

T.A.S. MANI

Many firsts to his credit

Srilatha Krishna

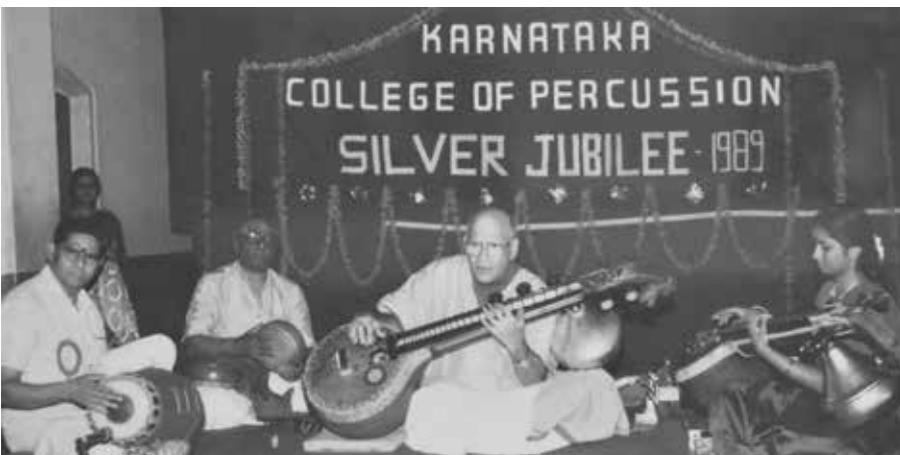
The first impression one gets of T.A.S. Mani is of warmth and gentleness, traits that are also conveyed in his mridangam play. Known for brevity in his role as an accompanist, he is among the few percussionists who retain old-time musical sensibilities.

Born T.A. Subrahmanyam in a family of musicians, it was natural for him to take to music. His grand-uncle was the legendary musician Palghat Anantharama Bhagavata. His paternal uncle, Someshwara Bhagavata and father Arunachala Bhagavata were musicians. However, his was a large family of modest means. When he started his percussion lessons with Ayyamani Iyer in Bengaluru at the age of seven, the lessons were sporadic at best. Yet, it was sheer determination and discipline that allowed him to progress. As his sisters Jayam and Bhagyam were performing vocalists, he gained access to the concert stage at a very young age. T.B. Narasimhachar, then secretary of Malleswaram Sangeetha Sabha, was a well-wisher who encouraged him with many concert opportunities and suggested that he use the lucky name 'Mani' on stage.

With increasing concert opportunities, T.A.S. Mani started accompanying many senior artists. Browsing through photo albums of his concerts is like walking through a portrait gallery of leading musicians of the past. The divergent styles of the older generation of artists he



(L to R): T.A.S. Mani, H.P. Ramachar, Veena S. Balachander and Jayanthi

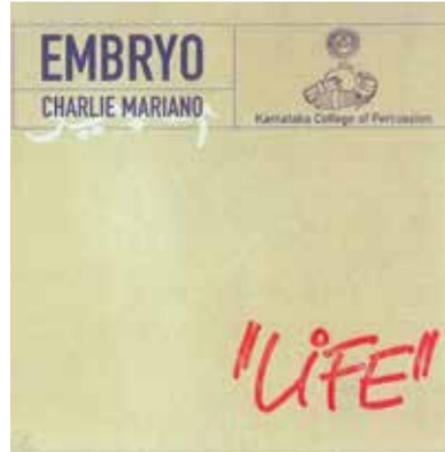


accompanied, like B.S. Rajam Iyengar, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavata, Mysore Mahadevappa, D.K. Pattammal, Salem Desikan, Veena Doreswamy Iyengar, Sattur A.G. Subramaniam and M.S. Gopalakrishnan allowed him to adopt a flexible style early in his career.

He launched the ambitiously named 'Karnataka College of Percussion' in 1964, with a few students from Bengaluru and Shimoga. He introduced innovative techniques to teach mridangam to his

students. A first of its kind in Bengaluru, if not in south India, the college was dedicated to percussion during the first fifteen years and only later included vocal music classes. Mani got the much-needed support to run the college when he married musician R.A. Ramamani. Under the guidance of this musical couple, many batches of students have appeared for the examinations of the Karnataka State board. The institute grew from strength to strength and started conducting Purandaradasa and Tyagaraja aradhanas, annual *Naada Namana* programmes and concerts by various artists. The college imparts training to students from all over the world. Louise Kidder from the USA, Tunji Beier, Ron Reeves and Gary France of Australia, Christian and Ralph from Germany, are some of the notable foreign students.

A turning point occurred in Mani's music career when he went on a two-month long trip to Paris for workshops and concerts



in 1974. While accompanying Vemu Mukunda, the nuclear-scientist and musician, Mani noticed that his percussion solo received overwhelming appreciation from the audience. Realising that regular Carnatic concerts were not the best place to showcase the capabilities of percussionists, he came up with the idea of a percussion-centric concert. He brought together percussionists from his school and drew up a concert format conducive to rhythmic expositions. Thus was born Tala Tarangini—the first all-percussion ensemble—which soon became popular and started touring abroad.