



SRUTI NOTES

A Tribute To Smt. M.S.Subbulakshmi

SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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Dear Sruti Members,

2004 ended in profound sadness for music lovers with the passing away of MS. On an unimaginably massive scale, the South East Asian countries are still going through an earthquake/Tsunami related tragedy which has indeed assumed mythical proportions. The unmitigated suffering never seems to end and everyday brings more and more horror stories. Sruti wants to record its great sorrow and heart felt sympathies for the bereaved with prayers that hope and reconstruction work take over soon. You will find some more thoughts on this tragedy in the issue.

Numbing as it is this tragedy does not reduce great sorrow felt by music lovers caused by the passing away of M.S. Subbulakshmi. As a society dedicated to India Music and Dance, Sruti can not be silent about this loss. The void created by the loss of MS would be very difficult to fill. Her contributions to both music and the cause of humanitarian assistance are unsurpassed. Words cannot describe either her greatness as a musician or her magnanimous and selfless contributions to alleviate suffering as well as to promote noble causes.

You will find in the following pages rare articles published for the first time about MS as a beloved family matriarch, as a great grandmother, and many reminiscences and recollections of this super artist. You will also find a copy of the official Sruti condolence message that was sent to her family.

Wishing you all a peaceful 2005.

The Library committee.

Tsunami Disaster by T Parasuran

Sruti wants to record its great sorrow and heart-felt sympathies for the bereaved with prayers and hope that their sufferings will be mitigated soon. We hope that the reconstruction work will continue unabated till the rehabilitation effort is completed successfully.

The colossal tragedy never seems to end and everyday brings more and more horror stories. At the same time there is also the hopeful news of the whole world as a single body rushing to help the stricken people of South and Southeastern Asia.

Scientists say that the tectonic plates in the Sunda strait halfway between Sumatra and Java in Indonesia are quite unstable as was shown by the eruption of the Krakatoa volcano in 1883. That eruption caused a massive Tidal Wave similar to the one now. It is the same underwater instability near Sumatra and the violent movements of the plates that caused the present massive Tidal Wave with the associated disasters on the 26th of December, 2004. There have also been many ripple effects. According to scientists in Italy and elsewhere this earthquake was so powerful that the whole earth vibrated and is rotating three millionth of a second faster as a result. No one knows what effects, if any, this will have on the various terrestrial phenomena. We can only hope that this turbulence will settle down of its own without additional havoc.

It is our sincere hope and desire that the generous donations pouring in from all over the world will provide quick relief and solace to the suffering people. CIO, the umbrella organization of which Sruti is a part and many other local institutions of the greater Delaware Valley will be organizing fund raising events locally to donate to the cause.

From the President's Desk

Dear Sruti Members,

The Board and I take this opportunity to wish you and your loved ones a very happy, healthy and prosperous 2005. As we enter the second year of our term, we look forward to bringing you quality programs and maintain & grow the organization to a bright future. As we look back at the year gone by, we see great achievements as well as some sad events - especially towards the end of the year. We had a wonderful year in terms of Sruti programming - we reviewed these in the annual issue of Sruti Ranjani.

Unfortunately, the end of the year saw several tragedies: the passing away of a Carnatic Music Legend, the late Bharata Ratna Smt M.S.Subbulakshmi. Her angel voice and divine personality and universal humanity have captured, lightened and enlightened the hearts and minds and souls of millions for decades. Rightfully so, our Library Committee produced this special issue of Sruti Notes, dedicated to the memory and honor of MS and I am sure you will enjoy the articles herein.

The other tragedy is the unfathomable tsunami, that has wiped out hundreds of thousands of lives in a matter of minutes. It has caused unimaginable amount of loss in our India, Asia and even the entire globe. Sruti is joining the local and worldwide efforts in raising funds to help these victims and to rebuild lost societies. Please donate generously by sending a check payable to Sruti and mail to Sruti, 135 Brochant drive, Blue Bell, PA 19422. (Include 'Tsunami Relief Fund' in the memo).

Looking ahead, we have an impressive line of events being planned for 2005. As is our custom, we are starting with Thyagaraja Aradhana on Feb 19 (snow date March 5), followed by a grand concert by L. Shankar on Mar 12. We then have a dual concert by Shashank and Ravikiran on April 2. With another possible Carnatic Vocal concert on May 1, our spring season will end on May 21 with a full length Kathakali dance event. Please mark these dates and make 2005 a greater success by attending and participating in all of them.

On the organizational front, I am sorry to announce that Dr. C. Nataraj has left the Library Committee due to personal reasons. Nataraj has done wonderful job in working with the LC team in bringing out very well composed and laid out Sruti publications. The Board and I take this opportunity to thank Nataraj for his selfless services to Sruti. I also would like to thank Ms. Kamakshi Mallikarjun for being a guest editor for this special issue of Sruti Notes.

With best wishes for love and peace among us
Prabhakar,
President, for Board of Directors.

Condolence Letter Sent by Sruti BOD

On behalf of the Board of Directors of SRUTI, The India Music and Dance Society and the larger music loving community of Greater Philadelphia, U.S.A., I wish to express our sincere condolences and heartfelt sadness on the passing away of Bharata Ratna Smt. M.S.Subbulakshmi. Her divine voice and soulful music with absolute adherence to sruti endeared her to millions of rasikas. Great as the achievements of Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi were in the music world greater still were her services to humanity. SRUTI joins the millions of her admirers in paying this humble tribute to Smt. Subbulakshmi. May her soul rest in peace.

