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## Styles merge as Ravikiran and Sacramento Symphony come together

By Krithika Rajagopal

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CALIFORNIA, May 24: While many of us would like to claim that we are a product of traditionalism and modernity, the Chitravina representing the South Indian Carnatic music and collaborating with the California-based Sacramento Youth Symphony (SYS) Orchestra, stood as a grand personification of such claim. Chitravina N. Ravikiran yet again proved his immaculate musical acumen with not only his own Melharmonic compositions but also with a re-creation of a Tyagaraja's piece arranged for the orchestra. The first-of-its-kind collaborative effort that this Symphony ventured into with an Indian composer accentuated the aesthetic experience of the large turn out.

One could clearly see the best of both the worlds in this "Spirit of India" concert held on May 13 at the Hiram Johnson Auditorium. The repertoire, carefully chosen by conductor, Micheal Neumann, kept the Indian spirit even in traditional Western pieces such as 'The Crown of India' suite by Edward Elgar and Kromsky's 'Song of India'. Ravikiran's participation ensured that two compositions of master-composer Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi - Shri vighna rajam bhaje and Neelavanam - were interpreted by young local dancers.

Ravikiran was then invited on stage by the orchestra and, after a brief introduction comparing and contrasting Indian and Western classical systems, he served a crisp appetiser (Raghuvamsha in Kadanakutoohala) with Charumati Raghuraman (Violin) and 'Anand' Anantha Krishnan (Mrdangam).

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Three subsequent pieces showcased Ravikiran's innovative concept of Melharmony. "Melharmony endeavours to showcase harmony with an emphasis on rules of highly evolved melodic systems such as Indian classical". These were undoubtedly the most aesthetic confluence of two different cultures in world music. Every element in the performance was meticulously orchestrated by Michael Neumann and the spontaneity of the Indian musicians made the experience distinctive and unique.

While "The Haunted Brook" and "Maltz" were Ravikiran's creations in contrasting styles, Tyagaraja's 'Niravadi Sukadha' in Ravichandrika marked a grand finale. Although a traditional Indian composition, the raga gave ample scope for a Symphonic-style treatment. The end result was soothing, melodic and harmonious. It was preceded by another short solo by Ravikiran - Tyagaraja's Appa Rama bhakti. It was a capsule-format rendition with every element of improvisation from the Indian music culture, yet giving the listener a very holistic experience.

The effort of co-coordinating a nearly 100-strong symphony and syncing with Carnatic music is a Herculean task which seemed effortless on stage. Kudos to everyone for this wonderful effort and a listener would only wish for more such splendid performances from artistes of such calibre. While the orchestra's co-ordination, the wonderful acoustics and ambience were constants through the evening, they were made even more distinctive by the interspersed spontaneity brought in by their Indian counterparts.

(The author is an audio engineer and music connoisseur in The San Jose Bay Area, USA)

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