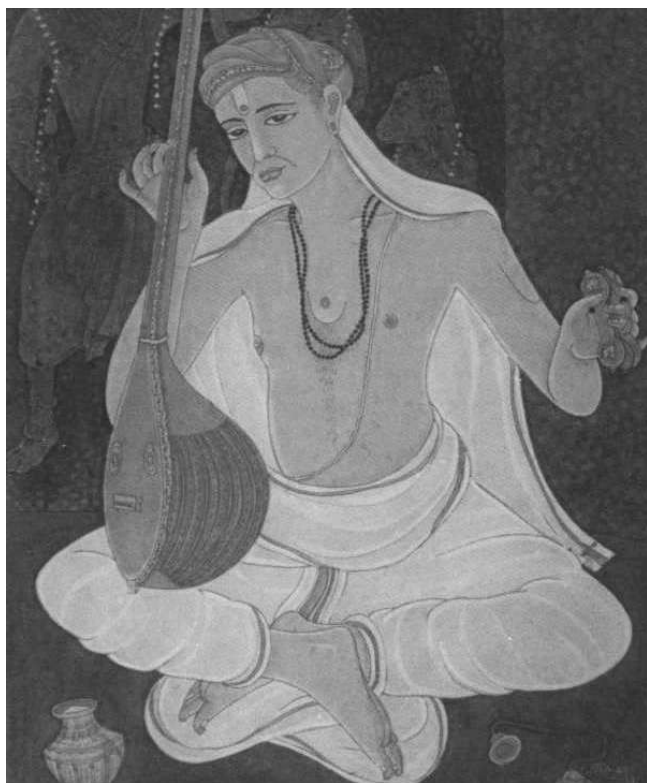




Sruti
The India Music
& Dance Society,
Philadelphia



Sri Thyagaraja Aradhana

Saturday, March 22, 2014 at 8:30 AM

Hindu Temple of Delaware
760 Yorklyn Road
Hockessin, DE 19707

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

Every year, around 10 or more world class music and dance recitals are presented during the Spring and Fall seasons by SRUTI in the Greater Philadelphia area. SRUTI also collaborates and partners with other presenting organizations like the Painted Bride Arts Center, Kimmel Center for Performing Arts, Annenberg Center at the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, and Montgomery County Community College.

SRUTI has received generous grants from private foundations and public organizations including the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Dance Advance and Philadelphia Music Project (funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts) and the Sam Fels Foundation in addition to a loyal and appreciative audience.

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Program

08:30 AM - Pooja

08:45 AM - Group singing of Utsava Sampradaya Kritis
followed by Pancharatna Kritis

11:15 AM - Individual Participation

12:30 PM - Lunch and Stage Setup

01:00 PM -

Introducing the 2014 SRUTI Board of Directors

Unveiling 4S - SRUTI Sangeetha Sahithya Sangraha

01:30 PM - Main Vocal Concert by Sri. Madurai R. Sundar

Accompanied by:

Smt. Sandhya Anand on Violin

Ms. Rajna Swaminathan on Mridangam

03:30 PM - Snack Break

04:00 PM - Individual Participation (Continued)

Pancha Ratna Kriti's of Tyagaraja

Dhanya Karra

When I decided to write an article about Tyagaraja for Tyagaraja Aradhana utsavam, I started researching about the great Saint, his compositions and what is Tyagaraja Utsavam. Tyagaraja Aradhana Utsavam is a commemorative music festival held every year at Thiruvaiyaru in the months of January and February in honor of Saint Tyagaraja. In this weeklong festival various carnatic musicians from all over the world come to his resting place (Thiruvaiyaru) and sing the pancharatna kriti's in unison.

This got me curious to learn more about Pancharatna Kriti's. Pancha Ratna kriti's when translated to English Pancha meaning five, Ratna meaning Gems, which means Five Gems. These are the five gems of Saint Tyagaraja's compositions. Out of these five kriti's only one is written in Sanskrit and the remaining four are in Telugu. The Pancharatna kriti's are written in praise of Lord Rama. They are set in Adi Tala. All the 5 ragas used in these kriti's are Ghana ragas which are Nata, Gaula, Arabhi, Varali and sri. Naa gowaa va sri is the formula to remember them. Ghana ragas have depth and serious kind of nature in structure and exposition, and improvisation is possible with these ragas. These compositions have a special structure. After Pallavi and Anupallavi with certain variations, comes a series of charanams. The charanam parts of these kriti's are set as 'swara-sahityam', it is better for group singing. Hence these five are rendered as homage to Saint Tyagaraja on his Aradhana day.

Since now we know why these kriti's are sung now let me write what each kriti is about..

Jagadananda Karaka – Ragam Natai: In this song, Tyagaraja praises Lord Ramachandra. He praises Rama as one who is the cause of all bliss in the universe. It deals with this theme with all its depth of thought and expression.

