



SRUTI NOTES

SRUTI

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From The Editors

Dear friends

With four of this year's programs of SRUTI already behind us and the promise of many more exciting concerts, the Library Committee has been very busy trying to bring you reviews of the events and news from both our community and the rest of the world of music and dance. In this issue of the Sruti Notes, we present opinions about the theatre production 'The Living Tree' from many who attended the unique presentation, comments on this year's Thyagaraja Aradhana and reviews of the concerts presented recently by SRUTI. We also present news and events in the SRUTI community and elsewhere in our area.

SRUTI mourns the loss of Sri. Namagiripettai Krishnan, the illustrious Nadaswaram exponent, whose music was synonymous with auspiciousness (see obituary on this page).

As mentioned in the earlier Notes, we have been working on bringing out a special issue of *Sruti Ranjani* to commemorate the millennium and the 15th anniversary of the founding of SRUTI. The issue, planned for release in August, will carry articles related to the history, evolution and growth of classical music and dance in India over the centuries. We are very excited to say that we have received enthusiastic responses from many stalwarts in the fields of music and dance who have accepted to write for the publication. The endeavor, however, also needs financial support to cover the cost of publication. While we hope to get some support from corporations and local businesses, we also appeal to all our members to help us make this a success through small contributions. Please contact any of the Library Committee members if you would like to help.

It is our pleasure to welcome Dr. H.Y. Rajagopal, who has graciously accepted to serve as a member of the Library Committee for the rest of our term. An engineer by profession, Dr. Rajagopal hails from a very illustrious musical family and has served on former SRUTI committees in various capacities. Coming with a wealth of ideas, he has already been a valuable addition to the committee.

Viji Swaminathan

Chairperson

For the Library Committee



Namagiripettai Krishnan passes away



Renowned nadaswaram maestro Namagiripettai Krishnan died in a Chennai hospital on April 30 following a cardiac arrest. He was 77. He is survived by three sons and three daughters.

Hailing from Namagiripettai, a small town in Tamil Nadu, Krishnan was born on April 2, 1924. He had his initial training from Smt Mahalakshmi Ammal from the age of 12 and had advanced training from Chinappa Mudaliar (his grandfather) and Aruppukkottai Ganesa Pillai. He mastered the best traditions of the Nadaswaram and presented his incredibly melodious music, synonymous with auspiciousness, with an old-worldly dignity. Krishnan was known for the encouragement he gave young and up-coming artistes. He was conferred with several prestigious awards including the Padma Bhushan, Sangeetha Nataka Academy Award, Isai Perarignar, and Isai Perarasu. He was also a violinist. A great admirer of T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai, he considered Pillai to be his *manasika guru*.

From the President's Desk

Dear friends,

This year got off to a good start with the Thyagaraja Aradhana and the *Living Tree*, which we presented jointly with Tamil Association of Delaware Valley. The program was a complete success both in terms of the production itself and the attendance. The response to the program was overwhelmingly positive.

We followed this program with another joint program with Triveni Arts Group where we presented a double-header by Mysore Manjunath and Nagaraj, followed by M.S. Sheela. There are many advantages to jointly sponsored programs, and there are some disadvantages as well. *Living Tree* was a large program and it was strategically in Sruti's interest to get a partner. It turned out to be a sound move in reducing risk, adding much-needed human resources, and in maximizing attendance.

As the directors of Sruti we are deeply aware of our basic mission and we are careful that any joint projects that we undertake do not distract or dilute our goals. One of the reasons both programs worked smoothly was that Sruti defined the rules of engagement fairly clearly at the outset, so there was no role conflict and there were few misunderstandings. Both TAGDV and Triveni Arts Group indicated that they were delighted that these programs could be offered.

The term of this board draws to a close this year. I would like to invite every one of you, our members, to consider serving on the board or one of the committees. It is an opportunity to give back to the community from which you and your family benefit. Please feel free to email your interest to me at pauln@mcr2000.com so that I may forward it to the appropriate people charged with conducting the election.

