovered in an almost un-noticeable way. The master musician, MS, had, of course, noticed it and wanted to correct him. She had apparently called his home phone twice already by the time he returned home! When he called her back, she complimented him on a fine concert and then gently pointed out the issue with the pAlincu kAmakshi sangati!

Even as we celebrate and idolize MS and her music, we should not lose sight of the fact that she was **a human being**, after all. As an ordinary human, she was fallible too. But, as an extraordinary human, she recovers from her few & minor slips in the most graceful way, setting an example for all of us to follow. The incident was a concert she was giving at the Birla house, in New Delhi, during the late-1960s/early-1970s. She was singing a Meera Bhajan and towards the end, she seems to have forgotten the next line! Unperturbed and maintaining an inner equilibrium, she searches her mind to recover the faded lines and comes back with swan-like grace! Such poise is what is also taught to us in the name 'marALi manda-gamana' in Lalitha Sahasram.

I would like to conclude my appreciation of the excellent Lec-Dem presented by Vidwan RK Shriramkumar with **a few pictures** of the extra-ordinary human and role-model that MS was and continues to be.



Prabhakar Chitrapu is a long time supporter of SRUTI and has served the organization in various capacities including President, since its inception. An engineer by profession, Prabhakar has a deep interest in classical music, language, literature and philosophy and contributes his views frequently to Sruti publications. He maintains a website devoted to Saint Thyagaraja at www.thyagaraja.org.

Bala Bhavam – Bharatanatyam by Rumya Venkateshwaran

Concert Review by Roopa Nayak

On November 12 2016, Sruti, The India Music and Dance Society presented a tribute to Bharat Ratna Shrimati M.S. Subbulakshmi. As part of the Bala Bhavam series, Rumya Venkateswaran presented a Bharatanatyam dance recital.

Rumya needs no introduction to the Greater Philadelphia region. She has been learning and performing Bharatanatyam in Kalakshetra and Bharatanrityam style under the able guidance of gurus such as Smt Shobha Sharma, Smt Bala Devi Chandrashekar, the Dhananjayans, and Shri N. Srikanth. With a well thought out format, the entire performance was a sequence of neatly arranged pieces. Each one, in the original ragam as sung by M.S

Amma herself, evoked the feeling of seeing a dancer deeply rooted to tradition. It was an appropriate and fitting tribute to the legend.

The first piece presented was an invocatory item. Alarippu in Misra Chapu was interlaced with the well known Annamaachaarya Krithi, *Entamaatramuna*, which was popularized by M.S. Amma during her time. The crisp and rhythmic sollukattu by the young and talented Vivek Ramanan and the melodious rendition of the Krithi by Rumya's mother Nalini Venkateswaran set the mood for a great recital. This Alarippu was Rumya's own choreography and was performed with precision and calm composure.

In the next piece, Rumya performed to one of M.S. Amma's most famously rendered compositions of all time, Maharaja Shri Swati Tirunal's Bhavayami Raghuramam in a Varnam format, which speaks of the



SrutiPhila

glories of Lord Rama. Based on the structure of this piece, each of its six charanam describes one kaandam, each corresponding to Valmiki's Ramayanam.

These are, respectively, Baala (Rama's birth and childhood), Aayodhyaa (Rama's banishment to the forest), Aaranya (Rama's contact with Jataayu and Shurpanaka), Kishkindha (Rama's meeting with Hanuman, Sugreeva, and Vaali), Sundhara (Rama and Hanuman's search for Sita in Lanka), and Yuddha (Rama and Raavana's final battle in Lanka). Its first Jathi was an adaptation of a well-known Vazhuvoor Jathi, while the other two Jathis were composed by the Nattuvanar, Vivek Ramanan. The song, composed in Ragamalika and set to Rupaka Talam, is choreographed by Rumya's Grand Guru, Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam. The complex and cross-rhythmic pattern of the jathis brought to light not only Vivek's skills as a Bharatanatyam dancer and as a trained Mridangam artist, but it also showed Rumya's tremendous grip on taalam.



Rumya's in-depth training in Carnatic music, and hence a sound knowledge of the thalam, proved to be an asset in her skillful presentation of the jathis which she had choreographed herself. Each jathi was performed with such

immaculate precision that it elicited repeated applause from the audience. She was also very convincing in Abhinaya, and whether she portrayed the antagonistic Manthara, the calm and devout Sita, the troublemaker Shurpanakha, or the bhakthi of Hanuman, her facial expressions were quite real. She was able to convey the actual nature of every character portrayed, and she was certainly able to express in detail, even with mere glances, the multitude of characters within her dance.

