



SRUTI NOTES

SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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From The Editors

Dear friends

Welcome to the new year and the new millennium! With spring just around the corner, we are looking forward to a spate of exciting programs at SRUTI, starting with the Thyagaraja Aradhana. We are also very excited about the special publication of Sruti Ranjani we plan to bring out to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the founding of SRUTI.

This issue of Sruti Notes mainly consists of a review of the more recent concert of Priya Sisters by S. Sankaran, articles by Shuba Bhat and Ameetha Palanivel who recently gave their Bharathanatyam debut performances, news from the music world and our own Sruti community. In addition, Kamakshi Mallikarjun, who visited India this past December, gives a graphic account of the very enjoyable music season in Chennai. We thank all those who wrote for the Sruti Notes.

We are very glad to note that the SRUTI website (www.sruti.org) has been attracting more and more visitors since the inclusion of a number of features (news, programs, discussion, links to other sites, audio, etc). If you have not visited the website recently, please do visit to enjoy the music, participate in the discussions and post your opinions about our concerts.

As always, we welcome members to send us information about the milestones and achievements of your family members, that you would like to share with the SRUTI community. The new year has brought a change in the Library Committee. Jeya Sankaran has decided to leave the committee because of other demands on her time. We enjoyed having her on the committee this past year and thank her for all her input and help with the publications.

Viji Swaminathan

Chairperson

For the Library Committee



UPCOMING SRUTI PROGRAMS IN 2001

Thyagaraja Aradhana

(March 3, See attached flyer for details)

The Living Tree

A Dance Theatre Production of The Cleveland Cultural Alliance
(March, 31)

M.S. Sheela – Vocal

(May 5)

Unnikrishnan – Vocal

(June 2)

From the President's Desk

Dear friends,

In 2001, SRUTI commences its 15th year. With these years of experience, SRUTI has now attained core competencies in event presentation and is financially sound. Now it can potentially take on new challenges. For many families in Delaware Valley SRUTI has been a focal point in nurturing their interest in the performing arts. We hope the next fifteen years will bring many others to share the unique benefits and the genuine sense of belonging that SRUTI offers. The spirit of volunteerism and enthusiasm exhibited by our members can greatly impact how well SRUTI flourishes in the years ahead. The more our members/attendees think of themselves as "hosts" and less as "guests" the more successful we will be.

We will begin the year with Thyagaraja Aradhana on March 3 in the Hindu Temple in Berlin, NJ. The event will begin with the singing of *Pancharathna Krithis* followed by the children's *Uthsava Sampradaya Krithis*. This year we have the pleasure of having Sri. N. Aravindan to present the afternoon concert. Sri. Aravindan works in the US as a software consultant. He has had his initial training in vocal music under Madurai Vaidyanatha Iyer followed by training under Neyveli Santhanagopalan. He continued advanced lessons under Sri. T R Subrahmaniam (father of SRUTI's Vice President Sri. S. Rajagopal) and Dr Radha Venkatachalam. He has performed in various sabhas in Delhi and Madras. Sri Aravindan will be accompanied on the violin by Smt. Sandhya Srinath and on the Mridangam by Sri. Venkat Varadan. We are looking forward to a whole day of delightful music.

On March 31 of this year we will be presenting the U.S. Premiere of *The Living Tree*, a production of the Cleveland Cultural Alliance (producers of the very successful *Jaya Jaya Devi* and *Abhyasa*) with dancers from Madras. Narendra, a distinguished dancer himself, who is well known for creativity and classical purity in Bharathanatyam, has choreographed this event, which has been in the making for a long time. SRUTI and TAGDV (Tamil Association of Greater Delaware Valley) are presenting this program jointly. Tickets are \$25 and \$15 and are being sold with pre-numbered seating on a first come first served basis. For details please refer to the accompanying flyer or visit our web page (<http://www.sruti.org>). Season ticket purchasers automatically get a \$15 ticket, which they can upgrade to a \$25 ticket for an additional \$5 at the time of season ticket purchase. Tickets for children (other than infants) will be \$5. The slightly higher prices are needed to cover the cost of the program (estimated to be \$4500 contrasted with \$2500 for our regular programs). A season ticket costs \$55, and admits you to any five concerts of the season. Annual membership in SRUTI is \$25 and Life Membership is \$100.

