



SRUTI NOTES

SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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610-240-0268

Email

sruti@sruti.org

Please visit our Web Site
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From The Editors

Dear friends

A special feature of this issue of Sruti Notes is that the Juniors' Corner makes its debut, with articles by some young students on their experiences in learning the Indian classical arts. With four young and enthusiastic music lovers in charge of this section of Sruti Notes, the Juniors' Corner promises to bring many interesting and educational features in future issues. We request more youngsters to come forward with their contributions and the parents to encourage them to participate in this venture to make it a success. In addition to this, this issue presents the news and happenings in the world of music and dance, events in our own community, reviews and letters.

Many of you have already received information in your emails regarding Srutiranjani 2000. The annual issue will be published in November and we request all writers to please observe the deadline of October 15 for sending their articles. The Juniors will make their debut in this forthcoming issue of Srutiranjani with a separate section allotted to contributions from youngsters under 18. We also welcome advertisements from corporations and small businesses. Please contact the LC for rates and other details.

The Library Committee is also working on the special millennium publication planned for the year 2001 to coincide with Sruti's 15th anniversary. We are in the process of identifying topics, writers, and also sources of funding for the venture. Those who would like to help the LC in this task are requested to contact a member of the committee.

Viji Swaminathan
Chairperson
For the Library Committee



UPCOMING SRUTI PROGRAMS IN 2000

Maharajapuram G. Ramachandran — Vocal
(September 23)

See attached flyer for details

M.S. Gopalakrishnan & Narmada – Violin Duo
(October 21)

Priya Sisters – Vocal
(November 11)

From the President's Desk

Dear Friends,

Now that Labor Day has passed, and the first leaves of fall are floating down in the breeze, SRUTI members are eagerly anticipating the first concert after the summer. We will begin by presenting **Maharajapuram Ramachandran**, son of the late Maharajapuram Santhanam on September 23.

This year we have received a continuing grant from the Philadelphia Foundation. We have also been awarded a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. We are very gratified by the recognition and support SRUTI continues to enjoy from its donors. However, I would be remiss if I did not bring your attention to some trends that give us cause for concern. The first is the escalating artist fees and auditorium rentals. They have gone up by an average of 40-50 percent compared to five years ago. The second is the decline in attendance. Ticket prices have not been increased, and season ticket sales as well as single ticket sales have been falling steadily. Indeed, without institutional support every one of our events will end in a significant deficit.

This is clearly not a good position -- while institutional support is welcome, I believe that we, as music and dance lovers, should ensure that at least 60 - 70 percent of our cost base is supported by community (member) contributions. There are really only two ways to do it: the first is to increase prices. Obviously, we are reluctant to do that. The second is to increase attendance. Apathy on the part of our members, demonstrated by their reluctance to buy season tickets, and in simply not attending our concerts, is starting to hurt us.

This message is just a wake up call to all old and new members, and would-be members. The only way for us to ensure that we can offer quality programs is to show support by our sustained attendance of the programs. From our part, we are committed to bring you carefully selected and well-organized programs.

We look forward to seeing all of you in the upcoming concerts by Ramachandran, **M.S Gopalakrishnan** and **Narmada**, and **Priya Sisters** respectively. Please be sure to visit our web page (<http://www.sruti.org>) for additional details.

On behalf of the Board of Directors,

P. Narayanan
President



Alarmel Valli's Sprightly Bharatanatyam Concert

By Chandrakala Menon

On May 13, 2000, the Indian community in the Delaware Valley was treated to an exquisite and scintillating Bharatanatyam performance in the Pandanallur tradition by Alarmel Valli that left the audience craving for more. Valli combined swift foot-work, flexible and graceful body movements, naturalness in abhinaya, master choreography and excellent musicianship from the 20 year-old Randhini Ramanathan to make this Bharatanatyam recital a memorable one for everyone.

Valli is truly a master communicator at several different levels. She eloquently explained to the audience the deeper philosophical interpretation of the different compositions she had lined up for the evening while choosing to squat comfortably on the stage rather than disturb the height-adjustment on the microphone that she had to share with her musicians. As a dancer, her movements conveyed an unmistakable joyous spirit that appears to be a hallmark of her performances. Her abhinaya was so natural and free-flowing that she slipped into and out of the characters that she was portraying with ease.

