





## **SRUTI RANJANI**

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A Special Issue Dedicated To Maharajapuram Santhanam



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#### From the editors:

The news of Sangeetha Kalanidhi Shri Maharajapuram Santhanam's demise has shocked Indian Classical music lovers everywhere. As a means of expressing our heartfelt condolences to his family, we dedicate this issue of SRUTI RANJANI to Shri Santhanam.

This is the second issue of SRUTI RANJANI from the newly formed Sruti Library Committee. Since our Thyagaraja Aradhana in March 1992, we have had three scintillating programs - Madurai Shri T. N. Seshagopalan's vocal, Shri N. Ramani's flute and the International Dance Alliance's dance drama. Read on for reports and reviews on these performances.

This year also marks the first time SRUTI has floated the concept of season passes for the programs. These have been well received and we encourage more of our members to make use of this convenience.

We are most privileged to be releasing this issue on the day of an Odissi recital by Ms. Samjuktha Panigrahi. To enlighten our audience on this style of dance, we also have an informative article on Odissi in this issue.

The Library Committee has also assumed the responsibility of catering to your requests of SRUTI concert tapes. A listing of the recordings is included in this issue. We are in the process of smoothing out our wrinkles. We strive for your satisfaction.

We have some excellent articles, reports, reviews and letters in this issue. We thank our contributors for the same. Your comments and suggestions are most welcomed by your committee. Please do not hesitate to let us know how we are doing and how we can continue to bring you great pleasure from music and dance. Keep those letters and cards coming folks! We hope you enjoy our programs!

Editors: Lakshmi Govindan Kannan Ranganathan G. Sridhar Dinakar Subramanian

p.s. Several volunteers have helped us to bring out this issue. We express our thanks to them.

#### Santhanam - A tragic loss

SRUTI Staff

The Indian Classical Music world mourns the death of a well known musician. On 24th June 1992, Maharajapuram Santhanam, reportedly, was killed in an auto accident when the car he was traveling in, struck a stationary vehicle near Dindivanam in Tamil Nadu, India.



Heir to the great Maharajapuram tradition, Santhanam was one of the most popular and sought after musicians in India. Santhanam's father, the late Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer was regarded as a giant among musicians of his day and was revered as the embodiment of manodharma sangeetham. He had a special way of rendering Arabhi, Atana, Kamboji, Mohanam and Mukhari. Santhanam not only carried the mantel of the Maharajapuram school, but in later years carved out special styles of his own. His robust and mobile voice was capable of rendering flat notes as well as brigas, and was equally at ease in gamakas in elongated notes (karvais). Santhanam would captivate his audience with frequent modulation of his voice, suddenly drop his voice to a pianissimo, especially negotiating phrases in the higher octaves, and then giving

full throttle to his voice again.

Santhanam's large repertoire of kritis included those of the great Trinity as well as those of Swati Tirunal, Sivan and Purandara Dasa; he quite often used to sing the Shanmukhapriya kriti Vilayada Idhu Nerama by the Delaware Valley composer, T. N. Bala.

Santhanam was a consummate professional on the stage, communicating in a pleasant manner with his accompanists as well as the audience. A fairly typical Santhanam concert would include selections from the major ragams like Thodi, Kalyani, Kamboji as well as from semi-major ragams like Hindolam, Kanada, Madhyamavati etc. He would raise his level of popularity a notch in the post RTP period by singing a number of lilting items. He was particularly well known for rendering ragamalikas which rolled one ragam into another and often spelt the name of the ragams as part of the lyrics.

Santhanam has visited USA a number of times. SRUTI had arranged his concert on 9th Sept. 1989. The SRUTI newsletter (Nov. 89) reported his concert as follows. "On 9th Sept. Maharajapuram Santhanam gave a delightful vocal concert. Heir to the great "Maharajapuram" tradition, Santhanam carried the day with a beautiful Hindolam (Chandrasekhara) and the lilting Kamboji (Ma Janaki). The piece which generated the longest applause was a Purandara Dasa ragamalika - Ksheerabdhi Kannikey. A large audience thoroughly enjoyed the concert."

Santhanam created history in Dec. 89 when the Madras Music Academy awarded him its prestigious title of Sangeetha Kalanidhi. His is the only case where both father and son were recipients of this title. Santhanam has groomed his sons Ramachandran and Srinivasan as professional musicians to continue the Maharajapuram tradition.

As we said at the beginning, Santhanam's death at the age of 64 is a big loss to the Indian Classical Music world. SRUTI sends its deepest condolences to Santhanam's family on the tragic bereavement.

#### From the readers...

Editor:

January 22, 1992

The second issue of Sruti "Publication" (Jan. 1992, Ed.) with a variety of articles on music and dance is a credit to the editorial committee. Congratulations. I particularly enjoyed reading the article "The place of music in dance" by Ramaa Subramanian. Ramaa has expressed her thoughts with great fluidity. It is our good fortune that such a good dancer, teacher and writer lives in our area. One sentence in her article interested me very much. It is, "the inarticulate language of Raga has the unique power to express more by suggestion, the deepest and subtlest of feelings, which articulate words fail to comprehend". I have a lot of reservations about the validity of this statement.

