

AMRITHA MURALI

An accomplished musician

A first-generation performing artist, Amritha Murali, born on 16 July 1982 to Rama and G. Murali, is an established vocalist and an accomplished violinist. Amritha continued to do both comfortably until recently when she decided to concentrate on her solo performances as a vocalist and also to resolve this identity crisis of whether she is a violinist or vocalist.

Amritha enjoys a musical pedigree that includes some outstanding gurus. Hardworking and dedicated to the art, she is among the more talented Carnatic vocalists of today. Endowed with a mellifluous voice and sharp intellect, she has displayed a steady growth over the years. Amritha's performances combine erudition and emotion. Her presentation may not be flamboyant but her holistic approach to the art and her orthodox vocalisation devoid of populist impulses have helped her gain a lot of appreciation from rasikas and critics.

An A grade artist of All India Radio and Doordarshan, Amritha has performed in many prestigious music festivals in India and abroad. She has received many awards and accolades including the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar from the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, Kalki Krishnamurthy Memorial Award, and Kala Ratna from the Cleveland Tyagaraja Aradhana Committee. In a candid interview Amritha speaks about her musical journey and issues faced by artists today.

In conversation with Sukanya Sankar

With her gurus: Kedaranathan and Meera ...



... Rama Ravi



... T. Rukmini



V.R. RAVI

Tell us about your initial training.

I began learning vocal music at the age of nine from my grandmother Rajam Nagarajan. My mother soon realised that I was not taking my vocal classes with her seriously, so my formal training started with the late K.R. Kedaranathan and Meera Kedaranathan. Inspired by my cousin's violin playing, I wanted to do the same. I started learning from violinist Vittal Ramamurthy and subsequently came under the tutelage of veteran violinist T. Rukmini.

I started getting serious about my music when I was in high school. As the Kedarathans had laid a strong foundation in vocal music, I learnt from senior vocalist Rama Ravi for a brief period, then started advanced training with veteran guru P.S. Narayanaswamy, and more recently from musician R.K. Shriram Kumar.

After an informal vocal concert at our neighbourhood temple, I sang my maiden vocal concert at VDS Arts Academy, Chennai, and my first official season concert at Nada Inbam, Chennai on 15 December 1997. My first concert as an accompanist also happened at VDS Arts Academy where I played the violin for vocalist Kunnakudi Balamuralikrishna.

On your switch from violinist to vocalist

I have not actually switched over from violin to vocal, but have been doing both comfortably all these years. As I have accompanied many senior artists on the violin; the frequency of concerts must have created that impression!



AKSHAY PADMANABHAN

With guru P.S. Narayanaswamy



A rare concert. (L to R): Manoj Siva (mridangam), B.S. Purushothaman (khanjira), T.M. Krishna and Vijay Siva (vocal), Amritha Murali (violin) at the Fine Arts Society, Chembur

As accompanists are more in demand, people could have seen me more on stage as a violinist than a vocalist. Although I have been singing at the Music Academy since 2004, even recently people ask me if I am a new entrant in the vocal scene!

Who shaped your musical journey?

My parents never forced me to learn music nor perform on stage. I was fond of music and liked going to classes. My mother would take me to numerous concerts, even though I used to dose off by 8 pm however famous the artist was! She introduced me to a lot of listening. She sacrificed a lot for what I am today. The foundation laid by my gurus has definitely paved the way for whatever I am today.

The Youth Association for Classical Music (YACM) has been another inspiration. I was in the YACM committee and then went on to become the vice president. I was

fortunate to have interacted with all the senior musicians of today like T.M. Krishna, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, S. Sowmya, and Vijay Siva among others. I have also seen them perform at close quarters and had the opportunity to be part of the millennium show that we put together at YACM; everything was inspirational and really shaped my thought process.

Accompanying Suguna Varadachari and Suguna Purushothaman



SHANKAR RAMACHANDRAN