



SRUTI NOTES

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web: www.sruti.org; e-mail: sruti@sruti.org

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Dear Sruti Members,

We have the April Sruti Notes to bring you up to date with Sruti activities and tell you how the concerts in the past few months went.

Starting with the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana, we had a full day program with enthusiastic participants of all age groups, concluding with a concert from local artists in the evening. As usual we had plenty of food to go around, thanks to the volunteers. We have included in this issue, impressions of the day from a new writer and a concert review from a veteran Sruti member.

We also had two different types of concerts in the last few months. For the first concert, we have two reports; a review and a viewpoint. For the second we have a review.

We have also included a solicited article on Neelotpalambha Vibhakti songs by Prakash Rao. The presentation of the songs, you may all remember was by Bhavani Rao and group last year on the Sruti Annual composers day. A short note on Vibhakti has been added by Srimati Ranganayaki for those who would like to have a brief refresher on the Sanskrit grammar.

Sri H.Y. Rajagopal has been kind enough to send us a tribute to MSS for the current issue, since we will be doing a special program in the forthcoming Sruti gathering on April 30th, along with T. M. Krishna concert.

Last but not least we do have a community news item by S. Sankaran that may be of great interest to music lovers. Our aim is to make this column a regular feature and your help in this regard will be greatly appreciated.

Have a great Spring.
The Library Committee.

Note to Contributors

Sruti publications can only get better with active participation from the readers. Hence, we would like to emphasize that your contributions are very welcome. However, in order to avoid any misunderstandings, and to protect the rights of our beloved organization, we would like to list a few guidelines. Your articles are extremely important to us and we hope these simple guidelines will not scare away any of you potential contributors! As always, your feedback is welcome.

- ◆ Please note that submission of an article to this and other Sruti publications automatically implies that you are permitting Sruti to publish (and re-publish) the article in this and other publications, in the form of print, web, or any other medium.
- ◆ Your submissions will also be edited for typography, length, grammar, and clarity of content. If you have serious concerns about this, please request that you need to review the edited article before publication.
- ◆ All submitted material will be attributed to the author by name, unless withholding of the name is requested explicitly.
- ◆ The submissions need to be timely (five days before the scheduled date of publication) for inclusion in the newsletter.

Editor

From the President's Desk

Dear Friends:

Hope you and your families are in good health and good times. Hope also that you attended the recent Sruti events and showed your support. Let me briefly review our activities so far this year.

The Thyagaraja Aradhana was held on 19 Feb. at the Berlin Temple, N.J., a venue we used for many years in the past for this event. In the recent years, we had the program at Villanova University, but moved it back this year partly to demonstrate our commitment to our diverse audience and supporters in the entire Greater Philadelphia area. The choice of a venue is often a conflicting one, for a variety of reasons including proximity, space, ambience, cost. The event was well attended with some 80 participants ending with a pleasing vocal concert by Savita, accompanied by Sandhya (violin) & Srinath (mridangam). This year we introduced a new format for the Utsava/Bhajana Sampradaya Kirtana rendering at the beginning of the festivities. We played a pre-recorded tape containing selected kirtanas with individuals on the stage and in the auditorium joining in the group singing. We did this for a variety of reasons. (a) The group that sang these kirtanas in the past was made of school going children, which keeps changing as the children graduate and/or shift their focus to other activities. (b) Also we felt that the participation should be opened up to a larger number of musicians. (c) These kirtanas are meant to be sung together in a group. Indeed, for that very reason, Sri Thyagaraja composed them as musically simple songs. We plan to make a special recording of these songs and make them available on our website as well as CDs, so that people intending to join in the group rendering may practice the styles ahead of time. There is no cost to the recording process, thanks to the rich volunteer spirit in our Sruti community. We think that it is a model that can be sustained and that will be an inviting & inclusive approach open to all. We hope that the future Sruti Boards would continue this practice.

The "World Music Concert" by L Shankar et al on March 12, was a learning experience. The nature of the music was new to us (we only did pure classical music concerts so far). While the music itself was good, the attendance was rather poor. This, in spite of extensive marketing in various forms including mailing to Sruti (600) and Painted Bride (over 800) people; advertising in various media: press: India Abroad, Little India, Philadelphia Inquirer, Daily Pennsylvanian of UPenn and The Triangle of Drexel University; radio: Princeton Radio station WPRB; Classical & Jazz music station WRTI while TV Asia aired the event round the clock during the entire week before the concert! The event was partly supported by a grant from PMP. However, the combined costs of such extensive marketing, cost of the 800+ capacity prestigious auditorium plus the high cost of the artists was unfortunately not offset by the lack of a large attendance at the event. Sruti simply cannot afford such programs again!

The lute and flute jugalbandhi concert by Ravi Kiran and Shank on April 2, was well attended despite the torrential rain on that day. Driving was difficult and several roads were closed. This probably discouraged several far-away friends from attending, but we are grateful to those of you that dared the weather and heard a really good concert.

For the rest of the Spring season, we have two excellent programs lined up - TM Krishna vocal concert on April 30 dedicated to the memory of the great M.S. Subbulakshmi and a grand, unique, first ever performance of a full length Kathakali dance drama on May 21. (flyer enclosed). I sincerely hope that you will make these successes by attending in large numbers. Please also consider sponsoring these and other events by financial contributions - we will gratefully acknowledge your support in all our communication channels.

