

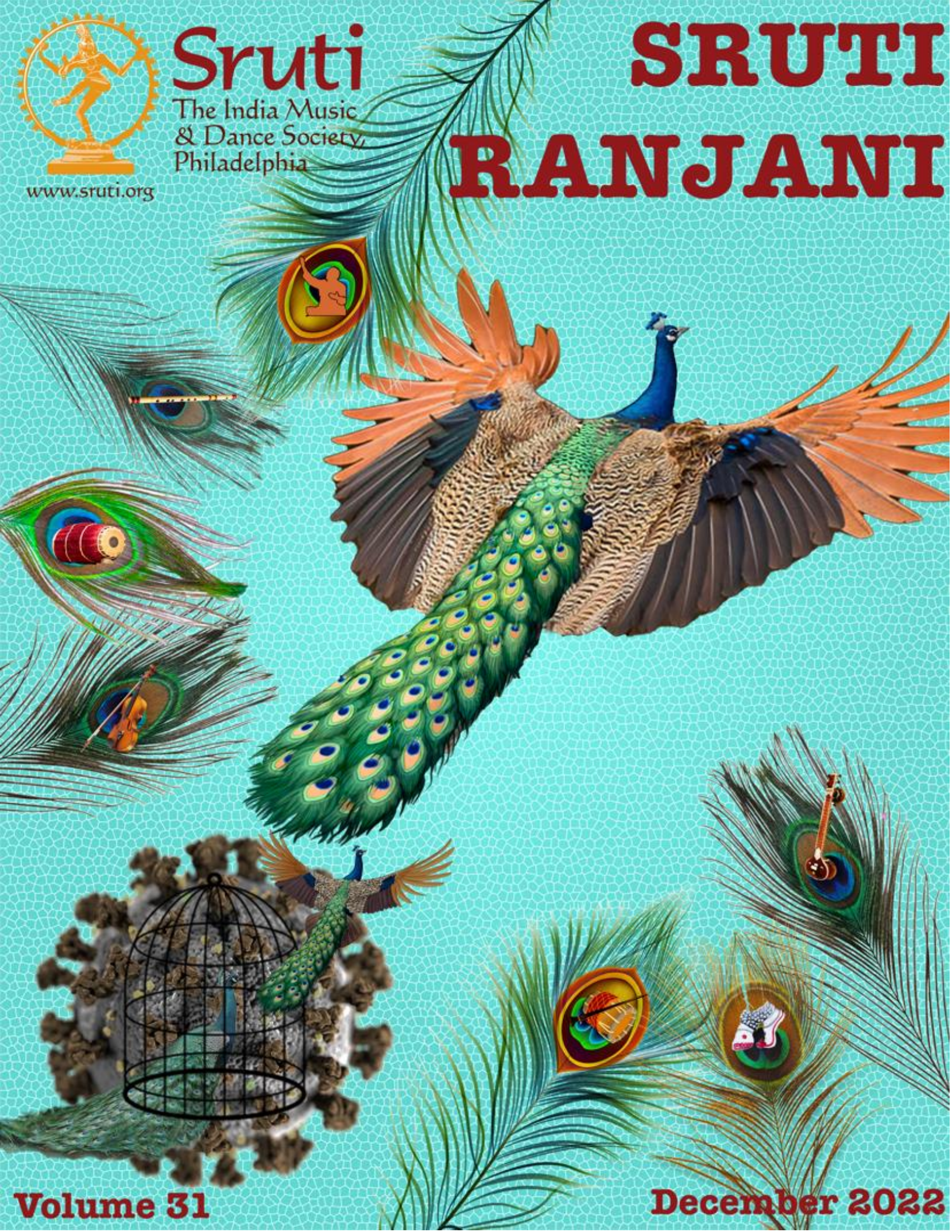


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Sruti

The India Music
& Dance Society,
Philadelphia

SRUTI RANJANI



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Table of Contents

BOARD OF DIRECTORS	2
FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK	3
FROM THE PUBLICATIONS AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE	5
2022 THYAGARAJA ARADHANA PARTICIPANTS	6
THE KSHETRA KRITIS OF PURANDARA DASA.....	8
<i>SRIRAM V</i>	
DELIGHTFUL FLUTE CONCERT BY SHASHANK.....	13
<i>HARISH BEVINAHALLY</i>	
SHASHANK'S FLUTE CONCERT – ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE	14
<i>JAYARAM SATALURI</i>	
AN EVENING AT SRUTI WITH KRITHIKA NATARAJAN	17
<i>MIRA SRIKANTH</i>	
CONCERT REVIEW – BALA BHAVAM VIOLIN CONCERT BY SAHANA SREERAM	18
<i>GAYATRI RAM</i>	
VANI RAMAMURTHY – THYAGARAJA ARADHANA CONCERT	18
<i>DINAKAR SUBRAMANIAN</i>	
HOMEcoming SORTA	19
<i>PRABHA SUBRAMANIAM AND M.M. SUBRAMANIAM</i>	
RANJANI GAYATRI CONCERT	20
<i>RAJEE PADMANABHAN</i>	
AMRITHA MURALI.....	21
<i>ARVIND LAKSHMIKANTHAN</i>	
BALA BHAVAM REVIEW: RASIKA SIVAKUMAR, BHARGAV TUMKUR, AND SRIKAR CHITTARI.....	22
<i>PRIYANKA DINAKAR</i>	
A MELODIOUS EVENING WITH SANDEEP NARAYAN	23
<i>DINAKAR SUBRAMANIAN</i>	
AN ENCHANTING EVENING OF MUSIC BY SANDEEP NARAYAN	24
<i>RAVI IYER</i>	
SOUNDARYAM – SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM CONCERT REVIEW.....	27
<i>P. SIVAKUMAR</i>	
MY EXPERIENCE WITH SRUTI YOUTH GROUP	28
<i>ANIRUDH VENKATESH</i>	
A JOURNEY INWARD.....	29
<i>RATIPRIYA SURESH</i>	
SRUTI 2022 IN PICTURES	30

BLUE PLANET SERIES.....	34

CELEBRATING M.S. AMMA'S CENTENNIAL YEAR!	40
<i>9-YEAR OLD ADVIKA ANAND</i>	
INFLUENCE OF ŚYĀMĀ ŚĀSTRĪ ON THE COMPOSITIONS OF SUBBARĀYA ŚĀSTRĪ - A SHORT ANALYSIS	41
<i>SRIVIDYA SRIDHAR</i>	
RAGA SUDHARASA - PATH TO JEEVANMUKTHI	44
<i>N CH PARDHASARADHI</i>	
CARNATIC VOCAL CONCERT / LEC DEM ON SHYAMA SHASTRI BY DR. TS SATHYAVATHI	48
<i>SURESH TYAGARAJAN</i>	
SANGITA KALANIDHI T.V. SANKARANARYANAN-IN MEMORIAM-	49
<i>RASIKAN</i>	
MILES TO GO BEFORE I SING: IN DEFENSE OF A LATE MUSICAL EDUCATION	50
<i>BALAJI RAGHOTHAMAN</i>	
SPONSOR LIST FOR 2021/2022	52
CONCERT PATRONS AND LIFE MEMBERS	53

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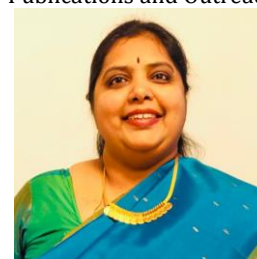
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From the President's Desk

Dear Rasikas:

Welcome to this year's edition of Sruti Ranjani.

At the beginning of 2022, the global pandemic was still in full force, and it was uncertain whether artists from India would be able to travel to the United States. However, the Sruti Board decided that the time had come to return to live programming — and we succeeded in that mission. We were among the first Carnatic music organizations in the country to initiate live concerts. As I look back on the past year, I'm proud of how much we accomplished: a full-fledged season featuring world-renowned musicians performing to packed audiences, not to mention many valuable digital programs. Every member of the Sruti Board worked tirelessly to make this happen, and I am grateful for their support.

Sruti organized seven fantastic live in-person concerts this year. After a long hiatus of three years, it was only fitting that our first live program was our traditional Thyagaraja Aradhana in March at the Delaware temple. The Sruti community attended in large numbers, eager to congregate in person again to pay homage to Saint Thyagaraja.

Very few artists from India were travelling in the spring. So when I received a call from Shashank Subramanyam informing me that he had obtained a visa to travel to the US, it was music to my ears! Shashank kicked off Sruti's Spring season with a wonderful flute recital. The other spring concerts — by Vani Ramamurthy from Los Angeles and Krithika Natarajan from Pittsburgh — showcased the immense talent that we have right in our backyard.

We had a stellar lineup in the fall as well. Ranjani and Gayatri and Sanjay Subrahmanyam drew audiences of over five hundred, resulting in a record number of ticket sales. Since they weren't performing elsewhere in the tri-state area, rasikas traveled from New Jersey, New York, and DC to attend these concerts. As always, Ranjani-Gayatri dazzled us with their beautiful voices, an ingenious RTP, and enchanting abhangs. And Sanjay's daring manodharmam and infectious energy blew us away.

Sruti forged a new partnership with Community Music School to present an electrifying concert by Sandeep Narayan. Sangeetha Kalanidhi Sri Trichy Sankaran's mridangam accompaniment here was unforgettable, and Sruti commemorated his 80th birthday with a special reception. Amritha Murali's concert was yet another delight, steeped in raga bhavam and elegant classicism. All the concerts were packed and ended with standing ovations!

While Sruti was determined to bring back live programming, we also organized a variety of digital concerts to connect with audiences around the globe. January featured a one-of-a-kind digital Thyagaraja Aradhana that has received over three thousand views on YouTube. In February, Dr. Sriram Parasuram presented a brilliant lec-dem on the concept of Nada in Saint Thyagaraja's compositions.

Sruti also made available to its sponsors twenty-one high-quality digital concerts from the Blue Planet series produced by First Edition Arts. For this series, leading artists like T.M. Krishna, Ramakrishnan Murthy, and Abhishek Raghuram performed at various endangered biodiversity zones in India to raise awareness of climate change and sustainability issues. The Blue Planet series received global recognition, and Sruti was one of the leading organizations in the US to support this initiative.

Finally, Sruti organized a three-day online Syama Sastri workshop, taught by renowned musician and Guru Dr. TS Sathyavathi. The workshop was followed by an illuminating digital lec-dem and concert by Dr Sathyavathi in November: a wonderful conclusion for the Sruti 2022 year. We would like to thank PNC Arts Alive Connect for supporting this program.

On the business side, Sruti's revenue from sponsorships and concert patrons increased significantly in 2022 — it's currently the highest it's ever been in the last ten years! Sruti also lowered sponsorship rates in early 2022 due to

the uncertainty around returning to live programming. We successfully broadened our sponsor base to rasikas living in New Jersey and DC.

To promote youth engagement in Carnatic music, Sruti provided a platform for three gifted youngsters (Sahana Sreeram, Rasika Sivakumar, and Meera Ratnagiri) in our Bala Bhavam series. I am happy to report that the Sruti Youth Group has shown great initiative this year, from helping out on the days of the concerts to conducting artist interviews.

As we draw the curtain on 2022, I feel a great sense of joy to see how Sruti has flourished. I am grateful to have had the privilege to serve this organization as President and to work with such a talented, dedicated group of people on the Board. My deepest thanks to P. Sivakumar (President-elect), Venkat Kilambi (Treasurer), Raji Venkatesan (Secretary), Balaji Raghothaman (Director, Resources), Nari Narayanan (Director, Marketing), Lata Suresh (Director, Publications), Lavanya Sambasivan (Director 1) and Rajee Padmanabhan (Director 2). It has been a pleasure working with them.

Finally, I would like to thank our sponsors and our concert patrons for their generous support for Sruti — your contributions are what makes all our programming possible! And I wish the incoming Board under the leadership of Sivakumar the very best.

Musically yours,

Revathi Subramony



From the Publications and Outreach Committee

Dear SRUTI Supporters and Rasikas,

As the cover page by Balaji Raghothaman rightly depicts, SRUTI came out with flying colors in 2022!

While the year 2021 nudged us to reinvent ourselves with a realistic lens for a pandemic situation, 2022 became a year of shifting gears further for our community's camaraderie and synergy to bloom into more on-premise experience of some excellent programming.

SRUTI is currently laying a foundation to make ticketing and admission a more seamless, end-to-end onsite experience for our rasikas in the forthcoming years. In keeping with current trends, SRUTI continues to make strides by looking at state-of-the-art audio / recording technology landscape. We appreciate Dinakar Subramanian's continued efforts for the archival project towards readiness for Mobile / website accessibility. Thanks to Presser grant, Dinkum continues to assist us with Mobile App development, website facelift and SRUTI Radio feature. All in all, we expect these efforts to lead to a user experience in par with the latest.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dinakar Subramanian, Raman Visweswaran, Ramya Ravi and Sindhu Nair for a productive and collaborative journey with valuable outcomes. I would also like to acknowledge the teamwork with my fellow BOD members.

The team successfully released the Thyagaraja Aradhana Souvenir during the 2022 *utsavam*. My sincere thanks to all the volunteers, contributors of quality articles and reviews, that were written and dispatched in a timely manner. The SRUTI Youth Group (SYG) deserves a special mention for their valuable volunteering in key areas of 2022 programming. All of the above passionate volunteering efforts were evidenced by the positive, appreciative feedback we have been receiving from the SRUTI members.

It was indeed a wonderful experience, serving you as the POC Director. Your articles and contributions to our periodicals are always welcome. We encourage you to explore thought-provoking topics and arts-related questions that have piqued your interest. Do not hesitate to take your ideas to your keyboard and send an article to us. We will be delighted to include your expressions in our publications.

Please visit <https://www.sruti.org/publications/> for more information.

Feel free to reach us at publications@sruti.org for any question or suggestion that you may have about SRUTI publications or our website.

We thank all the contributors and reviewers who helped with a successful rollout of this 'Sruti Ranjani 2022' periodical.

Lata Suresh

On behalf of the SRUTI Publications and Outreach Committee

Note on cover design:

*This year marked the re-emergence of activity around the world after the isolation caused by the pandemic. The music and arts world was no different. We chose to commemorate this resurgence in our cover design, with the bird escaping the covid cage and taking flight, spreading its wings. The peacock as the Indian national bird, was a natural choice.-
.Balaji Raghothaman.*



2022 Thyagaraja Aradhana Participants





The Kshetra Kritis of Purandara Dasa

Sriram V

Celebrated as the pitamaha or grandsire of Carnatic Music, Purandara Dasa (1484-1564) was a Haridasa, a devotee of Vishnu. The Haridasa movement itself originated in the 13th -14th century, its growth coinciding with that of the Vijayanagar Empire. All members of the sect were staunch Dvaitin-s, followers of the school of philosophy propounded by Madhvacharya. However, a few Haridasa-s appear to have also expressed thoughts closer to Visishtadvaita, the line of thought propounded by Ramanuja. Very little is known of Purandara Dasa's life, though legends abound. The generally accepted storyline about him is that he was a miserly moneylender of Purandargarh who owing to a powerful catharsis brought about by his wife, became a renunciate who went about from place to place singing the glories of the Lord. The composer himself alludes to such a happening in his composition – Adadella Olite Ayitu – where he prays that his “wife's family increase a thousandfold – because of her I have come to hold the staff, the Haridasa's tambura.”

He became a member of the Dasakuta, a “forum of Dasa-s, a school of servants of Vishnu, organised by Vyasarayana”, and left behind a vast corpus of songs, estimated in his own words, at 425,000 in number. A very small fraction has come down to us, and almost certainly only the words and not the music. The tunes that we hear for his compositions are the work of musicians of the last century. The lyrics reveal Purandara Dasa to be a man of great wit, wisdom and devotion. Forming a bridge between Annamacharya and Tyagaraja, the composer revels in singing of the Gods of the Hindu pantheon – Vishnu and His incarnations, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Parvati, Siva, Ganesa and Anjaneya besides the Guru. There are songs that seem to address a higher power – a supreme being. However most have observations of daily life, the humdrum happenings, in all of which Purandara Dasa sees the divine. Understanding his lyrics in full is the work of many lifetimes. In this he seems to be a role model for Tyagaraja, who in his works paid tribute to this illustrious predecessor in music.

One of the interesting subtopics in the study of Purandara Dasa's works, is the set of songs in praise of various temples or kshetra-s. As he says in his Vasudeva Namavaliya – he, in obedience to his guru Vyasarayana travelled from Kedara to Ramesvaram, singing of the Lord. Though it is the name of Muthuswami Dikshitar that immediately comes to mind when we link songs with temples, it must be remembered that there were others who preceded him in this – the Tamil bhakti poets travelled quite a bit, Annamacharya himself composed at a few shrines, Arunagirinatha was prolific as is evident from his Tirupugazh, King Shahji left behind several compositions dedicated to Siva and Vishnu temples of what is today Tamil Nadu as did Margadrasi Sesha Iyengar. The pioneering composer of pada-s, Kshetraraya too travelled and a few of his songs carry references to well-known temples of Andhra and Tamil Nadu. Purandara Dasa was no exception.

Historically, post the era of the Bhakti poets, we see a hiatus in travel to shrines – this gap occurring roughly during the 13th and 14th centuries. That was a period of strife in South India – the Chola power was weakening and there were many competitors to its mantle. The invasions of the Delhi sultanate added to the confusion. In 1336 we witness the beginnings of the Vijayanagar empire at its eponymous capital, known today as Hampi. Its northward expansion was somewhat chequered but not so its inroads into the south, which began almost at once. Much repair work and renovation began on existing temples, as also vast expansion of these precincts. New gopuram-s, mandapam-s, and prakaram-s came to be built, with new architectural and sculptural elements being added to what was already a rich tradition. The performing arts, like sculpture and architecture, were evolving, with new ideas and concepts. Music therefore followed the same route – it is interesting to see that Annamacharya, Arunagirinatha and Purandara Dasa were all men who lived under the Vijayanagar regime.

