

Maharajapuram Ramachandran's Concert—Listener's Review

A Review (Sept 23, 2000)

By T. Parasaran & T. Sarada

When asked to review Sri Ramachandran's concert (Sruti, Sept 23, 2000), it was with some trepidations that we accepted. We have no formal training in classical music, but we appreciate good music. We enjoyed the concert and here are some of our thoughts about the same.

For classical music starved South East Pennsylvanians, the concert by Sri Maharajapuram Ramachandran and his accompanists turned out to be a feast to the ears. With able supports on violin by Sri Mullaivasal G. Chandramouli and on Mridangam by Sri. Kumbakonam R. Ganesh, the program was all that a music lover expected and hoped for.

There was no mistaking the solid foundation laid by seven generations of Carnatic music stalwarts, their lineage and tutelage, when one heard Sri. Ramachandran. Glimpses of his popular father, Sri Santhanam, his grandfather Sri. Visvanatha Iyer and his most illustrious disciple Sri. Semmangudi, all flashed throughout the concert, at different times, while at the same time Ramachandran maintained his own distinct style. Similarly, Sri Chandramouli reminded the listener of his gurus and their lineage occasionally, without being a copy.

The program had a tentative start with the varnam, but very soon picked up tempo. The universal favorite *Vatapi*, offered an unusual bonus of lively *niraval* and *kalpanaswaras*. Special mention should be made here of the short but highly structured Jugalbandi style of duet between the singer and the percussionist. It is remarkable that Sri. Ramachandran exhibited equal facility in his rendering of swaras whether it was *kalpanaswaras*, or methodical rhythmic build-up, or *that a prayogas*; the transitions were smooth and nicely blended, making the exercise very pleasing to the listeners.

Another passage that stood out was the combination of both Raga and Sahithya Bhavas exhibited in the elaborate niraval of *Alaga Muddunu*, in the charanam of *Meru Samana*, in the raga Mayamalavagoula.

The alapana in Mohanakalyani was non traditional and highly original, holding the full attention of the audience; it was equally great and spell-binding that Sri. Chandramouli opted to go all traditional during his turn.

Nannu Vidichi in Ritigoula from Thyagaraja's *Prahlada Bhakthi Vijayam* gave the artist ample opportunities to excel in true *Sahithya Bhava* with melodic, expressive and graceful sangatis and sancharas; the improvisations using the different names of Sri Rama had a nice touch of *Bhakti Rasa*, a technique that was commonly used by many of the old veterans.

Thodi ragam was so good to listen to after a long time, instead of the ubiquitous Panthuvrali or Purvikalyani. Papanasam Sivan's kriti *Kartikeya Gangeya* added to the pleasure.

Listeners, did you notice that Sri Ramachandran mentioned 'post-thani' songs and not 'post-pallav' songs? Well, there was no RTP, but probably there was no need since quite a few of his *swaravistaras* had *thanaswaras*. We sure heard a short but well paced Thani. Our total ignorance about the intricacies of Mridangam playing prevents us from writing further on the topic.

The cascade of Tamil songs on Muruga, renderings of his father's compositions, our own Bala's song, the uplifting devaranamas and the bhajan that comprised the post-thani were rendered beautifully. It was not 'theatrical', but Sri Ramachandran sang these with reverence and liveliness. These were followed by a thillana in the time honored style of concert singing. A restful Madhyamavathi followed the traditional *Mangalam* to end the concert.

We have to mention the only sour note to the whole evening; but mercifully it was only in the beginning although it crept up briefly, again, during Thodi alapana. We are referring to the problem with the mike

arrangement; this was highly distracting but then that is life. Sure enough, there were more than enough compensations.

We are sure that the audience left the hall as happy and fulfilled as we did.

[Dr. Sarada is a consultant for printing industry. Dr. Parasaran is Technical Director at Polysciences Inc. in Warrington, PA. They both live in Horsham, PA]