On behalf of the Board of Directors,
P. Narayanan
President



Concert Reviews

The Living Tree

[Members' comments on *The Living Tree*, the dance theatre production presented by Sruti on March 30, 2001]

The unique feature of this beautiful dance drama is that although based on a simple story in a rural setting, it has many serious and powerful messages to convey. The story revolves around an innocent young girl who grows up in a prosperous village under the care of her brother and sister-in-law. She spends her days lovingly nurturing a tree in her yard and develops a deep sense of affection for the tree. The tree, adorned with its magnificent foliage, joyously responds. The sister-in-law finds this relationship wasteful and awkward. Much against the wishes of her husband, she successfully connives to get the girl married to a man in a far away place. The girl is forced to break her intimate relationship with the tree. Ironically, the innocent bride entrusts the care of the tree to her sister-in-law who promptly abandons it. In a short time, a drought befalls the village, the tree becomes emaciated, the brother falls deathly ill, the village is impoverished, and internecine fights break out. The girl learns of this catastrophe, hurries back home and nurtures the tree. Her loving care revives the tree; her brother recovers, the drought is ended, and the village is saved. The messages are readily apparent. Human life is intimately connected to its environment. Environment responds to human actions. While many among us do not care for or

appreciate nature, fortunately there are many others who do. Neglect and abuse of the environment are wrought with disastrous consequences. Material poverty arising due to a lack of concern for the ecology may eventually lead to depraved human behavior. Nature however, is benign and forgiving and allows for immediate redemption.

The elegant choreography accompanied by fascinatingly rhythmic music conveyed the complexity of these themes through extraordinarily graceful and fluid movements. Exquisite costumes and sets in pleasing colors were a treat to the eye. The drama was embellished by thoughtful narratives which enabled easy comprehension. This is wonderful theatre indeed. A uniformly high level of performance by the artistes makes it very difficult to single out a particular great role but Krishankshi Sharma as the domineering sister-in-law does stand out.

P. S. Ayyaswamy, Broomall, PA

I thoroughly enjoyed the dance drama *Living Tree* jointly organized by Sruti and TAGDV. I liked it perhaps for the same reasons a lover of "traditional" Indian music and dance may not have liked it. The event was a bold experiment aimed at fusing different forms of music and dance and a big hit among our children. I wish Sruti sponsors many more such 'Trees'.

R.Sivakumar, Blue Bell, PA

Given that most of our dance dramas are based on themes from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata or the Puranas, it was refreshing to see a drama based on a secular theme. An experiment such as this is apt to evoke comments both in favor and against it. I liked the overall effort and the effect it created although I felt at times certain aspects of it lacked dramatic force and artistry. The commentary, for example, was in general good but tended at times to be somewhat preachy and sanctimonious, which took away the poetry from it. The opening sequence was rather gloomy and lacked visual impact. The scene depicting the violence to the tree was very effectively conceived and carried out. Dancing and acting were generally good. Krishnakshi Sharma, as the girl's sister-in-law, gave an outstanding performance. Mahalakshmi, I felt, was miscast in the role of the girl. Her performance was rather disappointing.

Narendra's choreography employed several dance styles, from Bharata Natyam to ballet to Bhangra. And to match it, Narasimhan's music also employed different sounds to make it rather non-denominational. Some may justify such mixing of styles on the grounds that the theme is universal. I have some reservations about such a view. Universality comes from the theme, not so much from the style or the medium employed to present it. A story does not become universally appealing just because it is written in English. One could bring out all the universality staying within a particular genre that is competent or using only those genres that are organically related to it, rather than by using completely different (I am almost tempted to say alien) ones. I am certainly not against experimentation and innovation, and would even welcome it when the story line demands it. In this particular case, however, I felt there was no compelling reason to mix various styles. Well, that is a matter of never ending debate,

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Concert Reviews

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of perennial tension between classicism and innovation. There are no winners in that battle, I am afraid.

H.Y. Rajagopal, Media, PA.

The *Living Tree* was unique among the various dance dramas I have witnessed so far. It is customary in choreographing a dance drama to choose a particular form of classical dance whether it is Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak or Odissi. However, in *Living Tree* we witnessed brilliant demonstration of the various classical dance forms as well as the folk dances including the western Waltz, etc. For a purist, this symphony of different dance forms may be objectionable. But then, fine art when delivered in its original form is always enjoyable. The performing artists, though trained in Bharatha Natyam, had no difficulty in gliding from one dance form to the other. Narasimhan's scintillating music and Narendra's inspiring choreography captured the emotions of the various scenes of the drama resulting in a memorable experience. The stage setting, the props, the choice of bright colored costumes all added to the beauty of the dance drama. *Living Tree* left a memorable impression among the audience. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Needless to say, SRUTI had a sold out audience for the evening. Kudos to Narendra and his dance troop.

P. Swaminathan, Ambler, PA.

Living Tree was a stupendous show. The direction and performance were flawless. The organization of the event was very professional. The acoustics could have been slightly better, but overall a very enjoyable performance.

Nitish Chowdhary, Princeton, NJ.



