

A REVIEW OF "KVN" CONCERT

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This is a sketch of yet another "rave review" KVN concert, this one in the suburbs north of Philadelphia [SRUTI concert of June 5, 1993, ed.]. It had the usual KVN trademarks of unison with sruthi, impeccable classicism derived from decades of experience; further, its format was quite unlike anything I've heard from him before.

As though he had been tuning into our recent discussion on pentatonic ragas, and wanted to share a thing or two, KVN rendered three of them in succession from the start: Abhogi varnam, Sripathe (Nagasvarali - Thyagaraja), and GopalakaPahiMam (Revagupti - Swati Tirunal). Sripathi was embellished with a pinch of neraval/swaras in the charanam. Gopalaka was preceded by a short alapanai and rounded out with a few crisp swara-sequences at the end. This krithi itself is the best exemplar of Revagupti I've come across: it contains slow and majestic segments and interspersed with faster, madhyamakala passages. Quite a treat ...

KVN next rendered Syama Sastri's Brovavamma in Manji. He took pains to distinguish Manji from Bhairavi in another short alapanai (Sa-Ri-Ga exclusively, no Sa-Ga-Ri-Ga of Bhairavi; emphasis on D1). He also avoided the Tarasthayi(?) in both the alapanai and swara passages at the end. The krithi is another bhava-laden creation of Syama Sastri that is KVN's forte...

The next piece was in Kalyani, one of Svarna Venkatesha Dikshitar's. "SvarnaKalaBhairavam" was set to the unusual [Sankeerna jathi tripata, ed.] Talam of 9+2+2, and it was marked by a change of Nadai(?) (from Chatusra to Kanda) in the last line of the charanam. KVN prefaced the krithi with a somewhat longer alapanai (befitting a sampurna raga) and included a fairly intricate neraval and swara-singing at one point in the charanam.

After rendering Periaswamy Thooran's "Muruga Muruga" in Saveri, KVN started to elaborate - of all ragas - Sahana. It wasn't clear for a while that he intended to use it for a Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi. As the alapanai unfolded (it was sung in two segments), he brought out wonderfully the emotions Sahana suggests - a sort of longing, nostalgia if you will.

The tanam was sung to a muted Mrudangam accompaniment, and the coordination between KVN and Ramabhadran was marvelous. The pallavi (the

words I don't recall) [Eds...daravi daLita kuvalayadaLa nElam] was set to 2-kalai Adi. What was quite unusual here was that KVN took up a ragamalika in the neraval itself ... in Bilahari, Varali, Sama, and Sindhubhairavi. He then returned to this ragamalika in the swara-singing. This was the first time I've heard a ragamalika neraval, and coming from KVN, it was great.. (KVN is unparalleled at neraval-singing).

After a short, crisp Tani by Ramabhadran, KVN concluded with a couple of short pieces - a Thiruppavai (again in Sindhubhairavi), and a thillana in Paras.

KVN is the supreme master of letting the music speak for itself. The entire concert was marked by an unhurried, measured approach: no flashiness or gimmicks, just solid classicism. Nagai Muralidharan and Vellore Ramabhadran joined wholeheartedly in creating the atmosphere - they were also equally subdued and measured. With such a match of temperament, the result was glorious. Yes, most of the pieces were slow, and the ragas like Saveri and Sahana can with some justification be classified "melancholy", but the audience (>100) was held in thrall throughout the concert. He was obviously able to "connect" to persons like myself, a generation younger than himself.

At a dinner social afterwards, I chatted with KVN about a few things, including Svarna Venkatesha Dikshitar and his compositions. He happens to be a contemporary composer in Sanskrit and Tamil, whom KVN regards as a sort of "realized soul". KVN has undertaken to perform his compositions only in recent years.

KVN also seemed fascinated by the InterNet. I mentioned to him how I hoped to write this review in the manner of one P.J. Narayanan, whereupon he pointed to a (young, mustachioed) person and said "this is P.J. Narayanan". Of course, it was quite gratifying to meet "PJN" in the flesh (the suburbs of Philly are only some 320 miles from Pittsburgh!) ...

Aravind works for At&T Bell Labs in NJ. He is an avid listener of music. This article was posted on Internet in the "rec.music.indian.classical" newsgroup
