A GENTLE INTRODUCTION TO

SOUTH INDIAN CLASSICAL (KARNATIC) MUSIC

PART IV

BY MAHADEVAN RAMESH
mahadevan_ramesh@maxtor.com

THE CONCERT MUSICIAN

If you have ever been to a Karnatic concert, you would have noticed that the ensemble sitting on the stage is usually only a few people strong. If the main performer is a vocalist (let us assume this, for the time being !) he is usually accompanied by a violinist and a Mridangam player. If he is lucky, there is also a Ghatam player tapping on a clay pot for accompaniment. There is, of course, a person strumming the Tanpura or the Sruti box and if the musician is a senior artiste, some of his disciples too sit on the stage and sing along - sometimes camouflaging the flaws of the Guru and reaching higher notes their Gurus cannot reach.

It is always a dream of every student to become a performing musician and to be top notch. But before being let loose on concert stages, they still have one final plateau of excellence to reach - the ability to perform what is called a 'Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi' or RTP or simply 'Pallavi'. (Note again, how we use the same word Pallavi to mean two different things) Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi is a total elaboration of a specific Ragam and is one hundred percent improvisation and creativity. It is the perfect place for a musician to show off his skill and mastery in enunciating a Ragam. The Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi is in fact the centerpiece of a Karnatic music concert.

First of, the musician chooses a 'strong' Ragam to perform his RTP. Oftentimes he picks a Melakarta Ragam, where the scope to make creative melodies is enormous (because they have all the allowed seven notes in the scale - remember they are all Sampoorna or 'complete' Ragams) He would also often choose a complex Talam to set his musical phrases in. Let us say he chooses Shankarabharanam and set to a Talam with a eleven beat cycle (!). In real concerts, usually the artiste does not reveal the Ragam of his RTP before hand. The audience and often, the accompanying musicians find out the Ragam just when the musician begins to play the RTP.

The first part of the RTP is simply the Alapanai of the Ragam (the word 'Ragam', is also a synonym for Alapanai, remember ?) After the Alapanai, the singer usually takes a break (and sips 'hot water' or milk kept on the sidelines) when the violinist takes over and tries to play the same musical phrases the singer just sang. This calls for a tremendous memory and ear for musical phrases. Of course, no one keeps tabs on how accurately the violinist follows the musician. The closer the violinists and the musicians are, the better. (This probably explains why specific violinist play for specific musicians because they 'know' each other well)

The second part of the RTP is called Tanam - don't confuse it with TaLam. Here the Ragam is elaborated even more. But now, the improvisation is in a faster tempo and set to a rhythm. Syllables such as 'Tum', 'Tanam' etc are used in this section (as opposed to syllables typically used in Alapanai). The violinist usually follows the musician after every passage. (unlike in the Alapanai part where he waited till the musician got done with the whole Alapanai) If instrumentalists are performing the RTP, in Tanam segment, they would play the sympathetic strings for added effect.

After the Tanam, the singer then starts on Pallavi, which in the context of RTP is just one line of text - often made up by the musician himself. He could very well have chosen 'Baa baa black sheep' as the Pallavi if he can massage the line to fit the Talam. Here, the Mridangam and Ghatam join in. The musician would embark on a series of 'Neravals' stretching the one line of Pallavi into several melodic phrases. The violinist of course follows the musician one step behind. Interestingly, at this point, the Mridangam would play when the musician sings and the Ghatam player would play for the violinist. The musician would cap it all off finally with a spate of Kalpana Swarams, by which time all the dimensions of the Ragam would have been (hopefully !) brought out.

Then the singer would break into an impromptu Raga Malika - singing Kalpana Swaram sequences in a bunch of Ragams, one after another. He chooses the Ragams in the Raga Malika to be widely apart, instead of being only subtely different. (Often 'light' ragams or Hindustani type Ragams are chosen). If Shankarabharanam is the Ragam for the RTP, then derivatives of Shankarabharanam are usually not chosen in the Raga Malika section). At the end of the Kalpana Swaram passage of each Ragam, he would sing the old Pallavi in that particular Ragam. The grand finale is when he breaks into a long series of Swarams (typically in the reverse order of the Raga Malika Ragams) and finally landing on the initial Ragam he had set out to play - (Shankarabharanam).

