



SRUTI NOTES

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SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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

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President's Note

Dear Sruti members and wellwishers,

Summer is well underway and we are getting geared up for a number of exciting music and dance programs in the fall season. We have been very fortunate in getting funding from the Philadelphia Music Project for the three instrumental concerts this year. The central backing for Sruti, however, comes from its membership and concert attendees. If you have not yet renewed your annual membership or purchased season passes (for life members), I would urge you to do so at the earliest. The events we have lined up for the fall season alone will be well worth it.

Also, for our regular mailings of Sruti Notes and event announcements, we are planning to cut down on paper consumption and rely more on contemporary communication technology – email and website updates. Please check our website www.sruti.org for concert listings, venues and dates. However, if you would still like to continue receiving paper mailings, please let us know via an email to sruti@sruti.org. Enjoy the rest of the summer break and turn up in large numbers for Sruti's fall concerts.

Vidyasankar Sundaresan

From the Publications and Outreach Committee....

Dear friends,

We have just come to the end of a successful spring concert series. *Sruti* was privileged to present a special concert by the great teacher Parassala Ponnammal- one of her very few concerts in the U.S. The rare Mohiniyattam dance performance by Bharati Shivaji, Vijayalakshmi and group was an aesthetic delight. We have included a heartfelt write up on this performance by a *rasika* who has articulated the thoughts of many who attended the performance.

We have been mailing *Sruti* concert announcement flyers via U.S. mail. In an effort to go "green" we propose to communicate our event announcements electronically to our membership. Please communicate with one of the office bearers if you would like to continue to receive flyers in the mail. In addition we welcome any feed back and suggestions regarding this effort.

We look forward to your continued attendance at *Sruti's* programs. We request the *Sruti* membership to contribute news items and articles especially as we prepare for the year end publication *Sruti* Ranjani.

Sincerely,

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Mohiniyattam

Padmashri Bharati Shivaji and her students
Vijayalakshimi, Manjula Murthy, Mom Ganguly and Vinaya
Manoj
from The Centre for Mohiniyattam
May 3, 2009
Plymouth Whitemarsh high School Auditorium, Plymouth
Meeting, PA
Impressions of one rasika – Ram Ramaprasad

It is not often that one gets an opportunity to see a performance of authentic Mohiniyattam in the US. Though it was a rainy spring afternoon, more suitable for staying home with a hot cup of something, it was gladdening to see a good audience at this fine auditorium.

The enjoyment of the program was enhanced by the lucid explanation that Guru Bharati Shivaji prefaced each of the pieces in the program with. Mohiniyattam is a dance form that, with Swathi Thirunal's patronage, took its present form under the direction of Vadivelu of the Thanjavur Quartet. It is to be noted that this particular art form from Kerala, relies not so much on footwork as the movement of the body and the abhinayas. Dressed in authentic white saris embroidered with bright golden brocade or *kasavu*, one was transported for a couple of hours to the region that also has given us Kathakali. The swaying of the body, characteristically found in Mohiniyattam, is to be reminded of the gentle movements of the flora and the waters of Kerala, an aesthetic feast for the eye.

The program consisted of the following dance pieces:
After paying homage to Ganapathy (*Ganapathy Sthuthi*) in Arabhi, the next item, called *Mukhachalam*, used a song in two different ragas – Suruti followed by Samantha Malahari, a raga indigenous to Kerala, – as the musical canvas for depicting the pure movements of Mohaniyattam.

Next was the well known Swathi Thirunal Padam, *Kanakamayamidum*, in Huseni. The story of two girls discussing who the handsome man was that they had seen, with surmises regarding his identity, that he could be Shiva, or Kubera etc. was abhinaya at its pinnacle. The end of the piece when the five girls on stage realize that it was none other than Neerajanabha, reclining on Adishesha, was a scene that was dance, painting and melody, all in one.

Ashtapadi in two ragas, Panthuvrali followed by Mohanam, was a rich and imaginative interpretation of a stanza from Jayadeva's *magnum opus*. The turmoil suffered by Radha as she witnesses Krishna playing with the gopis was danced with a grace befitting the work of the great poet, and with a graceful abandon that conveyed the suggestive sensuality of Gita Govinda. A great performance, and this writer's favorite piece of the evening.