With one overarching empire spanning the whole of South India, with the exception of the Malabar region, travel became easier, and probably safer. Routes that had existed from ancient times became better defined with the establishment of villages and markets by their sides. Temples came up where none had existed earlier and became the glue that held the new settlements together. There were rest houses – choultries – constructed through royal grant or built and maintained by merchants who earmarked a part of their earnings for charity. Besides there were also maths or monasteries of various orders that sheltered all kinds of people, from the nobles to the ordinary folk. King Krishna Deva Raya's Amuktamalyada, the poem on the life of Andal may have ostensibly been set in an 8th

century Pandyan kingdom but it was in reality describing the prosperity of Vijayanagar. Reading it reveals a world of incessant travel – someone or the other is on a journey, either to a temple, or to a king's court to settle a philosophical dispute, or an army is on the move, as a prelude to war. Such an amount of travel was made possible only because of an empire.

It was in such an environment that Purandara and other Haridasa-s went, from place to place. His life coinciding with the closing years of the Saluva dynasty and the best period of the Tuluva dynasty meant Purandara Dasa was ideally placed to go about his travels. During his lifetime, Vijayanagar reached its zenith under King Krishna Deva Raya (r 1509-1529) and basked in his afterglow during the reign of Achyuta Deva Raya (1529-1542). Interestingly, Purandara Dasa died just one year before Vijayanagar the capital city was razed to the ground by the confederacy of the five Deccan states in 1565. The kingdom, though it was never the same again, survived for long in a weakened form, eventually vanishing in the 17th century. But Purandara Dasa's songs lived on, to tell us what it was to live, and travel, under the Vijayanagar kings.

It is perhaps best that we begin our journey with Vijayanagar/Hampi itself. The song Kunda Gaura (malahari/rupaka), one of the Pillari gita-s attributed to Purandara Dasa, is a piece that every beginner in Carnatic music learns. Very few appreciate its historicity for the song celebrates the temple to Siva as Virupaksha, the tutelary deity of the city and the empire. Siva here is also known as Pampapati, for the Lord is said to have come down to marry the river goddess Pampa, another name for the Tungabhadra. An eternal spring by name Pampa Sarovara even now exists in the area and is considered sacred to Parvati. Pampa incidentally gives us the name Hampi, given that in Kannada, Pa becomes Ha. Close by is Hemakuta hill, a rocky outcrop, with some shrines of a vintage even earlier to the Vijayanagar empire. In a city full of ruins, the Virupaksha temple is still a live shrine, in worship. Its tall gopura and the long Virupaksha bazaar leading from it, which probably financed the construction and later functioning of the temple, are landmarks. Other than Kunda Gaura, there is also Kande Karunanidhiya, a composition on Siva who is clearly identified as Pampavasi.

If the Virupaksha is a functioning temple, the Vittala shrine is testimony to the greatness of Vijayanagar as a ruin. Begun in 1520 by Krishna Deva, work on this complex continued through the reigns of Achyuta Deva and Sadasiva, coming to an abrupt halt in 1565 when the city was sacked. As in most other Hampi temples, this too has no deity in the sanctum but legends persist that Vittala from Pandharpur was brought here by Krishna Deva for the safety of the icon. The Bhakti tradition of Maharashtra has it that it was Bhanudas Maharaj, great-grandfather of Eknath, who took the idol back to Pandharpur. None of this however has any documentary evidence but if Vittala did reside in this temple, He must have delighted Purandara Dasa no end, for the composer considered this deity to be particularly sacred and used Purandara Vittala as his mudra. It is perhaps no coincidence that just behind the Vittala temple in Hampi is a pavilion known as the Purandara Mandapa. Half-submerged in the Tungabhadra during the monsoons, it is essentially of granite, fifty stone pillars divided into five bays holding up on very rudimentary brackets a stone roof. In one of the pillars is carved an image of Purandara Dasa and it is believed that this was where the composer lived, while in Hampi.

Also in Hampi is the Yantroddharaka Anjaneyaswami Temple, containing one of the 732 Hanuman idols consecrated by Sri Vyasaraya himself. This leader of the Madhva order was preceptor to Krishna Deva Raya and Purandara Dasa. The temple, still in active worship, is accessed with some difficulty, traversing a rocky path that borders the Tungabhadra. At one point the river turns on itself, forming a circle and the spot is known as Chakra Teertha. Just above this is a small shrine to Hanuman. The deity, two armed, is a bas relief and is set inside a star or yantra. All around the star are small bas reliefs of crawling monkeys. It was here that Purandara Dasa composed his Swami Mukhya Prana, a song that after languishing for years, is now making a comeback to the concert platform.

Outside of Hampi, which in Purandara Dasa's time must have been a place forever in a state of construction, Belur was a temple town that was hugely venerated by the rulers and residents of the Vijayanagar empire. The central shrine to Lord Chennakeshava, with its beautiful statues of nymphs all around the sanctum predated the Vijayanagar empire by at least two hundred years, as it was constructed by the Hoysalas. To the Dasa Kuta it was particularly sacred and there are compositions in praise of Chennakesava, the tutelary deity, by other members of the order such as Kanakadasa. Purandara Dasa was no exception. In his song Arige Vadhuvade Ambujakshi, he asks Goddess

Lakshmi a series of questions about her choice of groom. One of the options is Chennikaraya of Belur. His Kande Na Govindana too is in praise of Belura Chennigana.

An interesting song by Purandara Dasa is his Ranga Baro Panduranga Baro, wherein no less than five famed Vishnu shrines are sung of – Pandharpur, Tirumala, Varadaraja of Kanchi, Chenna of Mahishapuri (probably Mysore) and Udupi. The last named was particularly sacred to followers of Madhvacharya and Purandara Dasa seems to have spent quite some time here, given the number of songs of his that are in praise of Lord Krishna in this town. It is to be remembered that the immortal Krishna Ni Begane, attributed to Vyasaraaya, was composed in praise of this deity. Of course, it is his illustrious contemporary, Kanakadasa, who is identified even more closely with this shrine. Noda Banniro Janaru is a song that describes every worship at the Udupi temple, beginning with an early morning darshan lit by torches. Another song, Kande Na Udupiya Krishnarayanna describes the whole of Udupi town.

That the Vijayanagar empire owed its origins to Vidyaranya, one of the preceptors of the Sringeri Sarada Peetham ordained by Adi Sankara is well known. One of the murals on the ceiling of a mandapam at the Virupaksha temple in Hampi depicts Vidyaranya arriving in a palanquin into Vijayanagar. Sringeri was a great beneficiary of Vijayanagar munificence and Purandara Dasa dedicates his Palisemma Muddu Sarade to the tutelary deity of that sacred town.

Probably of historic significance is the composition Kandu Kandu Niyenna, which is on Purandara Vittala at Honnur. There are quite a few Honnurs in Karnataka but the one in Belgavi district has an ancient shrine to Vittala and Rukmini which thanks to the construction of a dam in 1977 remains submerged for most of the year. The deities themselves were shifted to a new temple and are in worship. Purandara Dasa clearly offered his song at the earlier one, which after 45 years in water, remains amazingly intact.

The Vijayanagar empire spanned a vast territory and Purandara Dasa travelled extensively in Telugu and Tamil-speaking areas as well. He, like Annamacharya, sings of Ahobilam in several compositions. The shrine itself is a Divya Desam, one of the 108 Vishnu shrines adored by some of the Azhwars in their Nalayira Divya Prabandham. The temple therefore was in existence even in the 7th century. It rose to prominence under the Kakatiyas of Warangal and thereafter the Vijayanagar kings. Krishna Deva visited it with his two queens prior to his Kalinga war and made offerings. Purandara Dasa too seems to have been here at around this time. His Mahadadi Deva Nama clearly pays obeisance to Prahlada Varada Ahobila Narasimha. His Saranu Saranu Surendra Vandita mentions five different Narasimha-s, including Ahobila Narasimha. It is noteworthy that Ahobilam is one of nine shrines dedicated to Narasimha, all in close proximity. The song may be incomplete, or the text lost and may have originally been intended as a tribute to all nine. Of the five names mentioned, only Ahobila and Jwala Narasimha match with those in worship.

The song, Siva Darusana Namagaayitu is found in the Sri Purandara Mani Malai of Madras Lalithangi and ML Vasanthakumari, set in raga Madhyamavati and tala Adi . It is structured as a set of devotees going to the temple of Mallikarjunaswami in Srisailam. It was a very popular place for pilgrimage and Krishna Deva had visited it immediately after his victory over the Gajapatis and endowed the temple with land and much else. The shrine itself is much older, being a Padal Petra Sthalam – revered in the Tevaram hymns. There is a delectable reference comparing the Lord here to the jasmine that blooms in the evening in Adi Sankara's Sivanandalahari. Being one of the 12 jyotirlingas it also finds mention in his Dvadasa Linga Stuti. To Akka Mahadevi of the 12th century, the Lord here was her spiritual ideal.

The temple witnesses a ten-day Brahmotsavam during Maha Sivaratri, which itself is on the seventh day of this festive period. The wedding of Shiva and Parvati is celebrated that evening. It is to be remembered that this celestial marriage is the most popular legend behind the observance of Maha Sivaratri all over the country. The composition reflects on a just concluded darshan of the Lord. "We have just seen the Lord on Sivaratri," is the burden of the Pallavi. Purandara Dasa uses the word jaagarane – meaning remaining awake – which is part of the observances prescribed for this event. The anupallavi is more specific on the kshetra – "Having bathed in the sin-destroying Patalaganga, we saw the Jyotirlinga and got rid of our daily concerns." Srisailam itself is located on the banks of the river Krishna, which at this spot is known as Patalaganga. It is considered very important to bathe in it before going to the shrine proper. Thus, by combining the reference to Jyotirlinga and the Patalaganga, Purandara Dasa makes it clear that he means Srisailam in this song and no other temple.

The charanam is most interesting as it states that Siva looks at the boon-giving Sarasvati and dances in joy on Nandi. The line as given in the book is Brahmana Rani (the queen of Brahma). But this is clearly either a misprint or an error that has come down the ages. The Goddess at Srisailem is Bhramaramba. She is also referred to as Bhramara Rani – the queen of the bees. Depicted as an eight-armed icon, legend has it that the Goddess took on the form of a bee to kill a demon who could not be vanquished by any two or four-armed creature. The line clearly meant Bhramara Rani which over time became Brahmana Rani. It is significant to note that on Maha Sivaratri day, just prior to the wedding, Lord Shiva here goes around on the Nandi Vahana exactly as Purandara Dasa describes it. In addition, Maha Sivaratri is also associated with the Tandava of Siva, which he performs in the presence of the Goddess.

Tirumala was a shrine very dear to King Krishna Deva Raya. He made many pilgrimages to it and made several endowments when he was blessed with a son, a child who sadly proved short-lived. There is a legend that when Purandara Dasa visited the place he met the aged Annamacharya but this is clearly fiction for the timelines of the two composers do not match. Venkatachala Nilayam is a well-known composition of Purandara Dasa on this hill temple. But there are several others. His Ninna Divya Murutiya is a description of Tirumala for it mentions the Swami Pushkarini, the Varaha shrine, the process of entering the temple proper and ends with a description of the deity with all its ornaments.

Today we may associate Bhadrachalam with Kancharla Gopanna or Bhadrachala Ramadas, the 17th century composer who is said to have renovated and expanded the Rama temple there, but Purandara Dasa visited the place two centuries prior to this. His compositions Baro Barayya Namma Bala Gopala and his Barayya Manege Rangayya Neenu speak of Bhadrachalam and Bhadrachala respectively.

The temple of town of Sholingur is unique for it is home to two massive rocks, on which are shrines to Narasimha and Anjaneya. The latter is unusual for it depicts a Hanuman in deep meditation, and endowed with four arms, the two upper ones wielding the conch and the discus. The town is a Divya Desam and later, Muthuswami Dikshitar would compose his Narasimha Agaccha (Mohanam) and Pavanatmajagaccha (Nata) in praise of the two respective deities. That Purandara Dasa too came here is clear from his Ghatikachaladi Ninda Sri Hanumantha which apart from mentioning the ancient name for the place – Ghatikachalam, also speaks of the sacred tank – Chakra Teertha, the presence of the Narasimha shrine and that the Hanuman here wields the conch and discus.

Not far from here are the great temple towns of Tiruvannamalai and Kanchi. Purandara Dasa visited both. His Karunanidhiye Isa is on the former shrine where Siva is worshipped as fire. The kshetra name of Arunachala is given here as Arunagiri. The temple has tanks in the eight cardinal directions and Purandara Dasa mentions one – Indra Teertham, which is on the eastern side. He also intriguingly refers to the place as Parvathipura for which there is no clarity as of now. At Kanchi, Purandara Dasa composed his Kannara Kande Achyutana, which mentions the Punya Koti Vimana, the canopy under which the main deity is housed. It is not clear if Purandara Dasa came to Thiruvallikeni, the Divya Desam that is now inside Chennai, but his song Barayya Venkatakrishna suggests it to be so, for the deity here goes by this name. There are two verses in this song that speak of Vishnu as Padmanabha and Garuda Vahana – there are two sanctums in the same temple for these manifestations as well.

For his times Purandara Dasa had travelled widely thus far but there was more. Even as the emperor Krishna Deva pushed southwards, the Dasa Koota seems to have followed. Several songs of Purandara Dasa and Kanaka Dasa are on Srirangam, the shrine that the Vijayanagar empire virtually resurrected from the 14th century, after the depredations of Malik Kafur. Ba Ba Ranga Bhujanga Sayana is a song that describes the seven enclosures of the Srirangam temple, its location between two arms of the Cauvery, the Chandra Pushkarini, and the association the place has with Vibhishana. He also seems to have visited Namakkal, famed for a magnificent rock-cut shrine to Narasimha dating to the time of the Pandyas. Vyasaraya installed a Hanuman facing the shrine and behind it, sometime in the 17th century, the Nayaks erected a giant monolith Anjaneya which draws many devotees. Simharupa Nada Srihare is Purandara Dasa's piece on the Narasimha here. It describes carvings in the sanctum most faithfully.

Purandara Dasa's travels seems to have concluded with a place further down the same river – Kumbakonam. The Mahamakam festival had acquired significance by then, for there are hardly any references to it prior to the 15th century. It appears that the Mahamakham was an event of local significance till the time Kumbakonam came under

the Vijayanagar Empire. An inscription at Nagalapuram has it that Krishna Deva Raya made donations to the temple there en route to attending the Mahamakham at Kumbakonam in 1445 Saka era that corresponds to 1523 CE. It is therefore clear that by then it was important enough for the emperor himself to bathe in the waters and make a powerful statement. Purandara Dasa too visited the town though it is not clear if he did so during the Mahamakham festival. His Chandrachooda Siva Sankara Parvati Ramana is dedicated to Siva at Kumbhapura.

For someone who undertook travels in the 16th century, Purandara Dasa's footprint is most impressive. And by recording his impressions in his songs, he passes on valuable history to us. We get to know how the temples were in his time, and then we realise that the same temples still stand, for us to delight in. They, and the songs on them are valuable aspects of our heritage that we need to cherish.

The lyrics for all the songs in this article have been sourced from Sri Purandaradasara Sankirtanegalu, Sri Rama Vittala Trust, Chennai, 2006

¹ Jackson, William J, Songs of Three Great South Indian Saints, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, p 79

² Ibid, p 74

³ Ref the kriti Vasudeva Namavaliya

⁴ For an overall view of the history of Vijayanagar from 1336 to 1565, please see Sewell, Robert, A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar), A Contribution to the History of India, Swan Sonnenschein & Co, London, 1900

⁵ There are plenty of villages in Tamil Nadu that owe their origins to a Vijayanagar-era temple in their midst.

⁶ An excellent sources on the Amuktamalyada for those not familiar with Telugu is Sistla, Srinivas, Sri Krishna Deva Raya Amuktamalyada, Drusya Kala Deepika, Vishakapatnam, 2010

⁷ Four dynasties ruled over Vijayanagar – Sangama (1336-1465), Saluva (1485-1491), Tuluva (1491-1570), and Aravidu (1570-1646)

⁸ For more on this shrine see Gowda, Dr Gowri, Ahobilam, The Sacred Abode of Nava Narasimha, Sri Ahobila Mutt Paramparadheena Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Devasthanam, Universal Publishing, Chennai, 2021

⁹ Lalithangi & Vasanthakumari, ML, Sri Purandara Mani Malai, Vidyashankar Publications, Madras, 1955, p 100

¹⁰ Rao, VN Srinivasa, Tirupati Sri Venkatesvara- Balaji (Origin, Significance & History of the Shrine), Umadevan & Co, Madras, 1949, p 154-156

Sriram V

Sriram V - Music Historian, Writer, and Secretary, The Music Academy, Madras.



Delightful Flute concert by Shashank

Harish Bevinahally

It was great to see our SRUTI music community come together for Shashank Subramanyam's first in-person concert after two seasons of virtual concerts due to the COVID pandemic. Shashank gave a masterful performance at the Fugett Middle School auditorium in West Chester to kick-off the 2022 concert season.

Shashank opened the concert with Saami Ninne Kori varnam in Sri raga and performed with amazing speed and precision. Shashank followed this with a beautiful rendering of Ninnada Nella (Saint Thyagaraja composition) in Kannada. This kriti brought fond memories of late N. Ramani playing this composition. Shashank played the swaraprasthara with a touch of Hindustani mukthaayas, a reminder of his proficiency in both classical forms.

For the next composition, Shashank offered a choice of ragas, Kumudakriya or Sriranjani, and the erudite SRUTI audience selected Kumudakriya. This raga (janya of Panthuvrali) without the panchama, offers a unique melody, but also presents challenges to a flutist while playing the gamakas. Shashank's rendering of alapana and Dikshitar's Ardhanaareeshwaram was graceful. Mysore Srikanth on the violin played Kumudakriya beautifully, inspired by the late maestro Parur MS Gopalakrishnan. Shashank next played his guru KV Narayanaswamy's favorite song Suma Sayaka (a Swathi Thirunal kriti in Karnataka Kapi). Shashank had not played this piece in a while but performed with poise and demonstrated breathing technique that brought out the essence of KVN's vocal music on the flute.