At this point, the singer typically lets the percussionists (Ghatam and Mridangam player) perform solo. This is called Tani Avartam or Tani Avartanam or Tani. This is also the time when the audience too takes a break and typically indulges in disruptive behaviour like chatting, rushing home or even dozing off. The percussionists grab this opportunity to perform the intricate aspects of the Talam.

A good Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi can last upwards of an hour and it is a vehicle for showcasing a singer's talent.

A TYPICAL KARNATIC MUSIC CONCERT

One of the dangers on writing about a 'typical' music concert is that these days there is no clear definition of what is 'typical'. Only a few years ago, instrument solos were rare in the Karnatic music tradition. Now, they are all over the place. These days several Karnatic musicians follow the Hindustani format as well and just sing a Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi and a few additional pieces. There are of course, numerous other changes that always keep happening - some trend-setting, some others just passing fads. Let us however look at a garden variety Karnatic concert.

A typical concert lasts around three hours. And most concerts do not have a 'program' given out ahead of time. By and large, the audience does not know what song is going to be performed next, even though these days most musicians have become reasonably Westernized and 'announce' their next song and what Ragam and Talam they are set in and who composed the song.

The musician would start the concert with a fast paced Varnam. This not only serves as a warm up piece for the ensemble to synchronize, it also sets the mood for the concert. And of course, it allows the latecomers in the audience the time to find their seats and sit down before the heavy-duty songs are sung. Usually, the singers will also resort to some gimmicks in the Varnam itself - such as playing the Varnam in several speeds or adding their own Kalpana Swaram passages.

This will then be followed by a song about Vinayaka in the Ragam Hamsadhwani or Nattai. Given there are only so many songs in Hamsadhwani and Nattai about Vinayaka, you can almost predict what is coming. Then the singer performs a variety of songs - choosing them appropriately so that he has the right mix and order of Ragams, tempo and audience appeal. He would choose to express his creativity whereever by performing Alapanai or Neraval or Kalpana Swaram at the appropriate parts of the songs. Then eventually he will perform the Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi.

After the RTP, the concert winds down and tends to get 'light', where the musician plays several short, light numbers. Instrumentalists sometimes tune their instruments to a higher pitch, (That is, intentionally shift their basic octave higher) to give the concert an artificially bright mood (and also to wake up the sleeping members of the audience) These light pieces are usually called 'Tukkadas' (literally meaning 'pieces') They could be popular, recent numbers or 'trademark' songs of a particular performer or even movie songs. Many Tukkadas are set in light Ragams or rare ragams and some in Hindustani Ragams. They could be a Bhajan song, a folk song, song in an obscure language, a Tillana (which is basically a dance song, often set in high tempo, with a lot of dance steps set to syllables such as 'teem', 'takka timi', 'thaa thai' etc), or a Javali (a short, 'quick' composition) Toward the end of the concert, members of the audience usually request their choices - often honored by the musicians. Finally, the concert is officially ended by singing a brief number called 'Mangalam', usually in the Ragam Madhyamavati, but sometimes even in Ragams like Surati.

A VERY, VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF KARNATIC MUSIC

Like many things Indian, even Indian music has a colorful history, which can probably give us insights into some of its numerous traditions and grammatical structure. Indian classical music, as an institution, has evolved greatly over the years - it is still in the process of evolution, changing itself at every possible opportunity and adapting itself to popular sentiment and political climate. Let us take a quick look at the history of Indian music - of course, it will be a 'quick look' and you can look in any of the references quoted at the end of this primer for an in-depth study.

Remember that in ancient India, music played a significantly larger role in people's lives compared to these modern times. Our ancestors did not listen to music in their chariot-stereos the way we do these days. Greater percentage of the population (compared to these days) composed music, performed it and even did research on it. People dedicated themselves to music. Kings and queens patronized music and had a full court of accomplished musicians. As Dr. Baghyalakshmi puts it, "The Kings went to sleep and woke up to music...". There were music competitions held every once in a while, which pitted one learned musician against another, where the degree of difficulty was so high that most of the modern day musicians would not even qualify to enter. Although these music contests produced outstanding scholarship, they were also vehicles to heap shame and humiliation on the defeated rival - an aspect which is hard for me to understand. History is also full of legends and astonishing individual accomplishments. Very high standards were established. It took a musician several decades of intense studentship (typically in a Gurukulam) before he or she could be considered a concert performer. These days after one summer, kids are already on stage 'performing' music.