Duduku gala – Ragam Goula: In this song Tyagaraja lists all the errors he has committed in his life and asks Rama to redeem such a sinner. . It deals with the serious subject of man's follies. When Sadguru lists the follies normally committed by a man, he touches his own life in a retrospective manner and lists out the mistakes he himself has committed. He mentions how petty things and mundane considerations like even a full meal, unnecessarily wasting time by giving sermons to people who cannot comprehend such things, considering himself as above all of them etc. made him feel good earlier. This supreme realization that results to self-evaluation makes him great beyond description.

Sandhinchane – Ragam Arabhi: This song is very sweet in nature as the

Raga used is Aarabhi. In this Saint Tyagaraja describes Lord Rama & Lord Krishna in a different angle with happiness and enthusiasm. He says that though you gave this mind to all of us to satisfy the worldly desires but later you got us arrested with your wish to control us in both mind & body. He then tells about Lord Rama and says he is eternal and untouched or untainted by anything. He questions “How can Rama go in such a way ignoring our earthly prayers?” But then says “this Tyagaraja understands your plays of all kind and keep you all confined in my heart”.

Kanakana Ruchira – Ragam Varali: This is the least sung or performed of the five Kriti’s, due to the peculiarity of Varali Ragam in which it is composed and the associated obscurity, but it is considered by some to be the most beautiful song. This song deals with the story of Dhruva and it leads to analogies from the Ramayana, the favorite subject of Saint Tyagaraja. It is believed among musicians that if it is taught, it will eventually create a rift between teacher & student. Due to all these factors, this has become the less used among the Pancharatna.

Endaro Mahanu bhavulu – Ragam Sri: This song is a salutation to and praise of all the great saints and musicians down the ages. This is the fifth and the final one of Pancharatna and is the most famous, most often sung composition. This composition defines the great names in the context of music. It includes Saints Narada, Saunaka etc. Saint Tyagaraja is bowing before the great souls of music. This is believed to have been composed and sung at the young age of Sadguru before his own Guru. Later a widespread belief came that this was composed in honor of Shadkala Govinda Marar, one of eminent history makers of Carnatic music in Kerala. It is believed that when Marar sung an Ashtapadi in 7 kalas (speeds) with absolute & meticulous precision, Saint Tyagaraja out of his sheer joy composed this song to honor Marar. But those who study Sadguru Tyagaraja have a difference of opinion about this since Sadguru never praises a human being. In this kriti he says clearly “Narastuthi Sugama”, that means does the praise of a human being gives me happiness? He always wants to praise only Lord Rama. So here also it is extremely remote that he composed this to honor Marar. But it is believed that on getting pleased with the extraordinary musical skill of Shadkala Govinda Marar, Sadguru asked his senior students to sing this composition which was taught to them earlier to honor Marar.

I would like to thank my guru Mrs. Lata Suresh for giving me this opportunity, and also will take this opportunity to thank my very first guru Mrs. Uma Sivakumar.

Dhanya Karra is a student of Mrs.Lata Suresh and is 9 years old.

Music and Sadhana

Mira Srikant

Saint Thyagaraja's life and kirthis are the eternal verities of divinity. According to Sri Thyagaraja, Music is a way to experience the Love of God. Sri Thyagaraja, lived, to demonstrate, that realization of God is best achieved through Nadopasana (Music and Devotion). His compositions though primarily devoted to Rama, also reveals his deep understanding of the tenets of the Vedas and Upanishads. Among musicians of his time, Thyagaraja led a poignant life of devotional and spiritual striving. Through the meaning and messages packed in his songs, he takes his place among the greatest musician-saints of our country, like Kabir, Purandaradasa and the pioneers of devotional poetry, the Azhwars and the Nayanmars.

Of all arts, music has the greatest power to take us away effectively, easily, immediately and completely from the earthly plane and helps make our inner spirit elevated to a higher level of consciousness. Our ancestors realized this truth almost at the very dawn of our history. Sri Thyagaraja made his compositions in such a way it energizes our inner spiritual forces to attain moksha or salvation in this life.

As a Musician and a saint, Thyagaraja has handled this noble art for the moral and spiritual enlightenment of his self and humanity. The greatness of Sri thyagaraja is the way he linked the human to Divine. Through his compositions, Sri Thyagaraja explains that only through Divine grace, can one, realize his aspirations. A true devotion makes oneself deserve the continuous grace from the Divine.

In his krithis, Sri Thyagaraja has taken himself to guide, admonish and appeal to erring humanity. There are several references to nadopasana in Indian music, philosophy, and epics, as is evident, in The Sangita Rathnakara, the opening slokas explain how nada or music awakens the inner energy and how this knowledge is important for salvation. Sri Thyagaraja took the first three slokas and composed the following kritis, Nada Thanum Anisam, Sobhillu Saptha Swara, and Nadopasana, using the first, second, and third sloka's respectively. The importance of Nadopasana can well be understood from the famous Dhanyasi song Sangita Gnanamu. According to Sri Tyagaraja, music, without devotion, would lead one astray, and its real virtue is achieved only by a person knowing the right and wrong, the worthlessness of worldly things, and one who has subdued his defects and the six inner enemies, passion, anger, avarice, delusion, elation, and intolerance.