First of all, comprehension is a human ability. Some gifted people, such as the celebrated composers of Carnatic music, have the ability to string words together to express (articulate if you will) their deep emotions of Bhakti or Sringara etc. A dancer or a vocalist has to comprehend and absorb the emotional content of these words as a first step. The really good dancer can convey deeper and subtler feelings of a Padam with her mastery in Abhinaya. But, I would argue, that for a dancer who does not understand the words she is dancing to, reaching the depths of emotions will remain elusive. Same is true for vocalists. However, there is a myth in circulation that Sahitya is not important or as important in music. Of course Sahitya is unimportant for Nritta, but Nritta is not all of dance. So is it in music. You can demonstrate your mastery in music without the Sahitya, but again a concert is not Alapana alone. Most of the popular items rendered by vocalists in the concerts are Krithis in which the composers expressed their hearts out. Think of "Santhamu leka soukhyamu ledu" for example. For a vocalist who does not understand what these words mean, no amount of mastery in music is going to help in conveying deeper or subtler feelings to the audience.

Ramaa says in her article "These Padas seem ideal for dance owing to the presence of emotional sentiment like spiritual love". In the article on Abheri Ragam by the Sruti Staff, it was said that Balamurali renders "Nagumomu Ganaleni" at a slower pace than

others in order to bring out the Bhavam in this Krithi. The article also says that he renders the Krithi in a particular fashion to ".. leave a deep impression of piety in the rasikas". These quotes support what I am trying to say, that rendering a Raga or expressing an Abhinaya to bring out soul stirring emotions depends upon understanding what the emotional content of the words in the Padam or Krithi is.

As you know, the South Indian vocal or dance music is written in many languages. It is rare to find an artist who understands all these languages. But, a good artist has the responsibility to at least understand the words in the compositions they are presenting to the audience. I may also add here that they (the vocalists) have to learn to say those words properly because improper pronunciation distorts or destroys the meaning of the word. I may give the example of the word most often abused in the concert halls. The word "Komala" is an adjective derived from Sanskrit and it means "gentle", "soft" or "tender". Most artists that I listened to sing it as "Komalla" with a harsh syllable "lla" at the end which completely destroys the tenderness of the feeling the word was meant to describe. If I am going to buy a ticket to see/hear the artist perform, I expect the artist to pay attention to what he/she is doing.

I don't want to give the impression that I am complaining about the non-Telugu vocalists destroying Telugu words. I am. But that is only because I do not understand the krithis in other languages. However, I have no doubt that a similar fate is being meted out to them also by artists who are ignorant of what they are singing or dancing to.

Sincerely,						
A. Sitaramayya						
***********	*****	****	****	****	*****	*

Editor:

January 22, 1992

I would like to add the following note to my earlier letter on the importance of Sahityam in Sangeetham.

After I wrote the letter, I came across an "Is Tyagaraja really great?" by Rasikan in your recent issue of Sruti publications. A prominently

high-lighted question in that article was "As for the lyrics--honestly WHO CARES?". Needless to say, I care and ANYBODY WHO UNDERSTANDS AND APPRECIATES THEM CARES. Not simply because I am talking about lyrics in Telugu either. If I understand Kannada. Sanskrit or Tamil to a degree where I can enjoy the beauty and bhavam in the lyric, I would be disappointed if an artist puts up a mediocre rendering of the lyrics. Carnatic music composers wrote the lyrics almost exclusively to express Bhakti or Sringara Rasam. The pleasure of hearing an artist who can convey the emotional content of the lyrics is difficult to explain. If you experienced that, you care; otherwise you say-WHO CARES.

Sincerely, A. Sitaramayya



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#### An Evening with the Madurai Maestro

Vijay K Sundaram

Some of the most chaste traditions of Carnatic Music were vividly upheld by Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan during his vocal recital in Philadelphia for SRUTI. In front of an appreciative audience, Seshagopalan portrayed a multitude of moods with little signs of strain in his voice that sometimes mars his performances. Accompanying Seshagopalan were G. Chandramouli on the violin and Neyveli Narayanan (Mridangam).

Seshagopalan commenced the concert not with an "auto-pilot" varnam but with the Thyagaraja kriti Rama Nannu Brovara in Harikambhoji set to Rupaka talam. Some of the audience were still settling into their seats when Seshagopalan capped the kriti with a sparkling swara passage. It made for a most uplifting start to the concert. The following piece Vandanamu Raghu Nandana in Sahana and Adi illustrated his versatility: the swara passage was slowly built up, rising to a final crescendo, a telling contrast with the initial item.

The first raga essay was in Vachaspati. Seshagopalan swept up and down three octaves, demonstrating the natural richness of his briga. The well-known composition of Patnam Subramania Iyer, Ennadu Nee in Adi talam followed, rendered at a brisk pace with quite an elaborate neraval passage and swaram. It was noticeable that Seshagopalan was fairly restrained in his elaboration. In the past, he has been justifiably criticised for eschewing aesthetics in favour of mathematical combinations, particularly in his swara improvisations. On this occasion there was certainly a fair use of kanakku (in a clever sequential passage based around the dhaivatam) but in a manner so as to enhance the listener's appeal.

