



Sikkil Gurucharan's Masterful Christmas Day Recital

RADHIKA R B

Christmas being the occasion for yuletide and cheer what better gift could the music lovers have than Sikkil Gurucharan's concert? He was accompanied by vidwan L. Ramakrishnan on the violin, vidwan Patri Satish Kumar on the violin and on the ghatam by vidwan Giridhar Udupa.

The Hamsadhwani Varnam 'Jalajaaksha' composed by Manambu chaavadi Venkata Subbaiyer gave a highly beaming start to the concert. The 10th Thiruppavai Paasuram 'Notru Suvarkkam' in the ragam Thodi marked the Margazhi offering to the Lord by Gurucharan.

The virutham 'Vaakkundam Nalla Manamundaam' very beautifully bloomed into the verse 'Siddhi Vinayakane' of Kavi Kunjara Bharathi in the ragam Bilahari. The Kalpanaswaram was a friendly but exciting T20 match between Gurucharan and Ramakrishnan. Rudrapriya ragam was rendered lucidly by Gurucharan before starting Muthuswami Dikshithar's krithi on Lord Shiva 'Rudra Kopa jaatha Veerabhadramaadhraye.'

Can percussion instruments reproduce swaras? The way Patri Satish Kumar and Giridhar Udupa handled their instruments, gave the audience a feeling that the sounds were not just beats, but melodious swarams!

A soft portrayal of the Kesari Raga Thyagaraja Krithi 'Nannu Kanna Talli Naabhagyama' in which the Saint complaints to Goddess Katyayini for not showering mercy on him, moved the listeners to tears.

Gurucharan wove the aalapana very skillfully consisting of the ragaas Varaali,



Shree, which got enlarged into a galloping thanam in Gowla, Aarabhi, Nattai and took its cosmic form as the beautiful Pallavi 'Maanikya Margada Moudika Neela Vajra Keerthane' - as a tribute to the Ghana raga Pancharathna Keerthanas of Thyagaraja, comparing them to the five most precious stones Ruby, Emerald, Pearl, Blue Sapphire and Diamond.

As an acknowledgment of the prowess of the percussionists, the audience sat expectantly through the Thaniavarthanam, nor were they disappointed. Stroke for stroke, beat for beat, it was an enthralling tango between them. At the end, Giridhar literally threw up the ghatam and caught it in sync with the beats of Patri!

The choice of 'Parthasarathy Thiruvallikkeniyil' in the ragam Sumanesharanjani composed by Vidushi Rukmini Ramani, daughter of the legendary Papanasam Sivan exemplified the attention to detail of Gurucharan to render it in Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha.

The popular patriotic song 'Jayathi Jayathi Bharatha Maathaa' in the ragam Kamas composed by Mayooram Vishwanatha Shastri was a fitting tail-end song. Kaapi Thillana composed by Tanjore Kalyanaraman had a fast tempo. The Surutti mangalam ended the concert.

In the last 10 days, it was the fifth concert of Vidwan Sikkil Gurucharan that the writer had attended; not even one was

any similar to the others - with varied krithis of different composers and ragams. Even the texture of the concerts changed according to the venue where it

was conducted, which is the testament for the hard work put in by him constantly. It proves why Vidwan Sikkil Gurucharan remains one of the most sought-after artiste year on year.



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Musical Aesthetics – Clarity of Pure Notes and Vibrant Gamakas: Lecture-demonstration by Prince Rama Varma & Amrutha Venkatesh

 **SUNDARARAMAN CHINTAMANI**

On 22 December, Vid. Prince Rama Varma, accompanied by his disciple Amrutha Venkatesh, presented an insightful and well-structured lecture-demonstration on *Musical Aesthetics – Clarity of Pure Notes and Vibrant Gamakas*. The session examined how even subtle deviations in swara intonation—particularly during *manodharma* - can allow impure notes to slip in, gradually affecting the core identity and aesthetic balance of a raga.

Both artistes articulated the dos and don'ts of preserving *suddha swara* integrity, reinforcing their points with apt and illustrative musical examples. The stage responsibilities were evenly shared, and the lecdem stood out for the generous space given to the disciple - an encouraging reflection of a healthy and respectful *guru-shishya* relationship, especially in an academic format.

The central theme was developed through comparisons of closely allied ragas such as Hindholam and Varamu, and Shanmukhapriya and Simhendramadhyamam, demonstrating how marginal changes in intonation and gamaka placement can blur raga boundaries and alter perception.