Sri Thyagaraja, emphasized music as an aid to Bhakti and as the means to Mukthi. Summing up, as it were, the Phala-sruti of music, he says in his Mukhari song, Sangita sastra jnanamu that the knowledge of musical lore,

would confer on one, wealth, fame, good conduct, grace of the lord, love for good men, devotion and above all the bliss of oneness with the Brahman.

Again in his Devagandhari song Sitavara, Tyagaraja prays that he may be blessed with the knowledge of music so that he might attain the state of Jeevan mukthi. A true understanding of Sri Thyagaraja's krithis serves to deepen the purpose of our existence. The various dimensions of his music include all the aspects of sangitha shastra and also contain a core of spirituality. The realization of spirituality in his songs is really the Voice of Immortality.

Mira Srikant loves Carnatic Music and is an avid listener and learner of this ancient art.

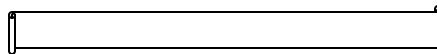
Tyagaraja

Vaishnavi Iyer

My name is Vaishnavi Iyer. I am 11 years old, and live in Gaithersburg Maryland. I have been learning music from Smt. Lata Suresh of West Chester, Pennsylvania for three years. The Tyagaraja Aradhana conducted by the Sruti society has given me this chance to understand the life and works of this great composer.

Tyagaraja was born on May 4, 1767 in Tiruvarur and lived for most of his life in Tiruvaiyaru. The period of Tyagaraja's life and times saw many other noted composers, including Shyama Shastri and Muthuswami Dikshitar, who along with Tyagaraja are called the trinity of Karnatic music. He is believed to have composed 24,000 compositions of which only less than 1000 are available. He also composed 3 geys natakas or operas. Most of his songs are in Telugu and a few in Sanskrit. All his compositions have his signature name "Tyagaraja" in them. Tyagaraja was a Rama devotee and his songs reflect the bhakti path of philosophy. His compositions often contain aspects of his own life that are used by historians to write his biography. Having lived for a period of 80 years, Tyagaraja died on January 6th, 1847. Even though he passed about 2 centuries ago his name will remain immortal so long as Karnatic music exists.

This year at the Tyagaraja Aradhana, my fellow-students and I will be singing the Tyagaraja kriti "Vinave O Manasa", in the apurva Ragam Vivardhini, set to Rupaka talam. In this kriti, Tyagaraja appeals to his mind to refrain from knowingly indulge in bad ways and get ruined, as these ways will not serve it and won't bring Ishwara's grace. He appeals to his mind to perform Dhyana (meditation) and Bhajana (singing songs of praise).



An Interview with Sri Mudikondan Ramesh



Below is a lightly edited transcript of an interview with Sri Mudikondan Ramesh, conducted by Suresh Thyagarajan and Balaji Raghothaman on behalf of SRUTI, with help from Vidya Jayaraman in formulating the questions.

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Born in a family with rich musical tradition Ramesh belongs to the Sishya Parampara of Sangitha Kalanidhi Mudikondan Sri Venkatarama Iyer. Commencing his training in Veena from his father Sri.S.Narayanaswami Iyer, Ramesh started performing Veena Concerts even at a tender age.

He has been giving veena concerts for the past 4 decades and has travelled extensively throughout the length and breadth of the country on concerts. He has also visited several countries across the globe on solo concert s and group performances. He has received several awards and has also been honoured as the Asthana Vidwan for Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam and Sringeri Sri Sarada Peetam.

He has also been conferred with the titles “NADA KALA NIPUNA, SANGEETHA KALA BHARATHI,VEENA NADA MANI AND BALA VAINEEKA RATHNA”.

Apart from his solo concerts he is performing in ”VAADYALAHARI” Instrumental Ensemble with Kalaimamani Kum.A.Kanyakumari and Mambalam Sri.M.K.S Siva and Ramesh deems it a rare prevelige to perform with A.Kanyakumari for the past 20 years whom he adores as his second guru. He has also played Jugalbandhi concerts with Pandit R.Janardhan Mitta on sitar and Pandit R.Vishweswaran on Santoor.

The interview starts with a rendition of nada tanumanisham on the veena by Sri Ramesh. He also sings along some of the phrases.

ST[8:30]: You have learnt Tyagaraja kritis as a student, then played, then taught.. If you meet him today what will you ask him ?

MR: We have fortunate to be born with music in this birth, and I would ask that we should be blessed with a musical inclination in all our janmas.