Prabhakar Chitrapu, President.

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



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 - A legend passes away

A tribute by Rasikan

A legend in one's own time: never did this phrase apply more appropriately than to the great M.S. Subbulakshmi. The Carnatic music world, indeed, the whole music world is very saddened by the death of this illustrious woman.

There is very little that I can add to the many tributes paid, in her lifetime, to M.S. Subbulakshmi, popularly known as MS. Sarojini Devi called her the Nightingale of India. Jawaharlal Nehru once famously said, "who am I, a mere Prime Minister, in the presence of the Queen of music". MS was expanded to "Melody Supreme" by N. Pattabhiraman, the late editor of Sruti magazine of India. Mahatma Gandhi, when told that MS had not learnt the famous bhajan, "Hari Tuma Haro" which he had requested her to sing in his prayer meeting, said that it is enough for MS to speak the words even if she could not sing it. Such was the greatness of her captivating voice.

When you hear MS, it is the voice that attracts you immediately. This is a divine gift. But she effectively used this gift to render the kritis of the Trinity and other composers with great feeling. Her sruti suddam is legendary. It is said that when practicing at home, on occasions, she would keep the tambura away, and take it back sometime later to ensure that she still maintained the sruti! Hearing her alapanas of Kambhodhi or Sankarabharanam is a delight in itself. This listener would get Goosebumps whenever he hears MS reach the Ga or Ma of the tara sthayi and holds the note with a long karvai and perfect sruti alignment.

The music of MS attracted the connoisseur as well as the lay person. She appealed to people with different feelings of appreciation. A story is told about a conversation between the venerable Rajaji and T.T. Krishnamachari (TTK). Both had left Madras for Delhi to participate in the central government following the Independence and so had not listened to MS for a few years. That was the time when MS had studied with Semmangudi. Listening to her concert in Delhi, Rajaji is said to have remarked that he thought that MS music had changed and not for the better. Oh no, exclaimed TTK, a connoisseur of music, with the remark that it had definitely improved considerably!

The fame of MS rests not in her music alone but in her services to humanity as well. With the help of her husband T. Sadasivan, she helped renovate the houses in which the great Trinity of Carnatic music were born in Tiruvarur in Tamil Nadu. She helped collect millions of rupees from her numerous concerts to be donated to various charities. For these and other reasons the Government of India honored her with the award of Bharata Ratna, the first musician recipient of this highest civilian award. Earlier she had received the prestigious Sangita Kalanidhi award from the Madras Music Academy.

One cannot write about MS without mentioning the many social and other barriers that she helped break. As a youngster, she broke into the then male dominated music field and helped

trail blaze the entry of other talented women musicians. When it was held as taboo among the orthodoxy for women to voice the scriptures, she recorded the Vishnu sahasranamam, the Venkatesa subrapatham and many others. These are played regularly not only at various houses but also at the temples!

Alas, the Nightingale has been silenced. But her great voice would live for ever through the many recordings of her music.

I join the millions of her admirers in paying my humble tribute to the great person.

A Letter from Shri. D. K. Nagarajan

Our families, D. K. Pattammal's and M.S. Subbulakshmi's have known each other for more than seventy years and have held each other in great esteem and high regard all these years. In the early days DKP and MSS would sing wedding songs together and their meetings were always cordial. About sixty five years ago when I was a teenager, I was singing along with my sister, DKP. On one occasion we sang at a concert in Madurai and were scheduled to go to Rameswaram. Unfortunately, I had developed fever and was not able to undertake the journey. MSS who was in Madurai at that time offered to take care of me since I couldn't travel to Rameswaram with my family. I spent about a couple of days with their family mostly learning songs from MSS and playing Carom, the board game. That was the time I found that MSS was keenly interested in carom and herself a good player as well. Even while it was some sixty five years ago it is very vivid in my memory. DKP, who seldom went to movie houses made an exception and saw Meera where MSS played the main role in that movie. I always made it a point to visit MSS when ever I went to Chennai and the last time I saw her was in March 2004 and was continued to be impressed with her pleasing personality and polite bearing. I will miss her very deeply. It is an irrecoverable loss to the world of carnatic music to say the least.

Thank You. Best Regards,

DKN

Shri D.K.Nagarajan worked for the Indian Government including the Embassy of India in Washington DC for nearly forty years and is currently living in Potomac, Maryland with his wife, son and daughter-in-law.



AmmuPatti—Recollections of a Grandniece
By Kamakshi Mallikarjun

Ammupatti, that is what we, grandkids, called the legendary Smt. M S Subbulakshmi. The older folks depending on their own age called her Kunjamma or Kunjakka. Gowri Ramnarayan writes in the Hindu “... Sadasivam's family of two daughters (Radha and Vijaya) , an orphaned nephew (Ambi) and niece (Thangam) wholly in their care.” My mother is the niece referred to in this sentence. Gowri (who is actually my first cousin , her dad being the nephew referred to here) goes on to write “Kunjamma thrived on the love she found among the children in her care. ... Kunjamma enjoyed recounting details of how she brought up the four children, shielding them from hot-tempered Sadasivam's wrath. ... Her evening Ovaltine making was a ritual treat. Moonlight nights found the children nestling round her on the terrace, as she ladled out curd rice with a drop of vathakuzhambu into each hand by turn.”

Past memories and nostalgic moments are flooding my brain, especially of those treasured years when I stayed with Ammupatti at Kalki Gardens.

