



The Saintly Centenarian's Contributions to Music World

When I reminisce the great musician/musicologist Dr. S. Ramanathan, I am reminded of John Keats, a contemporary of Byron and Shelley, who wrote that *the most powerful and effective artists efface themselves in their art.*

I was privileged to listen to some great musicians, on a one-on-one setting, starting with my father & Guru Kumaramangalam Srinivasaraghavan, and later with Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, G N Balasubramaniam and Madurai Mani Iyer. But, in retrospect, I feel that my experiences with those four stalwarts were different than with Professor S Ramanathan (aka S R) thanks to greater freedom due to my personal interactions with him. In fact, those interactions with S R, on music of the 'yesteryears (and lamentations about the state of music in 1970s/1980s)', were unfettered, candid and spiritually uplifting. Thus my attempt, here, to describe the colossus, will be less of a biography and more of a memoir stemming from personal admiration of a true Acharya.

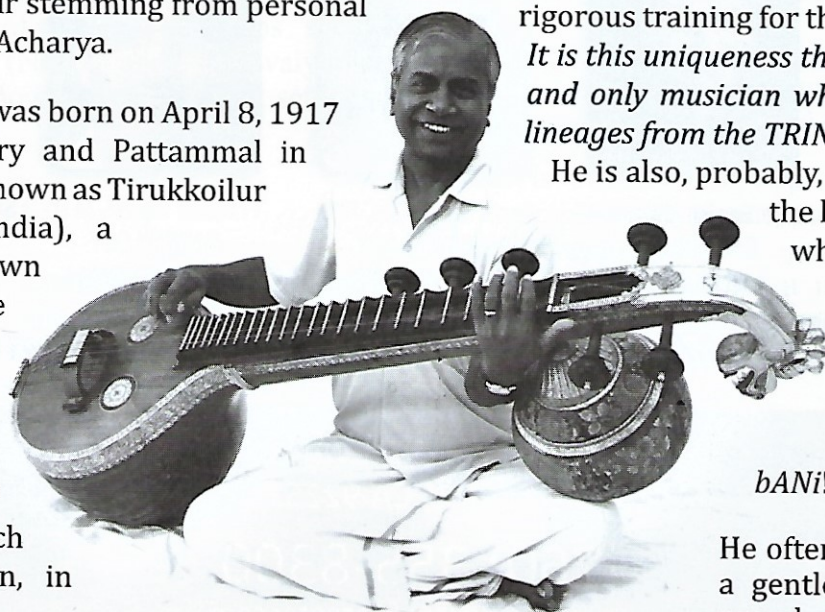
S. Ramanathan (SR) was born on April 8, 1917 to Subramania Sastry and Pattammal in Tirukkoalur (now known as Tirukkoilur near Villupuram, India), a famous historical town which witnessed the births of several great Chola Kings and the queen mother of RajaRaja Chola (S R himself had mentioned such details on the town, in

a personal setting). His initial *gurukulavasams* were with Tirukkoilur Ramudu Bhagavatar and Manalurpettai Subrahmanya Dikshitar. He was later blessed to train under Thanjavur Ponniah Pillai, Tiruvaiyaru Sabesa Iyer, Sathur Krishna Iyengar, Madurai Subrahmanya Iyer and with Tiger Varadachariar at the Annamalai University. His distinguished graduation to 'SangIta BhooshaNam' at the Annamalai University did not stop his quest for continued higher learning. Being a Vainika (as he was known then as *Veenai-Ramanathan*) he continued Veena and vocal lessons with Devakottai Narayana Iyengar and Valadi Krishna Iyer. The list of his gurus goes on to include Chidambaram (Nagaswaram) Vaidyanatha Pillai, Karaikudi (Veena) brothers and Anayampatti (Jalatarangam) Subba-Iyer. Many from my generation would agree that SR was one of the very few musicians of eminence who had acknowledged with grace every guru he went to, whether to learn a few songs or for rigorous training for the subtlest of nuances.

It is this uniqueness that puts him as the one and only musician who can claim all three lineages from the TRINITY of Carnatic Music.