Seshagopalan then embarked on a most majestic forty minutes or so during which he sang two Dikshitar masterpieces (Neerajakshi Kamakshi in Hindolam and Sri Ranganayakam in Nayaki) sandwiched around Ambujam Krishna's Kaathiruvenu Nanu in Ranjani. It was a most moving experience and once again illustrated that apart from K.V. Narayanaswamy, there is nobody who can compare with Seshagopalan in vilamba kala. With B. Rajam Iyer and D.K. Pattamal in the twilight of their careers, Seshagopalan can

rightly claim to be today's champion of Dikshitar kritis. His repertoire is impressive and he lends a bhakti bhavam that simply captivates the audience.

The pervading measure of control was maintained during the ensuing Keeravani ragam which was in two parts. Seshagopalan was both fluent and expressive as he explored every nook and cranny of this most emotional of ragas. His voice modulation was skillful so as to create first a poignancy and then a feeling of "gambeeram" during a foray up to the upper rishaba which drew spontaneous applause from the audience. He capped this twenty minute work of art with a perfect graha bhedam, gloriously exhibiting the raga Bowli.

Chandramouli's Keeravani alapana was sweet if a little short. It is always a formidable task for a young artist to accompany Seshagopalan because of his wild improvisations coupled with strong layam. The likes of Mysore Nagaraj and Nagai Muralidharan have in the past shown the ability to meet this challenge. Chandramouli still has a way to go to match this standard but he sensibly played within his limitations.

As ever, Seshagopalan's tanam was spectacular and varied in tempo. Only Mandolin Srinivas of today's musicians generates so much vibrance of energy during the tanam passage (a school of opinion has criticised this explosive approach as gimmicky). The Pallavi (Gambeera Vani Keeravani in Kanda Triputa talam) was actually sung by Seshagopalan during his last North American tour in 1987 (most notably in Toronto). By his own standards, the pallavi was less elaborate than expected. There was no anuloma and pratiloma and the swararagamalika was limited to four shortish ragas (in Vani Mahal last December, Seshagopalan's swara ragamalika encompassed eighteen elaborate ragas and lasted almost ten minutes on its own). Amusingly, Seshagopalan finished his excursion into Kadanakuthukulam with a swara passage lifted straight from Raghu Vamsa Sudha.. Having recapped in Keeravani, he then left the stage to Neyveli Narayanan who executed an unflashy but satisfying thani avartanam.

The lighter items that followed included a virutham in Kamas and Suruti; two of Seshagopalan's parallel favourites dedicated to great shrines in South India (Guruvayurappanne in Reetigowlai and Tirupati Venkataramana in Hamsanandi) and a short tukkada in Brindavanasaranga.

So after nearly 3-1/2 hours of cut and thrust, the concert closed, leaving the audience heavy with emotion. Seshagopalan has an almost unique ability to leave an audience awe-struck. It is to be hoped that he will continue to do this during his tour without resorting to the "bull-in-a-china shop" pyrotechnics which have attracted criticism in the past.

\*

Vijay Sundaram is an MBA student at the Wharton School at Penn. 

#### Keeravani

SRUTI staff

Keeravani is one of the major rakthi ragams in Carnatic music. It is the 21st melakarta ragam with the following swarams: Shadjamam, Chatusruti Rishabam, Sadharana Gandharam, Suddha Madyamam, Panchamam, Suddha Dhaivatham, Kakali Nishadam.

Keeravani is a very popular ragam capable of great elaboration. Thus it is often heard at the ragam-thanam-pallavi level. T.N. Seshagopalan's superb rendition at the SRUTI concert of May 2<sup>nd</sup> is fresh in our minds.

Probably the most commonly heard kriti in Keeravani is Thyagaraja's Kalikiyunte. This kriti, usually sung in the vilamba (slow pace) kalam, brings out the quintessence of the ragam. A good rendering of this kriti can instill a sense of repose and peace in the audience. Some other well known kritis in Keeravani are:

Innamum sandeha padalamo - Gopalakrishna Bharati

Devi neeye thunai

- Sivan

Bhavaye sarasanabham

- Swati Tirunal

Amba vani nannu

- Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar

Varamulosagu

- Patnam Subramanya Iyer

In the (asampurna) melakarta scheme of Dikshitar, the 21st melakarta is known as Keeranavali. This lilting ragam is a janya (derivative) ragam of Keeravani. Kalyana Vasantam is another popular janyam of Keeravani. Nadalodudai of Thyagaraja in this ragam was played by N. Ramani in his SRUTI concert of 17 May; Lalgudi Srimathy also played this kriti in her first concert for SRUTI in 1987.

Keeravani has found a place among the repertoire of North Indian musicians. Chandra Kauns, a popular North Indian raga is a janya of Keeravani.

Aficionados of Western classical music will recognize the scale of Keeravani to be identical to the minor scale. Mozart used the minor scale effectively in many of his compositions, especially to invoke a sense of poignancy. Beethoven's famous fifth symphony as well as Dvorak's New World symphony (Symph. #9) are some other well known works in the minor scale.

In the Venkatamakhi scheme of melakarta ragams, every suddha madhyama ragam has a mirror image in a prati madhyama ragam. Simhendramadhyamam is the prati madhyama counterpart of Keeravani. SRUTI audiences will remember the elegant treatment of Simhendramadyamam, by the Rudrapatnam Brothers last year.