Looking ahead to the Fall season, we are putting together a superb Bharata Natyam dance program by Ms. Leela Samson and her dance school Spanda from New Delhi, India. Ms. Samson is a highly respected Bharatanatyam dancer, teacher and choreographer, whose contributions have been underscored by her recent appointment as the Director of Kalakshetra in Chennai. The dance performance will be preceded by a week-long Dance workshop to be taught by Ms. Leela Samson and troupe and coordinated by our local dance teacher, Ms. Lakshmi Komineni. Also in the Fall, we will have a grand Carnatic concert by the famous Dr. Yesudas, planned for Saturday Sep 24. Please mark your calendars and more details will follow. In conclusion, I am also very happy to announce that we have been able to secure partial funding for the above two events from Dance Advance and Philadelphia Music Project (PMP) respectively. In fact, the PMP grant also partly funds a mandolin concert by U. Shrinivas and his brother U Rajesh during April 2006.

Hoping to see to you all on Apr 30 for TM Krishna event and May 21 for the Kathakali dance event,

with kind regards
Prabhakar Chitrapu.

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.

M.S. Subbulakshmi – where Life and Art Become One

By H.Y. Rajagopal

With the passing of M.S. Subbulakshmi the world of music has lost one of its brightest stars. The voice that not only thrilled millions but also gave them comfort in times of distress is no more. Her chosen field of art was Karnatak music but her vision of art and humanity was so broad, she was able to cut across regional and language barriers and relate to people all over. It was perhaps in recognition of this universal spirit, of reaching out to humanity through art, that she was invited to give a concert at the UN General Assembly in 1966. She is undoubtedly one of the most charismatic personalities of the musical world.

My first experience of Subbulakshmi's music was when I was in the second year of high school. It was examination time. I was seated next to an open window overlooking a field across which was a boys' hostel. I could see preparations were under way for some celebration at that hostel, and as is the custom in India, long before the actual event, they had started broadcasting music via loud speakers to draw attention to the event. The song they kept playing again and again was M.S.'s '*Giridhara Gopala*.' The song captivated me and I just wanted to sit and listen to it. But I had an examination on hand. I would stop working on my answers every now and then and lose myself in a reverie listening to the song, only to pull myself away a few moments later. I had a hard time concentrating on my work. Fortunately, I was able finish the test on time and do well on it too. But the memory of that incident has not faded. I still hear that beautiful voice coming from across the field, articulating "*Leelamanasasarovihara*," a phrase that has stuck in my mind. Through a strange alchemy, over the years the purity of the voice and the meaning of the phrase have combined to evoke in me the image of a lake of pristine waters whose deep pools reflect the infinite blue of the sky.

Ask a hundred people about their own experiences. It wouldn't be surprising if a majority of them narrated some such personal event, or spoke of a moment when they felt uplifted from their humdrum existence into a world of joy by M.S.'s music. She appealed to people from all walks of life, from the humblest hut dwellers to presidents and prime ministers, from the unlettered to those who extended the frontiers of knowledge. I recall an incident narrated by my brother relating to the conferment of honorary doctorate on her during the golden jubilee celebration of the University of Delhi in 1972. Amongst the other honorees was Dr. S. Chandrasekhar, the eminent astrophysicist. When the university committee in charge of selecting the candidates for the honor (of which my brother was a member) wrote to Dr. Chandrasekhar informing him of their decision and inviting him to come to Delhi to receive the honor, it seems he wrote back saying that normally he wouldn't have thought of undertaking such a trip, but seeing the name of M.S. Subbulakshmi "for whom he had the highest regard" on the list of honorees, he would attend the convocation, provided he is seated next to her on the dais. They did seat him next to her and it pleased the great scientist

enormously.

M.S. began her artistic career while still a teenager and steadily rose to the pinnacle of her profession as one of the greatest vocalists of the age. She was gifted with an incomparable voice, a voice that comes maybe once in a century. She was a most earnest practitioner of her art, who spent long arduous hours in practice. She was a learner till the end, constantly expanding her already vast repertoire. Her concerts were meticulously planned (a rarity in Indian music) and brilliantly executed. But it was not just the technique or the showmanship. It was not just the voice, it was not just her good looks (of which she had plenty), nor was it just her musical knowledge. The magic of Subbulakshmi went beyond all that. It was an amalgam of all those great qualities. Her stage presence was electrifying. Music came out of her as a deeply felt experience that unerringly touched the hearts of her listeners. There was a strong current of devotion and caring that guided her performances. Every performance offered something new, maybe it was a long-forgotten composition she was reviving, or an altogether new work of a contemporary composer. She treated each raga, each song with such loving care and devotion that it was impossible not to be moved by it. Listeners felt as though she was singing just for them, and inviting them to join her in the great quest of finding divinity through music. It was as though she was appealing to the Supreme Listener through each one of her earthly listeners.

Early on in her career, Subbulakshmi acted in four films, the last of which was Meera, first made in Tamil and later in Hindi. The film, produced by her husband T. Sadasivam, was a phenomenal success. In her foreword to Shama Futehally's book "*In the Dark of the Heart, Songs of Meera*," M.S. says, "It was given to me, some fifty years ago, to re-live Meera's devotion through the film of her life which my husband Shri T. Sadasivam produced. Travelling in Brindavan, Mathura, Dwaraka and Rajasthan for the film, I felt that Meera was alive and could never die. How could she, when what she sang was as timeless as the blue of the sky and the sea?" The bhajans she sang in the film touched people's hearts and skyrocketed her fame. Her rendering of Narasibhagat's 'vaishnavajana to' and Meerabai's 'hari tuma haro' so endeared her to Mahatma Gandhi that he was moved to make his now famous statement that he would prefer having the words of Meera's song just spoken by Subbulakshmi than sung by others.