He is also, probably, the only one who had the longest list of teachers who represented several *bANis* (expert schools) of Carnatic Music but, yet, came to be well regarded for *SR bANI!*

He often used to tell me with a gentle laugh that he was proud to be a 'perpetual



student' and shunned the acclaim every time when he was praised to be an ace teacher; but in reality he held a long list of distinguished teaching positions over several decades.

He was a Dean of Music of Kerala University, a Professor in Madras Music College, the Principal of Madurai College, Director of Research, Tamil Isai Sangham, a Member of several Boards of Studies of several Indian Universities, and a distinguished Professor (1964) of The Wesleyan University, Connecticut, US, which awarded him a (formal) PhD in Ethnomusicology for his acclaimed musical research on '*Silappadikaram*', one of the five great epics of Tamil Literature. During this long teaching career, he also produced several masterpieces of thesis three of which highlighted his role as a great musicologist; '*Silappadikaram* Isai NuNukkam (Intricate musical nuances in *Silappadikaram*), Masterpieces of Syama Sastri, and Tamil Translation of SangIta SampradAya Pradarshini (SR provided the Lakshana segment and B Rajam Ayyar did the Lakshiya part). Tamilnadu Sangita Nataka Academy made him a 'Researcher' in the 1950s which led to his first paper on Musial Scales in *Silappadikaram*. He was conferred several titles and honors such as *Isai-Perarigyar* (Tamil Isai Sangam), *Swati Thilakam* (Swati Tirunal Sangeeta Sabha), *Sangita Kalanidhi* (Madras Music Academy) and *Sangita Kala Sagara* (Vishaka Music Academy). The Hindu made this

tribute, "*Dr. SR was a musician and musicologist, a walking encyclopedia of information on Carnatic Music. He has served as the last court of appeal on all theoretical doubts for years... with his clear and riveting demonstrations*"

My children, the Krishnan Sisters (aka California Sisters), were blessed to be his disciples from a young age, until he left this mortal coil (1988); our annual India-vacations (from Paris and London, 1982 through 1987) were planned and geared to availing maximum time with their 'Thatha' as they used to address him. Before we left India, we had the pleasure of his surprise visits to my Bank house to teach the 'Singakkuttigal (lion cubs)' as he used to address them (in a personal setting). This was the time when I was blessed to interact with him during our long walks, before he settled down with the kids for their time with thatha. His love and child-like/hearty laughter while answering the kids' serious to silliest of questions was genuine and consistent. My wife (Radha) and I used to feel overwhelmed at the simplicity and purity of his expressions of both love and music. He never spoke ill of anyone, any musician, past or present, or about any performance, before or after; he had a good word for every one and every recital/concert we heard together; he encouraged every little kid to the senior most of musicians and always had plenty of kind words of encouragement about his or her performances. Many distinguished music

organizations felt privileged and comfortable inviting him to be the Guest of Honor since they knew well as to how the performers, the audience and the organizers would feel blessed by his presence and words of encouragement.

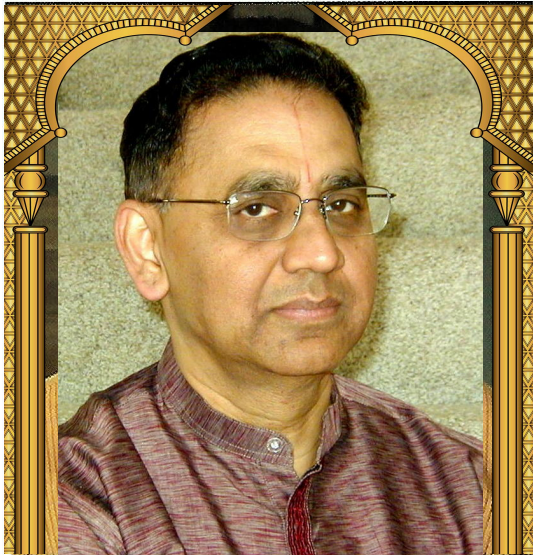
I never heard of anyone ever turned down by S R for music training, even if the person appeared to be *tone deaf*. He believed that anyone could be trained if only there was *evidence of passion to learn!* I have never seen him discuss financial matters such as fees for tuition or for concerts and he would direct all such queries and matters to his wife (Gowri Mami); surprisingly, mami used to simply accept any offering from students (if and when offered), and had no back-accounting nor any demands from anyone! I used to tell my friends in India and abroad, repeatedly, about this rarely witnessed characteristic of a 20th century musician/musicologist of acclaim who reminded Saint Tyagaraja on several fronts.

