

SHUDDHA SWAROOPAM — A garland of nine different songs composed by Shuddhananda Bharati and tuned by Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi. Produced and released by Charsur Digital Works.

Shuddhanada Bharati, the ascetic poet, was given the title of Kavi Yogi Maharishi by the Sringeri pontiff Satchidananda Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bharati. True to that name, he was a kavi who penned 250 works and 1000 songs. These songs range from topics on patriotism, gods, and seers like Ramana Maharishi to the more abstruse philosophy of Nirguna Brahman and the omnipresence of the same.

Carnatic musician Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi has picked nine songs from his set of poems and tuned them at the behest of his family members, who wanted to commemorate Swamiji's 125th birthday. The songs are *Suddha swaroopam athuve*, *Ammaye appa opilla karunaiyai*, *Etti nirpadum ennaiyya*, *Dhandayudhapani*, *Varaado karunai*, *Ettanayo murayittu*, *Aadugiraan ennul paadugiraan Kannan*, *Bhagawan Ramanarai*, *Athuve parabrahmam*. Out of the nine songs, three have been sung by Bombay Jayashri, two by Abhishek Raghuram, Bharat Sundar and Amritha Murali. The album has been produced and released by Charsur Digital Works and is a joint effort along with eight other accompanying artists.

Of the nine songs, if one were to chose any three as top picks for the perfect tune that aligns well with the lyrical content, they would be *Suddha swaroopam athuve*, *Etti nirpadum ennaiyya*, *Bhagawan Ramanarai paartale pothumey*.

Suddha swaroopam athuve, set in raga Yamunakalyani and Adi tala, takes the top slot. The lyrics signify the highest Nirguna tattva, which extols the supreme power as manifesting itself in various forms. The song is about god being beyond the confines of name and description. In keeping with the universality principle of god, Swamiji says that the suddha swaroopam can manifest as Vishnu, Brahma, Allah, Yehova or Ahura. One can realise this only with the internalisation of the principle of *Om tat sat* (Thou art that). Yamunakalyani befits the lyrics and the thought well, and Vijayalakshmi has deftly used the raga to accentuate the import of the song; it makes for a wholesome listening experience. Somewhere this song reminds one of the popular song, *Maitreem bhajata*.

In contrast to this, *Etti nirpadum ennaiyya* is structured like a sringara padam. Here Swamiji is conversing with Lord Siva assuming the role of a nayika, pining to be one with the

Lord. Yadukulakambhoji brings out best this emotion in full scale. The sangatis in the pallavi are graded step by step, allowing for the meaning to be reinforced. Accompaniment by the chitraveena and tavil is a musically intelligent arrangement, as it enhances the song's overall melodic and rhythmic quotient.

Bhagawan Ramanarai paartale pothumey is a uniquely tuned song in a typical Hindustani bandish style. Set in raga Bhatiyar, this song has a lilting effect. The typical 'pakad' of the raga—*M-D-S-D-P/D-P-G-R-S* has been used effectively as a wonderful refrain in many places, making the tune memorable. The lyrics describe and glorify Ramana Maharishi, and the plaintive soft approach of the raga aptly fits the lyrical content. Again, the use of flute and tabla is brilliant and adds to the presentation of the song.

This, however, does not take away from the other songs. Each one has been thought out well, and the selection of the raga and the meaning of the songs quite fit well. *Dhandayudhapani* in Shanmukhapriya and *Ettanayo murayittu* in Sindhubhairavi are so replete with phrases that speak of the tunesmith, who is well-trained in the Lalgudi bani. One can hear typical phrases in these ragas that have become so strongly associated with Lalgudi compositions. Behag for *Aadugiraan ennul paadugiraan Kannan* is another well-done tune for a song that describes the playful and naughty Krishna. Behag has that indescribable character to highlight Krishna and his varied personality.

Ammaye appa opilla karunai in Dwijavanti, *Varaado karunai* in



Ragesri and *Athuve parabrahmam* in Durga are all well done, to bring out the beauty of the compositions.

What stands out are the use of appropriate ragas, the perfect melding of the swaras and accents in the raga to signify the required emotion at relevant places. Also, deft use of absolute Hindustani ragas like Bhatiyar and Durga in their original form and the right use of accompanying instruments that accentuate the rendition. Vijayalakshmi proves that she is the undoubted scion of a lineage well known for sensitivity in tuning that brings out the best presentation of the composition.

Special mention has to be made of all the artists who have made this album come alive. Bombay Jayashri



Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi

for her dulcet voice, Abhishek for his vivacity and rendition of the song in raga Bhatiyar, Bharat Sundar for his melodious and weighty presentation, and Amritha Murali for her classicism. Apart from these, a big part of the effect of a good musical

presentation in this album is due to the supporting artists of great merit with outstanding musical intelligence. Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi – violin, Sumesh Narayanan – mridangam, Navin Iyer - flute, Sai Shivanam (*Athuve parabrahmam*), Vishnu - flute (*Bhagawan Ramanarai*), Chandrajith - tabla (*Bhagawan Ramanarai*), Triplicane Sekar – tavil, Vishal Sapuram – chitraveena.

This is a good album that makes for a pleasant listening and also effective learning for interested students of music who wish to build their repertoire with Kavi Yogi's compositions.

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