The final offering was *Pandattam*, based on a poem by the

Kerala poet Mahakavi Vallathol Narayana Menon, who played a key role in infusing new life to Kathakali and Mohiniyattam at the beginning of the last century through establishing the Kerala Kalamandalam. The raga chosen was Kambodhi. It revolved around the poet's comparing life's high and low points to a ball that bumps up and down during play. The magic of the dancers made the scene more realistic than if a ball were to be really there.

Bharati Shivaji and her students gave an extraordinary performance on stage. Their movements, so fluid, elegant and graceful, and their team work so cohesive that they merged in and out of each other with a magic that kept the story line smoothly flowing, even as the abhinayas detailed the words, this was our heritage at its best. It was difficult to pick out the guru apart from the disciples, such was the disciplined show. And, even though they were only five on stage, with their changing expressions as the story proceeded and swaying bodies as the dance progressed, there could have been fifty on stage. They filled the frame called the stage with their dance. As the name Mohiniyattam implies, the dancers enchanted us. Our collective kudos to the dancers.

About the author: Ram Ramaprasad is a scientist by profession, with a lifelong interest in music - Indian and Western - and occasionally forays into writing his thoughts on music.

In the News.....

We report the passing away of some stalwarts in the field of classical music with deep sorrow.

B.Rajam Iyer, the scholar musician passed away after a brief illness on May 3rd, 2009 at the age of 86. Rajam Iyer was decorated with the Sangita Kalanidhi and the Padma Bhushan titles in recognition of his contributions as a musician and a musicologist. Born in Sivaganga region in Tamil Nadu he learnt music under Karaikudi Ganapathy Iyer, T. L. Venkatrama Iyer and from the great Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar.

He was known to be a master of the compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar. He officiated as the head of the Tamil Nadu Government Music College and later, of The Music Academy's Teachers College of Music in Chennai.

Palghat Raghu, the great mridangam vidwan passed away on June 2nd at the age of 81. Sri Raghu was especially known as the master of laya and for the creative exposition of the mathematical principles associated with the rendering of carnatic music. Sri Raghu evolved a unique style blending the great traditions of Palghat T.S.Mani Iyer and Pazhani Subramania Pillai. Recipient of many awards including the Padma Shri, Sangeetha Choodamani and Kalaimamani, Sri Raghu leaves behind a legacy to be upheld by his disciples Tiruchur Narendran, Manoj Siva, Bombay Balaji and Trivandrum Balaji to

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.

name a few. The maestro's musical tradition is also being carried forward by his grandsons vocalist Abhishek Raguram and mridangist Anand (New Jersey). The following are links to tributes to the Vidwan in the publication Hindu.

<http://www.thehindu.com/2009/06/04/stories/2009060457670700.htm>

<http://www.thehindu.com/fr/2009/06/05/stories/2009060550810300.htm>

Mysore S. Rajaram, Carnatic musician and composer, who served Kalakshetra, Chennai, for nearly two decades passed away in Bangalore on June 1st at the age of 85. Grandson of the stalwart Mysore Vasudevachariar who came to Kalakshetra in 1953 at the behest of the legendary Rukmini Devi, Sri Rajaram was groomed by his grandfather in the skills of vocal music and composition. Vasudevachariar, who worked and taught music in Kalakshetra, had taken up the work of setting to music Valmiki Ramayana's dance drama. After his demise, Sri Rajaram took up the task and completed nearly half of the work. An accomplished musician and Sanskrit scholar, Sri Rajaram was among the few musicians who were the repository of Vasudevachariar's compositions. Sri Rajaram took over as Director of Kalakshetra from Sankara Menon and headed the institution from 1995 to 2005.

