



SRUTI NOTES

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FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Friends:

In this second issue of Sruti Notes we bring you updates from the president and the resource committee. We have also included reviews of two concerts (Abhishek Raghuram and Sikkil Gurucharan) for your enjoyment. We would like to thank P. Swaminathan and Rajee Padmanabhan, who have taken the time and effort to bring these reviews to us. As always, we encourage you to use our web site (www.sruti.com) to have discussions on various subjects and email us relevant articles for publication.

Vijaya Viswanathan — For the Publications and Outreach Committee

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear Friends:

We have had a very good start and look forward to some exciting events this year. We kicked off the year with wide and enthusiastic participation at Thyagaraja Aradhana with over 20 adults and 50 children taking part. We had the usual expert rendering of Utsava Sampradaya Kritis led by Smt. Praba Subramaniam, Dr. Dinkar Subramaniam, Smt. Sumathi Sarangan and Dr. Susheela Varadarajan. Following that was the rendering of Pancharatna Kritis led by Smt. Kiranavali Vidyasanker with children as young as ten participating. Our appreciation is due to her dedicated efforts at motivating and teaching the Sruti youngsters. The day ended with a scintillating concert by Abhishek Raghuram accompanied by Mysore Srikanth on the violin and B. Ganapathy Raman on the mridanga.

This year's Thyagaraja Aradhana was one of the most heavily attended events we have seen with a cumulative attendance of over 500 people. We had to make the decision to hold it in Hindu Temple of Delaware, which is quite far for many of us including the BOD members themselves, because of availability issues, but are gratified that the extraordinarily high attendance justified the choice of location. We also made the decision this time not to impose a mandatory charge for the participants as Sruti had in the last few years. Unfortunately, this led to a smaller number of attendees contributing a donation. This was offset by a very generous (\$5,000) contribution by a long-time patron of Sruti who deserves our gratitude, but wishes to remain anonymous. We hope that such generosity will inspire others in the community to contribute to help keep our organization strong and to enable high quality programming.

Our second event was a well-attended vocal concert by Sikkil Gurucharan held at Colonial Elementary School. He was accompanied by Nagai Sriram on the violin and Neyveli Skandasubramanian on the mridanga. Upcoming spring concerts include a veena concert by Smt. Jayanthi Kumaresh (which you would have enjoyed by the time you get this newsletter), a vocal concert by Smt. M. S. Sheela, and a unique nadaswaram concert by Kasim and Babu, grandchildren of Dr. Sheikh Chinna Moulana. The fall line-up is not completely finalized but does include vocal concerts by Sanjay Subramaniam and Ranjani and Gayathri as well as the famous violin duo, Mysore Nagaraj and Manujanth. These three concerts are supported by the Philadelphia Music Project. We also have plans to have a Composer's Day and a Bharatanatyam dance event in fall.

In a first-time collaboration with the Painted Bride we will be presenting a Karnatak concert by Guitar Prasanna in Philadelphia. This will enormously help increase visibility for Sruti in the Delaware Valley, as well as bring a unique program to our concert line-up. In addition, outreach into the mainstream community has always been our goal, and this will certainly help foster that effort as well as aid in securing grants from foundations all of whom strongly encourage outreach and education. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ramaa Nathan who went above and beyond her Resource Committee duties and took the initiative to make the initial forays that is making this event possible.

In addition to these regular concerts we have a chamber concert on May 24th in collaboration with Villanova Indian Students Association. This is a lecture and demonstration by Smt. Subhashini Parthasarathy and Smt. Nirmla Sundararajan. The chamber concerts are not ticketed events and compensation to the artists depends on voluntary donations by the attendees. In general, we have very little organizational expenses for these concerts as we try to get

an auditorium for free (as in this case).

Since we were successful in securing the grant from PMP (please see Ramaa's Resource Committee report elsewhere in this newsletter) we have a significant amount budgeted for improving the marketing material and to help produce professional brochures. Srinivas Pothukuchi, our Marketing Director, will be pursuing this effort in the summer months.

Our special thanks to those who continue to be, or have newly become Core Supporters. We are aware of some lapses in the support for last year's Supporters. Hence the BOD has requested Dr. Ramaa Nathan to serve as the Ambassador for Core Supporters. She will contact you to ensure that Sruti is providing what was promised to you. In the meantime please feel free to approach her or me with any questions or concerns.

As always, I look forward to your honest feedback as well as strong support of Sruti by attending the concerts in large numbers and by financially supporting the organization.

Sincerely,

C. Nataraj

Note from The Resource and Development Committee (R&DC)

The members of the Resource & Development Committee for this year include Ramaa Nathan (Director), Uma Prabhakar, C. Nataraj, Vidyashankar Sundaresan, and Venkat Kilambi .