A Legendary Musician, a Famous Celebrity, but first and foremost our Patti

She was so loving , approachable , supporting and forgiving of our mischief as every grandmother is.

I flip through the letters she wrote to me through the years of my stay in this country. It is addressed to Kamakshi Kanmani. There was always a Kanmani or Kanno after our names when ever she called us. She writes about how happy she is to know that I am going to have a baby and how much she wishes she could be with me. She tells me not to be afraid or worried if the baby cries. When Anandhi Mami (Smt. Anandhi Ramachandran) comes to the US to be with me for my delivery, she comes with the most wonderful surprise– a cassette in which AmmuPatti has sung lullaby songs together with my mom and aunts. Just like she sang for the Oonjal (swing) ceremony at my wedding, Patti ‘sang ‘ for my daughter’s thottil (cradling ceremony) as well !

Whenever she used to sing Kanchadalayadaskhi or any of the many songs in which ‘Kamakshi’ would come, she would glance at me and give me a big smile. My cousin Gowri has the exact same recollection, the smile coming her way for lines like Kamala Gowri in Vidulaku and in later years when Patti sang Akhilandeswari because Gowri’s daughter’s name is Akhila. When I was very young, I was convinced that Patti was singing about me !

Whenever Patti saw any one of us after a gap, she used to be concerned that we had pulled down and we should eat better. This was the case even after my years in America when I was by no means pulled down in weight! She was always worried that I might be traveling by myself and would be happy to know that I had come with my husband Ramesh.

Celebrating Indian Festivals

I think of each of the Indian festivals that were celebrated so painstakingly by Ammupatti. Tons of relatives and friends would gather at Kalki Gardens for Deepavali.

On Deepavali day, each of us would take turns sitting on a Palaha (wooden seat on which a kolam was drawn) and Ammupatti used to dab a little bit of heated oil on our heads and put kumkumam on our foreheads and then we would be marched off for a head bath. Then came the lighting of all the fireworks. I remember Patti asking me to light a sparkler for her that she would carefully hold up in the verandah and cajoling me to eat some of the Deepavali Marindu since it was part of the Shastras to do it.

The priest would come for the various festivals like Shri Rama Jayanthi, Krishna Jayanthi etc AmmuPatti used to carefully draw the kolam footprints for baby Krishna. She was meticulous, had tremendous attention to detail in anything that she did. I also recall one year, how as soon she entered my aunt’s house that she instantly noticed that the footprints were lopsided ... they were all for the same foot and did not alternate ! During Karthigai , we would help her place the lamps on various spots in the verandah and on the big kolam in the halls.

Navaratri is evergreen in my memory. Ammupatti used to do pooja every day. On Navaratri and other special occasions, she used to do more elaborate Poojas. She used to sing every evening in the Pooja room during Navaratri and it was an out of this world experience, listening to her melodious music and to the nadam reverberating from the tambura that she used to play ; the ambience was just perfect. It was also a big treat to accompany her as she visited houses for kolu since she used to sing on those occasions too. Anandhi Mami shared this anecdote with me : When Anandhi Mami, Radha Chithi , Vijaya Chithi were all young, they would also go with Ammupatti for kolu and my mama Ambi Mama used to chauffeur them. So that the young kids could also sing along, she sang the same songs Sarasi Ruha (Nattai) and Nee Yee Manam (Kalyani) in every house. I believe after the third or fourth house, Ambi Mama said “ Kunjakka , if you keep singing the same songs, I am not going to drive you next time “ and so she immediately said “ No, no Ambi .. I will sing different songs for you , “

In the music room ...

AmmuPatti practiced for a full year before she recorded the Vishnu Sahasranamam. I remember her practicing in the music room at Kalki Gardens. This room was the only one that was carpeted. There were stands in the corners so that the tamburas could be placed and secured. Her two tamburas embossed with Lakshmi and Saraswathi images used to be placed here. There was also a magnificent grand piano. There used to be this radio – it was huge and it also had a built in player to play LP vinyl discs.

I remember going and sitting next to Patti as she recited the Vishnu Sahasranamam. I would pick up the extra copy near her and when she flipped the page , I would too ... (it really didn’t matter that I could not read any Sanskrit at that

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time !)

There are so many incredible memories about times spent in the music room. This is where Patti and Radha Chithi used to learn from Semmangudi Mama; I recall KVN Mama (Shri . K V. Narayanaswamy) mama teaching them Devi Brova (Chintamani) and Mayamma (Ahiri). They used to learn Bhajans from Srinivasa Rao who used to play the harmonium as he was singing. Patti used to also play the veena in this room and learn additional songs from Veena Mama (Shri K S Narayanaswamy).

Ammupatti and her fans

My mom used to always say that Patti's rendition of the thodi varnam is so fabulous. I had not had the opportunity to listen to Patti singing this varnam and so when she had some free time at Radha Chithi's house one day , I went up to her and asked her if she could please sing it for me. She said " Sure" and sang it. She sang it exactly the same way she would have sung it in any of her concerts. When she finished singing, she smiled at me and asked " Was that all right ? Did you like it ? "

It does not surprise me at all when reading one of the letters to the editor in the Hindu newspaper that recounts Ammupatti singing Sambo Mahadeva in response to a request from a two year old child ! There are other letters that describe a concert at the E V Kalyani Nursing Home in response to requests from the staff , an impromptu musical interlude sitting on the banks of the Tungabhadra river when she heard some women wondering if they will get to see MS when she comes for the Puradaradasa festival !

