

**Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira (R)**

(Distinguished Service to Carnatic Music since 1955)

# **Lalitha Kala Tarangini**

Quarterly Music Magazine

Volume 2015, Issue 3

July 2015



**Special Edition**

Visit us online at [www.srlkmandira.org](http://www.srlkmandira.org)  
Please do share your feedback with [srlkmandira@gmail.com](mailto:srlkmandira@gmail.com)

## **“Raaga Laya Prabha” to HM Smitha and BC Manjunath**

Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira awarded “Raaga Laya Prabha” to Violinist HM Smitha and Mridangist BC Manjunath on 07<sup>th</sup> June 2015. This award is to commemorate the memory of the Founder-Director, Karnataka Kalashree GV Ranganayakamma and her sister, Founder-patron and Veena artiste Dr. GV Vijayalakshmi. The award carries a cash prize of rupees Twenty Five Thousand and a citation.

The award function was followed by a concert of Sangeetha Kalanidhi Sudha Ragunathan which happened to be our 1500<sup>th</sup> concert.



*From L to R - Shri. GV Krishna Prasad, Hon. Secretary SRLKM, Sangeetha Kalanidhi Sudha Ragunathan, Ex. Union Minister of India SM Krishna, BC Manjunath, HM Smitha*

July 2015

Dear Readers,

Five kritis learnt from Shri. NM Narayanan (The Hindu critic) in 1965, Sangeetha Kala Acharya Neela Ramgopal is a treasure house of Karnatak Music today and she probably has the widest repertoire that includes many post trinity composers from across South India. It is a lesson for our youngsters considering majority of this is self learnt with utmost determination and dedication. She is not finished yet and her journey continues. At a felicitation function marking her 80th birthday recently, she said, god willing, she will live for 100 yrs, learn more and continue to serve her student community.

From her first public appearance at 'Navaratri Program', where her music was not so well received by her family and others, she has fought every battle personal or music, and always been on the winning side. For her, nothing is impossible and that word does not find a place in her dictionary.

Neela Mami's music really blossomed after marriage with Shri. Ramgopal with his family fully supporting her endeavour. Ramgopal mama helped the cause further being a staunch follower of GN Sir and Madurai Mani Iyer. GN Sir school influenced mami's music so much so that she would listen to MLVs recording all day long and started singing exactly like MLV. She was in such a good nick that MLV asked her to provide her vocal support for several of her concerts. It is also a fact that mami changed her style to instil originality later.

One of Mami's greatest virtues is that she makes it a point to attend others concert be it established or upcoming. Rarely we come across a musician, who takes

such a keen interest in youngsters, gives them advice and blesses them wholeheartedly. As a human being, she is very special and a complete person. Every time I meet her, there is a feeling of energy, confidence and positivity that has made each one of my interactions so very special. On behalf of our readers and SRLKM, I wish her a long tenure for the benefit of our music.

I am happy to inform that SRLKM has completed 60 years of purposeful existence by providing quality music. It also completed 1500<sup>th</sup> concert recently. I am sure Shri. Vedanta Iyengar will be very pleased with his children's achievements who have worked tirelessly in realising his vision.

We are covering 'Bangalore Gayana Samaja', one of the three oldest Sabhas in the country, as part of our "Great Stages of Karnatak Music" series. I am sure it will bring back old memories to some of our readers who have been part of this institution for long.

Kalavantha-2015, second year in succession was opened up internationally that gained momentum significantly. The overall execution was far superior with the quality of music moving a notch higher. Karnataka Fine Arts Council has charted out bigger plans in the days to come considering the huge success they have enjoyed so far.

Anand S

**Contributors and Photo courtesies:**

Sudha Prakash, Rajashree Yogananda, Sachi R Sachidananda, Vrinda Acharya, Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, Sumitra Nitin, Priyanka Prakash, Geetha Murthy, Deepa Ganesh, KS Kalidas. Photo courtesy - Paniraj, Sreeranjani Kodampally, Neela Mami Personal collection, Priyanka Prakash. Gayana Samaja archive, The Hindu archive.

Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira (SRLKM) founded by Shri. G Vedanta Iyengar in the year 1955 is rendering yeomen service in the field of music. In addition to music classes, music concerts are held all through the year. The significant festivals are Sankaranti and Spring music festivals. Mandira also takes pride in conducting music awareness program, music workshops, Lecture demonstrations etc. Entry to all program conducted by the Mandira is free as the aim of the institution is to enable everyone to listen to the best of the music and to propagate Karnatak Classical Music. SRLKM is a Trustee of Karnataka Fine Arts Council (Regd.) which is a consortium of 10 sabhas in Bangalore.

"Lalitha Kala Tarangini" publication is fostered by Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, disseminates knowledge in the area of Karnatak Classical Music and bring to light talent and excellence in this area. We believe this is just another step towards preserving and promoting this great Indian fine art.

All Rights Reserved- All articles, photographs and material appearing in this magazine whether in whole or part is copyright of Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira exclusively. No part of this magazine should be reproduced or stored in any form without prior consent. While Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira takes all the care to verify the correctness of information, it is quite possible that there could be an occasional inaccuracy in our publication.

**Magazine Committee**

**Editor - Anand S**

**Senior Associates:** Neela Ramgopal, KS Kalidas, Dr. Mysore M Manjunath, GV Neela, Rajashree Yogananda, Deepa Ganesh and Sudha Prakash.

Printed and published by GV Krishna Prasad on behalf of Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, No. 28, 9th Main Road, Near Devagiri Venkateshwara Temple, Banashankari II Stage, Bangalore 560070, Karnataka, India.



## Contents

04 Sangeetha Kalanidhi 2015

05 Palghat Mani Iyer and Palani Subramanya Pillai

- 11 Quintessential Musician
- 13 A passionate pursuit
- 16 Spiritual sojourn through music
- 19 Marking six decades
- 20 Effervescent at 80...
- 22 An eternal music
- 24 Bangalore Gayana Samaja
- 29 Neela Mami at 80!
- 31 A contest with prizes with no winners?
- 33 Tasmai Sri Gurave namaha
- 36 MLV the Master Musician..
- 38 Aural treat by Vijaya Siva
- 39 Lasting impressions of Lec-Dem

## Lalitha Kala Tarangini - Inbox

Dear Sirs,

My name is Dr. MS Vasudevan and am the second son of the late Shri MS Selvapillaiyengar (I currently reside in the United Kingdom).

Reading the article by Shri. S.Krishnamurthy was for me a very heartwarming and emotional experience indeed-bringing me back a flood of cherished memories about my dear departed father and enabled me to relive my younger days. I particularly remember Shri Krishna-murthy as my father's esteemed colleague at the AIR and as a dear friend often visiting us at home.

To Shri.Krishnamurthy, myself and all our extended family are very grateful and we deeply appreciate his contribution to the April 2015 issue of your magazine. I would be grateful if you can please convey to him our warmest regards as well as our profuse thanks.

Thanking you,  
Dr MS Vasudevan

Dear Sri Anand,

It was a pleasant surprise to me to see my profile in LKT, April issue. It was factually very correct – as if you had interviewed me in person.

However, when I went “vanvaas” in Lucknow and Delhi between 1978 and 1986, Delhi AIR gave me a lot of

opportunities to play for local and visiting artists, sometimes even thrice a month.

I think the total number of concerts I played in Delhi AIR (including DD) was almost equal to the ones I played in AIR, Chennai.

Among the great musicians I played with during my playing days, were TM Thiagarajan, KV Narayanaswamy, MA Kalyanakrishna Bhagavathar, Lalgudi G Jayaraman, MS Gopalakrishnan, TN Krishnan, VV Subramanian, Dr. M Balamuralikrishna, M Chandrasekaran, Nedanuri Krishnamurthy, Chittibabu, DK Jayaraman, PS Narayanaswamy, B Rajam Iyer, S Kalyanaraman, Dr. S Ramanathan and many others including the great Kanjira artist of modern times, G Harishankar.

It was all due to my Guru's kataaksha.

Yours Truly,  
KS Kalidas

Dear Mr. Krishna Prasad and Mr.Anand,

It is always a pleasure to read "Lalitha Kala Tarangini". Every publication is informative bringing the best of what is happening in today's Karnatak music world and a blissful glimpse into the past years. Your efforts are much appreciated. Your article on Prasanna Seetharama Mandira in the April 2015 edition made me pause for

many minutes reflecting into my childhood. It was here that I started my music journey as a student and also listened to some of the best concerts during the Ramavami season. Thanks to Sachidananda for writing this and to you for carrying this wonderful article.

Eagerly looking forward to the next edition.  
**Mysore Sateesh**

Dear Shri. Krishna Prasad and Anand,  
First of all, We would like to express our deep gratitude and thanks to the editorial people of Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Tarangini magazine. Especially to Sri Krishna Prasad and Anand, (editor of this magazine), For having taken initiative to report about the 95th Birth Anniversary of Sri. Vidwan RK Srikantan in the magazine.

We are also regular readers of this magazine which is very special, because it covers a lot of information about music. It handles music articles written by great masters. The articles covered reflects various aspects of music which gives opportunity for us to improve our knowledge and be curious to know more about it. It captures the attention and interest of music lovers. The quality and style and presentation of the articles and the photographs featured has been excellent. It is inspiring to note that Sri Krishna Prasad is doing a commendable job and yeomen service in the field of music both as an organiser and publisher of this magazine.

He has been very close associate of our family especially to my father who was very close to his father and used to call him Kittu with affection and was teaching music to his sisters. At the same time Krishna Prasad has great respect to my father and his music.

We pray God that let Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira celebrate it's 100th year and also the magazine become more and more famous with world wide readers for this magazine. We would suggest the publisher of this magazine to come out with more and more good articles of music and also great musicians for the youngsters to know more about the same.

Your Sincerely,  
Vidwan R.K.Srikantan Trust  
(R.S.Ramakanth and R.S. Kumar)

Dear Sir,  
I am in receipt of the e-copy of your very nice and informative magazine – Lalitha Kala Tharangini – the latest edition which features the great Neduneri Garu – I have from my young age, listened to his concerts and have always followed his music which has depth, richly classical; we treasure his compositional rendering as well –

and we are really happy to see the cover picture and the editorial mention – special thanks to Shri Chikkanna to have written a beautiful article on the same.

Your sincerely,  
**Vijay S Narayanan, Mysore**

Dear Sir,  
We thank you for your high quality magazine which is getting bigger and more voluminous and qualitatively superior with each edition; what can we say about this particular edition – which has in just one edition – the tall Neduneri-garu, the divine MS Amma, synonymous with violin – Vidwan Chowdiah, the child prodigy which was snatched away from us so soon – Mandolin U Srinivas and the one – and – only Begum Parveen Sultana; the icing on the cake are the articles by Ranjani-Gayathri; Wishing you all the very best.

Sincerely  
**Tripurasundari Rao, Chennai**

## Errata

An inadvertent error has occurred in the last edition of the magazine concerning the story on Shri. MS Selva Pillai lyengar. Page 26, para 3, 'The 72 melakartha ragamalika of Ramaswamy Dikshitar' should read as 'The 72 melakartha ragamalika of Maha Vaidyanathan Iyer'. We regret the same.

## Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira Awards for 2016

SRLKM announced the following awards on  
7th June 2015.

**Sangeetha Vedantha Dhureena**  
(To be given away during Spring Festival-2016)

Vidwan Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Vocal)

**Raaga Laya Prabha**  
(To be given away during June or July-2016)

Vid.Vinay Sharva (Vocal)  
Chi. Ramana Balachandra (Veena)

# Sangeetha Kalanidhi 2015

Sudha Prakash

Sangeetha Kalanidhi designate Sanjay Subrahmanyam has a very nice ring to it-of erudition, of vidwat, of a significant and momentous accomplishment, of the years of hard work, perseverance and dedication and total surrender to the great art that Carnatic Music is - it was announced on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 2015, by The Music Academy Madras, that Vidwan Sanjay Subrahmanyam will preside over the conference for the year 2015-16.

As Historian V Sriram says, part of the elite group of 13 who received it before they reached 50! Sangita Kala Acharya, Vidushi Neela Ramgopal says "Truly well-deserved!", she says.... "Sanjay is truly versatile in all aspects; his 'bhakti' towards music is unparalleled, and that he epitomised 'tireless striving' all through the years...."

Everyone knows that Vidwan Sanjay Subrahmanyam is a rank-holding-Cost Accountant and a Chartered Accountant... of his initial tutelage by his grand-aunt Smt. Rukmini Rajagopalan, then senior Guru Sri Calcutta Krishnamurthy and for many years from Nagaswara Vidwan Sempanarkoil SRD Vaidyanathan.

Vidwan Sanjay is an acclaimed Guru – some of his prominent disciples include – Prasanna Venkatraman, Sandeep Narayan, Swarna Rethas, Jayanth (Flute) and many others.

Vidwan Sanjay Subrahmanyam is a veritable genius - he is indeed a role-model for aspiring young musicians and dare I say, for all young professionals. An extremely intelligent musician-Sanjay, enthralled audiences the world over always, with his amazing concerts-there is always something new, 3-plus hours of creative genius, versatility, innovation, and sheer brilliance..... He is known for his discipline-always on time (read-well before time) for his concerts, he \*never\* takes audiences for granted.

It's a happy coincidence that, as was in the case of Sudha Raghunathan, the Sangeetha Kalanidhi title announcement follows SRLKM's announcement of 'Sangeetha Vedanta Dhureena' being bestowed on Vidwan Sanjay Subrahmanyam.