Amrutha Venkatesh emphasized the role of pure notes and illustrated how impure shades can unintentionally creep in by juxtaposing allied ragas, including Sri and Manirangu; Mukhari, Kanakambari and Varali; Todi and Dhanyasi; Poorvi Kalyani and Panthuvrali; Kedara Gowla and Surutti, and Mayamalavagowla and Lalitha. Her presentations were precise, methodical, and pedagogically effective, making nuanced concepts easily graspable for students.

Prince Rama Varma complemented this with a broad spectrum of examples drawn from Nattai and Chala Nattai, Vagadeeshwari, Mohanam and Mohana Kalyani; Arabhi and Suddha Dhanyasi; Malahari and Saveri; Valaji and Malayamarutham; Charukesi and Sarasangi; Shankarabharanam and Kamboji; Kalyani and



Yaman Kalyani, and Vasantha, offering a comprehensive view of raga aesthetics across genres and stylistic approaches. Some key general observations highlighted during the session were:

Training in instruments such as the veena or violin helps internalise precise *suddha swara sthanas* and apply appropriate gamakas.

Excessive or misplaced gamakas can dilute, and sometimes distort, a raga's

personality.

In certain contexts, silence between gamakas enhances raga aesthetics and heightens musical impact.

Crude sounds and unnecessary decibel levels should be avoided to ensure a smooth and refined raga exposition.

Ending a passage with a still note after continuous swara movement provides a sense of relief and aesthetic satisfaction to the listener.

Kelvi gnanam (deep and informed listening) plays a crucial role in distinguishing between pure and impure notes.

Listening to stalwarts such as Voleti Venkateswarulu, Madurai Mani Iyer, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, and Dr. Balamuralikrishna helps internalise authentic raga-specific gamaka signatures.

Essential elements of beautiful gamakas include shruti suddham, swarasthana suddham, steadiness of voice, anuswara suddham, an understanding of kalapramanam (tempo), and awareness of phrase timing.

Overall, the lecture-demonstration proved immensely valuable for serious students of Carnatic music seeking to refine their aesthetic sensitivity and raga clarity. Prince Rama Varma's gentle, well-timed humor added warmth to the proceedings, making the entire lecdem both intellectually enriching and thoroughly engaging.

R Suryaprakash's morning concert on 21 December 2025, accompanied by vidwans VVS Murari (violin), Thanjavur Murugabhoopathi (mridangam) and K. V. Gopalakrishnan (kanjira), offered a thoughtful blend of depth and accessibility. Be it the expansive, chaste exploration of Hamsanandi or the later Desh piece '*Thunbam Nergaiyil*' had the strong classical foundation, while his

characteristic English note added warmth and individuality. The team of seasoned artists provided sensitive support throughout, enhancing both the structural clarity and emotive appeal of the presentation. It was a concert that served equally as a learning experience for students and a rewarding listening session for the rasikas.



Malladi Brothers: Synonymous with melody

ANURADHA SHANKAR

The Malladi brothers Sreeramaprasad and Dr Ravikumar set the perfect mood for a scintillating evening with Dhanyasi raga composition 'Namah sivayathe namo bhavaya.' This is one of the compositions in the group Adhyaathma Ramayanam composed by Sri Munipalle Subramanya Kavi, popularised by Sri Voleti Venkateswarulu. A very bright krithi with swaras in the line 'Namah Sivayathe' grabbed everyone's attention in the hall. Dhanyasi was followed by the Dikshitar's Navagraha krithi for the day, 'Bhudamashrayami' in Natakurunji.

Dr Ravikumar presented a nice aalapanai in raga Phalamanjari. A rare raga in which Thyagaraja has composed only two songs. This rare raga was taken as the sub main for the evening and was very well presented. One of the two krithis of Thyagaraja, 'Sri Narasimha' was presented.

The next composition was Thyagaraja's 'Enduku nee manasu' in Kalyani. Malladi Brothers presented this krithi in the most suited pace. A very melodious slow-paced rendition added beauty to the lyrical value where Thyagaraja pleads to Sri Rama why His heart is not sympathetic towards him.

They then sang Ponnaiya Pillai's composition 'Ranganathude' in Sowrashtram. The main raga for the evening was Sahana. Sreeramaprasad sang a beautiful bhava-laden alapana, which was equally carried forward by B Ananthakrishnan on violin. The song was the masterpiece of Sri Thyagaraja, 'Giripai nelakkonna.' Beautiful neraval and swarams enhanced the melody of Sahana.

This soothing Sahana was followed by a reverberating Thani Avarthanam by Parupalli Phalguni on Mridangam and Dr V Suresh on the Ghatam.



