

Unique concert of songs by a living vaggeyakara

Ramesh Vinayakam, the talented film music composer, conceptualised and curated *Class of Class*—a full Carnatic music concert featuring many of his own compositions rendered by leading Carnatic musicians, at a well got up event recently in Chennai. The event, produced by Music Temple and managed by Kavasam TV, had around 30 musicians participating in it including Aruna Sairam, Nithyasree Mahadevan, P. Unnikrishnan, Sriram Parasuram & Anuradha Sriram, Trichur Brothers, Gayathri Venkataraghavan, Sikkil Gurucharan, Abhishek Raghuram, and Sriranjani Santhanagopalan. The accompanying instruments included the chitraveena, violin, mandolin, nagaswaram, flute, mridangam, and khandjira played by a team of young artists.

Explaining the background of the initiative, Ramesh Vinayakam said that classical music and film music had always exhibited a healthy give and take. “If you take out the raga element, there will scarcely be a film song. While Carnatic music expects the artist to stick to tradition and a structured format, cinema offers the freedom to explore beyond the tradition.” Film music in the early days was heavily dominated by ragas in their pure, Carnatic form. His father Vinayaka Subramaniam—a writer and composer of merit—was a strong influence and Ramesh Vinayakam created his own first composition at the age of 12. A devotee of Tyagaraja and other vaggeyakaras like Papanasam Sivan, Ramesh writes the lyrics and the music of all his Carnatic music compositions which has naturally given him the status of a vaggeyakara. It is a befitting

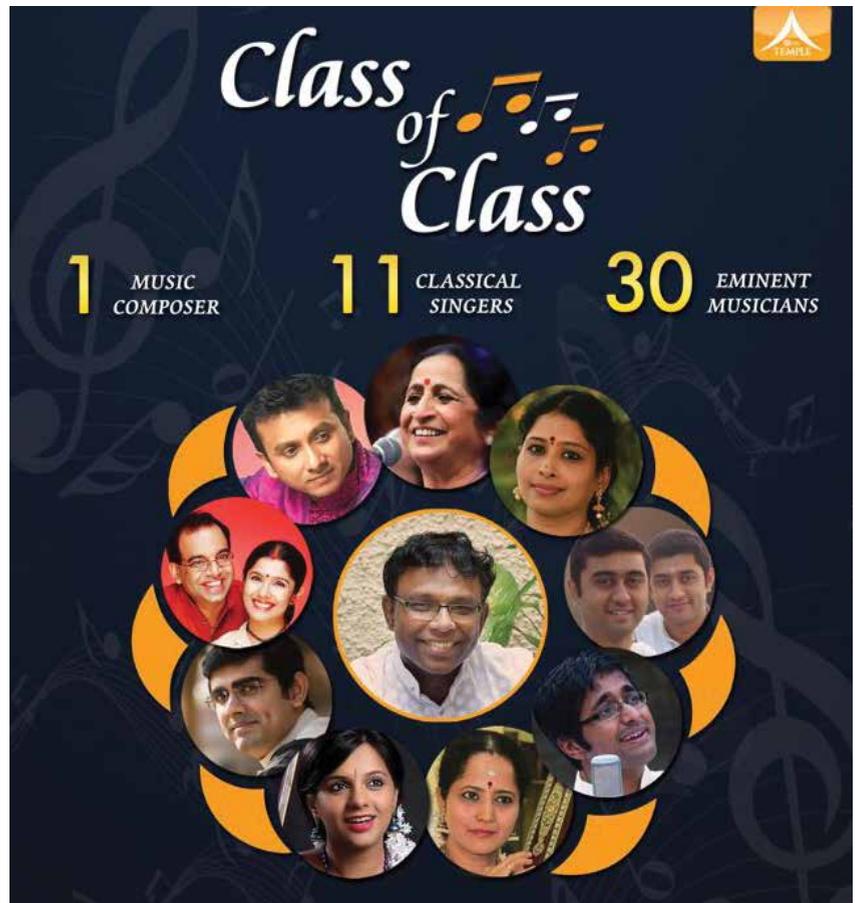
recognition of one who has been with music for more than 35 years now. Ramesh had obviously done a precise selection of the songs and musicians, not to say of a professional presentation including the venue, ambience and excellent stage effects. The event commenced with a brief introduction of the composer and included a short video of Ramesh’s initiatives in the field of music and his collaborative efforts. He has been associated with almost all genres of music and travelled widely for many of his collaborative works.