ST[9:30]: What is your first recollection of learning a Tyagaraja kriti from your guru ?

MR: After the basic exercises, the first kriti I learnt was *giri rāja sutā tanaya* , on Lord Ganesha.. To be frank, even a beginner can sing Tyagaraja kritis, and a veteran can do justice as well. A lot of his kritis are concise and written in captivating raga. The same kriti that you sung as a beginner gets a very different treatment and outlook when you sing it after a lot of experience and maturity - you have gained a lot of spiritual experience in the meantime and that is reflected in the music.

BR[12:00]: You were also singing along while playing. Did you learn singing right from the beginning, or one before the other ?

MR: Veena is supposed to be the nearest instrument to the human voice. This instrument has a special importance for carnatic music. The best method for learning, from my father's point of view, is to sing along while playing. The frets help us get the right *svara stāna* perfectly. Also when you learn the *sāhityam*, your veena playing improves dramatically. One challenge is that the veena is tuned to 2.5 D# or E, and for male artists who find the upper octave difficult, they can sing along on the lower octave. When we sing and play simultaneously, it is indeed a divine experience. When you sing and play, the voice will follow the voice and veena the voice, hence it helps vocalists improve their sruti as well.

ST[16:45]: When you play in an ensemble with violin and wind instrument.. These instruments need not be amplified, but veena is better off amplified. How do you manage the sound, and emphasize the presence of veena ?

MR: There are two things to consider - the sound, and the style of playing. Let me address the style first. Playing in a group is very different from playing solo. I have played with artists like Kumari Kanyakumari (violin) and Mambalam Siva (*nādasvaram*). Compared to those instruments, there are some limitations in the veena, for example in executing fast phrases. But in a group setting, when the *nādasvaram* vidwan plays a fast phrase, we have no choice but to get into that groove and keep up the tempo, so that the whole presentation is cogent. I have thus gained a lot of improvisational skill by playing with them. With regard to sound, I have embraced electronic amplification, in order to equalize the sound with other powerful instruments in a group. The quality of the electronics has also improved over time, but I still have to choose the right one carefully to minimize distortion.

(Continued on page 12)

Madurai R. Sundar

Madurai R Sundar was initiated at a very early age into Carnatic music by his aunt Mrs. Ananthalakshmi Sadagopan, herself a musician of repute. Later Sundar came under the tutelage of the musical legend Sangeetha Kalanidhi Madurai T.N.Seshagopalan in 1972 and made his debut in 1974.

Amongst numerous prestigious prizes, distinction and awards bagged by Sri. Sundar, the following deserve special mention.

1. Was conferred the title of '**Sangeetha Rathna**' by Dubai Tamil Family on Jan 6, 2007.
2. Was honored in the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Mrudangam Maestro Trichy Sri Sankaran in Dec 2005.
3. **Sarada Krishna Iyer memorial award** at Madras Music Academy in Dec 2000 for the best concert among senior musicians.
4. **Best vocalist award** from the Indian Fine Arts Society, Chennai.



Sundar, a resident of the United States of America, and his wife Padma run a music school 'Trinity Academy of Fine Arts' in the metropolitan Detroit area. A few of his students have blossomed into performing artistes in their own right. Sundar has performed extensively in India, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, USA, Canada and the Middle East. He is an "A" graded artiste of the All India Radio.

Sandhya Anand



Smt. Sandhya Anand is an All India Radio graded professional Violinist and Vocalist having exposure to traditional Carnatic Music genre for around 23 years.

She has performed over 1000 concerts in India and abroad having learnt and nurtured the divine art under eminent Gurus Padmabhushan Sri. T.V.Gopalakrishnan, (Vocal and Violin), Sangeetha Kalacharya Smt. Suguna Varadachari (Vocal), Sri. R. Swaminathan (Violin) and Sri. K.S. Suryanarayanan (Flute).

Her vocal and violin performances at several prestigious sabhas in India and USA including the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt and Sringeri Sarada Mutt have won her several awards and accolades. A postgraduate in Music and Sanskrit, she regularly featured in AIR, Doordarshan and other TV channels. As a violinist she has performed with top grade artistes like Padmabhushan T V Gopalakrishnan, Padmabhushan Sri R K Srikantan, Sangita Kalacharya Suguna Varadachari, Sudha Raghunathan, Seetha Rajan, Vishakha Hari, P Unnikrishnan, Kunnakkudi Balamuralikrishna, Sikkil Gurucharan, Priya Sisters and Bombay S. Jayashree to name a few.

Rajna Swaminathan

Rajna Swaminathan started learning mridangam from her father Dr. P. K. Swaminathan at the age of 5 and came under the direct tutelage of Sri Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman at the age of 8. During spring 2009, Rajna toured USA in an all female ensemble featuring Smt Lalgudi Viji (violin), Smt Sikkil Mala (flute), Smt Jaishree Jairaj (veena) and Smt Bhagyalakshmi (Moresing).



