



**PLEASING VOICE:** Manasi Prasad (left) and Nisha Rajagopal. PHOTOS: V. GANESAN

## Melodious and natural

If Manasi Prasad's voice resembled a singing violin, Nisha Rajagopal was fluent.

CHARUKESI



### Music Academy

Manasi Prasad provided a brisk start to her vocal recital, with the varnam ('Valachi Valachi') of Patnam Subramania Iyer. The plus point for Manasi is her natural thin voice, which does not sound shrill even when she reaches higher octave. Almost like a violin that sings. Manasi's next piece was 'Vigrahavanu Niliso,' set to catchy Khamas. Muthusami Dikshitar's popular kriti 'Manasa Guruguhana' in Ananda Bhairavi followed after a brief alapana.

Manasi presented Muthaiah Bhagavathar's 'Sarasamuki' in Gowdamalhar in an unhurried manner. Her Mohana Raga alapana was expansive but attractive, with brigandage-oriented sancharas found aplenty. The beauty of the lilting melody of the raga was presented in all its purity. The kriti chosen was 'Mohana Rama' of Tyagaraja. Her niraval line 'Mohana Rama Modhatti Deyvama' gave Manasi ample scope for modulation. There was a short 'Thani' by N. Hariharan. Ambujam Krishna's 'Oodi Vandhen Kanna' in Dharmavati and a Swati Tirunal tillana were the concluding pieces sung in the post-Thani session. Manasi closed shop with ten minutes to spare. Violinist R. Raghul carefully shadowed the vocalist and his version of Mohanam was pleasant and his niraval and swara-prastharas were neat. The percussion support by Trivandrum N. Hariharan was unobtrusive and aided the vocalist sail through the concert smoothly.

Nisha Rajagopal has blossomed into a fine vocalist and is inching towards making a claim for the coveted prime time-slot. That Nisha,

the gen-next musician, has an attractive voice is a pleasant plus factor in her favour. It has melody no doubt, but it has weight too. There are no aggressive hand gestures when she sings and she keeps her poise.

The best part in Nisha's kutcheri is her natural expression in all the departments, alapana, niraval and kalpanaswaras. Her alapanas are not tentative statements but flow fluently. Nisha began with a Ritigowla varnam, followed by Kedara raga kriti 'Rama Neepai' of Tyagaraja in a brisk gait. 'Lavanya Rama' in the raga Poorna Shadjam came next. Saveri raga alapana by Nisha was enjoyable, as her attractive raga vinyasa combined melody with manodharma.

Muthusamy Dikshitar's composition 'Saraswati Manohari' in the raga Saraswati Manohari was brief, perhaps meant as filler, before launching the major raga of the day, Kalyani.

Tyagaraja's 'Nidhichala Sukhama' in Kalyani was the main piece of the concert and therefore, Nisha did an elaborate version of the raga, preceding the rendition of the kriti, backed by neat niraval and imaginative swaraprasthara, before leaving the field for a crisp thani by Erode Nagarajan.

Papanasam Sivan's 'Saravana Bhava Guhane' (Kannada) took a fast pace, after which Nisha began her alapana in Ritigowla for Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi.

Why this special treatment for the Ritigowla that was featured twice in the span of two hours — first varnam and then RTP, one wondered. Even after the RTP, Nisha had time for two more light pieces, which proved that she could pack as many kritis as possible, with enough time apportioned for alapana, niraval and swaras, in the right proportion. This is laudable.

Poorna Vaidyanathan provided adequate violin support to Nisha and her solos in alapana and niraval were quite satisfactory.

# Heavy on accompaniment

The chitraveena's melody was subdued by high percussion.

V. SUBRAHMANIAM



**PERFECT NOTES:** (Left) N. Ravikiran and O.S. Arun. PHOTOS: V. GANESAN



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It is not easy to achieve competence in handling the chitraveena as it has no definite position for the notes as the veena does. An ivory block held in the left hand is moved over the strings and the position of the notes is achieved to perfection only through vigorous practice. Absolute control over this instrument has been achieved by maestro Ravi Kiran and not an off keynote is heard from the instrument which he has mastered through diligent sadhakam. The gamakas and the half tone phrasings flow out of his playing with natural ease.