Rumya also choreographed the next piece, a composition of Shri Subramanya Bharathiar entitled Vellai Thaamar, where the poet describes the beauty of Goddess Saraswati. Throughout this song, the poet recites, “She resides in the white lotus flower and is present in the sweet sound of the Veena, yet she also resides in the hearts of devotees and poets who sing songs, spreading their inner joy outwards to one and all.” This composition in ragam Bhimplas was set to Adi Thalam. The finale, a duo consisting of the Shiva Panchaakshara Stotram followed by Shivoham, was definitely the highlight of the performance. The Shiva Panchaakshara Stotram, written by Shri Adi Shankaraachaarya, corresponds to the five syllables of the chant of Lord Shiva’s name, “Om Na-Ma-Shi-Va-Ya”. This stotram preceded Shivoham, a choreography of Rama Vaidyanathan that invokes the dancer’s meditation by spiritually connecting with Lord Shiva through the medium of dance. The verses, “Jeevaha Shivaha Shivo Jeevaha”, taken from the Skanda Puraanam, reflect that life, which is inside of me, is Shiva. Therefore, I am one with Him. This meaning resonates throughout the piece, symbolizing the connection the soul makes with the Supreme Being, a concept known as Jeevatma-Paramatma. The Shiva Panchaakshara Stotram, in Ragamalika and Khanda Chaapu, followed by Shivoham, in Charukesi and Adi Talam, was a feast for the eyes and the ears.

The recital concluded with a mangalam in Madhyamavati with verses taken from the Venkatesha Suprabhatam, one of M.S. Amma’s most famous devotional renditions. It was a performance that came together in all aspects, including the dancer and the accompanying orchestra. One could appreciate both the dancer and the accompanists together without forcing the audience to separate them.

Nalini Venkatesan’s melodious voice enriched the performance with the necessary variations in amplitude, and Dr. Sriram Balasubramanian’s mridangam offered the nadham that rounded out the audio aspects without distracting the tone of the piece. Additionally, Shri Balachander Krishnaraj’s lilting music on the flute completed the ensemble. Rumya’s dance was performed with conviction. There was a sense of confidence and authority that was depicted in the sudden and arresting pause she provided, after a brisk sequence of movements, a technique she used throughout the performance in various places. This technique, performed to a perfect rhythm gave the impression of a promising and bright future for Rumya in Bharata Natyam.

Roopa Nayak is a Bharatanatyam teacher in Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania and continuously strives to preserve and present the purity of her style and currently encourages young budding artists through her institute, Nritya Surabhi.

Dr. M. Balamurali Krishna
A humble tribute to the legend and musical genius
By Uma Prabhakar

Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna (6 July 1930 – 22 November 2016) is a household name to Carnatic music connoisseurs and music lovers in southern India and other parts of the world. Who isn't familiar with his renderings of Sri Bhadrachala Ramadasu, Sri Annamacharya compositions which he is known for popularizing among his music lovers? Not to mention the compositions of the Trinity of Carnatic music, Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshithar and Syama Sastry that he aggrandized/glorified, unique ragas and over 400 compositions that he created.



You can find all his accomplishments, credits, awards he won, recognitions he received etc. in books, and on the web- just google his name and you get 357,000 results in less than 0.83 seconds (yes, I did that just now as I started to pen this tribute!)!! I would not be surprised if Dr. Balamurali Krishna himself was not even aware of all the information there is about him!

I enjoy and indulge in immersive musical appreciation that I have acquired through years of attending concerts and listening to classical music. I acknowledge my limitations of not understanding all the nuances to the fullest and not being a 'trained' musician. With that disclaimer, this tribute to the musical genius, Dr. M. Balamurali Krishna (BMK) will not indulge in regurgitating facts, stories and the like one can find readily. Instead it represents my personal thoughts, interspersed with interactions and experiences that I have had. I just wish to celebrate his life that was filled with music, fun and creativity that brought music to the common man and have taken the liberty of writing this tribute on impulse.

Since the really sad news of his passing on, BMK's fans and aficionados have been pouring their hearts out on social media, reminiscing about the maestro, sharing anecdotes, stories about him, photographs of themselves and their families with him and so on. Every morning I wake up to see these lovely stories on Facebook, twitter, whatsapp etc. I realize with awe and joy, what a great man BMK had been to have reached out to so many people, in every nook and corner of the world, with his music and creativity both in the classical music as well as the non-classical space.