#### Sri Ramani Venuganam

#### Kannan Ranganathan

Carnatic music fans in the Delaware valley were treated to an evening of delightful music at the Stein auditorium, Drexel University, by Padmashree N. Ramani and party during their performance for SRUTI on May 17, 1992. Dr. Ramani was in his element in devising subtle movements in his rendition. Ably supported by Ms. Kanyakumari on the violin and Shri Guruvayoor Dorai on the mrudangam, Ramani managed speed and tonal melody competently throughout the concert.

He began with the padavarnam Chalamela in Natakurinji. This was followed by a kriti of Krishnaswamy Ayya in the raga Hamsadhwani. This kriti, set to tisra nadai adi talam, was beautified by cascades of kalpanaswaras. Harikambhoji and Kalyana Vasantham were delineated in a masterly fashion in Dinamani Vamsha and Nadaloludai respectively. Rarely have I heard Kalyana Vasantham taken up for such a detailed treatment. The neraval and swaras that followed were marked with artistry and scholarship. With the accompanists also in full bloom, Ramani then raced through the Thyagaraja kriti Nenarunchinanu in Malavi, keeping up the speed to the very end. The piece that followed, Marivere in Lathangi, brought the audience back to the sublime mood that prevailed throughout. This was followed by another exercise in aesthetics in the form of Bhairavi. A lilting rendition of the alapana kept the audience captivated. After an equally delightful treatment of Bhairavi by Ms. Kanyakumari, the Dikshitar kriti Balagopala was presented on a wider canvas with many lingering essays of neravals and swara vinyasas. Resting on the taara shadjamam added to one's aesthetic pleasure. This, in my opinion, was the best piece of the evening.

After an intermission, which to everyone's annoyance turned out to be a rather long one, thanks to a power outage on-stage, the very patient and understanding trio served up rich fares in the form of the popular kritis Akhilandeshwari (Dwijavanthi) and Paramatmudu (Vagadeeshwari). An elaborate treatment of Madhyamavati was followed by a thanam and a pallavi. There were gamakas, trills, articulations, and rapid sallies which kept the audience glued to their

seats. The excellent rapport the trio had in the ragamalika swaras, especially the kanakkus, leading to a crescendo, was a treat to hear and the audience responded by applauding at every stage. After a song in Mand and a ragamalika, the concert came to a grand finale with a delightful thillana in Bindumalini composed by Dr. Ramani himself.

The accompanists were at their best throughout the concert. Kanyakumari displayed a complete mastery over the violin, even in the tara sthayi. Guruvayoor Dorai's mrudangam play was an unforgettable feast to the ears. The gentle touch and the creation of intricate and interesting phrases on the instument, especially during the thani-avarthanam after Bhairavi, was greeted by the audience by thunderous applause time and again.

All in all, this is a concert that will linger in my memory for a long time.

#### Cleveland Thyagaraja Utsavam - Review

#### Kalpagam Jeyaraman

Recently, I had a wonderful experience attending the fifteenth Annual Saint Thyagaraja Music Festival in Cleveland, Ohio. This opportunity came about most unexpectedly. The organizers of this celebration happened to visit my husband and me at our house for lunch. During conversation, they extended a warm invitation to the upcoming event. I happily accepted and was looking forward to be part of the fun.

This Festival was organized under the auspices of the Music Department of Cleveland State University, under the leadership of Dr. T. Temple Tuttle, Director. What a job they had done! There were more than 1400 people in attendance.

The morning started with a sumptuous breakfast which included a

variety of traditional South Indian items. In the auditorium, the Pancharathna Kirthanams started in full gusto. Following this, was the voluntary singing of Thyagaraja Kirthanams by local artists of all ages. There were also performances by several artists from other states, even as far as Seattle, WA! This portion of the festival continued till lunch, which was in itself an amazing culinary delight prepared by dedicated volunteers from the local area.

After the wonderful meal, everybody was treated to the anxiously awaited main event of the day--the Jugalbandi by famous artists from India, Dr. N. Ramani-flute, U. Srinivas-mandolin, Kanyakumari-violin, Zakir Husain-tabla, and Guruvayur Doraimridangam. This splendid instrumental concert lasted over three hours and it was simply out of this world! The audience was spellbound at the mastery of the artists.

The next item was the vocal concert performed by V. Ramachandran, another famous musician from India. His repertoire was outstanding and the recital lasted over two hours. To the delight of many, he carried the banner of his guru, the late G.N. Balasubramaniam. Mr. Ramachandran was bestowed with the title of Sangeetha Ratnakara by the Aradhana Committee. Personally speaking, after attending a concert at the Shanmugananda Hall, in Bombay, this is the very first time that I have ever witnessed this magnitude of people attending an Indian classical concert of this kind. The following morning, the festivities continued with the vocal concert by Dr. Seshagopalan and party. He is also a very famous Indian artist who has made his name among Carnatic music lovers. This wrapped up the event.

This was a splendid experience for music lovers everywhere. I cannot stress the joy of being part of such a marvelous function. If you have never had the opportunity to attend the Thyagaraja Festival in Cleveland, I highly recommend that you do so at least once in your lifetime! You will not regret it!

