

**“Strings Attached”
A different experience**

Carnatic Classical Instrumental Concert by Jayanthi & Kumaresh (June 2, 2012)

A Review by Rasikan

I was not sure what to expect from the Sruti concert of June 2, 2012 in Mitchell Hall of Drexel University. The concert was billed as Strings Attached. The artistes, Jayanthi and Kumaresh, are well known musicians playing the string instruments Veena and Violin respectively. [They are also life partners.] They were accompanied by Anantha R. Krishna on the mridangam and Trichy Krishnaswamy on the Ghatam.

Jayanthi, has played twice before for Sruti. She hails from one of the most renowned musical families in South India. She is a niece of the legendary violin maestro Lalgudi Jayaraman, whose musical lineage goes back directly to Saint Thyagaraja himself. Steeped in classical Carnatic music, her approach to music is very much traditional. She is capable of and often produces meditative music without much of pyrotechnics.

Kumaresh, with his elder brother Ganesh, also a violinist, had performed for Sruti a few years ago. The duo is known for their mixing of serene music with some flamboyant playing.

Thus one had little idea how the two would jell and what kind of music would emanate.

The answer, in part, came early and in short order with the very first piece in Kalyani. This was not a traditional varnam or a kriti. The two played some very fast paced swara patterns for this “composition“. After the piece, Kumaresh called it just “Strings Attached“. At that point, I deduced that I should not expect traditional fare. This “stream of consciousness” approach dominated the concert although at times there were flashes of beautiful music especially from Jayanthi.

A simple Atukaraadaani, a Thyagaraja kriti in Manoranjani followed. Then came an elaborate alapana which some of us surmised was in Sri Ranjani. This was confirmed when Jayanthi, at the conclusion of the piece, announced that they had just played Sri dum Durge, a kriti of Dikshitar in that ragam.

The concert continued with a free form composition Sam vaada in two ragams - Sahana and Vagadeeswari.

The main piece of the evening was an extensive dwi (two) raga RTP in Shanmukhapriya/Natakurinji. The pair displayed mastery of their respective instruments playing the two ragams sometimes switching back and forth between the two in quick flashes. Once again while Jayanthi tried to be more contemplative, Kumaresh jumped in with fast paced prayogams.

A short and neat thani followed the Pallavi in Khanda Triputa talam and ragamalikai swarams. The last two items were a free flowing piece in Behag, which Jayanthi mentioned was composed by Ganesh, and a Thirupukash in Sindhu Bhairavi.

Perhaps following the pattern that they had set up, the duo did not conclude with a traditional mangalam!

That left this reviewer and a few others that he talked to after the program with this question: what kind of program did we just listen to? It was not a traditional Carnatic music concert. But then they did play classical Carnatic music ragams, albeit with novel twists, sangatis and prayogams. Is this a new wave, the harbinger of a modern trend? Whatever it was, a good segment of the audience lapped it up with frequent applause. Ultimately is that not what matters?