On one of my trips back to Madras, I told Ammupatti that many of my friends in the Philadelphia area are her fans and that they sent her their regards and also that many of them drove from city to city to attend her concerts when she performed in the US. Patti smiled and said "Please tell your friends that it makes me so happy to know that they still remember me after all these years. "

In Patti's Room

Patti's bedroom was at one end at Kalki Gardens and adjoining it was another room that led to the main hall. There used to be this really old record player that used to play 78 rpms in her room. To play them, you had to first manually rotate the knob 20 - 25 times ! I remember stumbling on to her recording of Evari Maata (Kambodhi) sung when she was 10 - 12 years old and Patti laughing at the astonished look on my face when it started playing.

I used to love looking at her music notebooks. Each song would first contain the lyrics. Then there would be the word by word meaning and then the song with the notation.

Getting Ready for the Concert

As Gowri writes in the Hindu "“Each concert brought trembling anxieties, she prayed for divine assistance to pass the test.” She would start getting ready hours and hours before the scheduled time. Her hairdo was the more elaborate kondai from the one she wore daily. A veni (arc) of jasmine flowers would be placed over the kondai. She would select the matching Hyderabad glass bangles to go with the sari that she was wearing. She would wear bangles in both the sari's border and body colors. She would put on those coruscating diamond earrings and nose rings. She would have a light tiffin of idlis and steaming hot coffee.

The 2 tamburas would be brought to her room and she would sit and painstakingly tune them. She would sing a few scales in the main raga that she was going to sing (Sankarabharanam or Todi or Bhairavi etc). She would first start slow and then accelerate to supersonic speeds; in the blink of an eye she would traverse the entire scale.

Sometimes, I would get the chance to put the sruti box for the concert. She would make me practice so that it flows smoothly and not in spurts and starts and the volume is just right. It was an awe-inspiring sight to sit behind Patti and Radha Chithi at one of the Music Academy concerts and see the jam packed hall in front. During the concert, as I discreetly tried to shift my foot, I would wonder how Patti could sit ramrod straight like that without even moving a little bit for hours and hours.

Planes, Trains and Automobiles

Ammupatti was obviously an inveterate traveler. I think her favorite mode of travel was the train. The travel was done in style and in the company of not only her accompanists but also family and friends. Elaborate food items would be packed for the journey - Standard Idlis (idlis that were almost like fluffy round pancakes) sprinkled with Molaga Podi, Tamarind Rice , snacks like mixture etc and this would be shared by one and all. As they went on their long train journeys to North India, letters would go out in advance to friends in say, Kanpur, and they would come and meet Patti and her entourage when the train stopped for a while at the Kanpur station, bringing with them freshly made delicacies !

My mother recalls how people in neighboring compartments would get into the one that Patti was traveling in to come and see her, as word spread in the train that she was aboard. I have these vivid memories of Patti walking so briskly along the corridor in the station carrying her blue Samsonite vanity case and keeping a careful eye on her tamburas.

Ammupatti did not like to travel by plane at all. She would find it very difficult to relax during the plane journey and the frequent quip from her husband was that Kunjamma was alert because someone had to be awake to make sure the pilot was driving properly!

One glorious trip

Travelling with Ammupatti was always so much fun. My most memorable trip was one where we went by car all the way from Madras to Trivandrum with multiple stops along the way. The model of the car that she used to travel in was a Plymouth Dodge.

In Madurai, we stayed for a couple of days with her brother Saktivel Mama and his wife. Saktivel mama used to look just like Patti and was very jolly and cheerful. His house was the one Patti had grown up in. Since Kalki Gardens was a palatial dwelling, I was very surprised to see how small Ammupatti's childhood home was. I now realize that I had the opportunity to sit on the very same steps that she used to sit on when she was young and listen to the radio playing in the neighbor's house. She has said in interviews that she would listen to North Indian musicians like Abdul Karim Khan and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan on the radio.

We visited so many temples along the way - Nager-

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coil, Udupi, Suseendram, Mookambikai, Kanyakumari. At the temple, once the pooja was over, Ammupatti used to sing in the Praharam (inner sanctum). It was the ultimate listening experience – being in the presence of the divine was truly cemented. I still remember her outdoor concert at the Udupi temple and the electrifying Krishna Nee Begane.

When we were at the Mookambikai temple, I saw Ammupatti doing Pradakshinam and so went up to her and held her hand and also started doing the rounds with her. Well, she just kept on doing round after round after round and it was not a round of just walking. At the end of each round, came a namaskaram as well !

In Trivandrum, Ammupatti (and all of us) were guests at the Travancore Palace guest house. I was fascinated by the bath tub in the bathroom because that was the first time I had seen one. However, Ammupatti was worried that I might hurt myself in the tub and so insisted that I should just place the bucket inside the tub and take my bath. Since it was Ammupatti saying it, I unquestioningly obeyed ! (Yes, my mom has gotten me to obey many things by telling me that, that is what Patti wants ... until I began to catch on !!)

