



SRUTI  
The India Music & Dance Society  
651 Limehouse Rd, Radnor,  
PA 19087-2856

To:

### UPCOMING EVENTS—MARK your calendars

3/15/2008	Thyagaraja Aradhana Vocal Concert by Abhishek Raghuram and Party
4/5/2008	Sikkil Gurucharan -Vocal
4/26/2008	Jayanthi Kumaresh - Instrumental (Veena)
5/10/2008	M. S. Sheela—Vocal
9/6/2008	Sanjay Subramaniam - Vocal
9/20/2008	Jaya Jaya Devi - Dance
10/11/2008	Ranjani/Gayathri - Vocal
11/1/2008	Mysore Nagaraj/Manjunath - Instrumental (Violin)



# SRUTI NOTES

A Publication of SRUTI  
The India Music & Dance Society  
Celebrating twenty one years of service to the community

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#### **FROM THE EDITORS**

Dear Friends:

This is the first issue of 2008 with a new board headed by Dr. C. Nataraj. We bring you the new president's welcome letter, some reviews of past concerts, and upcoming events at Sruti this year. Please save the dates and we will send you further details as they become ready for publication.

We have added a section on Sruti members (and their children) in the news. So feel free to submit any information that you think is relevant for publication in future Sruti notes.

**We are seeking articles for the upcoming Thyagaraja Day Aradhana Souvenir.** Please submit your articles for the Thyagaraja Day Souvenir to [vijaya@valimation.com](mailto:vijaya@valimation.com). The due date is March 3rd, 2008. We look forward to many interesting articles from our members.

We encourage you to visit our website frequently for updates.

Thank you.

Vijaya Viswanathan

For the Publications and Outreach Committee

#### **FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK**

Dear Friends:

Welcome to Sruti's 22<sup>nd</sup> year of celebration of the glorious art of Indian Classical Music. Thanks to a large number of selfless volunteers donating their time, money and talents over the years we have developed into a truly successful organization known for professionalism and objectivity. The state of our beloved organization is quite good indeed – our concerts and performances are executed reasonably well, and our reputation is such that we are sought after by renowned artists since a performance under the Sruti banner can substantially add to their prestige.

Yet we have many challenges that we should address before they become major hurdles. The first and most important one is that of attendance. Sruti has not been able to increase its audience numbers in spite of a demographic increase of ethnic Indians in the area. It could very well be that this reflects trends beyond our control (such as the obvious fact that popular music will always draw bigger audiences than classical music); however, we may still be able to attract more than we have been able to by using several strategies. The second factor, connected to the first one, is that of finances. We have not been able to grow our "sunshine fund" at a quick rate that would essentially free us from having to make sufficient money to cover the costs of every concert. As it stands, we would lose

money in every concert were it not for the continuing assistance from excellent and supportive organizations such as the Philadelphia Music Project. Thirdly, the operating costs including the artist fees and auditorium rentals continue to increase dramatically, an uncontrollable fact we just have to contend with.

None of the above problems are insurmountable (and are in fact, shared by most nonprofit member organizations), but I do believe that we need to be fully cognizant of them in order to arrive at solutions. The present BOD is decidedly well positioned to do so; I believe that we have an excellent team of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers: S. Vidyasanker, Venkat Kilambi, Sridhar Santhanam, Ramaa Nathan, Revathi Sivakumar, Vijaya Viswanathan, Srinivas Pothukuchi and Seetha Ayyalasomayajulu. In addition, we are ably assisted by the various committees; in particular, V. V. Raman and Rungun Nathan deserve special mention for their exemplary work with the website and the audio respectively.

The BOD and the Resource Committee (along with Uma Prabhakar, who has officially handed over the position to Ramaa Nathan, but continues to help) have already met to brainstorm solutions to some of the issues mentioned above. We will continue the \$500 Patron membership and discounted vouchers for music students (through their teachers). In addition, we are exploring additional funding sources such as corporations.

As an American organization we need to carry out more outreach activities to attract mainstream audiences. One of the elements of outreach is education; in this vein, we intend to have an educational component to some of our concerts this year, where a knowledgeable member of the community or the artists themselves will spend an hour or so after the concert to explain abstruse aspects of the concert they have just heard. This will be an optional event, and could also help to attract and retain ethnic Indians who are not regular attendees.

In terms of programming we will kick off as usual with Sri Thyagaraja Aradhana, and follow up with some excellent concerts and dance performances. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find a list of them; the web site will always reflect current information. In the event of inclement weather please try to check the web site before coming to the concert.

