



# SRUTI NOTES

**SRUTI**

The India Music & Dance Society

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## From The Editors

This issue of Sruti Notes comes to you at the end of a busy spring concert season. In this newsletter, you will find reviews of the three recent concerts including two music and one dance performance. We would like to thank the contributors, namely Kamakshi Mallikarjun, Praba Subramaniam and Chidambaram Narayanan, who readily produced detailed and critical reviews of the various concerts. The debate on the role of saahithyam in Carnatic music continues with yet another letter to the Editors on this topic by Rasikan! In honor of the well known Carnatic music vocalist, Musiri Subramaniya Iyer, we have included a brief excerpt on the musician from Sruti magazine. In addition, you will find our regular features including a note from the President, community news and a list of Sruti Tapes available for sale.

We are now getting ready for our annual Sruti Ranjani publication scheduled for November 1999. We look forward to receiving interesting articles, quizzes, anecdotes etc., related to Indian classical music and dance, from both the young and not so young. Please do send us your contributions.

Happy reading!  
Uma Prabhakar  
For the Library Committee

## UPCOMING SRUTI CONCERTS

### Sikkil Mala Chandrashekhar: Flute Concert

September 25, 1999

&

### 'Thyagaraja Vaibhavam'

### Dance ballet by Dhananjayans

November 20, 1999

.....details to follow

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## From the President's Desk

Dear Sruti Supporter,

Greetings! I hope you and your family are having an enjoyable summer. As we take a break from the concerts at the end of the Spring season, and await our fall program, I would like to thank all of you who supported us with your presence at our programs this spring. We had a very successful spring season which included the 'Workshop on Appreciating Carnatic Music', the Thyagaraja Aradhana, a dance ballet 'Abhyasa', a vocal concert by Neyveli Santhanagopalan and a double violin concert by Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath.

We are looking forward to the fall season with a schedule including a flute recital by Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar on Sept. 25, a dance ballet 'Thyagaraja Vaibhavam' by the Dhananjayans on November 20 and our General Body Meeting on December 4. Please mark these dates on your calendar.

Sruti is the recipient of two new grants to support our activities. The Philadelphia Foundation has given a grant for \$5000 from the Nancy B. McKean funds to support Sruti's 1999-2000 activities. We have also received a grant for \$1500 from First Union Bank for our 1999 concert series. We are grateful to both these organizations for their continued support for Sruti's mission and goals.

As most of you are aware, SRUTI has a new web site address at [www.sruti.org](http://www.sruti.org). We have formed a committee to upgrade our presence on the web and make effective use of our web site. The committee will consist of Prabhakar Chitrapu, Dinakar Subramaniam, Kishore Pochiraju, Kamakshi Mallikarjun, Uma Prabhakar and Viji Swaminathan. Please call Prabhakar Chitrapu with suggestions or write to us at [sruti@sruti.org](mailto:sruti@sruti.org).

Looking forward to seeing you at the forthcoming Sruti events !

Sudhakar Rao.

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the comments (see Sruti Notes of March 99) of G. Shridar, a close friend of mine, on my article on the role of kriti in a concert (Sruti Ranjani of Nov. 98). I was surprised that he dubbed his comments as another point of view. I rather think that his views are more mainstream. At any rate here is another point of view (extract from an article by Ramaswamy R. Iyer published in Sruti magazine of Madras - Issue 173 Feb. 99), commenting on certain weaknesses found in modern day concerts like lack of sruti alignment, too much speed etc. Ramaswamy Iyer wrote: These are compounded by certain features which are not even recognized as weaknesses but are in fact assumed as strengths: a preoccupation with word-play and turns of phrase, a stress on emotionality under the rubric of, and above all, the tendency to regard the whole corpus of Carnatic music as essentially devotional music. As a result, the response is often not to the music but to puns/alliterations or to the text as poetry; or to the sentiments expressed; or to the evocative names of the deities or shrines mentioned. When this happens, the experience is not musical but literary or sentimental or pietistic. There seems to be a reluctance to be open to genuine musical experience and a refusal to recognize music as an art; instead it is turned into poetry-recitation or unctuous declamation or bhajan-singing. If this is what we want by way of musical experience, Carnatic music cannot rise above the second-rate; its potential for greatness unrealized.