Ustad Ali Akbar Khan the eminent sarod exponent and great teacher passed away on June 18 2009 at his home in St. Anselmo, California. He was 87 years old. He was born in Shibpur, a small village in Bengal (now Bangladesh). He grew up in Maihar, where his father Ustad Allauddin Khan was the principal court musician. He began vocal training at 3 and, after studying the surbahar, sitar and tabla, focused on the sarod. In 1989 he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian honor, and in 1991 he became the first Indian musician to receive a [MacArthur Foundation](#) "genius grant." Ustad Ali Akbar Khan along with his brother-in-law Ustad Ravi Shankar was responsible for popularizing Indian classical music in the west.

Smt. D.K. Pattamal one of the icons of Carnatic music passed away at her Chennai residence on July 16 2009 at the age of 90 years. She was popularly known as one of the "women trinity" of Carnatic music; M.S. Subbulakshmi and M.L. Vasanthakumari were the other two. Smt. Pattammal carved a niche for herself, which was marked by uncompromising adherence to tradition. Her music was known as much for its technical brilliance, as for its emotional appeal. She was a recipient of Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan awards- among India's highest civilian awards- in 1971 and 1998 respectively. Smt. Pattamal was considered an authority on the compositions of Muthuswamy Dikshitar and had also sung the compositions of Papanasam Sivan who introduced her to the movie world. The first movie she sang for was "Thyaga Bhoomi". She had been a source of inspiration to numerous practicing musicians and music lovers.

Sruti Community News....

Awards

Shoba Narayanan, daughter of Vasantha and Paul Narayanan was declared the winner of the prestigious Bharatanatyam (senior category) 3rd annual competition conducted by the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana Committee. The judges were the Bharatanatyam stalwarts Smt. Radha and Smt Savithri Jagannatha Rao. As the winner of the top prize, Shoba will be performing on

January 3rd 2010 at the prestigious Narada Gana Sabha, Chennai. Shoba is the disciple of Smt. Shoba Sharma, San Diego, formerly of Philadelphia, PA. We congratulate Shoba Narayanan on this achievement.

Sriranjani Srinivasan, daughter of Bhuvana and Kumar Srinivasan, student of Kiranavali Vidyasankar received a "Special Mention" award in the category Krithi Vocal Junior Girls (10-12) at the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana Music competition.

Instrumental Treat

Veena, Venu, Violin

Review by Rasikan

Veena, venu (flute), violin form an interesting combination of musical instruments. Of these, veena and venu are associated with Indian mythological figures and have been integral parts of Indian music for centuries. Violin, a Western musical instrument, has been so well adapted to S. Indian music that it is difficult to imagine a concert in this genre without violin accompaniment. The tonal qualities of the instruments are varied; in the Western music parlance, if veena is regarded as bass, then flute and violin may be thought of as contralto and soprano respectively. Again, while flute is a wind instrument, veena and violin are string instruments that differ in how they are played; veena strings are pulled and plucked whereas violin strings are played with a bow.

Concerts with this combination were launched during the 1960s by Lalgudi Jayaraman (violin), N. Ramani (flute) and R. Venkataraman (veena). But by the early 1970s they stopped performing as a team. However, we have recently seen a revival of this instrument trio with Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi (daughter of Jayaraman - violin), Mala Chandrasekhar (of the Sikkhil family - flute) and Jayashree Jairaj (from the Muthuswami Dikshitar parampara sishyas - veena).

The trio gave a concert for SRUTI on 4 April 2009 at the Calvary Vision Center, Blue Bell. Rajna Swaminathan (a teen ager from the neighboring state of Maryland) on the mridangam, and Bhagyalakshmi Muralikrishna on the morsing completed the all woman ensemble.

The musicians and the music blended seamlessly. They took turns in rendering the alapanas, performed kritis jointly and shared the swaraprastarams. The whole concert was well conceived. The pieces were rendered at a nice kalapramanam (pace) - neither too brisk nor too slow. The fare was varied: mostly well recognized pieces with some not so well known (at least to this reviewer).

The concert started with the Bahudari varnam of Lalgudi Jayaraman followed by Mysore Vasudevacharya's kriti *Pranamamyaham* in Gowlai. Then came a Pallavi Seshayyar's kriti in Oormika. This unfamiliar ragam sounded like a janya of Simhendramadhyamam.