Even in the early part of this century, people did not have the modern day 'high stress', 'no time for anything' lifestyle. Concerts lasted all night and people sat down and 'sustain-listened' to the same Ragam performed for the sixth continuous hour. These days we get a few minute condensed pop versions of most Alapanai on CDs and tapes. Well, I am sounding like a bitter cynic, but it should be borne in mind that the ancient texts on music (and traditional Karnatic music in general) are way, way more complex than what I have elaborated. There is almost very little you or I can add to the Indian music theory, really.

There is a staggering amount of written work on music that exists in India - right from Vedic times to the present day. A good lot of them are extremely sophisticated and seminal and boggle the mind on the level of analysis. It is easy to read just the first paragraph of one of those works and get totally lost in a buzzword-maze of "Lakshana', 'Beda', 'Grama' and so forth. These texts on music are about as tough as texts on Indian philosophy and the degree of abstraction employed can be scary. Remember that we had more than our share of mathematicians and theoretical people (and software folks !) in India who not only invented concepts like zero, but also established fascinating mathematical foundations for music. Not knowing enough sanskrit (or music for that matter) can only hamper our quest for understanding these texts. Suffice it to say that there exist elaborate frameworks on which the musical system is based. Throughout history, famous texts on music were more or less considered the 'Bibles' and the rules and formulations they spelt out were strictly conformed to and taught to students.

There is something or the other mentioned about Indian music in a variety of Indian literature. Even in the Vedic times, elements of music were recognized. Mantras were chanted using selected notes. Initially, only a few notes were used, but eventually to relieve the monotony, more notes got added. Sama Veda, the most musical of the Vedas, is almost 'sung out' even these days. For most parts, the lower octave was employed (Mandra Stayi, remember ?) Music was considered divine and was kept in the selected social circles for most parts. The earliest Ragam is speculated to be 'Sama Ragam', which

could be a derivative of the modern day Kharaharapriya. Theories and treatises began to be written - about how the primitive sound 'om' gave rise to the notes etc.

By the time the Epic period came around, the ancients were entrenched in the seven notes used in Indian music as building blocks, namely Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha and Ni. They were considered the 'Saptha Swarams' and explanations were abound regarding their deeper meaning. About the only thing that was not fixed was the exact 'frequency' or pitch (in the octave) which was used to produce each of these notes. Which 'keys' could be used to produce these seven notes ? The relationship between Sruti (frequency) and Swarams (notes) has been the focus of several theoretical works on music through the ages.

written by Bharata. This is a monumental reference for the Bharata Natya and other dance forms, but contains several chapters on music as well. The date of this work is pegged somewhere between the second century BC to the second century AD. This is probably the first work which clearly elaborated the octave and divided it into 22 keys. Bharata based his idea on a stunning scientific experiment he performed using his musical instrument (made of strings) which 'proved' that there could be only 22 basic frequencies that could be generated in an octave. He even located them in his octave and thus tuned his string instruments.

Not only did Bharata 'invent' the keys in an octave, he also gave some basic rules to scale building. He defined three major scales with the following shifts to choose seven keys out of 22:

Scale 1: 4/3/2/4/4/3/2 (This is called Shadja Grama)

Scale 2: 4/3/2/4/3/4/2 (Called Madhyama Grama)

Scale 3: 3/2/4/3/3/4/3 (Called Gandhaara Grama)

Here the word 'Grama' is simply a synonym for a scale. This kind of algorithm is somewhat similar to the Western Major/Minor algorithms. In addition to these principal algorithms, he also derived seven secondary 'scales' per algorithm - each of these derived scales was called a 'Moorchana' (literally meaning 'fainting'). From these Moorchanas, using some other rules, he derived even more scales which could have less than seven notes (called 'Tanas') which eventually led to what could be called Ragams ! Phyooo ! It isn't clear whether Bharata used the term 'Ragam' in the sense it is used these days.