Rajna debuted in Chennai during summer 2005. She received great approbation from dignitaries and musicians. Rajna performs regularly during the Chennai December Music Festival. Rajna received the "Best Junior Mridangam Artiste" award from Music Academy, 2007. She is the youngest and the first female to get this award. Rajna performs mridangam for Dance programs.

During 2006, Rajna won a Maryland Traditions Apprenticeship Award, using which she learned the nuances of playing mridangam for dance. Rajna is co-artistic director of Rhythm Fantasies, Inc. - a non-profit organization that strives to promote South Indian classical music and dance in a space that encourages education and enrichment through innovation and cross-cultural collaboration. Rajna holds degrees in Anthropology and French from the University of Maryland, College Park.

(Continued from page 9)

BR[21:40]: - Can you speak about the Mudikondan *parampara* and how you are carrying on the tradition ? What are some of the unique aspects of this lineage?

MR: The Mudikondan *parampara* needs no introduction. I learnt veena from Sri Narayanaswami Iyer, who in turn learnt vocal music directly from Mudikondan Sri Venkatarama Iyer in *gurukula* style. He then decided to learn an instrument and studied the veena under Rajamani Sastrigal, a staunch devi upasaka from Kumbakonam. He had very few classes - only twelve according to him - but later developed his range of skills through self-teaching and improvisation. He did vocal concerts with another disciple, under the banner *Mudikondan Brothers*. My father is my only guru and he taught me everything I know.

BR[25:25]: Can you tell us about some of the contemporary artists that you have high regard for, and who you learnt from ?

MR: My father was a great admirer for veenai Gayatri. I play the tanjavur bani or gayaki style, in which I take a lot from vocal and adopt the vocal style as much as possible in the veena. So there have been a lot of vocal artists who have influenced my style too.

ST[27:10]: In your perspective, when you think of Tyagaraja's kritis, what aspects come to your mind as being unique ?

MR: All composers sang out of bhakti. Everyone experiences devotion differently. Tyagaraja was in conversation with rama - that was his personal experience. But when we listen or sing, we can get some of that experience even without knowing the lyrics and their meaning fully. For me the bhakti element comes to the forefront through the lyrics as well as the raga.

ST[30:15]: Can you give an example of kritis or passages where music is in the forefront and one in which the spirituality is prominent ?

MR: Let's take *mōkshamu galadā* - in this kriti, tyagaraja extols the greatness of the veena. I know the lyrics and their meaning, but even a listener who does not know the meaning cannot escape the experience of bliss that tyagaraja is trying to convey.

Similarly, take the kriti *svara rāga sudhā* in *ṣankarābharaṇam*. In this kriti, the caranam *mūlādhāraja nādam(e)rugutē* - it is a similar experience, where the listener or performer feels the emotion without knowing the passage. [He plays the passages mentioned above].

ST[35:15]: Tyagaraja has a pronounced preference for some ragas in his compositions.. what is your view or analysis of how and why he chose certain ragas ?

MR: I am not a musicologist, so I will present my view with that caveat.

Tyagaraja has composed numerous songs in certain ragas, for example *tōdi*, *kalyāni*, *kambhōdi*, *ṣankarābharaṇam*. But different kritis in the same raga sound very different. As you sing more kritis in the same raga, one's virtuosity in the raga improves. The raga alapana or manodharma is in fact an extension of the kriti itself. There are other ragas in which he has composed only one kriti - for example *srutiranjani* (*ē dāri sancarinturā*), and *āndōḷika* (*rāga sudha rasa*). He also introduced new ragas (again, *āndōḷika*).

BR[38:45]: What are your thoughts on the state of veena playing in carnatic music, how is the future looking ?

MR: I am actually very happy to say that the enthusiasm for veena has not diminished. A lot of people are learning, though there are not as many concerts as you would expect with that many learners. Perhaps it is a cycle - currently vocal music is more popular for concerts these days. But the potential of the instruments takes different forms. For example a lot of veena artists are playing for *bharatanāṭyam*, and having a thriving career. This is very a challenging task by itself, and gives scope for *manōdharmā*. So even if you don't see many veena concerts, there are a lot of veena players today.

ST[41:00]: As audience, we make our own reviews in our mind about the concert performance. What is your reaction as a performer to the kind of expectations you see from the audience, and by the kinds of audience - technically or emotionally involved, etc. ?

MR: For the performer, it is inevitable for us to keep the technical aspects in mind, but as a rasika, if you get too involved in the technical details, you lose some of the beauty and charm of the performance.

ST: Thank you Ramesh sir.

MR: I am very happy that Sruti is interviewing a *vainika*, and I thank you on behalf of the entire vainika fraternity.


