

Much beauty lies hidden under the orthodox

MADRAS

There are quite some people who are against the uncompromising stand of the classicist. They feel that his conviction that classical music should be maintained in a changeless condition is wrong. It is impracticable. Classical music cannot escape modernism and altered social conditions. To take a stance in favour of pristine purity in the present times would really be asking raskas to settle for stagnation in classical music. It would be suicidal to Carnatic music.

It is also argued that it would be nothing short of folly to identify Carnatic music with the orthodox only. There should be scope for movements away from the severely orthodox to the moderately conservative, to the progressive and to even the radical outlooks. If, in the process, the orthodox is shut out or becomes extinct, it does not matter. It has to be accepted as inevitable. If the orthodox lacks the survival energy to exist in the challenging company of the popular and progressive, nothing can be done about it except letting it perish.

All this is advocacy in relation to the classicism associated with the entertainment halls. The varying and oftentimes cheap and questionable standards that obtain there have given rise to the justification of them in colourful terms as "progressive", "liberal" and all the rest. This is a very interesting way of accepting commercial cutcheri music which very often is so light and diluted that it is not classical at all.

The concern of the classicist for preservation of traditional values and for keeping Carnatic music in a state of unsullied beauty has to be understood. It is easy for the unthinking and uninvolved to speak denisively of stagnating classicism and the need to update it to suit modern times. What they forget is that in the dubious process of updating, modernising, streamlining or whatever you choose to call it, the unique beauty of Carnatic music is lost. Its taste is destroyed.

Imagine what would happen to the Taj Mahal if it is renovated to fit in with the modern concepts of architecture. Such a thing cannot happen. If it happens, then the Taj Mahal would no longer be the Taj Mahal. It would be just another utilitarian building like the many we see all around. Similar would be the fate of Carnatic music if it is tampered with in the name of giving it a modern look. If one has to be responsible about the Taj Mahal, one has greater reason to be responsible about the oceanic Carnatic musical inheritance and its preservation.

Surely, nobody wants Carnatic music to be pulled down on par with pop and cinema

music. But many practitioners are bringing it dangerously close to the common forms of music. On the one hand, the very content of classical music is altered and on the other, a calculated stridency is practised in the name of ensuring impact. The whole approach is insensitive. The aim is questionable. The pity is that all this should happen to the classicism of Carnatic music which is supremely sensitive.

In fact, at no time has the need for a rigid stand in favour of classicism been more urgent than at the present time. With the advent of competitive professional music, irresponsible trends which were imperceptible at first have now swelled to alarming proportions to smother classicism out of shape. It is no longer in tune with its colour and character. These have much to do with the orthodox. After all, it must be remembered that Carnatic music is *sastreyya* sangeetham and spartan discipline is part and parcel of it.

It must also be remembered that Carnatic music once attracted listeners as Carnatic music, chaste and unsullied. The practitioners then were dedicated to values and equal to the challenge of classicism. The challenge was to

CONCERT

make the orthodox and morally disciplined music attractive and alluring. They could achieve this artistic feat because they had the vision to penetrate ' ' the depth of classicism. They could perceive how much of beauty and the radiantly romantic lay hidden under the orthodox exterior of Carnatic music. Grappling with the orthodox, they discovered it had a silken flexibility and brought a tremendous range of captivation to their musical expression and exposition.

They provided the profound experience of Carnatic music. It carried a power which was sacred in evocation and sublime in beauty. This experience is hard to come by in the modern cutcheris though the performances are countless. The dubious knowledge explosion witnessed in recent times has brought about a disgusting "improvement" to the performing outlook which has cheapened the complexion and content of Carnatic classicism.

Much depends on the youth to reverse these trends in favour of genuine classicism. Youth interest (particularly performing interest) in classical music today is tremendous. The YACM (Youth Association for Classical Music) which has spearheaded the movement celebrated its third anniversary with an impressive festival

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packed with performances and features both novel and familiar. Much organisational energy and enterprise was in evidence. All of it signified youth in delightful bubble and ferment. Happy as it was, one also wished that the YACM start a small cell for "Youth in Silence", dedicated to enquiry (vichara) aimed at rediscovering the aesthetic values, the depth and weighty quality of Carnatic classicism and to reliving them in genuine Sadhana.

N. Ravikiran is gloriously equipped for providing an electrifying example of this Sadhana to the young musical aspirants of today but he missed the opportunity owing to a switch in his own thinking. The YACM thoughtfully placed his concert ahead of its valedictory function (venue: Music Academy) and the gottuvadyam maestro was thus freed from the customary anguish associated with the after-function concert. He showed his enjoyment of this freedom in the most unpredictable way.

He chose the light Behag for the central raga. This was a surprise. The alapaana was elaborate. It went on and on and one fancied that Ravikiran intended to play a Pallavi. And now came the greater surprise. After the lengthy raga essay, he chose to play the light javali "Valkalai". The greatest surprise appeared when he extended the javali in neraval and swaras. This seemed like mounting a measure of pallavi art on the javali. But, can the fragile and delicate javali stand this burden? This aspect was forgotten.

The whole exercise was most unlike Ravikiran and one was left speculating whether he had deliberately submerged his personality to be identified with the youth in ferment for a while. But before all this happened, Ravikiran was his profound self in his impeccable and serenely expressive playing of "Brovavanna" (Manji), Meera Narayan (violin) and J. Vaidyanathan (mridangam) were the zealous collaborators in this recital.

At the YACM festival concerts held at the Kasturi Srinivasan auditorium of the Music Academy, some maintained really respectable standards. Of the women singers, Subashini Parthasarathi was one. Accompanied by Kalpana Kishore (violin) and K. Ashok (mridangam), she gave classicism no jolt but a decent look singing with a steady and strong voice. Among the highlights were "Dehi Tavapada" (Sahana) and "Tyagarajaguru" (Karaharapriya).

Among the men singers, C. B. Ramarayanan was impressive. Supported by P. Ramadas (violin), P. Padmanabhan (mridangam) and Ravichandran (ghatam), Ramarayanan sang not only with conventional cutcheri proficiency but with a laudable sruthi sense. It was heartening to find that he found use for bhava too in his music. Poorvikalyani (Ananda Natamadivar) was well done. — MNM

Ravi Kiran impresses

MASTER Ravi Kiran is a child prodigy.

Twenty-year-old Kiran is the only leading exponent of gottuvadya. He has won acclamations all over the world. Generally his recitals are full of grandeur. There will be swaras, pure and serene, resonance in the well-tuned strings, depth of ideas, clarity, rhythm and a wide range of embellishments which adorn his rendi-

Music

tions. In his recital for Sri Rama Seva Mandali on April 8 he took up raskapriya and caused a gentle wave of appreciation with the very first notes. His mastery strokes and the resonance drew the true image of Todi raga to render *Enjiesina*. The exposition of Kambhodi for a raga, tana and pallavi and the tana-malka was correct to the core, while his phrases were not only rich in variety, but were intensely tuneful too, all well-placed. In spite of all these plus points, there were many undosings by Ravi. He seemed to have some trouble with the tuning of his instrument. This he did, repeatedly, even when the violinist was playing his turn. The violinist as also the audience were disturbed by this. Overall, the recital was a successful one, with the accompanists both of them youngsters from Karnataka, Mysore M. Nagaraj (violin) and V. Praveen (mridang).

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