I would also like to thank the previous Board and Ramana Kanumalla (the previous President), for a fine job last year that is very difficult to surpass; I myself certainly cannot hope to match Ramana's energy! Also, Uma Prabhakar has decided to step down as the Chair of the Resource Committee after many years of devoted and competent service; she was able to help secure much needed funds from the granting organizations and deserves our gratitude. Thanks, Uma, but know that we will continue to rely on you!

Finally, Sruti is a member organization and can only exist and prosper with your attendance and support. Please try to come to all the concerts and get your friends as well. And, do become a Patron Member.

With best wishes,  
C. Nataraj

### **Core Annual Supporter Pass — An Appeal**

Dear Sruti Members:

The board has been busy finalizing the Spring and Fall 2008 calendar of music and dance programs. We have an exciting calendar of concerts, both vocal and instrumental. In addition, we will have a dance ballet "Jaya Jaya Devi" that has received very good acclaim in past performances. We are also planning educational postscripts to select concerts, and workshops and chamber music events as well.

### **Kuchipudi Dance and Malladi brothers - Concert Review by VidyaShankar Sundaresan**

SRUTI's programs in the second half of 2007 saw a predominance of duet performances of Carnatic music by male vocalists: Carnatica brothers, Hyderabad brothers and Malladi brothers. The concluding event of the last year was a double-header event, featuring a Kuchipudi dance program by Pasumarthy Venkateswara Sarma and party followed by a Carnatic vocal concert by the Malladi Brothers. These programs were held at the auditorium of the Calvary Vision Center in Blue Bell, PA.

The dance program was a short and enjoyable presentation of the Devi Bhagavatam legend of Goddess Durga's slaying of Mahishasura. The dancers on stage included not only a visiting troupe from India, but also dancers from our own community, including Sunanda Gandham, Swapna Dhanwada and Anita Kilambi. The story moved in quick episodic fashion, encapsulating the well-known legend of Mahishasura, beginning with his rise to supreme power and culminating in his end at the hands of the Mother Goddess. Hindu mythology deliberately challenges conventional norms of time and birth. In this instance, the Goddess is portrayed as being born through the combined powers of all the deva-s, but is at the same time the source of the individual powers of each deva. This was brought out fairly well in the dance movements and the accompanying dialog. This reviewer did feel that the dance program could have been benefited much by live music. While recorded music ends up being a necessary limitation of such dance presentations outside India, an element of live dynamism invariably gets lost in the process. The sound and light requirements for the dance were handled admirably well by SRUTI's team of volunteers, including some of the youngest members of our community.

After a short interval, the audience reassembled for a vocal concert by the Malladi Brothers, accompanied by Embar Kannan on the violin and Neyveli Narayanan on the Mridangam. Sreeram Prasad and Ravikumar come from the Andhra Pradesh based school of Dr. Sripada Pinakapani, being disciples of Sri Nedunuri Krishnamurthy, and Malladi Suri Babu, their father. The Malladi Brothers seem to have reached a good working relationship on stage, with each brother yielding room to and reinforcing the other's strengths when performing together. In most cases, Ravikumar, the younger brother, rendered the bulk of the creative *Raga Alapana* expositions, while the elder brother, Sreeram Prasad, took the lead in *Neraval* and *Swara kalpana*. Beginning with the Ata Tala Varnam in *Kanada* (Nera nammiti), their concert featured a mix of rare and popular kritis of Annammacharya, Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri and Muttuswami Dikshitar. Vade Venkatadri in *Vasanta* was briskly rendered, while Bhakti Bhiksha in *Sankarabharanam* and Na morala in *Devagandhari* struck a more reposeful pace. The main pieces in the repertoire for the evening were Ninnu vina (*Purvikalyani*), E nati (*Bhairavi*) and a Ragam Tanam Pallavi in *Nattaikurinji*. These were interspersed with and followed by shorter compositions, Manavyala (*Nalinakanti*), Adum Chidambaram (*Behag*), Kandarpa Janaka (*Kalavati*) and Jagododdharana (*Kafi*). They concluded the concert with the popular Swati Tirunal bhajan, Visveswara darsana (*Sindhubhairavi*) and Bhadrachala Ramadas's Mangalam, Ramachandraya (*Kurinji*).