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An Interview with Sri Mullaivasal Chandramouli



Below is a lightly edited transcript of an interview with Mullaivasal Sri Chandramouli, conducted by Suresh Thyagarajan and Balaji Raghothaman on behalf of SRUTI, with help from Vidya Jayaraman in formulating the questions.

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Sri Chandramouli initially received training from Smt. Savithri Sathyamurthy, and thereafter was groomed under the tutelage of the veteran violinist (Late) Sri R.K.Venkatrama Sastry and Violin Maestro Sri V.V. Subrahmanyam. In a career spanning over two decades, Sri Mullaivasal Sri G. Chandramouli extensively accompanies great stalwarts of Carnatic music and performs Violin Solo concerts across many countries like USA, Canada New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Gulf countries, Germany, UK, South Africa, Zambia, Kenya etc.

Musicians he has accompanied include great Vidwans of the calibre of Sangita Kalanidhis Shri T.M. Thyagarajan, Shri Palghat K.V.Narayanaswamy, Shri B.Rajam Iyer, Shri R K Srikantan, Late Shri T.K Govinda Rao, Shri Kalakkadu S.Ramanarayana Iyer, Shri Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman, Shri Trichur V.Ramachandran, Shri T.V.Sankaranarayanan, Shri T.N. Seshagopalan, Shri O.S.Thyagarajan, Shri Maharajapuram Ramachandran, Shri K.J.Yesudas, Shri V.Rajkumar Bharathi, Shri Neyveli Santanagopalan, Shri N Vijay Siva, Shri Sanjay Subramaniam. Shri T.M.Krishna and Shri P.Unnikrishnan. And great Vidhushis of the calibre of Sangita Kalanidhis Smt. D.K.Pattammal, Smt Mani Krishnaswamy, Smt. R.Vedavalli, Bombay Sisters, Smt Sudha Raghunathan, Smt S Sowmya, Smt Suguna Purushothaman, Smt.Bombay Jayashri Ramnath and Smt Nithyashree Mahadevan. And great instrumentalists like Sangita Kalanidhi Dr.N.Ramani, Smt Sikkil Sisters, Shri N.Ravikiran and Shri Kadri Gopalnath.

Perfection in bowing technique, bringing out the melodic nuances with raga bhava and sahithya shuddha, and weaving intricate and dexterous laya patterns are among his fortes. This technocrat from IIT-Madras is also a

committed music scholar and teacher who has trained many students, both in India and abroad, of whom some have become performers and teachers. He is an A- grade artiste of both AIR and Doordarshan, and also operates a recording studio Brindavan Audio in Chennai, which had produced many Devotional and Classical albums. The Music Academy, Chennai has awarded him the ‘Outstanding Young Violinist’ for senior concerts.

ST [6:00]: What or who is Saint Tyagaraja to you ?

MC: Tyagaraja’s kritis are important not only musically, but also helps us in our personal and intellectual development. As the saying goes, we pay respect to and derive our inspiration from ‘*mātā pitā guru dēyvam*’. In that list I would place tyagaraja as dēyvam alongside Rama. My experience as a performer started with Tyagaraja kritis. As a Chennai based youngster, I attended lot of nook and corner tyagaraja festivals, and got a chance to hear great musicians in close quarters. I was also called upon to play in impromptu fashion at these gatherings.

BR[8:40]: What is your earliest memory of attending a Tyagaraja aradhana? What was the atmosphere - and did those experiences play a part in choice of music as career ?

MC: There were these *akhandam* - non-stop concerts - they usually take place in a temple or a room with a Tyagraja and Rama idol, and an oil lamp that is kept constantly lit. We feel God’s presense in these events, just like Tyagaraja is said one of his last kritis ‘*paramātmuḍu veligē muccaṭa bāga telusukōrē*’ - divinity is expressed in animate and inanimate objects.

Both the light (from the oil lamp) and the *nāda* (from *tambūras*) are unbroken, hence the name *akhandam*. I attended these when I was 18 and in college, and most of the other attendees were far more senior. In this format, no *manōdharma*, *rāga ālāpana* or *svarams* were allowed, neither was any repetition of *kīrtanas*, so I got to listen to 250+ *kīrtanas* over 24 hours. I was asked to play *tambūra* when the main *tambūra* person got tired around midnight. At 5 am or so, the tiny tots would sing *divya nāma kīrtanas* and *utsava sampradāya kritis*, and they would ask me to play along on the violin. These experiences were a cornerstone of my musical upbringing. Similarly, in the december season, my friends and me would be at the (music) academy and similar venues from morning till night, starting with a devotional session, then proceeding to a lecture demonstration, perhaps a debate, then concerts.

ST[15:55]: In your experience, do you see some kritis as being rich in their expressiveness and emotion, while others are more decorative, musically constructed, grammatically beautiful ? Can you give some examples ?