Valli opened the evening's concert with a brisk *Shakti Vandanam* – an invocation to Shakti or the Goddess of Energy embodied by Mahishasuramardini, Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. She used Adi Shankaracharya's Sanskrit composition, *Ayi giri nandini* to depict the various attributes of Devi. The swarams in this piece were composed by Prema Ramamurthy and the viruthams were set to music by S. Rajeswari. Valli's choreography of this piece showed immense creativity and attention to detail.

This was followed by the Varnam in ragamalikai that was composed by Prema Ramamurthy and choreographed by Valli. *Kaanna aavadaa di endan naadanai* was fast-paced and depicted the bhakta's longing for Lord Siva as the Nayika's yearning for her lover. In this number, the nayika tells her sakhi that she longs for a glimpse of her beloved Lord and is reminded of Him by everything in nature including the splendor of the rising sun and the darkness of the rain clouds. She describes His beauty as the Lord of Dance and complains to her sakhi that although spring is in the air and the cool perfumed wind is blowing gently, her Lord is indifferent toward her and that she should bring Him to her immediately. Valli's talent and creativity were evident in the choreography and execution of this piece.

The first piece after the intermission was a philosophical one, *Jeevanam Jeevanamrutham*. This piece compared human life to the cycle of water in nature having its origin in the rain clouds, traveling on earth as rivers, merging with the seas and evaporating and becoming rain clouds again. It was a gentle piece that dealt very subtly with the fullness of life treating losses and gains as necessary experiences for a wholesome life. This piece was also set to music by Prema Ramamurthy. Valli's choreography of this number showed a maturity and insight that was capable of depicting abstract themes through Bharatanatyam in a manner that was intelligible to the lay person.

The next piece, a Sangam era composition, by far was enjoyed the most by everyone -- the young and not-so-young alike. It was a piece based on an Indian folklore and captured a moment of transition between childhood and adolescence. The piece, *unnuneer vikkinnaan* in Ragamalikai and Talamalikai told the story of a childhood friendship between a boy and a girl that blossomed into physical attraction between the two at

(Continued on page 3)

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adolescence. Valli's depiction of the scene where the childhood friend appears at the doorstep of the now adolescent nayika asking for drinking water and the nayika's efforts to hide his flirtation with her from her mother by distracting her with a tall story about her friend choking on the water she gave him to drink was well received by the audience and was representative of Valli's expertise and finesse.

Valli ended the evening's performance with her favorite Thillana, in Kuntaalavaraali ragam which was composed by Balamuralikrishna. It was very brisk and ended the concert on a high note.

Those in the audience that were traditional-minded missed not having a Mangalam, while those who were enamored by her performance that evening were disappointed that they could not give her a standing ovation because Valli did not return to the stage after the Thillana. Fortunately, the performance's unusually late start that evening combined with the relatively short repertoire that was presented did not take away from the audience's appreciation of the art or the artist.

Special mention needs to be made of Valli's young accompanying musicians. Randhini Ramanathan was a sheer delight. Her melodious voice and especially her modulation to suit the different moods presented by the dancer were exceptional. The nattuvanar, C. K. Vasudevan, a student of Valli, exhibited great control and dynamics with the cymbals. The mridangist, Shaktivel Muruganantham, the violinist, Kalaiarasan Ramanathan were all worthy in their own right and provided excellent support to Valli.

[Dr. Chandrakala Menon is a member of the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. She also teaches Bharathanatyam]



Community News

Graduations

Suresh Swaminathan, son of Viji and P. Swaminathan (Ambler, PA), graduated from Upper Dublin High School and will be attending the University of Pennsylvania Engineering School this fall. A member of the National Honor Society, Suresh has been awarded the Class of 2000 Scholarship for Academic Achievement. Suresh was captain of the Varsity Baseball Team and is an active volunteer for Habitat for Humanity.

Vishnu Sridharan, son of Malini and B. S. Sridharan (Uniontown, PA), graduated from Laurel Highland High School in Union Town, Pa and will be attending MIT this fall. A member of the National Honor Society, Vishnu was one of two valedictorians. Keenly interested in music and acting, he was Tenor 1 in honor choir and played tympany in the band.