On behalf of the Lalitha Kala Tarangini Team, we wish to convey our heartiest congratulations to this great artist and wish him many many many decades of overwhelming performances!



# Palghat Mani Iyer and Palani Subramanya Pillai

Vidwan KS Kalidas

Differing in age by just 4 years - Palani Subramanya Pillai (Palani), born 1908 and Palghat Mani Iyer born 1912, the legendary twosome provided an unforgettable feast of laya to music lovers from the early decades of the 20th century up to its sixties. Palani was gone in 1962 and Mani in 1981, but one can not think of or talk of one without in some way bringing the other in to picture.

After about 5 yrs of training at Culcutta, I had the good fortune of learning from Palani for a couple of years. On a few occasion while teaching me and my fellow students, he would sink in to a reverie and relive the past. For him 'periya-vanga' (literally elders) meant Pudukottai Dakshinamurthy Pillai whom he never mentioned by name. He would play a sollukattu, the way 'periya-vanga' would have handled it. On a couple of occasions, he also mentioned that Kumbakonam Azhaganambiah Pillai's method of playing was extremely simple without any vyavaharam (laya intricacies) but it was so sonorous

that listeners would compare him favourably with Dakshinamurthy Pillai. Those days, in fifties a disciple posing questions to the 'guru' was unthinkable and one had to be content with what the guru chose to tell. Thus, it was not possible to form our opinion on those great artistes analytically; not that even a more vivid description would have enabled me in my teens then, to get much insight. I have heard from my father and his friends, all keen listeners, about the two pillais and their prowess but this again was not good enough for me as technical details were not available. The few 78 rpm Gramophone records of Chembai Vaidhyanatha Bhagavathar in which Dakshinamurthy Pillai played on the Kanjira (his mridangam playing records are not available at all - perhaps they were never made), which I heard a few years ago, thanks to a collector of vintage music as well as radio broadcasts, do not give a full account of the vidwan's prowess. What can a mere three minute or six minute record in which alapana, kriti, neraval and swara's and a



half a minute Tani with two percussionists - Mridangam and Kanjira artistes - are packed in reveal? Ofcourse an alert listener did discover flashes of the tonal quality and uniqueness of a few sollukattu's but that was all.

Except for the fact that mridangam or its fore-runner has remained in the Tamil country from the Sangam age if not earlier, the modern mridangam and techniques of playing it have come down to us thanks to settling down in Tanjavur and adjoining areas, of Marathi bhajan and Harikatha troupes after Shivaji established the Maratha empire and its influence spread to the northern, and central and southern parts of the country. Tanjavur itself was the melting pot of cultures - the original Tamil, Telugu (Naik) and Maratha. Mridangam was an essential accompaniment to Bhajan-s, katha-s (Harikatha), and dance (Sadir as it was then known). The names now familiar to us among the descendants of Marathi-speaking mridangam players are Narayanaswamy Appa and Tukaramappa. The terms used in Mridanga play 'tehka', 'chapu', 'mohra' clearly indicate their Maratha origin and the term 'faran' suggests North Indian - as distinct from the Maratha-connection. A close relation of Mridangam, the Dholak also seems to have been a popular instrument, being played in bhajan-s and in folk arts like Tamasha and Lavani.

However, the art of playing the modern mridangam in Tanjavur was essentially based on the tradition of Maratha percussionists. In this type of playing, the predominant function of mridangam was in the establishment and maintenance of kalapramanam and the addition of rhythmic lilt to the composition being sung by appropriate jati-s and rounding off a passage by an appropriate teermanam or mohra. In their handling of the instrument, basic rhythmic support and sonorous stroke-s, the tehka-s, chapu-s, were paramount and vyavaharam was minimal.

In the 18th and 19th century and also the first few decades of 20th, music and other forms of fine arts used to be patronised by the rulers of principalities such as Tanjavur, Pudukottai, Ettayapuram and Ramanathapuram, not to forget

larger states like Travancore and Mysore. Events like weekly Bhajan-s, Harikatha, and Radha Kalyanam did take place, but organised concerts took off only during the closing decades of the 19th century. Sabha-s were to come up only after the dawn of the 20th century.

However, tavil playing was a living tradition for many centuries in the Tamil country as an accompaniment to nagaswara music in temples and secular functions like marriage, upanayanam etc. Over the centuries, tavil playing acquired great laya intricacies all its own and spread its wings beyond Tamil land in to neighbouring regions. The Cauvery delta, Pudukottai, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Palani, besides other important towns of religious/commercial importance became centres of percussion art and myriad shades of tavil art evolved at these centres. To this day, laya intricacies (vyavaharam) indulged in by tavil vidwans have not been excelled by any mridangam vidwan.

Pudukottai, long famous for its temple and the royal court, had its own tavil and nagaswara artistes, some employed in temples, others in royal manors and still others, freelance artistes. One Marimuthu pillai, a renowned Tavil vidwan was in service of the royal court and besides his state duties, was also participating in secular and religious functions. A disciple of his, Manpoondia Pillai (1857-1922) by name, played on Khanjira, till then was a folk instrument, sometimes played for Bhajan-s. It was improved tonally and Manpoondia Pillai could play on the single-sided instrument what ever his guru played on the two sided tavil. The Khanjira, as an instrument is tonally severely restricted with only two sounds, 'tha' and 'dhum' emanating from it. But Pillai developed a playing technique that produced fast 'faran' patterns and also the equivalent of the 'gumki' of the mridangam. Soon the Khanjira was elevated to the status of the concert instrument, a prestigious one at that. Very often, if the Khanjira artist was the senior of the two, he was seated nearer the audience.

Manpoondia Pillai's disciples included, among others, Pudukottai Dakshinamurthy Pillai and

Palani Muthiah Pillai, both highly versatile artistes with great proficiency in handling various percussion instruments such as Taval, Khanjira, Ghata and Mridangam. As far as percussion history is concerned, this was its golden period.

It will not be out of place to mention here that, in the Tamil country, as in various other parts of India, historically the music and dance performers constituted a distinct caste, almost always attached to the temples. The higher classes involved with music and dance were, more often than not, scholars, chroniclers, codifiers and composers who laid down rules governing the performance of the fine arts and often patronised the performing class. There were also linkages between the two classes-both platonic and physical liaison - as many women of the performing classes were, by tradition, 'married' to the deity of the local temple, a system declining from the middle of 20th century. The performing caste was perhaps socially looked down upon but their cultural attainment were lauded. Great vidwans from the performing - the 'isai vellalar' community - were held in great respect by everyone, irrespective of caste or status. The interaction between the 'performing' and 'patronising' classes was extremely beneficial to the art form as in the case of cross relationship in any field.

That the musicologist became performer happened first in vocal music when Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer and Patnam Subramanya Iyer, two generations removed from the Trinity of Thyagaraja, Dikshitar and Shyama Sastry started giving concerts not in the present format, perhaps, but concerts they certainly were. Then followed an explosion of talent among the hitherto 'non-performing' classes-brahmins and non-brahmins (excluding isai vellalar-s) although the proportion of the second-named was minimal and remains so to this day.

All this lengthy preamble is necessary to understand the development of the two schools of laya and the stars these schools produced-namely Palani and Mani.

The two schools developed independently and although the distance between Tanjavur and

Pudukottai was only 35 miles, their interaction was minimal for a few decades, due to the constraint in the transport and communication and the number of public concerts being few and far between. However, by the time Azhaganambia Pillai of the Tanjavur school and Dakshinamurthy Pillai of Pudukottai school were holding the fort, much better contacts had been established and, while the Pudukottai school absorbed some of the aesthetic elements of the Tanjavur school, the latter did likewise on the vyavahara aspects that were the hallmark of the Pudukottai school.

Tanjavur Vaidyanatha Iyer was among the few brahmin mridangam artists who first made inroads in to the 'Isai Vellalar' fort. However, it was left to Palghat Mani to open up the laya field to other than traditional performers just as Rukmini Devi did for dance. We should remember that Mani himself had received his initial training from Chathapuram Subba Iyer and only later did he come under the tutelage of Vaidyanatha Iyer. According to the late Kallidaikurichi Mahadeva Bhagavatar, Vaidyanatha Iyer himself had been initiated into some laya vyavaharam by none other than Dakshinamurthy Pillai and thus, although Mani can be technically classified as belonging to Tanjavur School, he had derived inspiration from different sources including the folk traditions of Kerala like the Chenda. With these under his belt, he also observed and imbibed certain aspect of laya from taval vidwans of the area and it has been said that he modelled 'kriti playing' technique after the great Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai who was described by people who had heard him and whom this writer had the privilege to speak to, as playing taval in a way one would play the mridangam; the tonal quality would equal that of mridangam! Mani also played in concerts with Dakshinamurthy Pillai whom he held in the highest respect and who had a role in influencing his play.

Palani Subramanya Pillai, on the other hand, descended from a lineage of percussion artistes who had been playing the taval for many generations. His father and guru, Muthiah Pillai, earlier

a tavil vidwan of great repute, later took up mridangam and the Khanjira and was considered as good as, if not better than Dakshinamurthy Pillai himself in certain respects. Palani, besides being the son and disciple of a great master, considered Dakshinamurthy Pillai as his 'Manaseeka guru', such was his great respect and regard for him. It is a fact not widely known but he played the mridangam in concerts where either his father or Dakshinamurthy Pillai played the Khanjira. That was the time when Khanjira was considered even superior to the Mridangam, thanks to stature given to it by Manpoondia Pillai (Palani was later to play Khanjira with Mani on Mridangam in many concerts). Palani also struck up a close friendship with Iluppur (aka Malaikottai) Panchapakesa Pillai (Panchami), one of the greatest tavil vidwans ever, who was a fine vocalist and khanjira vidwan too. Although Panchami was senior to Palani, they spent much time sharing ideas. Unfortunately, like many geniuses, he died very young when he was only twenty nine years old.

Palani's other influence was Tabla and according to late T Sankaran (Grandson of Veena Danammal), whenever Palani came over to the Radio Station at Tiruchi for a performance (where T Sankaran was Asst. Station Director), he would invariably play on the studio's tabla for a while. The 'bhaya' of the tabla corresponds to the 'toppi' of the mridangam and any observer would have noticed that the gumki performs a major role in tabla playing. Palani's gumki, including the positioning of his palm and its movements across the toppi was entirely influenced by the tabla artistry. He also picked up the tabla's tehka-s in his inimitable and unexcelled use of soft sollu patterns while playing for tukkada-s in the later part of the concert.

Thus then we see that while Mani and Palani are usually represented as scions of the Tanjavur and Pudukottai schools respectively, in reality they went far beyond the boundaries of their schools, thanks partially to their innate quest for broader rhythmic experiences and partially due to better communications between the two schools themselves. T Sankaran, who was well acquainted with both the vidwans told me

that both Palani and Mani would attend concerts where Tanjavur Ramdas Rao played, intently watching and internalising the way he played his stokes, especially the chapu-s.

They adopted styles of playing all their own. Mani's accompanying techniques for songs would be to follow Sangati-s faithfully and Palani's was nadai based with emphasis on the 'take-off' or other important points in the kriti. Of course, one can not stretch this fact beyond a point; it is not that Palani and Mani played at all times like this.

Mani's playing was always rousing from the start of the concert to its finish and he was an ace communicator with the audience. The audience just loved him and no wonder that he was the most popular mridangam vidwan in the 1940's and the 1950's. The vocalists (or the instrumental soloist), with the exception of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar who was his mentor, often overawed or even overwhelmed by him. Very often it would appear that the concert was centered around him and not the main performer. People have at times accused him of being a show-stealer and putting himself ahead of the team but the enormous success of the concerts in which he participated proved that it was not so. However, he was an artist whom the main performer could ignore only at his or her peril. He was the embodiment of supreme confidence. His stroke play was bold and would ring out loud and clear with flourishes in the higher tempo.

Palani's mridanga play was a study in contrast. There were no exuberant flourishes nor showmanship. His performances would always merge with that of the team; he was always a team man. He was the master of understatement. His motto in playing for kriti-s was 'poshaakku' - adding nourishment to the kriti itself. He was always considered as the main performer's best friend and partner. The mix of intellectual and aesthetic aspect in his playing was optimum. He was quintessentially the musician's musician. His sarvalaghu patterns were most famous but they were also played on the spur of the moment and never tiresomely

repetitive. The sarvalaghu would often be interspersed with cross-patterns or 'edir nadai-s'. Madurai Mani Iyer used to call him a 'tyagi', one who made sacrifices for the success of the concert.

If Mani was the Cecil B. DeMille of Mridangam (The Ten Commandments, the glorious spectacle), Palani was David O. Selznick (of the unforgettable classic, 'Gone with the Wind'). TK Murthy, a close associate of Palani and Mani says Palani was Jupiter to Mani's Saturn (Sruti 33/34). Another writer Sriram V, has gone lyrical in comparing them to Sun's rays (Mani) and the Moon's (Palani)

Their personalities were also very different; Mani, a man of few words and taciturn; Palani, genial to a fault. Of course both had special friends with whom they opened up without restraint. Lalgudi G Jayaraman said in the course of an interview that where Palani was, there was also 'gauravam' (dignity).