Violin Duo Concert by Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath

Kamakshi Mallikarjun

Sruti teamed with Triveni Arts Group to give us a unique double treat on Saturday, May 5th 2001 that started with this lovely concert of lilting melodies. Having enjoyed listening to each of these accompanists, it was another treat to hear them play together in perfect unison!

The concert started with a sparkling

rendition of the Durbar, Adi Tala Varnam *Chalamela*. A short sketch of the raga Nattai was followed by *Shri Maha Ganapathim*. Then, Manjunath delineated the raga Garudadhvani triggering memories of the English Note that Madurai Mani Iyer made famous (Garudadhvani, the converse of Bilahari, has the notes of Sankarabaranam in arohana and Mohanam in avarohana). They played Thyagaraja's *Thatva Meruga Tharama* with charming kalpana swarams.

After a bhava-laden alapana of Abhogi by Nagaraj, came *Sabapathiki*. This was followed by a rare Dikshithar kriti in raga Gurjari. The main item was *Bhajare Re Manasa*, preceded by a beautiful alapana in Raga Abheri. The *tani* by Srimushnam Raja Rao was lovely, especially his varying modulation of the sound.

The artistes were deluged with requests and they graciously played a lot of them. After the *tani*, the songs were *Tunga Theera Virajam* (Salaga-bhairavi), *Baro Krishnayya* (Ragamalika), Akhilan-deshwari (Dvijavanti), a bhajan in Vasanthi, *Krishna Nee Begane* (Yaman Kalyan), *Naan Oru Vilayattu Bommaiya* (Navarasa Kanada) Jagadodharana (Kaapi), and finally Lalgudi's *Thillana* in Raga Thilang. Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath embellished these melodies with deft touches: one playing the high note and the other the low note in *Krishna Nee Begane*. They have such a beautiful Gayaki style ... their violins seem to be singing the words.

A most enjoyable concert!

[Kamakshi Mallikarjun is a software engineer and a music and dance enthusiast.]



M.S. Sheela's Vocal Concert

By Yeshwantha Prabhu

When a musician sings alapanas and kritis at a slow or moderate speed, with appropriate and lavish gamakas, he or she can bring out the *raga bhava* and *raga-chhaya* and the delicate nuances of a raga and the rasikas can relax and enjoy the singing, and feel the *ananda* that Carnatic music can give.

With this thought in mind I sat in the beautiful and luxurious McShain Theater with apprehension and anticipation. M. S. Sheela started her concert with the varna *Ninne Kori* in Kanada at a leisurely and proper speed, and I soon found myself relaxing, putting *talam* and nodding. In her clear, high-pitched angelic voice, she sang

the varnam very well. Next she sang *Vinayaka nata phala dayaka* (Mohanam), not often heard at concerts. I was already beginning to be impressed! Then she sang Thyagaraja's *Sogasu Juda tarama ni* in Kannadagowla. TVS, TNS, Maharajapuram Santanam, DKJ, DKP, and many others have sung this kriti. Next, with a brief alapana in Todi, she sang *Sharadeye karuna varidhiye* exceedingly well. Muthiah Bhagavata's *Samayamide nannu brochutaku* in the rare raga Budhamanohari was quite pleasant to hear. For a brief period I wondered why Muthiah Bhagavata was so fond of "inventing" ragas, and composing in very rare ragas. Sheela brought my wandering mind down to earth with a beautiful but brief rendition of Reetigowla alapana. One of the prominent princes of the raga kingdom, Reetigowla deserves an elaborate rendition. Smt. Radika Mani played the alapana wonderfully well and drew a well-deserved applause. I was touched by Sheela's soulful rendition of *Harikatha Shravana mado*. (It was still ringing in my ears, while at work, two days later!). So far six kritis rendered without an elaborate alapana! I was beginning to feel a twinge of disappointment.

Next she sang a melodious, elaborate, methodically developed Pantuvarali, bringing out the ragaswaroopa magnificently. It was the first, fully developed alapana. I felt it should have come much earlier. Radhika Mani, who is an excellent violinist, was more than a match. Her Pantuvarali was superb. I leaned to the rasika sitting next to me and whispered, "She is going to sing Dikshitar's Ramanatham Bhajeham". The way an alapana is rendered often hints at the composition to follow! Musicians such as Sanjay Subramaniam and T.M. Krishna are adept at conveying the kriti they have chosen through their alapana. It was most appropriate that she chose this majestic kriti as the main item. Both the neraval and kalpana swaras were superbly rendered. The thani avartanam was excellent. Anoor Dattatreya Sharma played the mridangam very well. At this stage, even A.V. Kashinath, the kanjira player, who seemed sleepy and distracted throughout the concert, played with vigor, as if rejuvenated. R.Satya-kumar, the ghatam player was excellent. I thought of the incomparable Sukanya Ramagopal, the ghatam player who accompanied Sheela during her 1996 concert. The audience was thrilled at the layavadya lahari, although in the begin-

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ning I felt that three layavadyas were two too many. I have attended many memorable concerts where the mridangam was the only laya vadya.

