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Thyagaraja Aradhana 2005



SRUTI
The India Music & Dance Society
Philadelphia, PA

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Thiruvarur Vaidyanathan (Mridangam)

78. Sanjay Subrahmanyan (vocal) 2004 - 3 Cd's Nagai Muralidharan (Violin)

Mannargudi A. Easwaran (Mridangam)

79. Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman (Mridangam) 2004 - 2 Cd's Nemani Somayajulu (Jalatharangam),

E. M. Subramanian (Ghatam),

Nagai Sriram (Violin),

Mattanur Sankarankutty (Chenda)

Unnikrishnan (Thimila, Edakka & Sanku)

80. T. N. Bala (vocal) & party 2004 - 2Cd's Murugaratnamala



	C.G. Balachandran (Mridangam), Murali Balachandran (Ghatam)	
64.	S. Shashank (Flute) B.U. Ganesh Prasad (Violin),	2002(2)
	Satish Kumar (Mridangam),	
	T. Radhakrishnan(Ghatam),	
	M. Gururaj (Morsing)	
65.	Ustad Shahid Pervez Khan (Sitar)	2002(2)
	Ustad Kadar Khan (Tabla)	
66.	Malladi Brothers (Vocal)	2002(3)
	R. Swaminadhan (violin),	
	Palani C. Kumar (mridangam)	
67.	Pandit Vishwamohan Bhatt (Mohan Vina) &	
	Chitravina Ravikiran (Chitravina)	2002(3)
	Subrata Bhattacharya (tabla),	
	Subhashchandran (mridangam)	2002(2)
68.	T.M. Krishna (Vocal)	2002(3)
	B.U. Ganesh Prasad (Violin),	
CO	J. Vaidyanathan (Mridangam)	2002(2)
69.	Rama Ravi (Vocal)	2002(3)
	B.V. Raghavendra Rao (Violin) Prakash Rao (mridangam)	
70.	Aparna Balaji (vocal)	2002(2)
70.	Radha Mani (violin)	2003(2)
	Vijay Gopalakrishnan (mridangam)	
70.	Aruna Sairam (Vocal)	2003- 3 Cds
70.	B.V. Raghavendra Rao (Violin)	2003- 3 Cus
	J. Vaidyanathan (mridangam)	
71.	Ganesh & Kumaresh (violin duet)	2003- 3 Cds
,	Neiveli Venkatesh (mridangam)	2003 3 643
	Giridhar Uduppa (ghatam)	
72.	Kadri Gopalnath (Saxophone)	2003- 3 Cds
	A. Kanyakumari (violin)	
	Denkanikotta Mani (Thavil)	
	Sumanth Swaminathan (saxophone)	
73.	O.S. Thiagarajan (vocal)	2003- 3 Cds
	Delhi Sundararajan (violin)	
	Neiveli Narayanan (mridangam)	
74.	V. K. Raman	2004- 2 Cds
	Jay Shankar Balan (violin)	
	Mali Santhanakrishnan (mridangam)	
75.	Vijay Siva (vocal)	2004 - 2 Cd's
	R.K. Shriramkumar, Violin	
	J. Vaidyanathan, Mridangam	
76.	Dr. N. Ramani (Flute)	2004- 1 Cd
	C.S. Anuroop (violin)	
	P.K. Swaminathan (mridangam)	
77.	Kanya Kumari (violin)	2004- 2 Cd's
	Embar Kannan (Violin)	

From The Editors

It is always a challenge to choose a topic of interest to the readers when planning to get up a souvenir issue. Sri Thyagaraja Aradhana is an annual event for all of us. We all know that there are so many books, write ups, scholarly discourses, discussions and thesis on the composer, his life, songs and everything associated with the saint.

We started asking everyone we saw for suggestions and decided on asking for articles on their favorite song, based on a suggestion from Parasaran, a life member and an enthusiastic music lover. We have a small sample in the following pages. Therefore we will, as is usual with any series that we start, keep the topic and the pages of Sruti publications open for future articles on the same topic, "My Favorite Song", and why it is so. Please send us your thoughts.

In this issue we have articles from teachers, persons who know music, faithful listeners and more important a few next generation music lovers.

We have our regular features, a review of a different kind of Pancharatnas, from the Composer's day, a letter from the President and a list of recordings/CDs available for your leisure time listening.

Please, give your feedbacks and, please, contribute articles. We are still hoping that we will get information about our community regularly and find people willing to review programs and interview artists. We welcome the next generation music lovers to get more involved so that their voices can be heard.

We have a new editor, V.V. Raman, starting this month. We are very grateful for the great work done by the past editor, C. Nataraj who is still very much a part of the Library Committee. We thank Kamakshi Mallikarjun for helping us in bringing out the Special Issue on Smt. M. S. Subbulakshmi.

Thank you,
Library Committee.
T. Sarada
Prasad Lakshminarayan
V.V. Raman
Rangaprabhu Parthasarathy

Saint Thyagaraja

(1767-1847)

The classical music of India has been an integral part of our spiritual heritage. A great many composers have contributed to the rich tradition of Carnatic music which is essentially devotional. The sacred memory of Sri Thyagaraja, the foremost of our saint composers, is honored on the *aradhana* day by thousands of musicians offering tribute to the prolific composer.

A great devotee of Lord Rama, Thyagaraja composed over 2000 songs mostly in Telugu and some in Sanskrit. Simple, beautiful and soul stirring, his style appeals to the layman and the scholar alike. He also wrote two operas *Prahalada Bhakthi Vijayam* and *Nowka Charitram*. The *Ghana Raga Pancharathna Kirtanas* in the 5 ragas Nattai, Gaulai, Arabhi, Sri, and Varali, are considered to be the most scholarly contribution of Thyagaraja to South Indian Music. The composer seems to have condensed his musical genius, his matchless devotion to God and the profound wisdom of the Vedanta teaching into these five immortal kritis. Appropriately enough, the musical offering at the aradhana begins with the singing of the Pancharathna kritis in unison.

[Some books on Thyagaraja: *Spiritual Heritage Of Tyagaraja* by V. Raghavan and C. Ramanujachari., *Tyagaraja-Life and Lyrics* by W.J. Jackson, *Know your Thyagaraja by* S.V.Krishnamurthy.]



