

Memorable start to the Spring Season with RKM

Carnatic Vocal Concert (April 14, 2018)

A Review by Revathi Subramony

Sruti's Spring 2018 season kicked off with a fabulous concert on April 14th by Ramakrishnan Murthy, accompanied by Charumathi Raghuraman on the violin and Manoj Siva on the mridangam.

Ram started his concert with a brisk rendition of the Kalyani Ata tala varnam, followed by Saint Thyagaraja's composition Maampala Velasika in Asaveri. This krithi has three sahitya intensive charanams which Ram delivered with perfect diction. He embellished this krithi with kalpanaswarams cleverly ending in S P to connect with the Pallavi line, Mampala Velasika.

Ram then went on to present a detailed Narayanagowlai ragam (janyam of Harikamboji with Arohana Avarohana (SR2M1PN2D2N2S/ SN2D2PM1G3R2G3S). Interestingly, the Arohana and Avarohana of Kedaragowlai (SR2M1PN2S/SN2D2PM1G3R2S) is very similar to Narayanagowlai. However, Narayanagowlai is distinguished by certain patent phrases like RMPN S, NDP and MGRGR, S which are not used in Kedaragowlai. Also, Gandharam is a strong note in Narayanagowlai while it is a weak note in Kedaragowlai. Ram delineated Narayanagowlai in his alapana very clearly right from the start by singing the characteristic phrase MGRGR,S. He elaborated this majestic raga with all its distinct beautiful glides. Charumathi followed suit by playing a mellifluous ragam. Dikshitar's classic composition Sri Ramam Ravikulapti Somam was presented and rounded off with creative kalpanaswarams. Manoj Siva's sensitive mridangam accompaniment made it all the more enjoyable. A short but bhavam-filled Saveri alapana followed and Muruga Muruga was rendered at a slow pace.



L to R: Manoj Siva, Ramakrishnan Murthy, Mallika Dinakar, Charumathi Raghuraman

The main piece for the evening was Muthuswami Dikshitar's Balagopala in Bhairavi. Ram's Bhairavi alapana was excellent and stood out for its classical purity, azhutham and sowkhyam. Charu played a fantastic Bhairavi with all the classic phrases to bring out the beauty of this quintessential ragam. Her perfect silk-smooth bowing made for a very satisfying and aesthetically pleasing Bhairavi. It was refreshing to hear Nereval in the line "Vainika gayaka guruguha nuta pura vairi vihita gopika manohara" instead of the usual Anupallavi line "Neela Neerada Sharira". The kalpanaswarams culminated in a koraippu

alternating between lower and higher rishabam, making for a lively exchange between Ram and Charu. Manoj Siva's crisp and energetic thani was the perfect ending to this piece.

Ram followed his Bhairavi with Entha cheluvage, a lilting Purandaradasa krithi in Abheri, and Edayya gathi in Chalanattai, a soulful Koteeshwara Iyer composition.

The highlight of the concert was the three raga RTP in Nattaikurunji, Nattai and Kuranji. Ram started off with a glorious Nattaikurunji alapana, and cleverly used the R2G3M1 phrase of Nattaikurunji to transition to R3G3M1 of Nattai—a seamless transition! After demonstrating his strong manodharmam in Nattai, he switched back to Nattaikurunji and again used the R2G3M1 phrase of Nattaikurunji to transition to Kuranji this time. (The phrase is common to both ragams.) While Nattaikurunji is a janyam of Harikamboji, Kuranji is a janyam of Shankarabaranam and Ram was quick to bring out Kuranji by using Kakali nishada as an ending note. Charu was very sharp to catch on instantly to all of this and played all these ragas flawlessly. Similarly Thanam was sung in all the three ragas. The Pallavi “Nattai Kuranji Enbar Siranda Engalada” was set to Vilamba Adi Talam (Chatushra gathi). After embellishing this with Kalpanaswarams, Ram concluded the RTP with a catchy korvai made up of phrases in Kuranji, Nattai and Nattaikurunji—a brilliant RTP indeed!

The concluding pieces were Eppo varuvaro and a Pasuram (Ragamalika) by Thirumangai Azhvar exquisitely tuned by Ram's guru Sri. R.K.Shriramkumar.

Ramakrishnan Murthy's first performance for Sruti was for Thyagaraja Aradhana in 2013. Ram's musical growth since then has been phenomenal and he has developed his own unique style while tapping into the richness and pure classicism of the old stalwarts of Carnatic music. Charumathi's violin accompaniment was of a high order in terms of aesthetics and proportion, true to her legendary guru Prof. T.N. Krishnan. Manoj Siva's sensitive mridangam accompaniment brought the perfect balance to this musical evening.

Revathi Subramony, in addition to her full-time job, teaches carnatic music and volunteers as a Director of Sruti Board.