



SRUTI NOTES

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SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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Dear Friends,

We bring this October issue of Sruti Notes with mixed feelings. It is becoming more and more difficult to get regular contributors whom the readers can relate to, to write, even the reviews. At the same time we are getting new participants who are enthusiastic about Sruti publications. We appreciate the contributions wherever they are coming from but we do need both groups and so please don't be silent.

In this issue we have included just a few reviews, thanks to the faithful, kind members. You will also find a very short write up about the new cultural and religious activity forum amongst us, The Bharatiya Temple and Cultural center, in Montgomeryville, PA.

As always we do request members to submit community activities and personal interest stories but so far there have been no takers. Only you can change the situation and we sincerely hope that you will follow up on this.

By the way the 2005 Sruti Ranjani Annual is in the process of getting assembled. Those of you who are so inclined please send us articles related to music, dance, composers and or great musicians. The deadline is October 27th.

Thank you,
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

President's Note

Dear Friends,

I am happy to be with you once again through this Sruti Notes medium. Hope you all had a good Summer and are having a productive Fall.

As you know, we began our Sruti Fall season with a Carnatic Vocal concert by Dr Yesudas on 11 September 2005 at the Mandell theater of Drexel University. The day was filled with much tension, due to cancelled flights of the artists, missing baggage, fire alarms at the auditorium etc! But the day ended superbly, with a sold-out 4-hour concert that thrilled the audience and made all our efforts worth while.

Our next event is a Jugulbandi concert on October 29, by Sandhya Srinath (on Carnatic Violin) and Allyn Miner (on Hindusthani Sitar), both of whom are very well known to Sruti audiences. (You must have received the flyer already). This is also a fund raiser event for Sruti - a first of its kind for us. The thinking behind it was like this. Our sources of income have largely been ticket revenues and external grants. The expenses mainly include artists' fees, auditorium rentals, and marketing costs. All of these costs have been steadily increasing, while our attendance, and hence ticket revenue, has not increased in general. The net result is that, on most of our events, we don't break even from ticket revenues alone, making us increasingly dependent on external grants. External grants are good, but provide only 50% - 60% of the event costs, leaving us to raise the remaining amount, which in case of big events can be significant. So, we are trying out this concept of fund raising coupled to an event, so that Sruti has tangible support from the community that it serves. It would show that the cause of Sruti is important to the community and that its supporters are patrons of music and arts organizations. This also bodes well when we apply to mainstream granting agencies. We hope you agree with the concept and generously donate to Sruti.

On November 19, we are planning a Bharatanatyam concert by the famous Malavika Surukkai, with live orchestra. The last event for the year is our annual local talent showcase day, namely SRUTI Day. This is scheduled for December 11 to be followed on the same day by the General Body Meeting and Elections for the Board of Directors. (See attached flyers).

Indeed, with these we would come to the end of the term of the present Board and all the satellite committees. Two years passed quickly and we thank you for having confidence in us and for giving us the opportunity to serve you, SRUTI and our dear classical art forms.

I would like to inform you of some organizational activities that took place. As you may recall, the General Body last year passed a comprehensive set of amendments to the by-laws concerning the structure of the governing Board of Directors. The major changes included (1) elections every year when

roughly half the Board gets elected, thus providing continuity between successive Boards, (2) creating the position of President-Elect, who will serve as President-Elect for 1 year and as President for the next year, two (2) more Board members, who would be the chairpersons of the Resources and Library Committees. As you know, an ad-hoc committee was formed consisting of Sudhakar Rao (Chairperson), Bala Balasubramanian, T S Venkatraman, H Y Rajagopal and Prabhakar Chitrapu to produce a set of amendments to the Sruti by-laws accurately and clearly reflecting the approved changes. The changes were significant and complex, posing considerable challenge especially to anticipate all possible special circumstances and document them in a seamless manner into the present by-laws document. In this task, the committee was aided by valuable help from M. M. Subramaniam. I would like to thank them all for undertaking and successfully completing this important task. The amendments will be posted soon on our website.

Secondly, you may recall that, during last year, certain copyright and other issues arose around the book, "Sruti Ranjani – Essays on Indian Music and Dance". Following the discussions at the last year's General Body Meeting, the BoD recommended a set of changes to the book, namely increasing the visibility of Sruti and insertion of the then President's note in the book. In order to make these changes, a special committee was formed with Ramana Kanumalla (Chairperson), Ayyaswamy, Paul Narayan and Bala Balasubramanian. They worked with Viji Swaminathan, editor of the book, and reached an agreement, based on which the books have been modified and brought back into circulation. You may purchase these unique books at the upcoming Sruti events or by contacting any of the Board members. I thank the Committee for the service provided to Sruti in this difficult task.