46.	Lalgudi G.R. Krishnan (Violin)	1998(2)
	Vellore Ramabhadran (mridangam)	
	V. Nagarajan (kanjira)	
47.	Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Vocal)	1998(2)
	Ananthakrishnan (Violin)	
	Palghat Raghu (Mridangam)	
48.	T.M. Krishna (Vocal)	1998(2)
	Bombay Gayathri (violin)	
	K. Arun Prakash (mridangam)	
50.	N. Ravikiran (Chitravina)	1998(2)
	Ananthakrishnan (Violin)	
	Master Anand (Mridangam)	
51.	Neyveli Santhanagopalan-Vocal	1999(2)
	Delhi Sundararajan (Violin)	()
	Srimushnam Rajarao (Mridangam)	
52.	Mysore Nagaraj & Manjunath (Violin)	1999(2)
	Thiruvarur Bhakthavathsalam (Mridang	
53.	Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar (Flute)	1999(2)
55.	H.N. Bhaskar (Violin), M. Suresh (Mri	
54.	T.N. Seshagopalan (Vocal)	2000(2)
J 4.	Jayasankaran Bala (Violin)	2000(2)
	Vaidyanathan (Mridangam)	
	- · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
55.	Maharajapuram Ramachandran	2000(2)
	M. Chandramouli (Violin)	
	Kumbakonam Ganesh (Mridangam	
56.	M.S.Gopalakrishnan	2000(2)
	& Narmadha (Violin)	
	Tiruvaroor Bhakthavatsalam (Mridanga	
57.	Priya Sisters (Vocal)	2000(2)
	B. Raghavendra Rao (Violin)	
	J. Vaidyanatha (Mridangam)	
58.	Mysore Nagaraj & Manjunath (Violin)	2001(2)
	Srimushnam Raja Rao (Mridangam)	
59.	M.S. Sheela (Vocal)	2001(2)
	Radhika Mani (Violin),	
	A. R. Dattatreya Sharma (Mridangam),	
	V. Kashinath (Kanjira),	
	Rudrapatnam Sathyakumar (Ghatam)	
60.	P. Unnikrishnan (Vocal)	2001(2)
٠٠.	Vittal Ramamurthy (Violin)	2001(2)
	Trichur Narendran (Mridangam)	
61.	Hyderabad Brothers (Vocal)	2001(2)
01.	Delhi Sundararajan (violin),	2001(2)
	S. Raja Rao (Mridangam)	
62		2001(2)
62.	Bombay Jayashri (Vocal)	2001(2)
	R.K. Sriramkumar (Violin),	
(2	K. Arun Prakash (Mridangam)	2002(2)
63.	Rajeswari Satish (Vocal)	2002(2)
	Radhika Mani (Violin),	

Shashidhar (Violin) Satish Pathakota (Mridangam) 30. Vijay Siva (Vocal) 1993(2) Shriram Kumar (Violin) J. Vaidhyanathan (mridangam) 31. Charumathi Ramachandran (Vocal) 1994(2) M.S. Anantharaman (Violin) Skandaprasad (Mridangam) 32. Bombay Jayashri (Vocal) 1995(2) Vittal Ramamurthy (Violin) Palani Chakravarthy (Mridangam) 33. Sowmya (Vocal) 1995(2) Narmada (Violin) Balaji (Mridangam) 34. Sanjay Subramaniam (Vocal) 1995(2) R.K. Sriramkumar (Violin) K. Arun Prakash (Mridangam) 35. Vani Satish (Vocal) 1995(2) Satish (Violin) Mahesh Krishnamurthy (Mridangam) 37. Nithyasree (Vocal) 1996(2) Embar Kannan (Violin) Siva Kumar (Mridangam) 1996(3) 38. M.S. Sheela (Vocal) Nalina Mohan (Violin) Anoor Ananthakrishna Sharma (Mridangam) Sukanya Ramgopal (Ghatam) 39. Jayanthi & Padmavathi (Veena Duet) 1996(2) Thiruvarur Vaidyanathan (Mridangam) 40. Shashank (Flute) 1996(2) Gopinath (Violin) Satish Kumar (Mridangam) Tripunithira Radhakrishnan (Ghatam) 41. O.S. Thyagarajan (Vocal) 1997(3) Srikanth Venkataraman (Violin) Srimushnam Raja Rao (Mridangam) 42. Balaji Shankar 1997(2) Ganesh Prasad (Violin) Poongulam Subramaniam (Mridangam) 43. T. .N. Krishnan & 1997(2) Viji Krishnan Natarajan (Violin) B. Harikumar (Mridangam) Vaikkom R. Gopalakrishnan (Ghatam) 1997(2) 44. Kadri Gopalanath (Saxophone) Kanyakumari (Violin) Guruvayur Durai (Mridangam) 45. N. Ramani-Flute 1998(2) Srikant Venkataraman (Violin) Srimushnam Rajarao (Mridangam)

What shall I write about?

By Prabhakar Chitrapu (With editorial help from Anil Chitrapu & content help from Mani Subramaniam)

Over the years, I have developed a deep sense of friendship, respect and awe towards Thyagaraja. I do not intend to sound presumptuous in speaking of a man like Thyagaraja as a friend, but it is only a statement of the bond that grew in me after countless hours of listening, reading and brooding.

The aspects that touched my heart and mind in these many hours are his music, his poetry, his ideas, his spirituality and his personality. I sat down to write an essay with the intention of sharing with you some thoughts on some of these aspects. I asked myself, what shall I write about?

Thyagaraja is famous, perhaps, first and foremost, for his music. After all, he is called Sangeetha Brahma. Yet, it is this aspect of him that is so hard to write about. We see so many books and articles written about Thyagaraja's songs, their meaning, anecdotes around these songs, his life etc. How many writings do we come across that describe his music? Very few! Even those few would typically say that he composed in some 300 ragas, with such and such scales. That he embedded his best music in the compositional structure of 'kritis' (Pallavi-Anupallavi-Charanam). That he innovated and perfected the concept of 'sangathis', with some sophisticated compositions like 'Daarini Telusukonti' have as many as some 14 sangathis and so on. That, however, his most famous musical compositions, namely the Ghana Raga Pancharathnas, have almost no sangathis, do not employ the kriti structure and that in fact are more like 'swarajathis'! That he composed more major kritis in raga Todi than in any other (based on what we know) and so on. That he created new ragas such as Amritavahini and so on. That he breathed life into many other then-dormant ragas such as Kharaharapriya and so on.

Not finding much else to write about or written about Thyagaraja's music per say, I thought to myself: let me leave thinking about music structurally (i.e. ragas etc) and look at music as a vehicle to convey mood or feeling (i.e. bhava). Closely associated with the aspect of bhava are of course the lyrics, which through the semantics tend to directly affect the bhava. It is possible that someone who does not either know the language of the composition or understand the

meaning of the lyrics is better qualified to write about the bhava induced solely by Thyagaraja's music. But, for me, it is very hard to put aside the lyrics when analyzing the bhava behind the kritis. So, I thought of writing about Thyagaraja's music and how it imparts bhava in conjunction with the lyrics. Even here, there is little written and even less of what I can write myself! For example, the kriti 'Kaarubaaru' in Mukhari raga starts sharply with higher notes and imparts a piercing, chilling effect whenever I hear it. What about the Madhyamavathi kriti 'Allakallola maayenamma'? The music produces such a feeling of commotion, quite consistent with the meaning of the song (i.e. a boat caught in a storm and being swayed on the waves). In contrast, the music of the Yamunakalyani kriti 'Haridasudu Vedale' progresses briskly and with such gaiety, that it induces cheer and springiness – once again matching the words that describe the marching of the Haridasa singing praises of Sri Hari.