Overall, it was a wholesome evening of traditional Carnatic music, sung with youthful enthusiasm and verve. The stamp of the Nedunuri style was evident throughout the concert, while there were also glimpses of an influence of the late Sri Voleti Venkateswarulu, who was their father's guru. Embar Kannan on the violin and Neyveli Narayanan on the Mridangam provided solid support. In particular, Kannan's Alapana in *Bhairavi* was of a high order and Narayanan's *Tani Avartanam* sparked. It was a good finale to the year for SRUTI's concert programs.

I will conclude with an anecdote attributed to Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. A neighbor of the musician had over a period of time heard the maestro assiduously practicing the Varali kriti, *Seshachalanayakam*, of Dikshitar. However, since the great singer did not present the kriti in any of the concerts for over six months, the neighbor enquired of the vidwan for the reason. Ariyakudi is supposed to have responded that he had not mastered the kriti in nearly six months of practice and would not present it until he had complete confidence regarding the piece<sup>1</sup>.

1. Ref: Indira Menon: Great Masters of Carnatic Music 1930-1965, Indialog Publicatoin Pvt. LTD; 2004, page 29

### Gayathri Venkataraghavan- Concert Review by Dinakar Subramaniam

It was a beautiful fall day in the area (October 7, 2007) when Sruti presented a vocal concert by Smt. Gayathri Venkataraghavan at the Calvary Vision Center in Blue Bell. I had listened to her Navarathri Kritis CD earlier where I was impressed with her mellifluous voice. I was looking forward to the concert for another reason too. I had heard a great deal about the violinist Akkarai Subhalakshmi and what a promising young artist she was. So, it was with great expectation that I attended the concert.

Gayathri started the concert with a Bahudari varnam composed by her guru Shri A. Sundaresa Iyer. The tempo and verve with which the varnam was rendered provided a good indication on how the rest of the concert was to be. After this varnam, Gayathri sang the Sriranjani composition by Papanasam Sivan - Gajavadana Karuna Sadana. She then eagerly jumped into a Kalyani Ragam that was embellished with crisp brigas. After a very melodious alapanai from Akkarai Subhalakshmi, Gayathri sang the Dikshithar kriti - Bhajarey Chitta - a song composed on the deity Balambika of Vaitheeswarankoil in Tamil Nadu. The neraval was done at the Devi Shakthi Bijothbhava in the charanam culminating with the madhyama kala lines - Bhava Raga ThaLa mohinim. There was a wonderful rapport between the Gayathri, Subhalakshmi and Manoj Siva that made you feel at home and even closer to the music. After this kriti that energized the audience, Gayathri launched into an alapana in Reethigowlai followed by a composition of Mysore Sadashiva Rao called Nannubrochutaku. Sadashiva Rao belongs to the shishya parampara of Sri Thyagaraja. Before commencing the main piece in Thodi, Gayathri concluded the first hour of her concert with the brisk Thyagaraja composition in Janaranjani - Vidajalathura.

She then began an elaborate Thodi ragam which was solidly rendered with classical phrases. Subhalakshmi displayed her manodharma very well in her rendering of the alapana too. Gayathri then sang the Shyama Sastri kriti - Emani Migula in praise of Panchanadeeswara and Dharmasamvardhini of the Panchanada (Tiruvayyaru) Kshetra. She sang neraval using the charanam phrase - PanchanadaKaveri Teeramuna. Akkarai Subhalakshmi was a spirited foil in the ensuing kalpanaswara. Manoj Siva rounded out the almost hour-long rendition with a well-balanced taniAvarthanam.

Gayathri then gave us a quick ManavyalakincharA in NalinikAnthi before starting on the Ragam Thanam Pallavi in Gowrimanohari. Both Gayathri and Subhalakshmi displayed her virtuosity in the ragam and the thanam. The pallavi was in Tisra Jampa Thalam in Khanda nadai - Guruvai AruLvAi Guhane, Pazhani VaLar KandhA Nee (Guruvai). The RTP had the customary sprinkling of extra ragams such as HamsanAdham, Bilahari and KANada. All in all, it was not a very spectacular RTP but satisfying.

In the *tukkada* portion of the concert, Gayathri sang a Tamil composition in KANada before singing a very lilting Purandaradasa Kriti in KApi - Yadava Ni Ba, Yadukula Nandana. This was followed by Gopalakrishna Bharati's VaruvArO varam taruvArO in Ragam sAmA. The other tukkadAs included a Periaazhwar Pasuram - Mudi Ondru followed by a Kavadi Chindu and a very lyrically driven Thillana composed by Oothukkadu Venkata Subbaiyer in Surutti. Rounding out with a Bhajan in Desh, Gayathri, Subhalakshmi and Manoj Siva provided us with a very enjoyable concert that evening.