Mala then rendered alapana in Sahana in what I can only describe as very “sowkyam” playing. The kriti was *Oorage Kalguna* by Thyagaraja, again not one of his better known compositions in this ragam.

Sahana was followed by a nice alapana in Hindolam by Jayashree. The kriti was *Govardana Girisam* of Dikshitar.

After a quick Nalinakanti (*Manavyalakinchara* of Thyagaraja) Vijayalakshmi took up Karaharapriya for elaboration. This elaboration was beautifully played with vintage Lalgudi prayogams. The group rendered *Rama nee yada*, a classic Thyagaraja composition.

This was followed by the “thani“. Rajna, born and brought up in this country, displayed admirable maturity belieing her age. During her turn Bhagyalakshmi produced some very interesting tonal variations on the morsing to delighted applause from the audience.

To this point the concert had followed the traditional classical music format. But here the musicians capitulated to the modern trend of racing through Ragam, Thanam, Pallavi in a minor ragam, in this case, Behag. No importance was given to any of the three components of RTP. Although they chose an interesting pallavi (chapu with ateeta eduppu) there was no laya vinyasam and they moved hastily into ragamalikai swarams - Dhanyasi, Kedaragowla, Narthiki.

The concert concluded with the evergreen *Chinna chiru kiliye kannamma* of Bharathiyar and a Mand thillana of Lalgudi Jayaraman.

Despite the rushed RTP, the concert was an instrumental treat that will linger in our minds for a long time.

About the author: An ardent admirer and lover of Carnatic music, Rasikan has been a regular contributor to Sruti Notes and other publications of Sruti.

SRUTI Membership

SRUTI membership is for the entire family, which constitutes the husband, wife, dependants and their children. Dependants are defined as those living with the main family throughout the year and do not cover visiting parents and grandparents. Membership fees are subject to review and change by the elected board of directors at the beginning of each calendar year.

Annual Membership

- ◆ \$35 for the calendar year (January – December), renewable every year
- ◆ Discounted tickets for concerts when offered
- ◆ Eligible to purchase all concert recordings*

Life Membership

- ◆ One time fee of \$150
- ◆ Discounted tickets for concerts when offered
- ◆ Eligible to purchase all concert recordings*

Tickets and Passes

SRUTI events are ticketed and open to both non-members and members. Tickets can be purchased on the day of the concert at the venue. For most events, children of age 12 and below are allowed to attend free of charge. Ticket prices are listed on the website (www.sruti.org) and on concert flyers. Members can buy tickets for individual concerts or avail of the following two kinds of passes for the entire year.

Season Pass (open to all members)

- ◆ \$100 for adults, \$75 for seniors and \$50 for students (with valid school/college ID)
- ◆ Valid for most events in the calendar year, except for specified concerts, as determined by the board of directors

Core Supporter Pass (open to life members only)

- ◆ \$500 per calendar year (January – December)
 - ◇ \$250 of the \$500 is tax deductible
 - ◇ Or, \$250 of the \$500 can be paid by matching grants from corporations
 - ◇ Installment payment option available
- ◆ Free tickets for four family members for all Sruti concerts during the year. Additional family members are requested to buy season passes or individual concert tickets.
- ◆ Free copies of all concert recordings made available during the year*
- ◆ Invitations to select receptions with artistes
- ◆ Preferred seating kept open up to the first ten minutes prior to the start of each concert
- ◇ SRUTI concert recordings are available to members for purchase, subject to permission from our performing artistes and/or other technical constraints. The board of directors reserves the right not to sell recordings of specific concerts, in order to honor contractual obligations and maintain quality control.

Mysore Nagaraj and Dr. Manjunath – Vigorous Violin Duet By Vidyasankar Sundaresan

The violin has made a permanent home for itself in Carnatic music and its contemporary importance clearly overshadows many of the traditional south Indian stringed instruments. Convert vocalists invariably opt for the violin as an accompaniment, while it has also gained stage as a solo instrument in its own right. The last five decades may well be described as the period in which the art of Carnatic music concert presentations on the violin has reached great heights. In their violin duet concert on Sep 20, 2008, Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath proved admirably to Sruti’s audience that they are among the principal torchbearers for carrying this legacy forward in the coming decades.