Finally, I am happy to write that recently there appeared a 3-page article on Sruti in a mainstream music magazine called Philadelphia Music Makers. Scanned copies of the article may be found on Sruti Website.

I remain, with thanks to all and looking forward to seeing you all in large numbers at upcoming Sruti events – Jugulbandi Concert (10/29), Malavika Surukkai dance event (11/19) and Sruti Day/GBM (12/11)

With warm regards
Prabhakar Chitrapu
President, For the Board of Directors

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.

Music, Muthuswami and Tsunami

By K. R. Ramaprasad

December in Chennai. Balmy winter sun warming up the city, early in the morning, as people brush past each other on crowded sidewalks surely on some great mission. The music season is in full swing, as you can see the mostly middle-aged men and women, briskly walking towards some sabha or other, with the program sheets clutched in their hands. Some of the early birds are at their favorite sabha canteen, breakfasting on pongal and coffee. Into this innocent morning comes the news, first in trickles, then in a torrent, that tidal waves have flooded the eastern coast of India. Whisperings of fishermen lost at sea, huts washed off and early joggers on the marina swallowed by the sea punctuate the order for coffee or dosa. Pictures of devastation, splashed in the media, have brought the word tsunami into the general consciousness again.

The Coramandel coast, hit by the tsunami on December 26, 2004 is also the eastern border of what could be called the land of the Carnatic Trinity. And a natural disaster of the magnitude that the December 26 tsunami was could not but affect, in some degree or other, the mood and music of the season. The hardest hit was Nagapattinam, once a bustling port and home to many shrines. All the members of the Trinity had visited this and other neighboring places at one time or other. The hot topic was identifying the kirtis of the Trinity, if any, that had specific references to this aspect of its history. Two kirtis, in particular, were mentioned by Sriram, V. [1]. Both were composed at Nagapattinam. One is Thyagaraja's karmamE balavanda mAyA in Saveri, where he says, "vAridhi madi garvinci yIvasudhaku tA rAnEncaci ninnu (when the sea spurred by arrogance threatened to overwhelm the land, you humbled his onslaught). The other is Dikshitar's kriti in Brindavana Saranga, soundara rAjAm Ashraye, in which the line "ambudhi garva nigraham (suppressed the pride of the ocean) appears. Sriram, after quoting V. Raghavan (from his Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja) that possibly the composers were speaking of a local legend, asks the question whether such a tsunami phenomenon occurred on this coast during the period 1800 to 1835. Are there any historical records to rely on?

The oldest sea-related disaster that is understood to be a tsunami was set off by an earthquake in the Indus delta in the year 326 B.C. [2]. Though the Indian subcontinent is seismically active, the numerous reports of tsunamis along the Indian coastline are not accepted because of scanty evidence. The major dates of reported tsunami events, relevant to the time the Trinity lived, are 1737, 1762 and 1819. The 1762 event was in the Bay of Bengal. T. S. Murty, one of the leading authorities on tsunamis, thinks that they were probably storm surges [3]. He is an adjunct professor in the Department of Earth Sciences, Ottawa University, Canada and formerly tsunami advisor to the Canadian government.

Murty's choice of tsunami studies for a career itself makes an interesting story, yes, connecting tsunamis to Indian music. After leaving the University of Chicago with a Ph.D., he

joined the Canadian Oceanographic Service. His first assignment was to find an explanation for the damage pattern of the tsunami caused by the 1964 earthquake in Alaska. The largest amplitude was at an inland place called Port Alberni in British Columbia, which was not in accord with the thinking at the time that the amplitude would be greatest at the open coast. He modestly says that he knew a little bit of Indian music and string instruments like veena and sitar, which work on the principle of quarter-wave amplification. Extending this idea to tsunamis, he was able to explain the paradox in tsunami behavior that won him many awards.

Coming back to the question whether there were "authentic" tsunamis during or just prior to the time of the Thanjavur Trinity, Murty feels that, probably, what was observed were storm surges which are identical to tsunamis as far as coastal effects are concerned. "The only difference," he writes, "is that while tsunamis occur due to under-ocean earthquakes, storm surges are due to cyclones. Cyclones are very frequent and Tamil Nadu is hit by a cyclone, on an average, at least once in four years." These great composers would certainly have heard of, or seen, these cyclones and their coastal impacts. Murty estimates that during the 1800-1835 period, Nagapattinam area was struck by at least five cyclones, and probably up to seven. There was even a supercyclone in 1831.

Thyagaraja and Dikshitar might not have known the difference between a tsunami and a storm surge the way we do now, but the fury of the ocean waves and its impact on coastal and inland life that they heard about or were witness to would surely have aroused imageries in the minds of these geniuses, resulting in karmamE balavanda and soundaraAjAm Ashraye for future generations to enjoy.