As you know all these performances are becoming very expensive. For several years now, Sruti has been very fortunate to receive grants from the Philadelphia Music Program and Dance Advance organizations. Both these grants are funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. Without the financial support from funding organizations, we almost certainly could not have presented the programs we did. For two years in a row now, we have not been successful in obtaining a grant from Dance Advance, which will begin to affect our programming. It is also important to note that this BOD (as practically every BOD before us) is exercising strict fiscal responsibility, where practically every dollar raised goes towards programming. As described in my letter elsewhere in the newsletter, if we relied only on ticket sales, the results would be disastrous in terms of the number of programs and quality. We probably could organize mostly house concerts and just one or two world-class artists!

A primary factor that positively influences the granting organizations is the sustained member commitment, contributions and event attendance. To continue to grow the Indian classical performing art support base, and to bring even more exciting programs that interest the Sruti audience, we need to improve the funding and attendance at these programs. To this end, we intend to continue to increase the core annual support and funding base from among our own members that can generously support the organization. The Core Annual Support membership, that we established last year will continue this year at \$500.

The benefits include,

- Premium seat passes to all events including premium presentations (e.g., dance ballets) for you, your spouse and children.
- Recordings (CD's) of all concerts presented during the year where available.
- A tax deductibility of \$250.
- Recognition in select Sruti publications and events.
- A warm and rewarding feeling for being one of the strongest supporters of an organization that we all hold dear.

I encourage all of you to extend the level of support you have provided to SRUTI, by signing on to become a Core Annual Supporter of the organization.

Best wishes to you and your family; we will see you at the Thyagaraja Aradhana on March 15 2008 and at all the year's Sruti events. Thank you very much for your time and your continued support.

C. Nataraj  
President, Board of Directors

Please mail your annual core supporter checks payable to Sruti, Attn: Venkat Kilambi – Treasurer, 3055 Highley Road, Audubon, PA 19403-1836.

### Sruti Members in the News

#### Upcoming Performances by Members

This year Sruti is proud to announce that our local talent will be represented at the Cleveland Aradhana festival. Revathi Subramony, an accomplished All India Radio rated vocalist will be performing at the Cleveland Aradhana festival this year. Please be certain to attend her concert if you are in Cleveland for the Aradhana. Revathi's concert is scheduled for Thursday, March 27 at 1pm.

Revathi started learning vocal Carnatic music at an early age from Dr. Neela Ramgopal and was trained in the classical style of the Late Sri. T.K.Rangachari. She has won prizes from institutions like the Mu-

sic Academy, Bangalore Gayana Samaja and Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Revathi Subramony has given performances on All India Radio (Bangalore) and several sabhas. Revathi is a pharmacist by profession and lives with her husband and two children in Exton PA.

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Shreya Adiraju was chosen through an independent audition process to sing in Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana's 'Sustaining Sampradayam,' on Saturday march 27th at the Cleveland Aradhana festival. This performing group is trained rigorously over a period of several months by vidwans from Chennai.

#### Awards

Ustad Shafaatullah Khan was nominated by Sruti, and was presented with the Council of Indian Organizations' (CIO) 2008 Professional Excellence Award for outstanding musicianship, performance, and teaching by the Honorable Tom Corbett, Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in the presence of other distinguished guests and dignitaries on Saturday, February 2nd, 2008. CIO also presented Shreya Adiraju (d/o Renuka and Ramesh Adiraju) and Harsha Kanumalla (s/o Santi and Ramana Kanumalla) "Outstanding Young Achiever" awards at this function. They were among the four young achievers selected for the award this year. Commonwealth of PA Attorney General Mr. Tom Corbett presented the awards.

Harsha Kanumalla is a 14 year old freshman at the Wissahickon High School in Ambler PA. He visits Chennai for mridangam lessons from Mr. Palani C Kumar and the renowned mridangist Srimushnam Rajarao. He presented his Arangetram Mridangam performance in October of 2005. In 2006 he was invited to perform at TTD, at their temple located in Chennai India. He won the second prize in the Junior Category at the competitions held at the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana in 2007. Harsha presented two concerts and an All India Radio Program in India in 2007.