The interesting point is, Bharata's theory has been pretty much the guiding principle for subsequent musicologists through history. Various theories were framed to understand the divine and religious nature of the seven notes. There were theories to assign each note to a body part which produce sounds, like nose, throat, stomach, head etc. Yet another theory suggested that the sounds of each note matched those of common animals like Sa for peacock, Ri for ox, Ga for Goat, Ma for crane, Pa for Cuckoo, Dha for horse and Ni for elephant. All this might sound very primitive, but believe me, these theories quickly

go into extremely complicated mathematical formulations. Some people have even suggested formulas to generate millions of Ragams!

The next major work to hit the scene after Bharata's work was Dathilam. The exact period of this work is not firmly established. Here too, the author sticks to the 22 sruti per octave formalism and even goes to suggest these 22 srutis are the only ones a human body could make. (This view was expressed again by another musicologist of the thirteenth century of name Saranga Deva in his famous work Sangeeta Ratnakara - in fact, Sarang Deva was an expert in Ayurveda as well and goes on to give an Ayurvedic basis for the 22 sruti octave)

There were other seminal works such as Brahhaddesi (Ninth century AD) written by Matanga. He probably takes the credit for the emergence of the term Ragam, although the term had been used by authors before him. Matanga was the one who explained it and helped 'define' it. Interestingly, around the same time, the native South Indian music also dealt with terms like 'Pann' and 'Paalai', which can be construed as the South Indian equivalents of 'Ragam'. Tevaram and Silappadhikaram describe several such 'Ragams' and in fact, we have already seen that Ilango Adigal, the author of Silappadhikaram has described the prevailing Tamil algorithms to build scales. (called Ilikkiramam) It is quite possible that Ilango Adigal and the composers of Tevaram and South Indians in general were aware of the all pervasive work of Bharata's, 'Natya Sastra' (Quite a lot of cultural exchanges took place between the South and the North, contrary to what we would like to believe now). However, these Tamil classics are major works in their own right and it is a pity that not too much of this is discussed in the context of history of Indian music, especially due to the large volume of musical literature in sanskrit.

Sangeeta Makaranda, a book presumed to be written in the eleventh century by a person called Narada, enumerates 93 Ragams and classifies them into masculine and feminine species. The next major work on music was Sangeeta Ratnakara written by Saranga Deva during the thirteenth century. Saranga Deva was a Kashmiri, but wrote his work while in South India.

It was approximately around this time in history that the South Indian (Karnatic) music and Hindustani music bifurcated themselves and began to evolve in two different directions. (Dr. Rangaramanuja Iyengar, suggests the twelfth century as the cut off point, in an operational sense) Even now, the Dhrupad music practiced in the North India is somewhat similar in style to the South Indian Karnatic music. For example, in Dhrupad, they use a percussion instrument called Pakhwaj, (instead of Tabla) which is similar to the South Indian Mridangam.

Sangeeta Ratnakara was a milestone of sorts. Not only was it a musicology text, but it also had detailed prescription for the performance. (The grammar and framework are usually called 'Lakshana' and the actual performance is called 'Lakshaya') We have already seen how he gave an Ayurvedic basis for the 22 sruti octave. He too performed a famous experiment (on a veena) to determine the 22 srutis uniquely. He also mapped the 22 srutis into seven Swaras. (like our Table III) and also suggested the 'mood' for the

various Swaras (Sa produces heroism, Ri - terror, Pa - love and so on) He was probably responsible for suggesting an inter-relationship between the various notes constituting a Ragam, by proposing the Vaadhi-Samvaadhi-AnuVaadhi-Vivaadhi notion of a Ragam.