I guess the reason for there not being much written about Thyagaraja's music or the bhava is simply because music & bhava are not to be written about. They are to be heard and felt. If one leaves Thygaraja's music, a lot can be and has been written about his songs, their meaning, embedded ideas etc. For example, it has been interestingly explained how the kriti 'Evarani Nirnayinthuraa' extols the Rama Nama as the essential support of both Narayana and Siva mantras. Indeed, Thyagaraja says that without 'ra', narayana mantra becomes 'na-ayana', which is a negation of Narayana. Similarly, without 'ma', the namasivaya mantra becomes na-sivaya, which is a negation of Siva! Of course, there are many more such examples in various books and articles. Both you and I can read these excellently written material.

So, where does this leave me now? It seems that most of what can be written about has been already written. And the rest defies verbalization, compelling us to being silent on those aspects! So, what shall I write about?

Dr. Prabhakar Chitrapu, a life member of Sruti, is the President of Sruti and is a frequent contributor to Sruti's publications.



	P. S. Ramamurthy (Violin)	
	K. V. Prasad (Mridangam)	
14.	Sudha Raghunathan (Vocal)	1992(3)
	V. V. Ravi (Violin)	
	T. Vaidyanathan (Mridangam)	
15.	Maharajapuram Santhanam (Vocal)	1989(2)
	& Srinivasan	
	Nagai Muralidharan (Violin)	
	Vellore Ramabadhran (Mridangam)	
16.	T.N.Seshagopalan (Vocal)	1992(2)
	G. Chandramouli (Violin)	
	Neyveli Narayanan (Mridangam)	
17.	Nedunuri Krishnamurthi	1991(2)
	Thiruparkadal S. Veeraraghavan	
	Padmasri Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman	
18.	Saroja & Lalitha (Bombay Sisters)(Vocal)	1989(3)
	M. Narasimhamurthi (Violin)	
	T. Narendran (Mridangam)	
	M. Govindarajan (Ghatam)	
19.	Ravi Kiran (Chitra Veena)	1994(2)
	P. Sunder Rajan (Violin)	
	Vellore Ramabhadran (Mridangam)	
20.	K.V.Narayanaswamy (Vocal)	1993(2)
	Nagai Muralidharan (Violin)	
	Vellore Ramabhadran (Mridangam)	
21.	Kadiri Gopalnath (Saxaphone)	1987(2)
	T.S. Srinivasan (Violin)	
	T.R. Ramakrishnan (Mridangam)	
22.	T.V. Sankaranarayanan (Vocal)	1994(2)
	T.K.V. Ramanujacharyulu (Violin)	
	B. Harikumar (Mridangam)	
23.	Trichur V. Ramachandran (Vocal)	1992(2)
	V. V. Ravi (Violin)	
	S. V. Raja Rao (Mridangam)	
24.	Lalgudi Srimathi Brahmanandam (Violin)	1990(2)
	Prakash Rao (Mridangam)	
25.	Rudrapatnam Brothers (Vocal)	1991(2)
	R.N. Thyagarajan (Violin)	
	R.N. Tharanathan (Mridangam)	
26.	T.K. Govinda Rao (Vocal)	1990(2)
	N. Shashidhar (Violin)	
	Satish Pathakota (Mridangam)	
27.	T. R. Subramanyam (Vocal)	1988(3)
	Vasantha Kannan (Violin)	
	Trichur Mohan (Mridangam)	
28.	T. N. Bala (Vocal)	1994(2)
	Sashidhar (Violin)	
	Balachander & Murali (Mridangam)	
29.	S.P. Ramh (Vocal)	1994(2)

SRUTI Concert Recordings

The following recorded tapes and CDs of Sruti concerts are available for distribution among patrons of Sruti. To order any of these tapes or CDs, please contact Dr. P. Swaminathan (215-643-2145). The year of the concert and the number of cassettes (within parentheses) are given. CDs are marked as such.

1006(2)

1 M.I. Wasanthalsumani (Wasal)

 M.L. Vasanthakumari (Vocal) 	1986(2)
Kanyakumari (Violin),	
Ramnad Raghavan (Mridangam)	
2. Kadri Gopalnath (Saxaphone)	1987(2)
T.S. Srinivasan (Violin),	
T.R. Ramakrishnan (Mridangam)	
3. Smt. Sheela Ramaswamy (Vocal)	1987(2)
K.S. Mani (Violin),	
M.S. Venkatesh (Mridangam)	
4. T. R. Subramanyam (Vocal)	1988(3)
Vasantha Kannan (Violin),	
Trichur Mohan (Mridangam)	
5. Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna (Vocal)	1989(2)
Purna Chandar (violin)	
B. Balasai (flute)	
Dara Appala Srinivas (mridangam)	
6. Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna (Vocal)	1990(3)
Pandit Bhimsen Joshi (Vocal) Solo	& Jugalbandi
7. Dr. M. Balamurali Krishna (vocal)	1991(3)
Raghavendra Rao (violin) Solo &Ju	()
Dara Appala Srinivas (Mridangam)	8
Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia (flute)	
Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia (flute) Anuradha Chaurasia (tanpura)	
Anuradha Chaurasia (tanpura)	
Anuradha Chaurasia (tanpura) Madan Misra (tabla)	1993(2)
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Anuradha Chaurasia (tanpura) Madan Misra (tabla) 8. Lalgudi G. Jayaraman (Violin) G.J.R. Krishnan & J. Vijayalakshmi	
Anuradha Chaurasia (tanpura) Madan Misra (tabla) 8. Lalgudi G. Jayaraman (Violin) G.J.R. Krishnan & J. Vijayalakshmi Trichy Sankaran (Mridangam)	
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Impact of Thyagaraja Krithis on me

By Rajee Raman

As a rasika and humble student of music, I consider Thyagaraja Swami's krithis an ocean of which I have only tasted but a drop. But that does not stop me from relating to you the major impact they had on me. Hence I am writing this from the perspective of how Thyagaraja krithis have been influential in my personal musical journey, not to delve into my own journey but to stress the transformative powers of the krithis to the youngsters in the audience.