Next Sheela sang a shloka in raga-malika. I liked the Hindola and Amritavarshini. She then sang *Govinda gopala gopika vallabha*, also in ragamalika. The rasika sitting next to me told me that female vocalists are usually reluctant to sing compositions made popular by the great M.S. because of the unavoidable and usually unfavorable comparison. Just then, coincidentally, Sheela began to sing Swati Tirunal's beautiful ragamalika kriti, *Bhavayami Raghuramam* with Saveri as the main raga. Having heard the wonderful renditions by M.S. and also Maharajapuram Santanam numerous times, I felt Sheela sang it in a somewhat hurried way, without taking care to bring out the beauty of the sangatis in Mohanam and Natakuranji. Had I not heard M.S.'s recording, would I have felt the same way? I wondered.

Then she sang seven brief kritis in succession, without alapanas. *Tungateera virajam* in Salagabhairavi, and four Purandaradasa's kritis: *Narayana yenni* in Saranga, *Tarakka Bindige*, *Ramanama payasakke*, and *Yelliruvano Ranga* in Sindhubhairavi. Although almost all these songs were in response to requests from the audience, it was apparent that she has a special affinity to Purandaradasa's kritis. She sang with great bhava and her pronunciation was impeccable. These were followed by Thyagaraja's *Gandhamu puyyaruga* in Punnagavarali and P. T. Narasimhachar's *Aalisu Krishnana kolalina kare*.

A great musicologist and one of the most knowledgeable persons I knew, the late Sri Vishveshwaraiyya, had told me, "Musicians have a duty to show respect to the Trimurtis and the Pitamaha, so they must sing a couple of kritis of Thyagaraja, Dikshitar and Purandaradasa and one kriti of Shyama Shastri also, and then they can choose a few other composers they like. A musician should sing at least three or four alapanas elaborately and two short alapanas, and it would be nice to include a RTP also." When I think of the most memorable concerts I have been to, I am not surprised that most of them correspond to this formula. Sheela sang one elaborate alapana only, and she sang one ghana kriti only, which might explain why I felt the way I did

when the concert was over. Although it was a good concert, it was not a satisfying one. I have observed that at concerts arranged by Sruti, CMANA and the Telugu Association, the audience consists of a significant number of very knowledgeable people, many of whom are concert grade musicians themselves. These rasikas flock to a concert with the hope of listening to not just a few well-rendered kritis, but quite a few well-rendered alapanas also. It would be nice if a musician keeps this in mind and tries to quench the rasikas' thirst for alapanas.

Sheela could have sung fewer kritis, and included at least one ghana-kriti of Tyagaraja and one more of Dikshitar's. This concert had an abundance of "tukdas" and a shortage of ghana kritis, and an enigmatic scarcity of alapanas. And because I have attended several of her excellent concerts over the years, I was quite astonished.

A word must be said about the innumerable requests and notes sent to the musicians by the rasikas through their children, while Sheela was singing. The rasikas have an obligation to remember that the musicians need to concentrate and that sending a note while they are singing or playing the violin can be very distracting. Perhaps the organizers should have reminded the audience before the concert to refrain from doing so.

[Yeshwanth Prabhu is a chemist and an aspiring vocalist. He learnt Carnatic vocal from flutist Sri Gopalakrishna Iyer, and composer/vocalist Sri T.N.Bala.]



Maharajapuram Ramachandran's Concert—Listener's Review

By T. Parasaran & T. Sarada

When asked to review Sri Ramachandran's concert (Sruti, Sept 23, 2000), it was with some trepidations that we accepted. We have no formal training in classical music, but we appreciate good music. We enjoyed the concert and here are some of our thoughts about the same.

For classical music starved South East Pennsylvanians, the concert by Sri Maharajapuram Ramachandran and his accompanists turned out to be a feast to the ears. With able supports on violin by Sri Mullaivasal G. Chandramouli and on Mridangam by Sri. Kumbakonam R. Ganesh, the program was all that a music lover expected and hoped for.

There was no mistaking the solid foundation laid by seven generations of Car-

natic music stalwarts, their lineage and tutelage, when one heard Sri. Ramachandran. Glimpses of his popular father, Sri Santhanam, his grandfather Sri. Visvanatha Iyer and his most illustrious disciple Sri. Semmangudi, all flashed throughout the concert, at different times, while at the same time Ramachandran maintained his own distinct style. Similarly, Sri Chandramouli reminded the listener of his gurus and their lineage occasionally, without being a copy.

