

NEWS & NOTES

Enriching music and enthralling dance

Isha Yoga Centre, situated at the foothills of Vellingiri Mountains near Coimbatore, recently organised a unique festival of music and dance, aptly named 'Yaksha'. It showcased some of the most exquisite samples of Indian music and dance in an ambience the artists basked in.

A beautiful temple dedicated to Linga Bhairavi, the goddess representing female energy, has been built adjacent to the already well-known Dhyanalinga temple at the Isha Yoga Centre, and this festival followed the consecration of the deity.

The vocal and instrumental concerts were conducted in a lovely pandal, just in front of the sanctum sanctorum of Linga Bhairavi, overlooking the three huge faces of Siva carved in stone, with innumerable lamps glittering in the background. With neatly-arranged, spotless cushions, courteous volunteers, and the ubiquitous cell phones either silenced or switched off, listening to the music there was an experience one would cherish.

The assorted audience comprised experts in Hindustani music, Carnatic music, Western music and simple, uninitiated people who loved just any kind of music.

The long array of Hindustani musicians was led by Pandit Shivkumar Sharma whose ethereal music, meditative in nature, presented an out-of-the-world experience. Sharma has made a few changes in the ancient santoor, referred to as 'sata tantri' in the Rig Veda.

Sharma's explanation of the nature of Hindustani music, the techniques used and the liberties that can be taken, was very welcome. He elaborated Jhinjhoti, slowly, feeling the pulse



Shivkumar Sharma with Anindo Chatterjee (tabla)

of the raga, and then bursting into speed. Pahadi, the melody from the Himalayas, followed. Anindo Chatterjee, the great tabla player, impressed the audience with his crisp and clear bol-s.

Hardly any auspicious function in North India can be celebrated without the smooth notes of the shehnai. Ustad Ali Ahmed Hussein Khan, one of the veterans of the instrument, wowed all with his admirable breath control and his soft and subtle notes. His sons, Hassan Haider Khan and Ahmed Abbas Khan, accompanied him on the shehnai while tabla maestro Sandeep Bannerjee gave one of the finest samples of tabla playing.

Ustad Ali Ahmed Hussein Khan with his sons Hassan Haider Khan and Ahmed Abbas Khan



Subhendhu Rao on the sitar, Partho Sarothy on the sarod, and Anindo Chatterjee and his son Anubratha Chatterjee on the tabla presented a memorable jugalbandi. The evening raga, Pooria Dhanasree, seemed to depict the sadness caused by the ending of the day and the joy at the arrival of the beautiful night. While Shubhendhu's music was melodious, Partho Sarothy's was full of speed and thrills. The father and son duo worked wonders on the tabla.

Padma Talwalkar, famous for her khayal-s, has received training under the three gharana-s - Gwalior, Kirana and Jaipur, and evolved a unique style of her own that has characteristics of

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Padma Talwalkar

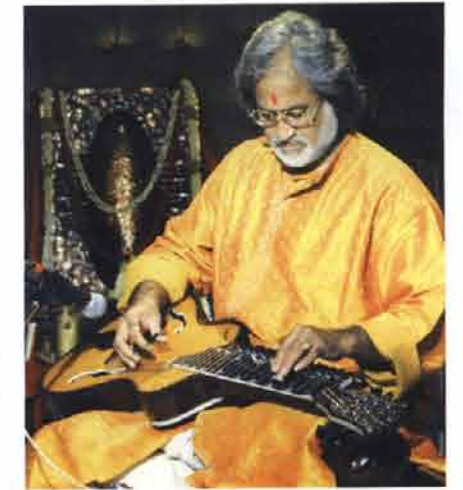
the above three, and is yet different. The songs had very few lines, at times just one, like the first one *Jai Jai Ram Krishna Hari*, but the improvisation and the variety brought out the beauty of the melody and the devotion. She also presented *Darsan devo Sankar Mahadev, Mata Bhavani, Kali, Durga* and concluded with *Payojee maine Ram ratan dhan paayo*, a Meera bhajan. The singer was as moved as the audience and towards the end, she declared with glistening eyes that she had actually received an inexplicable blessing that day.

Grammy-award winner Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's 'Mohan veena' recital was another big hit. He has

Indianised the Hawaiian guitar and uses the techniques of sitar, sarod and veena. With Ramkumar Mishra on the tabla, he lifted the audience to a different plane. Most of the people were seeing the Mohan veena for the first time, but Bhatt established an immediate rapport with the audience and made them feel comfortable by talking to them and giving them relevant information. After giving elaborate treatment to Maru Behag, in the typical Hindustani classical style, he played a few light pieces such as *Tom tananom*, his own composition, and a sample of the folk music from Rajasthan, and one from his award-winning album, *A Meeting By The River*.

Violinist N. Rajam's concert 'The three generations' featured her daughter Sangeeta Shankar and granddaughters Ragini Shankar and Nandini Shankar. Known for her gayaki style of playing, Rajam explained to the audience the differences in the Carnatic and Hindustani styles of playing. She also demonstrated the regular and gayaki styles of playing the violin. Ragini and Nandini scored easily, with their young age and mature virtuosity. Sangeeta Shankar exuded confidence and for Rajam, playing violin is second nature. It was an awesome foursome.