The advent of the Russian Ballet Dancers

On one of my recent trips back to India (around 4 years back I think), I went to see Ammupatti. She was living in Kotturpuram at the time. When I walked in, the whole house was in a bustle. I heard that a whole company of Russian Ballet dancers were coming to see Patti. I remember thinking that the location may be different from Kalki Gardens but never a dull moment at Ammupatti's house ! I had to wait for my mom to join me so I decided to hang around. I saw Patti rushing to get ready just like she used to for concerts. Soon, the dancers arrived in a huge tourist bus ! It turned out that they were actually from Ukraine. They were very excited to see Patti. Similar to what happens in one of the Lucy sitcoms, I was involved in a 3 way language translation ! The dancers spoke in Ukrainian or Russian, then somebody translated it to English and then I translated it to Tamil for Ammupatti and then it went back all the way ! They presented her with a pair of pink ballet shoes and she was determined to find out exactly what it was !

Then they all wanted to take pictures with her and so she went to the garden with them. Soon, some one came to me and said that Patti was looking for me. It turned out that they wanted her to sing a song and so she asked me if I know "Kurai Onrum Illai" and to sing it with her. It was one of those moments which are truly marvelous and terrifying ! Just like one would not go around discussing physics with Einstein, in all the years of growing up, we used to be very reticent about singing in front of her. Here was my chance, out of the blue ! I waited for her to start and gingerly joined her. I still remember her turning to me and smiling when I hit the high notes properly ! If I could only get hold of that video tape that is with some ballet dancer in Ukraine !

In conclusion

My mind flashes back many, many decades ago, to the first time I saw the film Meera. It was a private screening. It was breathtaking to see Ammupatti as Meera and listen to all the bhajans, that I was intimately familiar with, unfold with such majestic grandeur on the screen. The added element of interest were all

the cameos – young Radha Chithi, even younger Vijaya Chithi, my dad and Ambi mama in various scenes; looking at Patti sitting on a camel and thinking, boy, she must have been scared of that. Then came the final scene where Meera sings Suno Meri Mano Vrata and then falls down and her soul mingles with Lord Krishna's. I remember sobbing. As soon as the lights came on, I frantically looked for Ammupatti and rushed to where she was and gave her a big hug to reassure myself that she was really there and she was okay. How I wish with all my heart that I could do the same thing today.

Kamakshi Mallikarjun lives in Exton, PA.

Ammupatti – Recollections of a Great Grand Niece

By Amritha Mallikarjun

During my trip to India in Dec 2003, when I first walked into Patti's house, I was astounded by all the photographs with all the famous people she met. I kept asking my mom, "Who's Patti standing next to here?" and exclaimed "Oh my gosh! It's Helen Keller!" or whomever it was that I knew. It was really amazing. On one of our visits, I just listened to my mother talking to her, and heard my mom sing a song for her. Even when Mom sang a song, Patti knew when she made a mistake with the beat. That made me smile, because Mom always tells me when I hit a wrong note or miss a beat, and it was interesting hearing someone else tell my mom that!

During this visit to India I'd try to go to Patti's house every day. One day when I was working on my schoolwork, my mom left by her self and came back, telling me that the princess of Travancore was there with Patti. I was so impressed! Of course, I was a bit upset that my mom didn't take me that day, but it was such a wonder to hear that a real princess was there!

One of the times that I met Patti after that, Mom asked me to sing a geetham for her. I picked the fifth geetham, "Aana Lakhara," and with much nervousness sang it in front of her, one of the greatest singers ever. At the end of the song, she smiled at me and told me to sing part of it again. I was overjoyed that she enjoyed the song that I had sung! She also told me to practice singing every single day, and not to eat ice because it's bad for your throat. After she said that she immediately said that sometimes I could have ice cream, just for a treat! After that, my mom told me to dance. I was a little hesitant, but I got up and did a korvai that I knew for her. She clapped her hands for the kita thaka thari kita thom at the end and told me that she enjoyed it very much, in Tamil, when I sat down. I understood very well what she said, but speaking was harder for me. She also said that tomorrow we should all go to Radha Patti's house and show it to her, because she also learned dance. She smiled at me. I felt so happy at that moment when I realized how much she liked it. She also shared a mini Hershey chocolate with me !

After flying back home, I was a little sad about leaving everyone, including the dog that I fed every morning. It felt so

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different coming back home and seeing all of the things that I hadn't seen in three weeks. I still jumped at every little breeze of air that I felt for fear of a mosquito. Anandhi Patti came during my summer break, and it felt more like India again, with dance practice every day and amazing Indian food. Before she left, I knit a light and airy scarf for each one of my grandmothers, and I also made one for Ammu Patti. After Anandhi Patti left, and I knew that she reached India, I constantly asked my mom, "Has Patti got her scarf yet? Does she like it?" and finally the news came that she got the scarf and she loved how soft and pretty it was and that she had immediately tied it around her neck. I was simply joyous at this news. I hoped for so long that she'd like it. ☺

Amritha Mallikarjun is a seventh grader at Lionville Middle School. She also learns Carnatic Music and Bharatanatyam.

Some Reminiscences on M.S. Subbulakshmi as a person

By T.S.Sarada

It looks like trivia to add to the vast recollections, events, write ups and books on MS but what follows is more to say that she could touch even ordinary people in ways that mean so much to them. Here I want to mention four of them.

In the forties MS readily accepted to give a benefit concert in the forties, to raise funds for the then National Secondary school on Mahadhana Street, Mayuram for which my father was the headmaster. It is no surprise that it was a tremendous success and the school became a high school and is still one of the well known schools noted for excellence. My mother, a teacher those days would tell us about this episode. When she was waiting for the concert, she turned to the lady seated next to her and said that she was there to hear MS who had graciously agreed to give a fund raising concert to benefit the school. The lady very modestly and with folded palms said, it seems, "I am MS and I hope that you all like the concert". Many of her fans have such personal experience of her modesty.

