

Review of 1994 SRUTI Concerts

T.N. Bala's Vocal concert
March 5, 1994.

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Thyagaraja Aradhana, 1994, is an important event in the history of SRUTI, The India Music and Dance Society of Delaware Valley. The daylong aradhana celebration, wherein dozens of participants performed kritis of Thyagaraja, was highlighted by the vocal concert of Sri T.N. Bala accompanied by Dr. N. Shashidar on violin, Dr. C.G. Balachandar on mridangam and his son Murali on kanjira.

Sri T.N. Bala is a familiar name among the music lovers of greater Delaware valley. As a disciple of Madurai Mani Iyer, Bala brought back the memories of his guru in many of our senior patrons of SRUTI. The choice of rare kritis and Bala's style of rendering them created a unique and extraordinary atmosphere of music which made the concert a memorable one for me (and I am sure to many of our patrons).

Bala started the concert with the kriti *Anupama Gunambudhi* in *Atana* raga which set the stage and the mood for what turned out to be an exciting musical experience. He reminded me of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar at times when he rendered this piece. Following this, Bala rendered the kritis *Nija Marmamulanu* (in *Umabharanam*), *Evaru Unnaru Brova* (one of the three Thyagaraja's kritis in the raga *Malavasri*, composed in praise of Lord Panchanadeswara of Thiruvaiyaru temple) and *Anuragamu Leni* (in *Saraswathi*). Bala's rendering of *Marubalka Kunnavemira* (in *Sriranjani*) was scintillating. Last I heard someone singing this, was Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer in late sixties. Bala's rendering of *Marubalka Kunnavemira* demonstrated the maturity of his knowledge, his extraordinary flair for raga alapana and musical rendering. His *neraval* at *jarachora* was replete with intricate gamakas and brigas proving the high caliber of his voice culture. *Swaraprasthara* in *Sriranjani* was very pleasing (reminiscent of Sri Madurai Mani Iyer) filled with phrases like " Ni Da Ma Ma Ni Da Ni Da Ma SaRiGaMa; Ni Da Ma Ni Da Ma Sa Ni DaDa Ma Ga Ma; NiNiDaDa Ma Ga Ma Sa Ni DaDa Ma Ga Ma;....." His artistic mingling of notes was brilliantly supported by Shashidar on the violin.

Having excited the audience with *Sriranjani*, Bala and his team went on to entertain them with the brilliant rendering of *Upacharamulanu Chekonavayya* (in *Bhairavi*) after rendering *Adigi Sukhamu* (in *Madhyamavathi*). The alapana

in *Bhairavi* proved beyond doubt the imaginative and innovative skills of Bala. Shashidar's solo on *Bhairavi* was so brilliant, it seemed (to me) that they (Bala and Shashidar) were trying to outdo each other. The rendering of *Upcharamulanu* and the kalpanaswaras immediately after that were so pleasing to the ears, that it received numerous cries of applause (*aahaa....*) from the enthralled audience. Bala brought the performance to a very sweet conclusion with the rendering of a virutham in ragamalika (featuring *revagupti*, *brindavana saranga*, *sahana* and *suruti*) which was very soothing to the heart and soul of the listeners. I want to pay my tributes to Shashidar. I came to know him in 1990, when he agreed to accompany Sri. T.K. Govinda Rao (for a SRUTI concert). Little did I know then, of his talents. He has an excellent sense of shruti and impressive bowing technique (fitting disciple of the genius Lalgudi Jayaraman). In addition to being a superb violinist, he is a professional engineer with a doctorate in material science. Lion's share of the success of the concert should be given to the brilliant accompanists Dr. Balachandar (on mridangam) and his lawyer son Murali (on kanjira). I heard (personal note from Bala) that Dr. Balachandar never missed an opportunity to accompany Bala. It was a wonderful sight to see the smiling face of Balachandar playing along with Murali, his son. Great father/son team. There was a great deal of mutual respect and admiration between the performing artists (crucial for the success of any performance). Everything seemed right on that day making the concert a remarkable one both emotionally and musically. The only complaint (positive) I heard from some people was that the concert was a bit too long, but that did not bother me since I was in euphoria after a wonderful concert. I want to thank the members of SRUTI managing committee for having arranged Bala's concert.

Swaminathan is very deeply interested in listening to and learning Carnatic Music and was a former President of SRUTI.