An artist's life is no bed of roses and Subbulakshmi's was no exception. Despite many advantages like a wonderful voice and radiant beauty, she had to struggle hard to earn for herself a place of honor in the male preserve of the concert stage. (Male instrumentalists would even refuse to accompany female vocalists. It was T. Chowdaiah of Mysore who tore down such barriers and boldly offered to accompany M.S. very early on in her career, an act she remembered with gratitude all her life and acknowledged in public at the concert she gave for the Indian Academy of Sciences Diamond Jubilee at Chowdaiah Hall in Bangalore in 1984.) Despite her demure looks, she was a determined woman. G. Venkatachalam, a prominent art and music critic of the previous generation, who met with her when she cut her first gramophone disc in Bangalore at age 13, has said:

“M.S.... had a vivid personality even at that age... Her dark dreamy eyes... revealed not a fragile child but a strong silent girl... For a girl of thirteen, she had the will of a woman of forty and for a gay and light-hearted child of song, she was a bit self-willed and stubborn...” (Quoted by Indira Menon in “The Madras Quartet: Women in Karnatak Music, Roli Books, 1999) However, a good part of the success of her extraordinary career spanning more than six decades must go to the steady influence of her husband, Mr. T. Sadasivam, a journalist and a freedom fighter, a force in his own right. Somewhat imperious but always protective and nurturing of her, he was her husband, mentor, manager, producer, critic, public relations man, and image-maker – all rolled into one. I tend to think that Sadasivam was perhaps the first image-maker on the Indian art scene.

Sadasivam and Subbulakshmi aligned themselves with the freedom movement early on and wholeheartedly supported national causes. They gave away millions in charities. Indira Menon lists in her book that between 1944 and 1987 M.S. gave 243 performances for charity. In addition, there were recordings she made for the benefit of various temples. (I believe it was she who started the trend of recording *suprabhatams* and other devotional hymns.) In addition, privately they supported a large number of students in their educational pursuits. There is perhaps no other artist in India who gave away so much in charity. One estimate puts it at more than a crore of rupees. Theirs was a great partnership that made Subbulakshmi a highly respected figure not only in the music world but also in the life of the country as a whole.

I must confess that it still bothers me how a creative artist of the caliber of Subbulakshmi could so completely submit her will and artistic freedoms to another’s dominance. Fortunately it worked well in her case for Sadasivam was not just a control freak but one endowed with a great sense of art, social purpose and direction. Gowri Ramnarayan, M.S.’s grandniece who has written extensively about her, says M.S. was a conservative to the core. She was ‘convinced that a woman’s place was in the home. She shook her head over “independent” girls; it was one of the few English words in her vocabulary. If you reminded her that she herself was a career woman on hectic performance tours, she would look puzzled and say, “I just did what your *thatha* (grandfather) asked me to do. Besides, he was always with me.”’ (The Hindu, Sunday, December 19, 2004) M.S.’s kind of marriage may not work for all, but thankfully it worked for her and so wonderfully at that.

Some years ago, Subbulakshmi made a cassette recording of a few compositions of my father, Sri H. Yoganarasimham of Mysore. While it was in preparation, I was on a visit to Chennai and wanted to see her. When I called her home, Mr. Sadasivam picked up the phone. I introduced myself and asked if I could visit them for a short time. He agreed immediately and asked if I could come that very evening. I was overjoyed and went to meet them taking along with me my uncle with whom I was staying. It is a visit I shall never forget. They were most gracious to us. Subbulakshmi talked to us with so much warmth that made us feel she knew us all along and brought out snacks from the kitchen herself for us to eat. There was another family visiting them that evening and when we said we would take leave, they offered to send us home in their own car, as we didn’t have transport of our own. Sitting

in the car, I looked out at them. They were both standing in the verandah; she had bent down, her hands clasped in the traditional *namaskara* gesture. Here she was, the reigning queen of music, seeing off someone like me, a mere visitor, so graciously and respectfully! I felt I had never met a more beautiful person. She seemed like the very personification of art and learning, beauty and grace, charity and compassion – truly an artist in whom the person and the art are indistinguishable.

M.S. was a most gracious guest too, as those who have entertained the couple at their homes tell us. B.V.K. Sastry, the music critic, recalls an occasion when he had invited the couple to his house in Bangalore. M.S. inquired about all the people of his household, and upon learning that Sastry’s sister normally wouldn’t come out of the kitchen when there were other men visiting, went into the kitchen herself and talked to her. In the course of their conversation, the older lady told M.S. she had never heard her in person. Upon which, she sat right there and sang for her Purandaradasa’s ‘*kaliyugadali*.’ (‘Murali Vani,’ Sri B.V.K. Sastry Felicitation Volume, 1999) My eldest sister-in-law tells many charming stories about her. Once on a visit to Delhi, M.S. told her that lately Sri Sadasivam had been complaining that he was becoming somewhat forgetful. But almost immediately after that somber note, there was a giggle and in a girlish gesture, she pinched her on the leg and said, “But he has told me, no matter what, he won’t forget me!”

Subbulakshmi is one of the most recorded artists of our times. Thanks to those recordings, generations to come would have the satisfaction of listening to one of the greatest artists of this age and appreciating what a rich legacy she has left behind.

I cannot think of another person in whom life and art blended so beautifully.

[H.Y. Rajagopal is a member of long standing and a frequent contributor to *Sruti* publications.]

Thyagaraja Aradhana 2005
by Sujata Kumar

It was a rare event for me. I say so because after leaving my beloved India to reside in foreign soils more than 30 years ago, this is the first and only time I had the opportunity to witness a function such as this! This is because we lived in Europe and such an occasion is unimaginable there. In America, Indians are fortunate to be able to indulge in the feasts of music and dance from our country, the huge Indian immigrant population of India making it possible. It is also a reflection on their zealous attempt to keep our culture alive through propagating our great music by encouraging the progeny with such concerts and teaching our invaluable fine arts to them.