Nagaraj and Manjunath began their concert with a mellow

(Continued overleaf)

rendition of Papanasam Sivan's masterpiece, *Sri Valli Devasenapate* in the Raga Nathabhairavi. They followed this with Muthuswami Dikshitar's *Anandamruta* in Raga Amrutavarshini and Thyagaraja's *Dinamani Vamsha* in Raga Harikambhoji and *Nadupai* in Raga Madhyamavati. The leisurely rendition of *Ksheerasagara* in Raga Devagandhari set the stage for the main Kriti of the day, *Upacharamu* in Raga Bhairavi, which culminated with the sparkling Mridangam Tani Avartanam by Srimushnam Raja Rao. Nagaraj and Manjunath also presented a Ragam Tanam Pallavi in Simhendramadhyamam, with a garland of myriad Ragas woven dextrously into the Swara improvisations. Srimushnam Raja Rao responded enthusiastically with a short second Tani Avartanam and then it was time to wind up the concert with popular pieces like *Venkatachala nilayam* in Sindhubhairavi and *Enna tavam* in Kapi.

Nagaraj and Manjunath handled the Raga Alapana expositions and Kalpana Swarams very creatively and vigorously. The brothers exhibit a healthy mix of instrumental virtuosity and vocal-like rendition of the Carnatic music repertoire. There were many dramatic moments in the improvisational parts, with musical phrases held in picturesque pose, like a well-chiseled statue in a museum display! Some of it was deliberate and some was spontaneous, but the whole was thoroughly delectable and uplifting. In this aspect of their playing, Nagaraj and Manjunath seem to have imbibed some of the best features of both the Lalgudi school and the Parur school of violin playing. I noticed that Nagaraj tended to let Manjunath, the younger brother, take the lead in many places. For his part, Manjunath did so with grace and never overstepped concert decorum. He did not try to dazzle and eclipse Nagaraj's contribution to the concert. It was very good adherence to what has come to be known as concert *dharma*, with each artiste on stage embellishing the others and producing highly noteworthy music.

It was satisfying to see that quite a number of people had come in from the north New Jersey area to attend this concert. However, the Calvary Vision auditorium could have accommodated some more audience members than those who attended this concert. I hope more Philadelphia area residents attend such wonderful musical evenings on a regular basis.

Review of Neyveli Santhanagopalan's Concert By Dinakar Subramanian

We all gathered during the afternoon of May 30, 2009 for Neyveli's (NSG) concert at Bharatiya temple in Montgomeryville. He was accompanied by S. D. Sridhar on the violin and Tanjore Murugabhoopathi on the mridangam. There was a large attendance for the concert which I suspect was due to Neyveli's presence on the internet.

After the usual introductions, the concert was ready to start. NSG announced right away that he wanted the audience to request songs for him to sing. I thought it was an unusual request that clashed with my thinking that the audience should not distract the artiste with requests so as not to conflict with the artiste's idea, form and manodharma decided for the concert. This announcement of course opened the floodgates and the requests started flowing in at a steady clip. As a refinement of his request, NSG wanted the audience to shout out the request as opposed to send-

ing in chits as the latter choice could easily be circumvented in its fulfillment.

NSG started the concert with Thyagaraja's nAda tanumanisam in cittaranjani which he embellished with a few kalpanaswarams. Next was Thyagaraja's tuLasi daLamulache in mAyAmALavagowLai. NSG did a neraval at the caranam refrain - sarasIruha punnAga. So far, his voice, though not his earlier self, was holding up. Next was Thyagaraja's mAkellarAvicAramu in ravicandrikA offered with a short Alapana and a neraval at **jata gUrci nATaka**. **This song was** rendered with many brigas that were quite pleasing.