Our new year has started off with a big bang. We are happy to announce that SRUTI has been awarded \$18000 from the Philadelphia Music Project to present three concerts in the fall of 2008. We have applied to Wachovia Foundation through Villanova to support a "Composers' Day" in the fall of 2008. We are waiting to hear back from Wachovia. Similar to Tyagaraja Aradhana, this event will encourage individual participants to present compositions by various composers in either Hindustani or Carnatic music styles either by singing or playing on any classical instrument. Details are still being worked out by the board. Watch out for the announcements.

On the program development front, we are actively working to build our outreach and long-term relationships with other presenting organizations. After an initial enthusiastic proposal, the committee is now working with Painted Bride to co-present a Carnatic Instrumental Concert in the fall of 2008. The proposed concert is a Carnatic concert on the Guitar by Prasanna. With this, we hope to introduce Carnatic Music to the mainstream classical music loving American audience while bringing a new artiste to our SRUTI audience. Our funding agencies have always been critical of our marketing efforts. We sincerely hope that this venture with Painted Bride will help market SRUTI to several thousands of people and increase the awareness and presence of SRUTI in the greater Philadelphia region.

On the resource front, we are applying to a few other granting foundations to support the rest of the concerts. Our goal here is to get funding for most of the SRUTI concerts for this year. The committee has already been at work, coming up with several new implementation ideas. We regret to inform that we were not successful in getting a grant from Dance Advance for the Jaya Jaya Devi Dance Ballet. This application had been sent out last year. Members of the previous and current R&DC committee met with Dance Advance to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of our grant application. This feedback session was extremely helpful and insightful about what the funding agencies expect from us. We have documented and archived our notes from the feedback session. We hope to use the feedback to improve the quality of all our future applications. Meanwhile we will explore other opportunities to fund our programs.

We welcome ideas from our membership and look forward to assisting the Board of Directors in their cultural endeavors.

Sincerely,

Ramaa Nathan—For the Resource & Development Committee

Reviews

Sikil Gurucharan—By P. Swaminathan

SRUTI presented a vocal concert by Sikil Gurucharan on April 5, 2008. This is the first program among the 2008 concert series of SRUTI. This is also the first time Gurucharan performed for SRUTI audience. Gurucharan was accompanied on the violin by Nagai Sriram, nephew of maestro Nagai Muralidharan and by Neyveli Skandasubramaniam on the mridangam.

Starting the concert with a brisk rendering of Thyagaraja's '*Brochevarevare*' in sri ranjani, Gurucharan gave a classical performance of Bhadrachala Ramadas's krithi '*O Rama nee nama*' in purvi kalyani rich in imagination and highly demonstrative of his creativity. After performing an elaborate alapana and good niraval, he concluded the krithi briskly without a swarakalpana. '*Suma sayaka*' of Swati Tirunal which describes the oscillating moods of a pining nayaki, received a high-standard execution with niraval improvisation and lilting swaraprasthara. This piece in addition to being a popular dance musical is particularly interesting in the sense this is classified as (pada) varnam, which is usually rendered in the beginning of a concert as a warm up item. However, the structure of this composition contains intricate raga delineations with raga malika swaras characteristic of a krithi. Hence many artists prefer to render this (krithi) pada-varnam during the middle of the concert instead of at the beginning like other varnams. Gurucharan fol-

lowed a similar tradition. Even though there are no defined rules as to when to render a particular song in karnatic music concert, there are some artistic preferences set in traditional music concert where varnams are rendered as the introductory item. His renderings of Kotiswara Iyer's '*Ganamuda panam*' in jyotishwarupini and the delineation of '*Nimma bhagya doddadu*', a Purandaradasa composition with charming idioms and phrases including niraval and swaras were classy. The *piece de resistance* of the concert was Swati Thirunal's popular krithi '*Rama Rama gunaseema*' in simhendra madhyamam. He gave an elaborate alapana of simhendra madhyamam, (even though I got the impression that he was going to render either shanmukapriya or kiravani in the beginning few moments). However, the rendering of the krithi, niraval on the familiar phrase '*muni manasa Rama*' and the ensuing kalpana swaras were indicative of his artistic ability. During the sixties and seventies, this krithi was made popular by none other than Smt. M.S. Subbalakshmi including her recital at the Carnegie Hall in US. Gurucharan went on to give an RTP in the raga lalitha set to khandajathi-triputa tala. His rendering of the ragamalika swaras following RTP were too short - too fast which simply disappeared before it could register. After rendering some popular short pieces Gurucharan concluded the concert with Lalgudi Jayaraman's tillana in desh. Blessed with a baritone voice Gurucharan's recital proved that quality is the result of hard work and knowledge gained from great teachers in addition of God's Gift.

Nagai Sriram provided refined and mellifluous violin accompaniment. His simhendra madhyamam essay deserves mention. He earned as much applause as Gurucharan did during the alapanas and swaraprastharas. Mridangist Skandasubramaniam gave a good account of himself. Right through the songs and tani avarthanam his mridangam accompaniment was not a mere energetic sound. It vibrated with the chords of percussive power and penetration with the lightning patterns sprawled all over the auditorium.