I come from a family with a Bhajana tradition and we celebrate SreeRamaNavami every year over a period of four days culminating in Seethakalyanam. My earliest musical memories are associated with listening to the Namavalis, Ashtapadis etc sung at this function. On the last day, towards the end of the Seethakalyanam, the krithi Upacharamulanu Chekkonavaiyya is rendered. At that time neither did I know this was a Thyagaraja krithi nor that the raga it is set to is Bhairavi. All my untrained ears knew was that I tremendously enjoyed the krithi and its tune. I started looking forward to the wonderful rendition of this krithi by Sri.Ramaswami Iyengar who conducted the function at our house in Trivandrum every year. During each stanza of this song, the deity would be offered and adorned with a new vastram (attire), flowers, ornaments etc. This song would somehow signal to my young mind the grand culmination of the function and convey a sense of happiness. As I learnt later, in this piece, Thyagaraja Swami offers various salutations to Rama, whose attire, peethambaram, he describes as having the luster of millions of lightning bolts. Even to this day, whenever I hear this song in a concert, I see in my mind's eye our family deity, bedecked in all his glory and I feel a certain sense of serenity.

As a youngster, I confess to have been a very reluctant student of music. I went to music class only at my mother's insistence and would always think up of non-existent excuses to avoid the class. My guru would always take me, and a couple of her other students, along with her to concerts at the Swati Thirunal Sabha, the Sruti equivalent in Trivandrum. Even though now I am ever so grateful to her, I didn't truly appreciate this at that time. (I am sure if there were video games available then, I would have sneaked them in.) I might have been around thirteen at that time and we went to this concert of Nellai Sri.Krishnamurthy, a popular musician/teacher in Trivandrum. He began with a varnam. Then he started *SriGanapathini Sevim*-

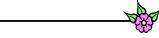
parare in the ragam Sowrashtram (of course, this invocation to Ganesha precedes the Pancharatna krithis on Aradhana day.). As usual, I was shuffling in my seat, looking at my nails to keep myself amused. My guru asked me whether I am able to identify the ragam and I wrongly identified as Mayamalavagowla. She then reprimanded me and asked me to pay close attention to the song. The musician started the anupallavi and sang a couple of fluent sangathis for "Vagadhipathi supujala chekkoni..." A light bulb went on in my head, I just thought to myself, how nice those sangathis sound, the grip, the alignment to the sruti in those phrases. This incident is clearly etched in my memory since on that day, I transformed from being an unwilling listener to a rasika. I got it finally. I enjoyed the whole concert, didn't even mind the crowded bus journey back home.

So why do I think this might be useful to anyone? I hope that some thirteen-year old is in this crowd listening, a bit unwillingly, to the scores of beautiful Thyagaraja kirthis being rendered today and then this one krithi, one sangathi comes along, she has this epiphany and she gets IT and a new rasika is born!

Legend (might be helpful to our youngsters):

SreeRamaNavami - annual function celebrating the birth of Rama SeethaKalyanam - Concluding day of SreeRamaNavami where Rama's marriage to Seetha is celebrated Namavali - Short Bhajans to various gods/goddesses Ashtapadi - Jayadeva's opera on SriKrishna Trivandrum - capital of Kerala, a southern state of India.

Rajee Raman is an ardent rasika and student of Carnatic Music. She lives with her family and collection of CDs and tapes in Exton.



Errata

Special issue of Sruti that came out in January 2005, on M.S.Subbulakshmi: p7 2nd column. It should read, "in the year 1977" instead of "1976".

Review of Muruga Pancha Ratna Mala

By Padma Subramanian

The concert, held on December 4th, to present the Muruga Pancha Ratna Mala composed by Sri T.N. Bala was majestically begun with a Muruga Sthuthi in Nattakurinji. It was followed by five heart-felt compositions, the Muruga Pancha Ratna Kirtanas, set in five Ghana ragas and ended with another sthuthi in Suruti. Bala was accompanied by 16 artists on the stage making it a micro representation of the Thyagaraja Aradhana tradition.

What impressed me most was Bala's ability to adhere to the alliteration pattern seen in these Pancha Ratna Kirtanas that we are so familiar with, weaving in the melting aspect of the name of Muruga. "Murugananda Sagara" was a grand composition with such rumbling and richly descriptive lyrics. The concert picked up speed and momentum with "Swaminathane O Muruga" in Arabhi. Lyrics were appealing and the rhythm was like the soothing sound of fresh summer rain. It was also refreshing to hear "Endaye Mal Maruga Va" sung on two scales at times. The violinist, flutist, veena and the two mridangam artists all did a fine job making this concert a harmonious success.

May I humbly add, that the rich poetry that Bala had effort-lessly strung this ratna mala with would have been enjoyed more if the audience had had a copy of the mesmerizing lyrics? I have to confess that I got hold of a copy after the concert to appreciate this more. Did Sruti not want to risk seeing the audience in a flood of devotional tears or was it because of the risk of audience participation? It was indeed a joy to see the whole group singing in unison. No one had to ask who trained him or her! An auditorium with better acoustics would certainly have enhanced the performance.

Sruti and the sponsor need to be commended for making this concert possible. Admitting that I am least qualified to review an artist like Sri Bala with his formidable experience and deep love of music, I am sure everyone will agree when I say Sri Bala is a ratna in a league of his own.

Padma and her husband Mani live in Delaware. To her, listening to good Indian classical music is akin to a spiritual experience. It has to be felt from within.

bhakta Anjaneya held onto His feet and thus prevented Rama from coming down to rescue Thyagaraja. However, at no point does Thyagaraja actually accuse Rama of any wrong doing, only looking for other deities who could account for the neglect. Not only that, he cannot but help defend his Rama, wondering whether Rama's capacity to save his Bhaktas has been exhausted because of all those he saved before. Thyagaraja even blames himself, saying that this indifference of the Lord is perhaps because "Thyagaraja himself forgot to keep Rama in his heart or lost his devotion to Rama"; or perhaps it is because of all the sinful deeds (papam) in Thyagaraja's past (what sinful deeds could this saint have committed, one might ask, but that's just how complete Thyagaraja's surrender to Rama is). This song is a tribute to the unequivocal and unparalleled devotion of Thyagaraja swami. In addition to the *nindastutis*, this composition exudes *Karuna* Rasa. The lyrics are typical of the saint's compositions - simple colloquial Telugu- that even village folk can understand (draksha rasa). Thyagaraja is so adept at choosing his simple words spontaneously that we feel transported to Rama's abode and can actually visualize all these reasons for Rama's apparent indifference to the pleadings of the saint. That is why, I suppose, he is called a 'Vaaggeyakara' (master of words and music). As I repeatedly read the lyrics (with help from my parents), I marveled at Thyagaraja's complete devotion and faith in Rama. A composition that is rarely presented in public, this has become a must learn for me, for the beauty of its lyrics and the essence of Saint Thyagaraja's Ramabhakti. I will try to learn and sing it at one of the forthcoming Aradhanas.

