

## Exemplary jugalbandi

Shuchita Rao

A MITHAS (MIT's Heritage of the Arts of South Asia) programme featuring a jugalbandi between the Carnatic duo Malladi brothers and the Hindustani dhrupad pair of Gundecha brothers, was held at MIT's Kresge auditorium on 11 September 2011 in Boston, U.S.A.

Artists are often seen as people with big egos, difficult temperaments and low flexibility in adapting to the needs of other people. The MITHAS concert proved this assumption to be false. The two sets of brothers, Malladis and Gundechas, experts in two different styles of Indian music, came together to think, collaborate and work together towards the single mission of producing a work of art that brought Hindustani, Carnatic and Western music lovers to experience the beauty of Indian music in one place. The accompanists were Neyveli R. Narayanan (mridanga), Akhilesh Gundecha (pakhawaj), H.N. Bhaskar (violin) and Bhavana Gallewale (tanpura). In enhancing the total effect of the jugalbandi, the team proved to be competent, creative partners.

The programme started with the Malladi brothers presenting a composition on Lord Rama in raga Nata, while Gundecha brothers sang one in praise of Lord Siva in the corresponding Hindustani raga Jog. Ahir Bhairav/ Chakravakam, and Puria Dhanasree / Pantuvarali/Kamavardhini followed. Post intermission, the Gundecha brothers sang Sivaranjani, and the Malladi duo sang *Maitreem bhajata* in raga Yamunakalyani. The team then took up the Carnatic Madhyamavati and the Hindustani Megh as their main offering and concluded the concert with the Hindustani Malkauns and Carnatic Hindolam.

The programme was received very well by Hindustani and Carnatic music lovers alike. One of the listeners, Anu Chitrapu said, "Seldom does one get to hear Hindustani and Carnatic sung together – it was not just a jugalbandi but actual singing together with the two different forms running parallel for a while and then together and then separating again. The experience was magical and unique."



*Shuchita Rao spoke to the Malladi brothers and Gundecha brothers about their impressions on the unique jugalbandi after the MITHAS concert.*

**Shuchita Rao: What was your overall experience singing together on stage? Was it a successful experiment?**

*Gundecha:* Yes. You could call it an experiment and it turned out to be very successful in its objective to take the Carnatic and Hindustani styles to reach a wider audience in a single concert setting. We are satisfied that the collaboration was fruitful.

*Malladi:* Two brothers singing with two brothers (with a third Gundecha brother on the pakhawaj) is something unique and innovative, possibly the first of its kind in our times. We are mutual admirers of our music styles. Our programmes are team efforts – they are not competitions or wars. Off the stage, we go for walks together and play tennis too. We chat for hours together and discuss our individual styles and their confluence. Until now, no one from the Dagar family (or for that matter from the dhrupad tradition) had tried to perform a jugalbandi with Carnatic musicians. All credit goes to this team.

**What has been your experience working with the Malladi brothers?**

*Gundecha:* The Malladi brothers have learned from great masters and are wonderful singers. They are intelligent and efficient. We enjoy working with them.

**When did you first meet the Gundecha brothers? How did you get the idea to perform “together” on stage?**

*Malladi:* Three years ago, we sat together for about an hour at the Chembur Fine Arts Academy in Mumbai and we sang compositions in our own individual styles. It was not a jugalbandi. In 2010, we performed in Chennai and our concert was received very well and appreciated by musicians. Someone from the U.S saw a newspaper review and invited us to perform in the U.S. We are doing six concerts in U.S in September. Many people have asked us “What is the reason behind jugalbandi?” The truth is that people from North India rarely listen to South Indian music and vice-versa. We listen a lot to Nazakat Ali-Salamat Ali and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. Our father’s teacher Voleti Venkateswarlu encouraged us to do that. Hindustani music lovers should learn to appreciate Carnatic music and the same holds true for Carnatic music enthusiasts. They need to listen to Hindustani music. Our classical music should become known by the name of “Bharatiya Sangeet” or “Indian music”.

**How did you approach the task of singing a jugalbandi?**

*Gundecha:* When we decided to sing with the Malladi brothers, we put considerable thought into planning on how to make this jugalbandi effective. We listened to each other and made observations on each other’s musical content and style. We discussed with the Malladis how to bring out the best of both styles. We then isolated musical movements and components that sounded similar and those that synthesised well when we sang together. We thought of raga-s and tala-s common to both systems and came up with a plan for our jugalbandi presentation.

**Do you have any dhrupad-s in Carnatic music?**

*Malladi:* No, we do not have dhrupads in Carnatic music. After listening to dhrupad in Kasi, Muthuswami Dikshitar created compositions that sound like dhrupad. (Malladi Ravi Kumar hums a kriti in Yamunakalyani – *Nanda gopala Mukunda* – to demonstrate the point). Dikshitar also borrowed several raga-s from the north (Dwijavanti, Hameer Kalyani and Brindavana Saranga in Carnatic music) for the purpose of creating compositions in Carnatic music.

**Do you feel there is a common source of knowledge from which Hindustani and Carnatic systems branch out?**

*Gundecha:* The Hindustani and Carnatic systems do have a common source or root. The objectives are similar. The music is devotional in nature, there is similarity in the principles of raga, tala, laya, manodharma. What distinguishes the two systems is the difference in vani. In *Sangeeta Ratnakara*, Sarangadeva talks about “desh kaaku” and “sthaan kaku”. It is a difference of kaaku (the manner in which speech is rendered). Every language has its own influence on its music. There are phonetic impressions of the language on the music of the region. Our music grew up with Braj and Sanskrit. When music developed in south India, with south Indian languages, a different flavour emerged. Vidwans born in the two regions, north and south, developed the music in their own independent musical styles using the languages of those regions. However, the root of the music is the same.