Another such event happened, in Washington DC., during the tour MS made in 1976 to the US. By this time MS had already become an international figure with millions of admirers. After a truly great concert, some of us went to greet her and say how much we enjoyed it. My sister in law told her, "You must have made milk and honey Abhishekam to Goddess Saraswathi in your previous birth to be blessed with such a glorious voice". With folded arms MS replied, "it is the blessings and good wishes of all the people assembled that make me sing every time".

A personal event in early sixties happened on the Tirupati Hills. I have written partially about the event in Sruti Ranjani 2003. We were a handful of special invitees who had the privilege to attend a private singing of MS and Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer in the Sri Venkateswara Temple, Mukha Mandapam. The singing was in front of the Deity. There were no accompaniments but Smy Radha Viswanathan sang with her. My friend also a lecturer in the Devasthanam college, in a low voice told me that she would be very happy to hear MS sing, "Rangapura Vihara" of Dikshitar in Brindavana Saranga. I told her that it is rude to make a request

and that we should let her sing whatever she wanted to. MS just smiled and sang Rangapura Vihara along with the opening sloka. We were in ecstasy and were truly overwhelmed by her graciousness.

Her Pittsburgh concert in 1976 would be remembered by all those who attended it for two reasons. It was performed in the small old auditorium with packed and standing room only audience and was charged with genuine emotion. When MS was singing, "Srinivasa Tiruvengatam Udaiyane" of Papanasam Sivan in Hamsanandhi she lost herself and became so emotional she broke down during singing, "Thiruvadikk (u) Abhayam". Loosely translated the words mean (Your feet are the only hope for me). Many in the audience felt the highly charged emotion and had moist eyes. Once again many have seen MS getting totally absorbed and getting so involved in her music. But to witness in person one of these events is a unique experience. She would not only feel intensely whatever Bhava a song conveyed but had the unique capacity to take the listeners along with her to similar heights.

A League of Extraordinary Women

by Akhila Ramnarayan

How I dreaded those 3 o' clock Sunday "tiffins" at Vijaya mami's house when I was a little girl! Nose in a book, I would be shooed into my mother's room and maneuvered into a pavadaï chattai, hair oiled and woven into a single, thick braid by my grandmother. Then we would leave, all three generations bedecked in jasmine and silks, for the Nungambakkam home where Vijaya mami lived.

A sprawling kolam embellished with peacock plume and lotus flower, the original handiwork of Babuji (Rukmini Krishnamurti, the late Kalki Krishnamurti's wife, was given this nickname by a grandchild), adorned the front yard of the house. Up the steps and through the iron grill, you could see all the way to the backyard while you waited for Vijaya Mami (Smt Vijaya Rajendran, daughter of M.S.Subbulakshmi and Sadasivam) to unlock the sliding door. The house was cool and dark, with red sandstone floors, and the tiny living room in which we all gathered smelled of incense, freshly picked flowers, and Vijaya Mami's divine cooking.

On top of the old-fashioned gramophone radio, the room's centerpiece, adorned with hibiscus and yellow sampangi, sat a large black-and-white photograph of Kalki thatha. Babuji's daily ritual included dusting the mantel and decorating her husband's photograph with festive blooms, which you then dutifully admired.

Some weeks, Ammu Patti (MS) was already waiting for us with Radha akka (Smt Radha Vishwanathan) in the family room, exclaiming with delight as each group of visitors entered. While Vijaya Mami bustled (I don't ever remember her sitting down!) and Babuji potted, we sat cross-legged on

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the floor, ready to partake in tiffin and communal song. From time to time, Kadayanallur (Venkatraman) Mama, a long time friend and composer of many of Patti's most famous tunes would join us.

Sometimes, we would practise an oonjal song composed specially for a family wedding. Other times, Patti would render a new kriti that Kadayanallur Mama had recently set to tune. More relaxed than at a concert, she would surprise you with an Akhilandeswari (Dvijavanti), always insisting that the entire congregation join in the singing, and smile at the child of the same name in front of her. (For years, I thought this song was about me!) More often than not, Patti would break off mid-phrase to ask, "Vijaya, inniki kartala enna samaiyal?" (Vijaya, what did you cook today?) or "Anandhi, Ambi sowkyama?" (Anandhi, how is Ambi doing?). Reminiscences past and stories present, of homes and husbands, children and chores, would then be exchanged over the drone of the sruti box. Whenever this would happen, Kadayanallur Mama frowned at my mother, "Unga Pattiya pada solungo." (Tell your grandmother to please resume singing!)

Throughout these teatime sessions, piping hot coffee would make the rounds, followed by pink-tipped strands of jasmine coiled onto banana leaves. Babuji would distribute kalkandu (little sugar crystals) or bananas or kadalai/ellu urundai (candied peanut or sesame brittle). The piece de resistance was Vijaya Mami's superb tiffin that always came at the end: steaming idlis with fragrant sambar and chutney, buttery adai or spicy upma, whisper-soft dosas crisp around the edges, or molagu aval redolent of freshly ground black pepper and curry leaves, made the way only Vijaya mami could make it.

I went to Sunday tiffins mutinously through my teenage years, not knowing I would recall these occasions misty-eyed, as symbols of an era past in which women gathered to exchange the small joys and woes that made up their daily lives. A feminist scholar, I have come now to recognize those musical moments as a celebration of "women's ways of knowing." Seeing Patti and the other redoubtable women of her family interact in such intimate spaces has been my great good fortune.