The first Muthuswami Dikshitar song came in the form of the mAnasa guruguha in Anandabhairavi. This serene kriti was performed very well with a short kalpanaswara segment. NSG then sang Swati Tirunal's karunAkara mAdhava in begadA. The alapana seemed quite labored and NSG was not able to cleanly hit the higher notes. NSG wrapped up this kriti with very lively kalpanaswarams.

NSG then presented Thyagaraja's teliyalEru rAmA in dhenukA where again his voice did not cooperate on the high notes. The same ensued in Thyagaraja's paritApamU in raga manOhari. After a brisk sarasa sAmadAna in kApi nArayaNi, I was waiting to see what main piece he was going to offer where he could portray his full capabilities as so far all the songs were handled in a relatively safe manner.

At this point NSG embarked on an elaborate and delightful alapana in tOdi. S. D. Sridhar's accompaniment rose to the occasion for the alapana and NSG then started the Papanasam Sivan's kriti - kArtikEya gAngeya gowri tanaya. A good portion of the elaborate kalpanaswarams were sung in the lower notes that were not very enjoyable to the listener. S. D. Sridhar just about managed to keep pace with NSG's swarams. Murugabhoopathi then performed an excellent tani to finish the composition on a high note.

NSG started on an RTP in sAmA as a fulfillment of a request. It was an interesting choice of raga for an RTP. The pallavi was manasA mAdhava smaranE gati in khanda jAti rUpakam with the name of the ragam cleverly interspersed between the first two words of the pallavi. The pallavi had the requisite set of extra ragas such as kApI, Ahiri and kadanakuthuhalam.

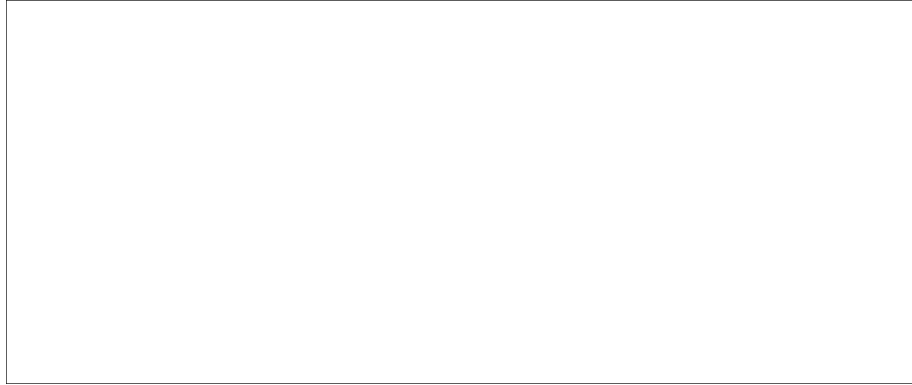
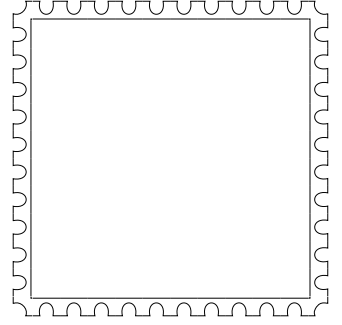
NSG then sang Narayana Teerthar's gOvardana giridhara in darbArI kAnadA and concluded the concert with marubAri - a dharmapuri subbarayar javali in khamAs. Overall it was a concert where I am sure many people left thinking of the Neyveli of several years ago. I know I did.

About the author: Dinakar Subramanian is an avid listener, teacher and fan of Carnatic music. He loves other forms of music including Hindustani, film and classic rock. He lives in Audubon, PA.



SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society
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Upcoming Sruti Events

- 1) Sep 12 Vocal Concert by Maharajapuram Ramachandran
- 2) Oct 3 Flute and Sitar Jugalbandi by Shashank and Shahid Pervez
- 3) Oct 24 Bharatanatyam Performance by Alarmel Valli
- 4) Nov 7 Saxophone Concert by Kadri Gopalnath
- 5) Nov 14 Chitravina Concert by Ravikiran
- 6) Dec 12 Composers Day and Sruti General Body Meeting