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#### Ali Akbar Forever

#### S. Narayanaswamy

Did you ever think that Hindustani music is a little too slow, dull, and hence boring? Then it is highly probable that you never had a chance to listen to Ali Akbar. Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. 'The greatest musician in the world' (That's what the Welcomat said). The Ultimate Maestro. The Wizard of Sarod. He recently was in town, along with Swapan Chaudary. Oh Man, what a concert. Penn Scholars' Program of the University of Pennsylvania sponsored the event which took place on June 26 at Annenberg Center. Ali Akbar (affectionately known as Khansaab) is the son of Allauddin Khan, Guru to most of the leading musicians of India. His professional music career spans over the past five decades. Since his first tour of the U.S., he became 'instrumental' in shaping this country's fascination with Indian music. He founded and is still running the Ali Akbar School of Music in California.

The program started with Rag Medhavi, an evening melody. Its mood is one of devotion and serenity and its gait majestic. It is rarely encountered in the usual repertoire and I felt some strains of the Karnataka Ragam Kambhoji during the alap. The format was traditional with jorh following the alap and concluding with two compositions in *Teental*, the first in *vilambit* (slow pace) and the second in *madhyalaya* (medium pace). The *taane* (swaraprastharam) of the composition were executed with great skill. Khansaab's lithe fingers were flying all over the shiny handle of the sarod, jumping across the octaves. They were weaving intricate patterns with melody as the yarn and rhythm as the loom. Swapan's accompaniment on tabla was like adding wind to the fire. After a twenty-minute intermission, the concert resumed with Rag Mishra Piloo, a semi-classical melody. This Rag originated from folk music and is famous for its captivating sweetness. You may understand its enchanting power from the hundreds of Indian movie songs which were based on it. Khansaab started with a short alap and then plunged right into the compositions. These were set to Chautal, Ektal and Teental. Once again, it was amazing to watch the taane come out in a torrential downpour from the nimble fingers of Khansaab. The solo interludes of tabla between taane and the scintillating sawaal-jawaab between sarod and tabla were thrilling.

I was a little disappointed when the concert came to an end with *Piloo*. You see, I was hoping for at least another *Rag*. This is a habit I acquired in Pune, India, where the concerts start at 9 PM, and go on late into the night as long as the artist could perform. I guess one has to make allowances for the situation here. Anyway, Khansaab's advancing years couldn't stop him from giving a most wonderful performance, and Swapan proved to be a worthy match for him on *tabla*. I wish for a long and healthy life for Khansaab so that he will continue to regale the audiences world over and spread the appreciation of Hindustani music.

Narayanaswamy, also known as Nasi, is the President of Pragathithe Indian Student Association at Drexel University. He is a graduate student in Mechanical Engineering at Drexel and a music enthusiast.

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#### "Out of Context" Ouiz

#### Uma Prabhakar

Described below are some contexts, which may remind one of the first lines of some of Thyagaraja's songs. However, I am willing to bet my last dollar that the original contexts, in which these songs were composed, were entirely different! Have fun in guessing these songs.

- 1. You are at this five point intersection, and don't know which way to go! You are staring daggers at your friend-passenger and saying, "please tell me which way!". (raga Sruti Ranjani)
- 2. You are lost in New Jersey, pulled up the car to a side and have been studying various maps for a while. At last you found the way and burst into this ecstatic song: (raga Sudhdha Saveri)
- 3. You are at this cultural festival of the ... Association. You came at the said time and have waited over an hour. The organizers are bustling about, making it seem like it will start any minute. But the screen is still drawn and you feel like feebly singing this song in raga Gowlipantu.
- 4. She is kind of shy to say that she loves you. She slips into humming this tune in Hindolam and hopes you will get the hint!
- 5. You are taking this exam and sweating it out. Not one problem seems within reach. You have chewed the pencil to the lead and started praying (in raga Purvi Kalyani):
- 6. After a lengthy argument, you admit guilt and say: 'yes, where is the need to point fingers at you? I am the one to blame' (raga Kalyani)
- 7. Complimenting women is not always easy (as you may know!). Didn't she walk out on you even as you were completing the sentence: 'Hey, your divine figure...' (raga Kalyani).
- 8. During the short vacation to India, you were thoroughly pampered by the help around the house. You didn't have to do the

cooking, the dishes, the laundry... Why, even your kids were baby sat for free and you couldn't help lamenting in Bilahari "can you ever get such service (here in the US)?"

- 9. You hoped that your friend will bring the car, so you could drive to the movies. But when you opened the door and saw this cheap guy, you literally shouted out in Mohana, "why did you have to come walking to pick me up???"
- 10. You have been yelling from downstairs, and he just won't respond! You cry out "why can't you just say yes!" (raga Kambhoji)

A Personal Apology: Oh Thyagaraja! We do love your music and respect your personality. It is just that too many of us these days are taking your music too seriously! I am afraid that we are losing the ability to see beauty in simple things and the simplicity in beautiful things. So, I thought of this 'out of context' interpretation as a refresher!

#### (Answers on Page 21)

#### **Introduction to Odissi**

#### Reeta Prusty

One of the inherent qualities of the Indian Classical Arts in general and Dance in particular is its resilience. Within a span of three decades the Odissi dance has recovered its elegance, brilliance and lustre that was remnant of its glorious past. An almost extinct tradition has blossomed into its fullness. Many historical events were responsible for its degeneration; however the maestros were not unaware of its languishing condition.