A word or two about this since you might hear these terms mentioned. What is the relationship between the various notes in a Ragam ? How can we understand how the note 'Sa' is related to the note 'Ma' or 'dha' in that Ragam ? This scheme defines a concept called the 'Vaadhi' or the primary note of a Ragam or the sonant or the 'King'. And by the same token, a Samvaadhi or the 'Minister' or the second in line ('Concordant note'); 'Anuvaadhi' or the 'Servant' to give the 'proper shape' to the Ragam ('Assonant') and finally the 'Dissonant' or the Vivaadhi, or the 'enemy'. It is questionable as to how useful such dissection is; but considerable volumes have been written about such things and several hundred Ragams and their Vaadhi-Vivaadhi etc structure has been catalogued by several authors. You must remember that this theory is essentially to analyze the concept of a Ragam and explain what gives its specific appeal.

Saranga Deva, among other things, defined almost 264 Ragams, including some Dravidian and North Indian ones. He also described the various 'kinds' of 'microtones' and how to produce them. He also classified them into various categories. He defined something called 'Kaku' (a term that is hardly used these days) as a blending of melody and sruti.

More than anything else, after his work came into being, it provided a veritable guide to the performers. Any standard reference such as Dr. Bhagyalekshmy's or Dr. RangaRamanuja Iyengar's or Dr. Shringi's book has greater details on Sangeeta Ratnakara. Saranga Deva's work probably launched a whole new era in music compositions and performance. In fact, for several centuries afterwards, the theorization of music became dormant, giving importance to performance. In the seventeenth century, there was a resurgence of theoretical works - such as Sangeeta Sudha (written by Govinda Dikshitar) and Chaturdandi Prakasikam (by Venkatamakhi). The latter expounded the present day Melakarta Scheme. The author mentions the twelve sruti octave and defines the Melakarta Ragams. At that time only about 19 (out of 72) were 'known'. He proposed the Katayapadi scheme of figuring out the keys used in the Melakarta from the name. It is interesting to point out that the original names given by him for the 72 Melakartas are not the ones used these days. For example, he called the first Melakarta as Kanakambari whereas it is called Kanakanki at present. In fact, except for one or two Ragams almost all of the 72 names are quite different compared to what he had meant - although his names, as well as the present names follow the Katayapadi scheme outlined in Table V ! It must be remembered however, that this is not the only way to classify Ragams. There are several other alternate schemes and names (composers like Muthuswamy Dikshitar used alternate names for several ragams) and you can get very deeply into such things.

While such elaborate theoretical works were being written, eminent composers appeared on the scene and produced music. Annammacharya (1424-1503) a devotee of the 'Lord of

Tirupati' composed several notable pieces. He was followed by Purandara Dasa (1480-1564).

Purandara Dasa is considered the father of Karnatic music. He was a multi-millionaire ('koteeswara') to begin with, and accumulated enormous wealth in business. He was only interested in the pursuit of money and material pleasures, like most of us, till one day due to a divine intervention, his life changed one eighty degrees. He renounced his wealth and became a 'Dasa' (which means a servant) dedicating his life to serving god and making music in god's honor. From then on, his life was one misery after another and there are several legends associated with him which make interesting reading. Through all this Purandara Dasa never stopped making music. He is said to have composed nearly a quarter million songs in his lifetime, for which he probably earned quite a lot of 'Frequent Composer Mileage' awards. By the way, this works out to be about fifteen songs for every single day of his life. Even discounting for exaggeration, he was quite prolific. Several hundreds of his songs are still available, although it is likely that many of the present day versions of his numbers were set to tune by later musicians. His compositions were mostly in his native tongue, Kannada.

Purandara Dasa's songs are simple and easy for beginners to learn. He was the one who is credited with standardizing the Mayamalavagoulai Ragam as a Lesson Number One for beginning students and is said to have even composed the Sarali Varisai/Jandai Varisai (exercises in 'note' reproduction) for beginners.

The Golden Age of Karnatic music was perhaps the time when the Trinity of Karnatic composers Thyagaraja (1767-1847), Shyama Sastri (1763-1827) and Muthuswamy Dikshitar (1775-1835) made music. Interestingly, they were all contemporaries hailing from the same Thanjavur district, although it is not clear what kind of influence each had on the other. Their lifestyles, music, attitudes seem so different that it contributed to their musical styles being distinct from each other. Volumes and volumes have been written about them. So what you will find here are truly only the thumbnail sketches.