*Malladi:* We agree that the source of both music systems is common. We have several common raga-s. The “phrase-wise” progression and development of raga-s is similar in both systems. There are some differences too. Carnatic compositions are longer than Hindustani compositions. We have pallavi, anupallavi and charanam, while dhrupad seems to have only sthayi and antara.

**How did you show the commonalities in the two systems of music in this concert?**

*Gundecha:* We have explored commonalities from many angles. We looked at raga-s common to the two systems such as Mohanam and Bhoopali, Malkauns and Hindolam. Our tala structures are also similar. We sing compositions in 12-beat cycles and they sing such compositions too. We, dhrupadiya-s have the habit of keeping tala with our hands as we sing, like the Carnatic musicians. The percussion instruments mridanga and pakhawaj are in a sense, similar. In ragam-tanam-pallavi, their raga alapana matches our alap, their pallavi is our sthayi, their tanam matches our jod. We learnt some Carnatic compositions and they learnt some dhrupad-s in Sanskrit. We composed a few items; they did it in the Carnatic style, we did it in Hindustani. We did not try to

imitate each other because then our unique flavours would be lost. We improvised in our own individual styles. It seemed to us that our blending was smooth.

**What are the contrasting aspects in the two systems and how did you maintain and show the contrast when you performed on stage?**

*Gundecha:* Ornamentation in the two systems is different. We have meend, gamaka and andolan ornamentations (Ramakant Gundecha demonstrates “andolan” ornamentation by singing it in both styles to show the contrast) and the Carnatic system has it too, but each system carries its own beauty. Carnatic music does have improvisation in the niraval movement but it also has some very structured patterns, as in sargam. There is no pre-conceived structure of improvisation in dhrupad. It is totally spontaneous. Our voice projections are different. In dhrupad, the voice is invoked from different parts of the body – nabhi (belly), hriday (heart), kanth (throat), nasika (nose), and mastak (forehead). In certain musical movements, it is important to project the voice from the belly, in others, the throat plays a more important role. We need to synchronise the projections at certain times. We use voice projection to suit the need of the raga, the composition and also the bhava (expression) prevalent in the composition.

We found one aspect interesting. When the Malladi brothers sang in sargam (dhrupadiya-s do not sing sargam, but have a corresponding musical movement called jhaala), we transformed our jhaala to suit the sargam they sang. The audience became very excited and gave us a standing ovation right in the middle of the concert!

### **The musicians**

**Ramakant Gundecha and Umakant Gundecha (H-vocal)**

**Malladi Sreeramprasad and Malladi Ravikumar (C-vocal)**

**H.N. Bhaskar (C-violin)**

**Akhilesh Gundecha (pakhawaj)**

**Neyveli Narayanan (mridanga)**

**Bhavani Gallewale (tanpura)**

**What aspects of Hindustani music appealed to you?**

*Malladi:* We find that the sruti foundation in Hindustani music is very solid and gives good training in voice culture. As we have always been interested in Hindustani music, it helps us maintain perfection in sruti.

**What do you feel about the dhrupad style of singing without a harmonium, violin or sarangi accompaniment?**

*Gundecha:* Even though dhrupad does not need a sarangi or violin accompaniment, H.N. Bhaskar's accompaniment was very able. Our brother Akhilesh on the pakhawaj and Neyveli Narayanan on mridanga, played extremely well. In the tani avartanam section of the programme, Neyveli Narayanan's konnakkol was excellent.

*Malladi:* We feel that dhrupad should adopt an accompanying instrument like the sarangi or violin. The pakhawaj is a beautiful instrument whose sound production matches our mridanga, but the style of playing does not match. Mridanga maestros have a different method of accompanying. Gundecha brothers may be able to sing with mridanga quite easily. We can conceive pakhawaj accompanying us in our niraval sections.

**The sensitive treatment of sruti-s or microtones and the manner in which the Gundecha brothers navigate through the various shades of musical notes with their voices are an important feature of their music. Do you feel that your music and treatment of sruti-s is similar?**

*Malladi:* Yes, our treatment of sruti-s is similar. We come from a musical family that was trained in a very traditional manner. Our father Malladi Suri Babu was a disciple of Voleti Venkateswarlu, who was known as Andhra's Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. Right from the beginning of our career, we have been singing Hindustani bhajan-s, so it was not that difficult for us to adapt to the Gundecha brothers' style of singing.

**What benefits do you see coming out of this musical partnership with the Malladi brothers?**

*Gundecha:* In the audience we found a predominance of Carnatic music lovers and 10 to 15% of non-Indian listeners. People told us after the concert that they were very happy to be exposed to great dhrupad music; they would now start listening to dhrupad. This partnership allows us to spread an awareness of dhrupad to a wider audience.

**Could you describe what you felt after your performance with the Gundecha brothers?**

*Malladi:* We felt very happy after the concert. We liked perseverance of the Gundecha brothers on stage. They treat raga-s in a very disciplined manner. In Telugu, we call this “madi”. They maintain the purity of raga-s just as it is done in Carnatic music. They have very good coordination and they harmonise very well. There is cogency between the brothers. At a recent concert, Ramakant sang *Rama nee samaanamevaru* in raga Kafi very well. The audience liked his rendition. At Visakhapatnam in August this year, I sang Hindustani Megh while my brother sang the corresponding Carnatic raga Madhyamavati. Rasika-s loved the concert and told us they were beginning to appreciate the differences as well as the similarities between the two systems.

“Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success,” said Henry Ford. The idea of bringing dhrupad and Carnatic music to one platform was innovative and the MITHAS team needs to be complimented for bringing such a wonderful concert to Boston. A team of seven exceptional musicians brought joy to music lovers.