The recent Thyagaraja Aradhana that took place in Berlin, New Jersey on the 19th Feb 2005 is an excellent example. I was fortunate enough to be able to attend it. It was a feast for

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both my ears and eyes. There were these young children, all dressed in Indian colorful garments and singing away beautifully the great Thyagaraja's Kritis! I, for a moment, forgot that I was in America and felt like I sat at a concert in India. The hustle and the bustle of the proud parents and anxious teachers, and an appreciative audience added to the aura of such an Aradhana. The temple ambience lent it the necessary authenticity. It took me back to my own childhood and my music lessons and our annual music concert. I could feel the nervous tinge in me even as I sat listening to those children, making me feel like it was my turn next! It was heart warming to see these kids who were born and brought up in America, singing so well with attention to the ragam and talam and pronouncing the words without any trace of accent. It goes to show how much hard work has gone behind all that from all sides: children, their parents and the teachers.

As the concert slowly gave way to the older participants, the enjoyment grew with it. Young aspirants enthralled everyone with their various musical attributes. There is so much talent and so much enthusiasm that infected all listeners with sheer joy. Added to the sensations our ears enjoyed, the palate too was tingled as the aromas of the culinary variety wafted into the air kindling the appetites of everyone! All of us were treated to a sumptuous lunch of various rice preparations of the South India and later a high tea with pakodas. This was then followed by the concerts of professional singers which unfortunately I could not witness as other engagements encroached on my time. But after this experience, I shall make it a point to keep my day absolutely free, to attend the Thyagaraja Aradhana next year!

[We moved about an year ago to US after my husband took an early retirement from his profession as an Anesthesiologist in Germany. Indians or Indian cultural activities was nil in the part of Germany that we lived. My whole family loves music. But for me, without doubt, it was our unique Indian classical music that gave the much needed spiritual guidance and support. I am an ardent admirer of Smt MSSubbalakshmi and thankful for her many recitals and slokams.]

Savita Rao's Concert - Thyagaraja Aradhana 2005

By P. Swaminathan

SRUTI, The India Music and Dance Society, organized the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana for this year on Feb 19, 2005. Due to scheduling conflicts, SRUTI decided to organize this event earlier than usual. The venue for this year's celebration was the Berlin Hindu Temple, South Jersey. This year's aradhana featured quite a few talented junior artists. I was very impressed with the incredible musical skills displayed by the second generation Indian immigrants, all acquired here, living away from India. As for the adult participation I noticed quite a few *no shows* among those who gave their names in advance.

The main artist for the occasion, Savita Rao, a seasoned vocalist from Boston, Massachusetts, gave an impressive performance. The accompaniments for the performance were members of her family, sister Sandhya Srinath on the violin and brother-in-law Srinath Balasubramaniam on the mridangam. This served as a great another example of family participation.

Savita started her concert with a crisp rendering of Sogasu Juda Tharama (*rupa-mahima*) in Kannada Gowla followed by the krithi Ninne Bhajana in Nattai (*visvasa-abhaya*). As far as my memory serves me, this was the second time this particular song was rendered for the SRUTI audience after 17 years, when the Bombay Sisters rendered it for the first time in 1988.

Savita went on to render Chala Kallaladu (*amarsa-rosa-rosokti*) in Arabhi. The story goes that the late Sri Mahara-japuram Viswanatha Iyer popularized this krithi. I guess every vidwan has some favorite raga as well as krithis which they sing in most of their performances. After rendering arabhi, Savita gave an elaborate alapana of Purvikalyani and rendered Paripurna Kama (*amarsa-rosa-rosokti*). The violin accompaniment for this piece was remarkably great. Both the alapana and the ensuing kalpana swaras were brilliant. Srinath provided good support on the mridangam. After a brisk rendering of Vidajaladura (*sthayi-bhava-sthira-bhakti*) in Janaranjani and Marugelara (*dainya, dainyokti*) in Jayanthasri, Savita rendered the main piece of the concert in Madhyamavathi. After a good alapana, she chose the famous Rama Katha Sudha (*kirtana*) for the krithi. Sandhya's violin support was remarkable which was evident from assembled the audience appreciation. It was noticeable that Savita had difficulty with the words of the krithi. This probably discouraged her from attempting a detailed niraval. Srinath gave a short and crisp thani on the mridangam following Madhyamavathi. After rendering Mivalla Guna (*bhagavad guna-daya ksama-grace*) in kapi, Narayana Hari (*artha-kama-garhana*) in yamuna kalyani and Rama Rama Ra Ra in senchurati, Savita concluded the concert with a mangalam in Nadanamakriya.

Overall Savita's performance was short, sweet and enjoyable. It is important to note that she presented krithis, some of which are not frequently heard in other music concerts by established musicians. Another observation is worth mentioning here. Thyagaraja krithis have been classified into three major groups based on their spiritual and philosophical appeal, viz: *Sadhana Sampath, Bhakthi Yoga and Nada Yoga*. These have further been subdivided into sub-groups like *vairagya, nitya-anitya-viveka, sama-dama* etc (Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja, by Prof. V. Raghavan 1966). The names of the classification of the krithis rendered by Savita are given within parentheses. It is interesting to observe, that the krithis rendered during the concert spanned all aspects of the classification described by Prof. Raghavan.

[P. Swaminathan is a member of long standing and a frequent contributor to Sruti publications.]

Review of L. Shankar and Ginger Concert

by Dinakar Subramanian

My first encounter with L. Shankar occurred when I was a young boy growing up in Chennai, India where I used to attend most Carnatic music concerts that were held close to my

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house. At that time, (more than 25 years ago), I was attending a violin concert by the 'L-trio'. The 'trio' referred to him and his two brothers, L. Vaidyanathan and L. Subramaniam. They performed that day with Sangeetha Kalanidhi Shri Palghat Mani Iyer. They were a famous 'set' at that time. That concert was memorable for me because they started off with the Sri Raga varnam – Sami Ninne Kori in 3 speeds. I was awe-struck after listening to the varnam. From that point I was always curious about the music that they offered.