Abhishek Raghuram- A Star on the Horizon - By Rajee Pdhmanabhan

As part of the annual Tyagaraja Aradhana celebration, held at the Delaware Hindu Temple Auditorium on March 15th 2008, Abhishek Raghuram gave a brilliant performance for a little over two hours in his maiden appearance for Sruti. If the performance had to be described in just two words, those would be 'Fabulously Unorthodox'.

As the artist himself announced at the onset, it was an all-Tyagaraja-krithis concert that commenced with the Chittaranjani composition Nada Tanumanisham with a nice round of swarams. Abhishek has a vibrant voice that is well-aligned to the sruthi. One must note that the electronic sruthi box had a dedicated microphone which gave a nice effect like the double Tamburas in a Hindustani concert. The raga alapana in Malayamarutham was definitely unusual with Hindustani-style phrases. Manasa Etulordune set to Rupaka Tala followed with neraval at 'Dinakarakula Bhushanuni'. The violinist Mysore Srikanth's responses to the Neraval were very mellifluous. The Kapi Narayani alapana was excellent and fast-paced sancharams ending in the distinctive pattern "MGRG,R" brought out Abhishek's creativity into full flow. The classic, Sarasa samadana, was rendered at a brisk pace concluding with very imaginative patterns in kalpanaswaras at the charanam.

Mokshamugalada in Saramathi set to Adi Tala was taken up as the main piece of the concert. Again, the alapana was not of the traditional mould and was quite innovative. The krithi itself was sung with a lot of improvisations. A substantial part of the kalpanaswaras was done in Khandam. The tani avarthanam by Sri.Ganapathyraman was very pleasing with great nadam. This reviewer, a laya novice, could make out the tisram and khandam in the tani. The artist, being a kanjira player himself and whose guru is none other than his grandfather, the eminent Mridangam vidwan Palghat Raghu, had complete mastery over laya.

There was a change of pace after the main krithi with the YadukulaKambhodi kriti "Srirama Jayarama Sringararama". After a sketch of Ahiri, the artist started off at the Anupallavi 'Sompaina' of the krithi "Challare Ramachandrudu". Ahiri was rendered beautifully with the characteristic poignancy of this soulful raga. One was hoping a Pratimadhyama raga krithi would be taken up. Even though that was not to be, "Uyyalalugavaiyya" in Neelambari was rendered with sowkhyam. A very unique Kaapi alaapana, with Hindustani flourishes, was followed by the viruttam beginning with the words 'Lokabhiramam'. The violinist played a wonderful Kaapi. Eti Nee Bhagya in Kaapi was the final krithi before Mangalam.

Overall, an excellent concert that kick started Sruti's annual fare of music and dance. Both the violin and mridangam artistes were of superior caliber and provided excellent accompaniment. The artist has such a pliant voice enhanced by incredible imagination and a mastery over laya that the music that came forth seemed to be deeply internalized and hence spontaneous.

One could perceive an amalgamation of styles, Balamuraliesque voice modulation and phrases traversing the octaves, Seshagopalan-esque no-sangathi-left-uninnovated, no-briga-left-unexplored approach in Abhishek's music. Listening to the vocalist for the first time, one got the impression that with his unquestionable vidwat and solid grounding in classicism, he is still in the process of charting his own style, finding his own unique bani and we as rasikas have a lot to look forward to what the future might bring forth from this young musician. got the impression that with his unquestionable vidwat and solid grounding in classicism, he is still in the process of charting his own style, finding his own unique bani and we as rasikas have a lot to look forward to what the future might bring forth from this young musician.



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To:

2008 Core supporters of Sruti

Sruti would like to thank the following CORE members for their generosity:

Santi and Ramana Kanumalla, Uma and Prabhakar Chitrapu, Meera Nathan, Usha and Bala Balasubramanian, Vasantha and Paul Narayanan, Latha Natraj and C. Natraj, Bhuvana and Kumar Srinivasan, Kumar Srinivasan, Nagesh Nama and Vijaya Viswanathan, Sudha & Raman Ravishanker, Gayatri and Sudhakar Rao, Srinivas Reddy Arva Bhumi

UPCOMING EVENTS—MARK your calendars

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| 5/10/2008 | M. S. Sheela—Vocal |
| 5/24/2008 | Lecture and demonstration by Smt. S. Parthasarathy and Smt. Nirmala Sundararajan |
| 6/7/2008 | Nadaswaram concert by Kasim and Babu |
| 9/6/2008 | Sanjay Subramaniam - Vocal |
| 10/11/2008 | Ranjani/Gayathri - Vocal |
| 11/1/2008 | Mysore Nagaraj/Manjunath - Instrumental (Violin) |