Next item was Raga-Thanam-Pallavi (RTP) in two ragas (Vagadheeshwari and Kambhoji) upon request from the audience, who could not decide on one! The first part was in Kambhoji, set to Mishra chaapu, followed by a brilliant thani avarthanam on the mridangam by Pathri Satish Kumar. Second part of the RTP was in Vagadheeshwari, set to Adi. Vagadheeshwari is a melakarta raga, and Shashank took the audience on a soulful journey (Saint Thyagaraja composed a deeply contemplative song, Paramatmudu, in this raga). Second part of the RTP was followed by another delectable thani avarthanam by Satish Kumar. Shashank treated the audience to melodious ragas and impressive swaraprastharas in the RTP, with capable support from Srikanth and Satish Kumar. Shashank concluded the concert with a bhajan in Desh raga, followed by my mother's favorite song, Venkatachala Nilayam (Purandaradasa kriti for Lord Venkateshwara) in Sindhubhairavi.

Shashank used four flutes and switched them to cover multiple octaves. He used the lower octave flute for the most part and switched to shorter flutes (for higher octave) or longer flute (for the base octave). I would have preferred that he played on the higher octave for the main concert performance. He has mastered the technique of switching flutes (introduced by the flute maestro late N Ramani) to transpose swaras for smooth transition. Shashank also used novel breathing, tongue, and fingering techniques to produce blended octaves, crisp staccato, and vibrations. His gamakas were superb, rooted in vocal training, and his grip on rhythm (laya) was outstanding.

Harish Bevinahally is a Carnatic music flautist and has been a long time supporter and admirer of Sruti.



Shashank's Flute Concert – Another Perspective

Jayaram Sataluri

Live at Fugett Middle School, West Chester, PA (Sruti concert- April 23rd 2022)

Shashank Subramaniam- flute

Mysore Srikanth- violin

Patri Satish Kumar- mridangam

Duration: approximately 2 hours 20 mins

Audience: Approximately 100 rasikas

- 1) sAmi ninnE kOri- Sri, Adi, Karur Devudu Iyer
- 2) ninnADanEla- kannaDa, dESAdi, Thyagaraja
- 3) ardha nArISvaram – kumudakriyA, rUpakaM, Dikshitar
- 4) suma sAyaka- karnATaka kApi, rUpakaM (2 kalai), Swathi Thirunal
- 5) Dual rAgam RT (kAmbhOji & vAgadhISvari)
 - a. kAmbhOji (w/ rAgamAlikA- hindOLaM, kEdAra gauLa, bEgaDa, aThANa) pallavi (about Muruga)- mISra CApu w/ swarams in kAmbhOji)- followed by 2 to 3 min thani by Patri
 - b. vAgadhISvari pallavi (same line as kAmbhOji)- Adi w/ rAgamAlikA swarams (pantuvarALi, bAgEshri, haMsadhvani, mOhanam, hindustAni tODi) followed by 4 to 5 min thani by Patri
- 6) rAma nAmamE- dESh, Adi, Thanjavur Sankara Iyer
- 7) vEnkaTAcala nilayam- sindu bhairavi, Adi, Purandaradasara

This was my first live Shashank concert although I had listened to him throughout the years. He, Mysore Srikanth and Patri Satish Kumar teamed up to deliver a solid start to the 2022 Sruti season which all rasikas joyfully lapped up. The stage was set up differently this time as Mysore Srikanth was to Shashank's right (our left) and Patri was to his left (our right), but was facing the audience at an angle, which helped us enjoy the intricacies of his mridangam playing on both sides.

Shashank thanked Sruti for organizing the concert and was happy he was performing in Philadelphia after a long while. He started off with a short Sri ragam alapana in G sruti and announced that he would render the varnam. He started at 1 ½ speed and brought out the ragam's beauty in the pallavi. When he needed to take a break, he let Mysore Srikanth take charge. After the mukthayi swaram, he repeated in 3rd speed and displayed his mastery. After the pallavi, he played 2nd speed for the charanam and the ettugada swarams twice. He ended with a tara sthayi shadja and Patri finished with a small theermanam.

Then Shashank played a short Kannada ragam alapana where he and Mysore Srikanth focused on the different variations of the ragam. He then announced he would render Ninnadanela and did justice to Thyagaraja's krithi by playing the usual sangatis that we've heard before. But it was the swaraprastara where he shined brightly by combining both mathematics and musicality much to Patri's glee. For the shorter portions, he would end at the ring finger. The audience enjoyed it immensely.

After the captivating Kannada, Shashank gave us two choices of ragams: Sriranjani or Kumudakriya. We chose the latter and Shashank delved into exploring each facet of the ragam and brought different dimensions which I wouldn't have paid attention to earlier. He switched flutes in between. He would bounce between the different notes and at one point I thought I could hear a grahabhedam somewhere. His faster taans were brilliant. After his alapana, Shashank announced the raga's name, what janya raga it was based off of and its characteristics (no panchama and kaakali nishada in the arohanam, but there is kaakali nishada in the avarohanam). As we're all aware, there is only one krithi in Kumudakriya, Dikshitar's Ardhanareeshwaram and Shashank said he would render it. Mysore Srikanth provided a short response which contained the Parur stamp and maintained the solemn mood throughout. The trio then proceeded to render the krithi with serenity and divine bhavam. One could say that the image of Ardhanareeshwaram was vividly visualized by the trio. The charanam especially was charming and I liked how Shashank switched from the small piccolo type flute to the bigger bambooish flute. I'm not too sure if there was a neraval, but the Kumudakriya swarams were entrancing. One just couldn't get enough of them.

Next was Suma Sayaka, one of my favorite Swathi Thirunal krithis and it was wonderful to hear it once again. It brought back memories of listening to recordings of KVN render this with such profundity. And Shashank definitely would have made his late guru proud. He played the swara sahityas twice and made sure they sounded different each time. The Ragamalika was exquisite as always and the trio were in sync. Patri's radiant gumkis stood out. Shashank mentioned it was one of KVN's signature songs that he formally learnt and it was the first time he had played it in decades; he humbly said that he hoped he did justice to it.

Shashank asked us if we wanted to hear Kambhoji or Vagadeeshwari. At first, most of the audience said the latter whereas some wanted the former. But there were a few people (including yours truly) who wanted both and we declared "Both!" out loud. With a smile, Shashank said 50-50 and played a familiar permutation of notes which defined both the ragams; he announced the same to which the audience broke into laughter. Then he proceeded to highlight Vagadeeshwari in the mandra and madhya sthayis and made sure to emphasize Shatsruthi Rishabham. He ended on the tara sthayi and let Mysore Srikanth take over where the violinist responded resplendently by echoing whatever Shashank did and alternating between slow and faster gamakas. When he finished at the tara sthayi, Shashank took over and made a clean transition from Vagadeeshwari to Kambhoji and highlighted the raga in the tara sthayi. He was also playing chords on the flute which made it sound more Western like and bounced between notes during the faster taans. He made another clean transition to the tanam and easily adjusted between the two ragams during each turn. I especially enjoyed when he played kanda gathi in the faster kalams. Mysore Srikanth's responses were subdued yet impressive and he did not falter a bit.

After the tanam, Shashank said although both ragams could be rendered together in equal measure, it would be hard for some of the listeners to differentiate between the two. Therefore, he would render two pallavis: the first would be Kambhoji in Misra Chapu Talam (started at samam) with a pallavi dedicated to Muruga which he sang (I don't remember the pallavi line) and the second one would be the same pallavi line in Vagadeeshwari this time in Adi talam (started at samam). He then played the Kambhoji pallavi in Misra Chapu. In the same pallavi line, he did a Ragamalika for each turn with Mysore Srikanth responding each time. Then he returned to Kambhoji and played the pallavi a few more times before proceeding with the swarams without doing trikalam. Like he did with the Kannada swarams, he did algebraic calculations in the shorter swarams and made them sound beautiful. He let Patri play a short Misra Chapu thani and the enthusiasm of the vidwan was infectious. He played misra gathi briefly and he played an electrifying korvai in 2 speeds which kept us on our toes; Shashank joined during the last turn of the faster speed.

Then Shashank quickly started Vagadeeshwari in Adi talam and played the pallavi line a few times without going into trikalam. He went into the shorter swarams and did Ragamalika for each turn by making sure we were able to identify each of the ragams' phraseology, although the last ragam was a bit tricky to identify. But the swaram finish was stupendous. Patri did slip up a bit towards the end, but made it up with a 4 to 5 min thani where he displayed his speed and control. His kanda gathi was wonderful and his farans, mohara and korvai were terrific. Like always, he picked up the pallavi line in his korvai much to the delight of Shashank who complemented him with his fast taans as Patri finished the pallavi with rousing thunder.

After the tremendous finish of the Vagadeeshwari pallavi and an applause session that lasted 15 to 20 seconds, Shashank proceeded with Thanjavur Sankara Iyer's Rama Namame and the trio went into the bhakti mode. It sounded so heavenly and the grace of Sri Rama appeared in my mind and I murmured His name silently. Next was a short but sublime Sindhubhairavi alapana where Shashank brought out Hindustani pidis and played Venkatachala Nilayam. The bhakti mode was still intact and everyone was in bliss. Just when we thought he would play a thillana or mangalam, Shashank announced the concert was over much to our surprise. Yet we rose up and applauded the trio fervently.

Shashank was in command and displayed his brilliance all around. I was happy he played rare ragams like Kannada, Kumudakriya and Vagadeeshwari, because we wouldn't have heard such unique and shining displays of each ragam. Although I wish he had rendered a dual RTP, he didn't disappoint with 2 separate ones. He combined purity and dexterity and delighted us all. He is on his way to become one of the legends of Bharatiya Sangeetham and we need to encourage him further

Mysore Srikanth was at his supportive best. The Parur school was alive inside him (which I told him after the concert) and one felt the presence of MSG in the auditorium. His responses to Shashank were appreciable where he was able to exhibit the finer attributes of the Parur school. His nimbleness was exceptional and his staccato side was splendid. I had heard him in recordings but never saw him live and was glad to see him.

This is the 5th time I have seen Patri live and he never ceases to amaze. This wizard is already a legend as far as I'm concerned. Layam reverberates from his entire body and soul. His beaming smile, inexhaustible joyfulness and 100% concentration and involvement in the concert is always a sight to behold. He is always in the moment and always enriches every concert he's in. Though his mic is on the higher side, his style which contains a lot of gumki and some tabla phraseology is just magical. I joked to him that it would have been great to have a dual RTP in Panchamukhi Adi talam which he would have aced with flying colors!

The trio was humble and thankful that they got to perform in Philadelphia. They were benevolent to take photos with the audience members at the end of the concert.

Overall, it was a wonderful start to a promising Sruti 2022 season and the rasikas couldn't stop appreciating what the trio delivered. The 2022 season has started with a bang and looking forward to the upcoming concerts this season! the higher

Jayaram Sataluri is an ardent fan of Sruti.



An evening at SRUTI with Krithika Natarajan

Mira Srikanth

On a bright sunny evening, we were looking forward to be drenched in the musical experience by the young and prominent vocalist Smt. Krithika Natarajan. She was accompanied by her life partner and seasoned artist Sri. Rajeev Mukundhan on the violin, as well as yet another accomplished artist Sri. Vinod Seetharaman on the mridangam and Rasika Sivakumar on the tambura. The concert was held at Fugett Middle School in West Chester, PA.

Krithika started the concert with a well-known Adi tala varnam, "Intha modi" in the ragam Saaranga by Thiruvorriyur Thyagayyar. After the soothing Saaranga, she sang the Dikshitar krithi 'Gajananayutham' in the ragam Chakravaham and completed the krithi with a small round of madhyamakala kalpanaswaras.

Next Krithika chose to do a short and beautiful raga alapana in the ragam Nalinakanthi, a janya from Sarasangi, which is the 27th melakarta ragam. Rajeev's elegant and masterful violin brought out even more of the ragam's beauty. The alapana accompanied GNB's "Nee Padhame Gathi" in Nalinakanthi, and she completed with some interesting swara patterns in the kalpanaswaram.

The next piece was "Saranam Raghurama" in the ragam Asaveri composed by Arunachalakavirayar. As an introduction to the piece, Krithika narrated a brief story about the lyrics. Lord Varuna (Rain God) was seeking apologies to Lord Rama. Since he was busy in solving a dispute between the fishes, he couldn't come immediately when Lord Rama called him to leave way to cross the ocean on the way to Sri Lanka in search of Mother Sita. This is song is part of the Ramanatakam series by Arunachalakavirayar. That was a beautiful composition, rendered by Krithika with utmost perfection, and we all were submerged deep into this chauka kaala krithi. "Marugelara," yet another popular krithi on Lord Rama by Sri Thyagarajar, was the next krithi before Krithika moved on to the main piece of the concert.

Varali--A melody that reminds one of a "bee's humming." Krithika started the raga alapana in this ragam which Rajeev followed so gracefully and thoroughly, making the audience feel complete satisfaction. Krithika selected the song "Eti Janmamidi", one of Thyagarajar's precious gems. Though the krithi has four charanams, she chose to sing the fourth one which has the composer's signature, and the neraval was performed at "Sagara shayanuni." An excellent round of kalpanaswaram was followed in different speeds. Again, Rajeev and Vinod beautifully supported the swara patterns which was much appreciated by the audience. Vinod's thani was exhilarating and added a beautiful shine to the main piece.

The next piece, "Vaanchathonuna" in the ragam Karnaranjani was so emotive. It was a filler before the RTP

(Ragam Tanam Pallavi) in the ragam Mohanakalyani set to misra jathi Triputa talam (Dwi nadai) with the poorvankam in tisram and uthrankam in kadam. The pallavi of choice was "Ramanai raghuveeranai nidhamum nee ninai mohana kalyana sita," which was reminiscent of Krithika's current gurus Ranjani & Gayathri's concert in 2019 for Sruti, in which they had also chosen this pallavi. The pallavi and the kalpanaswaras were rendered so beautifully by Krithika and she so clearly and cleverly did grahabedham, blending into Abheri and slowly moving to Sindhubhairavi. It was very commendable and showed her eminent proficiency in this Divine art. Vinod then played a short and crisp thani with such complex talam, which was a truly mesmerizing experience for all of us.

"Theruvadheppo" in the ragam Kamas, the Surdas bhajan "Gopigopalabala" in the ragam Gamanashrama, and "Sharade karunanidhe" in the ragam Hamir Kalyani were some thukkadas she sang before she concluded the concert with Lagudi's Sindhubhairavi thillana and mangalam.

It was such a memorable and enjoyable concert where all the three artists excelled in their respective ways, giving the audience a blissful experience and complete satisfaction.

Mira is a passionate, devoted music lover and teacher.



Concert Review – Bala Bhavam Violin Concert by Sahana Sreeram

Gayatri Ram

The concert by Sahana Sreeram and team marked the restart of the Bala Bhavam series after the pandemic lull. She started off with the Kedaram varnam Chaala ninnE by Sri Tiger Varadachari, which gave the concert an irresistible initial momentum.

A good sketch of Dwijavanthi preceded Muthuswami Dikshitar's sublime composition Chetasri balakrishnam with telling musical phrases in alapanas and swara sallies. A brisk rendition of Swati Tirunal's Bhogindra Shayinam in Kuntalavarali, set to Khanda chapu talam, with rapid swara passages came next in quick succession.

The main piece was the celebrated Nidhi chala sukama with an outline of the raga kalyani presented with utmost fidelity to the sahitya aspect. This grand composition of Syama sastri is commonly heard in instrumental concerts and Sahana did full justice to it with the right Kaalapramaanam. The kalpanaswaras brought out the many hues of the raga.

The concluding piece Bharatiyar's Chinnanchiru kiliye in the usual Ragamalika had the audience humming.

The percussionists - Srihari (Mridangam) and Samyuktha (Ghatam) - supported the artist finely with a good sense of anticipation and imagination. Their Tani for the main kriti was neat and matching the mood of the recital. These young musicians regaled the audience with their superlative performance which set the stage for the main concert of the day.

Gayatri, an ardent rasika of music, learnt music in her formative years in India. She holds a Masters Degree in Computer Science and currently works in the Software Industry.

Vani Ramamurthy – Thyagaraja Aradhana Concert

Dinakar Subramanian

Violin - Rajeev Mukundan; Mridangam - Keerthi Venkataramani

Sruti presented Vani Ramamurthy, a US based artist for the Thyagaraja Aradhana featured concert on March 26, 2022 at the Delaware temple in Hockessin. This was the first in-person concert for 2022 as part of the two-part Thyagaraja Aradhana celebration by Sruti.

Vani started with a soulful - nannu brOva nIkinta in AbhOgi. She seemed tentative with her kalpanaswarams displaying a bit of nervousness. A rAgA exposition in sAveri followed that still showed a bit of nerves and the kriti - balamu kulamu was well rendered. Vani then started the kalyANi kriti - amma rAvamma without any AlapanA with the neraval at the common caraNam phrase - tAmarasa daLa nEtri. The tArasthAyi notes of the neraval could have been sung a bit crisper and exposed a bit of sruti misalignment. The kalpanaswarams were ably presented with Rajeev Mukundan providing excellent support. A calming nIlAmbari - nIkE daya rAka was sung with a measured speed and azhuttham giving the kriti and the rAgA its due. This was followed by the varaLi kriti - karuNayElAgANTE.

Tanayuni brOva in bhairavi was the main piece of the concert. The rAgA improvisation was brilliant in parts. Rajeev's bhairavi was solid and gave a sense of listening stability to me compared to Vani's AlapanA. The kalpanaswarams for this piece were very meticulously done and in my opinion was where Vani shone the best in the whole concert. A competent tani by Keerthi rounded out the elaborate piece.