Palani's handling of the toppi, especially the gumki, has remained unmatched. It is said that none in the earlier generations, and certainly none during his time or later could come anywhere near its extraordinary beauty. His speciality was also the fine balance between the 'valantalai' and 'toppi' strokes and the 'vallinam' (forceful) and 'melinum' (soft) patterns. He also insisted on the simultaneous use of valantalai and toppi wherever possible although it was much more difficult and one could have got away with a single-handed stroke. "Ottha kai vaasippu vaasikkade ayya" (do not play single handed strokes) was his constant refrain to us, his students. On the aesthetic front (he had given up much of his vyavaharam-based playing as suggested by Chembai, his mentor), he had no equals.

The two vidwans complemented each other in the music field. There was also variety available in Ramanathapuram Murugaboopathy, another stalwart. The major vocalists of the golden era of music were fortunate in having these three titans to choose from.

While Mani had the advantage of the immensely popular Chembai to back him even as a teenag-

er, Palani had no such luck. His being a left hander was held against him and many senior violinists would not accommodate him in their place. Although all came round when Palani became famous, Papa Venkataramaiah did not relent except during AIR concerts where the seating arrangement was informal. Till Chembai came around having him as his accompanist, Palani had to rely on 'Laya-heavy' vidwans like Naina Pillai, Chittoor Subramaniya Pillai, PS Vedachalam Chettiar, Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer and Alathur Brothers with an occasional concert of a Musiri, Mazhavarayanendal Subarama Bhagavatar or Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer thrown in. From around 1942 till 1962, both Palani and Mani performed in an equal number of concerts in any music series in any part of India. Chembai told me during a train journey, how, in a span of couple of years, he ensured that Palani got the same fee as Mani for his concerts.

As Ariyakudi and Mani were made for each other, so were Madurai Mani Iyer and Palani. This is not to say that Palani did not accompany Ariyakudi or Mani, Madurai Mani Iyer; in fact they did so on many occasion. If on one specific date one was not available, the other usually substituted. There were other similarities too. GNB teamed together with Mani in the earlier years and Palani in the later years; the Alathur Brothers and Palani were inseparable in the earlier years and Mani replaced Palani in the later years.

Both of them had good personal relationship and held each other in high esteem. However both had differences about the way the mridangam should be played and I have heard from many sources that they had letters exchanged too in The Hindu. Research in this direction would help students. I was a witness to a lecture demonstration by Palani in the Music Academy when he suggested that mridangam playing for kriti-s should not follow the sangati to sangati and Mani Iyer, in a speech on laya, criticised certain vyavaharam aspects of Palani. The recording of this speech is available widely. Both were careful not to mention the other by name but the inference was clear. Fortunately,

this difference in perception did not come in the way of their personal relationship.

Sruti 33/34 incidentally brought out a comparison between the two in a tongue-in-cheek manner.

Both encouraged younger vidwans to come up the musical ladder. Those who received encouragement from Mani were KV Narayanaswamy and Ramnad Krishnan and many years later, Dr. S Ramanathan, Nedanuri Krishnamurthy, ML Vasanthakumari, DK Jayaraman, TV Gopalakrishnan, TN Seshagopalan, A Sundaresan and Tirupointuruthi Venkatesan. Palani, who had no god-father till Chembai came along, made it a point to see as many younger artistes as were deserving got his help. Lalgudi Jayaraman's smooth entry into music field was in a large measure due to Palani's efforts. He often cajoled or even compelled established vidwans and Sabha Secretaries to fix Lalgudi for the concerts in which he participated. He was also instrumental (pun intended) in Lalgudi and his sister Srimathi performing as a duo and the first and several subsequent concerts had him playing the mridangam. Other younger artistes of the day who received immense support from

Palani included M Balamuralikrishna, KV Narayanaswamy, Nedanuri Krishnamurthy, Ramnad Krishnan, Manakkal Rangarajan, TM Thiarajan, Thiruvapur Namasivayam and Ayyalur Krishnan. The vainika, MA Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar started giving vocal concerts only on the suggestion, and with the support of Palani.

That Palani did not receive any major titles or decorations during his illustrious career is an eternal shame. At a function organised to felicitate Shri. Yagnaraman, Secretary of Sri Krishna Gana Sabha on its completing 25 years, Palghat Mani lamented the fact that great artistes like Dakshinamurthy Pillai and Palani Subramania Pillai did not receive due recognition. No one knows the reason for this but there are many conjectures, not all of them complimentary to those concerned. But then, Palani had excellent company in TN Rajaratnam Pillai, TR Mahalingam, S Balachandar, MD Ramanathan, and why, even Murugaboopathy (part of the famous trio), who lived well into advanced age.

*(KS Kalidas is a direct disciple of legendary Palani Subramanya pillai and this article is reproduced with permission from Sruti)*

## Vasudeva Keerthana Manjari in English

Anand S, Editor



Vasudeva Keerthana Manjari (I Volume) was published 1929. The II Volume was out in 1956. Each volume contain 70 kritis. The script is in Telugu. Some of the compositions of Vasudevacharya like Brochevarevarura in Kamas, Ra ra Raajeeval-

ochana raama in Mohana, Sri Chamundeshwari in Bilahari saw the light of the day nearly a century old. Since then, there has been a demand for the Sa Ri Ga Ma notation in English

script for the benefit of non-kannadiga's across the country and abroad.

This long felt need is likely to be fulfilled shortly as "Shankarabarana Kala Mandira" of Bangalore has undertaken the publication of the book in English script under the supervision of Vidwan Bangalore S Shankar and edited by S Krishnamurthy grandson of the legendary composer Vasudevacharya.

This book is likely to be released in the month of December 2015. Stay tuned for more information on the release schedule in our subsequent edition of the magazine.

# Quintessential Musician

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, Member Executive Committee, The Music Academy

What is the secret of youth and joy?

One needs only to look at Vidushi Smt. Neela Ramgopal to learn that music and the pursuit of excellence can keep one young and happy. An octogenarian, she is driven by the quest for the true, the beautiful and the transcendental in her art. Her zeal and zest to know and share every aspect of Carnatic music render her the ideal exponent and Guru.

“Sangeetha Veeraanganai” (daring and adventurous female musician), an epithet that was once attributed to Vidushi M.L. Vasanthakumari would be the most apt to describe Smt. Neela Ramgopal.

While she has a special relish in exploring rare ragams and compositions, her in depth and expansive expositions of the familiar ragams and songs pack enough thrills of new facets that she is able to conjure. With a soft voice she commences her concert and within the first few minutes the audience is drawn into it as they

realise that this is not a run of the mill concert. Innovative, yet traditional, it appeals to the heart and head, with the emotive appeal predominant. It would not be possible to typecast her as belonging to any school or bani. Assimilating the best of several musicians, she has evolved a style of her own, distinct in form and content. Her seasoned approach eschews the clichéd and seizes on the core of the classical idiom.

Her expertise of the mathematics of Carnatic music is so well mastered and under control that it never burdens the lay listener with its complexity. To the initiated, it is of course pure delight to encounter the nonchalance with which she handles the teasers and tantalisers of the layam of Carnatic music.

Her insatiable thirst for knowledge is another of the secrets of her youth while she delves into the theory and history of music. Any topic related to music is of interest to her and she



has given scores of lecture demonstrations on a variety of topics. Multilingual, she could engage her audiences in Tamil, English or Kannada. She is an avid listener of such expositions by other musicians and musicologists and is ever on the lookout for opportunities to add to her knowledge bank.

When she undertook to learn and record some of the compositions of my cousin Rajee Krishnan (Arasi), none of us anticipated the speed with which she completed the project. She learnt these totally unfamiliar songs, added her own embellishment and gave a full length concert at a function where the CD was released. Once she is involved in a project she is known to go at it full steam and not rest till it is completed. How she manages to make time amidst her busy schedule of performing and teaching, to take on and present such projects is a lesson to her students and others around her.

Her source of joy is her perception of beauty without and within. Her instinctive appreciation of music of others makes her a true Sahridaya. She finds her inspiration from her seniors, fellow musicians and even younger artists for whom she is sincere in her admiration and generous with her praise. With a sharp word of disapproval for her students' errors and slips, she is also the first to compliment and express her happiness when they perform to her satisfaction. Her well spring of joy also resides within as she savours every phrase as they pour forth from her.

Her music takes on the hues of her own personality, vivacious, daring, fresh, youthful, imparting joy, instant and enduring.

---

*On 20th June, Vid. Neela Ramgopal was honoured by the music fraternity at SRLKM auditorium. Smt. Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, Member Executive Committee, The Music Academy was the chief guest who spoke highly of Neela mami. Prominent Sabhas in Bangalore joined in chorus.*



# A passionate pursuit

Deepa Ganesh, Senior Associate

“In those days, girls of Brahmin households were taught music only to sing before prospective grooms. If I think of it now I feel scared,” says Neela Ramgopal, the veteran Carnatic vocalist recalling the times in which she grew up. It was her 80th birthday (May 26) and Neela maami, as she is fondly called by one and all, enthusiastically recollected her musical journey from “not at all being serious” about music to making “music the centre of her life”. Neela maami, surely belies her age with good cheer; as you talk to her you wonder how she achieves that remarkable co-existence of attachment and objectivity. In her it seems as though purpose is never overshadowed by emotion. Like any other woman of her times, Neela maami has gone through the throes of life where nothing could be taken for granted, but not even once, does she make a big deal about it. “It was not difficult. Once I sent off my husband and children to school, all I did was to practise. Three to fours at a stretch, sometimes more,” says Neela maami, in a matter of fact way.

Going back to where she began, “From the way you sang they could find out everything, atleast that is what our elders used to say then. They would see how the girl walked, her vocabulary, the way she conducted herself.... many things. So music was a customary education, and it was always made clear that the purpose was to please the boy’s family! Even to me, it did not mean anything more then.” In her early years, the family lived in Kumbhakonam, but later migrated back to their village Tyagarajapuram. Her father was a landlord and decided to take care of his agricultural lands. Neela, her siblings, and other girls and boys of the village went to Tiruvudaimardur, which used to have a big school. They all travelled to school by train both ways. “Ours was a small village and the train used to stop for two mins. More or less, all the girls who came from similar families in the village



went through life the same way as I did. So it didn’t seem like I was going through anything different.”

In 1950, after her tenth standard, the young Neela remained at home. “There used to be work at home, but after finishing it we were relatively free. Many of my friends had also finished school, and we used to spend a lot of time together after our work. We couldn’t go out because our families were conservative, and the whole village was keeping tabs on us. They would say things like, ‘Why was your daughter standing at the gate? Tell her that it is not allowed...’ However, we played indoor games, chatted with each other and had a lovely time.”

When they lived in Kumbhakonam, the legendary Semmangudi Srinivas Iyer was their neighbour. “I often saw TM Thiagarajan, PS Narayana Swamy come to him for their lessons.

None of his students would sit in his presence. They would all stand with folded hands. I can never forget his long practise sessions. But can you imagine the opportunity I lost! I could have learnt from him but that was never to be....," she regrets.

Neela maami's sister got married and soon came her turn. "I was mentally prepared for this major event. After all, that's what they told girls during their growing up years. My husband's family was very fond of music, and I knew just enough music to impress them. My mother-in-law passed away a year after my marriage, but in that period, whoever came home she would say, 'please listen to my daughter-in-law and go.' She was very proud of my music, even when it was very amateur."

Life went on and Neela maami says she hardly paid any attention to her music, till her visit to Chennai as a young 19-year-old bride. "We went to a relative's house for Dasara. A lot of women were asked to sing, I too sang. But Meenakshi sang so well that day. Everyone praised her so much. For the first time I felt genuinely sad in my life. I came home and cried to my husband. It was at that moment I resolved to take music seriously." It was not easy to find a suitable guru in Bangalore in those days. Neela found herself weeping all the time. One day, a family friend, N.M. Narayanan who was a disciple of the great Brinda and Mukta came home. 'Why are you crying? I will teach you', he promised. And for the next 15 years, Neela learnt from him. "Every December I went to Chennai for 15 days. My classes would begin at 6 a.m. and it used to be rigorous. The first kriti he taught me was 'Karubaaru' in Mukhari....," Neela maami's eyes become dreamy. "Oh, how he taught!"

The desire to do something in music was constantly burning within Neela maami. Her guru passed away and she felt a huge void in his absence. She, along with six other women musicians, started an ensemble called Saptaswara. "We used to meet each other at the concerts in Gayana Samaja. Trained that she was under Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, except Seetalakshmi

Venkateshan, nobody else in the group was competent to give a solo concert. She was already performing in various cities. We thought as a collective we could do a good job and also hone our own talents. Moreover, this was first of its kind venture, a classical music ensemble by women musicians."

Neela maami recalls the initial fruitful years and how they attracted a lot of listeners. "They were fascinated by what we achieved in the group, and a lot of people came to see how we dressed too!!" The group had Seethalakshmi Venkateshan, Saraswati Ramachandran, Jambu Kannan, Vishalam Krishnan, Tilaka Sampath, Rajalakshmi Venkataraman, apart from Neela maami herself. "We gave concerts in Chennai and felt ecstatic to have Semmangudi maama and MS for the Krishna Gana Sabha concert. For nearly a decade or more, we performed, but due to internal squabbles the group had to be disbanded."

Her very first independent concert came in 1965. The concert originally was supposed to be performed by Anoor Ramakrishna, H.V. Krishnamurthy and Arunachalappa, but since they could not make it, Neela maami was offered the concert. "I was very happy, the concert went off well too. But at the same I also felt incompetent after my guru's demise. People appreciated my music a lot, but from within I felt I needed the guidance of a guru. I had heard of senior musician T.K. Rangachari's musical prowess, and wanted to learn from him. He had moved to Chennai and I wrote a letter asking him to teach me. He came one week every month to Bangalore, and I learnt from him for nearly two years. He had other students in Bangalore as well, but I was the only one who went to him till the end. He fell ill and passed away."