For his concert, Ravikiran had a team to accompany him — Mysore Manjunath (violin), Yella Venkateswara Rao (mridangam), Vyasa Vittala (ganjira), Vaikom Gopalakrishnan (ghatam) and morsing by A.S. Krishnan, one short of a full bench, konnakkol being absent. Chitra Veena is a melodious soft instrument and one wondered whether so many percussion instruments were necessary for this kutcheri as the total noise level could drown the mellowness of the main instrument. And surely it did. The virtuosity of Ravi Kiran was in bloom but got smothered.

Ravi Kiran opened with Nava Raga Malika Adi Tala Varnam of Patanam Subramania Iyer. After a sketch of Hamsadhvani ragam he presented 'Karunai Seyvai' the Adi Tala composition of Papanasam Sivan. The kalapanaswaras for this was a large dose which did affect the kutcheri tempo which sagged. Next was 'Evarani' in Devamrutavarshini Ragam (Tyagaraja, Adi).

The song which followed next was the only one from his scheduled

lot 'Ramanatham Bhajeham,' 'Kasi Rama Kriya' (Pantuvrali) Rupaka Talam of Muthuswami Dikshitar with a sumptuous raga alapana and niraval and kalpanaswaras at 'Kumara Guruguhamaitam.'

The Thodi alapana which was intended to be a prelude to the kriti of Oothukadu Venkata Subba Iyer turned out to be the main raga for the Ragam Tanam and Pallavi as by then the concert time had run out. The raga alapana by Ravi Kiran was exquisite with Mysore Nagaraj following suit. The Thanam included Raga-malika sequence, and the ragas were chosen alternately between Ravi Kiran and Nagaraj.

While Ravi Kiran chose Saveri, Behag and Surutti, Nagaraj took up Ananda Bhairavi and Kapi. The Pallavi was set in Khanda Jati Tripura Talam with the Eduppu in 'Samam' and Ravi Kiran sang the line for the rasikas to know the sahitayam 'Saravana Bhava Guruguhane - Vandana Kaatharul.' The pallavi session with all the frills ended with a thani of Yella Venkateswara Rao and team which was an appropriate presentation.

Musicians endowed with a supple voice often prefer fast tempo, instead of bhava-filled music. Their voices would traverse the octaves with ease and perfection obeying every musical command they give. This way of presentation has its own thrills of enjoyment for the listener. These artists turn to bhava when their music ripens with age and experience.

It was with perfect sruti that O.S. Arun started the concert. He was accompanied on the violin by Mullaivasal Chandramouli, on the mridangam by Vellore Ramabhadran and on the ghatam N. Govindarajan and on the morsing Tirukkannapuram Sourirajan. With perfect sruti unison Arun started off with 'Ramabhakti Samrajya,' Suddhabangala, Adi tala composition of Tyagaraja. Kal-

panaswara passages for this kriti gave a boost and placed the concert on the right keel.

The Sri Ranjani raga alapana came next packed with fast brigasangathi, typically Arun. 'Bhuvinidasudane,' (Tyagaraja, Adi) tala composition of Tyagaraja came with kalpanaswaras.

Nagaswaravali is a pleasant raga in which 'Gamaka' usage is minimal and this suited Arun's style of singing. An alapana of this ragam by Arun was vibrant. Chandramouli's version was chaste. The Rupaka tala composition of Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan, 'Sri Sankara Guruvaram' was well presented with chittaswaram. The kalpanaswara after the chittaswaram appeared redundant.

The piece de resistance RTP was in the raga Sankarabharanam. The alapana was comparatively short and the thanam was rendered with mridangam accompaniment by Ramabhadran.

It has become routine for artists to keep shelves of paper to which they refer constantly. It was surprising to find Arun referring to the sheets for the calculated "Theermanam" at the end of kalpanaswaras for the pallavi. The previous generation greats never had a piece of paper in front of them. Another sophistication of this habit is keeping a laptop in front by some artistes.

An alapana of Mand with 'Janaki Manoharam,' adi talam by Vasudevachar, Behag alapana with a composition beginning 'Monujoopura Krishna' in Roopakam and Sindhubhairavi alapana with Adi Tala Thanjavur Shankara Iyer's piece 'Manasukkuhantathu' saw the completion of the concert.

In Arun's alapana, the fast sangathi up and down the octaves became monotonous after a point of time. Chandramouli's solos that had bhavam acted as relief. The experience of Ramabhadran kept the kutcheri buoyant with the other percussion vidwans combining well.