Being the occasion of Thyagaraja Aradhana and keeping with the spirit of rendering Utsava sampradaya kritis, Vani melodiously rendered all 4 caraNams of SObhanE in pantuvarALi with great evocative feeling and lovely sancarAs. The concert ended with a lively kamalApta kula in bRndAvanasAranga. Overall, a good concert for the occasion and I hope that Vani gets to showcase her talent on the Sruti stage in the future.

Dinakar Subramanian is a long-time Sruti supporter living in Audubon, PA.

Homecoming sorta

Prabha Subramaniam and M.M. Subramaniam

On October 8, we had the pleasure of attending the Sruti concert of Amrutha Murali.

We have over the years attended many Sruti concerts, but this felt different. Though we moved from Pennsylvania to Maryland in October 2019, as members of Sruti Parivar, we had hoped to attend as many Sruti events as possible. Indeed, we came for the Sruti day in December 2019. But then the Covid-19 pandemic struck disturbing many of our lives.

Sruti, like many other Arts organizations, found ways to work around the pandemic by organizing online events. Sruti boards did commendable jobs with those programs including the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana. While they were all good, they could not accord the same pleasure as live concerts.

Thus, when the Board decided to offer live programs this year, we wanted to attend some of them. For many reasons we missed this year's Spring concerts. Hence, the Amrutha Murali concert held special significance for us. The presence of R.K. Shriramkumar (Violin) and Arun Prakash (Mridangam) was an additional incentive. We have known all these musicians for years.

A bonus was being able to enjoy the Bala bhavam concert of Rasika Sivakumar. As a child she often sat next to us and listened patiently as her father and mother performed on the stage.

In keeping with the Sruti tradition, the concerts started on time; the auditorium was very good, with comfortable seats; the sound system and amplification were top-notch; the music was of a high caliber and we all enjoyed the fare.

It was like a homecoming for us, to meet and enjoy the company of so many of our friends after a long time. It was also wonderful visiting with many of our friends. It was also great to meet the past as well as the current Sruti Board members. They have all been doing remarkable jobs under extraordinarily trying circumstances to continue to keep Sruti going.

Hopefully we will meet more often in the future. In the meantime, keep up the good work, SRUTI.

Prabha Subramaniam and M.M. Subramaniam are pioneers of the SRUTI organization and have provided the impetus for several subsequent teams to successfully carry the torch forward.



Ranjani Gayatri Concert

Rajee Padmanabhan

A Carnatic vocal concert by Vidushi Ranjani and Vidushi Gayatri with co-artists Vidwan L.Ramakrishnan and Vidwan Manoj Siva flagged off Sruti's fall programming for 2022.

Mysore Vasudevachar's Gambhirnattai krithi Girijaramana got the concert off to a brisk start. Rangapuravihara in Brindavanasaranga, clearly an audience favorite, was received with applause as soon as it started. The kriti was sung with the usual panache that has become the trademark of RaGa sisters. This rasika was certainly in a tiny minority who, having heard this kriti in their last concert for Sruti, wished another Dikshitar kriti would have taken its place. Vidushi Ranjani presented a sensitive Todi Raga Alapana, cleverly hinting at the kriti to follow. Vidwan L Ramakrishnan's violin, with its remarkably smooth tone encapsulated Todi beautifully, eliciting appreciation from Vidushi Gayatri. Papanasam Sivan's Tanikaivalar Saravanabhava in Khanda Chappu was the chosen kriti. During this kriti, there was an unfortunate audio glitch that caused an interruption, but the beautiful Neraval that followed compensated for the break in the flow. The charanam line "tuLLi viLaiyADi varum tOgai mayil mElE", lends itself so well to Niraval with its imagery - literally meaning "Upon the peacock, playfully dancing with its fully spread plumage". The Neraval had very interesting zigzagging patterns, especially in the faster speed, that musically painted the picture of the words to a T. Vidwan Manoj Siva's excellent anticipation in the Niraval enhanced the experience. The kalpanaswarams in the faster speed were full of verve. Raga Ranjani was taken up for elaboration by Vidushi Gayatri. In Gayatri's dulcet voice, this pleasing, asymmetric pentatonic raga was caressed and cajoled into a full shape. Ramakrishnan's response was equally sweet and brimming with melody. Saint Tyagaraja's masterpiece, "Durmarga charadhamulanu dora nivana jalara" was followed by a sprightly "Irabeku Haridasara Sanga", a Purandaradasa pada in Bahudari raga.

The stage was set for the piece de resistance of the concert - a Ragam Tanam Pallavi (RTP) that brought out the incredible imagination, mastery of technique and depth of artistry of these phenomenal musicians. The RTP was delineated in three ragas - Sri, Neelambari and Bindumalini- set to the tala Rendu Kalai Khanda Jhampa ((5+3)x2 = 16 beat cycle) in Tisra Nadai (3 units per beat). Sometimes there comes a time in a concert, the artists have entered into 'Flow' and drawn the audience along into that magical zone where there is total sync. In this concert, that point was during the alapana of the RTP, as Ranjani, Gayathri brilliantly and seamlessly transitioned from Sriragam to Neelambari to Bindumalini in the alapana with the full violin support of Ramakrishnan. Then there was no looking back. Tanam sparkled with alternating staccato and flowing, continuous phrases. Vidushi Gayatri explained the theme encoded in the Pallavi line as the concept of numbers - Ekakshari Sri Bhuvaneshwari (Sri) Padadvaya Prabhajale (Neelambari) Tripurasundari Mam Pahi (Bindumalini). After extensive Niraval for the Pallavi line, kalpanaswarams were done in each raga with the take off point (eduppu) matching the point of the corresponding lyric in that raga. Vidwan Manoj Siva played a brilliant tani replete with tisra patterns. Executing flawlessly on such a complex RTP is the most formidable task an artist faces and this team of artists proved that they are on top of their game.

As a commemoration for the legend Vidwan T V Sankaranarayan, a signature piece of his bani, Eppo varuvaro was aptly chosen. A beautiful virutham, Thayirchiranda dayana thattuvane, in a ragamalika of Simhendramadhyamam, Malayamarutham and Jonpuri preceded the song with its inimitable sangathis.

Harisaranemado in a lilting Yamunakalyani came before their signature Abhang Pandaricha Bhooth Mote. Vidushi Ranjani and Vidushi Gayatri, being Mumbai natives, bring such authenticity to their Abhang renditions, from both enunciation and presentation angles. Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar's beautiful Paras Tillana, excellently supported by Manoj Siva, was the final piece to this three hour concert that elicited a prolonged standing ovation from a rapt audience of nearly six hundred people!

Rajee Padmanabhan is an ardent rasika and student of Carnatic Music. Rajee has been a long-standing member of Sruti and finds a true sense of community within the Sruti family.



Amritha Murali

Arvind Lakshmikanthan

Rasikas in and around Philadelphia were treated to another delightful concert in the fall of 2022. Amritha Murali on vocal, RK Shriramkumar on violin and Arunprakash on mrudangam displayed a lot of poise when they performed on the evening of October 8, 2022 for Sruti. Their concert highlighted the importance of planning and succinctness in making any performance very successful and fulfilling.

Amritha started her concert with Muthuswamy Dikshitar's Vallaba Nayakasya in Begada, with many short phrases of kalpanaswarams. Being the first concert of their US tour for the season, this raga, with its unique madhyama and nishada swaras, enabled the artistes to settle in nicely and build the stage for what was to come for the next three hours.

Merusamana, a composition of Thyagaraja, in Mayamalavagowla was taken up next. Methodical in her approach for neraval at 'kalamuna sobillu', Amritha transitioned nicely to kalpanaswarams. The scale of the ragam and the ascending as well as descending phrases in the composition also provided a platform for the artistes to get comfortable in the different octaves. The brisk swara patterns and kuraippus were rendered smoothly. Having warmed up well, Amritha then presented Badalika Dheera in Reetigowla. Coming right after a 'two-kalai Adi thalam' kriti, and also rendered at a slow pace, Amritha knew exactly how to handle the piece with all the anuswarams beautifully packaged. This is where both Shriramkumar and Arunprakash, with their tremendous understanding of importance to sahityam, shadowed Amritha to embellish the magnificence of the composition.

After an elaborate alapana of ragam Kalyani, Amritha rendered Talli ninnu nera, a composition of Shyama Sastri. The clarity with which alapana phrases were presented showed Amritha invests a lot of time to obtain swarasthana-suddham. It was clear she applies a lot of learning and experience from also playing the violin. Shriram followed up with a nice alapana. Packaging this with nereval and kalpanaswarams with kuraippus, the artistes came together nicely to present this composition. This was followed by a Sahana composition of Muthuswamy Dikshitar, Sri Kamalambikam. Rendered with a lot of bhakthi, emotion and with tremendous clarity, it was clear the audience were moved by this presentation. Here again, Arunprakash showcased the importance of subdued playing for a composition like this.

After a brisk Saravana Bhava Guhane in Kannada, Evari Mata in Kambhoji was taken as the main piece for the evening. After an elaborate alapana and rendering the kriti, the line Sakthi gala Mahadevudu was chosen for neraval. With all the hallmarks of Kambhoji, Amritha and Shriram exchanged nicely structured kalpanaswarams. Arunprakash followed up with a crisp thani, incorporating kanta nadai phrases.

RTP in Kapi followed soon after rendering a composition of Purandaradasa, Venkataramanane Baro. Set to Kanta thrupada thalam with pallavi line starting two notes prior to samam, the artistes were very comfortable at this stage of the concert. Amritha presented ragamalika swarams in Behag and Dwijavanthi, while Shriram reciprocated with swarams in Nilambari and Jonpuri, both drawing a lot of applause from the audience.

Amritha then presented Sharadhe Karunanidhe, a composition of Shri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal. A lilting piece in Hamirkalyani and set to tune by Shriramkumar, this composition demonstrated Shriramkumar also as an excellent Vaggeyakara.

After presenting an abhang, Sundara tey Dhyana, Amritha concluded the concert. Laden with bhavam, bhakthi and with emphasis on purity, this was an excellent concert overall!

Arvind L. is a violinist and an ardent supporter of SRUTI.



Bala Bhavam Review: Rasika Sivakumar, Bhargav Tumkur, and Srikar Chittari

Priyanka Dinakar

On October 8th, 2022, Rasika Sivakumar gave a concert for Sruti's Bala Bhavam series with a robust song selection. She was accompanied by Bhargav Tumkur on the violin and Srikar Chittari on the mridangam. Overall, the team of three performers emphatically complemented one another throughout the concert.

Rasika began with a few phrases of alapana in the ragam Kannada to both highlight the ragam and to lead into the tara stayi shadjam before starting the varnam Sami Idi Vela by Patnam Subramania Iyer. Both Srikar and Bhargav provided strong support from the onset to respectively highlight the intrinsic laya and wide swara range of the composition. As an initial example of the three performers complementing one another, in the first line of the last chitta swaram of the varnam, Rasika staggered the first note 'Sa' by one aksharam, a shift that both Srikar and Bhargav picked up on, thereby accentuating the 'Ma' halfway through the avartanam – all three shared a smile at this small detail.

As a change to the upbeat Kannada ragam, Rasika launched into a few phrases of alapana in the ragam Shanmukhapriya (or Chamaram in the Muthuswami Dikshitar school), to similarly highlight the range of the ragam across stayis. To provide a contrast to the varnam in layam also, the kriti Siddhi Vinayakam Anisham by Muthuswami Dikshitar, was notably slower. Rasika began kalpanaswarams for the line 'prasiddha ganayanayakam,' a complex edam for swarams, as the sahityam begins an aksharam before the samam. Both Rasika and Bhargav exchanged a few rounds of swarams, including a short initial korvai and a final, tapered 83 aksharam korvai, a creative way to wrap up the swaram rounds.

The next piece was Thyagaraja's composition Nenendu Vedukudura in the ragam Karnataka Behag. After a brisk rendition of this kriti, Rasika began kalpanaswarams for the kriti at the line 'hari nenendu,' at the last two aksharams before the samam, rather than at the samam itself. This added complexity made for a more engaging exchange of swarams between Rasika and Bhargav. Srikar's playing added an extra element of emphasis to Bhargav's playing to clearly demarcate phrases of swarams that were grouped together.

To frame the next kriti, Sivakama Sundari by Papanasam Sivan, in the ragam Mukhari, both Rasika and Bhargav performed in-depth alapanas to highlight the ragam. For manodharmam, both Rasika and Bhargav exchanged kalpanaswarams for the charanam line 'kelayo en muraigal', with Srikar highlighting both the sarvalaghu, or free-flowing, and kanakku, or calculated, aspects of the swarams. Rasika completed her swarams with an elaborate korvai, which was underscored by Srikar's playing.

Finally, Rasika sang the kriti Paramatmudu in the ragam Vagadeeshwari. The kriti was framed by a weighty alapanas by both Rasika and Bhargav, and what stood out to me was the ease with which both performers handled the vivadi swarams while bringing out the ragam. Bhargav's alapana alluded to multiple swara phrases in the kriti, such as the 'Ni Da Ni Da' of the anupallavi line 'hariyata.' The neraval and swarams were for the charanam line of 'gagananila tejo jala.' The swarams also included a two rounds in tisra gati and khanda gati, to add an extra dimension to the manodharmam. Srikar's tani avartanam rounded out the concert to show his dexterity in addition to his ability to highlight key components of the vocal and violin performances.

Overall, this was a very good Bala Bhavam performance with a focus on heavy kritis and manodharmam. All of the performers on stage have a bright future ahead of them in music.

Priyanka Dinakar grew up in the Philadelphia area, deeply benefiting from Sruti's concerts and community, and has been a student of Carnatic for 20 years. She currently lives in Washington, DC and works in marketing analytics for a decision intelligence start-up.



A melodious evening with Sandeep Narayan

Dinakar Subramanian

There is a special joy in enjoying a live Carnatic music concert with brilliant musicians. That joy was compounded on October 15, 2022 in the cozy atmosphere of the Community Music School auditorium in Trappe, Pa. Performing for Sruti were Sandeep Narayan, VVS Murari, Sangita Kalanidhi Trichy Sankaran and KV Gopalakrishnan. All have performed for Sruti earlier.

There was excitement in the air right from the snippet of srlI ragam that Sandeep sang. Rasikas who listened to him at the same venue almost exactly 5 years ago were eager to see what would unfold. The eternal Karur Devudu Iyer's varnam pretty much glued the audience to their seats.

Declaring that the next rAgam was riSabriyA, Sandeep sang a BMK (M. Balamurali krishna) composition titled - nandiISam vandE sadA - a reference to Nandi - the mridangam playing vahana of Lord Siva. The haunting kriti also had the anupallavi line - sAmagAna kaLAnidhim shabhda shAstra pravINam, undoubtedly referring to maestro Sangita Kalanidhi Sankaran's presence on stage. The phrase roughly translates 'a treasure of art in sAmagAna (the precursor of Carnatic music) and an expert in the field of sound'. Very fitting indeed.

The kalpanaswarams were craftily designed and Sandeep made the audience vicariously participate in them with great flair. Violinist Murari came into his own matching the vigorous improvisations that redoubled my enjoyment. On a side note, this kriti, due to its structure, also reminded me of BMK's other Sanskrit composition cintayAmi santatam in sucaritA that he composed on Muthuswami Dikshitar's bicentenary celebration at the Music Academy in 1975. One of my favorite activities when presented with a rAga Alapana is to guess what kriti will be rendered. A relatively short exposition of kAmbOji suggested it would not be shrI subrahmaNyAya namastE. Sandeep sang EmayyA rAmA - a lovely kriti of Bhadrachala Ramadasu that we have not heard in Sruti perhaps ever. Memories of listening to this kriti sung by the great Neduneri on All India Radio in my younger years came to mind.

An elaborate sAramati followed with Sandeep going into a zone of showering us with sancharas. Guessing that the kriti was Thyagaraja's mOkshamu galadA, I thought to myself that the pace of the alapana did not match the sedateness of the composition. Enjoy each piece as its whole, I told myself.

Sangita Kalanidhi Sankaran then took center stage in an elaborate tani where he showed his mastery and defied his age. The denouement brought everyone to their feet with pure joy and prompted Sandeep to say what everyone was thinking - "Cannot believe he is 80'. What a moment to savor for everyone in the audience - having witnessed a stellar tani avartanam by such a great artist on our Sruti stage.

KV Gopalakrishnan showed his mettle by going in lock-step with Shri Sankaran giving the appropriate edification and playing his part for the crescendo. Murari played a beautiful anchor role with his mellifluous bowing and his alapana for kAmboji was especially superb that it took me to a different place.

Sandeep then concluded with a few other pieces including a short RTP in sAmA. As I compiled my thoughts at the end of the day, here were some observations: The artists had fun on stage and the camaraderie on stage was contagious. This resulted in a synergy whose ultimate benefactor was the audience. Sandeep has such a captivating disposition both as a person and a performer that you cannot but go into his world and enjoy the music. He makes you participate and that is a great credit to his personality and stage presence.

The artists also gave the requisite respect to seniority, experience and just pure class by acknowledging Sri Sankaran's vidwat by unreservedly applauding at the right moments. Truly an experience to behold for everyone. The cozy atmosphere at the CMS auditorium where the artists could see everyone in the audience fed on each other that the artist gave their best and the audience did their part to wholeheartedly appreciate the concert.

Another repeated and pleasant observation is that the reach of artists is so powerful in that the concert itself draws their students and families from outside of the usual listening area. This really creates a good cross-pollination of

ideas and creation of friendships. This could be a beneficial side-effect of people wanting to attend more concerts after the lock-down we have experienced in the past two years.

All of us left with a big smile on our faces and reverberations of some lovely music.

Dinakar Subramanian is a long time resident of the Philadelphia area, an avid rasika and musician and has served in various capacities on the Sruti Board.