Neela maami used to be an avid listener of Kalyana Raman and MLV. She had modelled her music so much on MLV's that many listeners considered her junior MLV. So, is there really a pure bani in Carnatic music? "I don't think so. It is like avil, the taste of several vegetables coming together and giving it a rich taste." She recalls that morning, when the phone in Neela



maami's house rang. "I am Vasantha Kumari speaking," the voice announced. "My heart skipped a beat!" she remembers. "I have heard that you sing exactly like me. How about accompanying me in my Bangalore concert?" Vasanthakumari asked. "It was such a nice feeling singing with her. I felt I was MLV myself!" laughs Neela maami, who accompanied her in about three concerts.

But gradually she developed a strong style of her own. "Gurus are so important to one's life. These days I feel that there are so many talented musicians, but they do not recognise or touch the core of music. You can develop your own style gradually, but the essence of guru's teaching is sacrosanct. That should never be compromised."

Neela maami started singing for AIR. "My husband never discouraged me. Once the household chores were complete, I would concentrate only on music. I wish I had the guidance of some great master, my career would have per-

haps taken a different turn. That was the disadvantage of my location. Had I lived in Chennai, I feel my music and my stature would have been different."

The one thing that bothers Neela maami is the quality of listenership these days. "No one is seriously involved. They are not giving themselves to music totally. In the past, the listener made huge demand on the artiste and the artiste in turn, had a greater responsibility towards the listener. But now anything is okay." She insists that lecdems are an important component of music propagation. Senior musicians and sabhas should take this up as their responsibility. The community has to be educated and this in turn will raise the level of music. "But what I really don't have answers for is the groupism in music. It is a hindrance to growth."

\*\*\*

# Spiritual sojourn through music

Rajashree Yogananda

Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira has been celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> year anniversary by arranging a variety of musical programmes throughout the year. Musical discourse by Smt. Vishaka Hari was one of them.

The topic chosen by Smt. Vishaka Hari was Narada Bhakthi Sutra which was conducted for two consecutive days. Her energetic voice and excellent mastery over nuances of music combined with deep spiritual study and excellent oratory-is always a potent combination. The large RV Dental college auditorium, packed to its capacity with the rasikas wanting to listen to her, is a testimony to her profound mastery over the subject.

The evening started with her singing Mokshamugalada of Saint Thyagaraja in raga Saranathi. In our scriptures, there are various shastras and sutras to make the respective subject more simpler. For eg. for Gnana marga there is Vyasa's Brahma Sutras, for Karma Marga there is the Jaimini sutras, likewise for Bhakthi marga there are two kinds i.e. Shandilya's bhakthi sutra and Narada bhakthi sutra. In Kaliyuga, bhakthi marga is the easiest way for spiritual enlightenment and she delved deep to explain the sutras in her own inimitable way.

Narada bhakthi sutra has 84 sutras, and she started explaining as to why we need the bhakthi sutras at all and what is there in the sutras that we need to understand. The very first sutra talks of pure devotion-bhakthi and what we gain by being a bhakta and what we lose by not being one-true devotion has to come on its own and we cannot artificially create it. She sang Saint Thyagaraja's "Bhakthi bhiksha meeyave" where Thyagaraja swami asks Ramachandra prabhu to give him the bhiksha of Bhakthi. Bhakthi is the feeling that comes out on its own. Just by singing or listening or going to a temple without pure love is not bhakthi.

Bhakthi is "parama prema roopa", Supreme devotion. It is not done as a ritual but doing whatever we do with Supreme love. This is also echoed in many of Purandara dasa's ugabhoghas and keertanas as Narada himself is said to have come as Purandaradasa. When we offer a flower at the feet of the Lord it is bhakthi, whereas offering ghee to a sacrificial fire without universal love is considered ritual or karma. The difference between karma/ritual and bhakthi lies in the emotion behind it. Only bhakthi gives pushti and thushti. Mothers love for her child is bhakthi yoga whereas that of a caretaker will be karma yoga. Bhaktas become immortal and are remembered even today because of their supreme bhakthi as it is amrutha swaroopa-true devotion in its intrinsic nature is immortal. A true bhakta is without hatred, anger and anything negative. Hence even today we sing kritis of Thyagaraja, Purandaradasa and so many other great souls.

Pure bhaktas are not afraid of death and they welcome it. The life of Sri Muthuswamy Dikshi-



tar is an example for this as he knew that he would not live to see his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. He gave up his life after making his students sing his “Meenakshi meemudam” in Poorvi Kalyani. At the words “Meena lochani Paasha mochani” he made them sing it thrice—wherein the disciples saw a jyothi travel from his body upwards. Another important aspect that she touched was the influence a true bhakta would have around his surroundings citing the example of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, where a fisherman starts chanting the God’s name by merely touching Chaitanya Prabhu. According to Narada, God is never far away as he is not a Vaachama gochara vasthu. He is within us, in our hearts as no one else can be more closer than he. One must shun all that is materialistic and give up the association of the greedy and make up the mind to dwell on the lord and if possible to sing his keertanas.

On the second day of her musical discourse, Smt. Vishaka Hari explained that if one is a true spiritual aspirant and prays for a guru, then the Lord sends Narada as their guru. He is the guru of Dhruva, and showed Dhruva that he can attain true happiness by climbing on to the Lord’s lap and initiates him the “Dwadashakshara mantra”. Narada preached Prahalada when he was in the womb of his mother Kayadu. It was Narada who also initiated Valmiki. Shrimad Bhagavatha begins with Vyasa-Narada samvaada where Vyasa tells Narada that he has no peace of mind in spite of writing the magnum opus Mahabharatha and worries about the people in kali yuga. Shri Narada advises him to write the Bhagavat katha, Shri Bhagavatham. Saint Thyagaraja also says that Narada is his guru.

Smt. Vishka Hari went on to explain the lakshana of a true bhakta as told in the sutras. A true bhaktha is always happy though he also goes through the turbulence and travails of life. Saint Thyagaraja in one of his kriti says that Narada always has a cheerful countenance - sadaa moda hridayam. A true bhaktha is one who totally surrenders at all times all aspects of his life-like the Gopikas of Brindavan who though having thousands of chores, their mind was transfixed on Krishna. Likewise we should

learn from them and do all the activities, chores happily; it gives us a balanced mind.

Smt. Vishaka Hari then goes on to explain sutras which tell us how to get into true devotion. True devotion can be got only by Bhagavat krupa (His grace). Narada goes on to tell his own story. There lived a maid with her five year old son and it so happened that they got the opportunity to serve the sadhu who happened to visit the place. The child got to serve the sadhu and be in his company and imbibed all the good. When it was time for the sadhu to go elsewhere, the child could not bear the separation. However, the sadhu told him that he was not alone and all that he had to do was close his eyes and meditate upon the Lord’s form for God to appear. Very soon the child lost his mother and was orphaned. Company of the sadhu had made the child very philosophical and he left for the forest to dwell upon the lord’s form as suggested by the sadhu. As the child sat down for meditation, the God appeared before him in his resplendent form. This child was none other than Devarishi Narada, who was Brahmas’s manasa putra in his next birth. The sadhu’s satsanga, his compassionate glance had made the son of a maidservant into a Devarishi. So if we can associate ourselves with great people and with humility bow to them, their company and compassion will also elevate us to a higher spiritual plane and keep us happy and to have tranquility of the mind. This has been beautifully said by Thyagaraja swamy in one of his Pancharatna kriti “Endaro mahanu bhavulu”. God tells Narada that He does not reside in Vaikunta nor in the minds of yogis, but He says “I will be there, where I hear my bhaktas singing” .

In the coming sutras, Narada advises to avoid evil company at all costs. There is the example of Karna, though a Suryaputra, he was the one who suggested that Draupadi be disrobed. This idea came to him because of his evil company. It is more powerful than Satsanga. It takes more than ten years of satsanga for us to purify our heart and mind and have chitta shuddhi. One second of dushta sanga (evil company) is enough to destroy like in Ramayana it just takes a few

minutes for Manthara to influence Kaikeyi's mind. Of course, we cannot expect to have the satsanga all the time, but whenever we are blessed with it, our minds should start contemplating on it and dwell upon the Lord - that is the influence of satsanga.

Smt. Vishaka Hari further explains the sutras pertaining to maya, the all powerful illusion in life. This maya is very powerful wherein we experience sometimes bhaya, sukha, dukha, maana, apamaana, laabha, nashta and the whole gamut of feelings. Maya is-yaa maa saa maaya-what is not existing, that is seen as existing. It is very difficult to cross the ocean of maya and to do so one must overcome vices like kaama, krodha and madha-arrogance. It is very difficult to overcome all these vices. Only by completely surrendering oneself at the feet of the God, and with his benevolent grace on us can we transcend it. Even Devarishi Narada could not escape his maya, when the arrogance of thought that he had overcome maya crept in. The Lord made him experience his all powerful maya.

It is very beautifully depicted in the story of krishna's birth. Both Krishna and his sister Maya are born at the same time. When Vasudeva, krishna's father carries baby Krishna all his shackles fall but when he carries Maya, Yashoda's daughter all the shackles are in place - a very

subtle way of saying to trust the Lord implicitly if we have to be free from the bondages of Maya.

As said earlier, a person must relinquish his ego, anger, kaama or matsarya (jealousy). If he is unable to overcome it, then he can redirect all these towards God. Just like the Gopikas who lusted after Krishna and got him, Shishupala hated Krishna and he attained his feet, Kamsa feared Krishna and he got Krishna.

Smt. Vishaka Hari concluded her musical discourse on Narada bhakthi sutras where Narada says that supreme bhakthi is something which cannot be defined. It is free from all attributes, desires and this kind of Supreme Love grows by every second. Of all the margas, it is the easiest way to attain moksha. Shabari gave phala and her janma became saphala. Every true bhaktha must cultivate virtues and dwell on the Lord.

Pure devotion is the greatest in this world and one will attain the supreme consciousness and see the Supreme Lord through this devotion, which is the easiest way as shown by many great souls by setting an example of living their lives in a truly sublime way and paving a way for all of us to follow.

## **T Chowdaiah National Award 2014 to L Bhimachar**



T Chowdaiah National Award 2014 has been conferred on Morsing maestro L Bhimachar by the Govt. of Karnataka. SR-LKM takes this opportunity to congratulate the family members for this covered award.

It is a significant development considering declining importance being given to this upapakkavadhyam that boasts of highest number of artistes from Karnataka.

While this is a big boost to the Morsing fraternity, it is the continued support from main artistes and organisers that will bring it back to the days of glory that it enjoyed 3-4 decades back.

# Marking six decades

Courtesy “TheHindu”, Deepa Ganesh

An intense and beautiful raga, Poorvikalyani draws every listener into its fold. Its poignant notes and meditative personality was well explored by the renowned Carnatic vocalist Sudha Raghunathan at Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira’s 1500th concert recently. She unravelled the contours of the raga, and crowned it with a beautiful composition by Tyagaraja, “Paraloka Sadhaname Manasa”. Delving into the depths of this raga and extending the Poorvikalyani canvas further was the violin maestro Embar Kannan. His slow, and methodical delineation was stunning. An unusual point for nerval, the last line of the charana “Dagalu needu Tyaga”, tying it up with the first line of the pallavi was striking for its novelty. Neyveli Skanda Subramaniam on the mridangam enhanced its beauty with his fine sense of accompaniment.

Hindola was preceded by a shloka “Ya devi sarva bhooteshu”, to be followed by the most eloquent “Maamavatu Shree Saraswati”. The main raga of the concert was Bhairavi; Sudha Raghunathan elaborated on the raga but it certainly wasn’t her best. It was driven more by the seasoned performer Sudha Raghunathan. Embar Kannan fuelled it with his sense of wonderment – a raga that opens up new avenues each time it is rendered. The Swati Tirunal kriti “Janani Maa-mava” was richly Bhairavi and both the morsing (R. Raman) and mridangam accompanists shone in the tani avarthanam.

Sudha Raghunathan was felicitated, and young Carnatic musicians B.C. Manjunath and H.M. Smitha were conferred with the Raaga Laya Prabha awards.

Vid. GV Neela, Founder and Principal, SRLKM with Vid. Sudha Ragunathan and Shri. SM Krishna during their 1500th concert



## Effervescent at 80...

Vid. GV Neela, Founder Principal, SRLKM



Vid. GV Neela with Vid. Neela Ramgopal and Vidwan RK Srikantan during a Thyagaraja Aradaṇa programme

Our association with Smt. Neela Ramgopal is more than four decades old. It started in Tata silk farm, Basavanagudi, where our family lived earlier, and it so happened that Smt. Neela was also our neighbour. Phones were a rarity those days and Smt. Neela would come over to use the phone and thus our friendship grew. She was not very familiar with Kannada those days, but that did not stop her from learning Purandaradasa and other devaranama's. Such was her interest that she would ask us for the meaning of those songs, pronunciation and practice diligently. Now, she can give lectures and talk in faultless, fluent Kannada!

Smt. Neela would give kutcheris along with a small group of six people and together they were called the "Saptha Kanyeyaru". They were Smt. Seethalakshmi Venkatesan, Smt. Neela Ramgopal, Smt. Jambu Kannan, Smt. Tilaka Sampath, Smt. Saraswathi Ramachandran, Smt. Vishalam Krishnan and Smt. Rajalakshmi Venkataraman. They would invariably assemble in one of their houses to have practice sessions. It was

not serious singing all the time, some fun like cooking classes would also be conducted.