The line-up for the rest of the year is equally ambitious. We will be presenting Smt. M.S. Sheela on May 5th, and Sri. Unnikrishnan on June 2nd. We are considering Hyderabad Brothers, Sri. T.V. Sanakaranarayanan, and Sri. A.K.C. Natarajan (clarinet) for the fall. As always, we will try very hard to present the best talent to our members.

We look forward to seeing all of you in the upcoming events.
On behalf of the Board of Directors,
P. Narayanan
President

A December 2000 Diary

Kamakshi Mallikarjun

The excitement of visiting India was increased exponentially because I was in Madras for the Music Season after a gap of 15 years! Following the example of my daughter who had been asked by her teacher to write a Journal of her experiences in India, I too kept a diary of my musical activities.

♦ Dec 19: **Vijaya Siva** at Rani Seethai Hall 6:15 pm.

R K Sriram Kumar – Violin, Manoj Siva – Mridangam

My eagerly awaited December season started off with a bang. Vijaya Siva sang incredibly well! The *Kalyana Rama* (Hamsanadam) I heard is still reverberating in my ears ... He also did a *Neraval* in two speeds in the line *Mallikadi Sugandha*. He then sang Sankarabaranam ragam followed by *Akshaya Linga Vibho*. I was reminded of the MS style ... Yes, the *sangatis* were the same and the raga delineation followed the same step by step development, finally blossoming into the upper notes.

♦ Dec 23 **Lalgudi G J R Krishnan and Vijayalakshmi**

at Krishna Gana Sabha slated for 4:30 pm

Tiruchur Sankaran Mridangam, V Suresh – Ghatam

Alarmel Valli - Bharata Natyam at 7:30 pm

My aunt was treating me to a great evening at Krishna Gana Sabha - Lalgudi's children's concert followed by Alarmel Valli's dance. She had 3rd row seats (Rs 200) and had ensured a fabulous view of the stage. Even though we left before 4pm we got stuck in the most horrendous traffic jam caused by massive procession of lorries filled with tons of people heralding some new political party! There were numerous road-blocks. Prudent folks would have stayed at home. But we were headed to concerts we would not miss for anything! We finally reached the Sabha at 5:15 pm and found the concert had still not started because Tiruchy Sankaran was still stuck in the traffic jam! We took our seats and a melodious stream of ragas was played from behind the curtain by Krishnan and Viji. Tiruchy Sankaran finally arrived and the concert started with a *varnam* composed by Lalgudi in my favorite Amritha Varshini. They played *Narayana* (Suddha Dhanyasi), a song in Kalyana Vasantham, and a kriti in Garudadwani. With RTP in Shanmukhapriya, they took turns playing Raga-malika swarams. It was neat when one of them played Kaanada and the other one played Kannada ragam. The *tani* by Tiruchy Sankaran and V Suresh was fantastic.

The hall started filling up for Alarmel Valli's dance. The Hindu dance critic V R Devika took a seat near us and so did Kalanidhi Narayanan, the famous *abhinaya* expert. Valli started with a sparkling *Sankara Shri Giri* of Svati Tirunaal's.. the lightning fast footwork took my breath away.. it is almost like she is playing a tabla with her feet. Valli performed a beautiful Kapi Tanjore Quartet Varnam on Lord Brihadeeshwara, with incredibly intricate *teermanams*. Her *abhinaya* is beautiful and dignified. The way she traverses the stage is amazing! What control to do a *Tat Thai Tam Dith Thai Tam* where she just leaps right across for the *Tam* and lands like a feather with such incredible precision!

Valli performed two new Sangam pieces choreographed for the season. In the first, the Nayika's younger sister

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notices that the hero is indulging in a dalliance with the Nayika under a tree that had germinated from a seed planted by the Nayika and her sister. So she tells them to show restraint in front of the tree that is almost a sibling to them and mischievously adds that there are plenty of other trees in the forest for their convenience! The second piece had three poems strung together. In the first, the heroine is upset to find that the tree in her garden has already flowered, mistaking some passing showers for the monsoon. It cannot be the monsoon, since her hero had promised her that he would arrive before the monsoon! Then she realizes that he is not coming and sinks into woe. In the third poem, she gets mad and decides she is not going to put up with the cavalier treatment; it is his loss if he does not realize how superior she is and come to her! Valli's *abhinaya* was so expressive that one was just drawn into the story. One could almost touch and feel the rain, smell the fragrance of the blossoms that had bloomed too soon, experience the despair and the anger! The finale was a lilting Lalgudi Thillana in Maund. Valli transmits the joy of dancing across the stage to the spectator. One wants to put on bells and dance too!