Before he taught any new kriti of Tyagaraja or any other vAkgEyakAra to the children, he used to ask them, 'has your appa taught you this?' If the answer was 'Yes', he would say, "do not change the bANi, but just listen to me, to help add a sangati or two to your rendition". He was curious to know about the rare kritis and the anecdotes relating to the time when my gurus taught those songs to me; he would then share his experiences with his Gurus, with the minutest of details with



stellar memory and childlike purity. I used to feel humbled, time and again, by the very proximity to that saintly soul and always wondered, "Is this how the disciples of Tyagaraja might have felt?"

He was a scholar at multiple levels and facets; he liked reading books in several languages and spoke scholarly English with fine diction and eloquence; this was another reason that the listeners of his Hari-katha and lecture demonstrations (around the world) felt fascinated by



the experience of listening to his 'Day with Tyagaraja', or TyagOpanishad or any other topic. SR was proficient in 'Ramavataram (Kampa Ramayanam)', Arunachala Kavi's 'Ramanatakam', Bharatiyar kavithaigaL and a long list of other works. His literary proficiency in Tamil language and tuning of poetry, prabandham/pAsurams, Tiruppugazh and (Saiva) Thirumurai with the most appropriate Ragams/tunes (perfectly representing the

mood and rasa of the lyrics) are some of his remarkable skills admired by many a scholar and a musician. His oft-repeated advice to his students was 'unless you enjoy your own singing and feel comfortable that you are bringing out the soul of the composition, no listener can enjoy your singing, however great your theoretical understanding may be!'. Unfortunately, such a fundamental requirement for a music performance is slowly eroding in today's fast world, where many a performer is more eager for fame and riches than for the 'anubhava' of the soul of music.

Just as he was a unique disciple to some of the greatest of teachers of his time, he was a unique Acharya who left to the mortal world scores of disciples many of whom have become torch bearers and star performers. Geetha Bennett and Frank Bennett, Sowmya, Unnikrishnan, Savithri Sathyamurthy, Seetha Narayanan, Vasumathi, Sukanya, Latha, Banumathy, Vanathy and Krishnan Sisters (Priya Parameswaran, Harini Vikas and Subhapiya Srivatsan) are just a few; the international jazz celebrity John McLaughlin, inarguably one of the living legends and a veteran British guitarist-composer, acknowledges in every global presence and interview, with gratitude, the teaching and contributions of Dr S R in his life of music. David Nelson, one of the great American musicians, wrote in his tribute to SR, a quote he borrowed from the internationally

acclaimed Musicologist/ Professor Bruno Nettl "..what he does not know about Music is not worth knowing". Prof S R, while he taught in Wesleyan, had two dozen distinguished students many of whom have become great musicians and acknowledge their legacy with pride. Bharata Ratna Pandit Ravishankar and quite a few internationally renowned stalwarts have described him as an exemplary musician/musicologist and above all as one of the finest human beings.

Geetha Bennett, the daughter and the distinguished torch bearer of Dr S R, lives with her husband, Dr Frank Bennett, another celebrity musician in the United States. Geetha is a multifaceted personality with extraordinary skills in Veena, world music, and fusion; she is also an accomplished story writer. You can read more about Dr S R in her web site: <http://www.geethabennett.net/>

Loosely translated from my interactions with the Acharya Dr S R, here is the summary of my understanding of his divine music and extraordinary skills.