The program had a tentative start with the varnam, but very soon picked up tempo. The universal favorite *Vatapi*, offered an unusual bonus of lively *niraval* and *kalpanaswaras*. Special mention should be made here of the short but highly structured Jugalbandi style of duet between the singer and the percussionist. It is remarkable that Sri. Ramachandran exhibited equal facility in his rendering of swaras whether it was *kalpanaswaras*, or methodical rhythmic build-up, or *thata prayogas*; the transitions were smooth and nicely blended, making the exercise very pleasing to the listeners.

Another passage that stood out was the combination of both Raga and Sahithya Bhavas exhibited in the elaborate niraval of *Alaga Muddunu*, in the charanam of *Meru Samana*, in the raga Mayamalavagoula.

The alapana in Mohanakalyani was non traditional and highly original, holding the full attention of the audience; it was equally great and spell-binding that Sri. Chandramouli opted to go all traditional during his turn.

Nannu Vidichi in Ritigoula from Thyagaraja's *Prahlada Bhakthi Vijayam* gave the artist ample opportunities to excel in true *Sahithya Bhava* with melodic, expressive and graceful sangatis and sancharas; the improvisations using the different names of Sri Rama had a nice touch of *Bhakti Rasa*, a technique that was commonly used by many of the old veterans.

Thodi ragam was so good to listen to after a long time, instead of the ubiquitous Panthuvrali or Purvikalyani. Papanasam Sivan's kriti *Kartikeya Gangeya* added to the pleasure.

Listeners, did you notice that Sri Ramachandran mentioned 'post-thani' songs and not 'post-pallav' songs? Well, there was no RTP, but probably there was no need since quite a few of his *swaravistaras* had *thanaswaras*. We sure heard a short but well paced Thani. Our total ignorance about the intricacies of Mridan-

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gam playing prevents us from writing further on the topic.

The cascade of Tamil songs on Muruga, renderings of his father's compositions, our own Bala's song, the uplifting devaranamas and the bhajan that comprised the post-thani were rendered beautifully. It was not 'theatrical', but Sri Ramachandran sang these with reverence and liveliness. These were followed by a thillana in the time honored style of concert singing. A restful Madhyamavathi followed the traditional *Mangalam* to end the concert.

We have to mention the only sour note to the whole evening; but mercifully it was only in the beginning although it crept up briefly, again, during Thodi alapana. We are referring to the problem with the mike arrangement; this was highly distracting but then that is life. Sure enough, there were more than enough compensations.

We are sure that the audience left the hall as happy and fulfilled as we did.

[Dr. Sarada is a consultant for printing industry. Dr. Parasaran is Technical Director at Polysciences Inc. in Warrington, PA. They both live in Horsham, PA]

[Submitted for the last *Sruti Notes*, this was unfortunately not published in that issue. We regret the omission—Editors]

Community News

ASME Award to Dr. P.S. Ayyaswamy

It is a pleasure to announce that a sruti life member Prof. P. S. Ayyaswamy of the Univ. of Pennsylvania has been selected to receive the highest international award given by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) for contributions to the science of Heat Transfer. The Executive Committee of ASME will formally present the award to Prof. Ayyaswamy at the International Mechanical Engineering Congress and Exposition to be held in New York in November, 2001. The "Heat Transfer Memorial Award in the Science category" is for his "very many seminal contributions to such diverse fields of heat transfer as phase-change, plasma, bio, and natural convection, in particular to transport processes with moving droplets and thermal design of advanced industrial equipment." Our congratulations to Prof. Ayyaswamy.

In Other News

Swathi Puraskar to K.V. Narayanaswamy

Veteran carnatic vocalist Sri. K.V. Narayanaswamy was the recipient of the prestigious *Swathi Puraskar* award for the year 2000. The award, instituted by the Gov-

In Other News

Swathi Puraskar to K.V. Narayanaswamy

Veteran carnatic vocalist Sri. K.V. Narayanaswamy was the recipient of the prestigious *Swathi Puraskar* award for the year 2000. The award, instituted by the Government of Kerala in 1997 in memory of the composer Swathi Thirunal, recognizes creative contributions to the field of classical music. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was the first recipient, followed by Ustad Bismillah Khan and Smt. D.K. Pattammal.

Padma Awards

This year's national awardees for distinguished service announced on India's Republic Day included many in the fields of classical music and dance.