An Enchanting Evening of Music by Sandeep Narayan

Ravi Iyer

At the outset, it should be stated that reviewing a kutcheri featuring the legendary mridangist Sangita Kalanidhi Sri. Trichy Sankaran is superfluous. So what I note here is my observation of the concert as a listener, student & enthusiast of percussion and rhythm, and a connoisseur of Carnatic music. So in that sense, for the sake of records, it is my honor to write a review of a concert by Sri Sandeep Narayan accompanied by a stellar team of Sri VVS Murari, Sri Trichy S. Sankaran, and Sri K.V Gopalakrishnan (KVG) held on October 15th, 2022, at the community music school, Trappe PA. This concert was also a celebration of the 80th birthday of Mridangam virtuoso Shri Trichy Sankaran and what a privilege it has been for Philadelphians and Sruti members who were fortunate to attend the live concert featuring Professor Dr. Sri Trichy Sankaran, (Sankaran mAmA as we fondly call him), a torch bearer of the legendary Pazhani School (also known as the Pudukkottai bani). Those who could not make it to the concert really missed a memorable evening. While the review provides an overview of the concert, it will focus a little more than usual reviews, on the rhythmic and laya aspects given a) significance of the concert and b) being an mridangam and laya enthusiast myself.

Sandeep opened the concert with the varnam “Sami Ninne” in ragam “Sri” composed by Karūr Dēvuḍu Iyer rendered in two speeds. The tone for the remainder of the concert was set by this brisk pace and the camaraderie of the team. Off the bat, one could not miss the ringing and vibrant harmonics of the “chappu” and “meetu” that filled the hall throughout the concert. The weight and consistent resonance emanating from the playing of the Chappu and the “ara” Chappu (half or sliced chappu) is a learning for any student pursuing the art of mridangam. This was followed by a madhyama kala composition “Nandisham Vande sada” of Dr. Balamurali Krishna in ragam Rishabhapriya set to Rupaka thalam. Rishabhapriya is the 62nd melakatha raga (the prati madhyama counterpart of raga Charukesi.) which is not frequently heard, though not a rare raga. His effort in demonstrating Rishabhapriya ragam was applauded by the rasikas. The highlight of the rendition was the kalpana swaras with an Atheeta eduppu (½ before samam) at “Saptaswara Rishabhapriyam”. The teermanam or muktayi was played to reflect the structure of the lyrics Nandisham Vande Sada.

The most important composition that is a definitive authority on Saramati is ‘Mokshamu galada’ of Saint Thyagaraja. Sandeep picked this composition as the highlight or the main piece for the evening. The raaga per se was rendered well. Sandeep brought about the melting and meditative characteristics of this raga with the distinctive phrases SRGS/DNS, and PDMGS, that sums up its mood. Sandeep’s crystal clear voice trained to sing in an open throated style with a range touching the panchamam in lower register to the Dhaivata in upper register during raga alapana and kalpana swara is worth a separate mention. The song itself was rendered at a leisurely pace. Sandeep took off from the anupallavi, “sAkSAtkAra nI sadbhakti sangIta jnAna vihInulaku”, at a high pitch. This lent both passion and majesty to the song. Delineation of this raga, and this piece in particular, evoked karuna rasa and bhakti rasa.

The kalpana swaras were rendered for vINA vAdana lOludau. String of phrases in vilamba kalam ending with Gandharam such as PDMG, NDMG, DMG, MPDMG, SPMG, was very lilting. Swara exchanges of fast phrases and kuraippu was followed by a crisp and short Thani Avarthanam.

As an mridangam enthusiast and an ever learning student of rhythm and percussion, I will be remiss if I don't shed some light in the rhythmic aspects of the concert especially in the thaniavarthanam section which consisted of an introductory stage, middle stage that involved change of pace or gati bhedams, and the concluding stage. The focal point or the eduppu, in this case "One after" samam chosen and elaborated upon by Sandeep for niraval and kalpana swara became the targeted point of return for mAmA's and KVGs rhythmic sequences. After a few avarthanas of phrases by mAmA, the korvai (which literally means strung together) played was a GoPucha Yati (which involves reduction or diminution like a structure of a cow's tail) in the Poorvanga followed by a variety of kanda (5), Thisram (6), and Mishram (7) Srotavaha Yati, in the Uttaranga. The final structure looks like a "Damru" so can be classified under a Damru Yati

To illustrate:

Tha tham kita dhin Thom tha dhin
Kita dhin thom tha dhin,
dhin thom than dhin,
thom tha din
tha
tha dhi gi na thom
thaDi GiNaThom
tha di Gi Na thom Thangu
thadi GiNa thom thadi GiNathom Thangu
(thadiGiNathom thadiGiNathom thadiGiNathom)*

*played in Thisram

When planning the second and third time the Uttaranga part is substituted by Tha di, Gi Na thom (6) and Tha, Dhi, Gi Na thom (7) respectively.

KVG responded to the call and action by setting up the korvai in similar fashion, however varied the structure by playing the thisram variation (of 5,6,7) once in the middle giving a different aesthetic flavor to the Korvai.

Then came my favorite part when mAmA set up the gati bhedam to Thisra Nadai by introducing the phrase "Dhin Kita thaka dhin, dhin dhin Tham Kitathaka, Din Thaku Dhin Tha ku Dhin, Tha Tha dhin...."

After introducing this pattern few times with different end variations, he began improvising by playing the thisram phrases in different speeds to accommodate different numbers of (THa Di, GiNa Thom (6); Thaka Tha Di, Gina thom(8); Thaka Dhiku THa Dhi, GiNA thom (10)). KVG responded ably by playing the thisram but ending with a misra nadai korvai that goes like this:

Tha Dhin Thadhin Tha ,,,

Thaka din thadin tha,,,

Kita dhin tha din tha,,,

(Tha dhin tha din_Thaka din tha din_Kita Din tha din) x 2

(Tha di, Gina Thom, Thaka Tha Di, GiNA thom, Thaka Dhiku Tha Dhi, Gina thom) x3

mAmA then played the sarva Laghu patterns in madhyama kalam crescendoing into the fast tempo with fast tempo phrases. This segment featured podi sorkal "Micro or minute syllables" a specialty of Sankaran mAmA. He ended this round with another Korvai traversing chatusram and thiram. KVG responded with a well-played fast phrases and equally challenging Korvai.

The Avarthana Kuraippu (cyclic reduction) indicating impending finale of the Thani, was a Chatusra kuraippu with glimpses of Mishra, Thisra, Kanda nadais, short korvais culminating in fast phrases in ½ cycles. Both mAmA and KVG kept audience excited with electrifying flow patterns, a pharan (fast rhythmic pattern), improvising upon them and

finally concluding with a Thisra Nadai mora and the final Korvai repeated three times. The final Korvai played was such that it would reach the 'eduppu' only on conclusion of the third round when Sandeep and VVS Murari joined by singing the phrase vINA vAdana lOludau and thereby indicating the end of the solo.

Forget the math or calculations that can be easily memorized and reproduced by almost anyone, but the clarity of each and every syllable and the precision with which falls can only be attained by Sadhana and experience which mAmA has a galore of starting from age 4 and a debut with his guru Sri Palani Subramania Pillai the age of 11. His vivacity and clarity of playing defies his age, and as rightly commented by Sandeep after the thani, "Didn't feel like an 80 year playing". His playing brought out expressions ranging from subtle sounds of cooing of cuckoo [(on the thoppi (left side of the mridangam))] to thundering bolts of lightning imbibing Palani sir's style (the Pudukkottai bani) known for delectable designs of patterns, yet creating his own signature for the generations to learn from. Needless to say, the thaniavarthanam by Sankaran mAmA and KVG received tremendous applause and standing ovation.

Next on the cards was a melody taken up for vinyasa in Kambhoji rāgam (Emayya Rama — Bhadrachala Ramadas) set to Kanda Chapu Thalam. Sandeep revealed the identity of the raga in his opening phrases and was dealt in a leisurely manner initially, which was impressive with some adventurous phrases during the latter part of elaboration. The Neraval and kalpanaswaras were aptly sung at the charanam followed by a sama kuraippu in Kanda Chapu culminating in an interesting korvai. At times, Sankaran mAmA and KVG played the Sarvalaghu of 4*5 = 20 providing sowkhyam and cross pattern effect. He used the thoppi to great effect and in some instances he played the exact swara's sung by the vocalist by exerting varying amounts of pressure on the thoppi while appropriately playing on the valantalai (the right side of of Mridangam).

The team rendered a short RTP explored with sAmA as the main ragam. It was very clever in the choice of the ragam and the lyrics (SaMAja Vara Gamana) to recognize, acknowledge their tour sponsor, SaMaa Arts LLC. There were moments of magic that VVS Murari created when delineating the ragas. The pallavi lyrics were set to Mishra Chapu thalam with a 'Eduppu' one after (ThakaDhimi) the samam. Two other Ragas that were explored were bhaagEshri and Kedara Gaula. There was short mora and Korvai at the end of this RTP.

The concert wound down with aaDum chidhambaramO a composition of Gopala Krishna Bharati in ragam behaag followed by an amazing presentation of the bhajan Gopala Gokula vallabhi written by saint Tulasidas in Adi talam set to tune by Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna. I had not heard the rendition of this bhajan in Carnatic concert for a long time. This bhajan in praise of Gopala, was rendered melodiously by Sandeep perhaps virtually disabling the lord to go anywhere else, but to listen to him. It was so divine, so melodious, so soothing!!! One can see a distinct change in the approach to playing for this bhajan by the Maestros Sankaran mAmA and KVG. The use of thoppi and Gumuki elevated the song to a different level.

The concert concluded with pUrvi Thillana in Rupaka tala composed by T.Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar and Mangalam. This thillana employs a Dhrupad style singing. One interesting tid-bit I would like to share here is unlike the traditional thillana where the sollus start first and then followed by the lyrics, the Purvi Thillana starts with swarams, followed by the lyrics and then the mridangam sollus. This Purvi thillana was made famous by MDR who sang it often in his concerts.

VVS Murari provided able support during the accompaniment for the songs and his approach to manodharma swaras and raagas were a mark of his fine caliber. All in all it was wonderful concert and great team work.

The concert hall ambience was cozy and with good sound production. A wonderful job as always by our rising star Rasika Sivakumar in ably supporting the artistes with the tambura. The concert ended was followed with a short special meet and greet and a Q&A session with the legendary mridangist Sangita Kalanidhi Sri. Trichy Sankaran. Kudos and thanks to Sruthi board for arranging such a wonderful concert and for the amazing concerts throughout the year!

Ravi Iyer is a music enthusiast, mridangam player, and healthcare researcher by profession.

Soundaryam – Sanjay Subrahmanyam Concert Review

P. Sivakumar

The hallmark of a great Carnatic musician is the ability to explore the unexplored through free spirit (Soundaryam), while keeping the audience captivated and engaged. Sanjay Subrahmanyam's concert for Sruti was an example of all that and more, as it provided a fitting finale to a fantastic 2022 season. The bright, sunny and a surprising 70° fall day was an early indication of an exciting evening in store. Accompanied by a team for the ages, S.Varadarajan on Violin and Neyveli Venkatesh on the Mridangam, Sanjay transported the listeners to a musical paradise, presenting carefully chosen pieces spanning languages, composers and deities.

The concert started with Poochi SrinivasA Iyengar's aTa thAla kAnadA varNam, Nera Nammithi, which was rendered in two speeds. The cardinal rule of singing each line twice was maintained so faithfully - a lesson to the young practitioners in the audience. Next was "sAmagltapriyan" a composition of rAmalinga AdigaLA in Gowlai set to Adi thAlam. A beautiful AlApana in Arabhi aptly shadowed by Varadarajan on the violin was followed by Thyagaraja's masterpiece, O rAjeevAksha. Swarams were rendered in second speed at the Pallavi line bringing out the Veera rasA of the rAgam, the stand-out component of the song being the Mishra arithi executed by Venkatesh. Sanjay then launched into a fantastic elaboration of rAga Sriranjani. The krithi chosen was Deekshithar's "Parvatha rAjakumAri". Neraval at the second line of the anupallavi, "sarvAni shambhumOhini" in madhyama kAlam provided for a delightful exchange between the vocalist and the violinist and the brisk swarAs at the Pallavi line with some wonderful mathematical calculations to the 3-mAthra eduppu was thoroughly enjoyable. The filler was a sedate "Indu Shruthi", a PurandaradAsa krithi in the rAga, Kosalam (aptly chosen for Sruti?) – the 71st mElakartha. This krithi was apparently tuned by Sanjay himself.

The main piece for the evening was a refreshing and scintillating kEdaragowla. Sanjay seamlessly traversed through the low and high octaves with an equally befitting response from Varadarajan on the violin. ArunAchala Kavi's rAmanAtakam piece "Andha rAma Soundaryam" was rendered with great emotion and the caraNam line virtually brought Sri rAmA before us. The swarams were subtle and sharp. Neyveli Venkatesh presented a classy thani Avarthanam demonstrating the wonderful thoppi sollus in his inimitable style. The trikAla kOrvai was cleverly designed and executed with one round of 63 aksharAs at slow chathusram, two rounds of 42 aksharAs in thisram and three rounds of 31.5 aksharAs in fast chathusram resulting in a grand total of 241.5 and leading into the 1.5 staggered eduppu (post hoc analyses after replaying the kOrvai multiple times in my mind!). For those interested in the details, here is how it went:

PURvangam (X3)

Thath dhith thaka jonu dhin thath dheem

dhith thaka jonu dhin thath dheem

thaka jonu dhin thath dheem

UttarAngam (X3)

Tha thOm thathikitathomTha thOm Tha thOm thathikitathom thathikitathom

Tha thOm Tha thOm Tha thOm thathikitathom thathikitathom thathikitathom

UttarAngam for Thisram changed the 8-mAthra "tha thOm thathikitathom" to 7-mAthra "thaka thathikitathom" with a 3-mAthra karvai in between

UttarAngam for fast Chathusram changed to "thadheenginathom" with a 6-mAthra kArvai inbetween

After a short and sweet Saraswathi ManOhari with SwAti thirunAL's "mAmava jagadeeswarA", there was a brief off-script "karpooram nArumO" in khamAs sung in response to audience request. Sanjay then rendered a lovely RTP "nAdanai dhinam ninai manamE brindAvana sAranga ranga" in BrindAvana sAranga (eduppu 4 mAthraAs after samam in Adi thAlam), which I came to know later was composed by my own guru, Vidwan Guruvayur Dorai sir. RAgamAlika swarams were rendered in chArukesi, udhaya ravichandrika (with the tantalizing SSGNSPNSS and PMGM proyOgam, the

tamil audience were taken down memory lane reminiscing some famous tamil film numbers!) and dEsh. The ending in dEsh provided a segue for “thunbam nErgayil”, presented soulfully in response to another of the audience requests. The thukkadA portion of the concert featured pApanAsam Sivan’s “thEriL ErinAn” in kalyAni, andPurandaradAsA’s “kandEnA” in DurgA. A short virutham “Vizhikku thunai” was followed by a touching exposition of “vA vA vEl murugA”, a composition of mAyuram ViswanAtha sAstri in Sindhu Bhairavi. A thillAnA in Anandabhairavi by swAti thirunAl rounded off a brilliant and fulfilling concert. Sanjay and the team never cease to amaze me – every concert raises the bar and sets a record, only to be smashed by the next one. It was 3+ hours of pure bliss and Sruti delivered big time yet again. Way to go!

Dr.Sivakumar is an avid Carnatic music fan and a mridangam player/teacher in the Philadelphia area.

My Experience with Sruti Youth Group

Anirudh Venkatesh

This year, the Sruti organization treated the music lovers in the Philly area to several grand concerts. The Sruti Youth Group (SYG) also had many opportunities to help out at these concerts and interview notable artists. As a youth member, I was fortunate to partake in these activities that created many memorable moments.

The SYG had the chance to interview Vidushi Krithika Natarajan and Vid. Sandeep Narayan; two eminent vocal artists. After their awe-inspiring concerts, we were able to ask them questions about their musical training and experience as performing artists. While Krithika Natarajan provided insight on practice tips for youngsters, Sandeep Narayan talked about his early life experience growing up in the US and moving to India to become a professional musician. It was a very humbling experience to interview such great artists, and their feedback was very relevant and helpful to students of classical music, like us.

In addition, the SYG also had the chance to serve the Sruti community by volunteering at concerts. We worked as a team making seating signs , checking tickets at the door and helping concert goers with their questions. Working with a team of like-minded students, we were not only able to engage actively with the Sruti community but we were also able to make lasting friendships.

I am grateful for the support, guidance and mentorship provided by senior Sruti members. Through continued involvement, I hope to learn and grow my love and interest in Carnatic Music.

Anirudh Venkatesh is an 8th grader at Great Valley Middle School, PA.

A Journey Inward

Ratipriya Suresh



I have spent more than 20 years of my life learning, teaching, and performing Bharathanatyam. Halfway into this journey, I started practicing (and later teaching) yoga. In addition to helping with fitness, strength, and flexibility, I have come to realize that there is a deeper connection between these spheres.

When I dance, my body is in constant pursuit of the ideal form. It is highly rewarding when that connection is made with ease. Yoga makes this pursuit a productive one, but ensuring that not only are the pearls (parts of the body) the best they can be, but they also string together to be a beautiful necklace (the aesthetic form). In yoga, this pursuit consists of body and breath. This cyclic pairing of one movement, one breath allows for the ideal form to emerge.

While the art is exemplified through the body, the mind provides vitality and vibrance. Symmetry in the body is achieved through equanimity of the mind. This equanimity is once again elevated by my yoga practice, where through the journey towards the inner self, I establish an intention to attain peace within.

Such a dialogue with my inner self is a core feature of the dance space as well. In preparing new pieces for my performance, I pay special attention to internalize the narrative, and portray the best rendition of the sequence. Through this, I aspire to present not just the story or the scene, but my version of it. When I took to yoga, I immediately noticed this similarity where the practice becomes personalized to me through the specific intention I set for myself. I frequently revisit and reflect on this intention and ask myself - does this align with my best self?