A Footnote:

For non-Telugu speakers, *Evadabbani Sommani* translates to "Do you consider yourselves entitled to this?"

Pratima Adipudi manages software projects for a local start-up company.



My favorite Thyagaraja Kriti

By Ranjini Prabhakar

The life and work of Thyagaraja is a miracle beyond all miracles. No musician has revolutionized the realm of Carnatic music quite like he has. His creativity meshed with his piety has provided more than 1600 kirthanas etched into the stone of history. Naturally, for someone to pick her favorite song from the myriad of Thyagaraja kritis is not the easiest task. Every kirthana has its own sentimental value, a unique stamp differentiating one song from another. Although my knowledge of Thyagaraja is very elementary, I've found that some songs shine brighter than others. After much deliberation and thought, my most favorite Thyagaraja kriti is *Kamalaaptakula* in raaga Brindava Saranga.

Music has been in my bloodline from the day I was born. My grandparents were avid music enthusiasts, and they have been generous enough to pass along their zeal. As a student of Carnatic music, I have learned to form opinions, criticisms, likes, and dislikes about the classical music I am exposed to. My erudition is far from reaching par, though I know what catches my ear. Saint Thyagaraja's Kamalaaptakula stands out like a shining star from the rest of his oeuvre. In this kriti, Thyagaraja clearly manifests his most loving devotion to Lord Rama, as he sings, "Ocean of mercy! Moon emerging out of the ocean of the dynasty of sun that causes lotus to blossom! Spouse of Sri Devi! Dutiful son of Kausalya! One with beautiful form! Friend of Siva who burnt Cupid! Having heard of your exploits on protecting myriads of devotees, I have come seeking your grace. Please show me mercy and assure me freedom from fear. O Lotus eyed!" Thyagaraja illustrates his praise and innermost faith in God by singing of His many glories and asking for His blessings. But how is this different from all of Thyagaraja's other works? This kriti is bathed in the simplest clothes, yet conveys such a vast and profound meaning. It has a soothing effect. The melody paints the emotion of the deep-felt longing that Saint Thyagaraja experiences with Lord Rama. He addresses Rama with the greatest degree of sincerity and fondness, and proceeds to humbly seek His eternal grace. Brindavana Saranga, along with the cadence of aadi taalam, captures the gripping intensity lingering on the lyrics and exemplifies the aura of the music. Altogether, all of the components of this kriti work hand-in-hand to proportionally craft this magnum opus.

Thyagaraja's measureless collection of compositions has thus

instilled the quintessence of Carnatic music. The eclectic variety of his music leaves so much material up to personal interpretation and preference. His music has stood the test of time, and will continue to last for generations and generations. Truthfully, my knowledge of Carnatic music is still nascent, so who am I to judge Thyagaraja's composition? It takes a true scholar to form an educated analysis of such a great man's musical work. But don't doubt that as my knowledge increases, so will my number of favorite Thyagaraja kritis.

Ranjani Prabhakar is a junior at Upper Dublin High School. She has been learning Carnatic music for eight years from Indu Vasudevan. Aside from singing, Ranjani enjoys writing, biking, and playing the violin.



Thyagaraja Festival

By Preeti

I have many favorite songs composed by Saint Thyagaraja. My most favorite is "Jagadanandakaraka". This beautiful Pancharatna keerthanam describes Lord Rama. "Oh, ageless lord! You are the victorious slayer of Ravana! You have innumerable qualities. You are the Lord of Lakshmi and the divine husband of Sita! You who are son of King Dasharatha are worshipped by the vaanaras! Your body is like the blue diamond of Indira. You have the moon and sun as your eyes. The mortal and imperfect Saint Thyagaraja praises you! Victory to You!"

I also admire this keerthanam because of its beautiful ragam, Natai. I enjoy the rishabam and the dhayvatham of this ragam. I think that this ragam is very beautiful ragam to sing songs in. This ragam is rare to me because I haven't heard too many songs in it. These are all reasons why I like this pancharatna keerthanam. I would like to learn this keerthanam in the future.

Preeti is a budding young artist who has been learning music from Mrs. Lata Suresh. She is currently a 7th grader living in the Exton area.



I discover yet another favorite composition of Saint Thyagaraja

By Pratima Adipudi

I was listening to the popular Bhadrachala Ramadas composition 'Ikshwaku Kulatilaka' the other day and the harsh tone of some of the lyrics grabbed my attention. (Those who know Telugu will appreciate the harshness of the raw colloquial words like 'Evadabbasommani'). Ramabhakta as Ramadas was, I wondered at the liberty that Ramadas was taking in his moment of anger and frustration (he does apologize to Rama towards the end of the composition saving that his harsh words are a direct result of the beating he took from the prison guards). Suddenly a strange thought popped up in my mind - did Thyagaraja, the other great Rama Bhakta ever scold or abuse the Lord in his moments of anger or frustration? Thus began my search to find a composition where Thyagaraja, the purest of Rama Bhaktas, resorted to blaming Rama. I referred to a biography on Thyagaraja's life, searching for times in his life when he could have tried to blame the Lord. My limited search yielded but one occasion when his brother Jalapesha threw away Thyagaraja's Rama vigrahas (idols) into the river. The great Thyagaraja, disheartened after a futile search for the idols and lost without his Rama, composed several songs in despair (Entarani, Chalamelara, Enduku Nirdaya, Yuktamu Kadu to name a few). Of these, the lyrics in 'Yuktamu Kadu' in Sri Raga appealed to me. Even in this piece, the closest that Thyagaraja ever comes to blaming his Rama is to use a pleading blame (ninda), but as all of us know, when it comes to praising the Lord, he never holds back. This composition is rich in 'Nindastuti', but even here, his stuti (praise) overshadows his ninda (blame). As I looked into this composition, its lyrics were a revelation.

Even in despair and anger, Thyagaraja is incapable of using harsh words with his Rama. The best he can ever do in his 'nindastuti' is to question Lord Rama's judgment. In Yuktamu Kadu, Thyagaraja wonders why the Lord has disappeared, exclaiming in despair that it is not proper on His part not to protect his beloved bhakta. In fact, the title or beginning phrase of the song literally means "this is not proper for you, Lord". Even in this questioning of the Lord's judgment, Thyagaraja's stuti shines through his ninda. He comes up with some serious accusations, questioning whether Sita advised Rama not to respond to his pleadings; or whether Lakshmana, in a fit of anger, told Rama "not to worry about him (Thyagaraja)"; or maybe his ardent

My Favorite Song

By Ponnal Nambi

When Sarada asked me to write about my favorite song from Saint Thyagaraja's compositions and why I liked it, the immediate song that came to my mind is "Samaja Varagamana" in Hindolam. Of course, the very first time I heard this particular song is years ago when I had no clue about the meaning or the raga or the composer of this song.

