

IN FOCUS

The first half of 2013 witnessed the loss of two legends of Carnatic music-violin maestros M. S. Gopalakrishnan and Lalgudi G. Jayaraman. Rasikas are still coming to terms with this irreparable loss. We at Shanmukha pay our homage to the two great souls by dedicating this issue to them.

We know of the violinist Lalgudi but we also get to know about Lalgudi Jayaraman the Guru and Vaggeyakara from the tributes written by Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi, Vittal Ramamurthy and Saashwathi Prabhu. In her tribute, Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi speaks of the originality and creativity of her Guru and father Lalgudi Jayaraman as a Vaggeyakara. Vittal Ramamurthy's tribute to Lalgudi Sir brings out the brilliant qualities of the Guru Lalgudi and we get to know how his teaching went beyond the violin and music. Saashwathi Prabhu's tribute talks about the sublime quality of Lalgudi's music and his creative genius. Lakshmi Devnath's biography on Lalgudi-The Incurable Romantic was a result of conversations with him which ran into 250 hours! She speaks about her experiences and gives a lot of interesting information about Lalgudi in her interview with Jyothi Mohan.

Dr. Narmadha speaks about her violin journey with her father M. S. Gopalakrishnan who was her Guru and philosopher too. In her tribute, Dr. M. A. Bhageerathi fondly refers to her uncle MSG's mastery over Carnatic, Hindustani and Western classical music on the violin. From N. Hariharan's tribute to MSG, we come to know of how adept MSG was at playing both North and South styles of music yet always maintaining the purity of each style.

Students Vidyanandi and Jyotsna pay their tributes to their Guru, the late Shri Vamanan who was an exemplary musician and an outstanding teacher of Carnatic music in Mumbai.

Tribute to Sugandha Raman, offers glimpses of a remarkable musical personality, based on her daughter Dr. Sakuntala Narasimhan's inputs, put together by Nalini Dinesh.

As promised in the Jan-Mar 2013 issue of Shanmukha and following up on his Vempati Chinna Satyam tribute, A. Seshan brings out the distinctive features of Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam in his comparative study of the two styles of dance. Jyothi Mohan pays a tribute to U. S. Krishna Rao in his birth centenary year. Her tribute gives us an insight into how he and his wife Chandrabhaga Devi dedicated their lives to the features of Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam in his comparative study of the two styles of propagation of Bharatanatyam by fighting all odds and making sacrifices. The essence of a classical dance form lies in the abhinaya and depiction of the Navarasas is an integral part of abhinaya. Ojaswita Chaturvedi explores the various facets of one of the rasas - the Raudra rasa in her article *Variations in the Raudra Rasa*.

Dr. Sakuntala Narasimhan brings to light the fact that the North-South dialogue in classical music began as early as the 19th century in her article, *Moula Bux- the pioneer in the North-South musical dialogue*.

Ashish Mohan Khokar's passion for dance is evident in the fact that he puts together the only dance annual of India "attend**ance**" year after year. Jyothi Mohan reviews the 15th edition of "attend**ance**" pertaining to 2012-13 with the theme 'Classical dance and Modern Times'.

This issue of Shanmukha brings to you another thought-provoking Quiz on Sangeeta and Natya . So put on your thinking caps and enjoy!

Sabha Roundup and Happenings at the Vidyalaya cover some of the events that took place in the quarter.

Lalgudi Jayaraman: The Incurable Romantic

An Interview with Lakshmi Devnath
by Jyothi Mohan

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Lalgudi Jayaraman with Lakshmi Devnath

The music world felt bereft and inconsolable after the legend Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman breathed his last. But Lakshmi Devnath ensured he could be seen and heard, for years to come, from between the covers of *The Incurable Romantic*. This engrossing biography has been a labour of love, spread over 250 hours of conversations between Lakshmi Devnath and Lalgudi Jayaraman. It therefore seemed appropriate to interview her to glean some more information on the colossus who strode the music world for well over seven decades.

How did the idea to do this biography come about? Did he willingly consent to it?

Well, the idea came from his daughter Viji and since I had done features on him earlier, the maestro was more than willing to work with me. The work on the biography commenced soon after he received the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008. Both, he and his wife Rajam Mami would be ready and waiting for me at the appointed hour, with all the facts and answers at their finger tips. In case of doubt they would cross-check with relatives, to get facts right. The kind of cooperation extended to me by both, was remarkable. Not once did he sound impatient or irritable, nor did he ask me why I had so many questions, when I was tracing the history of his illustrious family. In fact, he was fascinated by some of my questions! A biography can become a bit boring. To keep up the interest in the reader, anecdotes told well, adding a few humorous asides, etc. can add life to the narration. When I was writing the first chapter dealing with the family history, of the period 1807-1867, he put forth several interesting facts. When I asked him how he had come across all that information, he explained that as she fed him, his grandmother would recount stories of the family. Muthulakshmi Pati told him about the Mysore Maharaja's great regard for his grandfather, the illustrious Lalgudi Rama Iyer. Among several gifts, the Maharaja had given him a grand gold 'Toda' or bangle. Even his mother, who was alive then, would contribute her inputs readily. When I read out these passages to him later, Lalgudi Sir, was thrilled with the way I presented those glorious years of his family by recreating those vivid scenes in his ancient home for the reader.

As a child, did he resent having to practise all the time, not being able to play all the time, like children of his age?