Thyagaraja is probably hailed as the King of Karnatic music, although when he was alive he shunned publicity and even rejected the King's invitation to join his court. In fact, he renounced worldly goods, (including copyrights to his songs :-)) and devoted himself to God. His songs have the raw devotion ('Bhakti', if you will) and are considered emotional. He composed songs in his mother tongue, Telugu. It is not known how many songs he has composed, but nearly a thousand songs are available at present, completely notated and interpreted. He has also composed operas. From the musicology point of view, Thyagaraja is credited with the invention of 'Sangatis' and with numerous other creative ideas in rhythm. Thyagaraja's most famous compositions are the five Pancharatna Kritis set in the Ragams Nattai, Goulai, Arabhi, Varali and Sree. Yes, who hasn't heard the song 'Endaro Mahanu bhavulu..' and not liked it ?

Dikshitar was more of an academician of music and a pedagogue. He was quite a handsome man, which perhaps explains why he had two wives. He spent considerable time in the North studying Hindustani music, which influenced him quite a bit. He wrote

his songs primarily in sanskrit (I have heard one of his songs with just one stanza in Tamil). About four hundred or so of his songs exist at present. His songs are more complex and few can sing some of his complicated pieces. His lyrics are generally praises of the God (or Goddess) in point and are much more subdued and formal compared to the raw energy of a Thyagaraja song. His songs are often slow (influence of Hindustani) and often went into several different aspects of the Ragam.

Shyama Sastry is the most obscure of the three - he is considered a wizard of rhythm and composed several pieces called Swarajatis which enunciate various rhythmic patterns.

Interestingly, none of the Trinity's students made it very big. (some of them became reasonably famous alright) This brings to point the curious teacher-student relationship that used to exist in India. Karnatic music was largely an oral tradition. Information was often lost, sometimes forever, when Gurus passed on their knowledge to their disciples - and this doesn't even count jealous and selfish Gurus who wouldn't teach everything to the disciples. It is surprising that the ancient Indians, clever as they were, did not invent a scheme to notate music.

There are several other notable composers such as Gopala Krishna Bharathi who composed in Tamil and was a contemporary of the trinity. Prior to him were other Tamil composers like Arunagiri Nathar and Arunachala Kavi Rayar. Swati Tirunal, the king of Travancore was a great composer of the nineteenth century. Among the more recent composers are Papanasam Sivan and Balamurali Krishna and the list goes on and on. Now we have come to a point in history where not only has theorizing stopped, but even composing of heavy duty pieces seem to have stopped and we are left with only performers ! Many of the references I have cited at the end give a long list of such performers - some real luminaries and some also-playeds, but most have pompous sounding prefixes like 'Shankarabharanam' Narasayya, 'Todi' Raghava Iyer and 'Mohanam' Somebody.

A more fascinating aspect of history of Karnatic music is to study its evolution, delineate the broad musical trends etc. For example, even the instruments used in music-making have changed over the years. Gone are the olden instruments which were mostly derivatives of Veena. In fact, Veena-making was a fine art and there were many, many types of Veenas serving various different purposes. The harp type instrument ('Yazh') and the ancient flutes have disappeared. Instead Western instruments such as Clarionet, Guitar, Saxaphone and Mandolin are increasingly being adapted to Karnatic music. Interestingly, not many newer Hindustani instruments (such as sitar, sarod and sarangi) are used in Karnatic music.

Another historical accident was the introduction of violin in Karnatic music. It was popularized in the nineteenth century by Vadivelu, who was a member of what is considered as the Thanjavur Quartet - a set of four brothers who were very talented composers/musicians especially of dance music. (They came a little after the more famous Trinity) Vadivelu was a court musician in the Travancore Royal Court and made extraordinary contributions to dance music, besides being a master of violin. By the way,

he is said to have accompanied himself on the violin, a no mean feat ! Like his musically gifted patron, composer Swati Tirunal, the king of Travancore, he too died when he was in his mid thirties.

It is interesting to note that the violin was embraced very easily by the Karnatic music tradition whereas it is not so prominent even now in Hindustani music. Prior to violin, veena used to accompany vocalists. The present day vocal concert always has violin support, even though the violinist only plays in the shadow of the vocalist, with very few chances in the concert to show off his talents. This is quite intriguing to say the least. (Of course, the violinist can mask the vocalist sometimes and this can actually be a plus point if the vocalist has a horrible voice!)