For reasons I cannot explain, this song has left a lasting impression of bhakthi and fulfillment in my mind and heart. Every time I hear this song, it is like being in a trance. Later I came to know that the composer is Saint Thyagaraja and the raga is Hindolam. I do not know whether I like the song because of the raga or like the raga because of the song (even though I did not know the meaning of this song then).

Many great musicians have sung this beautiful song but my favorite musician for this particular song is Dr. Balamuralikrishna. I am sure he must have sung this song on many occasions but I like the unique way he has sung this song in which he starts the Pallavi with complex sangathis and slowly brings to the plain level before going into Anupallavi. It is absolutely enchanting and I do not have words to explain. Now that I know the meaning of this song, it is even more emotional to hear it.

Here is my understanding of the meaning of this song.

Saint Thyagaraja in his own way explains the glory and handsomeness of Lord Vishnu who is the savior of mankind and who is beyond space and time. He says the Lord is the shining light on the mountain of Nada of the seven swaras that originate from Pranava. He is the master of the music that is born out of Sama Veda. He enjoys mesmerizing all the Yadavas by playing his flute. He is the ultimate symbol of unblemished character, kindness, love and forgiveness. Oh Lord, I (Thyagaraja) offer my humble prayers to you. The meaning of this song enriches my appreciation even more.

Ponnal is in the board of Sruti.



Sri Thyagaraja's Universal Appeal

By T. Sarada

Sri Thyagaraja is a composer for all seasons to use a muchhackneyed expression but nothing describes better the universal appeal or the feelings of personal involvement or the profound emotions his songs generate in all listeners whether they are common people, music lovers or musicians.

We can all name many songs that we love, each suiting a particular time or occasion or context. Selecting just one favorite could be daunting as many told me when asked to write this article. Having asked my friends to choose just one song, it is only fair that I do the same. So here is my selection for this article. The song could stand on its own just for its theme, words or music by itself. It does transport me to a different sphere of existence. Added to that is the real life experience narrated by my aunt and hearing her say how it changed her life has made an indelible impression on me. So I want to share it with Sruti readers.

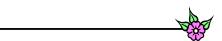
Sri Thyagaraja's Utsava Sampradaya Kirtana, "Heccharikaga Rara, hey Ramachandra", in the raga," Yadukulakambhoki" and Tala Jampa is packed with the indescribable love and emotion of Sri Thyagaraja. Probably we cannot fathom what the saint experienced when he wrote this. Thyagaraja is asking his Sri Rama to come gently, softly and with great care and caution without fast or rash movements. Was Thyagaraja visualizing a child when he says, "with your beautiful ear ornaments and pearl necklaces gently dancing in the breeze and the ankle bells making those tinkling sounds? Or was he still seeing his ideal Emperor Rama with the golden crown coming down the steps decorated with precious stones with Vina playing and his own sister, Parvati's parrot singing his praises? He describes both visualizations in this song. Also it is amazing that Sri Thyagaraja could combine the intense familiarity of address "Rara Hey Rama" (as though Sri Rama is a younger and intimate member of the family; not a formal way of addressing someone distant with respect) and at the same time describe Him as the Avatar Rama. The beauty of it is that it does not even sound strange or out of context. Thyagaraja goes on to say to Rama, "You, whom the great saints praise and sing about, You, the father of Manmatha, the protector of Devendra with Brahma and Indra on either side etc., please, walk gently, walk carefully and delight your Bhakta Thyagaraja". (1)

If one closes the eyes and listens to this song, especially when sung by some one without aggression but with a gentle soft voice it could practically hypnotize the listener. There is nothing jarring in the theme or tune or sentiments in the song to disturb the visual imagery. Now add to this, the following life experience story of my aunt. She had the privilege of growing up when her parents were patrons for Tiger Varadhachari who resided in their house those years. She learnt music from him and also learnt Vina from Veenai Dhanammal. Tiger used to practice music and sing everyday early in the mornings, it seems. When my aunt was pregnant with her son, Tiger would sing to her softly, "Heccharikaga' which happened to be one of his favorite songs. He would tell my aunt his belief that babies in the womb heard music and other sounds and imbibed their essence. My aunt used to say that when her son was born, sure enough he would respond spontaneously to Yadukulakambjoji and turn his head to follow the sound whenever he heard it. When a little older the child would come running to hear that raga. (Whether it really happened or not she was convinced of it.) Later on, unfortunately my cousin died very young due to some illness. My aunt was heart broken and could not bear to hear the raga or the song for many years. Finally when she actually got over her grief the song became something special and personal to her. She sang this to me years back in a soft voice with Vina accompaniment. Listening to it under the circumstances produced many mixed emotions in me. She is not there any more but her singing and experience will always be with me whenever I hear this song, "Heccharikaga Rara" along with the visual imagery and the beauty of the composition itself.

Reference.

1.Sri Thyagaraja Swami Kirthanaigal. T. S. Parthasarathy. Higginbothams Ltd. Chennai. 1976

Sarada is the Chairperson of the Sruti Library Committee.



dial DNA over eons to the present with all the awesome achievements of humans to a great extent. We can only marvel at the scope of its power and magnificence. However, when we see in Nature prey and predators, good and evil and the depravities to which the human beings can sink to, I wonder why God has created such incongruities and cruelty. The question keeps on coming back again and again and who can answer it except God? So I think, "Who am I to comprehend His/Her Greatness or purpose?" As Sri Thyagaraja says I would like to think of Him as the affectionate, loving and greatest of all personal Gods and hope He will answer our questions some day.

Ranganayaki is a 94-year-old wife, teacher, mother and matriarch of an extended family. She is enjoying her retirement by fantasizing about Astronomy, Nature, and Molecular Biology. She spends much of her reading time with Harlequin Romances these days that is when she is not reading Smithsonian or National Geographic! Incidentally in her preteen and teen years she had the good fortune to be exposed on a daily basis to the music of the brilliant exponents of Carnatic music, Tiger Varadachari and Veenai Dhanammal. She could sing to spell bound friends, family and small audiences. She also played the violin and set to tune many slokas and songs of Sri Sadasiva Brahmendrum to the delight of listeners.



My Favorite Song

By T. S. Ranganayaki

My dear friends, Thank you all for honoring me as one amongst you and asking me to write this article. I hope that you do not expect an erudite or scholarly contribution from me about the greatest of composers, musician and Bhakta or about his God, the creator of these universes. I do not know many songs to dabble with but I maybe able to write some of my ideas on some of the songs that have special appeal to me.

In my earlier days when my throat obeyed my will, I was able to learn music from some stalwarts, artists who knew music, songs and their nuances and more important how to sing them!