Shreya Adiraju is a senior at Wissahickon High School. Shreya was trained by Ms. Indu Vasudevan and with Sri. T.N.Bala initially. Shreya has sung at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam's Anniversary Day Celebrations, the National Hindu Temples Executives Conference, Penn's Landing Festival of India, Bharatiya Temple Inauguration Ceremony, Sangeet Rajani, Sruti, and Triveni's Dasotsava. A few years ago, Shreya was guided by Smt. Suguna Purushothaman. Recently, Shreya has started training with acclaimed vocalist Smt. Kiranvali Vidyasankar. In April 2007, Shreya gave a vocal Carnatic music arangetram concert in the presence of her guru, Smt. Suguna Purushothaman, Sri. T.R.Subramaniam, Sri. A.S. Murali, and Cleveland Aradhana's Sri. V.V. Sundaram.

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Ashraya Ananthanaryanan a 7 year old received the title of "Child Ambassador" from PFA, India for her community involvement and social service at this tender age. She did also do a few fund raisers for PFA through her carnatic Violin and Vocal performances.

#### Reviews

##### High Octane Music - Hyderabad Brothers Concert

Review by **Rasikan**

Hyderabad Brothers (Raghavachary, Seshachary) are veteran musicians well known for their adherence to classicism in their concerts. Some high energy renderings and able accompaniments by S. Varadarajan (violin) and K.S. Prasad (mridangam) culminated in a very enjoyable SRUTI concert on Septmeber 15, '07. From the well known (nava) ragamalikai varanam (*Valachi vachi*) there was nary a dull moment right up to the mangalam. The alapanas especially for Sankarabharanam and Shanmukhapriya were brilliant.

After the varnam, the brothers rendered *Vatapi Ganapthim* the ever popular Hamsadwani kriti of Dikshitar. Perhaps since the day was Ganesh Chaturthi they followed with another kriti on Ganesha, *Pranamam* in Saveri. *Subramanyam* in Shanmukhapriya was the next piece. This pallavi of this kriti has some nice rhythm oriented phrases and it was interesting to hear the interplay between the Brothers and Prasad.

The Brothers announced that the last two pieces are the compositions of Sri Bharati Tirtha, the head of Sringeri Mutt. Both the kritis were unfamiliar to the writer. Apparently they were only partially familiar to the Brothers also, since they whipped out some notes and were singing out of them. [More later about this modern habit of looking at a book or paper while rendering kritis.]

A feature of the concert was that the Brothers prefaced each kriti with an alapana, even for relatively minor ragams like Bahudari (*Brova barama*, Thyagaraja) and Kalavathy (*Ennadu joothuno*, Thyagaraja).

Many people associate pathos with the ragam Mukhari (e.g. Enraikku Siva kripai - Neelakanta Sivan). But Thyagaraja did not seem to go with that theory. He has many kritis in this ragam with different bhavams. One such is *Karubaru*, a majestic kriti extolling Rama's merits as a ruler. Unlike most kritis this one takes off in the tara sthayi. The proyagam Ri Ma in the higher octave lingering on the madhyamam and gliding to the ghandharam at end of the pallavi, anupallavi or charanam sends goosebumps to this listener. Hyderabad Brothers' rendering of this masterpiece was indeed masterly. However, I felt that the kalapramanam was a tad fast.

The *piece de resistance* of the evening was Sankarabharanam. Seshachary rendered a very elaborate alapana punctured by some nice repartees from Varadarajan eliciting the characteristic *adhi* (there) and *anthe* (that's it) from the former. The alapana from Varadarajan, however, was rather sedate. Since it was nearly two hours into the concert, I expected thanam, pallavi. Instead the Brothers rendered the Thyagaraja masterpiece, Enduku peddalavala with regulation nerval, swarams, at Veda sastra (start of charanam) and the thani.

Again, since it was almost two and half hours into the concert, I thought the Brothers would start the lighter pieces. However, they found the time and energy to present a short but crisp RTP in Keeravani.

The post pallavi segment consisted of two lilting javalis (*Meragadu*, in Atana and *Inthatiki in Kalyani*). The concert concluded with a Annamacharya keertana (*Garudagamana* in Hindolam) followed by the mangalam.

All in all a very satisfying concert.

p.s. It seems to be a growing tendency among the current day Carnatic music singers to refer to a book or notes while rendering some kritis/songs. A few do so surreptitiously hiding them behind the sruti box, while others make it more blatant. I have a problem with this. It seems to me that the musician has not practiced the kritis well enough before the concert. When I go to concerts by professionals I expect that the musicians would know what they are going to present having well learnt the pieces and giving their personal touches to them. However, singing (reading) from books/notes clearly indicates that they have not learnt the pieces well enough. If they had only partially learnt the kritis, why is there a need to present them? And it looks very unprofessional to present half-baked ideas. An occasional lapse of memory is understandable, but not whole pieces.