What moves the discerning music world is the genuine exposition by the passionate musician(s). The real influence of music is immense, but not direct! Music works by 'listening' and feeling not by preaching. Music draws power not by being timely or timeserving but by being timeless.

Tiruvaiyaru S R Krishnan





Press Release

The Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego is celebrating its 10th annual Music and Dance Festival from April 2nd through April 9th, 2017, at the Jewish Community Center in La Jolla, California. This organization is dedicated to the propagation and celebration of classical Indian music & dance in Southern California. This year, the festival has a fantastic line-up of world-renowned *vocal* and *instrumental* artists of both the *Hindustani* and the *Carnatic* genres of Indian music from India. Among the many highlights of the program are fascinating *vocal concerts by three of the leading artists of Carnatic music*, concerts that will showcase the virtuosity of artists performing on instruments such as Sitar, Chitravina and Violin, a vocal Carnatic- Hindustani Jugalbandhi duet, and melodious vocal concerts by several popular artists. The festival will also present some of India's most talented and engaging percussionists who will be playing on such diverse instruments as the *mridangam* the *kanjira*, the *tabla*, and the *ghatam*.

The IFAASD is also presenting Indian Classical Dance productions during the festival that promise to be marvelous aural and visual treats. These classical dance productions have been choreographed by India's most talented and experienced dancers in Bharathanatyam, Kuchipudi, and a dance Jugalbandhi between Kathak and Odissi. This year's festival includes performances by Padma Vibhushan Birju Maharaj, Padma Bhushans C.V. Chandrasekar, and Dr. L. Subramaniam, Padma Shri Aruna Sairam, Kavitha Krishnamurthi, and Satish Vyas, Sangeetha Kalanidhies M. Chandrasekaran, Trichy Sankaran, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Guru Neyveli Santhanagopalan, Vidwan Hyderabad Brothers, Chitravina Ravikiran, Lalgudi Krishnan, Vidushies Geetha Bennett, Gayathri Venkataraghavan, and Aarti Ankalikar, and many more. The differences in theme, style of dance, costume, and musical accompaniment not only make each event unique but also have the potential to transport audiences to completely different worlds. The festival will also celebrate the 250th birth centenary of Saint Thyagaraja, Dr. S. Ramanathan's birth centenary, and 97th birthday of Bharat Rathna Ravi Shankar, and will honor the prolific contributions of some of the greatest musicians, artists, and scholars of India. There are a number of scholarly sessions led by Dr. Pappu Venugopala Rao of the Madras Music Academy. The festival will also feature two music and dance concerts performed by over a 100 children from all over Southern California. **We are honoring Mr. M. Chandrasekaran, Dr. L. Subramaniam, N. Murali, TSR Krishnan and VV Sundaram for their life time contributions.**

Throughout the festival, the patrons will have the opportunity to taste a wide range of Indian vegetarian cuisine from the South to the North and everywhere in between. The festival is certainly a must attend event for all as it promises to delight the eyes, ears, and stomach. Please visit our website at <http://www.indianfinearts.org> for more information.

Contact: Shekar 858-442-1586

Raji – 858-663-8251 Narayanan – 858-248-2851

A. Damoor, N. Gopalan, A. Krishnan, S. Murthy, S. Nandagopalan, R. Nandakumar, S. Nayak, R. Nathan, N. Patel, L. N. Peesapati, S. Pottathil, T. Rao, K. Sharma, K. Srinivasan, R. Subramanian, C.M Venkatachalam, S. Viswanathan
**A non-profit community based organization with the purpose of promoting Indian Classical Music, Dance and Arts
16051 Avenida Calma, Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92091. Phone 858- 442-1586**

INDIAN FINE ARTS ACADEMY OF SAN DIEGO
presents



EVENT # 10A
April
08
2017

SATURDAY
06:45 PM - 07:30 PM



10th Annual
**Music & Dance
FESTIVAL**

Felicitation Ceremony

Festival Co-Chairs:
Supervisor **Kristin Gaspar**
Council Member **Barbara Bry**

Guest of Honors
Ambassador **Venkatesan Ashok**
Dr. **Joel Day**
Executive Director, City of San Diego