Swetha Srinivasan, daughter of Mythili and A.R. Srinivasan (North Brunswick, NJ), graduated from North Brunswick Township High School and will be attending the 6 year BS/MD program at Penn State University. Swetha, president of her school's honor society, has won several awards including the Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship and the Edward J. Bloustein Distinguished Scholarship. She also had her Bharathanatyam Arangetram on June 3.



In Other News

Ravi Kiran to Compose for BBC Philharmonic Orchestra

Chitravina Ravi Kiran became the first South Indian classical musician to be invited by the UK based BBC Philharmonic Orchestra to compose for them on a collaborative project for their Millennium Festival. Kala Sangam, an organization in Bradford, Yorkshire promoting South Asian Arts in the region announced the project and the schedule of events to be held in October at London, Bradford,

Newcastle and Manchester. Ravi Kiran will compose and conduct some pieces for the orchestra and also play Chitravina at the festival. Speaking to Carnaticmusic.com, Ravi Kiran said that he has composed pieces in Kalyani and Karaharapriya for the special Millennium project. A core group of major instruments like base guitar, piano, violin, flute, some percussion and tabla will be used in the orchestra. This is the first time BBC has ventured into Carnatic music.



Events in the Area

Sangeet Rajani, an annual event dedicated to the promotion of amateur musicians, will conduct its third annual **Indian Classical Music Competition for Young Artists** on October 14, 2000.

Participants must be 20 or younger and may present performances of vocal or instrumental (strings, woodwinds, and rhythm) music, Carnatic or Hindusthani. Three chosen winners will have the opportunity to present a longer program at *Sangeet Rajani 2000* on Saturday, November 18th.

Those interested in participating can send their name, mailing address (US mail and electronic), phone number, and name and phone number of the teacher, along with a brief screening tape and a check for \$10 payable to Marathi Vishwa, Young Artist Competition, 1039 Red Barn Drive, Warminster, PA 18974. Entries must be received by September 30, 2000.

For further information, please contact Vivek Khadilkar at (215) 357-5383.

Sruti Concert Recordings

The Library Committee maintains and distributes tapes of Sruti concert recordings to Sruti members and other music lovers. For a list of available tapes and to order, please contact Viji Swaminathan at (215) 643-2145 or e-mail your request to viji_swaminathan@hotmail.com

The opinions expressed by the contributors of articles and reviews are published in a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Sruti's Board or its members.

Juniors' Corner

Editors: Samhita Bhargava
Sowmya Menon

Chetan Ramamurthy
Sumanth Swaminathan

Dear Sruti Members,

The Junior's Corner is a recent addition to Sruti Notes in order to bring more Youth involvement in our organization. We are inviting all youths interested in Indian classical music and dance to send articles, puzzles, and any ideas they may have to be published in the regular Sruti notes Newsletter. This particular issue is our debut and it is based on the theme of how music teaching styles have differed between India and America. The articles were all written by the editors of the Junior's corner: Samhita Bhargava, Chetan Ramamurthy, Sumanth Swaminathan, and Sowmya Menon. We hope to see a continuing success in our new venture.

Editors, Juniors' Corner



I have had the experience of learning tabla and Carnatic vocal music in both India and America. Though I learned the same material, I noticed that the focus of the classes in both places varies. A regular Carnatic vocal class for me in India included the repetition of a selection of previously learned lessons: one verse from the sarale and *jantai varases*, an *alankara*, one *geetha*, a *varnam*, and a *kirthan*. Only after completing this would we commence with the new lesson. Most of the Carnatic vocal teachers in India follow a specific syllabus so as to prepare you to take an exam that I conducted by the state board of education. Generally the focus of a Carnatic vocal class in India was to get the student ready to take this type of examination.

The Carnatic vocal classes in America are quite different. My teacher in America was aware of the fact that being away from India, students had to be introduced to Indian music in a way that one could easily understand. We were introduced to the concepts of tala, raga, sruti, etc. Not only did we have regular lessons, we also had theory lessons in which we learned about the many different ragas, the various types of notes, and so on. In America, while learning music, we not only learned how to sing, but we also learned about our culture.

Learning tabla in both places was also a different experience. When I started learning table in America, my teacher put more emphasis on learning the many bhols and taals. I received a brief introduction to many taals, getting a strong foundation in tabla-playing. In India, the emphasis was put more on the quality of the sound produced and the movement and positioning of the hands on the tabla. The lessons were based mostly on the commonly used teentaal and its many variations, so I got more in-depth knowledge of tabla-playing.

