

Impressive show by the young brigade

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A hybrid season in 2021-22 provided good opportunities to musicians to present in-person concerts besides the virtual ones, and the musicians offered impressive performances in many venues. Here we focus mainly on the performances of up-and-coming musicians—on both virtual and live platforms—conducted by different organisations.

Mudhra

Mudhra organised its month-long virtual season during December 2021. Concerts were recorded in the newly refurbished Mudhra studio sans audience and were telecast over Paalam TV every day from 5.30 pm. Live concerts of two-and-a-half hours and more featured a mix of today's stars, emerging talents, and the Mudhra's Cutchery Competition title winners. Most of the concerts conformed to appreciable standards, were webcast free, and interested rasikas could voluntarily make donations. Impeccable audio, video, and the support of top pakkavadyam artists made the concerts an enjoyable experience.

Kalyanapuram Aravind aka Aravind Sounderrajan (see front cover), a disciple of vidwan Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan, has a pliable voice that can negotiate three octaves with consummate ease. Aravind's sruti suddham, impressive manodharma, repertoire, and camaraderie with pakkavadyam artists—all contributed to the success of his concert. The systematic development of Bhairavi along its glides, for the central piece was a joyful experience and *Balagopala*, the monumental composition of Muthuswami Dikshitar was presented in a relaxed

kalapramanam. His imagination in the madhya and tara sthayis was impressive, even as he traversed the octaves with ease and confidence. The niraval taken up on an unusual line—*Vainika gayaka Guruguha nuta* was handled with aplomb. The laya-centric kalpanaswaram with kuraippu at the rishabha was executed with precision.

In the first half of the concert, the alapana of Poorvikalyani stole the show for the kriti *Ekkalatilum* composed by Tiruvarur Ramaswamy Pillai. Aravind, with a voice marked with a good range, brilliant brigas and rounded gamakas, presented an alluring picture of Poorvikalyani. Alapana of Sree raga can be a tricky affair, but Aravind rendered it with diligence, and the Dikshitar kriti *Sree Varalakshmi* was presented in a leisurely tempo, appended with kalpanaswaram.

The post-tani items had a devotional flavour. The Ahiri segment in the ragamalika sloka was soothing. Violinist R. Raghul was impressive with his honeyed bowing, imaginative raga alapanas and succinct swara repartees. Ganapathyraman, with his long experience, embellished the concert with his deft strokes on the mridangam marked by sunadam.

A majority of today's young musicians are intelligently pushing the borders of Carnatic music within the accepted tradition, though some of them do tend to deviate. Sisters **Anahita and Apoorva** (see front cover), are the first winners of Mudhra's Cutchery Competition, and they have consolidated their position as seasoned performers in the past couple of

years. Their ragam-tanam-pallavi in a combination of Sree and Sreeranjani ragas in their concert was a tight-rope walk which they executed brilliantly. The alapana of Sree was rendered with precision, even while negotiating both the ragas alternately. The pallavi was in misra Triputa tala with the sahitya *Sreeranjani suvadani karunaipuri dayakari Sankari subhakari* with the poorvangam in Sreeranjani and the uttarangam in Sree. The seamless transition between the ragas in alapana, niraval, and swarams was commendable.

The main kriti was *Padmavati ramanam*, a composition of Oothukadu Venkatakavi, popularised by Sangita Kalanidhi Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan. The alapana of Arabhi before the kriti *Nadasudharasampilamu*, and that of Poorvikalyani were well within the contours, revealing the subtle nuances eloquently. Niraval on *Yadgopi vadanendu pada chandra chakoram* and laya-centric swaras underscored their musical brilliance. In the post tani segment, a ragamalika composed by their guru Chitravina N. Ravikiran on Lord Ayyappa, and a tillana in Chenchuritti were enjoyable.

Pappu Gyandev embellished the concert with his violin playing soaked in melody, revealing depth and control. His transition between the ragas in the pallavi was commendable. Mridangist Akshay Ram followed well with understanding and anticipation. His sarvalghu strokes were relishing. The tani with Sai Subramaniam on the morsing was appealing.