For more detailed accounts of the recent history, happenings etc, one should read a magazine published from Madras called 'Sruti', which not only provides concert reviews, news events etc, but also gives us a peek into the prevailing 'Karnatic music' taste and culture. However, if you are a history buff, my strong recommendation will be Rangaramanuja Iyengar's delightful book. He is fanatical about Karnatic music and gets quite merciless in condemning the 'modern day Karnatic music world' - his modern day being the 1950 s ! I wonder what he would have to say if he sees people with questionable credentials writing Karnatic music primers - who even has the temerity to suggest that a Western electronic keyboard be used as a learning tool!

MANGALAM ! A few final words

While you are trying to get more and more interested in Karnatic music, you should also perhaps ponder about where Indian classical music (and Karnatic music in particular) is heading toward, as we enter yet another millenium. The old generation and conservatives complain about the total degradation of the standard of Karnatic music these days, the low level of present day talent and how everything is so hurried and compromised. Oh, this age of high crime and fast computers and social mores ! Add to this the relentless onslaught of music from other cultures (notably Hollywood and Europe) and movie 'pop' songs which completely take over the popular taste. Does Karnatic classical music, as we know it, even have a chance of survival ?

I think the answer is 'yes' - purely because it has survived and in fact, flourished the last several thousand years, like many other Indian traditions and institutions. Part of the reason for this resilience is that the Indian classical music systems are very adaptive - they change and rejuvenate themselves. If some of the Western ideas can be incorporated, they will be. Who knows, several decades from now, concepts like chords, polyphony or orchestration may be standard in Karnatic music.

The other reason for my optimism is that the Indian institutions always percolated down to the masses and touched them. I know I am treading controversial grounds. (Following Dr. RangaRamanuja Iyengar) The Vedas were too complex for the ordinary people. So its core principles were outlined in simpler works like the Epics and Puranas. While expert musicians dueled with each other in Royal courts, the masses sang Bhajan songs without

worrying about any musical intricacies. These days too while concert musicians play to packed halls in Madras, there is an overabundance of classical music being composed for the masses - movie songs and Bhajans - which are quite appealing and tend to 'hook' people to classical music. Composers like Ilayaraja and A.R. Rahman have composed many, many nice classical pieces which are every bit melodious as some of the ancient songs, even if they don't meet all the criteria for great classical compositions. If you take good, classical music directly to people, you are not going to lose!

We just cannot hang on to our past. We cannot go back to Gurukulam days. We cannot analyze Sa Ri Ga Ma in terms of horses and elephants. Let us learn more and adapt ourselves to the new and exciting things in front of us. And let us enjoy Karnatic music !

REFERENCES

(1) Fundamentals of music - Raymond Elliott, Prentice Hall.

(2) Carnatic Music Composers - Edited by Dr. B. Dayananda Rao, The Triveni Foundation, Hyderabad.

(3) History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music - Dr. R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, 1972.

(4) Indian Musicology - Melodic Structure - Mriganka Sekhar Chakraborty, Firma KLM Private Limited, 1992.

(5) Carnatic Music Compositions - Dr. S. Bhagyalekshmy, CBH Publications, 1994. (Also by the same author, Ragas in Karnatic Music and Lakshanagrandhas in Music, both published by CBH Publications as well)

(6) Music in Cilappadikaram - Dr. S. Ramanathan, Madurai Kamaraj University, 1979.

(7) Karnataka Sangeeta Sastra - Theory of Carnatic Music - A. S. Panchapakesa Iyer, Ganamrutha Prachuram, 1989.

(8) Sangeeta Ratnakara of Saranga Deva - R. K. Shringy and Dr. Prem Lata Sharma, Munshi Ram Manoharlal Publications. (Vol I and II), 1991.

...