Akhila Ramnarayan is currently doing her Phd in Literature at Ohio State University.

Patti – A Collection of Reminiscences

Here are some of Gowri Ramnarayan's email replies, to some questions posed, interspersed with her writings.

Earliest Memories of Patti

As written in the Hindu article titled "An elegant simplicity":

"My earliest memory of Kunjamma is a dreamy vignette. Her fresh-washed hair is spread on a down-turned basket, drying through a mist of incense. I follow her down the staircase into the garden for the tulsi pooja, incessantly ringing the bell in my hand. She tells me, "Don't skip, walk softly. Ring the bell only when I tell you. Gently." Dressed in woven-to-order Kanchipuram silk after the oil-turmeric Friday bath, in a halo of abundant curls, eyes lined in home made mye, forehead aglow with kumkumam

and vibhuti, diamonds sparkling on ear and nose, Kunjamma looks like a goddess herself. Even as a child I sense that her beauty is not just physical. It has to do with an inner serenity."

I also remember sitting on her lap in the music room at Kalki Gardens, when vidwans like Semmangudi Mama, K S Narayanaswami mama and Tiruvalangadu Sundaresa Iyer and Patti would sing ragas, pausing with an expectant look for me to identify them, and getting absolutely delighted when I got them right.

Visits to Hyderabad

When they came to Hyderabad, Thatha would say as soon as he got off the train that they were all coming to lunch at my house. Patti would say, also just off the train, nalaikku ne tambura pottutaraya cutcherikku? (will you play the tambura for the cutcheri tomorrow?) I would say yes reluctantly because tambura playing was a painful affair in those 3 hour cutcheris. I was quite a novice in cooking and housework and so I'd be flummoxed by Thatha's statement as well, especially since Thatha always brought a lot of people with him, some of them very eminent, like Swami Ranganathananda.

Don't ask me how I managed. I just did, taking help from Pattu Mami, my husband Ram's aunt who lived there. Thatha and Patti would eat the food with absolute santhosham (happiness) and give me a hundred rupees as a gift, a princely sum in the 1970s. Patti also gave me any saree gifted to her in Hyderabad. She would sing after lunch and have me join her and Radhakka.

Getting Patti to share personal anecdotes

(In her book, **Past Forward**, Gowri has written about the childhood of eminent personalities including MS. Here are a couple of excerpts from Gowri's article on MS in Frontline magazine titled "Genius of Song":

"What were you like in those days?" brings a change in mood. "You can see it in the old pictures," she (MS) laughs. "A side parting in thick curls pressed down with lots of oil, a huge dot covering most of my forehead, the half- saree pinned to the puff-sleeved blouse with long brooch and longer safety pin, eardrops, nose- rings and bangles of imitation gold...Oh I forgot. The long plait was tied up with a banana stem strip! Or a ribbon which never matched." Getting ready for the stage meant also the addition of a row of medals on the shoulder...

The first stage appearance? "When it happened, I felt only annoyance at being yanked from my favourite game – making mud pies. Someone picked me up, dusted my hands and skirt, carried me to the nearby Sethupathi school where my mother was playing before 50-100 people. In those days that was the usual concert attendance. At mother's bidding, I sang a couple of songs. I was too young for the smiles and the claps to mean much. I was thinking more of returning to the mud.")

I heard these stories mainly because I was traveling with Patti. As you know, she was always more relaxed when we traveled, happy, carefree. She always answered any of my questions honestly, sometimes with tears in her voice as she recollected harsher times.

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Her Music

From Gowri's article "Genius of Song" in Frontline: "The warbles and trills of youth – the fine careless rapture of the song bird in springtime – gave way in course of time to richness of timbre, to chiselled, polished execution. The brika flashes and organised raga edifices with high note crescendos were replaced by longer journeys into less trodden ways in the middle and lower registers. These explorations were now undertaken with the freedom and ripeness of an autumn majesty. Retaining the sonorous sweetness and vitality through all these years of upward growth, 'M.S. music' now makes an even more ravishing impact on the mind. 'As I grow older, I feel more and more overwhelmed by the music.' "

It is too vast a subject for hurried jottings. I could sum up and say that I think the "divinity" came from her innocence as a person and her maturity as a musician who had inherited a centuries old family legacy. I learnt that singing is not a matter of training, technique or even talent. It is an approach to life, a reflection of your personality.

Gowri Ramnarayan works for the Hindu newspaper in Chennai, India. She is a prolific writer who also happens to be the grand-niece of Smt M S Subbulakshmi and the granddaughter of Kalki Krishnamurthy.

MS's two right hands By Kamakshi Mallikarjun

We are all familiar with the myriad achievements of Smt. M S Subbulakshmi. I would like to illustrate the pivotal role played by two helping hands – Smt Radha Vishwanathan and Smt. Visalam.

Radha was the apple of MS's eye. She used to sit behind MS on the dias during concerts from the age of four and in a few years, without any fan fare, she started accompanying MS in her concerts.. When MS played the role of Meera, it was Radha who played the role of child Meera. Radha got some formal music training but the lion's share was imbibed by osmosis - by listening to MS and learning along with MS whenever MS learnt a new song from Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer , Musiri Subramania Iyer , Dilip Kumar Roy, Srinivasa Rao ...