♦ Dec 25th **Nityashree Mahadevan** at Music Academy 4:45 pm

M. A. Krishnaswamy Violin, J Vaidyanathan— Mridangam, A. S. Krishnan - Morsing

I was forewarned that Nityashree's concert would be jam-packed and so in spite of having my mother's life-member donor ticket I got there early and stood in line at 4pm. It was quite interesting that just as the door opened, a bogus queue materialized magically near the door causing major pandemonium! Once I got in, I took a seat in the middle of a row. I soon realized that the space between rows was so narrow that I would have a tough time coming out! I watched an elderly gentleman gingerly negotiate his way out, his walking stick held high up in the air.

A little girl wearing a glittering Pattu Pavadai sat on the stage, just behind the violinist, surveying the full hall. That brought back memories of another little

girl, dressed in a similar silk skirt, sitting on the stage just behind Radha Viswanathan, at Smt M.S.Subbulakshmi's concert at the very same venue, more than a quarter of a century ago.

It was quite surreal to see that even after the concert started, people were waving to get their late arrival friends' attention and they in turn were quite determined to sit with their friends and doggedly trod on innumerable feet to get to the seat saved for them, though there were other seats available! Equally disconcerting was the mass exodus as soon as the *tani avartanam* started.

The beginning of the concert was a major let down. The sound was very loud and Nityashree sang at a very high pitch, concentrating on the upper octaves. The violinist kept playing the higher octave too. Morsing, one of my least favorite instruments, just added to the noise. It was ironic that she sang *Inta Sowkhyamanine* and there wasn't an atom of *sowkya*m in the rendering. During her Kaapi alapana, I was reminded of an episode of Home Improvement, where Tim Allen makes his new stereo system super powerful and his wife Jill tries it out by listening to an opera singer, resulting in all the glass in their house shattering! I have to add I was in the minority in the audience. People around me were extremely excited the higher the note that was reached!

Thankfully, the main piece *Koni Aadina* was rendered slowly, peacefully with *Azhuttham* and *Bhavam*. Nityashree sang it beautifully with a lovely *neraval*. The RTP in Shanmukapriya set to Adi talam but with a mixture of *nadais*, was incredibly complicated. Every *Thattu* was in *kanda nadai* and the rest in *Chatusram*. What incredible talent to render an RTP in it and nail it with such accuracy! D K Jayaraman's son Vaidyanathan played the mridangam with nice *Naadam*.

PS: I found out later that Nityashree had sung rare songs of the Tanjore Quartet with *bhavam* and grace at a morning demonstration at Krishna Gana Sabha.

♦ Dec 28 **O. S. Thyagarajan** at Music Academy at 10 AM

S.Manjunath-Violin, Umayalapuram Sivaraman-Mridangam, V.Suresh- Ghatam

Let me just say that this was an

incredible concert! It was a text-book example of a concert that gets carried to great heights when there are top class accompanists ... there is tremendous synergy and the enjoyment increases exponentially!

It was a morning, free kutcheri; so there was no A/C. The Hall was jam-packed and it was like a furnace! But I barely noticed the discomfort because of the marvelous concert! OST began with the Sri Raga *Varnam*. He had a real fancy, white electronic sruti box with Mickey Mouse Ears that he kept in front of him! Perhaps, because it was the first concert of the day, the sound system was also well balanced. He sang a beautiful Begada ragam followed by *Kadaikan*. Umayalapuram Sivaraman's mridangam was melodious and there was perfect rapport between him and OST and so it was lot of fun to listen to them! I noticed Tiruchur Ramachandran and M Chandrasekharan in the audience. There was a guy next to me with a Palm Pilot that kept beeping ...