The **Padma Vibhushan** was awarded to Ustad Amjad Ali Khan (Sarod), Delhi; Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma (Santoor), and Maestro Zubin Mehta (Music Director of Israel Philharmonic Orchestra).

The **Padma Bhushan** was awarded to Dr. L. Subramaniam (Violin); Lalgudi G. Jayaraman (Violin); Ms. Uma Sharma (Kathak dance); and Ms. Yamini Krishnamurti (Kuchipudi dance).

The **Padma Shri** was awarded to Shobha Naidu, (Kuchipudi).

Arangetrams

Devi Taranath

Shilpa Narayan and **Akhila Vasthare**, both students of the Natya Academy of Indian Classical Dance founded by **Mrs. Shoba Sharma**, gave their debut performances in April at the Gordon Theatre at Rutgers University.

Shilpa Narayan, daughter of Poornima and Badri Narayan, gave her performance on April 7th. The program included an invocation to Goddess Kali, a Jathi Swaram, a Varnam, three padams (*Ethanai Sonmalum, Vaani Ramanave & Saako Nina Sneha*) and a thillana. Shilpa has been learning Bharatha Natyam for the past nine years, and taking music lessons from T.N. Bala of Haverford, PA. This blend of talents has given Shilpa a unique approach to Bharatha Natyam that reveals itself as she performs. Without effort, she can listen to intricate thalams and follow with corresponding footwork.

Ms. Kathryn Keeler, member of the Board of Philadelphia Dance Alliance, was the guest of honor for the evening and Smt. Renuka Adiraju was the Master of Ceremonies.

Akhila Vasthare gave her debut performance on April 14. The theme of the evening was Lord Krishna. The recital started with praise for Lord Ganesha, leading into Alaripu, a Jathi Swaram, a Varnam, three padams (*Mella Mellane, Aasai Mugam* and *Yahi Madhava*) and a thillana. Akhila's portrayal of Krishna's many moods – loving, mischievous, and heroic just to name a few – was striking. Her enthusiasm for dance was evident from her performance and her poise as a sophisticated young lady was apparent from her eloquent vote of thanks.

The guest of honor at the performance was Dr. H.Y. Rajagopal, a professor at Villanova University and a founding member of SRUTI, CIO and INDUS. The Master of Ceremonies was Smt. Hema Ramamurthy.

[Devi Taranath, a former student of Natya, studied Bharatha Natyam and Kuchipudi under *Natyakalavathi Jaya Mani of Pittsburgh*. She had her *Arangetram* in 1988.]

Letters To The Editor

Thyagaraja Aradhana of 3/3/01

SRUTI successfully arranged another Thyagaraja Aradhana on 3 March 2001 at the Hindu Temple, Berlin, NJ. The Board of Directors (BOD) and all other volunteers that made this event possible deserve our unstinted praise.

Many Carnatic music aficionados of Delaware Valley look forward to the event and indeed some of them practice hard to pay their homage to the great composer/saint. Some of us who have been with SRUTI for a long time have noted that the children's singing has shown significant improvement over the years, which is very encouraging. We have also noticed that certain trends have crept in during the last few years. We like to point out some of these and hope that the future BODs would ensure that they are not repeated.

1. Alapana before a kriti: We believe it is a convention at the Aradhana that performers do not indulge in any alapana before a kriti. In fact one person even went to the extent of kalpana swarams. We

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have nothing against alapana or kalpana swaras per se. But if one or two persons were permitted, you cannot stop others, floodgates would open and time control would be a problem. In the early days the M.C. used to repeatedly request the artists to abjure alapana and kalpana swarams. This was when the number of participants was less than we have now!

2. Singing of kritis of composers other than Thyagaraja: The President, in one of his remarks mentioned that Thyagaraja Aradhana is very special. Indeed it is! There are many reasons why the Aradhana is special. One of them is that Thyagaraja, with his hundreds of compositions of varied levels of difficulty in rendering, practically shaped the Carnatic music world of today. There used to be an implicit assumption that the performers who come to pay homage would render only Thyagaraja kritis and the audience also expected to be treated to only his compositions. However, during the last two Aradhanas, the main artists indulged in compositions of other composers even including some light music. Once again, we have nothing against other great composers like Purandaradasa, Dikshitar, Syama Sastry, Sivan .. But we do not believe that the Thyagaaja Aradhana is the proper forum to render their compositions. Indeed, hearing non-Thyagaraja kritis at the Aradhana brings a dissonance to the day's program.