I rest my case.

Yours truly,  
Rasikan



## Spring Concert Reviews

### Abhyasa

By Kamakshi Mallikarjun

Alarmel Valli, one of the great Bharatanatyam dancers writes in the Folio magazine (Dec'97 issue) "Classes used to be conducted by my gurus Pandanallur Chokalingam Pillai and his son Subbarayya Pillai. These grand old masters gave me, with total generosity and complete commitment, the key to the infinite wonders of Bharatanatyam. They helped me realize my inner potential and express my individuality. They gave me the freedom, the strength and the courage to make that inward journey, so vital to artistic expression and growth."

All of us may not have had the good fortune to watch the dance classes that Alarmel Valli talks about with such reverence; however those of us who had the opportunity to watch the dance drama 'Abhyasa' can relate to what Alarmel Valli says since the theme for Abhyasa was a day in the life of a nattuvanaar and his dance students.

The curtains opened to reveal a house in the village. It is the house of the nattuvanaar. One of his students, comes out to do the kolam. Then the door opens to reveal the mittam of the house. It is in this mittam that the guru holds court, imparting his priceless art to his students.

The dance students portrayed by Mahalakshmi, Bragha Bessel, Sreelatha Vinod, Narendra and C.A Joy take their places. The nattuvanaar, portrayed by Shri Adyar Lakshman, is joined by the musicians led by the singer O.S.Arun. Mahalakshmi points to the new dress that she is wearing and the guru appreciates it. The dancers are practicing with extra care in the morning because they are going to perform in the village temple that night. The dancers first pay respect and bow before their guru and then start with the simple adavus, the stepping stones to the dazzling korvais that they will perform later. An abundance of charm is evoked because it is done to the

accompaniment of Sarali Varisai. They start at a slow speed that gets faster and faster!

Then the two men dance to the masculine Siva Tandavam jatis. Another item that is performed is the hauntingly beautiful Swara Jathi *Rave Himagiri Kumari* by Shyama Sastri in the raga Thodi. The guru interjects the performance from time to time, correcting the adavus and the mudras. He also asks the junior most student played by C. A Joy to learn from the senior students. The senior student, played by Narendra, does Abhinayam to the kriti *Evarani* by Thyagaraja and the guru tells him to show the emotion that Thyagaraja has poured into the kriti with his bhakthi (devotion) for Lord Rama. Another facet of abhinaya, Srngara or romance, is revealed in the abhinaya to the javali *Sarasamula* in Behag by another student Bragha Bessel. A touch of authenticity is added by the fact that the guru mentions that Bragha has learnt this from Gowri Ammal, an illustrious dancer of yesteryears. Then the guru asks his students to eat their lunch, rest and get ready for the evening performance.

When the guru is away, the students have some lighthearted fun, led by the singer who starts humming raga Amrithavarshini. The students start improvising abhinaya for the monsoon theme. When the guru comes back, the students are startled by his discovery of their disobedience, and scatter away in fear, instantly.

The second half of Abhyasa was like a traditional dance drama where the dancers portray the story of Meenakshi, her birth to the Pandya king and his wife, her childhood where she masters both the martial arts and music, her falling in love with Shiva and marrying him.

I enjoyed every minute of Abhyasa! The little deft touches made me feel I was actually part of the guru's household; the guru does not just teach dance, he takes a personal interest in the students; he compliments the students and the musicians (!) on the attire they are wearing; he asks his senior student Narendra to conduct the nattuvangam for the dance being performed by the others so that he can

master that skill as well; the musicians don't just perform the songs...they are totally involved with the dance and absorb all the nuances.