References

- [1] Sriram, V., A rising of the sea, Sangeetham.com archives, December 27, 2004
- [2] Ramachandran, R., Waves from the past, Frontline, Vol. 22 (2), January 15-28, 2005
- [3] I thank Dr. T. S. Murty for giving me his time and sharing with me his insights into tsunamis

[Dr. K. R. Ramaprasad is a physical chemist, currently working as a Senior Scientist/Group Leader at a research institute in Princeton, NJ. He has a lifelong interest in music (Indian and Western). His non-professional interests also include history, Indian heritage, writing and travel. He is one of the hosts of the radio program, Sangeeth broadcast from Princeton University]

A review of the Music Concert by Yesudas and Party

By S.Sankaran

Yesudas began his concert not with a Varnam or Krithi, but with an apologetic speech. After that he went on to sing a rare Varnam in the raga *Sarasangi*. This was followed by the Krithi 'Vathapi Ganapathim' by Dikshithar. At this point, Yesudas requested the members of the audience to applaud, a bit unusual for such a popular artist. The only other artist who asked the audience to applaud (in a Sruti concert) was the popular Veena player Chittibabu. He then went on to sing on another Krithi on Lord Ganesh, by Thyagaraja, (not heard often) in the raga *Kanakangi*, preceded by a small speech explaining the Raga. This Krithi was rendered well with feeling.

It was evident that he had a powerful vibrant voice. However, when he tried to demonstrate the 3-octave range of his voice, it was powerful in the lowest octave, but sounded somewhat shrill (like a falsetto voice) at the upper end of that range. At the least he sings comfortably with a range of 2.5 octaves, which is more than needed for Carnatic Music. But he sang in an affected way, making his music sound somewhat theatrical. His sonorous voice enabled him to use volume expansion & contraction, but then he overdid it. For example he tried to make a point in the krithi 'Kshira sagara' by singing the first line very loudly and then coming down to a normal level. I think that the meaning and feeling in that Krithi could be brought out, without that level of loudness.

Two ragas which he sang in some detail were *Kiravani* and *Kalyani*. The alapana in *Kirvani* was impressive. After the alapana, instead of letting the violinist play the raga, he started a little speech which was distracting to an intent listener like me. However the Krithi was rendered well. The best piece was probably the Ragam-Thanam-Pallavi in Kalyani. His alapana was well structured. The pallavi part showed his mastery of 'Thalam'. However he sang the Niraval after doing the Anulomam & Prathilomam thus reversing the conventional order. The kalpana swaras which followed were notable, and well accompanied by the violinist.

In the last part of the concert, Yesudas sang some popular pieces in various languages. One of them, which 'Bade' Gulam Ali Khan used to sing, begins with the words 'Kah kar sajani aye na baalam'. However Yesudas sang it thus: 'Kaa Karum sajani aye na baalam'. Another composition attributed to 'Thansen' was interesting & intriguing. It described how ragas (in Hindusthani music) get transformed to other ragas when one note is changed to its 'sharp' or 'flat' counterpart, or when the tonic is shifted to a different note. To appreciate the content of this composition however, one needs to know Hindusthani music deeply. A song on the deity 'Ayyapa' set to a simple melody was appealing. Finally the ragamalika slokam 'Agre pasyami' was a fitting end to the concert.

On the whole it was an enjoyable performance (to the majority of the audience at least), though it did not adhere to conventional concert traditions followed by an artist such as O.S.Thyagarajan or T.M.Krishna. After all Yesudas does perform occasionally at

the Madras Music Academy, and every year at the Naradha Gana Sabha, Madras.

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

Community News

Bharatiya Temple Cultural center, Montgomeryville, PA.
Activities in September and October, 2005

In September the Temple and cultural center celebrated Ganesh Mahotsav in a grand style just as they do in Mumbai, India. It was marked by ten days of religious and cultural activities that would make proud of any veteran organization. To think that the whole festival was planned and executed so well by a budding organization which is not rich by stretch of imagination is amazing. Every single day there was a feast in the evening for about 300 people and cultural programs of top quality mostly by artists who came from India. There was music, Kuchipudi dance, Kathak dance, Popular music and so on. The religious part included daily Pujas and Processions on many occasions with children dancing in native Indian costumes, lezims and Percussion instruments. There were the Stapanana function and the Visarjan in a pond on the tenth day.

In October the temple celebrated Navratri with Durga puja all nine days, Lakshmi puja for three days and Saraswathi puja for three days. Every single day there was "Navratri Garba" in the temple auditorium. It was a grand sight to see children and adults, both men and women in colorful Indian costumes singing and dancing. On the Vijay Dasami day they had a Ravan Dahan, a controlled effigy burning with all precautions. The function came to a close with Sarad Poornima Garba on Sunday the 16th of October.

The next one-week festivities will be for the Diwali function starting on the 30th of October.