APPENDIX I: SOME MELAKARTA RAGAMS AND THEIR DERIVATIVE RAGAMS

Melakarta 8 HanumaTodi (popularly known as Todi)

Derivative Ragams: Dhanyasi, Asavari, Ahiri, Punnagavarali, Bhoopalam, Hindolam

Melakarta 15 Mayamalavagoulai

Derivative Ragams: Bhowli, Malahari, Vasanta, Saveri, Nadanamakriya, Jagan Mohini, Goulai, Lalita, Sowrashtram.

Melakarta 20 Natabhairavi

Derivative Ragams: Abheri, Ananda Bhairavi, Kannada, Jayantasree, Dhanasree, Darbari Kanada, Jonpuri, Bhairavi, Mukhari, Reetigoulai, Saramati, Hindolam.

Melakarta 22 Karaharapriya

Derivative Ragams: Abhogi, Kapi, Kanada, Chandrakauns, Suddha Dhanyasi, Devagandhara, Darbar, Bageshwari, Brindavana Saranga, Madhyamavati, Sree, Sahana.

Melakarta 28 Harikambhoji

Derivative Ragams: Atana, Khamas, Behaag, Kuntalavarali, Kurunji, Kambhodhi, Kadankuthoohalam, Chenchuruti, Dvijavanti, Tilang, Navarasa Kannada, Neelambari, Nattaikurunji, Bilahari, Mohanam, Sama, Surati, Valaji, Savitri.

Melakarta 29 Dhheerashankarabharanam (commonly known as Shankarabharanam)

Derivative Ragams: Arabhi, Suddha Saveri, Hamsadhwani, Mohanam, Kedaram, Kurunji, Neelambari, Begada,

APPENDIX II: SUGGESTED LISTENING EXERCISES

(1) Ramnad Krishnan; Vidwan Music of South India by Explorer Series

In this CD, Ramnad Krishnan, a vocalist plays just about four pieces. This CD has a nice 'jacket' with a lot of notes written by Jon Higgins himself - they have even outlined the scales of the various Ragams used. See if you can identify the keys used in various Ragams. Among the Ragams chosen by Krishnan is Madhyamavati, a famous pentatonic Ragam. See if you can play it on the keyboard. For several mathematical reasons (the way the keys are arranged in the octave in specific ratios) this Ragam is supposed to sound unusually pleasant. See if you can relate to it. Krishnan plays Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi in Ragam Bhairavi. The CD jacket identifies the various components of RTP, such as Ragam, Tanam, Neraval, Kalpana Swaram and Tani Avartam. See if you can follow them.

(2) Irresistible; L. Subramaniam, Violin, Oriental Records

This has a rendition of the very first Geetam anybody learns 'Sri Gana Naada' in Ragam Malahari. The second piece is a Varnam in Ragam Hamsadhwani in seven speeds. The Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi is in a Melakarta Ragam Simhendra Madhyamam.

(3) Jon B Higgins, Vocal, EMI

The CD starts off with a Varnam in Ragam Bhairavi. See if you can identify this Ragam from Ramnad Krishnan's RTP in the same Ragam. This CD also has Thyagaraja's magnum opus 'Endaro Mahanu' in Ragam Sree. Jon Higgins also has songs in two Melakarta Ragams, Chakravaham and Pantuvarali (Pantuvarali is officially listed under the name Kamavardhini). He also uses another major pentatonic Ragam, Hindolam. Find out the notes of Hindolam and play it on the keyboard. It really sounds very pleasant and upbeat. Also, notice that Jon Higgins has used a variety of Talams, all the way from Adi to Roopakam to the Chapu Talams.

(4) Violin Virtuoso, Lalgudi Jayaraman, Violin, Oriental Records

The artiste here starts off with a Varnam in Ragam Valaji and plays a song in a Melakarta Ragam Nasikabhusani. The Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi is also in the Ragam Simhendra Madhyamam. Can you compare this with the RTP played by L. Subramaniam in the same Ragam ?

(5) U. Srinivas, Mandolin, Realworld

The Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi here is in Ragam Keeravani, a Melakarta. This Ragam differs from Ragam Simhendra Madhyamam only by the note Ma. (These two Ragams are 36 apart in the Melakarta sequence) Pay careful attention to the Ragamalikai section, in the RTP. There is also a song in another Melakarta Ganamurthy.