The dancers were fantastic. What perfect body lines when they did the beginning adavus! All the items performed were marvelous. They improvised so beautifully to the Amrithavarshini ragam. First, simple gestures of the creeper, then the flower blooming, the bees drinking nectar from the flowers, then the rain pouring, the peacock spreading its feathers and dancing in the rain ... voila! a three dimensional painting of spring! The theme of this dance drama was so unique that it lent itself to on the spot improvisation and variations in the items being performed.

O.S Arun the main singer for the performance really got into the spirit of the dance drama by the way he playfully enticed the dancers to improvise when he sang Amrithavarshini and matched his skills against those of the dancers.

The choreography of Shri Adyar Lakshman was wonderful. Each line of the Swarajathi was so lovely. It was a delightful moment when at the end of the performance (both at the temple in the story and for us) he comments like the traditional Indian guru, "Hmm... that was okay...let us continue working on improving it tomorrow!" It was a quintessential revelation of Indian culture – that it takes a lifelong journey to achieve perfection in the arts since there is always something to improve upon and I am sure others in the audience also had a delectable flashback of their own gurus saying that exact same sentence to them!

Abhyasa is the brainchild of Uma Ganesan, from the Cleveland Cultural Alliance. It was a refreshingly different kind of dance drama. For those of us who are aware of India's great cultural heritage, it was a beautiful trip to the glorious past of India. Abhyasa brought to life those old days that to quote from *Gone With the Wind*, "the old days had no glitter but they had a charm, a beauty, a slow paced glamour." They had perfection and completeness and a symmetry to it like

Grecian art. "For our children, Abhyasa was a learning experience that would have given them a glimpse of gurukulavasam – the tremendous respect the students had for their teacher, the humility they had as a result of knowing how much they had to learn from their guru. The goal to perfect their art, the assiduous practice that resulted to achieve that goal.

Some performances produce a momentary spark of enjoyment within us and a choice few produce a glow of satisfaction that persists. Abhyasa was the latter. From time to time, in my mind's eye, I recapture the vicarious joy the dancers and musicians must have had each day of their journey towards artistic perfection, the joy brought by the fact each day in their lives was as perfect as the previous day since each day was spent mastering the glorious art of dance and listening to melodious music.

### ***A Tribute to Musiri.....***

Musiri Subramania Iyer was known for his bhava laden rendering of kritis. During the 30\92s he was bracketed with Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer as probably the most popular Carnatic musicians of the day. Musiri was one of the youngest to receive the Sangita Kalanidhi award from the Madras Music Academy. He was the first principal of the Central College of Music in Madras. He is also credited with organizing the group singing of the pancharatna kritis at the Thyagaraja Aradhana in Tiruvaiyaru, a pattern followed in many places all over the world. According to Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, musicians in those days did not have a high social standing and many of them had dubious reputations, but Musiri was one of the first to be associated with dignity (gouravam in Tamil).  
(Reproduced from *Sruti Magazine, Madras*)

**A mixed Bag:  
Neyveli Santhanagopalan  
Concert  
Review by  
Praba Subramaniam**

Neyveli Santhanagopalan provided a mixed bag of some very innovative music with some rather pedestrian stuff during the SRUTI concert of 16 May, '99. He included both Pantuvarali and Poorvikalyani (most of the musicians render one or the other in their concerts). He included a Sankarabharanam suite and quickly followed it with RTP in Kalyani. There was very little pause between many of the pieces reminiscent of Ariyakudi style. He also sang a number of kritis without alapana a style associated with D.K. Jayaraman. Although a senior disciple of T.N. Seshagopalan, there were few traces of his guru's style in the concert. Clearly Santhanagopalan has developed a distinct style of his own. Delhi Sundararajan and Srimushnam Raja Rao provided violin and mridangam accompaniment respectively.

