

A Pleasant Spring evening with M.S.Sheela and Party

By

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It was a very pleasant spring evening in Philadelphia on April 20, 1996. M. S. Sheela and party performed for SRUTI that day at the cozy Holy Family College lecture hall. The crowd was thin (unfortunately) but was treated to over four hours of very pleasurable music indeed !

M. S. Sheela started the concert with a crisp varnam in Hamsadhvani - *PagavAri* by Patnam Subramania Iyer. She then sang Dikshithar's *Siddhi VinAyakam* in ShanmugapriyA with some neat kalpanaswarAs. She then sang *LAvaNya RAma kanulAra* in PoorNashadja rAGam composed by Thyagaraja. This rAGam was a very lilting one and Sheela did justice to it. By now the concert had attained a lively tone and I was looking forward to what main pieces she was going to concentrate on.

She then sang Mysore VasudevAchar's *Rama Ramana Narayana* in NagaswarAvali for which she sang very crisp kalpanaswarAs. This was one of her best pieces of the concert. Next was *AnupamagunAmbudhi* in AtANA. She then sang *Ninnucheppakaranamu* by Patnam Subramania Iyer in MandhAri before embarking on an elaborate MadhyamAvati.

The AlapanA in MadhyamAvati was copybook with Sheela easily traversing the octaves with her melodious voice. She even tried a 'Graha Bedham' for a couple of minutes but I felt that she could have persevered more to assert the changing of scales. I also felt here that Nalina Mohan could have lent more support for this exercise. Sheela then proceeded to sing ShyAmA ShAstri's *PAlinchi KamAkshi* which was a delight to the ears. I later learnt that this was a request to commemorate that day which was ShyAmA ShAstri day.

After Sivan's *MAImaruga Shanmuga* in Vasantha, she sang SwAthi TirunAl's *GopAlaka PahimAm* in Revagupthi, both of which were rendered capably. After about three hours, Sheela started on a KalyAni RTP. The rAGam was short and very competently done. The Pallavi was *Eesha Kothanda Khandana*

DuriNA, JanakajA Ramana in Tisra Triputa. The tAlam was a trifle uncommon and proved to be an adventure for both Sheela and Sukanya at times.

Nalina Mohan provided excellent violin support and she followed every turn of Sheela's with a silent and unflappable grace. She exhibited an excellent balance between her individuality and her in-step support of Sheela. It turns out that she learnt to play the violin from the late Anoor Ramakrishna Sarma, father of the mrudangist.

The *thaniAvarthanam* was one of the most enjoyable pieces of the concert. Anoor Ananthakrishna Sarma was calm, cool and collected. He gave an excellent performance on the mrudangam and along with Sukanya Ramgopal on the Ghatam brought the house down tackling the slightly unconventional talam with ease. Sukanya showed her experience of over 20 years by matching Sarma at every step though I did feel that she missed the tAlam a couple of times. This was her first trip to the U. S. and also was SRUTI's first concert with a female percussion artist. The thani was such an event that even Sheela could not prevent herself from being entertained by the percussionists' performance. She had to miss an Avarthanam to compose herself before proceeding. Sheela then finished the RTP with *MAYamAlavagowlai, KharaharapriyA, BehAg and Kedaragowlai*. She then proceeded to sing the Tukkadas given below.

SakiyA - Geeta Govindam

Hoobéké parimalada - Sivanranjani RAgamAligai
- Purandara DAsa

RAmudu Udhbhavinchu - Senjurutti - Prayaga
RangadAsu

KarunAjaladhey DAsarathay - Piloo +
RAgamAligai - Purandara DAsa

Valliyin KalyAnamadhai NANey solla -
KA vadichindhu

Thillana - Hamir KalyAni - Muthaiah BhAgavathar
RAManAma Payasaké - - Purandara DAsa
Mangalam

Sruti Ranjani, March 1997.

Sheela positively exuded the Karuna rasA with the *Karunajaladhey Dasarathay* piece in Piloo. The *kAvadichindhu* was very spirited and Sheela seemed to enjoy singing this piece. The thillAnA in Hamir KalyAni was composed by Muthiah Bhagavathar in praise of NAlvadi KrishnarAja WodeyAr.

Sheela has good stage presence and she brought with her a lively ambience to the evening. Sheela,

Nalina, Sukanya and Sarma seemed to have a good rapport on and off-stage and it certainly helped in the enjoyment of the concert. Sheela sang for over 4 hours and didn't seem a bit tired. Long concerts consisting of many songs seem to have been the hallmark of all of Sheela's concerts in this tour. To sum up, a very delightful concert !