Smt. Neela would make it a point to sing in the Thyagaraja Aradhana wherever it was conducted in Bangalore. It continues even today which speaks volumes of her regard and commitment to Carnatic music.

Smt. Neela Ramgopal has been with us during our journey and stood by us during important events pertaining to Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira. Mandira's concert hall was completed in 1986, and it was she who suggested that we conduct the Sankranthi Festival. The very first Spring Music Festival was conducted in 1990 - in Mandira's open air theatre and in the initial stages gave financial and moral support to our fledgling institution and even now continues to contribute in her own unique way.

She has conducted many lec-dem classes and has invited many musicians like N Ravikiran, PS Narayanaswamy to our Institute premises for

taking special sessions in the hall. We can proudly say that she is part of our Institution.

A very strict disciplinarian, an outstanding teacher her enthusiasm to impart music to aspiring youngsters has not diminished and she has set very high standards. We can proudly say that she has become the most sought after teacher for Carnatic music and has trained many a students who have become musicians in their own right. She even now continues to teach. "Sangeetha Kala Acharya" was conferred to her by The Madras Music Academy which is so befitting to her for dedicating her life to the service of music.

It is no wonder that her students started an organisation called "Neelambari". Many workshops have been conducted through this organisation by reputed musicians. Neelambari has recorded 72 Melakartha kritis of different composers directed by Smt. Neela Ramgopal.

A very interesting facet of Smt. Neela is that she is always very keen to listen to the concerts of young musicians. She not only encourages them to do their best but also supports them in every possible way. She is very open when she says that there is so much for her to learn by listening to them sing. Her quest to learn even at this age is a lesson for all of us to emulate.

She has overcome many obstacles in life especially with regard to her health with steely determination and unwavering involvement in music. A word of praise must be said about Sri Ramgopal who has always been with her and supported her.

Smt. Neela with her sisterly affection for SRLKM looks forward to all our programmes. She is in the editorial board of Mandira's magazine 'Lalitha Kala Tarangini' and continues to guide us.

We at SRLKM pray that God give Smt. Neela the best of health and the energy to continue in what she likes the best. Ever dignified Smt. Neela in her beautiful, crisp Kancheevarams is truly an asset to Karnataka.

\* \* \*

## Our forthcoming concerts

**Sunday, 26 July, 2015, 5.30 pm**  
(SRLKM auditorium)

Vasudha Ravi - Vocal  
HM Smitha - Violin  
Akshay Anand - Mridangam

**Sunday, 30 August, 2015, 5.30 pm**  
Kalavanta Award Winners concert  
(SRLKM auditorium)

Vani Ramamurthy - Vocal  
KJ Dileep - Violin  
Vinodh Shyam - Mridangam  
Sunaad Anoor - Kanjari

**Saturday, 19 September, 2015, 6 pm**  
Commencement of centenary year celebration of Bharat Ratna MS Subbulakshmi  
(Dayananda Sagar College Auditorium)

Neela Ramgopal - Vocal  
Charumathi Raghuraman - Violin  
Palladam Ravi - Mridangam  
Dr. Karthik - Ghatam

**Sunday, 27 September, 2015,  
10 am to 2 pm**

Seminar on Karnatic Music by  
TM Krishna  
(Dayananda Sagar College Auditorium)  
(more details to follow in our subsequent edition)

# An eternal music

Priyanka Prakash, Disciple of Vid. Neela Ramgopal

One can draw parallels between the music of Sangita Kala Acharya Vidushi Neela Ramgopal and the poetry of William Wordsworth. Both are fiercely creative, intuitive, and nuanced. They have a superior understanding of the medium, but are not constrained by it. They innovate, they are unafraid of dramatic interludes, and they are uncompromising to core artistic values. Vidushi Neela Ramgopal's (Neela Mami's) music is like a waterfall at times – gushing with energy, yet like a gentle brook at others – slow, soft, mild.

As the music fraternity ushers in Neela Mami's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday ('I am 80 years young!' she exclaims), I pay my deepest gratitude, respect and reverence to Mami – for being the incredible musician, Guru and mentor that she is.

Every music class is a revelation, an experience in the purest form of the Art one can experience. A recent class is especially fresh in memory. While singing Neraval for the Mayamalavagowla krithi Meru Samana (or 'Maha

## *The 'youngest' octogenarian in Carnatic Music and her inimitable style*

line Alakalla mudunu – tilakaputhirunu, referring to the beauty of the gently moving tresses of Lord Rama (Raghuvira, as he is referred to by Thyagaraja in this song), and the grandeur of the Tilaka on his forehead. Mami's trademark creativity and imagination was evident in the way she gently moved the notes to and fro for the word Alakalla, thereby linking the movement of the music with the meaning of the lyric; and then also musically expressed the Tilaka, replicating the way that a Tilaka is usually applied on the forehead.... The best part is, such true genius appears so effortless in Mami's singing.

Neela Mami's music requires no introduction to her students, rasikas and connoisseurs. Her music brings a combination of completeness, per-



Meru Samana' as some refer), Mami chose the

fect adherence to Sruti in every note, an un-

compromising adherence to Pathantharam, a reverence and wonder for the art, and an innate sense of proportion. As a disciple of Mami, she teaches us all these values.

As a Guru, Mami is painstaking in her effort to impart music and values to us. Her specific feedback helps us improve and focus our practice. Mami is a thorough professional – her feedback is so organised, that one can draw up a list of bullet points of strengths, and areas of improvement!

Mami's repertoire is unparalleled. Want to learn a rare Purandara Dasa Devarnama in Gangeyabhushani? Want to learn an evergreen composition like O Ranga Sayee? Want to learn a rare Subbarama Iyer Padam? Want to learn a Kannada Javali in Devamanohari? Mami knows all of these. Ever willing to teach students anything they are keen on learning, Mami does not

hesitate in unearthing rare notations and old books just to fulfil a student's request.

It is a joy, privilege (and challenge!) of singing Neraval exchanges in class. A firm believer in the Bhava-quotient of the lower-speed neraval, Mami's renditions are characterised by several rounds of 1<sup>st</sup> speed neraval (keezh-kaalam) in different octaves, with different ideas, with new themes – and then a few rounds of 2<sup>nd</sup> speed (mel-kaalam) infused with intricate grouping.

In Mami's music, nothing is enforced, nothing is artificial – everything is natural, and flows organically from an innate sense of classicism.

On behalf of Mami's disciples, we are truly blessed to be learning from such a veteran of Carnatic Music, who introduces us to the magnificence and depth of the Art form.

Here's wishing Neela Mami a very happy 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday!

## **The Music Academy Awards for 2015**

Executive committee of the Madras Music Academy has unanimously selected eminent vocalist **Shri. Sanjay Subrahmanyam** for the title of “**Sangita Kalanidhi**”. He will preside over the 89<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Music Academy in December 2015. At the conclusion of the conference, he will be conferred the title at the sadas on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2016.

The Executive committee of the Madras Music Academy will also be conferring the following awards during the Sadas.

### **“Sangeetha Kala Acharya Award”**

Smt. Mysore GN Nagamani Srinath (Vocalist)  
Shri. TH Subash Chandran (Percussion)

### **“TTK Award”**

Shri. Seshambatti Sivalingam (Nagaswaram)  
Smt. Kamala Aswathamma (Veena)

### **“Musicologist Award”**

Dr. Gowri Kuppuswamy

### **“Pappa Venkataramiah Award” for violin**

Shri. MS Mani

### **“Natya Kala Acharya Award”**

Smt. Alarmel Valli

# Bangalore Gayana Samaja

Sachi R Sachidananda

With 11 million inhabitants in 2015, Bangalore has an image around the world of attracting people from varied cultural backgrounds, with employment opportunities in nascent enterprises and high technology industries. In fact, in terms of development, Bangalore has always been ahead of the curve. It was the first city in India to have electricity in homes in 1906 (Hydel power from Shivasamudra). It soon became a centre for science, technology, research and manufacturing. Is it possible that its founding fathers foresaw its great future? For example, Kempegowda who built the four iconic towers, and Hyder Ali, who built the Lal Bagh garden admired by royal botanists from London?

For the culturally inclined, Bangalore also prides itself on a sabha for Carnatic music established as long ago as in 1905. The Bangalore Gayana Samaja is the oldest running sabha of its kind in India. It bears testimony to Bangalore's enlightened music lovers as well as generations of dedicated art administrators.

The Samaja started holding concerts at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The concerts were held in rented school and college premises. Its office functioned then from premises rented at Rs 2 per month in Chamarajapet. The present-day Samaja building came up in 1962. Before that, for 36 years, the concerts were held in the famous Shankaraiah Hall in the Theosophical

*View of the audience at the Shankaraiah Hall*



Society premises, constructed by Chief Justice Dewan Bahadur Chandrasekhara Iyer. In 1980, a platinum jubilee report on the history of the Samaja stated:

*"Some of our very old members, who had heard concerts both in Sanskrit College Hall and Shankaraiah hall, still nostalgically remember the "glory" of the concerts, which were mikeless and which were conducted in perfect acoustic conditions in these two halls. Two generations of the "all time great" musicians like the earlier Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Anantharama Bhagavathar, Naina Pillai, Bidaram Krishnappa, Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar, Tiger Varadachar, Muthiah Bhagavathar-all vocalists, Seshanna-Vainika, Thirukkodikaval Krishna Iyer, Govinda Swamy-violinists, Palladam Sanjiva Rao-Flute, Alaganambi, Dakshina Murthy-Mridangam, on the one hand, and the later Ariyakkudi, Musiri, Chembai, Maharajapuram, Madurai Mani, G.N. Balasubrahmaniam-all vocalists, Rajamanickam, Papa, Chowdiah, Dwaram- all violinists, Palani, Palghat mani-Mridangists, gave their memorable performances in these halls."*

Prof. V. Ramaratnam, in his *Reminiscences* (2005), states:

*"The Bangalore Gayana Samaja, an icon in the history of Karnataka, has been doing exceptional service to foster the growth of music for the past 75 years or so. While similar sabhas in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu that were started around the same time have gone into oblivion, the Bangalore Gayana Samaja is flourishing and reaching new heights."*

*These concerts have been of immense educational value to the younger generation of artists. This sabha has transformed many young artists into great vidwans."*

*"There were no sound amplification systems for musical concerts in those days and especially at the Gayana Samaja. Of the important audience, Justice Chandrasekhara Iyer was the only person who sat in a chair in the front row. Others sat on the carpets spread on the floor. There would be pin drop silence. During Dr C. V. Natarajan's stewardship as the secretary at the Gayana Samaja, concerts began at 4 p.m. and ended at 8 p.m. His successor V. T. Sreenivasan continued this tradition."*

The present-day premises of the Samaja was constructed in 1962, and ever since it has been a landmark for Carnatic music lovers all over India. The prolonged efforts of its well-meaning functionaries in securing land allotment and raising funds for its building makes an interesting story.

It is interesting to know the membership structure of the Samaja over the years. There were two classes in 1940 – First class membership at Re 1/- per month and second class at 8 annas. The membership fee increased incrementally over the years and in 1980 it was still Rs 3/- for a first class membership! Currently there are nearly 2000 members. There are 150 Patrons and Vice-Patrons. A new Life Membership today costs Rs 10,000 and entitles the member to a reserved seat.

The Samaja had, between 1905 and 1938, the services of five able persons as Honorary Secretary. However, after 33 years, the Samaja had only cash assets of Rs.1700.- (of which Rs.1000 - was a donation from the Maharaja of Mysore). The committee wanted things to change and prevailed on the young and capable Mr. VT Sreenivasan, an able administrator in the Mysore Civil Service, to take up the reins. Thereafter, Mr. Sreenivasan remained at the helm of affairs of the Gayana Samaja for a long period of 43 years, with only a short break during the period when he had taken up administrative assignments in other states.

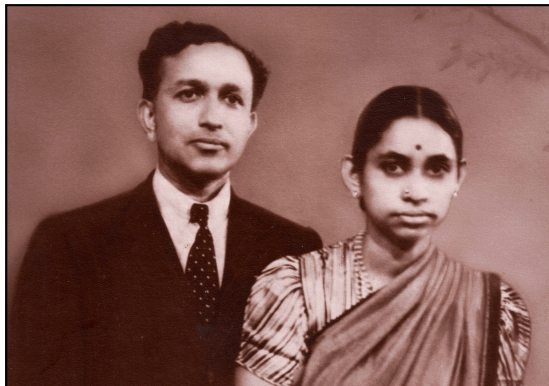
In 1941, the Samaja Committee members went to Dewan Sri N Madhava Rao for sanction of

land for a permanent building, although they did not have the funds for the building construction. The Dewan sagely advised them to raise at least Rs 10,000.- for the building and then come back for allotment of land. Spurred by this, Mr. Sreenivasan formulated a scheme of enrolling Vice-Patrons who paid not less than Rs. 500 - each as a donation, and a resolution to this effect was passed by the General Body in the year 1943. Finally, after collecting enough funds to raise a building, the Committee went again to the Dewan to broach the subject of the land allotment. This time he acceded to their request and sent a directive to the Bangalore Municipality Mayor to sanction a suitable site. In his reminiscences, Mr. Sreenivasan states how the then Mayor (a Muslim gentleman) was sympathetic and even quoted Shakespeare to persuade some dissenting councillors: “He who has no music in him is fit only for treasons, spoils and strategems”. The saga of land allotment continued until Mr. Sreenivasan finally secured the land transfer of the present site from Sri Raghunatha Rao Charities by payment of Rs. 16,000, made up of Rs 12,000 as compensation from the Municipality on relinquishing the earlier free allotment in Kalasipalyam, and the rest made up from the Samaja’s own funds.