The major piece was *Mahalakshmi* the Sivan kriti in Sankarabharanam. Santhanagopalan rendered an elaborate alapana and included neraval and swara-prastaram for Parkadal tharum kripakari. Since this piece also included a thani, I felt that there may not be any RTP. But after singing the ragamalikai Aarabhi-manam (which he started in the anupallavi), Santhanagopalan started RTP in Kalyani. Sankarabharanam and Kalyani differ only in the madhyamam. It is most unusual to render these ragas elaborately at such short interval. To his credit Santhanagopalan pulled it off very well indeed.

The concert started sedately with *Ninnu kori*, the adi tala varnam in Mohanam followed in quick succession by *Nada thanumanisam* in Chittaranjani of Thyagaraja and *Ini namakku oru kavalai illai* in Bilahari of Koteeswara Iyer. All pieces included short swara-prastarams. Santhanagopalan then rendered the Thyagaraja kriti *Siva Siva Siva* in Pantuvarali. He included alapana, neraval and kalpana swaram for this piece.

Santhanagopalan then continued with the beautiful Ananda Bhairavi kriti *Marivera gathi* of Shyama Sastri. I wish

he had included alapana in this ragam. He did compensate for it by singing kalpana swarams in 2 speeds. Yadukula Kambhodhi kriti of Thyagaraja, *Hecharikiga rara*, was rendered sans alapana which is not unusual since it is a utsava sampradaya kriti.

Many eyebrows must have been raised when Santhanagopalan started Poorvikalyani at this stage since he had sung Pantuvarali earlier. While rendering the well known Thyagaraja kriti *Jnana mosagarada* he included neraval and swara prastaram for Paramathmudu jeevathmudu.

Before the Sankarabharanam piece, Santhanagopalan sang *Kanden kanden kanden* a Arunachala Ramanataka kriti in Vasantha.

After rendering alapana and thanam in Kalyani, Santhanagopalan appended short bursts of thanam in the gana panchaka ragas Nattai, Gowlai, Aarabhi, Varali and Sri. An interesting feature of the thanam was the rhythm accompaniment by Raja Rao. Raja Rao usually excels at creating excitement and producing fireworks which was quite evident in his earlier thani in misra chapu. However when accompanying thanam a more sedate approach would have been welcome. Santhanagopalan gave a chance for another thani after the pallavi also.

Delhi Sundararajan gave excellent support throughout. We were very impressed with this young violinist when he had accompanied Ravi Kiran a few years ago. He has clearly matured considerably since then. I am sure he will be one the bright stars among violinists in the future.

In the post pallavi segment, Santhanagopalan sang *Rama mantra japitho* a Purandara dasa keerthana in Jonpuri, 3 thirupukazhs in Behag, Senchurutti and Madhyamavathi.

Although the concert was a mixed bag I got out with a feeling of having heard a very good concert.

**Mysore V. Nagaraj and  
V. Manjunath:  
Violin Concert  
Review By  
Chidambaram Narayanan**

The concert (June 5, 1999) ambiance was excellent with the sound system balanced to perfection. In the first few minutes itself Nagaraj and Manjunath's command over the violin was clearly evident. They have great technique along with strict adherence to shruti. The concert started off with a crisp rendering of the Saaveri Varnam (*Sarasooda*). This was followed by a fastish rendering of *Palukavatemira* in Devamanohari preceded by a small aalapanai. Shri Bhaktavatsalam (Mridangam) although technically very talented (amazing speed) came out a little insensitive to the aesthetic nuances of the kriti. This was followed by *Meru samaana* in Mayamalavagoula with a longish aalapanai. The presentation was sedate and well paced. This was followed by raaga-aalapanai in Lathangi. The brothers took turns in expounding the raaga with Manjunath bringing out slow patterns of the raaga and Nagaraj playing some intricate fast-paced sancharas. The kriti (*Marivere*) was followed by swaram exchanges which tended to be a little noisy. By this time Bhaktavatsalam had established himself as a loud and insensitive accompanist playing beautiful but unconnected thekas throughout. This reached its extreme with the next kriti (*Annapurne vishalakshi*) in Saama. The emotion of pathos so beautifully woven into the song by Muthuswami Dikshitar was attacked relentlessly by Shri Bhaktavatsalam, so much so that I even considered leaving at this point of time. For the first time I could relate with people who complain about mridangam being too loud and distractive. Well, if you are thinking "When will this guy stop complaining?" Not yet.