The next piece of the evening was a Ragam Tanam Pallavi in Ranjani. Dr Ravikumar presented the ragam and together they presented the Tanam and brought out the rakthi rasam of Ranjani so very well. The rakthi ragams always sound so very beautiful in Dr Ravikumar's voice and Ghana ragams in Sri Sreeramaprasad's voice. They both have such a great Sruthi alignment that it sounds just like a tambura. The Pallavi was 'Maamava Mahadeva Ranjani-Nikhila loka Janani Niranjani' set to Tisra Triputa thalam - Kanda nadai. They also presented beautiful ragamalika swarams in the ragas which had the suffix Ranjani in its name - Janaranjani, Sriranjani, Megha Ranjani and Sivaranjani.

Then came the composition of Sri Papanasam Sivan, 'Kumaran thaal panindhe thudhi' in the raga Yadukukula Kambodhi. This was followed by the Annamacharya's composition, 'Aakati velala' in raga Revathi and the concert concluded with the mangalam of Sri Annamacharya, 'Madhavunaku mangalam' in Suruti.

Rasikas are of different kinds - some enjoy the ecstatic presentation of ragas and swaras, some prefer rare compositions and new innovative styles. But some give more importance to bhakthi and bhava-oriented presentation with tradition and sowkhya bhavan. If you are one among that category then the destination is a concert by the Malladi Brothers.

Shruthi Shankar Kumar: A neatly presented concert

R BHARATHWAJ

Presentation is a special skill. It comes with practice. Shruthi Shankar Kumar has a good hold over this presentation skill. She shows this skill well during her concerts. And this one at Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha was no exception! Shruthi is the recipient of Dr. M.L. Vasanthakumari Award at the sabha this year.

Starting with a varnam in Nattai, she went on to present Thyagaraja's 'Rajurvedala' in Todi. One of the highlights of the concert was her presentation of 'Gopalakrishna Bharathi's 'Tillai ambalathanai' in Sahana. The kriti is more often heard in Surutti and the Sahana version, though not unknown, is less heard. Hence this was a refreshing experience.

Suddha danyasi and Poorvikalyani seem to be appearing more frequently this season, for this writer. Shruti presented Muthuswami Dikshithar's 'Subramanyena rakshitoham' as the next urupadi. The main course was Ramanathapuram Srinivasa Iyengar's 'Parama pavana rama'. She ended the concert with



a ragamalika slokam and Swati Thirunal's 'Krishna Chandra Radha manamohana'.

Shruthi did a good job with her raga Alapanais. They all had the classic pidis. The Poorvikalyani was especially expansive and well presented. She showed good patterns in her kalpanaswarams. Tumkur Bhargav on the violin played well during accompanying and in his solo versions. His accompanying suited well to the concert. BN Kasinadh on the mridangam played in a very apt manner with good anticipation. Sunil Kumar on the kanjira played very well with much more anticipation. With a charming personality and good voice, Shruthi could make a very good impression in this concert.

Abhishek Raghuram: Daring Musicianship and Deep Musical Architecture

RAJAGOPALAN VENKATRAMAN

Abhishek Raghuram presented a compelling and high-voltage Carnatic concert at the Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha, ably supported by Vittal Rangan on the violin and the formidable percussion duo of Patri Satish Kumar and Vazhapalli Krishnakumar. The evening was marked by clarity of thought, rhythmic daring and a strong sense of collective musicianship.

The concert opened with the Mohana varnam *'Ninnu Kori,'* rendered at top speed while remaining firmly anchored in melody and sruti alignment. The brisk yet aesthetic presentation immediately established Abhishek's intent—precision without sacrificing musicality.

Dikshitar's *'Chandram Bhaja Manasa'* in Asaveri followed, a vAra kriti set to Chatusra Jathi Matya Talam, associated with Monday in the Navagraha kriti corpus. The Sanskrit sahitya, describing the moon's luminous beauty, its adornment on Shiva's matted locks, and its divine attributes, was delivered with measured gait and gravitas, allowing the structure and rhythmic framework of the composition to stand out clearly.

A graceful Kedaram alapana unfolded next, notable for its repose and well-defined phrases. This led to *'Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye'* (Rupaka talam), a composition of veteran vidwan M.D. Ramanathan. The kriti, embellished with chittasvaras, showcased Abhishek's ability to internalise MDR's meditative musical idiom while retaining his own vocal signature. The line *'vara kedaradyakhila ragaratna malikam parama bhakta yogivaram'* stood out for its diction, bhava and structural clarity.

The Karaharapriya alapana that followed was one of the concert's high points. Abhishek explored the raga's depth and crevices with assurance, highlighting characteristic prayogas and traversing a wide vocal range with ease. His alapana balanced intensity with restraint, avoiding excess while delving deep into the raga's emotional core. Vittal Rangan responded with an equally evocative and sensitive violin essay, mirroring the vocalist's ideas while adding his own elegant touches.