The present-day Gayana Samaja building was put up on a site measuring 1350 sq. yards. The building was constructed at a total cost of around Rs. 3 Lakhs. It was constructed in several stages and finally measured 150 ft. by 80 ft. with a large stage, green rooms, a large hall with balcony, verandahs, utilities and so on. It was completed in 1962. Sri B. Singa Iyengar, retired Executive Engineer, Govt. of Mysore, prepared the blue prints. Sri C. N. Shama Rao, ex. Hon. Secretary, toiled hard to secure the site. Sri K. Padmanabhan, retired Executive Engineer, was the consultant in the first stage of construction and Sri S Suryanarayana Shetty was the engineering consultant thereafter.

On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1962, the Samaja building was inaugurated by Prof. Humayun Kabir, Union Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. His Royal Highness Sri Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar presided over the function. In the

*Shri. VT Srinivasan with his wife*



evening there was a music concert by Dr. M. L. Vasanthakumari and party.



*His Highness Sri Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, Governor of Mysore, being received by the Samaja President Sri SM Ramakrishna Rao, on his arrival to inaugurate the Samaja Building (10.9.62)*

The total expenditure of around Rs. 3 lakhs was raised through fees collected from members who became Vice-Patrons (Rs 19 thousands), Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi's benefit concerts (Rs 40 thousands), souvenir advertisements (Rs. 49 thousands), and other contributions; and the rest coming from substantial grants of the Corporation, State and Central governments. The report states:

*Here we should remember Sri VT Sreenivasan, our present President, who as Hon. Secretary toiled hard in those early formative years to collect the nucleus fund, by way of enrolment of Vice-Patrons. This could only convince our State Government, authorities about our earnestness in this matter. It may also be noted that we got the assistance of Dr. MS Subbulakshmi's benefit concerts only because of Sri VT Sreenivasan's acquaintance with Sri T Sadasivam and his wife. Next our acknowledgement is due to Sri SM Ramakrishna Rao who as the first president of the Samaja, conducted its affairs in an astute and business-like manner for 16 years and was mainly responsible in mobilising the balance fund required, by raising debenture loans and getting Souvenir Adver-*

*tisements.*

Over the years, innumerable stalwarts in all fields of classical music and dance came and performed in the Samaja. A new orientation was given to Samaja's activities in 1969 when the Annual Music Conference was started under its auspices. Many senior musicians presided over the conferences, and concerts were held of the who's who in Carnatic music and even Hindustani music. In 1979, Sri Mallikarjun Mansur presided. The twelfth Conference held during its Platinum Jubilee year 1980 was presided over by Sri Sandhyavandanam Srinivasa Rao.

The Conference was structured as a three-tier one, consisting of a morning Experts' Committee session, an afternoon series of concerts by promising young artistes of the State, and finally an evening series of concerts by well-known senior artistes. At the end of the Conference, a Sadas was organised where a title, "Sangeetha Kalaratna" was conferred on the President Elect of the Conference. Four to five other eminent artistes were also honoured on the concluding day of the Conference as the Sadas. At present, various endowments, and other contributions, are being utilised by the Samaja to award a cash purse of Rs 50,000.- to the recipient of the 'Sangeetha Kalaratna' title.

The '80s and '90s saw the Samaja sustain its activities in all areas. In the '90s, an idea was mooted to furnish the auditorium with 700 cushioned seats (550 in the main hall and 150 in the balcony). Until that time, the audience used

to squat on the floor in concerts. The administrators wanted to move with the times and improve the facilities to host a variety of events including dance and drama programmes. The project was taken up with a sense of urgency to avoid future cost escalations. The efforts of Sri H Kamalanath, then President of the Samaja,

*Maestro Gangubai Hangal receiving an award*



and Sri Krishna Prasad, Hon. Secretary are to be remembered here. Mr. Krishna Prasad remembers how they used to spend long hours every evening working on the various issues. They had earlier made an appeal for funds for the project to the Chief Minister's Office during the regime of Sri Ramakrishna Hegde. However no sanction had come through. Then in 1991/2, Sri S. K. Ramoo, Chief of Bureau of The Hindu, and an ardent music lover, came forward to help move matters. He took the office bearers for a personal audience with Sri SM Krishna in the Chief Minister's Office. Matters moved rapidly thereafter and a substantial amount was released by the Department of Kannada and Culture. The concerned minister was Smt. Rani Satish and the Secretary was Sri AR Chandrasaha Gupta. Later, Dr. Raja Ramanna, the famous scientist (and an accomplished Western Classical musician) agreed to arrange another sum from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. The office bearers worked in a time-bound manner to realise the plan. A Technical Committee of eminent persons in various fields was formed. Prof. BS Ramakrishna from the Indian Institute of Science was the chairman and the other ex-

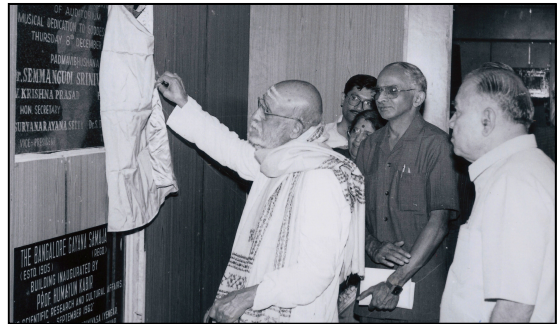
*Vid. Semmangudi & Vid. Doraiswamy Iyengar at the inauguration*



perts were Sriyuts G Ashwathanarayana, SK Karekar, V Ramamurthy, HK Nanjundaswamy, SK Satyanarayana, SN Lakshman, RV Simha, S Madhava Rao, Dr. RS Padmanabhan and S Suryanarayana Shetty. The Committee not only designed the best plans for renovation. but also supervised the construction.

Sri Krishna Prasad remembers how Prof. Ramakrishna wanted to achieve the best acoustics

in the Hall after the renovation. He was a well-known authority on acoustics and the head of



the department in Indian Institute of Science. He came with his instrumentation and used to spend long hours in every nook and corner of the auditorium taking readings and tweaking the construction suitably for the best acoustic parameters. When the renovation was completed, on his suggestion, a few test concerts were held without mic amplification. Mr. Krishna Prasad recalls a very good concert of Sri V Ramachandran. Prof. BS Ramakrishna went to the last row in the balcony and heard the concert. He finally gave his green signal for the acoustics of the auditorium.

When Dr. M Balamuralikrishna gave a scintillating concert at the renovated auditorium, Sri SM Krishna came and sat through the concert with his wife. The next-day, he sent an amount of Rs. 10,000 to the Samaja, without any fanfare, as his own personal contribution!

Sri Krishna Prasad also recalls Mr. K Srinivasa Iyengar, who had served the Samaja as the Hon. Secretary for 23 years from 1957. Mr. Iyengar wrote concert reviews for the newspapers under the pseudonym "Rajashri". He used to sit in Samaja office, listening to the evening concert, and would type out the review as the concert progressed. His review would be ready just after the concert and would be dropped off at the newspaper office the same evening for publication the next day.

We should also mention Sri B Krishnappa. He worked for the Samaja for 50 years. In the words of Sri VT Sreenivasan, "with a heavy subscription register slung over his shoulder, he

was a familiar figure on the roads of Bangalore City trudging mile after mile in sun and rain, visiting the houses of the Members to collect their subscriptions and deliver the monthly concert notices. He was only paid a pittance but no Institution ever had a more honest and dedicated worker than the late Sri B Krishnappa. When he had to retire from the service of the Samaja due to an injury sustained in the course of his duties, I persuaded the Committee and the General Body to sanction to him a pension of Rs. 25 per month for life with effect from 25.11.1956."

At present, the Gayana Samaja Trust is headed by Sri K Jairaj, IAS with members Sri HK Nanjundaswamy and Sri BNV Subramanya. In recent years, the Gayana Samaja is being steered by the new President Dr. MRV Prasad. He is a general physician of long standing and connected with several organisations. Many new initiatives have been started by him. The first is the Digital Library (with support from TAG, Chennai), offering over 6000 hours of music to be heard on headphones from a computer archive. The music has been categorised by raga, composer, performer, etc. As a result, one can, for example, instantly locate all alapanas in Madhyamavati or portions of niraval sung by different artistes in a particular composition.

Also, the Samaja has received recognition as a Research Centre. Many new types of programmes have been formatted viz. 1) Yuva Sangeethotsava, a boon for upcoming artistes. 2) Vadya Vaibhava is a one-of-its-kind festival where purely instrumental concerts are showcased and famous artistes are recognised for their life time achievement. Sri MS Gopalakrishnan and Sri Vikku Vinayakram have received the 'Nada Shri' title in recent years.

In 2012, during the annual conference, Hindustani legend Pandit Jasraj was conferred the 'Paarangatha Prashasti'. Nrityavaibhava, Natakotsava, Sugama Sangeetha, Yakshagana festivals, and other such events have become regular. In 2014, the Samaja hosted the Kalavanta Music festival, got up by the Karnataka Fine Arts Council (KFAC), an umbrella body comprising of ten

leading sabhas, all coming together to recognise and promote the most outstanding talent in Carnatic music among young and upcoming artistes.

Several donors have come forward to support the Samaja in recent years, including Dr. Sadanand Maiyya and the Ganjam family.

Dr. MRV Prasad shares his grand vision for the future. The plan is to have a very modern, one-of-its-kind, auditorium complex with state of the art facilities. There would be adequate parking for at least 150-200 cars, a present-day need voiced by most concert attendees. The main auditorium with 1200 seats will be created for major events. There would also be a mini-auditorium for a monthly concert with 300 seats. There would be space for artiste workshops of max. 50 people, affording an excellent rapport between the attendees and the expert/artiste conducting the workshop. There would be a Fine Arts Museum and an expanded library.

This highly ambitious project is coming together under the stewardship of Dr. Prasad. The Samaja has enlisted a team of 8 international experts from different fields of speciality and they have come up with a few design options and copious supporting material. The funding running to several crores of rupees is being mobilised from different sources. Once the work begins, for a couple of years the Samaja conferences will be held in other near-by auditoria.

Once completed, the new Gayana Samaja building will become a landmark in the performing arts landscape of the country and a beacon to all artistes.

*(We recognise the laudable services rendered to Gayana Samaja by V Krishna Murthy, President, N Nagaraja Rao President and Sri K Ramachandra Rao first honorary Secretary, K Srinivasa Iyengar, Secretary, MK Ramamurthy, Secretary, A Anantha Krishnan, Vice President, and BN Narayan, Treasurer and possibly few others we might have missed.*

*Gayana Samaja is fortunate to have received the patronage and blessings from 'His Highness Sri Krishna Raja Wadiyar' and 'His Highness Sri Jaya Chamarajendra Wadiyar'.*

# Neela Mami at 80!

Geetha Murthy, Senior Disciple of Vid. Neela Ramgopal

I first met Neela Mami in the mid 70's when I was also part of a group of a Thematic Presentation on Devi Krithis done by Sangeetha Kalarathna HV Krishnamurthy. Then, in the 80's, I was pleasantly surprised when mami asked me to be a part of a feature on rare krithis of Muthuswami Dikshitar that she presented at Gayana Samaja. We had practice sessions at mami's house, which would start punctually and finish exactly two hours later. The scripts would be ready for us. That is when I realised what 'Professionalism' means. "Professionalism, thy name is Neela Ramgopal!". Mami is a true professional who dispelled the 'myth' that professionalism is a monopoly of the corporates and technocrats-and this in the eighties!! Neela mami taught all of us, her students that everyone's time is valuable. There was an unwritten rule that one could not miss a class at will-we had to inform mami in the morning so that she could accommodate someone else from her long 'waiting list'. She did not make anyone wait and expected the same courtesy from all of us.

Mami is always 'current' - she keeps abreast of all that is 'happening'. Her zest for life is amazing! Whether it be participating in quizzes or getting prizes in answering questions in 'Ananda Vikatan' or 'Kalki'. Mami has always been a sport- always willing to take up a challenge. It is no small feat for a hard core 'Kumbakonam' lady in a short span of time to be able to make presentations, conduct workshops, make inaugural and valedictory speeches and to give her awards acceptance speeches in Shuddha Kannada. It is this attitude that took her to the US at the invitation of CMANA.

Mami not only works hard, but expects everyone who she is working with, to have the same sense of dedication. She is a great inspiration and one can learn much if one wants to.

Mami, the musician – a professional whose mission is 'learning and teaching'. She has left no stone unturned in her striving for advancement. Neela mami is one of those rare people who did not hesitate to approach another musician

*Vid. Neela Ramgopal seen supporting youngsters RK Sriramkumar and Arjun Kumar in a concert*





*Vidushi Neela Ramgopal with Vid. Palai Ramachandran and Vid. Thiruvengadu Jayaraman at Thyagaraja Aradana in Calicut*

even if junior to her, for a krithi or Pallavi she wanted to learn from them and she had no hesitation acknowledging that. This is a quality one does not see in very many artistes.