The Bhairavi ragam (followed by *Koluva*i) was incredibly good. Manjunath played it very well. The Tani Avartanam was simply fantastic. What incredible Naadam in the playing of U. Sivaraman. Not one person moved!

♦ Dec 30 **T V Sankaranarayanan** at Music Academy at 4:45 pm

Mysore Nagaraj - Violin, Srimushnam Raja Rao - Mridangam, Uma Shankar - Ghatam

I have always enjoyed listening to TVS. Uma Shankar (Vikku Vinayakram's son) played very well! The mike arrangement was a little sticky. A portion of the violinist's mike jutted in front and was knocked over more than once when Sankaranarayanan moved his hand! They finally moved it to the right spot! TVS meticulously stuck to the scheduled program. He started with *Palukavemi* (Poornachandrika) followed by *Ela Nee Dayaradha*. He sang a lovely Pantuvarali followed by *Ramanatham Bhajeham*. The *neraval* and *swaram* were most enjoyable since Mysore Nagaraj's responses were equally good. Sanjay Subramaniam came to the concert and in a short while moved two slots to give place to T M Krishna and his wife.

Saraswati Annaye, a Papanasam

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Sivan song in Kharaharapriya was preceded by a beautiful alapana. Then came a lovely Sankarabharanam followed by *Swara Raga Sudha*. Unlike U. Sivaraman who matched his virtuosity with OST with perfect harmony, Srimushnam Raja Rao seemed to display his acrobatics at the wrong time during the *neraval* and *swarams*. The *tani* however, was most enjoyable and joyous. TVS sang a short and sweet RTP in Kapi (Khanda Jati Triputa Talam) with grace, bringing it to life. Mysore Nagaraj's alapana was fabulous.

In addition to all these live concerts, I also listened to music on the radio and TV. The most memorable of the radio

concerts ... a great rendition of Varali by **Sanjay Subramaniam**. On TV, **Kadri Gopalnath** had an incredible group of accompanists; Kanyakumari-violin, Zakhir Hussain-tabla, Vikku Vinayakram-ghatam and Velayapatti-Tavil. **Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar** played Kalki's *Poonkuyil*, one of my all time favorite songs on the flute.

That concludes my enchanting month of December 2000 that I have relished by writing this journal! I can fully understand why so many flock to Madras for the music season each year like bees drawn to honey.

[Kamakshi Mallikarjun is a software engineer working at SCT (Systems and Computer Technology)based in Great

Priya Sisters' concert - A pleasant surprise.

This was the first concert in the Philadelphia by these artistes. So, many were rather skeptical about how it would turn out. On the other hand, listeners who knew that the artistes were students of Radha & Jayalakshmi were expecting a hurried rendering of some kritis, with some javali or thillana for about 2 hours or more. Both of these types of listeners got more than what they were expecting – because the sisters sang in the style of their mentor, but in a more appealing leisurely tempo in general.

After a Sahana Varnam by *Tiruvottiyur Thagayyar*, they sang a sprightly composition by Muthiah Bhagavathar in the raga Mohankalyani – a (seldom heard) second one by the composer who contributed that raga to Carnatic music. This was followed by the krithi Nadhadhanumanisam of Thyagaraja, setting the stage for a detailed rendering of 'Ennaganu Ramamahajana' in Panthuvrali. The serene alapana was brief but gave a good account of the Raga. The violinist's rendering of it was faithful, and gave a good start to this highly devotional work by *Bhadrachalam Ramadhasar*. The krithi was briskly rendered with some Birgas, characteristic of the GNB school of music, and ended with an impressive niraval and karpana swaras.

At this point for good measure, a tamil song in Sudhdhasaveri by a contemporary composer was sung swiftly.

This was followed by the major Krithi of the evening – 'O Rangasayee' of Thyagaraja. The alapana in kambodhi (ranging over the 3 octaves) was rendered in a tempo fitting that composition. It was sung by Haripriya (who seems to be the senior artiste among the two). The violinist's rendering of the Alapana was even better and drew a well-deserved applause. Then the difficult composition was rendered confidently with elaborate sangathis (but without niraval) by the sisters, embellished by the 2 accompanists who were at their best during this part. The kalpana swaras at the end in two tempos alternately sung by the sisters (with a methodic structure of their own) showed the full range of their comprehension of melody and rhythm, and the fact that they had come well prepared, unlike some other artists.

