

SRUTI BOX - 391

A breath of fresh air

I am neither an artist nor a learned rasika of Carnatic music, but a busy and a little stressed corporate professional who enjoys reading *Sruti* for a variety of good reasons. One is that it refreshes my mind away from my profession, gives me an insight into one of the oldest artistic forms in the world and makes me understand how an artist, especially a young artist, thinks and communicates. From this perspective, the interview with Bharathi Ramasubban (*Sruti* 389) came as a breath of fresh air.

Bharathi seems to me just another youngster in academic pursuit of a career driven by society who kept her mind open to identify her real passion. This requires courage and parental or family support which she recalls in her interview. Second is her ability to learn the art in a very unconventional way compared with how academic subjects are taught nowadays to students. Coming from my corporate background, I have always been intrigued by the absence of performing artists in the audience. In my profession, peer learning is extremely important as the cost of a wrong strategy or practice can be very high and we always look at peers for learnings and advice.

Overall the interview was well delivered and the interviewer, another young artist I understand, was equally good at asking leading questions.

Murali Rajagopalan
Pune

Divine music

Many rasikas and musicians are unable to dissociate bhakti from classical music which is really art music. They expect the performers to involve themselves in the divine aspect in the compositions in order to bring out the full impact of the piece. The melodic, rhythmic and poetic aspects alone can be highlighted and this is what

is happening. This thought occurred to me because of the huge popularity of a few top ranking musicians who draw a large number of knowledgeable listeners in spite of their declared or not-so-openly declared rationalist belief. There are also other musicians who only pay lip service to the divinity aspect in order to please rasikas as well as organisers. Of course, some listeners may extrapolate while listening.

*R. Narasimhan
Chennai*

Golden potter

Congratulations on the varied contents of *Sruti* 390 (March 2017) including a writeup on ghatam maestro T.H. Vinayakram. I first heard his ghatam playing in the precincts of Seshadripuram High School, in Bengaluru at the Sri Ramanavami Music festival in 1963 when he accompanied violin wizard Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu with Trichy Sankaran on the mridangam. The concert was reduced to 90 minutes due to heavy rain before the event. The presence of young Vinayakram with his charming look, curly hair, constant smile and humility and his strokes on the instrument, was highly commended by the gathering. Next day, he was asked to accompany M. Balamuralikrishna, with M.S. Gopalakrishnan on the violin and T.V. Gopalakrishnan on the mridangam. Then onwards, he was a regular participant in the festival.

In early 1970, I developed an intimate contact with him through my close friends Tanjore Upendran, Guruvayur Dorai and Flute Ramani. He was very generous in his concert fees and never bargained about remuneration. On my request he participated in numerous concerts in Karnataka and carved a niche for himself here. His achievements as a globetrotter with his pot and his services to music as a teacher par excellence deserve him a Sangita Kalanidhi at least this year considering his seniority and eligibility.

It was my privilege to introduce his disciple—the one and only female ghatam player Sukanya Ramgopal —to the Bengaluru audience in 1978 to accompany well

known vocal duo Radha-Jayalakshmi of yesteryear. That resulted in noted khanjira player H.P. Ramachar withdrawing from the concert in protest as he was not consulted for accommodating an up-and-coming young girl playing ghatam with him. Sukanya's debut was hailed by all and opened a flood of opportunities to her in Karnataka and Bengaluru became her matrimonial home later. It is an irony that the very same Ramachar was involved as the director of Tala Tarangini—the women's percussive ensemble that included Sukanya Ramgopal as the main ghatam player.

*C.P. Chikkanna
Bengaluru*

Subbudu's centenary

In the March issue of *Sruti*, my father P.V. Subramaniam aka Subbudu's photograph appeared in the birthday calendar. This is his centenary year.

The art world has a very short memory and it is no surprise that it has forgotten him completely. Is it so because he was a critic? There has been no writing or news item on him even in your magazine.

*Maj. P.S. Sriram (Retd.)
by email*

Stamps 100

My heartiest congratulations to S. Sankaranarayanan on writing 100 articles in the *Art-Stamps* series, going into very minute details of relevant stamps, institutions and musicians, by doing extensive research. These articles are a source of great inspiration to music lovers as well as stamp collectors. *Sruti* has given great importance to the 100th article on the Brihadeeswara temple of Tanjavur by publishing its picture on the cover page of the January issue (*Sruti* 388) and covering the long article in two issues. As a lover of music and a collector of stamps, coins and currency issued all over the world on the topic of music, for over the last 30 years, I found the articles to be of great educational value.

Sankaranarayanan covered every aspect of philately and numismatics in the particular article. *Sruti* has been generous in publishing the complete list of titles of 100 articles as a ready reference, which is very useful.

Cdr. G. Sri Ramarao, I.N. (Retd.)
Bengaluru

A guru and a gentleman

My first guru was my father Tirupoonthuruthi Viswanatha Bhagavatar, a talented, well-versed and highly respected vidwan. The influence of my paternal uncle, the redoubtable Mangudi Chidambara Bhagavatar, who was the doyen of Harikatha exponents of those days, was another reason for my interest in Carnatic music. Though I was giving stage concerts, I chose not to be a professional musician in my younger days and was working in the Southern Railway at Tanjavur.

I believe my commitment to music and my intense efforts to improve my proficiency attracted the attention of the great mridanga vidwan Palghat Mani Iyer who was then living in Tanjavur. He took great interest in my musical career and took me to Alathur Srinivasa Iyer in 1971 and requested him to groom me. The Alathur Brothers, Sivasubramania Iyer and Srinivasa Iyer had already become stars in the galaxy of front-ranking Carnatic musicians by that time.

Srinivasa Iyer taught me the nuances of Carnatic music with great affection and sincerity for over three and a half years. I had to see him in his house twice a week. I used to board the Shencottah Passenger from Tanjavur, then travel by bus and walk over to Srinivasa Iyer's house. Such travel was always an ordeal but my interest in music and respect for my guru did not diminish my enthusiasm. Often I had to make unofficial "adjustments" in my professional routine with the help of my colleagues. On the occasions when he had other engagements, I had to return without coaching. Still I must say that I gained immensely from my brilliant guru and learnt nearly 25 kritis and three pallavis over those three and half years.

Srinivasa Iyer did not accept any money from me. I used to take fresh betel leaves, handmade “seeval” and the famous “Sivapuri” tobacco, of which he was very fond. My guru accepted these with great happiness. Srinivasa Iyer’s wife was so kind that she never allowed me to leave their house without offering sumptuous and delicious tiffin after class.

The climax was in 1973 when I was invited for a concert by the management of Nandrudayan Pillayar koil at Tiruchi. This was a prestigious concert in those days. I was accompanied by L. Ganapathia Pillai on the violin and Palghat Mani Iyer on the mridangam. In those days Mani Iyer was actively promoting “mikeless concerts” as a mission. This was one such mikeless kutcheri. Alathur Srinivasa Iyer attended this concert and patted me on the back. Palghat Mani Iyer nodded his head in appreciation. Can there be a greater moment in one’s life?

It so happened that I was fortunate enough to have Palghat Mani Iyer support me on the mridangam in many more mikeless concerts at places like Valmiki Mandapam in Tiruvaiyaru, Udagamandalam, Kumbakonam and Chennai.

When comes another guru and gentleman like Alathur Srinivasa Iyer?

*Thirupoonthuruthi Venkatesan
Chennai*

Errors & Exculpations

Sruti 390, Sruti Box The building in the photograph on p. 4 is the house of Muthuswami Dikshitar at Tiruvarur (not of Syama Sastry as mentioned).

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