Anyhow here is one song that I have chosen to write about and why I like it. The great poet and Bhakta, Sri Thyagaraja asks his Rama why He is so very indifferent and silent towards him. This feeling is something we all feel at times towards our chosen Deity, Lord Rama or the god with a million names, attributes, shapes and personalities. The song is, "Palukkavemi Na Daivama", in the Ragam "Purnachandrika" and Talam, "Adi". The song goes thus: "Oh Rama why don't you talk to me, my own God? Ever so many people laugh at me and is it justified to be laughed at thus, my Rama?

"I do everything just as you manipulate and even then you are neglecting me, why? What is the reason for doing so?"

"In my younger days my own father and mother taught me to be pious, love you and protected me from wickedness. Even then some others made me unhappy over many things. You are witnessing all my sufferings and still you keep quiet. How long are you going to be like that, my most loving and affectionate Lord, the greatest of all Devas?"

I like this song because my own feelings and thoughts tally with the saint's in many respects. Only a personified Deity can explain or answer all our questions and doubts about the cosmic mysteries. I will give a sample of the many things beyond our understanding. Our Universe has come into being and has evolved into billions of suns and probably planetary systems. Probably there are various life forms in these, although still not proved with our definition of science. The life forms in our own planet have evolved from the primor-

'Nannu Palimpa'

By T.N.Bala

Recently, I was trying to teach over the phone the Thyagaraja krithi, "Nannu palimpa nadachi vachithivO" in Mohanam to a devout student of mine. Something came over me and I could not continue as it brought poignant memories of how I learnt the krithi from my mentor some years ago.

The time my mentor took to dwell upon the phrase "nadachi vachithivO" and his emotional involvement as he was teaching that phrase touched me deeply and I wiped my tears. Then I paused to ask him "Mama, your crying makes me cry too. What is it that you see so intensely overwhelming in that phrase that you choke with emotion?"

His reply was a lesson in understanding Swami's brevity and subtle phraseology.

He said: "In that krithi, I see Swami himself literally enjoying the 'divya swaroopam' of Lord Sri Rama and was consumed by the presence of the Lord. Only it comes out in simple words meaning far beyond what it appears to be. You see, Jeevan muktha's identification with their 'Ishta devathas' is an exclusive phenomenon, which we mortals cannot fathom. We get a glimpse of it in their immortal outpourings in the form of poems and literary creations."

No doubt, the song is interpreted to simply mean "Oh my love, have you chosen to come walking all the way to bless me? Knowing the secret longing of my heart, you have been gracious enough to appear before me in all splendor with your consort."

Of course, it is simple enough to understand - just as in everyday life, we see things around us and we seem to understand them, mostly as they appear to be". It takes, perhaps some imagination and insight to try to understand things beyond "what they appear to be". To me Swami's words have import far beyond what those simple words convey. That is what chokes me.

Let me take you through my world of understanding Swami. Beyond words, Swami extols and conveys to us his beloved deity's grace and humility in reaching his devotees. "By choosing to walk all the way" towards his devotee, Swami's beloved deity undertakes symbolically a pilgrimage to reach his devotee. Even in imagination, Lord

Sri Rama could have taken a swifter mode of transport, say, a horse, an elephant or a "pushpavimanam" to get to his devotee in haste. However, he chose to walk instead.

In temples, don't we walk barefooted and do "pradhakshina" as an offering to the presiding deity? This act of walking towards holy places of worship, symbolic of one's surrender to faith, is the simplest act of humility.

My mother used to insist that, instead of a swifter transport, we better walk up all the arduous steps of the Tirumalai hills to get to the top of the abode of Lord Venkateswara. Even today the older generation prefers walking barefooted around the compound of the sacrosanct alter as a symbolic gesture of surrender and humility.

"To protect me, (nannupalimpa), Oh Lord, (nadachvachithivo) did you choose to come walking towards me." Those words mean more than simple words to me.

What was Swami's long cherished desire? To have a vision of his Lord's countenance, "Momu joochuda". In response to the devotee's plea, Lord chooses to adorn Himself to the hilt just to present Himself as "Kodhandapaani" with all His attributes - only to please His bhaktha.

Though dictated by the syntax and grammar to conform to lyrical beauty, Swami's choice of words, like "Vanajanayana", meaning, lotus eyed, "thanuvutho neela mani nibha", meaning, adorned with strings of pearls over his body, "karamuna sara", meaning, holding a bow and arrow, "dharani thanayatho", meaning, accompanied by daughter of Mother earth - all these are references to Swami's yearning to devour his Lord's beauty, a feast to his eye. Summing up, Swami sees his deity walking up to him in total humility in all splendor to please his devotee's eyes. To further decorate this blissful thought of Sri.Rama's approach and appearance, Swami chooses a magnificent raga, Mohana, symbolic of eternal beauty!

Thus simple words, "nannupalimpa natachi vachithivO" blends lessons in humility, spiritual yearning and finally the awesome power of the presence of the Lord. All these virtues compete with each other to make this tear jerking musical masterpiece of Swami more than what those words "appear to be". In this immortal classic, his devotion transcends words!"

Panchama murchana, Sudddhasaveri have been used in India since ancient times. They have been employed for singing Tiruvachakam of Manikkavachakar and the Tevaram lyrics of the later Nayanmars, around 7th to 9th centuries AD. These ragas are used in the music of such far away places like China, Viet Nam and Indochina!

Suddhasaveri is a Janya Ragam of the 29th Melakartha ragam Dhira Sankarabharanam. The Arohana is Sa Ri Ma Pa Da Sa and the Avarohana is Sa Da Pa Ma Ri Sa with Chatusruti Rishabha, Suddha Madyama and Chatusruti Dhaivata. It is a very symmetrical Raga and the Swaras are fairly distributed which accounts for the beauty of this raga, it_seems. Unfortunately, it does not lend itself to elaborate Alapana being a minor raga according to Professor Sambhamurthy. (2). But in my mind this did not deter great musicians like Sri Mani Iyer or GNB from doing it so gracefully and beautifully. Ragam Durga of Hindustani music is Suddhasaveri in Tristhayi and Devakriya of Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar is the same as Suddhasaveri. Dikshitar has two compositions in this raga. Pallavi Seshayyar, Ramnad Srinivasa Iyengar and Aanayya have one composition each in this Ragam.

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Parasaran is a retired Chemist. He has been a Sruti Life member since its inception and is a music lover.



My favorite Composition of Sri Thyagaraja

By T. Parasaran

We all know that Sri Thyagaraja's Ishta Deva was Sri Rama But he has also sung in praise of many Deities including Ganesa, Siva and Ambal (Parvati).

There are just so many beautiful compositions of Sri Thyagaraja that it is difficult for me to make a choice but here it is: "Dharini Telusukonti Tripurasundhari Ninne Charananti". Raga, "Suddhasaveri" and Talam, "Adi".

