

An evening of enjoyable music : Sudha Raghunathan

Carnatic Vocal Concert (September 23, 2006)

A Review by Rasikan

Sudha Raghunathan is and has been for many years a leading and popular star in the Carnatic music firmament. A torchbearer of the GNB/MLV school of fast, bright based music, Sudha has developed a style of her own. The concert for SRUTI on September 23, 2006 at the Colonial Middle school auditorium in Plymouth Meeting was the second of a rare double bill - Bharatanatyam performance by Ramya Ramnarayanan preceded Sudha's concert - as part of SRUTI's twentieth anniversary celebration. Sudha was graceful in acknowledging this milestone in more than one way during the concert.

Sudha was accompanied by B.S. Raghavendra Rao on the violin, Neyveli Skanda Subramaniam on the mridangam and N. Raman on the morsing.

There is a tendency these days among some musicians of packing their concerts with kriti after kriti with very few alapanas and almost all the kritis in Adi talam. [Sowmya's recent concert for SRUTI comes to mind especially about the talam.] Sudha's concert was a welcome change. [see the concert listing at the end of the review.]

An expansive Kalyani followed by the Syama Sastry kriti 'Birana varalichi' was the central piece. Sudha rendered the kriti in tistra nadai Adi talam of (8x3) 24 aksharams for a cycle. It is difficult to maintain this talam with a suitable kala pramanam. Thus some musicians simplify it to a Rupaka talam requiring two cycles for the pallavi (6x2x2). I was glad that Sudha did not fall for this simplification. Sudha also exhibited her virtuosity by rendering an alapana for Narayani (Raama neeve gani) and some interesting swara combinations. [Narayani differs from the popular Suddha saveri only in the nishadam in the avarohanam.]

The RTP in Bhairavi was a display of her originality. Sudha chose an unusual pallavi in Tistra jathi Ata talam of 10 matras. The words for the pallavi were "Sri Krishna ghanam, venu ghanam, madhura ghanam (and 1½ matras after the arudi) Sruti layamudan serum (Sri Krishna ghanam)". Sudha cleverly started rendering the lyrics at Sruti layamudum as if highlighting that she was giving a concert under the auspices of SRUTI. There was more to the pallavi. She first rendered it in second kalai including tri kalam and tisram; reduced to first kalai for the swara prastarams and then changed to khanda chapu (5x2) for ragamalikai swarams! Compositions of Oothukadu Venkata kavi (OVK) are often referred to as Sri Krishna Ghanam. To emphasize this point (since her pallavi started with Sri Krishna ghanam) she chose Natakurinji, Kanada, Todi, Simhendramadhyamam for ragamalikai swarams inserting words from pallavis of OVK's compositions (Paal vadiyum mukhathai - Natakurinji, Alai payude - Kanada, Thaye Yasoda - Todi, and Asaindadum mayil - Simhendramadhyamam) - a very interesting touch indeed.

A note about the tanam. The mridangam and morsing artists accompanied the tanam. This is a tradition followed in Trivandrum during the Navaratri concert series. Since Sudha's concert was during Navaratri, perhaps they felt it appropriate to accompany tanam with rhythm.

Sudha has a very good stage presence and is a good communicator. It was very nice of her to acknowledge that she was part of SRUTI's twentieth year anniversary, even mentioning that the very first concert for SRUTI was given by her guru the late M.L. Vasanthakumari. Sudha complimented all the volunteers and leaders without whose hard work the milestone could not have been achieved and exhorted the audience to give a big hand to the present Board of Directors. A very gracious gesture indeed.

Raghavendra Rao, though young, is a veteran violinist. We have had the pleasure of hearing him many times. Once again he gave a very good account of himself, although he did not render the tisram for the pallavi. The "tani" by Skanda Subramaniam and Raman after the Kalyani piece was short and sweet. I may be wrong, but I had a feeling that they were somewhat lost during the pallavi.

A few days after the concert I met a friend of mine who opined that Sudha's concert was one of the best ones he had heard in SRUTI in the recent past. I couldn't agree more.

Concert listing:

- (1) Mathe (Dharu varnam) - Khamas - Adi - Muthiah bhagavathar;
- (2) Saranam Sidhi Vinayaka - Sowrashtam - Chapu - Purandara Dasa;
- (3) Pahi nikhila janani - Nattai - Adi - Irayamman Thanpi;
- (4) Rama neeve gani - Narayani - Adi - Thyagaraja;
- (5) Akhilandeswari - Dvijavanti - Adi - Dikshitar;
- (6) Birana varalichi - Kalyani - Adi (tisra ghati) - Syama Sastry;
- (7) Marugelara - Jayanathasri - Adi - Thyagarja;
- (8) RTP - Bhairavi - Tisra Ata.

The post pallavi pieces were

- (9) Kandanaal - Madhuvanti;
- (10) Jagado darana - Kapi,
- (11) Theerada vilayattu pillai - Ragamalika and
- (12) Brahmam okate - Folk tune based on Bowli

An ardent admirer and lover of Carnatic music, Rasikan has been a regular contributor to Sruti Notes and other publications of Sruti.