We believe that one of the objectives of having an artist of the day was to recognize an advanced musician living in the U.S.A and provide a platform to share his/her talent with us within the framework of the Aradhana. We hope that the scope of the Aradhana would not be widened further. In keeping with this philosophy, we suggest that the future BODs request the artist(s) of the day to limit their rendering to kritis of Thyagaraja (There is no risk of running out of Thyagaraja's kritis!). If the artist is really outstanding (e.g. Madurai Sundar of Detroit), it would be quite appropriate for the BOD to arrange a separate full-fledged SRUTI concert of the artist(s).

S. Sankaran and Rasikan

Response to 'Thyagaraja Aradhana of 3/3/01' from some BOD members:

Sri. Mani and Sri. Sankaran are respected members of the Sruti community and have given, like many of us in the board and the committees, a lot of their

personal time to the cause of Sruti. Their opinions are valued and we are sure the future boards will take them into consideration in organizing the Aradhana.

We would like to respond to the point they have raised about the rendering of Alapana. This occurs rarely and is not a rampant problem. Members of the Board have had experience in running the Aradhana more than once, and are quite aware of the importance of time on that day. We can tell the registrants all we want, but if someone decides to have their way, there is not much that can be done. Obviously, if Alapanas get out of hand, we may have to apply sanctions such as warning the singer after the fact or, for repeat violations, not permitting the artist to perform in the next Aradhana. These actions can be impractical and add additional burdens to the board members and volunteers. While on the subject, we would like to point out that the current Board has greatly streamlined the sign-up process through online Web registration. Furthermore, we finished an hour earlier than usual thanks to the registration and scheduling approach that took into account the preferences of the registrants.

As for the second comment: We should regard the Aradhana as an annual event in both the musical *and* the spiritual development of all of us, individually and as a community. After all, the undercurrent (for that matter, the overcurrent) of the event is the worship of Sri Rama as an embodiment of nobility and dharma. If consulted, Sri Thyagaraja might himself warn against *narasthuthi* (as he has in his compositions) and would urge us all to revere something greater than himself. Taken in that spirit, even though this day is named Thyagaraja Aradhana, it is more appropriate to view it as a tribute to the musical giants that have enriched us, as well as the teachers that continue that tradition by imparting this knowledge to others. *It is a celebration of not a man, but an ideal.* Our position has been to request the main artist of the day to confine the songs *mainly* to Thyagaraja Krithis. We do not actively encourage them to render compositions by others, but if they want to include an occasional piece we believe they are entitled to that artistic freedom. We believe the artists have by and large honored our expressed preference. Sruti is perceived by some as catering only to a South Indian audience. If we try to be restrictive about even what songs may be sung, its image is likely to become even

narrower: one of catering only *one* composer's music to a South Indian audience! This does not seem to be in harmony with our fashioned name of Sruti, The **India** Music and Dance Society. These are the views of the undersigned members of the board.

These are the views of the undersigned members of the Board. Since the present Board will not have any more Aradhanas to organize, this and similar matters may be discussed and acted upon by the incoming Board.

P. Narayanan, President

S. Rajagopal, Vice President

K. Pochiraju, Corresponding Secretary.

At the concerts on May 5, 2001.

I attended the two concerts presented jointly by SRUTI and the Triveni Arts Group on May 5, 2001. I anticipated 3-4 hours delightful music from Sheela, with detailed rendition of at least a couple of my favorite ragas and compositions.

I enjoyed the first two hours, though it included only one detailed alapana in Panthuvrali. Having attended many of Sheela's concerts in the past, I was not concerned yet and looked forward to another two hours with at least one or two detailed raga renderings and a ragam, thanam, pallavi. However, to the consternation of the other rasikas and my own mounting disappointment, the rest of the concert turned out to be quite colorless with an hour and a half of 'tukdas'/'short notes'!

The main cause of this totally uncharacteristic presentation by Sheela was, in my opinion, the barrage of requests that were presented during the concert. While passing 'chits' to the artist at a concert is not uncommon, this event was a case where besides being a great distraction and annoyance, it definitely influenced the course of the concert. A much anticipated concert turned into an unsatisfying and disappointing one. I believe the violin concert was also affected in a similar way.

I think requests for specific ragas or compositions should be conveyed to the artist in advance through the organizers. However, the artist should also be made aware of the expected concert pattern by the organizers. This could help avoid a recurrence of the events of May 5.

Viji Swaminathan, Ambler, PA

The opinions expressed by the authors 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.

My Arangetram Shilpa Narayan

On April 7, 2001, my guru, Smt. Shoba Sharma presented my arangetram at Gordon Theater in Rutgers University, New Jersey. I reached this milestone as a result of extensive training and concerted effort over a period of ten years.