When you are brought up in Chennai and Tanjavoor district there is a veritable drenching in Carnatic Music all through the year but I had to come to USA to listen to this exquisite composition sung by Sri Madurai Mani Iyer. My friend V. K. Visvanathan who is a great fan of Sri Mani Iyer played this reel-to-reel tape in the early 60's for me and I was flabbergasted by the beauty of the raga and the way Sri Mani Iyer sang it. When I learnt the meaning it became all the more appealing. The song is in praise of Tripurasundari, presiding Deity of Tiruvottiyur Temple, 6 miles north of Chennai. Sri Thyagaraja has written five songs about the Deity in this temple, known collectively as the Tiruvottiyur Panchakam.

Even in this song Thyagaraja refers to Ambal, as the sister of his beloved Sri Rama. This sentiment is so endearing. Then he goes on to praise the Ambal and how she can lead and protect her Bhaktas to reach the ocean of eternal bliss and protect them in many ways (1).

The other four songs that Thyagaraja wrote on Goddess Tripurasundari are: "Kanna Talli", in Saveri, "Sundari Ninnu" in Arabhi, "Sundari Nannindarilo" in Begada, and "Sundari Nee Divya" in Kalyani. He visited Tiruvottiyur, also known as Adipuram, at the request of his Sishya, Veenai Kuppayyar and wrote these kritis.

After listening to this masterly rendition mentioned above I had the good fortune of listening to the mellifluous rendering of the same song by Sri G.N. Balasubramaniam (GNB), particularly touching was the Sangathi, "Rajithamaniganabhushani Matagaja rajagamani".

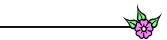
Now coming to some technical aspects of the raga, I found this. (2) It appears that the pentatonic scale of Mohanam and its

As I heard those words from my mentor, I got a lump in my throat and I let go my tears!

A Footnote:

My mentor was none other than the well known authority, a linguist and dynamic exponent of Swami's works, the Late Dr. R. Krishnaswami of Madurai.He was the Secretary of Sri. Sadguru Sangeetha Samajam, which brought out, in a book form, the first compilation of 676 of ThyagarajaSwami's krithis. "RK" lost his eyesight when he was 39 and chose to see the world through Swami's vision. His non-stop Akanda celebrations of Swami's krithis in Triplicane, Chennai was an annual event for a number of years until he passed away in 1989 at the age of 80.

T. N. Bala is well known to the greater Delaware Music lovers. He is a composer, teacher and musician who is also sought after for lecture demonstrations in religious music.



My Favorite Thyagaraja Keerthanai

By Lata Suresh

Picking out a favorite krithi from all the great compositions of Saint Thyagaraja is like asking a lady to enter a jeweler's shop full of exquisitely designed pieces of ornaments and asking her to pick one. Krithis could become one's favorite because of several reasons: 1) Emotional relationship with the composer's inspirational situation in which the composition was born. 2) Musical appreciation of the piece: meter, tempo and raga handling. 3) A personal nostalgia, so fresh in the heart, of hearing the composition being rendered by a favorite artiste.

Having said that, one has to recollect some specifics of Thyagaraja compositions' landscape. Until the time of Thyagaraja, musical forms were recitative rather than musical with the precedence of words over melody. It was Thyagaraja who introduced the musical form of Krithi that has minimum angas (divisions) and is rich in aesthetic appeal and melodic expression. His compositions are in Telugu and Sanskrit. He has composed about 2000 items in 210 ragas and his krithis are known to bring out the essence of the raga. Most of his compositions are in talas like Adi, Roopaka and Triputa. Although he has used simple talas, the monotony of rhythm was broken by the use of built-in intricacies and facility to improve the stanzas. He introduced the concept of sangatis i.e. melodic variations that convey the finer nuances of music and text, as a part of the kritis. Of all his compositions, the most famous are the Pancharatna Kritis in ragas Natai. Sri, Gaulai, Arabhi and Varali. In addition to being musically excellent, his compositions have religious significance. The slipping away of the cloth curtain at the Tirumala temple when he sang " tera teeyaga" is well known. The philosophy of his compositions is so great that they are believed to be on par with the Upanishads.

Now let me get into a couple of my favorites.

The first one, "Sugunamule Ceppukonti" in ragam Chakravakam extols the virtues of nama sankirtana and bhakti, where the devotee knows only of his ishta devata and forgets all else in worshipping Him/Her.

Meaning:

O handsome Rama, scion of Raghu's race, I have been speaking about your good qualities!

Not knowing you to be a trickster and without realizing the

futility of hoping that you will come to me, I have been speaking about your good qualities!

O Lord of Lakshmi, worshipped by Thyagaraja, I do not know of any duty such as bathing, offering alms or chanting mantras! Forgive me! I have been speaking about your good qualities!

The second one, "Sambo Mahadeva" in ragam Panthuvarali is also my favorite because of a couple of reasons: 1) It is part of the minority in the Thyagaraja repertoire- it is in praise of Lord Mahadeva and 2) The way the saint Thyagaraja has brought out the raga Lakhanam.

In 1837, Thyagaraja, in response to a Srimukham from Upanishad Brahmam, a saint of Kanchipuram, traveled to that city. On the way, he visited Madras (now Chennai), where his disciple Veena Kuppaiyyar was a musician. Kuppaiyyar himself was patronised by Kovvur Sundaresa Mudaliar, who was a wealthy Dubash of the East India Company. Thyagaraja stayed at the residence of Mudaliar at 41, Bunder Street, Madras. During his stay, he also visited Kovvur, the hometown of the Mudaliar and composed 5 songs on the deities of the temple at Kovvur. These are referred to as the Kovvur Pancharatnam. This is one of the songs.

Meaning:

O creator of well-being! Supreme Lord! Creator of all that auspicious! Beloved of Girija!

Protector of all those seeking refuge! Lotus eyed one! Grant me that I remain ever devoted to your lotus feet!

Supremely compassionate one! Wielder of a deer! Supreme Destroyer! Bearer of the Ganga! Bedecked by serpents! Ever resident in Thyagaraja's heart! Possessing feet that are illumined by the gem studded crowns of saluting Gods! Resident of Gopura! Handsome deity! Lord of the mountain! Supreme one! Destroyer of the Universe!

Through his works, Thyagaraja has taught us the concept of keeping the worship simple in form, yet rich in bhakthi and focus. The saint is indeed one-of-a-kind who provided humanity with a simple vehicle to transcend from the physical plane to bliss.

Lata Suresh has been living in West Chester, Pennsylvania for almost 6 years, and has been teaching Carnatic Music for the past 4 years. Lata is an ardent lover of music and wishes to pursue it to a greater extent.