Several years later I listened to a few of L. Shankar's albums (not the Shakti albums) that were still Carnatic based. I was quite enchanted with the sound of the double violin as it did provide a very rich and unique sound. The fast pace of his composition and the range offered by the double violin captivated me.

Not having listened to many Shakti albums and knowing that L. Shankar had diversified into many different kinds of music including that for feature films, I entered the hall on March 12, 2005 with a feeling of apprehension, wondering what was going to be offered. The presence of Pandit Swapan Choudhury raised my hopes.

The first piece was called Sunrise. It was set to a very brisk tempo and had the refrain of G M P N S, M P N S, P N S, N S in Ragam Savithri which was similar to Suddha Dhanyasi. This piece was very captivating with Swapan weighing in very nicely through the descending refrain noted above, until the point when Gingger started humming at the microphone. This brought me back to reality that I am attending a world music concert and that I can only expect brief flashes of classical Carnatic music. There were brief tabla solos interspersed in the first piece and Gingger built a crescendo and the duo concluded the first piece.

The second piece was called Voices from Heaven, which started with Shankar humming a bit tentatively. This piece had a nice folksy tune and Swapanji pleasingly kept the beat. There were several ragas used in this piece one of which I identified as Keervani. The Keervani part of the piece was built to a crescendo. After the crescendo, both Gingger and Shankar both abruptly left the stage.

At this point, Swapanji (after a lighthearted comment) started an elaborate solo, which showed what a class act and tabla player he is. He produced several unique sounds from the tabla with such speed and dexterity that demonstrated his true virtuosity. Honestly, to me the high point of the whole concert was this tabla solo.

Shankar and Gingger then returned as Swapanji was finishing and Shankar asked him to continue the solo with the Bols (uttering of the actual tabla sounds). This was very enjoyable as well as Swapanji did the Bol and played it on the tabla. Shankar then built another crescendo and finished the piece.

After a brief intermission, the next piece was based on the feature film, The Passion of the Christ, for which both Gingger and Shankar hummed. I thought that their humming was still tentative. This piece also had a mix of ragams one of which was Aberi that Shankar played a refrain reminiscent of one of his older al-

bums called Aberi.

Shankar announced that the next piece was a Ragam, Thanam, Pallavi in Ragam Kamboji set to 9 ¼ beats. This was the closest that any piece came to a pure classical Carnatic piece. It had Shankar singing a bit of an alpana, dueling violins and singing kalpanaswarams. Shankar's violin sounded much richer than Gingger's and it was very obvious in this piece. In Gingger's violin, the lower frequency stem did not show any melody at all – I am not sure if it is a fault of the violin or the sound system that the artists kept adjusting.

The last piece was aptly called 'Let's go home'. It had Swapanji using the Dholak in an upright fashion and providing another tabla solo. Though this piece was nothing spectacular melody wise, it gave the Sruti audience a new thrill – singing along with Shankar. Shankar urged the audience (like a rock concert) to follow his vocal expressions where he would provide a few notes for the audience to follow. There was quite a bit of audience participation for this part.

Overall, it was an interesting experience and I came away with the reinforced understanding that Shankar is now a World Music performer and his offering that night was exactly that – it was not for the typical Sruti audience but to a 'world music' audience.

[Dinakar Subramanian is a former president of Sruti and a frequent contributor to Sruti publications.]

Violin Concert by Shankar & Gingger – A Viewpoint By S.Sankaran

I learnt that the concert was arranged in a big hall on a strong belief that it will pull in a big crowd. If that was the rationale, then the results were disappointing. What happened actually was those few souls who bothered to come with an open mind had to be pulled to the front to form a small crowd.

Even before the music started, the first thing the artists did, was to turn on a reverberator to the point of producing a booming base sound. This was totally alien to Indian classical music, and unpleasant.

The concert got going with 2 or 3 pieces which had a vague resemblance to what we might call a Thanam-Pallavi. One thing that was evident was Shankar's *mastery* of the double violin designed by him, over a pitch range greater than 2.5 octaves. They claimed that at the low end, the instrument could produce sounds like a double-bass. However whenever Shankar played at that low pitch, as far as I could hear, I could not distinguish one note from another. Still, all that expertise was not put to good use. I say this because, some 20 years ago, I attended Shankar's concert in 'Painted Bride' (along with Dr.Subramaniam, Dr.Rangachar & others). Then he did play the krithi 'Siddhi Vinayakam' in Shanmugapriya, energetically, with a lot of improvisations, gliding over easily from one section of his violin to the other. (I do

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not remember if he played the Charanam part of it). I am not sure if Gingger has the same level of competence. She was not even facing the audience.

I do not know why he announced the next piece as a 'Ragam Thanam Pallavi' in Kambodhi. There was hardly any Raga Alapa. Whatever he meant by 'Ragam' sounded like Kambodhi only part of the time. May be he was not aware of what a 'Sruti' audience would expect.

The concert was a disappointment. What I heard was neither Indian Music nor World Music.

What lesson could we learn from this experience? In extraordinary cases like this, I wish we could come to an understanding with the artist about what 'Sruti' expects from such an expert, even before sending the formal application for a grant.

[Sankaran, a music enthusiast, is an active volunteer and Life member of Sruti.]