This moment of exultation was followed by the competent rendering of a definitive krithi of Dikshithar in Bhoopalam, which almost sounded like a paradigm of what 'Peace' means. At this point, when the audience thought that the major part of the concert was over, Priya sisters pleasantly surprised everyone by a starting a Ragam, Thanam & Pallavi in the raga Hindolam. The alapana was not long, but covered the nuances of the raga well. So did the Thanam, which was complementary to the ragam, especially with the competent violin accompaniment. The Pallavi was engaging, with the usual rhythmic intricacies germane to a Ragam, Thanam, Pallavi. This was followed by brilliant singing of kalpana swaras in two tempos, and then some in other ragas, as usually done. The accompaniments did very well during the Pallavi and the swara singing that followed. The Mridhangam solo that followed was a fitting conclusion to the Pallavi.

Community News

Valley. She is also a music and dance enthusiast. She lives in Lionville, PA with her husband Ramesh and daughter Amritha.]

New Arrival

Obituary

Rajiv Vaidya, 26, son of Dr. Vanitha Vaidya and Dr. Shailendra Vaidya, died on 10 Dec., after a hit-and-run car accident in Silver Spring, MD. Rajiv was standing on a median waiting to cross the street when an auto jumped the curb, struck a sign, and hit him. Vaidyas are long-term residents of Bryn Mawr and life members of Sruti. Our deep condolences to the family.

In Other News ...

Bharat Ratna for Bismillah Khan and Lata Mangeshkar.

Shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan and melody queen Lata Mangeshkar were awarded the nation's highest civilian honor, Bharat Ratna.

Octogenarian Khan, who has already been awarded Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan, learnt shehnai under Ali Bux and Ahmed Hussain of Benaras and gave his first public performance at the age of 14 at an all India music conference in Allahabad in 1930 and has not looked back ever since.

Lata Mangeshkar, who has enthralled audiences for over five decades, made her debut as a playback singer at the age of 17 and has sung over 30,000 songs. She is already a recipient of Padma Bhushan and Dada Saheb Phalke award for her contribution to film and music. Lata continues to sing at the age of 70 with her voice still retaining its magic.

Juniors' Corner

Editors: Samhita Bhargava
Sowmya Menon

Chetan Ramamurthy
Sumanth Swaminathan

My Arangetram

Subha Bhat

On September 9th, 2000 I performed my Arangetram for seven hundred guests at the Radnor High School Auditorium. I have been learning Bharatha Natyam for about 9 years with Mrs. Shoba Sharma (Shobakka), artistic director of Natya, Academy of Indian Classical Dance. The first eight years, I learned and worked hard to perfect my *adavus*, *mudhras*, and *abhinaya*. Last year has been the most significant year for learning. One of the key elements in my dance that Shobakka worked on was my *Bhava*. Although I understood what the dances meant, Shobakka urged me to really step into the character and show the emotions of the person I was depicting. She also helped me work on the subtle expressions and the flow of the abhinaya from one to another to make it a continuous story line. She also taught me the way to hold myself on stage and how to show crispness in my Nritha.

All of the hard work and preparation that I put into Bharatha Natyam paid off on my Arangetram day. Many of my Natya family and friends helped me out to make it a success. After putting my heart and soul into the dance form I really felt accomplished and proud to show everyone my cultural heritage through dance. Many people congratulated me and said that it was an extraordinary cultural experience for them. I am glad that I have put so much effort into Bharatha Natyam and I am thankful to my family, friends and my Guru, Shobakka for all their support.

[Shuba Bhat is an 8th grader at The Baldwin's School. She is the daughter of Dr. Bhim Bhat and Mrs. Sharada Bhat.]

A Unique Experience

Ameetha Palanivel

The day of my Bharatha Natya Arangetram was a very momentous day in my life. It was one of the greatest experiences that I have had and I recommend all students who are learning Bharatha Natyam to have such a great experience. Not only did my Arangetram give me a sense of achievement and elation but also it allowed me to begin to appreciate and understand the depth and complexity of my culture. Obviously, I learned a great deal about Indian Classical Dance and in doing so got a glimpse of Hindu mythology and theology. Through my training with Ms. Shoba Sharma, I began to realize the subtle differences in details. For example, the smallest eye movement would change the meaning of what I am trying to portray. In addition, the manner in which I walk can change the entire meaning of a dance. Walking stiff implies that I was being serious, whereas if I were to walk with a little bounce of

sway, I would be showing that I was happy or playful. My observation of Shoba Akka was crucial to picking up on these small nuances.