Mami's great 'Quality of Teaching' is something special. She was willing to teach at the students' pace and taught all of us many many special and rare krithis. She always guides us in the choice of krithis and ragams for a concert. Her astuteness in picking the ragas and krithis for every concert is the secret of the success of her concerts.

Neela mami is great at networking, putting some of us to shame. Another quality of mami's worthy of mention, is that even when she had

become an 'A top' artiste, she still encouraged upcoming accompanists for her concerts.

Mami has been a great inspiration for all of us. Ramgopal mama has had his share in our growth too. He used to record music for us.

I will be failing if I do not mention Neela mami's tech savviness. She was among the earliest to start Skype classes, move from the cassettes to CDs to MP3's and all the rest of it.

Honestly, there is so much one can say about mami and her achievements. Suffice it to say she changed the way many of us looked at life and continues to give us so much good music.

All of us wish her very good health and many many more years of rich classical music.

### **Condolence to Bellary Venkateshachar (1931-2015)**



We are deeply saddened by the news of Shri. Bellary Venkateshachar passing away on 8th June 2015 at the age of 84. We pass on our deep felt condolence and pray to god that his soul rest in peace.

At this time, we are very pleased that a full blown article in the form of a profile was published in the January edition of the LKT. Interested readers may like to down the load the said version (Jan 2015 edition, Nedanurigar cover page).

# A contest with prizes with no winners?

Sachi R Sachidananda

Of late there are many classical music contests conducted in India and perhaps even among the overseas diaspora. These contests, often televised or webcast, have well-known judges, several rounds of competitions, and progressive elimination of the contestants until one is crowned as the Grand Prize Winner or Idol. A substantial amount of melodrama is added in the popular TV contests with close-ups, tears, hugs, confetti, kisses and constant excitement. All this is supposed to help promote interest in classical music and spot talent early. The contestants go on to become sometimes big names in music. But a lot more damage is possibly done to those who lose out in the contests, who may not easily get over the feeling of rejection.

Let me point out some obvious problems in announcing a musician as a prize winner or “the best musician” in a contest:

1. You can only respond to a piece of musical performance, in a specific setting, and cannot extrapolate your assessment of that music to an assessment of the musician. Even if you assume that the musician showcased his or her best, two musicians who perform different pieces to different audiences in different circumstances cannot be compared. At best we can use some yardsticks to benchmark musical pieces or performances. We may even have bands or

grades like A High, A, B, etc. But nothing more.

2. Even such benchmarking will have a lot of caveats. All musical responses are subjective. No two people respond precisely the same way to a piece of music. If you now layer differences in musical backgrounds, musical alliances, personal networks, and prior reputations and impressions, you are almost sure that an objective comparison of two musicians cannot be made so easily.
3. In a highly publicised contest, with high stakes, and several rounds, we may eventually land up with promoting some musicians who offer “popular” music, formatted to suit the occasion. The history of classical music is full of mavericks or unrecognised geniuses.

We can understand that man is essentially a competitive beast. But “The winner takes all” approach is neither a cultural hallmark nor an act condonable ever as a dignified human behaviour. In Roman arena, men were thrown to fight lions. Musicians were similarly subjected to contests by kings and patrons who derived some thrill from seeing such a “fight to the finish”. Have you noticed that all legends about such musical contests depict the loser as a worthless fool, or a usurper, or an evil person?

Classical music contests even in the West have been plagued by controversy. Recently, in March

## Condolence to TS Sankaran (1930-2015)



We convey our deepest condolences to Shri. TS Sankaran's family. It is indeed a great loss to the field of Karnatak music fraternity and a void that will be hard to fill.

It is said that Shri. Sankaran had a style that was close to Mali and Mali was very appreciative of the same. We pray god to rest his soul in peace and wish JA Jayanth his grandson the best to carry on the tradition.

2015, a singer, Andreas Kummert, was publicly voted through for his song Heart of Stone to be representing his country at this year's Eurovision song contest in Vienna. But he made the shocking decision to turn it down. Andreas Kummert handed his vote to runner-up Ann Sophie, declaring "I am just a little singer", to a huge uproar from a bemused audience.

The distinguished cellist and conductor, Julian Lloyd Webber has told the Times that the winners of internationally esteemed music competitions were chosen by jurors selecting their own pupils. Lloyd Webber said corruption was rife, singling out the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow as the most prestigious example of unscrupulous judging.

With this kind of controversies, many distinguished musicians may find an invitation to be a judge in a contest a double-edged sword. That is why I say that such contests may award prizes, but they make no winners.

Kalavanta, Karnataka Fine Arts Council festival and competition, now in its second year, is an important festival because it employs a rigorous process of artiste selection. Since it has a sharp focus on young talent, it is also unique, with a global audience.

In this year's festival, many artistes did quite well in so many areas that the final prize winner selection could have had a few indefinable and subjective factors, which is very natural for a field like fine-arts. In saying this, I am not at all questioning the integrity or competence of the eminent panel of judges.

So I offer the following suggestions:

1. Kalavanta can constitute an eminent panel of judges and connoisseurs who will be either physically present or attend the concerts online to hear the artistes.
2. The panellists provide a detailed feedback in a structured format (to be followed by each of the panellists) to each artiste privately via Kalavanta (this process can be streamlined).
3. Do not award prizes.

4. Give certificates to each artiste at the end of their performance on the same day, signed by the head of Kalavanta and the head of the panel. This can be a very valuable recognition for each artiste.
5. Create an "optional" three year follow-up feedback process for each artiste by the Kalavanta panellists who can monitor and give feedback over that period, if the artiste opts for it.
6. The panellist feedback quorum need not be 100% for its usefulness. If there are 10 senior musicians/musicologists/connoisseurs on the panel and an artiste gets feedback from say, six, that is not bad at all. This feedback will go a long way to help each young artiste.

More youth festivals, well run like the Kalavanta, can give a big boost to the talented youngsters without the potential psychological trauma of being seen as a loser. Let us reinforce to every classical music aspirant that there are no losers in this wonderful pursuit, only winners.

## **Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards 2014**

### **Fellowship**

SR Janakiraman (Musicologist)



### **Akademi Puraskar**

Neyveli Santhanagopalan (Vocal)  
TA Kaliyamurthy (Tavil)  
Sukanya Ramgopal (Ghatam)  
Dwaram Durga Prasad Rao (Violin)

# Tasmai Sri Gurave namaha

Sumitra Nitin, Sr. Disciple of Vid. Neela Ramgopal

"Are you a student of Neela Ramgopal ?", used to be the most common question asked of me during my initial years as a resident of Bangalore. I would reply in the negative, but every time I heard her name mentioned, my curiosity to find out something about this Guru increased. As it happened, my first opportunity to listen to Mami came in the Music Academy, Chennai during the December music festival when Mami performed in the prime time evening slot at very short notice, filling in for an indisposed musician. In characteristic style, Mami sang effortlessly, making it all seem so easy. I still remember the Vachaspati and Begada she sang that day.

My appetite had been whetted. There was something so different about the way she sang, yet I could not put a finger on it. The ideas seemed to have a flow, but, like an unpredictable river, there were many rivulets of imagination that teased and left me gaping with wonder. Listening to more concerts by her, I came to the conclusion that her music was highly emotional and yet very cerebral too. I wanted to sing like her ! The goal was certain but how was I going to approach her ? As it happened, another Guru of mine came to my rescue.

'Please hand over my gift of a saree to Neela Mami' requested my dance Guru Smt. Rhadha during one of my visits to Chennai. Smt. Rhadha and Neela Mami had met at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, London where they had gone for teaching stints in dance and music respectively. They had developed great mutual admiration for each other.

I was thrilled at the thought of utilising the excuse of handing over the saree to meet Neela Mami in person and requesting her to accept me as her student. One Sunday afternoon I rang her doorbell and when the door of her apartment opened I was taken aback to see a room

full of students ! Of all days, I had chosen the day when all of Mami's students gather to sing and pay their respects to her on the occasion of Vijayadasami! I quickly handed over the saree at the door and scooted even as a bemused Mami was welcoming me inside.

I consider it divine grace that very soon, a fortunate sequence of events led me to sing alongside Mami for the dance recital of Smt. Rhadha in Bangalore. What an experience it was to learn and practice the songs with her ! On stage I saw the confluence of great music and dance when both my Gurus inspired each other to unbelievable heights during the elaboration of the line "Jagadodharaka namma Udupi Sri Krishna" in "Krishna nee begane baro".

Commencing learning from Neela Mami shortly after that, I have had the good fortune of having classes with her twice a week since June 2008. Yet, I must confess I have not even crossed the first step in deciphering the magic of Mami's music. Such is her genius! How does she discover the raga swaroopa of any raga in sec-





*Vidushi Neela Ramgopal conducting a workshop at Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira*

onds? How can she render raga alapana for the same raga in so many different ways giving a new colour to it every time? How does her neraval never fail to tug at my heartstrings? How can she have a repertoire that seems as big as the ocean? How can she add beauty to any composition? I only have more questions!

Mami is who she is because she is learning something new everyday. She has no problem even if a student shares some knowledge with her. 'Write down this korvai. My flute student played it today. I liked it very much and learnt it from him', she once told me. Incidentally Mami teaches music to flautists, mridangam artistes, vainikas and violinists as well.

Mami not only teaches me but she also listens to me. I mean, she listens intently with a critical ear when I overcome my trepidation and render raga alapanas in class. She is always spot on her with her evaluation of the good and the bad. If I pass Mami's test I feel confident enough to sing on any stage. After all, I have sung before Mami herself! All my mental faculties have to work overtime when I sing neraval and kalpanaswarams alternately with Mami. She, on the other hand, simply astounds me with incredible phrases even as she is walking to pick up the telephone! The best of music simply oozes

out of her. We must consider ourselves fortunate to absorb whatever little we can of that.

An ardent and inveterate rasika, Mami's favourite pastime is attending concerts. It does not matter if the artiste is an upcoming youngster or a front ranking musician. All that matters is that the music has to be to her liking. If she likes a krithi in the concert, the musician can expect a call for sure from Mami the next day, asking for the notation or the recording. Her choice repertoire has been built over the years with dedicated effort.

We students are a spoilt lot with a Guru like Mami as every song request of ours is fulfilled. A typical request would be, "Mami I need a song in Tamil, a slow moving one, preferably in a rakti raga and Misra chapu tala" and the typical response from Mami, "I know the perfect song for you. I learnt this one about 40 years ago. Give me your book and I will write it down".

Mami's ability to read and write notation in three languages --Tamil, Kannada and English, is legendary. The books of her students are filled with painstakingly handwritten songs. Her memory, of course, is razor sharp and nothing misses Mami's ear. She will never fail to notice the slightest change we may inadvertently make to any song she has taught us. How she re-

members every detail about the numerous songs in her repertoire beats me.

Any musician will agree with the fact that preparing a good concert list is half the battle won. Mami's students are indeed a lucky lot as they have one of the best concert planners in their Guru. Every concert of Mami's will have variety in songs, ragas, talas, composers, languages and any other criteria one may think of. When planning their concerts the students can be rest assured that "Mami's choice is always the best choice".

Mami's enthusiasm and energy is boundless. She puts us to shame with her readiness to take on any task related to music, be it rendering a concert, attending one, writing an article, presenting a lecture demonstration or even presiding over music related functions. She has this 'Never say no' attitude and a supreme example of this is highlighted in the following incident. I attended class as usual one Thursday morning and left for Chennai that night. Next morning I saw in the papers an announcement about Mami's concert in Chennai that evening. After the concert I asked her why she had not told me about the concert earlier, especially as she knew I would be travelling to Chennai. She said, 'After you left, I got a call requesting me to sing this concert. I took an overnight bus to get here, and am taking one more now to get back to Bangalore by tomorrow morning'. I was, as you can imagine, speechless with wonder.

Mami has conducted numerous workshops and donated the proceeds to worthy causes. 'Money is of no use to me beyond a point. Let it benefit others', she says magnanimously. "How religious is Mami", I wondered, and once asked her about her thoughts on God. Her reply strengthened my view that she is a true

Nadopasaka. She said 'I have experienced God through music especially while singing neraval on a few occasions'. Music is the be all and end all of her existence.

If there is one thing Mami will not entertain any talk about, it is discussion about her health. This attitude is even more remarkable considering she has had to fight many battles on that front.

Always elegantly dressed whether at home or outside, Mami is a joy to behold. Not only herself, even her surroundings are impeccably kept. I remember noticing, even during my first visit to her house, that everything was orderly and in its place. An excellent cook, she is also extremely quick and efficient in that department. Sometimes dishes get prepared in a jiffy in the few minutes she gets between classes as students come in every hour from morning till late evening. Totally tech savvy, Mami does much more with the computer than even someone half her age.

It would seem as if Mami has done it all in the past 8 decades of her existence. But even as recently as a few months back, she did something she had never done before. For the first time in her life she composed a song and that too in a rare raga called Pranavapriya! When I asked her how she did it, she said 'I needed a composition for a lecture demonstration where I was presenting this rare raga. I lay down thinking about it and soon the lyrics formed in my head. Try it! I am sure even you can do it'.

*Sumitra Nitin along with other students with Neela Ramgopal*



For us students, anything is possible as Mami is there to set the goal and guide us every step of the way. The only problem is that at 80, Mami is running so fast, we lesser mortals are unable to keep pace with her !

\*\*\*

# MLV the Master Musician..

Vrinda Acharya, Sr. disciple of Vid. Neela Ramgopal

I feel blessed to write about none other than Dr. ML Vasanthakumari (1928-1990), one of the outstanding musicians the Carnatic music world has ever seen. More so because, we are celebrating my guru Vid. Neela Ramgopal mami's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and MLV is mami's 'manasika guru'.