Mind and body in alignment is enabled by a continuous check-in on balance. Often in my yoga practice, I focus on a fixed point to establish my balance and sustain it. When I meditate, I focus my mind on my breath. And when I dance, I focus on the outward expression of my inner self. The focal points manifest to suit the space I am in. Shifting the focus from time to time helps maintain a balance between my mind and body. The yogi in me seeks acceptance of the fluctuations whereas the dancer in me seeks harmony in it. This delicate balance sets me on a path for continuous improvement.

A core tenet of my yoga practice is to go from effort to effortless. I let my mind surrender to the larger sense of self. This is a feeling I hold from my practice of dance, where such a surrender is an expression of oneness with the art form. In this oneness, I sense a spiritual connection between mind, body and soul. When directed inward, this is an appropriate destination of the journey culminating in the ultimate spiritual bliss.

Ratipriya Suresh learned Bharathanatyam from Smt. Ramaa Ramesh, Director, Nardhana Academy of Dance and has been teaching and performing since 2004. She has also completed her 200hour E-RYT200 yoga teacher training at Yoga Lounge & Barre in Hudson, Ohio. In 2020, Ratipriya helped kickstart a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, CAREspaces advocating for safety in the Indian arts space. She currently leads UX and Product Design for North America Corporate at Vitality Group International, a health wellness company.



SRUTI 2022 in pictures









Blue Planet Series

Devina Dutt & Viewers

On the road with Blue Planet

For eight months in the midst of the pandemic, a 12 member team from First Edition Arts in Mumbai comprising camera, sound and production teams travelled with more than 65 Hindustani and Carnatic musicians to ecologically significant locations across India to film open air concerts and interact with local ecological thinkers and activists

The idea for creating the Blue Planet series of concerts filmed in natural, open air settings as a cinematic experience came to us at First Edition Arts in Mumbai, in the fall of 2020. By then, six months had passed since the pandemic and uncertainties about the future were growing rapidly.

We had just started work on creating a digital series for younger classical musicians called the IndianOilNow Hear Us series powered by Indian Oil Corporation in Mumbai as a unique gesture of support for young artists in a time of crises.

While working on the digital series, we filmed young classical musicians in alternate locations in the cities they hailed from. Our cameras caught them picking each other up, conversing among themselves, discussing the music they would play later in the day as they walked through their hometowns. These moments served as a prelude, not seen in most live stage concerts, before the artists settled down for a recital.

The open ended format and perhaps the freedom of being in the open after months of captivity at home felt very liberating.

Simultaneously, the unexpected hiatus caused by the pandemic had led to several subliminal changes in the way we were all living our lives, thinking about the future and the larger scheme of things. There was undoubtedly a growing sense of both the vulnerability of the human condition and also a rare opportunity for reflection and change in the interest of the world and the planet we call our only home.

The concept

All of these thoughts finally came together as the underlying set of ideas which would run through the Blue Planet series. During this process, a key conversation with Warren Senders, a wonderfully sensitive musician and teacher in the US, who has years of training in Hindustani music and other forms of music, as well as a deep interest in ecological and climate justice issues, tied it together beautifully. He helped us formulate the key and subtle connection between the natural world and the arts eco system. Both bestow “invisible” gifts to us and both need to be nurtured and cared for in our own interest. “A walk in the forest changes the experience of time and space, expanding and contracting it in the same way that listening to a concert does”, he suggested.

In that moment, the concept and the execution began to fall into place. We started out in October 2021 with a three hour road trip to Mumbai-based theatre and arts organisation, The Company Theatre’s 5 acre arts space in Uksan village Kamshet along the Western Ghats. We filmed the wonderful senior Hindustani vocalist Shubhada Paradkar one morning at an open air stage framed by tall trees and overlooking the lake.

Travelling along the Western Ghats, one of the richest and oldest biodiversity hot spots in the world was always part of the plan. We tried to also select artists who were not too far away from the region they would be filmed in. Thus we filmed Ulhas Kashalkar who lives in Pune, in Machutar village Mahabaleshwar, with a majestic view of the Ghats. The concert was set in the garden and organic farm belonging to the remarkable music lover, organic farmer and industrialist Jaisinh Mariwala.

Ecology and the Arts

At every step in our onward travels we were to discover the interconnectedness of ecology and the arts. It was a marvellous vindication of a tentative premise we had started out with. In Mollem forests, one of the richest expanses of old forests and last remaining green zones of Goa, we had obtained permission from the state forest department to enter the forest and find a location where we could set the concert. For 45 minutes we walked into the forest, negotiating thorns, insects and branches of giant trees which seemed to have a knack for blocking our paths! Crossing sweet sounding streams with rocky pebbles visible to the naked eye, we finally came upon a clearing surrounded by streams on all sides. We decided this would be the perfect location for Uday Bhawalkar's Dhrupad concert.

Uday Bhawalkar drove down from Pune to Goa the previous evening and we all stayed in the slightly decrepit government run jungle resort on the edge of the forests. Uday ji was just wonderful and very cooperative, wading past streams (trousers rolled up!) with his students and pakahawaj artist Pratap Awad holding their tanpuras aloft. We decided to include some of these moments in the episodes to give audiences far away an idea of what it was all like. When he saw the location after a long and not very comfortable walk he smiled, signalling his happiness with the sheer beauty of the spot.

The forests as audience

The drone of the tanpuras, as we were to discover every time with a Blue Planet concert in the forests elicited a response from the birds and insects there. At first, as the music began, they seemed to listen in shocked silence before making a magical mix of sounds that never disturbed the music or the musicians.

Our sound teams with the indefatigable Aditya Mt, Sriram and Sabareesh from Chennai were there too recording it all. Our camera crew Ankur, Ajay, Lubdhak and Soham as well as Shubhojit, our production team member were all standing in the shallow streams, their tripods safely placed on boulders.

In Mollem, Goa, we met young designers, visual artists and ecological workers who had worked on the powerful Save Mollem campaign using art to make a strong and successful grassroots campaign a few months earlier. We were so impressed with their work that we asked Goa based artist Nishant Saldanha to help us coordinate the making of original art posters for each of the concerts. The Blue Planet Art Project is a stunning collection of art posters which will be exhibited in Mumbai and Bangalore next year.

For 6 months after that first trip we travelled to to places as remote as Nagaland's Tuensang district where we met Sethrichem Sangtham, founder of the Better Life Foundation, an NGO working on introducing progressive agricultural practices among the tribal populations.

This schedule had two sets of Carnatic concerts. TM Krishna was one and there was a duet featuring Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath and Brindha Manickavasakan. The co artists, younger more adventurous musicians included Praveen Sparsh, Vittal Rangan and Chandrasekara Sharma. Listening to the musicians in rehearsals in the chilly evenings as the dark descended by 4 pm, is one of the best memories of our five days in Nagaland.

I came to know about Better Life foundation and its founder Sethrichem Sangtam of Angangba village in Tuensang district of East Nagaland from Aishwarya whose husband Jayesh Ganesh is an architect and who had designed the Farmers Innovation Centre in the village.

They sent me photos and we began to talk to Sethrichem for at least four months prior to our travels. The more I spoke to him the more I warmed to the idea of going there. It was a daunting trip to even plan. We were 18 people in all including artists and we had people travelling from Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata. Our destination was a 12 hour drive from Dimapur on very bad roads.

We decided to break the journey by flying to Jorhat in Assam and driving four five hours plus on very bad roads to a town called Mokokchung in Nagaland. We were relieved for the break that night and sank into instant slumber at Hotel Metsuben. Although more than half of the group were vegetarians and anxious about the food we would get in Nagaland, the hotel served very good vegetarian food.

All the MTR packets and podis were not needed yet!

Next day we set out for the five hour journey from Mokokchung to Tuensang. On the way, we had to stop because of road repairs. That is when our promo recording of Highway Bhairavi took place with all artists sitting on a wood machan using buckets and utensils as Krishna, Aishwarya and Brindha sang.

Discovering nuance in intense reflections on Ecology

At the Gurukula Sanctuary in Wayanad, Kerala we met a team of dedicated and very knowledgeable ecologists and botanists who were trying to conserve the rapidly disappearing biodiversity of the region. Our visiting artists including KS Vishnudev and Anirudh Athreya spent a lot of time talking to the teams at Gurukula and grappling with the sheer complexity of terms like revival and conservation in the context of the natural world.

For some artists, the fact that there was no audience and we were filming in a natural open space, was an invitation for unparalleled creativity with the very format they could now use. The Abhishek Raghuram concert with HN Bhaskar on violin and Patri Satish Kumar on mridangam was one such concert. In some sections the artists were not even present at the same location! The abstract design and lay out of the Valley School in Kanakpura with its own forests just outside Bangalore supported this exploration.

In Kolkata we met wonderful groups like Disappearing Dialogues, an NGO that works to document the wetlands systems and its unique life affirming ecosystem. An early morning concert with Waseem Ahmad Khan was recorded here as local villagers went about their day.

In Attapady, the remote tribal districts of Kerala near Palakkad we saw the neglect that exists even in a developed state like Kerala. We were privileged to meet the greatly respected, retired Forest Director and passionate votary of forests and the rights of tribals, Mr P Unnikrishnan who had played a key role in the Silent Valley movement decades ago. Our interview with him in which he shared his views on forests and their relationship with tribal societies was a high point. He lives a quiet life today in Attapadi in the midst of the forests he has loved all his life unfazed by the elephants that often stop by.

A few kilometres away in neighbouring Tamil Nadu we stayed at Vidya Vanam, a remarkable school for local children with an unusually high art quotient in the curriculum. Founded by the dynamic educationist Prema Rangachary, this is a fine example of an inclusive and sensitive approach to education. In both Attapady and Annamalai we were constantly aware that we were in the path of the human and elephant conflict thanks to the electric fencing everywhere and signs asking us to keep away!

Music and Dance Collaborations in Natural Settings

We filmed a fine dance production titled Earth Unlimited in the distinctive natural spaces around forests and low lying hills of Anaikatti with the Bharatnatyam dancer Shweta Prachande and Carnatic musician Rithvik Raja. Earlier, we had filmed Nava, another original and very striking collaboration between the Bharatnatyam dancer Christopher Gurusamy and Vignesh Ishwar in a yoga and arts centre on the edges of the reserve forests in Kodaikanal.

These two productions are among our most favourite Blue Planet performances and our teams loved being around for the rehearsals and film shoots.

Musicians in conversation with Ecological Activists

We set out to film concerts in natural spaces but we ended up with a great deal more than that. Right from the beginning, we were very sure that Nature was not going to be a passive, pretty or decorative feature in our concerts. We were also sure we would like musicians to be involved and responsive to the places and issues they encountered. Therefore, conversations with artists and local ecological workers or other experts in each region appear as vignettes in each episode. In Nagaland, the artists visited innovative farms, weaving centres, local homes and also sat through cultural programs put together for them.

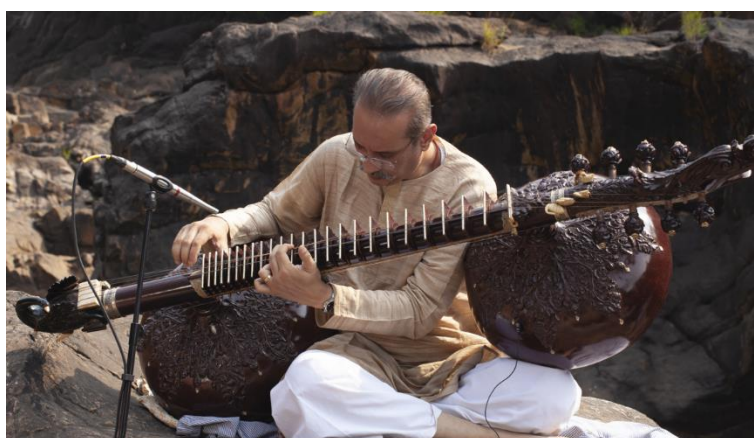
In Anjuna beach, Goa, Ramakrishnan Murthy met Gabriella D'cruz, a marine conservationist and sea weed expert. They had a lovely conversation as she explained the significance of tide pools and marine biodiversity.

We had a thrilling finale we could only dream of with a marathon five hour plus concert by Sitar and Surbahar Maestro Budhaditya Mukherjee in a clearing overlooking Rajaghatta village in Darjeeling's Sonada. A wonderful group called TIEEDI founded by Utsow Pradhan who left his corporate IT career, run forest conservation, permaculture and recycling programs in these villages. It rained in between and we had to all run for cover but the artists were in no mood to stop!

The Blue Planet series for us has not ended. It has shown us so much more about music, Nature and Society that we feel we will return to refresh these unforgettable experiences in new ways.

Devina Dutt is a curator, arts writer and editor. She is co founder and director of Mumbai based performing arts organisation First Edition Arts.

Sruti was one amongst the reputed sabhas in the US to subscribe to the Blue Planet series.



The year long Blue Planet Digital Concert Series was mainly supported by the Transworld Group, a shipping and logistics conglomerate with offices worldwide. Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and Union Bank of India were also part sponsors.

Here are the viewers' responses after watching the Blue Planet Series

Blue Planet was Out-of-the-World!



We always hear that the artists are energized by the responses from the audiences. But here, there is no audience. It is just them, nature, and cameras in front of them. In a way, we get to see their pure enjoyment of the music which in turn energizes us.

Thank you Sruti BOD for making this available to us 🙏

Just watched Ramakrishna Murthy's concert. As expected it was amazing - lived his paramAthmudu and Jambhupathe renderings. This is such a superb initiative on Sruti's part to make these concerts available to its members for such a nominal price. Thank you Thank you Thank You 🙏

Beautiful! I feel so happy that songs with such lovely messages are being rendered by artists like TMK. Prabhakar and I are soaking in TMK's NanupAlimpA! That voice and in Nagaland amidst the natural beauty of Mother Earth.... Just bliss



We heard three of the Blue Planet sponsored concerts: Ramakrishnan Murthy, TM Krishna and Aishwarya/Brinda duo. We would like to compliment the Sruti board for co-sponsoring these events which go to help improve the environment/ecology of the planet.

It was novel and beautiful to watch and hear Carnatic music concerts in natural sylvan surroundings. RMK intelligently chose kritis referring to water - Dhikshitar's Jambopathe and M D R's Saagara with real Sagara (Arabian sea) in the background. TM Krishna was the usual TM Krishna fare. Aishwarya and Brinda with their pleasant voices are sure to be stars of the future.



Although the concerts were outdoors the audio was excellent as also the video with the stunning scenery in the background. We look forward to hearing the rest of the concerts

We watched Aishwarya's concert as well and enjoyed it. I especially enjoyed the extensive amba kAmAkshi svarajati in bhairavi rAga. Nice that it was embellished with AlApana and niraval and svarakalpana. The niraval was powerful and seemed creative. The svarakalpana was innovative- with each of the caraNams being included in the prayOgams. I really thought it was a nice aesthetic innovation.

Also enjoyed listening to paralOkabhaya (tyAgarAja kriti). I heard it after a long time (after bAlamurali's rendition) - it was brisk and sprightly. Also, in the SyAma SAstri svarajati, I appreciated the neraval being rendered at the end, rather than in the middle (which some singers have, which to my sensitivities, disturbs the mood of the composition).



Today I heard Uday Bhawalkar. Although I am not very knowledgeable in Hindustani music, I thoroughly enjoyed his music. I was reminded of the Jugalbandhi concert of Malladi and Gundecha brothers at Sruti years back! Like Gundecha brothers Uday Bhawalkar also sings the dhrupad style. He sings Miyan Ki Todi which is equivalent to Shubapanthuvarali in Carnatic style but without Panchamam in the Arohanam. The slow and deliberate development of swara patterns in his Alap with perfect Shruthi and swarasthanam was impressive. It flowed like silk! I was impressed by the range of his voice, especially in the Mandara

Sthayi. The years of Sadhana that he has put in is so evident. The compositions in dhrupad style do not have much of a variation in tempo when one compares it to Carnatic. Also, the sangathi development in compositions is much less in the dhrupad style as compared to Carnatic krithis. The lush forests of Goa made me long for Spring on this bitterly cold morning!

We are loving the Blue Planet Concert series - each with its own serene background.!!



We just watched Malladi Brothers. Once again, interesting background in a fishing village near Chennai. We really liked the appropriate choice of kritis starting with Melukovayya (Bowli, Thyagaraja), Suryamurthe (Sowrashtram, Dikshitar) and Sagara vedalani (Yamuna Kalyani, Thyagaraja). They explained the context of each of them. They included seldom heard kritis (Etulaina, Sama, Thyagaraja and Sathatham, Karaharapriya, Swati Tirunal) All in all a very satisfying concert



Binge watching five concerts and relished the locales as well as the interviews with the local folk! - what an embarrassment of riches! This was a great idea Sruti BOD!!

Celebrating M.S. Amma's Centennial Year!

9-year old Advika Anand



Bharat Ratna M.S. Subbulakshmi was a remarkable musician whose enthralling music inspired humanity world over. Her voice had a divine power; even today, in many temples and households, the day begins with M.S. Subbulakshmi's rendition of 'Venkatesa Suprabatham'! Her perfect pronunciation and soulful singing made several bhajans and prayers such as 'Bhajagovindam' and 'Kurai Ondrum Illai' popular. When M.S. sang 'Maithreem Bhajata' at the United Nations to spread peace and harmony, she received a standing ovation from an international audience! She was a noble and selfless person who continues to be remembered as the 'Nightingale of India'.

Among M.S. Amma's most famous works is the 'Hanuman Chalisa'. Her multi-raga rendition struck a deep chord with me. This piece is my dedication to the singer of my favorite shloka, which I enjoy listening to every day on my way to school. My name is Advika Anand and I'm 9 years old. Born and raised in the Bay Area, California, I am always seeking ways to understand my Indian roots while exploring the world around me. Working on this sketch gave me the opportunity to learn more about the greatness of M.S. Subbulakshmi. I pray that her blessings will always be with me.