In order to master all the small deviations in facial expressions and dance postures, I had to spend a lot of time practicing and therefore I had to learn how to organize my time. For me, school and dance were equally important and consequently it was hard to do all my homework and practice dance everyday. I, however, did learn how to effectively use my time and prioritize the things that I wanted to do. There were even some days where I was unable to practice, but Shoba Akka was very understanding during those times because school was also very important to her. I began to realize that she valued all forms of education as much as my family did.

After learning dance with Shoba Akka for seven years, I am beginning to realize why Hindus have always emphasized respecting one's elders and teachers because I have seen first hand that they contain a wealth of information not only about specific subjects but also about life. During the time that I spent with Akka, I not only was able to learn more about Indian art but also learnt more about Shoba Akka. For instance, I heard many stories from her childhood and her dancing experiences. These stories were crucial to the learning process because they showed that even our teachers are human and can make mistakes. I learned from this that what distinguishes us is the lessons we learn from our mistakes.

Learning to accept mistakes and to learn from them, allowed me to begin to handle criticism. Most teenagers are not able to handle any criticism in any shape or form. But dancing in front of several hundred people, made me humble to receive the praises, as well as take the criticism with a grain of salt. Through this entire learning process, I also gained a great amount of self-esteem. I am now able to walk with confidence knowing that all my training will help me throughout my life. My training, my time management, my vigorous practices, and my desire to excel, all helped put together a successful outcome; naturally seeing my hard work and dedication pay off helped build my confidence. I now know that I have the ability to accomplish my goal, no matter what they are, as long as I put my mind to it and work hard.

Clearly, my arangetram has not only helped me learn about my Indian heritage, but it also has taught me a great deal about myself. I was able to think about who I was and why I was learning Bharatha Natyam. The arangetram along with everything that allowed me to reach that stage has clearly helped me develop into the person that I am today.

[Ameetha Palanivel is a 10th grader at Cherry Hill High-school East. She is the daughter of Kanchana and Soma-sundaram Palanivel.]

Letters to the Editor



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.

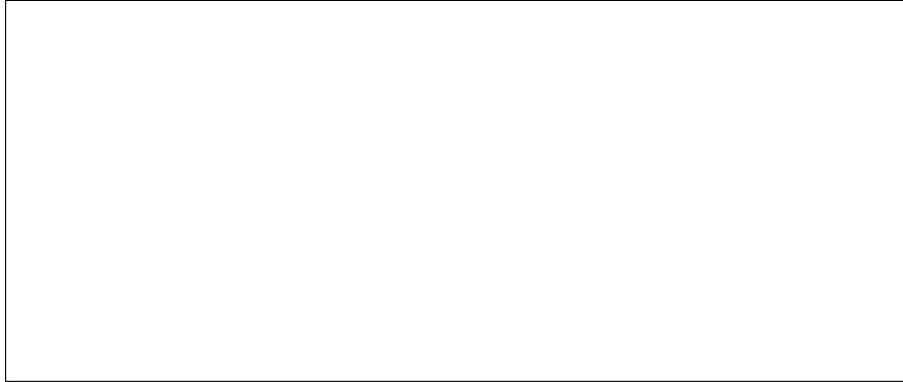
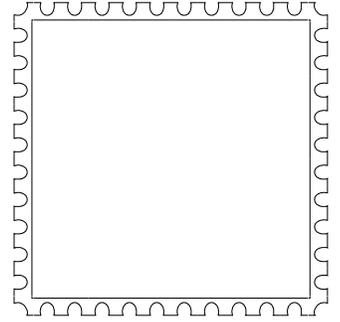
It is quite gratifying that the Sruti Notes pages attract about 50 users a day, who spend, on an average, 7 minutes and 20 seconds each reading the pages. So, for all the connoisseurs and also those who are just venturing into the world of Indian classical music and dance, it is a great opportunity to 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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