

Youthful Exuberance Review of Nityasree's concert

By
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I had written (SR March '96) that "the future of Carnatic music is safe in the hands of" referring to young Sanjay Subramanayam's concert. S. Nityasree's name must be added to the increasing number of young artists in whose hands Carnatic music is safe and who will carry its glory well into the 21st century. On 8 June '96, at the Stein auditorium of Drexel University, this young musician (just 22 years) gave a concert exuding youthful exuberance. In this concert arranged by SRUTI, Nityasree was accompanied by another young artist Embar Kannan on the violin and her father I. Sivakumar on the mridangam.

Nityasree has impeccable, indeed enviable, musical lineage. Her mother, Lalitha Sivakumar is a well known musician and composer. As noted above, her father is an accomplished percussionist. And going a generation back, her paternal grandmother is D.K. Pattammal, a torch bearer musician of yesteryears and her maternal grandfather was the mridangam genius Palakkad Mani Iyer.

Many artists who follow the footsteps of illustrious ancestors, tend to very much follow their elder's style or *bani*. So it would not be surprising if Nityasree had also patterned her singing to DKP's style. Instead, to her credit, even at this young age she has created her own path. It may take a few years for her style to crystallize, but whatever form it takes, it will not be DKP's *bani*. Nityasree glistens with fast paced *brighas* and exuberant flow of musical phrases more in the style of T.N. Seshagopalan.

The concert started with *Chalamela*, the *Ata tala* varnam in Sankarabaranam. She quickly followed it up with three Thyagaraja kritis: *Chinna nadena* (Kalanidhi), *Oka pari* (Kalavathi), and *Chera ravade* (Ritigowla). The first and the third of these ragamas are janyas of Kharaharapriya and are similar in appeal. I felt that the choice of these pieces so early in the concert were not the kind that helps the artist to really warm up. Ragams with *tivra* swarams help perk up the musician and the audience, which is one of the

reasons many musicians include Hamsadwani or Nattai early in a concert.

However, Nityasree really perked up with the next piece, *Esane*, a Nalinakanti composition of Muthu Thandavar. This rare kriti has a number of interesting sancharams woven around *Esane*, like *Sabesane*, *Chit Sabesane* and so on. Nityasree really sang this kriti admirably.

She then rendered Dikshitar's composition in Brindavana Saranga, *Soundara Rajam*, correctly interpreting the serene mood of this great kriti. Nityasree took up Poorvikalyani for some elaboration followed by *Inda Paramukhamedu* (composer unknown) with a short *niraval* and *swara prastaram*.

The *tani* (solo Mridangam) by Sivakumar that followed was short and sweet.

After a quick *Innu daya* (Kalyana vasantam) of Purandara Dasa, Nityasree took up Sankarabaranam for an elaborate RTP. Sankarabaranam is one of the most beautiful ragams in Carnatic music. It is probably the most universal ragam. *Bilaval*, its counterpart in N. Indian music, is very popular among Hindustani musicians; and the Major scale of Western music is the same as that of Sankarabaranam. But by some chance, in the ten years of SRUTI's existence, till this year, we heard this ragam only from two artists, Ravi Kiran and Sowmya. And suddenly we have back to back Sankarabaranam from the double Veena concert and Nityasree!

One of the traditions of Carnatic music concerts is almost never to repeat ragams unless they happen to be part of a ragamalikai. But in choosing Sankarabaranam for her RTP, a ragam in which she had already rendered the varnam, Nityasree followed another tradition which had existed a few decades ago, wherein the musician took up for RTP the same ragam of the varnam in which they had commenced the concert with. Ariyakudi used to do so often.

Sruti Ranjani, March 1997.

Nityasree rendered full justice to the Pallavi not only doing *trikalam* but also *tisram*. The ragamalika swarams that followed was a rare treat, especially the scintillating Chandrakauns and the rarely heard Vaasanthi.

Nityasree just glistened in the post Pallavi segment. She started with a Madurai Mani favorite, Bharatiyar's *Vellai thamarai* in Abheri. She followed by *Adikaka*, a Annamacharya composition, with music set in Durga by her mother Lalitha, and a Purandara dasa's ragamalikai (*Nannella maditho*). Then came the lilting *Valli kanavan perai*, a song made famous by DKP and hummed by the connoisseur and the novice during the 50's. A folk tune *Sundararajam* was followed by a

Tillana like composition, *Tha thai*, by Gopalakrishna Bharathi. The tune in Sindhu Bhairavi for this piece was also set by Lalitha Sivakumar.

Nityasree concluded her concert in a serene mood with another DKP favorite *Santhi nilava vendum*, "let peace prevail", a Bharatiyar composition in Tilang.

Embar Kannan provided able support and so did Sivakumar. Nityasree was a little slow to warm up, but once she did, the concert was quite enjoyable. There were many moments of sheer brilliance. I am sure, Nityasree will be one of the foremost stars in the years to come.