Most of us growing up Southern India in the 60's and 70's and with some exposure to Carnatic music have known MS Subbulakshmi, DK Pattamal, ML Vasanthakumari and Balamuralikrishna in the same breath. Even those of us who haven't had a classical music background have heard of his lighter semi-classical music, his compositions, and rendering of long-forgotten songs, new ragas and other renderings in films, on All India Radio, in music

shops etc. His deep and rich penetrating voice, the exuberant performances, the flawless ease and vocal maneuver in a three-octave range, displayed his profuse knowledge of music and sparkling creativity.

During my college years, I attended with my parents his music concert at the Keyes High School in Secunderabad. As expected the place was absolutely full; it was a great performance – sadly, I don't remember the songs he sang, but I do remember my parents having an immersive and enjoyable experience. I also distinctly recall during one krithi, BMK mentioned that the song had been popularized in a particular raga, but that the original was in some other raga. The elderly hard core tradition-loving, innovation-leery folk sitting in the audience were clearly annoyed at this comment and remarked amongst themselves in Tamil on how



ridiculous and arrogant that comment was- loud enough for BMK to hear! BMK seemed to be unfazed by the criticism; smiled his usual charming smile and continued with his concert.

The question of BMK's music and attitude, among music connoisseurs has been controversial, expressing either impassioned praise and declarations claiming him to be the best singer of all time or, downright scorn, and assertions that he broke all timeless traditions of Carnatic music. Seldom has there been a tepid or indifferent response. Such has been, and continues to be, his impact, on Carnatic music.

In 1975, I saw the Kannada movie 'Hamsageethe'. The music directors for the movie were BMK and TG Lingappa. BMK sang several of Jayadeva, Puranadara dasa, Sadashiva Brahendra and three of his own compositions in true classical style even though it was a movie. In several movies prior to that, the classical Carnatic songs were rendered in 'filmy style', but not so in Hamsageethe. 'Himadrisuthe' in raga Kalyani made an impression on me and perhaps also inspired me to appreciate Carnatic music. Two years later, I had the privilege to hear the very same composition by BMK again, in its entirety with alapana, elaborate neraval and swara kalpana, at another enthralling BMK concert at the Ravindra Bharathi venue in Hyderabad. From that day on, 'Kalyani' became my favorite raga and to this day, it continues to be so!

Few years later, I heard his recordings of Nanu paalimpa, Jagadanandakaraka, Dudukugala, Samajavara gamana and many many more songs. I thoroughly enjoyed his intellectual meanderings during krithis, his cheeky and playful swarakalpanas as he teased his accompanists and audiences with his creative and non-conformist variations of ragas etc. Younger audiences loved his flamboyance and the infectious joy with which he sang. His diction, in whatever language he sang, was flawless.

In September 1989, SRUTI had organized a two-part event comprising a bharathanatyam dance by Saraswathi accompanied by BMK on vocal, followed by a full length vocal concert by BMK. He was to be accompanied by D. Raghavendra Rao on violin and Balasai on flute. I was serving as the correspondence secretary for SRUTI at the time and was thrilled and ecstatic beyond words when it was decided at the SRUTI board meeting that my family would be hosting the artists at our house in Harleystown, PA!

BMK and party arrived at our house when it was still daylight and standing at our doorstep, he announced ‘Balamurali Krishna has come to your house’! I must have acted like a silly star struck teenager to that comment as we ushered them into the house. I had a huge spread for dinner and was making vadas for the appetizers. BMK made himself absolutely at home walking up to the kitchen and helping himself to the hot vadas just as they came out from the fryer! I may have even asked him to wait until I was done- I still cannot believe I did that! After dinner, Saraswathi and accompanists went off to the garage to practice while BMK sat with us in our family room and talked with us and a few other SRUTI board members. In those days, Prabhakar loved making up his own compositions and even dared to ask BMK to sing them! BMK of course was diplomatic and only corrected the composition and told him it was creative! He did not sing it.

The SRUTI concert started with the dance performance of Saraswathi, while BMK sat in the background and started singing in his thunderous and voluminous voice, ‘Onkara Akarini’ in raga lavangi. For his own concert, BMK sang ‘kamalambam’ in kalyani by Dikshitar for the occasion of navarathri. He also sang a “sarva swarakshara” krithi, Ma Manini, in raga Todi – where nearly all letters of the lyrics match the notes. Earlier in the day, Prabhakar had been talking to BMK about swarakshara krithis where one or two letters of the lyrics match the notes and just before the concert, BMK told Prabhakar that he had a surprise item that he would perform. As expected, his concert was a real treat. Over the years, BMK has continued to entertain SRUTI audiences with several concerts both solo and jugalbandis (with Hari Prasad Chaurasia and Bhimsen Joshi) as we continued to enjoy his concerts and also had several personal interactions with him. In 2011, he performed at the Delaware Temple for SRUTI’s 25th year anniversary along with Ravi Kiran on Chitravina.

