

Future of Carnatic Music safe in the hands of Sanjay Subramanyam

Rasikan

"The future of Carnatic Music is well and safe in the hands of musicians like Sanjay Subramanyam" quote from the well-known critic Subbudu, per Renuka Adiraju, President of Sruti at the end of a superb concert by Sanjay on October 14, 1995. Renuka herself opined that Sanjay's concert "was the best Sruti concert of the year". I can assert that neither of the statements is an exaggeration.

The evening was devoted to South Indian music of a high order with emphasis on classicism. Sanjay was accompanied by two other young musicians R.K. Sriramkumar on the violin and Arun Prakash on the mridangam.

The stage was set with the Swati Tirunal's Kambhoji raga Ata tala varna "Sarasija" followed by a crisp "Jaya jaya" in Nattai of Purandara Dasa. The detailed alapana in Begada next, only whetted our appetite. The Sivan kriti "Gana rasamudan" is not heard often these days. Madurai Mani Iyer used to sing it.

The Bhairavi alapana had classicism written all over it. To say it was beautiful is to put mildly. The maturity of Sanjay's rendering came out especially in the higher octave where he competently eschewed phrases resembling Karaharapriya; a failing even senior artists are wont to have. The Thyagaraja kriti "Sri raghuvara sugunalaya" used to be a favorite of Ariyakudi. Sanjay sang the kriti with great bhavam.

Sanjay then rendered another Ariyakudi favorite: the Atana piece "Anupama Gunambudhi" of Thyagaraja. A significant feature of this kriti is the liberal use of the same ravai type of gamakams in all the three angikas (pallavi, anupallavi, charanam).

and now came the piece de resistance. An elaborate Mayamalavagowla and the majestic Thyagaraja kriti "Meru samana". What a grand Mayamalavagowla! This raga used by almost all the musicians in the early training exercises at least from the times of Purandara Dasa, is somehow not given enough importance in concerts. Quite often it is rendered in the early

part of a concert with minimal exposition. Sanjay just let himself go and the audience was treated to a masterly rendition.

The tani by Arun Prakash after the kriti was quite crisp.

After a quick "Enneramum", the Devegandhari kriti of Gopalakrishna Bharathy, Sanjay took up Bilahari of RTP. Bilahari is a beautiful lilting raga and is heard quite often in the first half of a concert. But it does not lend itself to the varieties of elaboration to merit a RTP. Frankly, after the weighty pieces earlier, I was quite ready for the choice of Bilahari [I understand Sanjay was responding to a request from one of the organizers].

There seems a tendency these days to treat Pallavi rather peremptorily and quickly move to ragamalikai swarams and Sanjay also fell for it.

Pallavi, in this context stands for Padam, Layam, Vinyasam. A well rendered Pallavi would include neraval, anuloma/pratiloma, trikalam, tisram. Not all musicians render all of them, but modern day musicians seem to totally ignore all of them. With his earlier emphasis on classicism, I was surprised that Sanjay left himself open to this criticism.

The post Pallavi period started with a Kabir bhajan "Hey Govinda" in Madhuvanti. Madhuvanti is a rather modern raga. Except for this one, the ragams rendered by Sanjay that day were all time worn and traditional. I felt a bit let down although Sanjay was responding to 'chit' request. [I have strong feelings about this 'chit' thing. But more about it later.]

After the brief interlude to modernism, Sanjay went back to the classical mold rendering a bhava laden Senchuriti kriti "Pitham theliya" from the Nandanar Charitram of Gopalakrishna Bharathy. A vigorous "Sapasthsya Kaushalya" in Jonpuri and a serene Tiruprakash "Eyal esai" in Huseni rounded off a highly enjoyable concert.

Both Sriramkumar and Arun Prakash blended well with the main artist and gave very good

support throughout. It was so refreshing to see these young artists on the stage performing at this high level of classical music. Carnatic music is indeed alive, well and safe in the hands of such musicians and is sure to grow.

Now about sending chits in the middle of a concert:

When I go to a concert (Indian or Western), I expect to hear what the musicians have planned to present according to their moods and (in the case of Indian music) manodharma. The choice and variety of ragams, the weightiness of kritis in various talams all have a logic allowing for a smooth flow of music. The passing of chits disturbs the flow in more than one way.

Firstly it is distracting to see someone walk down

the aisles to hand over the chit. It may affect the concentration of the musicians. A particular composition requested may not quite fit with the logic of the concert (as happened with the Sanjay concert) or the mood of the artists. The artist may not be able to satisfy all the requests, and if he/she responds to one and not to another, he/she may be unfairly derided. And in the worst case, each member of the audience may have a different favorite and if everyone were to make a request, it will be nothing but chaos.

I suggest that the members of the audience should listen with discipline to what the musicians have to offer and not disturb the flow of music. They should keep their favorites to themselves and not ask for them unless a musician specifically solicits requests.