Maestros Ravikiran & Shashank in concert: A Review
By Rangaprabhu Parthasarathy

*"Kallal mayanguvadhu pole
Naangal Kanmoodi vay thirandhe kettiruppom"*
(Like the intoxication of alcohol, we would listen to him, eyes closed, mouth agape)
- "Theeradhe Vilayattu Pillai" by Subramanya Bharati

That pretty much sums up the experience one had on the 2nd of April, listening to Carnatic music maestros, Ravikiran on the Chitraveena and S. Shashank on the flute. The concert, organized by Sruti almost got derailed; courtesy some torrential rains that lashed the area the day before and almost all day on the 2nd. But music fans were thankfully spared the agony of missing a wonderful concert and a full hall greeted the maestros at the Bharatiya Temple in Montgomeryville, PA.

The concert started late since the rain delayed many rasikas from getting to the venue on time. Given the many closed roads and persistent rain, it was indeed a welcome decision.

The artists were introduced one by one, starting with the Mozart of Indian music, Ravikiran on the lute, Shashank on the flute, P. Satish Kumar on the mridangam and Parupalli S. Phalgun on the kanjira. One interesting person in the performing ensemble was Smt. Sukanya Ramgopal on the ghatam. A rarity in what has always been a male-dominated percussion instrument, the audience were enthusiastic in greeting the lady and curious to see if she could indeed make a significant mark.

The concert began with a Varnam in Raga Shri. It was evident from the beginning that the artists shared a tremendous amount of chemistry. After a simple yet effective start with Shri, the duo picked pace with the Dikshitar kriti, Swaminatha Paripalaya in Nattai. As the song progressed, Shashank first and then Ravikiran picked up the pace of the song and showed their control with their respective instruments. By the end of the piece, the artists had gotten settled into a comfortable pace and rhythm. The audience

had also been served a good taste of what was to follow.

The third piece of the concert was the classic Subbaraya Sastri composition in Reethi Gowla, Janani Ninnuvina. The song was given the elaborate treatment that it deserved and it was a great experience for all concerned. If there was a sleepy one in the audience, although there was definitely none, he or she was woken up by a short and peppy rendering of Manavyala in Raga Nalinakanthi. At this juncture, the stage was set for a good Ragam Thanam Pallavi and Shashank, while promising the same, requested a short break since it was getting really hot, on stage. The audience got a chance to mingle with friends and also get to pick CDs and cassettes featuring the artists outside the auditorium.

With the break modalities completed, Ravikiran and Shashank started their piece-de-resistance, a Ragam, Thanam, and Pallavi in Raga Kalyani. The artists excellently put forth the texture of the Raga, patiently and elaborately. It was a connoisseurs delight and a true masterpiece. To ensure that the audience got their share of nuances, Shashank and Ravikiran took turns playing small snippets of Ragas Abheri, Keeravani, Kamboji and Ahiri. Ravikiran hummed a bit of the Pallavi and then let the percussionists take over with the Thaniyavardhanam. The mridangam, ghatam and kanjira artists took turns showing their wares and as the crescendo increased, so did their control of their instruments. It was a sight to behold, with the artists enthusiastically performing and the audience thoroughly enjoying the proceedings.

It was getting late and Ravikiran signaled the intent that there would be a few Thukkadas and they would be done with the concert. Ravikiran met an audience request for a Purandaradasar Kriti with a witty repartee by saying that his instrument could play in any language. This had the audience in splits. Nevertheless, the duo obliged and Shashank started playing the timeless classic "Krishna Nee Begane" in Raga Yaman Kalyani. What followed was the Tamil version of an audience favorite if ever there was one, Theeradha Vilayattu Pillai. Starting with a small introduction in Sindhu Bhairavi, this Ragamalika glorifying the antics of young Lord Krishna by Subramanya Bharati, was a pleasure coming from the flute and the lute.

All good things must come to an end. This wonderful concert came to a close with the traditional Mangalam. The audience had been transplanted en masse for the three hours into an enchanting world of music. It was an exhilarating experience and I only hope that the combo of Ravikiran and Shashank continue to enthrall audiences, the world over with their awesome music and amazing chemistry.

[Rangaprabhu Parthasarathy, or Prabhu to friends came to the US in 2000 for his Masters and now works as a Software Engineer at Interdigital Communications Corp in King of Prussia. From the wonderful lullabies in Neelambhari, Prabhu's childhood memories are filled with kutcheris, live and recorded. Prabhu believes that Carnatic music deserves much more recognition than it currently gets and is

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doing his best to see that it gets all that attention that it is truly worthy of.]

Neelothpalamba

By Prakash Rao

Last November, a team of singers lead by my wife, Bhavani Prakash, (including myself, Prakash Rao) presented the Neelothpalamba Vibhakthi Krithis as a part of the Sruti Day Celebrations. Before we presented these rare compositions, I took a few moments to introduce the program since very few have heard of, let alone heard, these compositions. First of all, the program announced these as Neelothpalambika Navaavarana Krithis. Strictly speaking, these are Neelothpalamba Vibhakthi Krithis. For the benefit of the audience, we explained the difference between Vibhakthi Krithis and Navaavarana Krithis, who Neelothpalamba is, and the ragas they are composed in.

Of the three great composers, Thyagaraja, Shyama Shastry and Muthuswamy Dhikshitar, Thyagaraja's compositions are compared to grapes, Dhikshitar's to bananas and Shyama Shastry's to coconuts: you can simply eat a grape, you have to peel a banana and break a coconut. This refers to the musical quality of their compositions. However, if you compare the contents, Dhikshitar's is clearly more scholarly. Thyagaraja has produced several majestic pieces like the Ghanaraga Pancharatnam, and Shyama Shastry has created masterpieces like the Swarajathi in Bhairavi, but Dhikshitar has consistently produced literary works of art blending his knowledge of music, shastras, sthala purana, pooja vidhanam, mantropadesham, and Sanskrit. For example, the Navagraha krithis all describe the rasis that the particular grahas are adhipathis of, physical characteristics of the deities, ornaments, neivedyam, etc. (examples). His krithi Hasthivadanaya in Navroj describes the ten-handed Ganesha and all ayudhas he carries, and practically contains the dhyana sloka for Ganesha japam. His composition on Siddhi Vinayakam is particularly good for Vinayaka Chaturthi, his composition Sri Varalakshmi is particularly good for Varalakshmi Pooja.

