

## Classicism at its best A review of O.S. Thiagarajan concert

by  
Rasikan

O.S. Thiagarajan (OST) treated SRUTI audience (4/19/97) to music we were used to a few decades ago. I had mentioned in my reviews of Sanjay Subramanyan (Srutiranjani, March 1996) and Nityashree (Srutiranjani, March 1997) that South Indian classical music is safe in their hands. The statement holds true. It is also true that their music, as of many others these days, are somewhat different from those of the stalwarts of the 50's and 60's. Innovations and new ideas are always welcome and to be encouraged. But sometimes we (shall I say of the older set) do hanker for the type of music of the heroes of our youth. Occasionally Ravi Kiran or Hyderabad Brothers, while still modern, do evoke memories of the past in their approach to music.

Some features of modern approach to music include short alapanas of many non-rakti ragas, a proliferation of kritis from a number of composers and a tendency to "wow" the audience with virtuosity especially in swara prastarams - Mandolin Srinivas is a case in point.

In particular I miss the elaborate alapanas (of rakti ragams) of yesteryears and the inclusion primarily of the kritis of the so called Trinity.

A musician well wedded to the styles of the past masters is OST. His Todi at the SRUTI concert took the better part of an hour. The alapana was expansive and full of bhava, and included a beautiful graha bheda into Kalyani. The whole concert, held at Paxon Hollow Jr. H.S., was classical music at its best with most of the pre RTP pieces being Thyagaraja kritis. (OST later told me that his regard for Thyagaraja was so high that this is the norm in almost all his concerts.) Srikant Venkataraman (violin) and S. Raja Rao (mridangam) provided the accompaniments. More about Srikant later on.

The concert started serenely with a varnam, *Sami ninne*, in Sri followed by *Swaminatha paripalaya* (Nattai) of Dikshitar. OST then rendered a bhava laden *Enduku nirdhaya* in Harikambodhi. This was followed by *Ninne nera* in Pantuvarali. All the above

pieces, except the varnam, contained short nerevals and swara prastarams. OST then elaborated Brindavani in which he rendered a rarely heard Thyagaraja piece *Kamalpatha*, a kriti Balamurali brought into vogue a few years ago.

Then followed the piece de resistance of the evening - Todi. OST's elaboration of the ragam, the graha bheda at the end, the well known kriti *Kaddanu variki* will keep ringing for a long time in the ears of those present that day. Most musicians who perform *kaddanu variki* tend to do nereval and swara prastaram at the start of the charanam - *niddura nirakirinchi*. However, OST chose a later section of the charanam for nereval and swara elaboration include *kuraippu* etc. There were no great pyrotechnics in his treatment of rhythm.

Raja Rao in his *tani* however, provided the rhythm pyrotechnics, which according to many, is where it really belongs. It was quite a delectable *tani*, with the audience applauding many segments instead of just at the end.

Todi was followed by a sweet rendering of Neelakanta Sivan's Mukhari kriti *Enraikku Siva krupai varumo*, a song made famous by Musiri Subramanya Iyer. Like Musiri, OST started this kriti from the anupallavi *kanrin kuralai kettu*.

It was more than 2 1/4 hours into the concert at this time. So, like me, some may have anticipated that OST may wind up from here on. But OST, who was in full form at this stage, exhibited his professionalism by continuing on to render a RTP in Kalyani. This part is again something we miss in many of the concerts of the modern day musicians. They either do not render RTP at all or tend to treat it so lightly that one might be quite happy that they did not include RTP.

Not so OST. He did justice to the alapana, tanam and rendered a Pallavi in Adi talam with a *atheetha eduppu*, i.e. the first word of the pallavi starts before the beat. The swara prastaram was brief. The

Srutiranjani, October 1997

ragamalikai swarams included the gana ragas Gowla, Arabhi and Varali (he had already rendered Sri and Nattai in the first two pieces).

The post pallavi period included *Jagadodharana*, *Uyyala looka* (Neelambari) and *Naale nalla naal*, a Desika Vinayagam Pillai song in Kapi.

At the end of the concert, I got out with the feeling that this was classicism at its best.

A word about Srikant, the violinist. He is a young man of just over 25 years performing at a high professional level. Well, we are used to prodigies these days; so one might ask: what is new? What is new is, that this young man was raised in **Chicago!!** He told me that except for an occasional summer with

the virtuoso T.N. Krishnan, he learnt all the music by himself, of course with great encouragement by his parents. It is really amazing that he has reached the level of accompanying an accomplished artist like OST and playing with great aplomb even difficult ragams like Brindavani and the somewhat unusual Pallavi that OST chose. He is surely somebody that we in this country can be proud of and should be an inspiration to many youngsters growing up and learning Indian music here.

The audio system for the concert was well coordinated; in fact OST remarked about it more than once. Kudos to the Technical committee. The recording will surely be a well cherished addition to everyone's collection.