Bhargavi Venkatram, daughter of the illustrious musician couple—violinist H.K. Venkatram and vocalist Triveni Saralaya of the Saralaya Sisters, is a student of vidwan T.M. Krishna. Blessed with a melodious voice with an admirable range, clarity and strength, she has imbibed her musical skills from her parents, aunt, and guru. Her sadhana and dedication were amply revealed in her concert. She commenced with a stately Natakurinji pada varnam. The next song *Sobhillu saptaswara* in Jaganmohini brought in the necessary weight at the start of the concert. The kalpanaswaras on the lines *Dhara riksa maadulalo* revealed her manodharma. This was followed by a sedate raga alapana of Hameerkalyani for the Swati Tirunal kriti *Gangeyavasanaadhara*. After a brisk *Seetamma mayamma*, Bhargavi presented a detailed alapana of Simhendramadhyamam for the Mysore Vasudevachar kriti *Ninne nammitinayya*. Her voice felicity, measured gamakas, lightning brigas and long akara phrases were refreshing. Niraval on the lines *Pannagendrasayana* and the sarvalaghu swaras culminating in a complex korvai were well presented.

Bhargavi also presented another kriti, *Kapali*, in Mohanam very elaborately. The raga alapana, chaste rendition of the kriti with a chittaswaram (I have not heard so far) and striking kalpanaswaram at the pallavi added to the weight of the concert. Her singing was admirable for the visranti created on stage. H.K.Venkatram, her father, with his long experience of accompanying senior vidwans, presented alluring alapanas and succinct swara returns. His raga alapanas of Simhendramadhyamam and Mohanam deserve special appreciation. The inherent melody, proportion and control over the instrument came to the fore. Kallidaikurichi Sivakumar, with his



Bhargavi Venkatram

HEMAMALINI S.

predominantly sarvalaghu strokes on the mridangam, added colour to the concert with controlled volume and clarity. Playing the khanjira, Nerkunam Shankar jelled well to make the tani enjoyable.

Sreerangam Venkatanagarajan has already built up a strong fan base thanks to his many virtual concerts through social media in the last two years. He is a disciple of Ambujam Vedantham of Srirangam, and winner of the Sangeetha Mudhra title. Possessing a solid and flexible voice, his mastery of many rare kritis, and a friendly demeanour with pakkavadyam artists contribute to his popularity. Commencing the concert with the rarely heard Ata tala varnam in Mohanam *Manamohana*, composed by Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar and popularised by Sangita Kalanidhi Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan, Venkat went on to present a combination of rare and familiar kritis in authentic pathantaram. *Sree Ramam* in Narayanagaula composed by Muthuswami Dikshitar was presented in a sedate kalapramanam. In this concert he presented four raga alapanas—Varali (*Ne pogadakunte*), Reetigaula (*Manjanamaada nee vaaray* - Oothukadu), Poorvikalyani

(*Paralokasadhaname*) and Kharaharapriya (*Satatam tavaka* - Swati Tirunal). The alapanas of Reetigaula and Kharaharapriya deserve special appreciation for his easy traversing of the octaves, rounded gamakas and long akara sancharas brimming with raga bhava. The imaginative swaras at *Neerajanayana Tyagaraja* for the Varali kriti were well-rendered.

The composition of Oothukadu Venkatasubba Iyer is a rare one with its two madhyama kala passages, and Venkat sang the lyrics with great clarity. *Satatam tavaka* is rarely heard in the concert arena, and Venkat rendered it with its cascade of sangatis intact. The niraval on the line *Mama hridayasanisam* and the kalpanaswarams bore testimony to his manodharma. In the post tani segment, a ragamalika viruttam of Tayumanavar *Kantuka kaiyayum* rendered in ragas Begada, Kambhoji, Dhanyasi, Abheri, Behag and Kurinji culminated in the Papanasam Sivan kriti *Engum nirainthirukkum en deivame* in Kurinji.

Violinist Mantha Sreerama, another Sangeetha Mudhra awardee, followed with composure and appealing raga bhava. R. Rohit (mridangam) and N. Rajaram (ghatam) supported with enthusiasm, and were never a hindrance to the manodharma of the vocalist.

Sreerangam Venkatanagarajan



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