

Abhishek Raghuram - A Star on the Horizon

Carnatic Vocal Concert (March 15, 2008)

A review by Rajee Padmanabhan

As part of the annual Tyagaraja Aradhana celebration , held at the Delaware Hindu Temple Auditorium on March 15th 2008, Abhishek Raghuram gave a brilliant performance for a little over two hours in his maiden appearance for Sruti. If the performance had to be described in just two words, those would be 'Fabulously Unorthodox'.

As the artist himself announced at the onset, it was an all-Tyagaraja-krithis concert that commenced with the Chittaranjani composition Nada Tanumanisham with a nice round of swarams. Abhishek has a vibrant voice that is well-aligned to the sruthi. One must note that the electronic sruthi box had a dedicated microphone which gave a nice effect like the double Tamburas in a Hindustani concert. The raga alapana in Malayamarutham was definitely unusual with Hindustani-style phrases. Manasa Etulordune set to Rupaka Tala followed with neraval at 'Dinakarakula Bhushanuni'. The violinist Mysore Srikanth's responses to the Neraval were very mellifluous. The Kapi Narayani alapana was excellent and fast-paced sancharams ending in the distinctive pattern "MGRG,R" brought out Abhishek's creativity into full flow. The classic, Sarasa samadana, was rendered at a brisk pace concluding with very imaginative patterns in kalpanaswarams at the charanam.

Mokshamugalada in Saramathi set to Adi Tala was taken up as the main piece of the concert. Again, the alapana was not of the traditional mould and was quite innovative. The krithi itself was sung with a lot of improvisations. A substantial part of the kalpanaswarams was done in Khandam. The tani avarthanam by Sri.Ganapathyraman was very pleasing with great nadam. This reviewer, a laya novice, could make out the tisram and khandam in the tani. The artist, being a kanjira player himself and whose guru is none other than his grandfather, the eminent Mridangam vidwan Palghat Raghu, had complete mastery over laya.

There was a change of pace after the main krithi with the YadukulaKambhodi kriti "Srirama Jayarama Sringerarama". After a sketch of Ahiri, the artist started off at the Anupallavi 'Sompaina' of the krithi "Challare Ramachandrudu". Ahiri was rendered beautifully with the characteristic poignancy of this soulful raga. One was hoping a Pratimadhyama raga krithi would be taken up. Even though that was not to be, "Uyyalalugavaiyya" in Neelambari was rendered with sowkhyam A very unique Kaapi alaapana, with Hindustani flourishes, was followed by the viruttam beginning with the words 'Lokabhiramam'. The violinist played a wonderful Kaapi. Eti Nee Bhagya in Kaapi was the final krithi before Mangalam.

Overall, an excellent concert that kick started Sruti's annual fare of music and dance. Both the violin and mridangam artistes were of superior caliber and provided excellent accompaniment. The artist has such a pliant voice enhanced by incredible imagination and a mastery over laya that the music that came forth seemed to be deeply internalized and hence spontaneous.

One could perceive an amalgamation of styles, Balamuraliesque voice modulation and phrases traversing the octaves, Seshagopalanesque no-sangathi-left-uninnovated, no-briga-left-unexplored approach in Abhishek's music. Listening to the vocalist for the first time, one got the impression that with his unquestionable vidwat and solid grounding in classicism, he is still in the process of charting his own style, finding his own unique bani and we as rasikas have a lot to look forward to what the future might bring forth from this young musician.got the impression that with his unquestionable vidwat and solid grounding in classicism, he is still in the process of charting his own style, finding his own unique bani and we as rasikas have a lot to look forward to what the future might bring forth from this young musician.