Influence of Śyāmā Śāstri on the Compositions of Subbarāya Śāstri - A Short Analysis

Srividya Sridhar

Carnatic Music being primarily an oral tradition, necessitates a primary link in order to carry on the compositional gems of yesteryears in its most authentic form to the future - the disciple. In this regard, Subbarāya Śāstri (1803-1862), second son of Śyāmā Śāstri (eldest of the three great vāgēyakkārā-s or the Carnatic Trinity), earns the highest privilege of having directly studied under all three of the Trinity. He therefore becomes the best candidate for reflecting the quintessence of all three in his compositions which he undoubtedly achieved with immaculate perfection. Perhaps due to the enormity and intricacy involved in such a task, his output in terms of compositions is more quality oriented than quantity. Shankar(1995) surmises that although scholars estimate 40-50 compositions to his credit, only 12 or so have come out, possibly because of the exacting standards that he set for himself before passing it on to his disciples. Much can be analyzed and presented on Saint Tyāgarājā, and Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitā-'s influence on his compositions too. In this article however, a short analysis of Śyāmā Śāstri's influence on Subbarāya Śāstri's compositional works are discussed. All of Subbarāya Śāstri-'s works are in Telugu and he aptly uses "Kumara" as the mudra in his compositions, reflecting that he is the son and disciple of his father.

Comparative Analysis of Subbarāya Śāstri's and Śyāmā Śāstri's Compositions

Sāhitya Bhāva

Belonging to the Baṁgāru Kāmākshi arcaka family, both father (Śyāmā Śāstri) and son's (Subbarāya Śāstri's) compositions were a natural outlet for overflowing bhakti towards the Mother Goddess. A similarity in word choice to express this melting emotion is seen when examining their compositions. Few such examples are discussed below:

In the Ānandabhairavi kṛti Ō jagadambā, in one of the caraṇa-s, Śyāmā Śāstri appeals: Nannokani brōva karudā (Is it not possible for you to protect me?). The same sentiment can be seen in Subbarāya Śāstri's Rītigaula kṛti -Okkani brōva karudā daya rāda (Is it not possible for you to protect me? Have you no mercy?) (Shankar, 1995).

The kṛti Ēmani miguḷa varniṁtu in Tōḍi by Śyāmā Śāstri and Ēmani nē in Mukhāri by Subbarāya Śāstri, commence with the same question, 'How can I extol your greatness?'"(VeenaLakshmi.V, 2010).

Even in the climax of emotional appeal to dēvi, Subbarāya Śāstri seems to have derived inspiration from his father. In the last sāhitya of the bhairavi svarajati, Śyāmā Śāstri pleads- "Abhimānamu lēdā dēvi!" with "dēvi" halting on the tāra sthāyi ṛṣabha, he uses the same effect in the Cintāmaṇi kṛti when he halts on the tāra sthāyi ṛṣabha at Ēmammā of Ēmammā eritō bhāramā? We see a similar usage by Subbarāya Śāstri in his Mukhāri kṛti when he climaxes his call to dēvi with halting on tāra sthāyi ṛṣabha for dēvi in the phrase "narudanu nē pāmarudanu dēvi" (Shankar, 1995).

Structure of Compositions

Subbarāya Śāstri has closely followed his father's footsteps in this regard. The structure of the majority of his compositions is the type with pallavi, anupallavi, multiple caraṇa-s of similar melodic construct and Svāra-Sāhitya, which is in sync with the primary compositional structure of Śyāmā Śāstri's works. The highlight of Śyāmā Śāstri's kṛti-s are his svāra-sāhitya aṅga which closely resemble the structure of a svarajati (one-to-one correspondence between the svāra and sāhitya). Subbarāya Śāstri has maintained a similarity to this overall structure by including svāra-sāhitya for eight out of twelve of his known compositions. He however has also displayed his individual style by blending in madhyama kāla sāhitya in the last two lines within the caraṇa followed by the sāhitya portion of the svāra-sahitya which also predominantly follows the same madhyama kāla (for e.g. Saṁkari nīvē -in the caraṇa - munumukkuni onwards is madhyamakāla; Nannubrōcutaku-in the caraṇa- karunānidhi onwards is madhyamakāla).

A notable example for svāra-sāhitya similarity between the two composers is in the Tōḍi kṛtis of both composers as mentioned by Shankar (1995) and VeenaLakshmi.V (2010) and demonstrated below:

Śyāmā Śāstri - Ninnē namminānu – Miśra Cāpu

g,,, m, n, d, || m, g, r, s, d,, n,, || s,,, ,,,

Subbarāya Śāstri- Nannubrōcutaku – ādi

g,,, ,,, „g, m, n, d, m, g, r, s, n, r, | s,,, ,,,

The melodic structure as well as rhythmic structure (landing of ṣaḍja on the samam or first dhṛtam) are strikingly similar. The next phrase also has this same striking similarity and the last two lines of the svara are rhythmically very similar in construct as seen below (Shankar, 1995):

5 + 5 + 4; 5 + 5 + 4 (gmgrs-dmgrs-ndmg ; grndm-grsnd-n,sr) – Śyāmā Śāstri

6 + 6 + 4; 6 + 5 + 5 (mgrs,s-ndmg,g-gmdn ; sd,pdm-g,rsn-d,nsr) – Subbarāya Śāstri

Śyāmā Śāstri was considered a master of laya vyavahāra and his subtle introduction of laya intricacies into his compositions was one such stylistic feature. For example, in the bhairavi svarajati's 7th svara-sāhitya - he includes nsrgmp, -srgmpd,-mpgrgm,-pmpdns, . This 7-akṣara rhythm is subtly layered in to the composition giving it a beautiful syncopated effect. We can see a similar style incorporated by Subbarāya Śāstri in Janani ninnuvina svara-sāhitya – nns,n-dmm,g-rss,np.

It should also be pointed out here that his dhanyāsi kṛti Dalacina vāru-'s compositional structure is closer to many of Tyāgarāja-'s compositional structures that have matching melodic construct for anupallavi and caraṇa-s (for e.g: Tyāgarāja-'s dhanyāsi kṛtis - Entubhaya, Jānaki nāyaka, and Śrī rāma dāsōham). Additionally, in Janani ninnuvina he uses a structure where the first two lines of the caraṇa are similar to the pallavi and the rest of the caraṇa lines are similar to the anupallavi, this style is also seen in some of Tyāgarāja's kṛtis (Bālē bālēndu).

Rāga Phrases

With the exception of Hamīrkalyāṇi, Dēsiya Tōḍi, and Darbār, all the other compositions of Subbarāya Śāstri are in ragas that Śyāmā Śāstri has handled in his compositions. The overall distinctive feel of both composers' works comes from their similar use of gamaka laden phrases that contribute to the scholarly exposition of the raga within a single kṛti. One can glean some similarities in the rāgalakṣaṇā-s and phrases used by Subbarāya Śāstri as compared to his father through the following examples:

Kalyāṇi

In Ninnuvina gati gāna -Subbarāya Śāstri uses ṣaḍja and pañcama varja prayōga-s that add beauty to this raga (VeenaLakshmi,V, 2010) as seen in:

||d, r, n, d, m, d, d, n, | d, p, p, gm pm g, mp, d ||

||Vana...ruhabhava danu.ja | ri..pu nu.ta...., in the Anupallavi, as well as the phrase ndmgr dmgr in the svara-sāhitya. This phrase is very similar to that used by Śyāmā Śāstri in his kṛti Saṅkari Saṅkari where he uses the same for the words Rāja Rājēṣvari in the Pallavi.

Mukhāri

The kṛtis (Ēmani nē of Subbarāya Śāstri and Pālimpavammā of Śyāmā Śāstri) both start with very similar phrases; s,n,d,s,r,,,m,, m,,, and s,n,d,s,,,r,m,,, ,,, respectively (notation from Rao, 1997) and also are set in the same tāla structure (reṭṭai kaḷai ādi with 1/2 eṭam eṭuppu).

Yadukulakāmbhoji

Ninnusēvincina of Subbarāya Śāstri and Kamākṣi svarajati of Śyāmā Śāstri - the introduction of tāra sthāyi madhyama in this raga is credited to Śyāmā Śāstri (VeenaLalshmi.V, 2010) and here again some researchers claim that Subbarāya Śāstri follows his father in using it in his kṛti (VeenaLakshmi.V, 2010), even though both T.K.

Govindarao's book as well as Vidya Shankar's book do not depict the tāra sthāyi madhyama in Subbarāya Śāstri's composition.

However, overwhelming evidence of inspiration from his father's svarajati can be seen clearly in the phrase below in his svara-sāhitya:

s, „r, s,r, m,,,|| p, m,p, d,,, p,d,|| r, „s, „, m,p, || d, „p, „m, g,r,||

sā..ra.sada.lā.. .kṣaśaraṇā..gata..ja..nā.. ..vana.. .kṛpā..nidivi (Notation from Rao, 1997); adopted from the second āvarta of the 8th svara of the svarajati :

s, „r, s,r, m,,,|| p, m,p, d,,, p,d, || r, „s, „, m,p, || d, „p, „, m,g,

tā masamusē,,yakanē.....(Notation from Rao, 1997)

Conclusion

The above analysis of sāhitya-bhāva, musical structure as well as rāga sañcāra in comparing the two composers shows clear evidence that Subbarāya Śāstri derived primary inspiration from his father's compositional mindset. The fact that Subbarāya Śāstri's compositions are viewed in the same high regard as the Trinity's is a testament to his own distinct style blossomed from a fertile foundation laid by all three of the Trinity.

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Raga Sudharasa - Path to Jeevanmukthi

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Raga Sudha Rasa – Andolika Raga – Aditala

Pallavi: rAga sudhArasa pAnamu jEsi rAjillavE manasA

Anupallavi: yAga yOga tyAga bhOga phala mosangE ||ra||

charaNam: sadAshiva mayamagu nAdOnkAra svara

vidulu jIvan muktulani tyAgarAju teliy || ra ||

पल्लवि: राग सुधारस पानमु जेसि राजिल्लवे मनसा

अनुपल्लवि: याग योग त्याग भोग फल मोसङ्गे || राग ||

चरणम्: सदाशिव मयमगु नादोङ्कार स्वर

विदुलु जीवन् मुक्तुलानि त्यागराजु तेलिय || राग ||

Abstract

In this Kriti Sri Thyagaraja expounds his concept of music, its purpose and practice, and most important, its value as a yoga and siddhi, a path for self-realization.

Sri Thyagaraja advises to understand and practice ragas so that the sadhaka will attain the raga rasa and bhava also get immense eternal bliss, devotion, also the path of Moksha.

Before the universe came to be in existence, there was only sound. We call that as Omkararm or Pranava Nadam, Sri Thyagaraja gave illustration of jeevan muktas. May I shine by indulging myself in the sweetness of music and understand it to be the 'Om kara', the constant manifestation of Lord Shiva is the giver of the fruits of the Jivanmukthas.

Key words: Raga Sudharasa, Yaga, Yoga, Tyaga, bhoga phalamu, Omkaaram, Jeevanmukti,

Introduction: Drinking the ever-tasteful essence of raaga, why don't you rejoice, O mind! It gives the fruit of ritual, mediation (union), sacrifice and enjoyment all together! As known to Tyagaraja, the jeevan muktas are those who enjoy the melody that is the glorious form of SadAshiva, that is the sound of tuneful Omkara.

Sub-Units of the Kriti:

Pallavi: Raaga Sudhaarasa Paanamu jEsI Ranjilla ve mansasaa

Oh, soul! Be blissful, having enjoyed the ambrosia of music! That yields you the results of holy sacrifices, meditation, chanting, and riches of enjoyment!

Those who know the spirit of Pranava and the significance of the latter in the note, are really blessed and being mortals also, they are liberated, souls!

'Raga Sudha' in the ambrosia of devotion the Lord! Gulping this special drink, one elated beyond the limits.

In holy sacrifice, meditation and chanty chanting plays a vital role! Even in offering chanty, we recite hymns – without chant also we get diverted by mere charitable nature. Paanamau means to enliven body and soul.

Khatopa Upanishad says - "नकर्मणा नप्रजया नधनेन त्यागेना येकेन अमृतत्वमानशुः" - (1)

"Nakarmana Naprajaya Nadhanena tyagaena yekena Amrattvmanshuh"

Due to regular pious activities – due to beating of children, amassing riches one cannot attain salvation! By chanty only one gets the ultimate benediction.

‘Bhoga’ means enjoying the spirit of the Lord – this can be attained by the power of Muni. Sage Vasishta says – Rigveda

"पर्व इंद्राय मादनं हर्यश्वाय गायत | सखायः सोमपात्रौ | " - (7-31-1) - (2)

"Parva Indraaya Madanam Haryashvaya Gayata | Sakhaayah Somapatrau | "

“Oh, friends offer soma juice esoterically, soma means pure devotion) to the Lord of bay steeds, the Supreme, and sing an exhilarating hymn!

Rigveda – “शंसेदुक्थं सुदनव उत द्युक्ष्यं यथा नरः | चाक्रुमा सत्य राधसे।” (7-31-2) - (3)

"Shmsedukthan Sudanva Uta Dyukshyan Yadhah Narah | Chakrumaa Satya Raadhase. "

He is the only one affluent in truth! Let us, along with others repeat the brilliant praise! There by he enjoys it and we too can enjoy it with him.

"न इंद्र वाजयुः गम्यः हिरण्मयुः वसो |" - (7-31-3) - (4)

"Na Indra Vajayah Gamyah Hiranmayuh Vaso || -

“Lord is the bestower of food, cattle, gold and riches which mark ” –

‘Ranjillu’ – hear Sri Thyagaraja expounded the practice of musical ragas gives immense eternal bliss, devotion and moksha. Musical notes and sounds (ragas) shines the brilliance,

how Atharva Veda says-

“तं पुण्यं गंधं गंधर्वाप्सरस उपजीवन्ति |-“ (5)

"Tan punyan gandan ganadharvapsrasa upajivanti | Punyagandhi roopa jIvanIyO, bhavati ya Evam veda! “ –

But for His existence, air or fragrance of perfumes the divine cults ‘Gandharavas’ and ‘Apsorasas’ the Celestial maids, can’t be existing! The one who knows this truth shall become a strong ally and supporter of those communities too! ‘Ranjillu’ Has a wider canvas of purport, the music and the related arts are not just for jubilee! They give the Lord inspiration and strength to fight Evils in mortal land and Celestial globes too.

Rigveda says “अहर्यताय द्रुणवे धनु ष्ट्वन्ति शुक्रा वियन्ति असुरै..... || - (6)

"Ahrayataaya Drshnave Dhanu SThadvanti Shukra Viyanti Asurai Virniji Vipamagne Mahiyuvaah"

“[These hymns of priests, music and dance of devotees shall be pleasing to our soul and mind. Also, Supreme Lord as twangs of the bowstring and offer security as armour]”

Rigveda says “अभीनवक्ते अद्रुहः प्रियं इन्द्रस्य काम्यं वत्सं न पूर्वम् आयु नि जातं रिहन्ति मात्रः” - (7)

“Abhinavakte Adruh priyam Imdrasya Kamyam Vatsam Na Poorvam Aayur Ni Jaata Rihanti Maatarah” -

“[Let our performance of artistic bits and chants set in melodious music be pleasant to You, Oh Lord! As a newly born calf feels joyful and comfortable when the mother cow licks with her tongue all-over the body!]

In this way let us decorate the Lord with different Ragas and let us enjoy the excellent grace and beauty of Ragas, Raga is symbolic of 'Worship' and Sudha is 'Sharanagati' and Rasa is self realisation.

Anupallavi: yaaga, yoga, bhoga phala mosangE - 'याग योग त्याग भोग फल मोसङ्गे'

Is 'Manasa' not only to address the mind ' is significant of Lord, who presides over the activities of all worlds.

The great sage Samaya son of Brihaspati said Rigveda

"त्यमुव्वे अप्रहणं गृणेशे सवसस्पतिं | इन्द्रं विश्वा साहं नरं महिष्ठम् विश्व चर्शणिम्"- (8)

"tyamuvve aprahanam gruneshe shavasaspatin | indran vishwa sahan naram mahishtham vishv charshanin"-

"Oh worshippers, for you, I suggest and glorify the Lord, who never disparities his devotees the lord of strength, the all subduing, the leader of rites, the most gracious, and the very behold of all the worlds-

Charanamam: - sadAshiva mayamagu nAdOnkAra svara

vidulu jIvan muktulani tyAgarAju teliy ||

'Om' is described as 'सिक्वः' a fibrous network thing which shall be suspended by 4 strings!

(Taittiriya Siksha -8) - "ओमिति ब्रह्म। ओमितिगं सर्वं---" - "Omiti Brahma. omniscient all -

"continuing thus, explained the significance in more than ten aspects (both religious and social) and finally says.

"ओमिति ब्राह्मणम् प्रवक्ष्यन् आह | ब्रह्म उपाप्नवानीति | ब्रह्मैव उपापनोति "- (9)

"Omiti Brahmanam Pravakshyan Ah | Brahma Upapanwaniti | Brahmaiva Upapanoti"-

"The sadhaka in order to know and learn Veda, uttered 'Om' earnestly and Lo! The attains Brahman. Thus is called Jeevanmukthi.

Observe the speciality in charanam 'सदाशिव मयमगु नादोङ्कार स्वर विदुलु जीवन् मुक्तुलानि' -

All musician talking 'सदाशिव' as Lord Siva, explains and elaborates the statement taking the only literal meaning.

"गीति गानेन योगस्यात् | योगादेव शिवैकपतिः"- Nadabindu Upanishad - (10)

"geeta ganena yogassyat | yogadev shivaikpatih"

But 'सदाशिव मय' is the adjective of Omkar, Nada and Swara - is to be understood in Vedic sense.

