

## Review of 1994 SRUTI Concerts

A delectable concert by Santhanagopalan  
November 12, 1994

*Rasikan*

It is rather fashionable among many who have heard the great musicians of the 50's, 60's to harp on falling standards and bemoan the lack of serious musicians in S. Indian music world. Well, I have news for them. S. Indian music is alive and vibrant in the hands of excellent artists who are in their twenties or thirties. The masters U. Srinivas (Mandolin) and Ravi Kiran (Chitra Veena) are only in their twenties. And Sudha Raghunathan although barely into the thirties is already reckoned as a senior musician. To this list must be added the name of Neyveli Santhanagopalan (NS) who gave a delectable concert on 12 November '94. In this concert, NS was accompanied by another young artist, V.V. Ravi on the violin and the veteran Thanjavur T.K. Murthy on the mridangam.

Santhanagopalan's music is introspective and slower paced than his guru T.N. Seshagopalan's and though NS does indulge in some 'kanakku' in swara prasthara, he does not quite emulate TNS in that respect. In the SRUTI concert, NS rendered a mixture of compositions of the past masters with some of more recent or contemporary composers.

While at the beginning of the concert, NS was humming the notes of Kalyani, many (including me) expected him to start with the Adi tala or even Ata tala varnam in that ragam. But NS surprised us with a rare Tamil varnam 'Karunai kadale' by Tiger Varadachariar.

After a sedate 'Smarane sukham' (Janaranjani, Thyagaraja), NS rendered a short and sweet Keeravani alapana followed by another lesser known Tamil kriti 'Punniyam oru kodi'. He continued to tease the audience by choosing 'Palukavedemi' (Pornachandrika, Thyagaraja) as the next kriti. The scales of Janaranjani and Pornachandrika are close with many similar prayogams making it difficult to keep track of the differences.

The short Abhogi alapana which followed was limited mostly to the middle and lower octaves. NS sang a bhava laden 'Sabapathikku', a lyrical beauty by Gopalakrishna Bharathy. Continuing his impish mood, NS rendered an elaborate niraval of the anupallavi 'Kripa nidhi' but switched to Pallavi for swara prasthara.

NS then rendered, without alapana, Thyagaraja's Madhyamavathy kriti 'Nadupai palikeru'. This kriti in crisp Khanda Chapu taal, practically demands rhythm laden swara prasthara. And NS duly obliged. His complicated swara combinations elicited not only a prolonged applause from the audience but also a hand shake on the stage itself by the veteran T.K. Murthy himself!

NS then took up Kedaragowla for elaborate alapana followed by the well known composition 'Saraguna palimpa' of Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar.

The 'tani' by Murthy which followed the swara prasthara deserves special mention. Murthy is not only a great mridanga vidwan, he is also a master of the difficult and almost dying art of 'konnakol'; an art in which the musician voices the difficult 'solkattus' or the sounds emanating from the mridangam like Tha, Dhim, Thom, Na etc. It was thrilling to hear him vocalize the solkattus at various speeds and follow it up on the mridangam. He received a long ovation at the end of his virtuoso performance.

The last part of the concert consisted of a ragamalikai followed by Narayana Thirtha's 'Govardhana Giri' in Darbari Kanada, a Hamsanandi piece of Ambujam Krishna and a Surati Thiruppavai of Andal.

V.V. Ravi belying his years is a mature violinist. He gave able support.

While the concert which lasted just over three hours, was on the whole enjoyable, I personally would have liked NS to have cut a song or two and had included a Ragam, Thanam, Pallavi (RTP). I am of the old order who believes that a S. Indian music concert is not complete without a well rendered RTP.

After the concert NS assured me that the next time he performs for SRUTI, he would certainly include a RTP. Given his youth, I am sure we will have many occasions to hear Neyveli Santhanagopalan who is certain to be one of the star musicians of India in the years to come.