

Novel medium, classical concert

Carnatic Guitar Concert (May 19, 2018)

A Review by Balaji Raghothaman

Prasanna, the versatile guitarist, gave a performance for Sruti at the Ibrahim Theater in Philadelphia on May 19th, 2018. It was a packed audience, consisting of both die-hard Sruti rasikas, Prasanna fans who are familiar with his work, and those who were curious about the unusual mixture of guitar with carnatic music. Prasanna gave each group something to cheer about. He carried on a lively conversation with the audience, both with his music as well as his explanations between pieces. Prasanna stuck to a mostly traditional carnatic selection of numbers. He played in the usual concert style recognizable to most of us, with a weighty middle sandwiched by a brisk beginning and end. He started off with a bilahari alapana followed by the kriti toli janma.

Prasanna also played shanmukhapriya and karaharapriya in a full format with alapanas, coupled with the kritis marivere and chakkaneeraja respectively. It was unfortunate that there were a few noticeable lapses of sruti in the latter raga that marred an otherwise engaging and earnest performance. The crowd-pleaser brahmamokate had very interesting variations that veered into rock-music territory. It was clear throughout the concert that Prasanna was at his best at this experimental edge, while somewhat more circumspect in his elaborations in the pure carnatic domain. He presented a couple of other numbers off the beaten path, including a self-composition at the end. Prasanna was competently supported by Rajna Swaminathan on the mridangam and Ravi Balasubramaniam on the ghatam. Despite their lack of prior experience playing together as a group, they managed to present a collaborative and polished picture.



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L to R: Rajna Swaminathan, Guitar Prasanna, Ravi Balasubramaniam

All told, it was an enjoyable evening and another successful Sruti event that surely helped us propagate our mission to reach a wide variety of audiences.

Balaji Raghothaman was the President of Sruti in 2016 and has been an active board member since 2015.