The resurrection of this art form can be connected with the creation of an independent state - Orissa. The post Independence cultural renaissance saw the germination, growth and blossoming of Odissi Dance and ultimately its placement as an independent mature plant in the Classical map of India. This can be attributed to the relentless efforts of the scholars, dance lovers, maestros and performers.

This glorious art form had been locked up in mute sculptures for centuries (2<sup>nd</sup> century to 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.). It was only in the mid nineteen thirties and forties that there are records of the dance being performed by devadasis in temples and a more vigorous form of it by the "gotipuas" outside of the temple.

The present day gurus started off by composing and choreographing items for the theater groups and thereby nourishing and nurturing the infant Odissi seedling. One such choreographic composition performed by Shrimati Laxmipriya Mohapatra in the year 1945 was the first dance number to be announced as "Odissi Dance" - a dream come true for many of its proponents.

The institution of Kala Vikash Kendra and National Music Association was the buttress that supported this young art form by absorbing the poor maestros who were languishing in the theater groups and motivating them to further exploit their talents.

By then the dance had been elevated to a unique art form, rather than a frieze adorning the temples, thus urging the younger generation to learn, perform and propagate this young art form and giving it an identity of its own. Finally in the All India Dance Festival organized

by the Central Sangeet and Natak Academy, Odissi dance demonstrations proved its Classical elements and entered into the portals of the Classical dance edifice.

In the mean time, a born dancer like Sanjukta Panigrahi joined Kalakshetra, for a systematic, scientific and regular coaching in Bharat Natyam. But prior to her departure to Kalakshetra, she had been tutored and trained by Padmabhusan Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra and had given performances, getting ready to substitute and supplement the kudos earned by others.

The heady recognition of Odissi Dance at the National level gave birth to "Jayantika", a group of Gurus and scholars whose tireless tenacity has sustained the Odissi repertoire till date.

Many more original choreographies emerged from these two institutions and from the mid sixties no classical conference went without an Odissi number. Some of the maestros moved to the capital of the country on demand.

The establishment of Utkal Sangeet Mahavidhyalaya strengthened the foundation of Odissi Dance and Music and became the first governmental machinery to encourage this art form. It was headed by Dr. Minati Mishra who had adopted this dance form after her initial training in Bharat Natyam. With her, emerged the next level of serious classical dancers at a professional level, namely Padmashree Sanjukta Panigrahi and Kum Kum Das.

By the eighties, learning or even watching an Odissi performance had become a status symbol and the number of schools imparting Odissi dance and music lessons increased but the system remained unsystematic without a grammar. Music is the life and soul of dance. If dance and music are divorced then it is the dance which dies. The growth and expansion of the dance is fully dependent on the melodious structure of the ragas.

"Odissi dance is intensely tender and tenderly intense, lyrical and dainty, punctuated with poses not frozen but alive."

The basic body positions of the dance are Samabhanga - when the dancer stands straight, taking the weight of her body on both legs, with no bends anywhere; Abhanga - essentially the same as

Samabhanga but the dancer has to stand on one leg hence a slight bend at the waist; Tribhanga - "Tri" or three implying that in this posture there are three bends one at the neck, the second at the torso and the third at the knees; Chouka - "Chou" or four implying that the body bends at four right angles two with the hands, at the shoulder and the other at the elbow and two with the legs, at the knee and at the ankle.

The above four postures are the concrete pillars on which the entire Odissi dance structure is based. The secret of the superfluous tenderness of the dance lies in the subtle movement of the torso, this being the most difficult part for an infant dancer. The movement of the torso front and back and to either sides is one of the first things taught to a dancer.

Padasanchari or the foot movement of the dance is semi-circular where the dancer moves forward with the toes pointing outwards. Another typical movement - 'Lalita Parsni' is one in which the dancer moves by putting the right heel forward, then turns the toe to the right. The hand gestures are an essential, active and important component of all Indian classical dances that distinguish it from modern Western Ballet. Different finger and palm positions are used to narrate the lyrics of the song used in the Abhinaya (or miming).

Besides these there are an array of spins, jumps and other positions that form the basis of this dance style. Lately, the costume has taken a new dimension and is more suitable, convenient and comfortable. The typical Orissan hand woven textile is used to make the four pieces of the costume - the louss, the natabari (broad belt), a trouser with a typical fan like piece between the knees and a scarf that goes over one shoulder and under the other. The jewellery is usually silver and consists of the usual bangles, jhumka (ear rings), anklets, a waist band, armlets and a head gear which consists of two parts. One that covers the hair and the other that marks the division between the forehead and the hair line. The whole Odissi costume is known for its elegance and brilliance.

Like all Indian classical dances, Odissi also has the two aspects namely "Nritta" or pure dance and "Nritya" or dance with emotions. The Odissi repertoire has five main items

Mangalacharana or the invocatory piece where the dancer salutes
 Mother Earth because she will stamp on her in order to build her

dance structure. She also pays her homage to the Gurus and Musicians who accompany her and then she greets the audience and finally she bows down to the almighty.

- Batu is the pure yet basic dance sequence

- Pallavi is also a pure dance sequence but with a little more intricacies. This item is musically oriented.

- Abhinaya is the miming aspect or the drama form of the dance. The dancer tells her story by hand gestures and facial

expressions.