One has to keep in mind the Anu Pallavi - 'याग योग त्याग भोग फल मोसङ्गे' these ideas are explained very clearly in Taittiriya Narayana as follows

"यश्चंदसां ऋशभो विश्वरूपः|छन्दोभ्यः चान्दागं सी आविवेश |

सचागं शिक्वः पुरोवाच उपनिशदिन्द्रो ज्येष्ठ इन्द्रियाय रषिभ्यः || "- (तैत्तिरीय नारायण-8-1) - (11)

"yashchandasan rishabho vishwaroopः|chhandobhya: chandagan see avivesh |

sachagan shikya: purovach upanishadimdro jyesht indriyay rashibhya: || "

'Om' - The Pranava is the root of the entire creation it is the very prime chant of all Vedas; which is the quintessence of Vedas! It has roots in all the meters. The significance and prominence are propagated by Indra to sages and Rishis to attain wisdom and master the three features of action, meditation and contemplation.

'aa, vu, ma' are swarms the musical note of 'Om' is 'Nada'. Those who understand the sings are the liberal souls! Why 'nada' is mentioned in particular?

“ऋक् रसः ऋचस्साम रसः साम्ना उद्गीधो रसः” – Nadabindu Upanishad (12)

"Rikus: Rachsam Juice: Samna Udgidho Juice:" says chandogya Upanishad.
भवति य एतदेवं विद्यानक्षरं उद्गीधम् उपास्ते" – (13)

"आपयिताहवै कामानां

"Apyitahawai Kamanam Bhavati Ya Etdevan Vidyanaksharan Udgidham Upaste" – Those who understand the and on the true spirit of 'Om' shall achieve all they desire for! This is called 'Jeevanmukti' – Sri Thyagaraja even sometimes repeats certain sentiments, he always presents some new aspects!

Conclusion: The present Kriti is one of the unique models for the expertise of pen-picturing of Sri Thyagaraja which supports a far acclaimed statement that Sri Thyagaraja is never extravagant in use of phrases also directly and indirectly suggestion of Sri Thyagaraja that "the tone, tune, lyric, raga, tala are not to be employed for individual pleasure, mass attraction and yielding of other benefits but it is to be understood that singing etc. is another form of worship of the Lord. In the message of Prahlada keerthanm of the Lord suggested same sentiment enjoined in Vedic Literatures. The same is enjoined in the present Kriti.

Footnotes / Notes: (1) Kathopanishad; [(2),(3),4)] – Rigveda; (5) Atharvana Veda; (6) Rigveda - 7-99-1); (7) Rigveda (9-100-1); (8) (Rigveda -6-44-4); (9,10) Nadabindopanishad; (11) (taittiriya narayan-8-1); (12) Nadabindopanishat; (13) Chandogya Upanishad.

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Carnatic Vocal Concert / Lec Dem on Shyama Shastri by Dr. TS Sathyavathi

Suresh Tyagarajan

In this virtual program arranged by SRUTI, Dr. TS Sathyavathi (hereafter referred to as **Dr. TSS** in this write-up) took us through an enlightening and educative journey of the soulful compositions of Shyama Shastri (hereafter referred to as **SS** in this write-up), the eldest among the Trinity of Carnatic Music. This was a follow-up to the 3-day online workshop, organized by SRUTI and conducted by Dr. TSS. Through Dr. TSS's lens, we experienced the exquisite expressions of both rAgA and layA of SS's works. Dr. TSS was soulfully accompanied by Shilpa Shashidhar (Vocal Support), Mathur R. Srinidhi (Violin), K. U. Jayachandra Rao (Mridangam) and Sukanya Ramgopal (Ghatam).

We realized the splendor of the entirety of SS's creations, when we learnt that we could reach only about a 100 out the 300 or so compositions that he originated. Due to the absence of a *shishya paramaparA* and thereby a lack of documentation, today we only know of a few swarajatis, varnams and compositions. And yet, the brilliance of those kritis shine through the vistas of time. The inspiration of all his works is SS's profuse, undoubtable and unquestionable devotion to Goddess KAMAkshi.

The program began with *BegadA varnam* – highlights were the importance of (Ma - *MadhyamA*) a note of the BegadA scale, the structure of execution and caraNam going back to the pallavi to end the varnam. SS had a stronghold of Telugu, Samskritam and Thamizh. Next was a demonstration of SS's *rakti rAgA** Kritis. We shall very briefly browse through some of the demonstrations:

- *Sarōja daḷa nētri himagiri putrī* in Sankarabharanam – demo: Execution of *Ga Ma Paaa* (the gamaka as a curve and not a digital *Ga Ma Da Pa*). The differentiation between this and the *BegadA*'s execution was clearly brought out by Dr. TSS.
- Then Dr. TSS moved on to the last caraNam of *Palinchu KamAkshi* in MadyamAvati. Illustration: A pulsating *Ri*, unlike a plain, straight one in *Sri rAgam*. Also, a mention of swarAksharam** (*Pa*) was made. She elaborated the feel of the composition in the way *Pa (Panchamam)* is rendered.
- She then moved on to *Sankari Sankuru* in SAveri. There is a plethora of swarAksharas in SS's compositions (example in this piece being *Ri* in "... *Sankari*"). She then delved deeper into the lyrical beauty of his Samskritham expressions.
- Next on to Yadukula Kambhoji (YK) Swarajati – *KamAkshi Nee Pada*. A subtle distinction of YK from Kambhoji was pointed out.
- This was followed by the example of *Mada Gaja Gamana* (movement of an elephant) in Mari vErE: "...pAda yugamu madilo dalaci kOriti vinumu **mada gaja gamana**". This was followed by *pAhi shrI girirAjasutE* (S P Š notes). She explained the signature for Ananda Bhairavi (AB). She pointed out how SS's kriti was also a fitting grammatical explanation of AB (the same Ri, Ga, Da and Ni are present in both the *rakti rAgAs* AB and Ritigowla but in a different color, signifying the respective rAgAs). She used **ninnuvina maRigalada** to show SS's handing of Ritigowla. A rarity of anupallavi dhAtu (root) being the same as carNam dhAtu.
- Subsequently, Dr. TSS entered into the topic of mastery of MisracApu tAlA by the "tAla Laya Brahma" himself. The 7 mAtrA (count) tAlA is so deftly woven by SS in various kritis. They are not just as simple as $7 \times 4 = 28$, but more intricate and beautifully designed by SS. His handling of layA is described as MarjArakishora nyAyA (i.e.) The cat carrying her kitten gently with care, yet with firmness, in order not to let go. Dr. TSS then took us into SS's LalithA rAgam (Nannu brōvu lalithā); illustrating with jAru gamakAs showing the soft nature of SS.
- Then came the rare raga Kritis composed by SS – kalkadA (Pārvati ninu nē nera nammiti) , manji, niilambari (where the unhurried pace in MisracApu was emphasized). Dr. TSS illustrated how the vivAdhi swaras were being brought together in the right way – showing that SS's scholarship comes to the fore in those instances.
 - Ahiri – Was demonstrated using "mA(y)amma(y)ani nE pilacitE mATl(A)Da rAdA nAtO ambA.."
 - DevibrOva – In ChintAmani; she retraced the history of composer Bobbili Kesavayya's challenge resulting in SS's sarabanandana tAla pallavi and then composing Devi-brova-samayamide.
 - MAnji – Brovavamma. Dr. TSS showed us that it is similar yet different (certain smoother segments) from Bhairavi
 - Scope for neraval in SS's compositions: Examples: "Sathisubha Charitey sadA Madhura bhashiNi", "Madhava sOdari Gouri Amba" (Ma Da -swarAkshara) and "Ni Sa Ri (swarAkshara) evvaramma"
 - Meenalochana was demonstrated as another *rakti rAgA* (DhanyAsi) kriti of SS

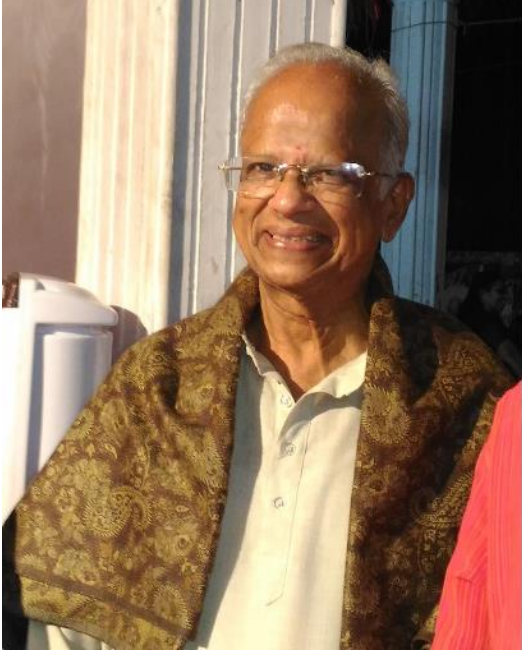
We were then taken into SS's Kalyani: Himathri sute, Birana varalichi (a quick raga, kalpanAswara & Tani) were demonstrated by the team. SS's wish was to attain the poetic ability to be able to praise his Mother better and better – an indicator of his true devotion. She provided a fitting end with a Mangalam in Kalyani (Khanda Ata tAlA): Sankari KarunAkari. The raga mudra comes naturally in SS's lyrics. Overall, this was such an emotionally and intellectually fulfilling program.

* **rakti** means 'gives pleasure'. Those gamakam-laden ragas suited to the slower tempo: sankarabaranam, kedaragowla, rithigowla, todi, varali, sahana, begada, bhairavi, ananda bhairavi, savori, yadukula kambhoji, arabi, nattai, janaranjani, nattakuranji, dhanyasi etc.

** **swarAksharam** = When a lyric / syllable coincides with a swara, it is called a swarAksharam (swaram + aksharam).

Sangita Kalanidhi T.V. Sankaranarayanan-In memoriam-

Rasikan



On September 22, 2022, the Carnatic Music (CM) world lost a great musician. Sangita Kalanidhi T.V. Sankaranarayanan passed away on that date at the age of 77.

T.V. Sankaranarayanan, popularly known as TVS hailed from a musical family. His maternal great uncle, Madurai Pushpavanam was a legend in his days. His maternal uncle, the great Madurai Mani Iyer, a nephew of Pushpavanam, was one of the most popular vocalists of the so-called golden age of CM - 1930s to 1960s. TVS's father, T.S. Vilvadri Iyer, learnt from his brother-in-law and later provided regular vocal supports for Mani Iyer.

TVS started learning from his uncle even as a child of 4 or 5. From a very young age he also accompanied his uncle. While learning and practicing music, TVS also studied Law. However, with the persuasion of his uncle and the encouragement of some leading vidwans of those days like the renowned violinist T.N. Krishnan, TVS decided to pursue a career in CM. The loss for the legal world was a gain for the CM world!

TVS imbibed much of his uncle's unique style of singing characterized by sruti suddham, rendering of alapanas and kritis imbued with a sense of sukha bhavam. and swara prastharams using sarva laghu patterns. TVS later developed his own style.

TVS concerts consisted mostly of the time-honored rakthi ragams like Todi, Bhairavi, Begada ... Most of the kriti selections were those of the Trinity or well-known composers like Papanasam Sivan. But he was not averse to presenting rare ragams/kritis of other composers, for example, Geetha vadya natana (Natakapiya, Adi), Balasubramanyam (Vishnupriya, Adi), both compositions by Tanjavur Sankara Iyer. He has even rendered RTP in relatively minor ragams like Brindavana Saranga and Bindhumalini. His singing of Eppo varuvaro (Jonpuri, Adi, Gopalakrishna Bharathi) in the inimitable style of Mani Iyer always elicited rousing applause. He often would sing the "English" note of Muthiah Bhagavathar before the Mangalam.

TVS has performed at many venues in India and abroad. He performed for Sruti in 1994. TVS received many accolades and awards including the prestigious Sangita Kalanidhi from the Madras Music Academy (2003). The Government of India conferred the Padma Bhushan, also in 2003.

I deeply cherish my memories of my interactions with TVS. He was a real gentleman. He also possessed a prodigious memory. I had met him for the first time, I believe in 1975, in Madison, Wisconsin. I had requested for him to sing some favorite pieces of Mani Iyer and he obliged. Fast forward several years. I moved to the Philadelphia area in 1980. In 1982, TVS held a concert there. I met him at the airport. While driving, I casually mentioned that I had met him in Madison though he probably would not remember me. He responded immediately, "on the contrary, I remember you very well. You requested for me to sing Oh Jagadamba (Ananda Bhairavi, Adi, Syama Sastri) and Kambhodhi. I sang the kriti and did sing RTP in Kambodhi." He then rattled off many other pieces that he sang that day! He even remembered that my wife Prabha had played the tambura that day.

Carnatic Music aficionados would sorely miss him.

May his soul rest in peace.



Miles to go before I sing: In defense of a late musical education

Balaji Raghothaman

I grew up in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. Not particularly a great bastion of Carnatic music, though it has had its small contributions. In my formative years I had the good fortune to be associated with the Thyagaraja festival in my city, through an uncle who was a key organizer. Two weeks every winter, sitting in the first few rows, legs crisscrossed on the floor in a stony maidan over jute matting, outdoor under a pandal made from coconut fronds, right by the theppakkulam of the Venugopalaswamy temple, the singing punctuated by the bells... the scene is still etched inside me, close to my heart. I was hooked on the music, the vibe and the magnetism of the great performers who came through - the likes of Madurai Somu, BV Raman & Lakshmanan, the Bombay Sisters, a Mandolin U Srinivas barely in his teens, the thundering percussion from Thanjavur Upendran, TK Murthy in his prime, the finesse of Vinayakaram's ghatam. In my teenage flights of fancy I would dream of emulating those masters, but these remained just dreams. Acquiring that engineering seat was far more important, and there was never a question of pursuing music with any seriousness. In hindsight it was probably for the better... for I can easily picture myself having become an obsessed wannabe musician unsuccessfully wandering the corridors of the madras academies, talent not quite matching the enthusiasm, with nary a care for my professional career or financial well-being.

But the yearning remained. Fast forward to my grad-school days in Texas. Having found that Smt. Viji Krishnan, daughter of the great TN Krishnan, lived and taught just a few miles from my university, I decided to give the violin a shot. My attempt lasted only about a year, despite the valiant efforts of Viji maam. I also recall a terrifying month when Dr. Krishnan himself was visiting, and he would be in the next room listening to the plaintive screeches from my bow. He was extraordinarily gracious and would have only kind words of encouragement.

Fast forward again a couple of more decades, I ended up in the Philadelphia area and through a stroke of good fortune, got connected with Sruti in my very first week here, right at the beginning of the 25th anniversary year. Sruti felt like home from the very outset. I have given many years of service to the organization, but I consider myself as having gotten the better end of that bargain. To be surrounded by many storehouses of musical knowledge, to be able to interact with some of the greatest musicians of our era, these are blessings that my 15-year old self would never have dreamed of.

Slowly the itch to formally learn music returned. I had been feeling that I had reached the limits of my enjoyment of the music through a superficial listening, that there were many more layers that would only open to me with a more formal and serious pursuit. And I firmly felt in my guts that for me, the most authentic musical knowledge comes through a practice of it, not from listening to it or reading about it. Or perhaps it was all just a manifestation of the cliched mid-life crisis, who knows.

With a lot of trepidation, in my mid 40s, I approached Dinakar Subramanian, who I had been fortunate to befriend, and he graciously agreed to teach me. It has been five years since I started, almost from scratch.

Dinakar has been a very patient and persistent guru, kind but firm in pointing out my errors and areas for improvement, which of course are myriad, and gently coaxing better efforts from me. It has been a very challenging and rewarding journey. I did start with a certain misplaced swagger - "I have listened for 40+ years, so I should be able to sing, no problem"... but of course the reality quickly set in. The inability to intuitively grasp and follow the sruti was one of my biggest obstacles early on.. there were quite a few frustrating hours spent when I felt my brain was telling me I was singing inline with sruti, while the recording would clearly show I was not. I cannot say I have fully overcome it, but I have made progress. With that progress comes an increased sense of pleasure and enjoyment in my singing - doses of dopamine reinforcement that are vital to continuing this pursuit, without which it is all too easy to switch on that TV and watch that game, than to fire up the drone and practice.

As professional workload, kids' chauffeur duties, erratic schedules and frequent travel fill up my calendar, I tend to treat any available interludes as opportunities to practise. Car drives, evenings in hotels, even bathtime... I have my tambura app ready to switch on at a moment's notice when I feel up to it. My family is witness to - or rather victim

of - my obsession.. That the pace of my progress seemed quite slow in proportion, is sometimes a cause for frustration. I have come to accept it as a price to pay for my late start. I also feel that I would benefit from more focus during practice sessions, perhaps through meditation and better breathing. I marvel at the kids and teenagers in our own community who demonstrate great feats of concentration and make great strides in musical artistry and manodharmam in a very short time.

The rewards of my pursuit have been unmistakable. At the Sruti concerts, when I can suddenly tease out a swara pattern lifted from a kriti and used in a kalpanaswaram, or a delicate but meaningful transition in a ragamalika, it is certainly a source of pleasure, like secret doors unlocked in a treasure hunt. In these 5 years, I have grappled with 7 varnams and around 20 kritis of various degrees of difficulty. I say grappled, not 'learned', because one never fully finishes learning a piece. Each time you go back to it, you unlock some new nuance.. this is especially true of varnams, which are treasure-houses that encapsulate the essence of their ragas. At the risk of trivialising, the process is not unlike playing a video game. I have been battling with the intricate final chittaiswaram passages of the hamsadhwani varnam [npgr ngrn. pnps..... and S...nRSnpgrsrgp...] for about 3 years now, especially in the 2nd kalam. As I attempt it for the 1000th time, I realise that it is not so different from conquering that monster in a video game in order to enter the next level..... As the famous British joke goes : "How does one get to Albert Hall? Practice!". It is simple but it is really true.

I am eternally thankful to Dinakar for leading me on this journey, one small step at a time. And for those fellow middle-agers who feel an urge, forget the new sports car and pickup a tambura (ok well...maybe do both)... you will be amply rewarded. Just don't expect the reward to come from outside. It is an internal journey... and the journey itself is the destination. The road is open, and I have miles to go before I truly sing.-----

Balaji Raghothaman is a board member and past president of Sruti. He is a telecom engineer by profession and a music lover by passion.



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