N. Rajam with daughter Sangeeta Shankar and grand daughters Ragini and Nandini



Vishwa Mohan Bhatt

The only representative of Carnatic music was Sudha Ragunathan, who did full justice to her selection. In spite of a severe viral fever, Sudha satisfied the immense crowd with specifically-composed songs. After *Sree Vighnarajam bhaje* by Oothukadu Venkata Kavi and *Idathu padam tookki* by Papanasam Sivan, she presented a viruttam on Abhirami and sang *Unnaiyallaal verey gati* in Kalyani as the main piece. When she came to niraval, instead of 'Meenakshi, Kamakshi, Neelayadakshi', she sang, 'Bhargavi, Sambhavi, Linga Bhairavi'. Songs such as *Ishaavil Ishan vandaan, Bhairavi vandaal, patthu disai adira*, and the arati song, improvised for

Linga Bhairavi, were well-received by the audience. Pakala Ramdass was his own excellent self, but he did not have much chance to exhibit his talent that day. The long tani by Tiruvarur Vaidyanathan (dholak), K. Sundar Kumar (khanjira) and R. Raman (morsing) was full of fire.

The dance programmes, three in number, were held at a different venue. The open-air auditorium had an immense stage and a spacious opening for the onlookers. The crowd sat under the star-studded sky, surrounded by coconut groves, protected by the mountains of the Western Ghats and caressed by the mild breeze, relishing every minute.

Aditi Mangaldas, the famous Kathak exponent and artistic director of the Drishtikon Dance Foundation, presented the Kathak programme, *Uncharted Seas*. Her theme was basically a search for the intangible; call it God, truth, beauty, love or freedom. The regal bearing of the dancers, the lighting scheme, the graceful movements and the innumerable twirls at an incredible speed kept the onlookers spellbound. The effect was heightened by the high quality of the orchestra. But, honestly, the programme did not reach the common onlooker, though it commanded his awe and admiration.



Sudha Ragunathan

Charishnu, conceived and directed by Leela Samson, a prominent Bharatanatyam exponent and director, Kalakshetra Foundation, was a magnificent pageant that celebrated the diversity and richness of India's performing art forms. Manipuri, Odissi, Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Mohini Attam and Kathak blended seamlessly into one another. The martial art form Thang ta was truly breathtaking. Imocha Singh's agile movements with the drums, his grace and confidence won him many admirers.

Charishnu means 'the one who likes to move about'. True to the title, the dancers kept moving at different speeds, in different directions, to different rhythms, establishing their freedom of expression. The spectators had the opportunity to watch and savour each style of dance individually as they appeared in their distinctive costumes and presented their characteristic styles. The precision of the percussive support given by various instruments led by Umamahesh Vinayakram was truly impressive. *Charishnu* concluded appropriately with *Maitreem bhajata* praying for

the welfare of the whole world, 'Sreyo bhooyaat sakala janaanaam'.

Sadanam Balakrishnan (Kathakali and Mohini Attam), Aditi Mangaldas (Kathak), Priti Patel (Manipuri), Imocha Singh (Thang ta), Aruna Mohanty (Odissi), Leela Samson (Bharatanatyam) were responsible for the individual dance forms. Bringing together artists of such high calibre is a mammoth task and Leela Samson has done it commendably. The recorded music was of a very high quality and created an atmosphere of unadulterated joy.

Sivanai Patri, conceived, designed, directed and narrated by Gowri Ramnarayan, was a soft, yet intense presentation through Bharatanatyam danced to the compositions of Appar, Sambandar, Trikut Rasappakavirayar, Muthu Tandavar, Kannappar, Tayumanavar, and Papavinasu Mudaliar, renowned for their depth of devotion and lyrical richness. Journalist and theatre person Gowri Ramnarayan's narration included interesting anecdotes that enabled a deep understanding of the background and helped in appreciating the performance better.

Priyadarsini Govind and Anjana Anand put their heart and soul into their presentation. *Teruvil vaaraano* depicted the intense love and longing of the nayika. *Nadamaaditirintha umakku* was a ninda stuti, expressing concern over Nataraja's inability to use his left leg. The various episodes referred to in this song enabled the dancer to bring out her dancing skills to the fore. The programme concluded with the total surrender of the nayika with the last lines, "Talaippattal nangai, talaivan taale". The various tevaram-s and other songs had their relevance and fell in place.

Everything about the performance had the quiet, subdued quality of high class. Savita Narasimhan's soulful singing, R.S. Balakrishnan's nattuvangam, Sakthivel's mridanga and V.V.S. Murari's violin came together to present one of the choicest orchestras and enhanced the listening pleasure.

Vocalist Pandit Rajasekhar Mansur of the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana, dhrupad exponent Ustad Sayeeduddin Dagar, and flute maestro Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia were the other luminaries featured in the Yaksha series.

B. RAMADEVI



Hariprasad Chaurasia and his ensemble (top), Sayeeduddin Dagar (middle left) and *Charishnu* (Manipuri, Mohini Attam and Kathakali)