As Dr. Prabhakar Chitrapu has indicated in his article on Sruti web site, Thyagaraja has created many sets of songs – utsava sampradaya, divya nama sankeerthana, operas, pancharatnams, etc. Shyama Shastry has also created sets, most famous of them being the nine gems on Meenakshi (Meenakshi Navaratnam). Dhikshitar's sets are unique – he composed vibhakthi sets. What are vibhakthis?

Sanskrit has a very complex grammar. Conjugations and case endings are exhaustive. There are eight standard case endings (including Sambhodhana or addressing mode). Dhikshitar has created vibhakthi sets on Guru Guha, Thyagaraja, Abhayamba, Rama, and Nilothpalamba. In each of these sets, there are eight songs covering each of the eight vibhakthis. In some of these sets, Dhikshitar has also included avahana and/or mangala krithis. The Kamalamba Navaavarana krithi set also contains eight songs in the eight vibhakthis, but contains one more in a garland of all eight vibhakthis. The Kamalamba Navaavarana krithis are specifically composed for Navaavarana pooja. Intense pooja to any deity includes mantra and yantra. The highest pooja to Goddess Ambika involves the Sri Chakra Yantra, the chakraraja or king of chakras. The Sri Chakra contains 43 triangles, two lotuses, a cir-

cle, a square and a dot (bindu) arranged in 9 enclosures. These enclosures, or avaranas, represent planes of consciousness. The navaavarana krithis explain the significance of each avarana and the means of reaching devi. Kamalamba Navaavarana Krithis are to be sung on each day of Navarathri starting with the avahana krithi in Mahalya Amavasa and ending with the mangala krithi on Vijaya Dasami.

The Kamalamba Navaavarana Krithis and the Neelothpalamba Vibhakthi Krithis are related by the fact that both represent deities in Thiruvavur. Neelothpalamba, the goddess with the blue lily, is in a shrine adjoining Thyagaraja and is his consort. Kamalamba occupies a shrine by herself in the same temple complex. Kamalamba is said to be Yoga Swaroopam and Neelothpalamba is said to be bhoga Swaroopam.

Lord Vishnu is said to have performed a penance to Lord Shiva in order to obtain a son with special qualities. When Shiva appeared before Vishnu to grant his wishes, he came with Parvati and Skanda. Vishnu was spellbound by the vision and asked for an image of the vision. Shiva gave him an unchiselled linga (vitanka) and an image of Parvati with her hand on Skanda's head. Neelothpalamba is the only vigraham of Devi with her hand on her younger son's head. Vishnu subsequently gave the lingam to Indra.

Many years ago, there lived around Thiruvavur a monkey that was a great bhakta of Devi. Devi was pleased with his penance and gave him nara janma. He was reborn as Muchukunda Cholan. Once Muchukunda Cholan assisted Indra in vanquishing some asuras. Indra offered Muchukunda a boon. Muchukunda asked for the vitanka. Indra was reluctant to part with the vitanka, so he made six likenesses of the vitanka and asked Muchukunda Cholan to pick one. Muchukunda was divinely inspired to pick the right one. Pleased with Muchukunda Cholan's choice, Indra presented all seven vitankas to him. Muchukunda Cholan installed the original (vithi vitanka) in Thiruvavur and the other six around there. The seven are referred to as the sapta vitanka kshetras.

Dhikshitar composed nine compositions about Goddess Neelothpalamba. Two of these compositions are in the same ragam, and only one of the nine compositions starts "Sri Neelothpala Nayaki", all others being in eight vibhakthis of the word "Neelothpalamba". In no other set has Dhikshitar put two songs in the same ragam. Therefore, many experts consider only the eight compositions in the eight vibhakthis as part of a set.

The set consists of:

Vibhakthi 1 – Narayanagowla

Vibhakthi 2 – Nariritigowla

Vibhakthi 3 – Kannadagowla

Vibhakthi 4 – Kedaragowla

Vibhakthi 5 – Gowla

Vibhakthi 6 – Mayamalavagowla

Vibhakthi 7 – Purvagowla

Vibhakthi 8 – Chayagowla

All these ragas contain the word gowla therefore they are sometimes called the gowla set.

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[Prakash Rao received early instruction (1977-1982) in mridangam from Sri K. Sudarshana Acharyulu of the Kolanka Venkata Rajulu Paddati of mridangam in Hyderabad. Since 1982, Prakash has received instruction in the accompaniment aspect of mridangam from Sangita Kalanidhi Vellore G. Ramabhadran. He has also received advanced instruction from Kanjira V. Nagarajan and Sri Palghat T. R. Rajamani, son of the illustrious Palghat Mani Iyer. Prakash has lived in the United States from 1987 and has accompanied many well known artists, both visiting and local, including but not limited to: B. Rajam Iyer, Charumathi Ramachandran, Trichur Ramachandran, Lalgudi Jayaraman, O. S. Thiagarajan, Neyveli Santanagopalan, Lalgudi Srimathi Brahmanandam, N. Ravikiran, Jayanthi Kumaresh, T. K. Govinda Rao, Bhushani Kalyanaraman, T. N. Seshagopalan, and Madurai Sundar.

Prakash received brief instruction in vocal music from D. Seshachary, Malathi Sharma of Boston, and Aravindakhan, but has otherwise been largely self-taught in vocal music and the theory of Carnatic Music. The biggest influence on Prakash's vocal music abilities is his wife, Bhavani, a vocalist, veena and flute artist.