I am very lucky to have had the opportunity to learn music in both India and America. It has been a very enriching experience and I have learned a great deal about

my culture and heritage.

---Chethan Ramamurthy

[Chetan is a 10th grader. He is a student of Sri. T.N. Bala and has learnt both Carnatic vocal music and tabla]



My knowledge of music in both the carnatic classical style and the western classical style was brought out and developed through two very different teaching methods. I started my vocal training in Carnatic music at a young age, and in the beginning much of the focus was placed on developing a basic understanding of tala, raga, and swara. These concepts were demonstrated in *Sarale varase* (swara exercises), *alankaras* (tala exercises), and *geethams* (raga exercises). After years of learning and climbing higher levels, I decided, after much influence from both my guru and my family, to pick up my saxophone and take up instrumental carnatic music. Because I had a basic knowledge of the instrument and some years of carnatic vocal training, I learned the instrumental style extremely quickly. After a few trips to India and continuing education from my Guru at home, I came to understand the giant distinctions between the teaching of Indian classical music and that of western classical music. When I went to my guru's home, and started on the next *kirthan* or song, I found that each time I came, he was teaching me a song that was more involved, one that demanded more technique, more emotion, and more concentration. This technique seemed perfect because it allowed me to perform and show my skills in front of people even though I hadn't reached a very high level yet. In addition, it helped me to learn ragas that I would otherwise be unfamiliar with. The greatest asset, however, to this teaching style was that I was trained on a one to one basis, and thus, my mistakes were pointed out and the right way was taught immediately without hesitation. Now, having reached the level I have come to, I feel that simply listening to my guru sing helps me learn the finer points in music.

Throughout my Western Training, I learned simply by sitting in one giant orchestra and asking my partner questions. I had to really learn on my own. If I asked someone how I would get better, they would respond by saying that I should go home and play through a technique book. Even private teachers emphasized playing through technique books and developing first the technical merit, and then the performance merit. In my opinion, my Carnatic training was more fundamentally sound and helpful in my musical education. Although I wouldn't say that playing through technique books is bad, I would definitely say that no book can educate like a knowledgeable and passionate guru. I continually view the two styles as modes of music on opposite sides of the musical spectrum in both sound and development.

[Sumanth Swaminathan, a student of Sri. T.N. Bala, is a High School Senior. He learns both vocal and instrumental Carnatic music.]

I have been fortunate enough to learn Bharatanatyam in India as well as in the U.S. Although I did not spend many years in India learning dance, I have spent a sufficient amount of time to know that there are some distinctions between learning Bharatanatyam here and in India.

As a child growing up in India, I felt very close to my dance teacher. She was like a part of my family. We would frequently welcome her into our home for no special reason. As a result of not having too much time on our hands in the U.S, the student's time to bond with the teacher is usually restricted to the time he or she has in the dance class. Also, in dance classes in this country, teachers have to spend lots of time relating mythological stories and tales from the epics (from which Bharatanatyam draws its inspiration) to their students. Therefore, teaching Bharatanatyam in the U.S. could be a tedious task. Abhinaya, or facial expressions, seem to come more naturally to the dancers in India, while this has to be meticulously taught to the children growing up here. Also, dancers in India tend to ask fewer questions and are more accepting, while my Bharatanatyam classmates here prefer to question and rationalize more.

The points mentioned above are purely based on the experiences I have had, and could differ from those of others.

Sowmya Menon

[Sowmya Menon is a 10th grader and learns music from Smt. Praba Subramaniam]



Having learned Carnatic vocal music both in the United States and India, I can share my own experience, and also generalize to a certain extent. Though I was learning the same music, the entire process was quite contrary. I walked to my teacher's home in Bangalore while I have to be chauffeured here! Most students attend music lessons at least twice a week in India, but in America, we are mostly taught once a week. In the US, the lesson is recorded on tape, whereas in India, my teacher made me repeat the music until I had learned it. The notes and lyrics are dictated to the student in India. However, in America, we receive typed scripts. Furthermore, group lessons are a popular mode of teaching in India, contrary to the one on one teaching that is common in America. Also, my music lessons in India were embellished by having the genuine tambura to maintain shruthi. American teachers prefer an electronic tambura, because of its convenience and portability. In India, people often asked me what stage of music I was at, and I didn't know what to say! I realized that Indian students learn their music in a certain order upon completing the basics (i.e., varnas, kritis, and so on). My teacher here doesn't necessarily follow any particular order. I was enriched by both my experiences.