MC: I should answer you like this: “*sangīta gnānamu bhakti vinā,*” - is this an example of bhakti or grammar or both or none ? One is not distinguishable from the other. Tyagaraja says that singing without emotional

involvement is not of much use. Focusing on the intricacies of the svaras is by itself a form of bhakti. Tyagaraja has delivered a lot of subtext through his svaras as well as *sāhitya*. In the same *dhanyāsi* raga, '*dhyānamē varamaina gangā snānamē*' has a different svara set compared to *sangīta gnānamu*, and conveys a different *bhāva*.

BR[20:00]: Do you focus more on technique and let the *bhāva* come organically, or is it the other way around ?

MC: Nobody registers for a PhD directly - everybody starts from kindergarten. After lot of effort, I have mastered the ability to put all of it together as an amalgam. But you start at the basic level, learn the ingredients gradually. *ātma gnāna* is important, and so is musical *gnāna* - namely the *gnāna* of the *gamakas*, *mūrcnanas*, *prayōgas* . As he says - *dhyānamē varamaina gangā snānamē* - once you start meditating, that is the true *gangā snānam*.

ST[22:25]: You first learn the basic rendition of the kriti, without necessarily knowing the lyrics.. Do you feel the bhava behind the song without knowing the language ?

MC: We can't compartmentalize too much based on the language differences, because a lot of these languages are interconnected through etymology, culture, etc. Sanskrit is the old lady, Telugu and Tamil etc. are sisters... Language is not a huge barrier to grasping the spirituality behind the music. As Tyagaraja says, use the advantages of your birth. I was fortunate to be in Chennai within short distance of so much music as well as culture - I can see the temple from my window. Immersion in the culture/religion, as well as *kēlvi gnānam* are very important... In Chennai some venues have 300 concerts a year. On average 5-10 concerts a day in chennai. So if you keep going, you meet the elders, and then get to learn more..more kritis in the same *rāgas* for example (take *dhanyāsi*, I might know *dhyānamē varamaina* very well, but later I got to learn the intricacies of *nī cittamu* or *mīna lōcana brōva* (Syāmā sāstri composition))

BR[27:10]: Do you alter the way you play certain *rāgas* based on the kriti you are playing ?

MC: As an analogy - *laddu*, *badushah*, *jalebi* are all sugar, but each of them is a different texture, taste, some other ingredients. Similarly, the base of the raga is the same. Kalyani is all about Ananda, whether you sing the lyrics or sing the svaras as *akāram*. The kriti gives you inspiration to take it in different directions based on the *sangatis*. Form your *alāpana* based on some of the *sangatis* in the kriti. [At this point MC demonstrated how to mold the '*ga da pa ma ga ga ri sa*' phrase in *alāpana* based on '*nīdi cāla sukhamā*'. Similarly, we can demonstrated other phrases and variations based on the anupallavi '*dadi navanīta..*'.] Then when you sing the actual kriti, it sounds like a complete package.

[Demonstrates the difference between *etāvunara* and *unnai allāl*]

ST[33:10]: Each of Tyagaraja's kritis has its own color and speciality. Can you point to a couple of kritis that stand out from your personal journey over a couple of decades - is there a kriti that you have found yourself going back and revisiting often and rediscovering ?

MC: The great T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal has provided a great series called 'Tyagaraja Ramayana'. This has been an inspiration to me. Tyagaraja says, in the kriti '*ē panikō janmincitinani*' - "Valmiki and others have described you already, but will my desire to do the same go away ?". Also, he says '*rāga ratna mālikacē*' - I have described you through the necklace of hundreds of ragas.

One kriti that is fantastic in my opinion is *dvaitamu sukhamā*.. . only questions, not answers.. to be or not to be. In this kriti he is not trying to incite controversy. He conducts the debate in a very nice musical way, and asks for Lord's guidance so that he can lead his life better. - [MC gives a brief overview of advaita and dvaita]

Later in the anupallavi - *caitanyamā vinu sarva sākshi* - he looks at the question in more detail. Where does god exist ? Consciousness exists in the physical elements (air, fire, etc.) in the tatvas - visnu brahma siva, in the celestials like indra.. but this still cannot answer the question of advaita Vs dvaita.

Similarly, going back to *nidi cāla sukhamā*, he asks questions but leaves answers ambiguous.. The answer is contextual too, and that is something we have to contemplate as well.


He is a master debater.. the music behind the kriti makes it so pleasing that the underlying debate is not acrimonious.

Another kriti - *nannu palimpa* - provides us a great snippet from Tyagaraja's life. The context of this song is that one of his disciples got this picture of Rama drawn in Walajapet, as a gift on the occasion of Tyagaraja's daughter's wedding. He then carries this heavy framed picture and walks a long distance from Walajapet to Tiruvaiyaru.