Bhavani is an "A" grade artist of All India Radio and Doordarshan. She has won many coveted awards including the AIR National Award, Best Concert award from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, and the Ambujam Krishna Award from the Madras Music Academy for her excellence in raga alapana.]

Additional Notes on Vibhakti by T. S. Ranganayaki

The word, Vibhakti in grammar means, "inflection of nouns and case endings, case terminations or case differentiations". (1) Indian languages like Sanskrit have suffixes or name/pronoun modifiers that are attached to the noun to differentiate cases. Modern English has only two well defined ways of using a noun, either as a subject or object as "man" and the other to show possession as "man's", three in the pronoun as "he" for subject, "him" for object and "his" for possession. (2) All the other interactions involving the subject will be represented through propositions like, "to, from, by, than, for, with and so on". The case endings of Indian languages will correspond to the following, when translated.

- Case1. "Neelothpalambha, Jayathi". (3)
The person: Neelothpalambha shines great. (She)
- Case2. "Neelothpalambham bhajare"
O mind, worship Neelthpalambha. (Her)
- Case3. "Neelothpalambhikayaa Nirvaana sukha"
I am being protected by Neelothpalambh. (By or with her)
- Case4. "Neelothpalambhikaayai Namashthe"
My Namaskarams to Neelothpamabha. (To her)
- Case5. "Neelothpalamkaaya param nahire"
There is no one superior to Neelothpalambha. (Other than or from her)
- Case6. "Neelothpalambhikaayaastava dasoham"
I am Neelothpalambha's servant. (Hers or of her)
- Case7. "Neelothpalambhikaayaam Bhakthim"

I have great Bhakti for Neelothpalambha. (For or in her)
Case8. "Neelothpalambhike Nitya"
O, Neelothpalambha, protect me! (Direct addressing)

References

1. The students Sanskrit English Dictionary. Vaman Shivram Apte. Motilal Banarsidass. New Delhi. 1988 reprint.
2. Encyclopedia Americana. Volume 13. 1977 Edition.
3. Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar Kirtanaigal. By Vanika vidwan a. Sundharam Iyer. Music Books Publishers. Madras. 1989.

[Notes by T. S. Ranganayaki who has read it all and heard it all. Now she is playing truant when it comes to reading classics! She is the mother of T. Sarada and T. Parasaran.]

Audio Recordings of Lecture-Demos By S.Sankaran

From my last visit to Madras, I have audio recordings of Lecture-Demos. on the following subjects (each about 2 hours):

1. Significance of Raga-Muthras in Dikshitar's kritis - their meaning or reference beyond just the name of the Raga
2. How to sing Niraval (This is very good)
3. Panel discussion on 'Approach to Post-Trinity Composers' (No.3 was mostly in English. 1 & 2 were partly English, partly Tamil. But the meaning is discernible from the context.)

Also I went on a conducted tour of some residences & places in the Mylapore area, called 'Musical History Walk'. I have some pictures taken of those places. I can narrate a summary of what the Leader said.

If a few readers are interested, we can meet together. My phone number is 610-279-3655.

Events in the Area

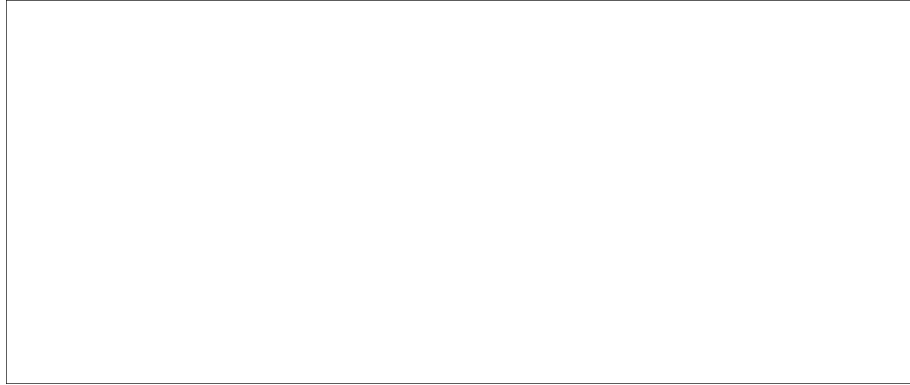
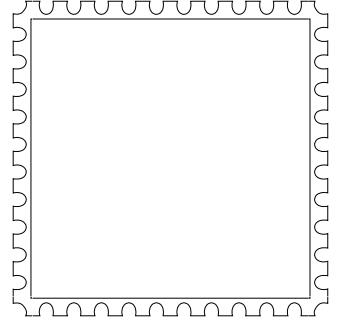
A North Indian Classical Concert On Violin By Sangeeta Shankar with Vinayak Netke on Tabla on Sunday, May 1st at 2 PM at 144 Hope Road, Holland PA 18966. Ticket: \$15 each Check <http://www.neelam.com> for more details.

Pandit Ravi Shankar and Anoushka Shankar perform at the Kimmel Center on May 4, 2005 at 8 PM. Tickets are \$37 - 68. Please mention "Sruti" to receive 10% discount.



SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society
135 Brochant Cir
Blue Bell, PA 19422



Upcoming Sruti Events

- 1) April 30 Carnatic Vocal Concert by T.M. Krishna
- 2) May 21 Dakshayagnam: A Grand Kathakali Performance
by Legends of Kathakali
from Kalamandalam, Sadnam, Margi and Kottakal
- 3) Fall, 05 Bharata Natyam dance program by Ms. Leela Samson
- 4) Sept 24 Grand Carnatic Concert by the famous Dr. Yesudas
- 5) Spring, 06 Mandolin Concert by U. Shrinivas