Samhita Bhargava

[Samhita Bhargava is a 10th grader. She has been learning Carnatic Music from Smt Vani Satish]

Letters to the Editor

From: Chidambaran Kollengode
West Chester, PA

I wanted to thank the reviewers of the programs for being very frank in expressing the opinions in writing. I have been coming for Sruti programs since 1993 and of late I have noticed that our reviewers are becoming critical in their assessment. This is good in many ways. First, it tells the performers (if they get a chance to read it) that we expect quality and we have some great people here who can be frank and fair in their assessments. Second, and perhaps more important, the audience can get the same message and ratify their instinct. If they feel that the program was bad, the reviewer also felt so and that is a consistent message. I was particularly disappointed with the Dhananjayan's program that at one stage I could not help imagining - what are they doing here! The program was monotonous. The different segments of the program did not integrate well. Third, with fair criticism, we will encourage good quality among the artists who come here - not that they are not good but more often than not they think they can get away with a below par performance. They would never do that in India. Result, we get to enjoy good performance that they are capable of giving and this could attract more people to the programs. It is no coincidence that the quality of the programs are getting better. To all Sruti organizers, keep up the great work! To all the reviewers and other hard working people in the organization, keep an eye on the quality and be frank and fair as you have been of late.



www.sruti.org The Sruti Website

The Sruti Website has been attracting a considerable number of visitors (close to 5000 hits per week) since it was revamped with many extended features, such as a discussion forum, Sruti Notes, and links to other music sites and articles, thanks to Kishore Pochiraju, our Corresponding Secretary, who has done an excellent job of creating and maintaining the website.

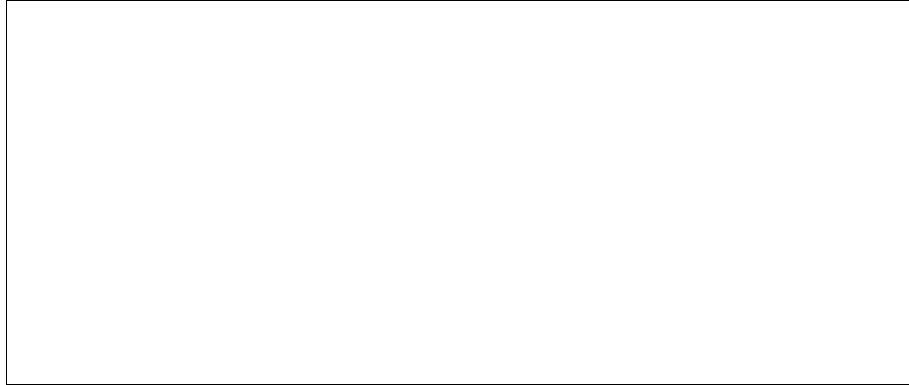
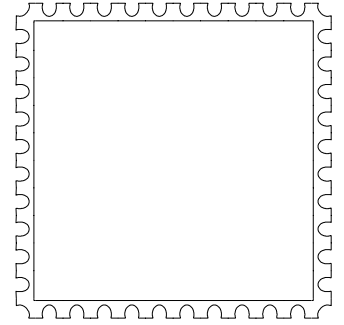
It is quite gratifying that the Sruti Notes pages attract about 50 users a day, who spend, on an average, 7 minutes and 20 seconds each reading the pages. So, for all the connoisseurs and also those who are just venturing into the world of Indian classical music and dance, it is a great opportunity to make use of the forum to have your opinions heard, find that rare music record that you have been looking for, find a teacher in your area, and interact with other music and dance lovers. We request you to please visit the site occasionally, get more involved in this forum and make it more interesting and educational through your own contributions to the interactive features, and to Sruti Notes through articles, puzzles, quizzes and discussions.

Editors, Sruti Notes



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The India Music & Dance Society
730 Cornerstone Lane
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010



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