

Maharajapuram Sri. Ramachandran's Concert

Carnatic Vocal Concert (October 14, 2006)

A Review by Yeshwant Prabhu

Maharajapuram Sri. Ramachandran's concert at the Montgomeryville Community College on October 14, 2006, was a most satisfying, wonderful and traditional Kucheri. It was one of the finest I have attended in the last five years. It reminded me of the grand concerts of the golden era of Carnatic music, a time when the legendary Madurai Mani Iyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Chembai Vaidyanatha Iyyer, and, of course, G. N. Balasubramaniam were alive. Even though I am writing this review a month later, his superb Harikambodhi alapana is still ringing in my ears.

He started the concert with a varna in raga Charukeshi, Innum Manam, a composition of Lalgudi Sri. Jayaraman. It was followed by the kriti Vinayaka Vinayaka in the Ghana Pancha ragas: Natta, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri. Ilalo pranatharthi in raga Atana, a Thyagaraja kriti was sung with great bhava. It reminded me of the soulful rendition of Ela nee dayaaraada, in the same raga, by the late Sri. Santanam. A superb rendition of an elaborate alapana in Harikasmbodhi followed. It was methodically developed. I have rarely heard a Harikambodhi more beautiful than this. This alapana alone was worth my driving more than one hundred miles to the concert! He sang Thyagaraja's kriti Undethi Ramudu gadu, a composition rarely heard at concerts. Sri. Nagai Muralidharan's alapana on the violin was equally superb.

I was delighted that Sri. Dikshitar's Swaminathana samrakshitham in the raga Brindavani (also known as brindavanasaranga) was sung at madhyama kala, to bring out the raga swarupa. Many vocalists simply rush through this song. Next he sang an astonishing Poorvi Kalyani alapana, followed by Dikshitar's Ekambranaatham.

The violinist's alapana was equally pleasing to the ears. (I am tempted to say that on the violin his melodious Poorvikalyani became Karnaranjani!) A short kriti in Huseni, Thyagaraja's Raghuvira ranadheera was next. For ragam taanam and pallavi he chose Begada. This is a delicate raga; only a few vocalists sing it well. Sri. Ramachandran's deep voice suited the raga perfectly. The alapana was very satisfying. I was surprised, however, that for pallavi he chose the simple Chaapu tala, instead of one of the more complex talas such as atta, Jhampa, Dhruva tala, or even the Deshadi, to give the mridangist wider scope to display his enormous talent. I have heard from some mridangists that for dhani avarthanam, the short Chaapu tala doesn't offer much scope for elaboration, unlike the longer talas such as Dhruva tala.

At the request of a rasika, I believe, he sang Purandara Dasa's Ksheeraabdhhi Kannike in ragamalika. This kriti was made very popular by his father, and I think Sri. Ramachandran sings it at almost all concerts. He sang with bhava Bhuvaneshwariya Nene maanasave in Mohana. A ragamalika in the ragas Kedaragowla, Dhanyasi and Sucharitra followed by a Tamil Kriti, Koteeswara Iyyer's Velum Mayilume in Sucharitra was excellent. Thyagaraja's Haridasulu vedale in Yamuna Kalyani was very pleasant. I believe the artist gave special attention to the sukha aspect of Carnatic music. He concluded the concert with a superb tillana in the raga Basant Bahar, a composition of Sri. Santanam, followed by Thyagaraja's Pavamana in raga Saurasttram. Lasting more than four hours, the concert was well balanced, and interspersed with quite a few elaborate alapanas. All in all, it was an extraordinary, most memorable concert. I left the hall with my heart bursting with joy, and my head ringing with divine music.

I must say that at most vocal concerts, the accompanying artistes rarely match the vocalist. Even though I would be breaching etiquette if I say this, I must say that I truly felt that the violinist even excelled the vocalist at many places! Mannargudi Sri Iswaran's mridanga was of very high caliber also. As a result, the entire concert was elevated to a level one rarely experiences these days.

Yeshwant Prabhu is a Chemist and an aspiring vocalist. He learnt Carnatic vocal music from Flutist Sri Gopalakrishna Iyyer and Composer/Vocalist Sri T.N.Bala.