Tyagaraja's description of Rama's characteristics is relevant even today. When he says '*nī nāma rūpamulaku*' - what does the name rama signify - it is also the characteristics that go along with the name. When Dasharatha has to send Rama to exile but does not have the heart to do so in person, Kaikeyi is the one who informs Rama. Rama is unfazed and unquestioning at this order. In fact, he asks whether he has offended his father in some way that he is not willing to deliver the news in person. Implicit obedience trust, understanding..

this is the Rama that Tyagaraja sang about, not just the big warrior Rama.. Rama was *mrdu-bāṣana* - he did not speak harshly even in the worst circumstances. When ravana kidnapped Sita, he did not immediately orchestrate an attack. Instead - *hitavu māṭalentō bāga palkitivi* (from *sarasa sāma dāna*) - he sends his messenger to talk to ravana in the middle of battle. When ravana is losing the war and has lost one of his sons, rama says ‘*inru poi nalai va*’... He is the embodiment of dharma, i.e., fairplay - *rāmo vighrahavān dharmaha*.

In the pancharatna kriti *duḍuku gala*, there is the phrase - *ciruta prāyamu nāḍē bhajanāmṛta rasa vihīna ku-tarkuḍaina* - which conveys an interesting technique from Tyagaraja, who is a great diplomat. When he says, “ I am the impertinent person, questioning everything..from my young age, I did not realize the importance of bhajana’.. we must realize that these are not Tyagaraja’s qualities, but in fact our own (the rasika’s) qualities.

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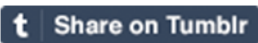
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SRUTI Presents Malavika Sarukkai

SRUTI is proud to present a week of dance culminating in a grand bharatanatyam solo ballet by the noted dance exponent Malavika Sarukkai. This will be Malavika Sarukkai's debut engagement in the Philadelphia area.

Ms. Sarukkai will perform her production **Ganga - Nitya Vaahini - The Eternal River** at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts. This ballet, choreographed by Ms. Sarukkai, celebrates the historic River Ganga.

The production journeys from the geographical confluence of the two great rivers, Bhagirathi and Alakananda, at Devprayag, high in the Himalaya mountains and traverses physical terrain and metaphysical spaces. 'Ganga' is at once the mythic river emerging from Lord Siva's matted locks as it is also the river of life coursing through the plains of India. She is the Eternal River – a silent witness to the relentless cycle of birth and death, to the sacred and profane, to purity and pollution. And now, in our times, she laments about the pollution and its environmental implications while moving finally towards the ocean. As the river surrenders her identity to the ocean she reflects the profound philosophic Indian truth of *Advaita* (a philosophy that self, *Atman*, is nothing but Brahman or the supreme. The separate self dissolves in the sea of pure consciousness, infinite and immortal.).

As a lead-in to this performance, Malavika Sarukkai will conduct and participate in a series of events over the course of the week from Sunday, April 6, 2014 to Saturday, April 12, 2014.

- **Sunday April 6th** at Montgomery County Community College - Three Master classes open to the public
- **Monday April 7th** - The Philadelphia Premiere Screening of The Unseen Sequence
- **Wednesday April 9th** at the Philadelphia Museum of Art – Lecture demonstration that will explore the deep connection between Bharatanatyam and the visual arts of South India and will be held in the Museum's South Indian Temple Hall
- **Thursday April 10th** at the Painted Bride Arts Center – Dance Professionals Workshop where Malavika will be joined by leading professional dance artists to explore topics of mutual interest. Professor Hari Krishnan from Wesleyan University will be facilitating this workshop

This program has been made possible by a generous grant from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. Please visit <http://www.srutimalavika.org/> for more details.

2014 Event Schedule



Thyagaraja Aradhana
with Vocal Concert
by Madurai Sundar
Saturday, March 22, 2014 • 8:30 AM
Hindu temple of Delaware



Malavika Sarukkai-
Bharatanatyam*
Saturday, April 12, 2014 • 8:00 PM
Annenberg center for the Performing Arts,
Philadelphia, PA

Malavika Sarukkai's dance performance and related residency activities are supported by The Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage

The performance also is provided with the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts

ANNENBERG CENTER
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan
and Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi-
Violin Concert
Saturday, May 3, 2014 • 4:30 PM
Agnes Irwin School, Bryn Mawr PA



Amricha Murali Carnatic
Vocal Concert
Saturday, May 17, 2014 • 4:30 PM
Agnes Irwin School, Bryn Mawr PA



Kalaksheetra Ramayanam
Dance Ballet
Saturday September 20, 2014



Pantula Rama
Carnatic Vocal Concert
Saturday, October 18, 2014 • 4:30 PM



Gayathri Venkataraghavan
Carnatic Vocal Concert
Saturday, Nov 1, 2014 • 4:30 PM

*Also attend and watch three planned residency workshops the week of April 6th-April 12th

Additional events are being planned.

Details, Season Passes and Event tickets are available from www.sruti.org

E-Mail srutiphila@gmail.com for questions or to join mailing list.

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