In any case, the next item was the main piece of the evening and the Mysore brothers chose Bowli. The raaga exposition was elaborate and complete with Manjunath successfully evoking the feeling of morning time with a very thematic aalapanai. The kriti was Par-



vathi nayaka by Swati Thirunal. This was followed by *Eduta nilachithe* in Shankarabharanam, a Thyagaraja kriti in Aadi thaalam. The brothers brought out the grandness of this Melakarta raagam with traditional sancharas. The thani-aavartanam was performed at the end of this kriti. Bhaktavatsalam played some scintillating phrases in Chaturashra nadai before playing an elaborate Khanda nadai and then ending with a bang with the traditional pharan, mohra and corvei sequence. The Mysore brothers then embarked on Raagam-Thaanam-Pallavi in raagam Shubhapanthuvrali. An excellent choice. The aalapanai was very enjoyable though there was a definite Hindustani tilt to it throughout. The pallavi was set to Khanda jaati Triputa thaalam which has to my knowledge become the thaalam of choice for pallavis. Of course, its structure I think is well suited for pallavi rendition when used in Retta-kalai format. The 5(laghu)-4(2 Drutham) combination makes it asymmetric as compared to Aadi thaalam and contributing to its complexity and aesthetics. The "traditional" raaga-maalika swarams consisted of Hamir Kalyani, Desh and Mishra Thilang all liting Hindustani raagams and very enjoyable. For the rest of the concert Nagaraj and Manjunath were unable to break away from the Hindustani mould and played Kamaas (Jaavali), Ahir Bhairav (*Pibare Raamarasam*), Sindhu Bhairavi (Lalgudi thilana), Kaapi (*Jagadodharana*) and Sindhu Bhairavi (Mangalam) in that order. I must say that all the above were rendered very well; but for a person steeped in Carnatic aesthetics it was very disappointing that almost half the concert did not do justice to that fact. I missed raagams like Saurashtram, Surutti, Madhyamaavati and other *pukka* Carnatic [ending] raagams. I came away with my Carnatic vessel only half filled. Overall Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath are very talented and fully matured musicians who can easily shoulder the burden of carrying forth this beautiful tradition of ours. Surely, I look forward to hearing them again.

Chidambaram Narayanan

## COMMUNITY NEWS

### GRADUATIONS!!

**Mahesh Swaminathan**, son of Viji and Swaminathan, graduated with honors, in Bioengineering, from the University of Pennsylvania. He will be joining the Medical program at Thomas Jefferson University this fall.

**Vidya Venkatraman**, daughter of Padmini and Venkatraman, and a recent graduate from the Springfield High School, was the valedictorian for her class. She received the Florence D-Scioscia Memorial Award, the school's top honor at graduation. Vidya will be attending Princeton University this fall.



### SRUTI Concert Tapes

A partial list of the more recent recorded music tapes are available for distribution among the patrons of Sruti. To receive any of these tapes and for a complete listing of tapes available, please contact Viji Swaminathan at (215)-643-2145. Each concert is on 2 cassettes unless specified otherwise within parentheses. Prices for Sruti members (unless noted otherwise) are: \$10 for a two-cassette set and \$15 for a three-cassette set. Non-members should add \$2 to the cost of each set. Please add \$2.00 per concert for shipping & handling.