- Mokshya or salvation. As the tempo and concentration of the dance increases It finally reaches its apex in this last item. In this pure dance item the dancer surrenders herself to the Almighty. The artist realizes 'Brahma' the creator. It is here that a classical Odissi dancer (as all other Indian Classical dancers) proves an ancient Indian thought that dance and music are the shortest route to reach the destination of 'Brahma' that is Godhood.

\*

#### Answers to "Out of Context" Quiz

- 1. E daari sancharintura, ika palkara!
- 2. Darini telusukonti!
- 3. Tera tiyaga raada!
- 4. Manasuloni marmamunu telusuko!
- 5. Jnanamosaga raada!
- 6. Ninnana valasina demi ..
- 7. Sundari, ni divya roopamu...
- 8. Dorakuna ituvanti seva..
- 9. Nanu paalimapa nadachi vachchitivo...
- 10. O Ranga sayi, Pilichite O yanuchu...

#### Krishnam Vande Jagathgurum

Joohi Sood Dev

As described by the choreographer, Dr. Sudharani Raghupaty, the production of "Krishnam Vande Jagathgurum" was an experiment in dance that was wnvisioned by the producer, Smt. Leela Sekhar. Disciples of several great Natyacharyas and dancers from India were brought together in an integrated production that attained a difficult feat - a well-orchestrated balance of several distinct styles of dance into one powerful performance. Sudharani's choreography maintained a respectable technical standard without compromising the interest of the audience.

The performers hailed from accomplished Gurus like K.J. Sarasa, Sudharani Raghupahy, Revathi Ramachandran, the Dhananjayans, S.K. Rajarathnam Pillai, Nirmala Ramachandran, Mangudi Dorairaja Iyer, and Chitra Visweshwaran. Of the nine dancers in the troupe, two were male, six wer female, and one was a young girl who played Bala Krishna. The two hour recital was in praise of Lord Krishnaand hailed him as the "Lord of the Universe".

The program opened with the Gita-Upadesham, or song of advice, proclaiming Krishna as the Loka Maheshwara, master of all the worlds. A dynamic Pushpanjali encompassed the Dasa-Avataram, the ten incarnations, andset the tempo for the remainder of the programme. The following enacted the life of Krishna, from his cradle ceremony to his marriage to Rukmini\*. The concluding act was Narada's recitation of the final verse fron the Krishna-Ashtakam and the famous verse from the Baghavat-Gita, "Sambhavami Yuge Yuge".

Musical acompaniment was provided by Padma Rajagopalan (nattuvangam and vocal), Chandra Krishnamurthi (vocal support), C.N. Thyagaraju(flute), M. Balachandra (mridangam), and B.V. Raghavendra Rao (violin) under the musical direction of Vidwan Madurai N. Krishnan. Padma Rajagopalan displayed extraordinary stamina in her non-stop renditions throughout the programme. Stage management, provided by Jaya Venkataraman, was polished and effective.

Highlights from the performance included a sharp portrayal of Rukmini by Pavitra Prasad, who displayed a good command of Nrittha, or pure dance. Revathi Ramachandran exhibited an indepth understanding and expertise in Abhinaya with her precise eye movements and expressions in the representation of Radha in the padam "Yaahi Madhava, Yaahi Keshava". The Thillana, choreographed by Padmasri Madurai Krishnan, was enhanced by strong footwork on the part of all the dancers and was particularly enjoyable because it began with a simple but interesting Getthu.

Although the programme was an overall success, it did have its imperfections. One disappointing section was the portrayal of Bala Krishna who was cute but did not appear prepared to perform pure dance sequences alongside dancers with a higher level of skill. To those members of the audience who sat in the left portion of the theatre, the views of the orchestra was blocked by a speaker and a flower arrangement, and as a result, the effectiveness of the orchestra was somewhat compromised.

The Philadelphia performance concluded the U.S. tour that visited several major cities. The programs were dedicated to Smt. T. Balasaraswathi and were sponsored by the Cleveland Cultural Alliance. The proceeds were used to benefit the Indian Cultural Studies Program at Cleveland State University and WVIZ-TV, Cleveland's PBS station.

To those fortunate enough to have witnessed this event, it proved to be a memorable program. It was an honour to see the joint efforts of a troupe of accomplished organizers and upcoming dance leaders.

\* Editors' comments

Two features struck us as being novel and indeed thrilling. One was a very innovative inclusion of the lilting but simple Bilahari swarajati - Rara Venu Gopala in the cradle ceremony. Another was Krishna running the length of the auditorium responding to Rukmini's supplications. The spotlight following Krishna lent quite some drama to the sequence.

#### Kumar Gandharva

SRUTI Staff

Kumar Gandharva - master theoretician of Indian music and performer par excellence will sing no more. He passed away on January 12, 1992. We pay humble tribute to this musical institution by presenting excerpts from G.N. Joshi's book "Down Melody Lane".