MLV was born in a musically and culturally rich family. Her parents Kuthanur Ayya Swamy Iyer and Lalithangi were noted musicians. MLV was naturally inclined to singing, and learnt many Dasa keertanas from her mother. She became the first disciple of the legendary vidwan GN Balasubramaniam. She would absorb her gurus' guidance like a blotter, soaking up every nuance.

Though she mostly followed GNB's bani, she was known for her distinct inimitable 'MLV style' which kept her rasikas mesmerised and

## *Special feature on MLV amma's 86th birth anniversary month*

spellbound. According to GNB himself as quoted in Sruti magazine, "Vasanthi typifies real discipleship. She applies her mind to all she absorbs and presents a glorious edifice of her own creation." Nevertheless, her music was as bold and courageous as her guru's. She was a true spontaneous musician, who, they say, would never practice before the concert. She indeed had no fear of the stage or of experimentation and improvisation on the spot. Her music had high energy and enormous imagination. It was more intellectual and rich with brilliant manodharma, than emotional. Lightening birgas, leisurely methodical development of ragas, elaborating unusual ragas like Andolika, Kapinarayani, Pushpalathika, Salagabhairavi, Devamanohari, Sarangatharangini, Gamanashrama and the like with a free-flowing ease, fluent voice that could traverse three octaves, highly imaginative and adventurous sangathis, scintillating shruti bheda essays, scholarly RTPs are some of the hallmarks of MLV's music.

MLV's style of raga exposition was special. Following GNB's patented style, she would first give a quick flashy sketch of the raga before settling down for a detailed step-by-step elaboration (particularly for RTPs). Given her perfect and comprehensive voice technique, she could produce any gamaka, birga or voice modulation with absolute control and melody. For instance, in Shanmukhapriya, she would sing unbelievably fast birgas from mandrasthayi panchamam to tarasthayi rishabham; in Hindolam from mandra madhyamam to tara madhyamam and in Shubhapantuvarali from mandra panchamam to tara panchamam, so perfect and tuneful. Her sa-pa varjya prayogams in Kalyani or Todi, and phrases like DNRN,DP, in Keeravani for instance were



soul-stirring. Her occasional use of the straight gandharam in Todi would always give special feel. She would normally decorate the descent of her ragalapana with three meaningful parallel phrases like MG,RSN-SN,DPM-MG,RSN or RGRSND-DNDPMG-RGRSND or S,SR,SD,P,PPD,PG,R- S,SR,SD,P.

Shruti bhedom is like tight rope walking. It requires concentration and expertise of a high order with respect to shrutis and swaras. A slip can easily land the musician in an abyss of apaswaram. Like her guru, MLV had a penchant for Shruti bhedom. A detailed Shankarabharanam would see her foraying into Kalyani in a flash. Similarly, she would beautifully bring Todi in Kharaharapriya. Not just changing the ragam, but coming back to the original ragam was equally a thrilling experience for the audience.

MLV's concerts were known for their brilliant and effortless Ragam-Tanam-Pallavis. One cannot but be amazed at the unimaginable mastery she exhibited in all aspects of pallavi singing. As for her control on laya, it was perfection personified. She has presented pallavis in complicated talas such as mishramukhi. 'Kanaka Sabesha Jagadeesha Natana Prakasha' in Shuddhadhanyasi, khanda triputa talam 3 kalai (tishra nadai), 'Kamalasani sundari chandravadani karunarasa vilochani' in Shanmukhapriya Adi talam 4 kalai ateeta eduppu are some pallavis of hers that the music fraternity will always treasure.

MLV was also outstanding in niraval, tanam and swaraprastara. She was inspiringly creative and original, striking surprising swara combinations with incredible fluidity. Her prayogams were inadvertent products of a fertile imagination, making it difficult for accompanists to follow. She was sure to steal the show with her ragamalika swaras, be it ragas like Kanada, Kedaram, Yadukulakambhoji and Sahana, or rarer ones like Tilang, Revati, Kalavati and Chandrakauns.

Her laya prowess was so exceptional that Mridangam Maestro Vidwan Palghat Mani Iyer accompanied her in some concerts. She was daring enough to sing Todi in front of no less than 'the champion of Todi', Vidwan TN Rajaratnam

Pillai and won his praise. Her music won the appreciation of stalwarts like Vidwan Lagudi Jayaraman, Vidushi MS Subbulakshmi and Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan.

MLV's repertoire was so vast that every concert of hers had newer and newer ragas and compositions to offer to the rasikas. In addition to the compositions of the Trinity, she often presented modern composers like Papanasam Sivan, Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar, GNB, NS Ramachandran, Ambujam Krishna and Periasami Theoran. Her exquisite rendering of Purandaradasa songs was a major attraction in her concerts. She was instrumental in popularising many compositions of the Haridasas by tuning them and bringing them to mainstream concert platform. 'Innu daya barade', 'Baro Krishnayya', 'Sharanu Benakane', 'Gajavadana paliso', 'Yamanelli kanenendu', 'Venkatachala nilayam', 'Yadava Raya' in her silken voice were sublime expressions of melody. 'Chandrachooda Shiva shankara' tuned by her in Ragamalika, with the last charana in khanda nadai and each line of it in the reverse order of the ragas previously used, speaks volumes of her exquisite musicianship. She would also sing Ugabhogas and shlokas, aesthetically blending the technicalities of the raga with the sahitya bhava. Tillanas, particularly Lalgudi's, were another draw in her concerts. 'Kalyana Gopalam' in Sindhubhairavi, 'Unnai enri' in Bhavani, 'Muruga Nin' in Behag, 'Mariyadagadayya' in Bhairavam, 'Marugelara' in Jayanthasri were some of her other masterpieces.

MLV's venture into film music was equally remarkable. 'Ellam Inba Mayam' and 'Chinnanchiru kiliye' (Manamagal-1951), Imaya malai chaaralile (Manithanum Mirugamum-1953), Taaye yashoda undan (Kuladaivam-1956), Anthi mayanguthadi and Vadiveru Tirisoolam (Parthiban Kanavu-1960), Paal Kadal Alaimela (Raja Desingu-1960) Aadatha Manamum Undo (Mannadhi Mannan-1960) were some of the classical super hits of MLV which gave her golden voice more reach and popularity. She would also sing for her daughter Srividya's dance recitals.

MLV's charm, grace and humility could never go unnoticed. Her open mindedness and infinite craving for knowledge made her fairly appreciate other artists and other forms of music.

MLV was beyond doubt a complete musician. A successful artist who became popular during her guru's lifetime and who reached the bracket of the female trinity with MS and DKP who

were many years senior to her, she was the youngest female recipient of the coveted Sangeetha Kalanidhi. She is a delight to any listener and a guiding spirit to any student of Carnatic Music. One may use all the expressions in the vocabulary, and write pages and pages to describe her music. Yet, explanations can never replace experience. Blessed are those

## Aural treat by Vijaya Siva

Priyanka Prakash, Disciple of Vid. Neela Ramgopal

The second day of the 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations of Sangita Kala Acharya Vidushi Neela Ramgopal witnessed the powerful and evocative music of Vidvan's Vijay Siva, RK Shriramkumar, Manoj Siva and Anirudh Athreya.

In a performance that marked the highest level of musical skill and perfect convergence of musical energies by the four artistes, Sri Vijay Siva commenced the recital with Thyagaraja's Suddha Seemantini kriti, Janaki Ramana. A succinct Dhanyudevvado (Malayamarutham) preceded an exquisite Begada aalapana. The aalapana was

marked for its chaste classicism, a theme underlying the entire concert. The alapana had some interesting phrases including a lovely apoorva prayogam of 'SGPM'. Sri Shriramkumar's rendition was replete with raga-bhava and the phase 'M,M,M,GMP' (like one of the phrases in the Charanam of the krithi Nadopasana) was a nice finishing touch. Muthuswamy Dikshithar's Thyagarajaya Namaste followed. The lyrics were rendered with so much clarity that one reminisced of the story of Muchukunda Chakravathi in the line beginning Muchukundaadi...



who have experienced the divine melody of this phenomenal musician!

This was succeeded by what the audience unanimously felt was the crème-de-la-crème of the concert. An evocative Slokam on Goddess Kamakshi preceded the magnum opus, Shyama Shastri's Swarajathi, Raave Himagiri Kumari. Goddess Kamakshi was present in the auditorium at this time... it was rendered with such great devotional fervor. The perfect unison of vocal, violin and percussion artistes created an atmosphere that was poignant. The emotion in each Sahityam called out to the Goddess in surrender. The Goddess must have heard the plea Raave ('please come'), for Her presence was felt by all in the auditorium that day.

In a quick change of mood and pace, a leisurely Kalyani ragam was followed by Nidhichala Sukhama. The neraval for this krithi was a masterpiece, with the lyrical content once again, occupying prime place. Thyagaraja's question to the world came out clearly in this Neraval exposition – Narastuti Sukhama? Kirtana Sukhama? (Is praise of an ephemeral mortal the source of happiness, or is it singing the praises of the eternal Lord Rama?)

The main item of the concert was a Raga Mudra Pallavi in Jayantasena composed by Vid Vijay Siva. A bright and wonderful ragam and thanam preceded the Pallavi, which was set to the interesting Chatura Jhampai thalam (2 Kalai) - a

14-beat cycle. The sahityam was - Senapathe Shakthi pANe - Jaya Jayanantha... when the Uttarangam leads to the Poorvangam, it forms the raga name 'Jayanthasena'. This was alternated by a quick cycle in 1-Kalai, and then back to the 2-Kalai cycle for the ragamalika swarams, which was an exciting series in Bilahari, Useni and Kathanakuthuhalam. The Thaniavarthanam by Sri Manoj Siva and Sri Anirudh Athreya was masterful, with subtle changes in Nadai's. After a few complex yet unobtrusive rounds, the Mohra and Korvai was simple and marked for its clarity and lucidity. The Thaniavarthanam complemented the concert well and was in line with the larger musical energy of the concert.

The post-thaniavarthanam section was a mix of energetic and peaceful, with the Devaranama Dasanenna (Yadukula Kamboji), the Hamsadhwani Javali Nera Mora, and a Mira Bhajan. This was succeeded by Arunachala Siva, a ragamalika composed by Sri Ramana Maharshi, a Tirupugazh in Anandabhairavi (Yeru mayil yeri) and a lovely patriotic composition Shanta Ahimsa Murthe in Sindubharavi which provided a reposeful conclusion to the concert.

Chaste, classical, pure and deep – the concert by Vid Vijay Siva, Vid RK Shriramkumar, Vid Manoj Siva and Vid Anirudh Athreya was the fitting finale to the 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations of legendary vocalist Sangita Kala Acharya Vidushi Neela Ramgopal.

---

## Lasting impressions of Lec-Dem

Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira had arranged two very informative and interesting lecture demonstrations in its premises, with its vision to propagate karnatak music to one and all, more so to help the students learning karnatak music. A lecture demonstration on 'Thaana' and 'Pallavi' was conducted by Dr. T.S. Sathyavathi on April 11, 2015. She is a name to reckon with in the field of music with her erudite scholarship.

Rajashree Yogananda





She first went on to explain Thana, the varieties in thana, different patterns in thana and how to present it aesthetically. She also went on to explain the two main types of thana, shuddha thana and koota thana and also how the thana originated from Veena.

The next topic was pallavi singing and she with her immense experience, explained pallavi singing strand by strand and also sang to give a clear and vivid picture.

Vidushi Sandhya Srinath on the violin and vidwan BC Manjunath on the mridangam shared the stage with her and rose to the occasion with their apt and competent playing. Vidushi Shilpa Shashidhar gave faithful vocal support to her guru.

The next lecture demonstration on the following day, 12<sup>th</sup> April was by another stalwart, violinist vidwan RK Shriramkumar who dealt with the topic “Manodharma Sangeetha” in karnatak music. He said that karnatak music is a perfect balance of kalpita and manodharma sangeetha

and there is a wealth of compositions by great vaggeyakaras to enrich our manodharma. Not only that, but also how a raga has to be sung and the various facets of the raga which are brought about in many compositions. It turned out that he is also a competent singer as he was able to sing and showcase all the aspects of singing. He emphasised that manodharma has to be developed within the framework of tradition and that allows a huge playing field. He was sensitively accompanied by Charulata Ramanujam on the violin and BR Shrinivas on the mridangam.

Both the lec-dems were a wealth of scholarly information, made interesting and lively by in depth and soulful singing to leave a lasting impression on a truly zealous note.

SRLKM gratefully acknowledges the initiatives taken by Smt.Neela Ramgopal for arranging the two lec-dems and sponsoring both the programmes.

\*\*\*

**Entry to all the concerts of SRLKM is FREE. We do welcome music patrons to come forward and extend financial Contributions/Sponsorships voluntarily and liberally, so that all music lovers can utilise the valuable opportunity to enjoy classical music. These donations carry exemption as per 80G of IT Act, 1961.**

# Kalavanta 2015 - Awardees



*Clockwise from top left - Vignesh Ishwar (Vocal), KJ Dileep (Violin),  
Vinodh Shyam (Mridangam), Sunad Anoor (Kanjari), Vani Ramamurthy (Vocal)*

**We  
just  
turned  
60 yrs...**



**Distinguished Service to Carnatic Music since 1955**

**...and that was our  
1500<sup>th</sup> concert.**