

R. Pichumani Iyer

With the diminishing numbers of veena players in the Carnatic style in the country, the passing away of my Guru R. Pichumani Iyer has created another vacuum amongst vainikas. He was 96 years old. Having been under his tutelage for almost 17 years made me realise that it needs a higher level of musical taste to appreciate the greatness of the instrument. Never seeking opportunities to perform, he performed willingly when sabhas and other institutions approached him for concerts.

Pichumani Iyer qualified as a Sangeeta Bhushanam from the Annamalai University, where he was groomed by the likes of Sangita Kalanidhi K.S. Narayanaswamy, Gomathi Sankara Iyer and others. His initial training was under one Kuppanna in Tiruchirapalli. A long stint with AVM Studios had him work with leading film music composers like M.S. Viswanathan, Viswanathan Ramamurthy and others. He eventually bid adieu to playing for films and devoted himself to the pursuit of Carnatic music. His numerous disciples include R. Visweswaran, Suresh Krishna, the Iyer Brothers based in Australia, B. Kannan, Vasantha Krishnamoorthy.

His methodology of teaching was a slow process, he did not encourage his disciples to learn compositions in a hurry. For many years during the period I was his disciple, only one line of a varnam was taught in a class. This ensured that the pathantaram remained firmly etched in your mind. His repertoire



of varnams was an amazing hundred. As a composer he had a few tillanas to his credit in ragas like Vasanta Kaisiki (Vasanta with the kaisiki nishada), and Brindavana Saranga.

Pichumani Iyer was one of the early artists to cut an LP – long playing record – of veena music for HMV. This record continues to be broadcast occasionally by All India Radio, Chennai. He has also recorded for other companies like Sangeetha. He enjoyed a very friendly relationship with fellow veena vidwans like S. Balachandar, Chitti Babu, and Vidya Sankar and made it a point to attend their concerts.

He had great admiration for Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer's music and played many kritis following the Semmangudi pathantaram. His eldest son P. Viswanathan was in the service of All India Radio, Chennai, as a guitar artist. He also accompanied his father on the mridangam for many a concert. For many years Pichumani Iyer performed on the occasion of Saraswati Pooja at the

Vaishnavi shrine in Tirumullaivoyal near Chennai.

Pichumani Iyer was a staunch devotee of the Paramacharya of Kanchi and at his instance, he performed in tandem with Lalgudi Jayaraman and flautist N. Ramani at the Kanchi math on a couple of occasions.

Laurels came his way which included the Kalaimamani award from the Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram, the TTK Memorial Award from The Music Academy, Chennai, Sangeetha Kala Nipuna from the Mylapore Fine Arts Club. He was an A Top graded artist of All India Radio and Doordarshan.

Though confined to his bed during the last couple of years, he was mentally very alert and often discussed the happenings in the Carnatic music world with those who called on him.

P. VASANTH KUMAR
(Vainika and connoisseur of music)

Profile of vidwan R. Pichumani
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