On 8th April 1924 a shining star of Indian classical music was born. One should be grateful to God for helping this gifted singer to fight against formidable odds and to emerge victorious and dedicate himself solely to the study and advancement of music. About 30 years ago, Kumar had to undergo very complicated lung surgery. and consequently had to suspend his extremely promising career as a singer for a few years. This lapse into obscurity actually proved to be a blessing in disguise because, even though he had to discontinue his singing riyaz, Kumar spent his temporary forced retirement in introspective, contemplative and meditative concentration on the study of music. This helped him to emerge from the ordeal a much matured and seasoned artist with newly sharpened creative faculties. When he was only 12 years old he held a large select audience of Pandits and musicologists spellbound with his spectacular performance at an All India Music Conference. Correctly judging the talents of the young boy, Professor B. R. Deodhar took him under his wing. He taught Kumar to be steadfast in his aim and inspired him to make an exhaustive study of music. As a result, Kumar has acquired a very wide and progressive outlook which enables him to appreciate all that is best in different styles of music and to absorb them into his own peculiar style. In doing so he has courageously brushed aside long standing conventions. Kumar studied very closely the folk music of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Malwa, etc. This led him into composing Geet hemant, Geet varsha, Geet shishir, and Triveni- bhajans of 3 great saints: Kabir, Surdas and Meera- which proved a sensational hit. These experiments clearly portrayed his revolutionary spirit and his bid to be a trend setter.

To watch Kumar tuning his tanpuras perfectly and tunefully so that they will blend perfectly is an enjoyable and memorable experience.

When the strings, perfectly blended in unison, resound and reverberate in the concert hall, and when Kumar blends his own voice as identically with the swara of the tanpura, the audience experiences a sensation divine and beyond description. Apart from the two tanpuras, one on either side, the only accompaniment Kumar uses is that of a soft harmonium and a tabla played in a tranquil, straightforward manner and in a tempo - laya with perfect precision. It has a soothing effect on the audience whose whole attention is riveted on Kumar's singing that very soon envelops them in its magic. When Kumar starts his methodical exposition of a raga picture, he puts before the audience the many mysterious and beauteous facets of the raga. The audience enjoys all these with ever increasing curiosity and delight. At one moment one is floating down a quiet and serene river of melody; at another one is rushing down a tumbling waterfall from the Taar aaptak to the Mandra aaptak. At times the swaras are swift and piercing like an attacking falcon; a little later they will sound caressingly soft and sweet and hauntingly imploring. Kumar's musical presentation is an experience of these contradictory impressions that are created with ease and grace.

For his distinctly valuable contribution to Indian music, Kumar was recently awarded the title Padmabhushan. His deep and extensive study of our ragas has enabled him to bring to light many forgotten ragas. Apart from this, the contribution of ragas of his own creation is very substantial. Among the new ragas which have already received public approbation are Sanjari, Malavati, Bihad Bhairava, Saheli Todi. Gandhi Malhar and Sohoni Bhatiyar. Though Kumar studied the rudiments of music in the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, he did not allow his art to be dominated by any particular style. One observes sometimes a very strong resemblance to the late Omkarnath's style, while at other times one has tantalizing glimpses of the Gwalior and Agra Gharanas. It is a matter of considerable speculation among those who are interested in our classical music whether Kumar, who had rebelliously cast away the cumbersome load of gharanas and traditions, will eventually establish an independent gharana of his own. Though Kumar has successfully explored and created fresh wonders in music, I do not feel that a 'Kumar Gandharva' gharana will become a reality, because there is and will always be one and only one Kumar.

Source: India - Digest

#### Ramaiah Pillai

Shobha Sharma

The field of Bharathanatyam lost a great 'natyacharya' in the passing of Ramaiah Pillai. Born on 24 December, 1910 in Vazhuvoor (Tanjavur district), Ramaiah Pillai hailed from a family steeped in the traditions of South Indian classical music and dance. He was trained in Bharathanatyam by his maternal uncle, Manicka Nattuvanar, with whom he lived for some years. In 1938, the opportunity to train dancers in films presented itself and Ramaiah Pillai moved to Madras. Besides teaching actresses, he also taught Bharathanatyam to young girls to prepare them for stage performances. Probably the most distinguished of his disciples is Kamala (Narayanan), who brought great fame to her Guru. Among those who studied with the maestro in the 1950's and later have become well-known themselves are - Kanaka Srinivasan, Komala Varadan, Padma Subramanyam, Chitra Visweshwaran, and Kamala's sister Rhadha. Swamimalai Rajarathnam and K.J. Sarasa, who are highly respected dance Gurus, also trained with Ramaiah Pillai for several years.

When Ramaiah Pillai picked up the reins of the Vazhuvoor tradition, he not only carried it forward but also imparted to it the fruits of his research, imagination, perception, and skills of innovation. He reintroduced some disused teermanam-s and brought karana-s (striking sculpturesque poses) back into vogue. He choreographed numerous new dances, especially to songs in Tamil, using Andal pasuram-s, Swati Tirunal's compositions and Bharati's poems. The hallmark of the Vazhuvoor style has been its fluid grace and its deep yet subtle feel for Abhinaya. In the words of Kanaka Srinivasan, "This delicacy was not confined to dance alone, but it permeated even the associated disciplines (viz. nattuvangam, music, mridangam, etc.)".

Ramaiah Pillai virtually retired from full-time teaching and nattuvangam in the erly 1960's. He, however, stayed on to guide and support his son, Samraj, who is his successor in wielding the Vazhuvoor baton. Though Pillai is no longer with us in person, the great art of Bharathanatyam that he so lovingly taught and nurtured will remain with us forever.

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