BMK’s great respect for the traditions of Carnatic music, how he has used it to explore new areas of this music is indeed remarkable. He led a rich and fulfilling life and his legend will live in our hearts and memories forever. We will miss him immensely, but he will always be an experience that cannot be forgotten.

Uma Prabhakar is a scientist by profession and keenly interested in the cultural arts. She lives in Blue Bell with her husband, Prabhakar. Over the years, both she and Prabhakar have served on the SRUTI board in various capacities and are keen supporters of the organization.

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What you said



Survey Feedback from SRUTI Concert Attendees

SRUTI thanks all who responded to the surveys after each concert. Here are some excerpts. We appreciate and value your feedback and comments and do our best to implement your suggestions where feasible.

[Thyagaraja Aradhana] was very well organized right from the Pooja, the Mangala Isai concert by Sumanth, Utsava Sampradaya and Pancharatna kritis. Delay is inevitable but the organization was very good. Food and food arrangement was good. It was really enjoyable to soak in the music from the individual participants as well as the featured concert. Overall a very good job by the team.

Wonderful group singing - both from the Utsava Sampradaya Kriti singers and the Pancharatna Kriti singers. Great leadership by the lead singers Kiranavali and Dinakar - Strong individual performances even from the youngest of the children! What a showcase of great talent! - Phenomenal performance from the headlining singer – Amrutha Venkatesh. Great day of music

Absolutely loved the concert. Anil Srinivasan was amazing. Aditya Srinivasan, equally superb. So enjoyed hearing carnatic music on the piano and was wonderful to have the youth see how versatile our music truly is. Thank You Sruti for such a unique experience. Would have preferred this concert in a better auditorium so we could have a better view of the pianist.

I am not a big fan of Piano accompaniment for Carnatic music.

The Piano and vocals were mesmerizing. Tabla was great too but could have been integrated more. Venue was superb. Churches are hard venues for concerts, western or Indian. The seats do not allow for good viewing

The event [Saayujya] was creative and ground-breaking. I appreciated the artists' approach to the philosophical topics and how singing and dance could meld together to create and meaningful interpretation. Both artists are highly skilled in their art and showed profound respect for each other and that they thought deeply about their Merging project. I was very impressed!

Everything about the [Violin Trio] concert was good. Shri Krishnan was superb, as well as Sriram and Viji and the accompanists. The school auditorium was also very good with excellent sound system. Overall, one of the best. Would have liked it to be longer but can understand.

Great to see two sangeetha kalanidhis on stage. [Sri T.N.Krishnan & Sri Trichy Sankaran]

This was one of the best carnatic vocal concerts [Sanjay] I have heard in years. Just loved the whole presentation, the choice of ragas, the accompanists. Kudos to Sruti for providing the opportunity to listen to a top notch concert.

Excellent concert [Sanjay], prompt start, minimal fuss of introduction and closure. Keep it up. Ushers were a good idea, their presence was felt by the quietness in the audience. Sruti must continue to use this option for big performances and where auditoriums have noisy doors??

Very classical concert as expected from Vijay Siva. The rakthi ragams were handled beautifully. The kamboji was Fabulous and the madhyamavati and thodi added a nice weight to the concert. Extremely enjoyable concert.

Started on time. Lighting and sound were handled very well. Food for sale was a nice idea, given the late start. Venue was nice and accessible. Concert itself was well structured and the artists presented themselves very well.

Wonderful dance by young Rumya with a very powerful vocal support from her mother Nalini as part of Bala Bhavam. Excellent and very moving retrospective of MSS' contribution to musical precision by RKS! Thoroughly enjoyable for those members of the audience who grew up during the 60s and 70s and have been part of the experience of listening to MS live! It was a pleasure to listen to the local children and marvel at the talent we have locally! Sri RKS was amazingly good as a raconteur. His personal glimpses of the great singer, brought tears to one's eyes!

I always enjoy when SRUTI hosts a Hindustani program, in addition to the Carnatic events. The venue for the Harsh Narayan concert was lovely and the sound was quite good for the space.

Outreach at the Penn Museum



Coming in 2017...



Sangeetha Swaminathan



Amrutha Murali



Lavanya Ananth



Shashank Subramanyan



& Purbayan Chatterjee



O.S. Thyagarajan



Shijith & Parvati Nambiar



Ashwath Narayan



Kiranavali Vidyashankar