V=Violin, M=Mridangam, G=Ghatam

Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath -Violin (1999) Thiruvarur Bhaktavatsalam (M)

Neyveli Santhanagopalan-Vocal (1999) Delhi Sundararajan (V), Srimushnam Rajarao (M)

N. Ramani-Flute (1998) Srikant Venkataraman (V) Srimushnam Rajarao (M).

Kadri Gopalanath-Saxophone (1997) Kanyakumari (V), Guruvayur Durai (M) T.N. Krishnan & Viji Krishnan Natarajan - Violin (1997) B. Harikumar (M), Vaikkom R. Gopalakrishnan (G)

Balaji Shankar - vocal (1997) Ganesh Prasad (V), Poongulam Subramaniam (M)

O.S. Thyagarajan-Vocal (1997) (3) Srikanth Venkataraman (V), Srimushnam Raja Rao (M)

Shashank-Flute (1996) Gopinath (V), Satish Kumar (M), Tripunithira Radhakrishnan (G)

Jayanthi & Padmavathi-Veena (1996)

M.S. Sheela-Vocal (1996) (3) Nalina Mohan (V), Anoor Ananthakrishna Sharma (M), Sukanya Ramgopal (G)

Nithyasree-Vocal (1996) Embar Kannan (V), Siva Kumar (M)

Vani Satish-Vocal (1995) Satish (V), Mahesh Krishnamurthy (M)

Sanjay Subramaniam-Vocal(1995) R.K. Sriramkumar (V), K. Arun Prakash (M)

Sowmya-Vocal (1995) Narmada (V), Balaji (M)

Bombay Jayashri-Vocal (1995) Vittal Ramamurthy (V), Palani Chakravarthy (M)

Charumathi Ramachandran-Vocal (1994) M. S. Anantharaman (V), Skandaprasad (M)

Sheela Ramaswamy-Vocal (1987) K.S. Mani (V), M.S. Venkatesh (M)

Vijay Siva-Vocal (1993) Shriram Kumar (V), J. Vaidhyathanan (M)

S.P. Ramh-Vocal (1994) Shashidhar (V), Satish Pathakota (M)

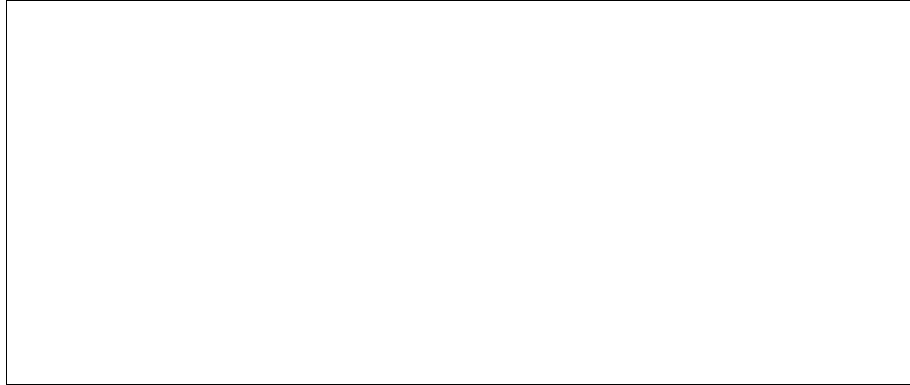
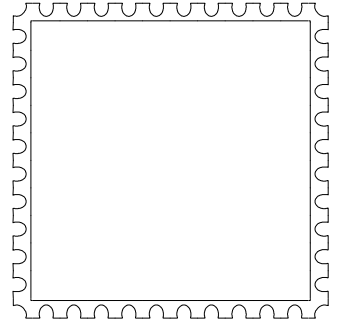


Please send your feedback/contributions to Uma Prabhakar, at 135 Brochant Drive, BlueBell, PA 19422 or e-mail to UmaSPrabhakar@hotmail.com



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