The programme offered thirteen compositions—ten by Ramesh

Vinayakam, two by his late father and one by Ravi Subramaniam (Su. Ravi) whom Ramesh describes as “an extraordinary Tamil poet of great calibre”. Most of them were in Tamil and two kritis in Sanskrit.

The first item was a varnam in Niroshtha (*Tarunam idhamma*), sung by Sriram Parasuram and Anuradha Sriram. The muktayi swarams were lengthier than usual. This was followed by a kriti in Sreeranjani on Vinayaka. The rendering was scholarly. *Saranam Ayyappa* in Bilahari was a bright rendering by the Trichur Brothers. Raga alapana and kalpanaswaras made it a full enjoyable suite much welcomed

Ramesh Vinayakam (centre)



by rasikas. The pallavi followed by nine stanzas in the format of a swarajati was abundant in swarasahitya and similar specialties. *Gatiyendru saranadaindene* on Lord Siva was a soulful rendering in Mukhari by Unnikrishnan with special gottuvadyam accompaniment by Allam Durgaprasada Rao. Aruna Sairam rendered the next two songs in Mohanam and Suddha Saveri (*Varuga varuga Muruga* and *Jai jai Harihara swamiki*) with verve. The second item was in the form of a bhajan. The next couple of songs were rendered by the flamboyant Abhishek aghuram. *Saravanabhavaguha* was in reverence to Purandaradasa highlighting the significance of the sarali varisai with contrasting usage of Mayamalavagaula and Hemavati.

Ramesh Vinayakam elaborates, “I feel the varisais have a great deal of musical content and I wrote the song conforming to the rhythmic subdivisions and beauty of contour. Most students of music think that singing sarali varisai is not for an advanced level and actually missing out on its worth.

This also facilitates voice culture. I think that singing the varisais in different ragas would be challenging but worthwhile for sure.”

Ramesh Vinayakam’s innovation if not invention—the raga Beethovanapriya—was a homage to the celebrated Western music composer’s tune via a parallel sahitya: *Tiruvarul tara varuvaay azhaganey*. Abhishek literally brought the roof down in delineating the raga, the kriti and swaras, it was an instant hit with the audience.

Kritis in Kanakangi (*Velavan malar padame* with a chittaswara) and Poorvikalyani (*Gopala Govinda* with pallavi and anupallavi in Sanskrit) were sung by Sikkil Gurucharan gracefully. *Mamalaivasan Manikantan* in Natakurinji (with a beautiful alapana) sung by Gayatri Venkataraghavan had the pallavi and anupallavi in slow tempo, and charanam in medium tempo, but not returning to pallavi. Quite an interesting format. The tanam rendition was a bonus. Sriranjani Santhanagopalan sang *Sri Rajarajeswari*—a unique

composition by Ramesh’s father. The raga was christened ‘Pratidhwani’ by none other than Dr. S. Ramanathan when it was demonstrated before him many years ago in 1985. A derivative of Kalyani, it ascends like Hamsadhwani (*SRGPNS*) and has a vakra prayoga in avarohanam (*SNPMPMGRS*).

Ramadootam in praise of Lord Anjaneya was a Sanskrit composition in Manirangu sung by Nithyasree Mahadevan. It has anupallavi sahitya in madhyama kala and charanam in vilamba kala which can be considered sort of a reverse of the general format of Dikshitar kritis.

All the compositions were aesthetically pleasing and seemed to illustrate the scope of improvisation in the existing format but within the limits of the Carnatic music idiom.

Young musicians of today could popularise the unique compositions of Ramesh Vinayakam, who besides being an ace pianist, is often referred to as an ashtavadhani in view of his multifaceted prowess.

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