[Contributed by T. Sarada]



(Continued overleaf)

Dakshayagnam -- who was the honoree anyway?

By Narayan

Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. This is a fairly general statement: “beauty” here refers to an aspect of that which is beholder, which appeals to the beholder. When people attend a performance like “Dakshayagnam” we can be sure that each person would interpret/enjoy/critique the aspect of the program suited to that person’s mood, knowledge and disposition. For example, I was talking to someone who had carefully noted the ragas sung that night, and was complimentary about the choices made. Others, particularly those from Kerala, and therefore perhaps more knowledgeable about this art form, would have focused on the dance rendition more closely than others. A few yoga-oriented people would have admired the effort it takes to stand unmoving in one place for two hours to play an instrument, as did the maddalam vidwan. I appreciated the whole performance more as an everyman, than as an expert. But as I watched the program my mind started to make connections, and started to speculate about what was being enacted before us. In Tamil Nadu, when a girl gets married, she goes from the “pirandaveedu” (the home of birth) to pugundaveedu (“the home that she enters”). Culturally, the presumption is that once married, the daughter’s interests and loyalties are completely aligned with that of her husband, and not much is expected of her from her home of birth. It is thus safe to conclude in Ramayana, that Sita never reverts to Janaka or Mithila. In Mahabharatha, the story of Sikandi reinforces the same principles.

Perhaps it was not considered appropriate for Dakshayani to have those residual loyalties to her father, and thus a lesson for her? Or was it that the father’s attachment to his child was so much that he could not accept a son-in-law to come into the relationship? Maybethis a variation of the Oedipus complex applied to girls? Or could it be that Dakshayani wanted to see the rest of her family, especially her sisters, and this was the reason she wanted to go? Finally, is this story of Dakshayagnam more popular in Kerala, which happens to be matriarchal, because the birth a daughter is a great cause for celebration (in India, even today, a male child is the preferred off spring in most places)?

When I read the Dakshayagnam as a child, I remember being filled with awe about the majesty of Shiva who without moving from his place, caused the death of Daksha and his cronies (although in the version I know, there was no Badhrakali; Veerabhadra alone was able to get the job done). This story also reinforced the importance of respecting the proper protocols in social and religious affairs. After all, isn’t it true that at the time of marriage, the father-in-law literally washes the feet of the bridegroom, who is likened to Mahavishnu himself until he ties the knot? As I was thinking about Dakshayani’s expectations from her father my mind darted to a recent book review on George Washington (1776, David McCullough, Simon & Schuster) in the New Yorker. It appears that when Lord Richard Howe, George Washington’s British counterpart in the revolutionary war, dispatched a letter addressed to “George Washington, Esq.” through a young lieutenant, he was rebuffed by Washington’s trusted officers declaring that “there is no person in our army with that address”. When he returned three days later with a new letter, this time ad-

dressed to “George Washington, Esq., etc. etc.”, he was rebuffed again. Finally Howe sent to inquire whether General Washington would agree to receive a new emissary, who was more senior, but carried the same letter. George Washington met him but refused to acknowledge it. When the officer pointed out the “etc. etc.” implied everything, Washington replied, “and anything”. Such is the importance of proper protocol in the affairs of men, and as it turns out, even in the affairs of Gods.

Returning to Dakshayagnam, I was struck by the attention to detail with regard to the costumes. They were all authentic and wonderful, except for Veerabhadra. The bulb on his nose made him a bit like a clown. The chenda and the maddalam were excellent, as was the singing. I especially liked the humor (e.g. the golden aired Dakshayani relieves herself on Daksha) and the gusto with which the battle was fought between the good guys (actually guys and girls) and the bad guys. The kids who were present that night probably could not believe that they were being treated to an exciting and full-bodied battle in what they probably assumed would be a boring dance program.

Dakshayagnam was a wonderful cultural and artistic performance.

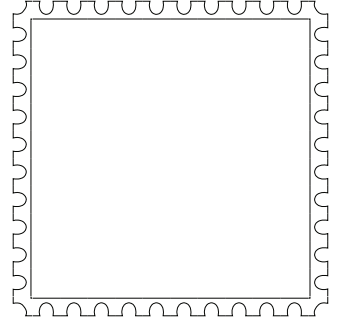
[Narayan is a long time life member of Sruti.]





SRUTI

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Upcoming Sruti Events

- 1) Oct 29 Sruti Fund Raiser and Jugalbandi Concert by
Sandhya Srinath(Violin) and Allyn Miner (Sitar)
- 2) Nov 19 Bharatanatyam by Ms. Malavika Surukkai
- 3) Dec 11 SRUTI Day & General Body Meeting and Elections
- 4) May 6, 2006 U. Srinivas and U. Rajesh Mandolin Concert