It is necessary for me to provide a brief description of Bharathanatyam to illustrate why this art form is so important to me. Bharathanatyam has been the most important activity that I have participated in outside of school. It is a beautiful ancient dance form of India that provides me with a creative outlet. Bharathanatyam consists of pure dance movements and mime. It is a way for me to learn about and keep in touch with my heritage through the themes from Indian mythology and epics that it depicts in various pieces. Bharathanatyam is also a great way to keep in shape.

The major part of my arangetram preparation involved intensive training with my dance teacher. I invested much of my time and effort in practicing and refining my dancing skills. Preparation for my arangetram enabled me to understand the amount of work and dedication involved in becoming proficient in an art form. Even though I have learned dance for ten years, my teacher had to fine-tune my dancing because every little movement or change in expression changes the whole meaning and impact of the dance. Especially for abhinaya pieces, dances with great expressive content, I had to think about how to portray various emotions within the Indian context. This enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of Indian culture.

My arangetram lessons with Shoba akka have been invaluable. Her attention to detail and her skill in polishing every move and nuance greatly contributed to improving my dance. Through my intensive training with Shoba akka, I have learned much about myself and Bharathanatyam. The more I learned, the greater my appreciation for Bharathanatyam became. Beyond my arangetram, my classes with Shoba akka have equipped me with the tools that I need to continue refining my dance.

I feel fortunate to be living in the Philadelphia area where it is easy to cultivate an appreciation for Indian fine arts. For youngsters interested in learning these art forms, there are excellent teachers like Shoba akka and Bala mama (musician Sri T.N. Bala) who have helped dance and music flourish in this region. The Indian community at large encourages performances by students through various forums. The teachers work closely with students and parents and foster a feeling of close-knit family. My arangetram went smoothly because of the selfless help that I received from my friends and family in Natya (Shoba akka's dance school), who focused on making the program successful.

More than my arangetram itself, my preparation for the event has been a very rewarding and fulfilling experience. In

addition to my growing appreciation for Bharathanatyam, I have also gained a greater appreciation for other art forms such as writing, music, and theater. I plan to continue learning Bharathanatyam, and I hope to influence youngsters in the community to learn Indian arts.

[Shilpa, daughter of Poonima and Badri Narayan, will be graduating this year from Highschool. She also learns Carnatic music from Sri. T.N. Bala]



My Bharathanatyam Debut Performance

Akhila Vasthare

When Shoba akka told me that I would be ready for my Arangetram, I told myself that I had to always remember that although it would seem like the Arangetram day itself was what the whole process was geared towards, the performance would not be the most important day. The whole year would be important. Because no one class of learning more important than another, there could be no most important day during the year of training. I felt that the Arangetram day itself was just a day to show others what I had learnt. Learning about dance and myself was the real key factor during the process. To me, the performance was just a reward, a bonus. The core of the performance lay in the year of training.

The training of my Arangetram has been a wonderful experience for me in many different ways. I have gained a much deeper knowledge of the art of Bharathanatyam. Having private lessons with Shoba akka has really helped me to learn the nuances of nritta and abhinaya and develop into a better dancer. I have always appreciated Bharathanatyam but, through this Arangetram I have really understood what a powerful art this is on the dancer.

Along with learning dance, I have also learnt a lot about time management. It was not easy managing schoolwork and dance at the same time, but through my parents' and Shoba akka's encouragement, I was able to not only get through the whole process, but enjoy it at the same time. The enjoyment made it a stress-free time.

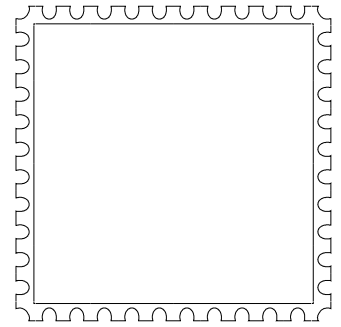
In addition, the most important thing that I have gained is the fact that I have become a better person. So many people were so selflessly helping, that it was hard not to learn from it! So, although to an outsider it may seem that an Arangetram only makes a person a better dancer, I know that it has shaped me into a better human.

[Akhila, daughter of Usha and Shivaswamy Vasthare, is a sophomore in highschool. Besides Bharathanatyam, she has also learnt Ballet, Tap and Jazz dance.]



SRUTI

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



UPCOMING SRUTI Concerts
Sri P. Unnikrshnan — Carnatic Music Vocal
(June 2, See attached flyer for details)
A. K. C. Natarajan (Clarinet), Hyderabad Brothers (Vocal), Bombay Jayashree (Vocal)
Dates and venues to be announced.



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