As Radha got older, she was like the faithful Lakshmana. She was basically part of any of MS's musical endeavors. As Semmangudi Mama taught MS a new song, she would learn it from him as well and she would take careful notes. She is incredibly talented in deciphering the minutest swara notations for complex sangatis. Radha also has an amazing memory power and the ability to recall songs that she had learnt decades ago, up to the smallest detail. This was invaluable for MS in their practice sessions. One can hear in some of the concert recordings, how subtly Radha used to prompt the next line of a Viruttam (sloka) for MS.

Radha's vocal accompaniment to MS is just phenomenal. Her voice blends with that of MS' and does not intrude in any way. Anyone who has sung jointly with others will fully realize how difficult this is to achieve and how the slightest difference in rendering by singers can be instantly perceived by the audience. What gets taken for granted in this accomplishment is Radha's enormous musical talent - she was able to master the crystal clear

enunciation, the cascading sangatis and the gliding gamakas and the supersonic speeds that are plentiful in a MS concert ! Radha was an integral part of the various tape recordings, including the countless practice sessions where new songs/slokas had to be learnt, new tunes triaged and selected. I think that Radha deserves a special prize just for decoding the mimes and gestures of her father Shri Sadasivam during concerts ; these were imperious signals to sing a different song or skip to the next one on the list etc and many times, these had to be interpreted as she was singing the current song !

It was an immensely rewarding experience for Radha to have been able to accompany MS for so many decades, and be part of so many wonderful events and being able to enjoy MS' glorious music first hand. But the fact remains that long before the concept became popular, Radha balanced her family life and her 'career' : the career being helping MS in every possible way. As Gowri Ramnarayan writes in the Hindu, "Elder daughter Radha and M.S. became and remained inseparable. The vivacious, intelligent child was to become more than M.S.' right hand through the decades of glory. Radha was her vocal accompanist, emotional support and sympathetic companion until her illness in the 1980s, a shock from which M.S. never wholly recovered."

MS and Radha were indivisible and both of them cherished each other. It is extremely poignant to note that MS left us on Dec 11. Dec 11 is Radha's birthday.

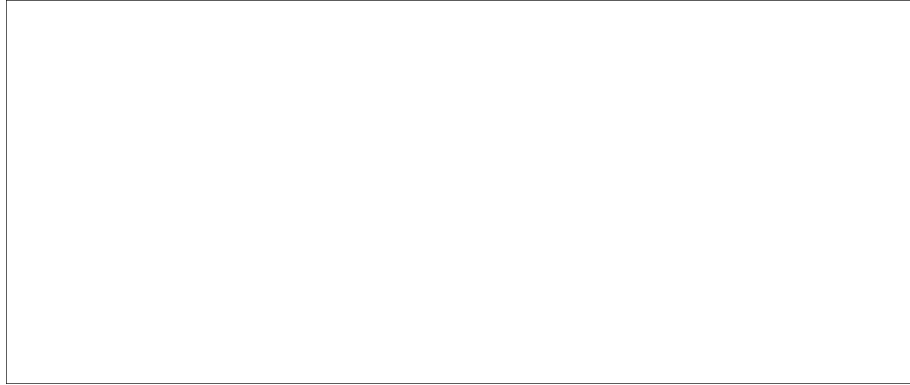
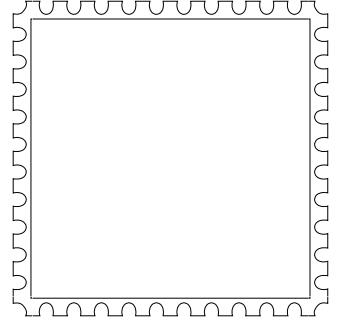
If Radha was the external right hand, Visalam was the internal one. Visalam who is around 70 years old now, came to Kalki Gardens when she was about 7 or 8 years old. Her mother used to work in the MS household and Visalam started helping out at that tender age. As Visalam grew up, she evolved into MS's principal aide. She washed MS's clothes, cleaned MS's room, helped MS with all the prep work for her daily pooja, strung the jasmines for MS to wear in her hair, helped MS get ready for concerts, she helped MS pack for her travels ensuring that not even the littlest item was forgotten. The list of items that Visalam helped MS with is just endless. MS was very punctilious and Visalam took the utmost care to dot every i and cross every t !

As Visalam grew up, married and had children, grand children and great grand children, she has stayed as an integral part of the MS household all these decades, assisting MS every step of the way. Her help has been most critical the past decade when MS has been in her eighties and in frail health. Visalam's care has been far superior to any care that a trained nurse could have provided because the care has been provided not just meticulously but with respect, concern, love and affection. Visalam has been more than a family member. MS was very, very fond of her and grateful for her incredible help as were every member of MS's family. When President Abdul Kalam visited MS's house to give her the Music Academy award in person, Visalam was introduced to him as the person who takes care of MS. He thanked her and said she deserved the thanks of anyone who cares about MS. When President Kalam came back that fateful day, Dec 11 '2004 to pay his respects, he remembered Visalam and again acknowledged her immense contribution. That about says it all.



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Sruti Spring 2005 Season events

- 1) Feb 19 Thyagaraja Aradhana at Berlin Temple, NJ
- 2) March 12 L Shankar, World Music Concert at Zellerbach Theatre, Annenberg Center, Philadelphia.
- 3) April 2 Shashank & Ravikiran, "Jugulbandhi Concert on Flute and Lute (Chitraveena)"
- 4) Being Planned
- 5) May 21 Kathakali Dance Program