

MANNARGUDI A. EASWARAN

## Three score and counting: the perfect accompanist

S. Janaki

SHANKAR RAMACHANDRAN



**M**annargudi A. Easwaran is a reputed and popular mridanga vidwan, who through his exemplary ability to enhance, embellish and admirably blend with any style of music, has carved a niche for himself in the field of Carnatic music.

Born on 1 April 1947, in a family that boasts of a lineage of Appayya Dikshitar, a great Sanskrit scholar of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Easwaran began his musical journey when he was only four years old and learnt this art from two giants, Kuniseri U. Krishnamani Iyer and Guruvayur Dorai. He began performing at an early age at sabhas, music festivals, and conferences organised by various institutions. He had his formal debut on 12 October 1958 in Chennai. Easwaran recalls with pride and emotion that he prefixed the name of his ancestral village as directed by the Kanchi Paramacharya

and became famous as Mannargudi A. Easwaran. He also cherishes the gift from his father—a gold chain with single rudraksha—which he always wears around his neck.

Easwaran served All India Radio as a Staff Artiste for 23 years and retired as a “Grade One” instrumentalist. A top-grade artist of All India Radio and Doordarshan, he has performed in a number of Radio Sangeet Sammelans. He had the privilege of taking part in the silver jubilee celebrations of India’s Independence held at the Red Fort, New Delhi in 1972. He is a much sought-after-mridangist and has accompanied a wide range of artists—vocalists and instrumentalists, men and women, across several generations—from maestros of yesteryear to young stars of today. The list of vocalists and instrumentalists he has accompanied over the years reads like a Who’s Who of



Carnatic music. Easwaran has been travelling worldwide for concerts including countries like the U.S.A., Canada, the U.K., Singapore, Malaysia, France, Australia, and Japan, which he has visited several times.

Easwaran was invited to teach mridangam as a visiting professor at the San Francisco State University, U.S.A., in 1979, and at the

Tamil Nadu Iyal Isai Kalluri in 2002-03. He also took special classes at the Boston Philips Academy, U.S.A., in 2009. He has been conducting lecture demonstrations in India and abroad.

Easwaran is the recipient of many titles and awards including Asthana Vidwan of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, Kalaimamani from the Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram, the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, Laya Kaladhara Samrat from the Indian Classical Music Federation, Mridanga Kala Shironmani from Percussive Arts Centre in Bengaluru, The Lifetime Achievement Award from Karthik Fine Arts in Chennai, Arshakala Bhushanam Award, Sangeetha Choodamani from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha in Chennai, Saptagiri Vidwan Mani in Tirupati, and Sangeetha Rathnakara from the Cleveland Thyagaraja Festival Committee, U.S.A.

Mannargudi Easwaran is well known for his amicable disposition, sense of humour, and positive outlook. Sporting a smile even as he launches on his crackling permutations on stage, he not only relishes the music but also encourages and appreciates the performance of his co-percussionists. He has worked steadily to acquire a style of his own and is acclaimed as an excellent mridangam accompanist. His style is a harmonious blend of grammar and aesthetics marked by clarity, precision, excellent tonal quality, sensitivity and spontaneity. ■

**Trichy Sankaran and Mannargudi Easwaran (double mridangam), Trichur Ramachandran (vocal) and Nagai Muralidharan (violin)**