Music was Lalgudi Sir's passion. He loved to sing and play violin. He says, even when his father woke him up at an unearthly 4 a.m., he would instantly arise, as if he was expecting the call. Unquestioning obedience towards his father, who was a strict parent and his deep abiding love for music, left no room for regrets or distractions of any kind. He might have felt slightly unhappy at the constant criticism, as his father was a strict taskmaster but his love for music was above all this, he stressed.

When did he give his first kutcheri and how did his family, steeped in music, react to it?

His first kutcheri when he was only 10 years old was a vocal concert at his village temple, he said. He recalls that nobody, not even his mother was present, as it was treated like something not out of the ordinary! He said, he just went there, sang and returned home. As an accompanying violinist, he performed first in the year 1942 and after that there was no looking back.

Since he ascended the stage at such a young age, accompanying the greatest of musicians, did he face any animosity from fellow accompanists who might have felt threatened by his presence?

He always spoke of the support he received from the senior musicians of that era. They would encourage him and openly commend his prowess on several occasions. He said, he would listen to their music constantly and was therefore attuned to their style when he accompanied them.

Did the younger set of musicians ever feel he would by his sheer brilliance, overshadow them in a kutcheri thus stealing their thunder?

He would be careful never to dominate the kutcheri when he was the accompanist. There were however some instances where the main artiste felt he was being more than an accompanist and this I have dealt with in some detail in the 18th chapter of my book, *The Incurable Romantic*.

How is it that he never felt tempted to give in to unnecessary pyrotechnics as most instrumentalists do, at the cost of melody and the composition? It calls for great maturity to be able to rein in one's unbridled imagination and virtuosity. Did he ever comment on that?

He told me, he always considered the violin as the instrument to portray the music in his heart and in his mind. Despite having a great command over the instrument, due to the constant practice over years, technique for technique's sake never appealed to him. To him, music was all about expressing the soul of the raga, the composition and feelings embedded in the lyrics by the composer. So where did showing off one's command over technique fit into this scheme of things?

He was known for the *gayaki ang* in his rendering. How was he able to make his violin sing? Was there a special technique?

He used to remind us that he started off as a vocalist. So when he switched over to playing the violin, he developed the bowing and fingering technique so as to sound as close to vocal as possible. I have spoken about this in detail in chapter 10 of my book.

He held the interest of the rasikas year after year without sounding repetitive. People looked forward to his New Year kutcheri which he played for 37 years without a break, and he always received a thunderous ovation. Did he plan every concert or was it mostly on the spot, impromptu, so to say, due to his vast experience?

To Lalgudi Sir, the audience was of paramount importance. He felt he owed it to them and planned meticulously, like he planned everything else. He felt he had to give of his best every time he performed and that enthusiasm stayed with him till the very end. He would of course, like all others, deviate from the planned path to accommodate the rasikas' requests, but the main part of the performance was always well prepared for and rehearsed to perfection.

How did he react to criticism?

He spoke very less. It did not bother him much when people criticised him. He would neither rush to defend himself nor react. He would quietly say, "That is their view-point" and leave it at that and maintain a dignified silence on the matter.

I have heard about people being profoundly influenced by his music. Did you learn about any such instances from him while you interacted with him?

He once told me about how a rasika was won over by the soulful Charukeshi that he played. As is his wont, he had his eyes closed while he essayed the raga. "When I opened my eyes, I found this gold chain on my lap. I later handed it over to the Sabha secretary telling him to return it to the owner. The rasika's appreciation was more than ample reward for me", he concluded. This happened at Muscat too, his son told me. I had heard about a rasika who was so moved by his *Mohana Rama* which she heard in his Veena Venu Violin disc in 2009, that she gave up all worldly ties to retire to an ashram on the outskirts of Chennai. I went there and met Gurumai Shantamma to hear about this from her. Such was the power of his music.

We have heard he was a meticulous, enthusiastic and extremely patient teacher. Did he encourage students to listen to his contemporaries?

With his permission, I observed how he taught his students. My daughter was just 10 years old, when she was learning under him. He would coax music out of her, ever so gently, encouraging, prodding, till she gave of her best. He would come down to the level of the student and patiently nurture his or her talent. I have seen so many teachers but none as loving and affectionate. He spared no effort and that in turn motivated the student to work hard to please the master. He made every learning session interesting and memorable. He encouraged them to listen to other artistes too.

He was known to be totally into music. He lived and breathed music. How then did he come across as a family man? We know he taught his children to be excellent musicians, but how was he as a parent?

He spent hours teaching his students and children. They were constantly rehearsing for performances, so they spent a lot of time together. The family as well as students went together for music camps out of Chennai. Music bound them all together. When I addressed questions to him, he would turn to Rajam Mami. She had a phenomenal memory. Whatever was important to her husband was of greater importance to her. She simply defined her role to suit his and what was remarkable was that she was immensely happy doing that. This came so naturally to her that she thinks anyone else in her place would have done just that. From this point of view she is as much an incurable romantic as he was.

While it will always remain an abiding regret for me that Shri Lalgudi is not around to see the book I am so thankful that I got to show him the entire book on my laptop. I had read out the entire manuscript to him when he was in better health and just a fortnight before he passed away, I showed him the final version with images. The great rasika that he was, he recognized and appreciated every little form of beauty that revealed itself all through the book. It requires a shift in consciousness to go beyond one's difficulties and participate in the work and joy of another. The enthusiasm which Shri Lalgudi displayed in my work, despite his ill-health was incredible! I was amazed. I was moved. Above all, I felt inspired by the incurable romantic.

Jyothi Mohan is a Bharatanatyam guru and faculty member of the Vidyalaya.