Honorees:
Sangeetha Kalanidhi
M. Chandrasekaran
Padma Bhushan
Dr. **L. Subramaniam**
Sri. **N. Murali**
Sangeetha Acharya
Tiruvaiyaru **SR Krishnan**
Rasika Shiromani
VV Sundaram



Matru Devo Bhava - Carnatic Jugalbhandi

EVENT # 10B
April
08
2017

SATURDAY
07:45 PM - 09:45 PM

Sangeetha Kalanidhi
M. Chandrasekaran & smt. G. Bharathi
(Carnatic Instrumental)

Mridangam : **Mannargudi Easwaran**
Ghatam : **H. Sivaramakrishnan**

Tickets:
Before March 19, 2017: **\$30 & \$40**
After March 19, 2017 : **\$35 & \$45**
Free for 2017 Subscription and
Subscription Plus Patrons
All above 5 years old must have a ticket

Venue:
David and Dorothea Garfield Theater
Jewish Community Center, LA Jolla 92037

Please become a Subscription Plus Patron to save money and preferred seating for ticketed events

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visit www.indianfineartsacademy.org for schedule of events and tickets

Thiruvaiyaru Krishnan

is a Vaggeyakara and has been a performing Carnatic musician for over sixty years. He trained under Vaggeyakara G a n a b h o o s h a n a m K u m a r a m a n g a l a m Srinivasaraghavan, his father, and also from three of the legends of the 20th Century, Sangita Kalanidhis Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, G.N. Balasubramaniam and Madurai Mani Iyer. An Acharya for more than 50 years, Krishnan is also a renowned exponent of the millennia old traditions, 'Sankeertanam' & 'Harikatha' and equally famous for his 'Bhakti-Sangeet', 'divya-dampati vivahams' & 'musical saint-series' concerts combining the Hindusthani and Carnatic systems of music since the 1980s. His AchAryAs in Sankeertanam & Harikatha traditions included Srirangam Nathamuni Narayana-Iyengar, Pudukkottai Narayana Sastri, and the legendary Swami Haridoss Giri, aka Guruji. Krishnan has numerous recordings to his credit. About 50 compact discs from some of his live performances are freely available on the internet from his website sankeertanam.com and some of the famous renditions are available on the YouTube as well. Krishnan's major music performances since 1980s have been fundraisers for spiritual and

philanthropic causes.

A devotee and disciple of His Holiness Chandra Sekharendra Saraswati aka Kaanchi paramAchArya, Krishnan underwent Vedic/Scriptural education in Sanskrit college, Madras. He is a composer & lyricist in six languages, a poet, journalist & a novelist in both Tamil and English. His operatic creations include, 'Sitaayaascharitham Mahat' in three languages and 'SaraNam Aiyappaa' in five languages. Tyagaraja Ramayanam, Tyagaraja's nava-vida-bhakti and nada-yoga, Tyagopanishad, Divya Prabhandam and Abhanga sankeertanam have been some of his famous musicals since 1980s.

Krishnan started with Reserve Bank of India in 1965 and soon became an international banking executive in France and Great Britain; he became an US Fiduciary in early 1990s. Krishnan has served in four continents and has extensively traveled around the world. He has been a Fellow of two Royal Academic Institutions of the United Kingdom since 1980s, a member of the American Arbitration Association, CEO of one and founder principal of two other US Fiduciary firms operating in several jurisdictions at the nomination



of Federal & State Agencies of the US Government.

He and his wife Radha, also a musicologist, live in southern California and are patrons of several philanthropic institutions in India, which care for mentally & physically challenged and the destitute, who the Krishnans describe as 'God's favorite children'. Krishnan's prime disciples, Priya Parameswaran, Harini Vikas and Subhapriya Srivatsan, known as Krishnan Sisters, are well known Carnatic musicians from the Bay area, California. Krishnan's siblings Smt. Bhooma Narayanan, Sri SR Lakshminarasimhan and Smt. Ramamani Ranganathan are Sankeertana Bhagavatas in India.