The kriti *'Appan Avataritta Kathamrutam'* of Papanasam Sivan (Adi talam) was presented next. Beginning from the anupallavi *'muppuvanan kalai vattum mahisha Mukhi,'* Abhishek built up to a striking, high-speed neraval at *'triloka mangalakara murti.'*



The neraval, demanding both rhythmic acuity and vocal agility, was executed with confidence, drawing appreciative responses from both accompanists and audience.

The main piece of the concert was an ambitious and imaginative presentation of an Ashtapadi describing the Dashavatara of Mahavishnu. Five stanzas were chosen, each set to a different raga and nadai, creating a riveting tapestry of rhythm, melody, and narrative: *"Pralaya Payodhi Jale"* – Nattai, Khanda nadai (Matsyavatara), *"Kshitir ati Vipulatara"* – Kapi, Koormavatara, featuring exhilarating, rocket-like svara passages, *"Vasati Dasana Sikhare"* – Hamir Kalyani, Tisra nadai (Varahavatara), *"Tava Kara Kamale"* – Pantuvarali, Chatusra nadai (Nrusimhavatara), and *"Chalayasi Vikramane"* – Kuntalavarali, Sankeerna nadai (Vamanavatara).

This segment was brilliantly conceived and executed, with the entire ensemble demonstrating superb control over bhavam, layam, talam and nadai. The tani avartanam by Patri Satish Kumar and Vazhapalli Krishnakumar was outstanding, marked by rhythmic clarity, inventive patterns, and seamless coordination. Vittal Rangan's masterly support throughout this complex centerpiece played a crucial role in holding the musical edifice together.

The concert concluded with *'Ramachandraya Mangalam,'* leaving rasikas wishing for the remaining five avatars to be sung—a fitting tribute to the success and musical completeness of the presentation.

Overall, this was a concert that combined intellectual rigor with visceral excitement, showcasing Abhishek Raghuram's distinctive artistry and the ensemble's collective excellence in full measure. It offered splendid variety and sustained listening pleasure, drawing richly on a wide spectrum of **tālam**s and **nada**i, a judicious mix of **composers**, and compositions in **multiple languages**, all woven into a cohesive and deeply rewarding musical experience.



The evening of 21st Dec, 2025 at the Madras Sanskrit College, unfolded with a serene and soulful flute concert by Sruthi Sagar, an artiste vcelebrated for his melodious, bhava-laden music. His playing carried an effortless fluidity; each phrase shaped with sensitivity and depth. Sruti Sarathy on the violin offered poised, responsive support, mirroring his ideas with finesse and adding her own gentle touches of raga bhava. B. Ganapathyraman on the mridangam elevated the recital with his steady, unobtrusive yet vibrant rhythmic presence, enhancing every crescendo and quiet moment.

Lec-dem: Innovative methods to take Carnatic music to Next Gen by S Saketharaman and Mahesh Raghvan

HARISHANKAR K

Vidwan S. Saketharaman and Mahesh Raghvan presented an engaging lecturedemonstration on 25 December 2025 at 8.30 a.m. Vidwan K. N. Shashikiran, in his introductory remarks, highlighted Saketharaman's initiatives to promote Carnatic music through the Sunday morning Veedhi bhajanais and Mahesh Raghvan's innovations through ensemble music shows and performing Carnatic music through GeoShred an iPad based musical instrument.

Saketharaman opened the talk by confirming that innovation is important for the development and progress of the artforms without which there will be stagnation. Quoting his guru Lalgudi Jayaraman, he said innovations should be incremental, building on established traditions rather than disrupting them. Further, he emphasised that all innovations must build on existing traditions and foundation principles of bhakthi-oriented Carnatic music. The purpose and intent of innovation must be for the sake of enriching the artform and not for individual popularity. He cited examples that even the Trinity embraced innovation—Tyagaraja by introducing more than 70 new rāgams, Dikshitar adapting western tunes for his nottuswarams. And in the recent past, when Lalgudi Jayaraman chose to create thillanas in lighter and Hindustani ragams like Behag, Maandu, Madhuvanti at a time when most thillanas were in heavier ragams. He sang a few snippets of these, to the audiences applause.

Saketharaman mentioned innovative contributions of Muthiah Bhagavathar's English note, Lalgudi Jayaraman and T R Subramaniam's decorative contributions to porutham swarams (few rounds swarams for Karpaga manohara was presented), inspiring ragam-tanam-pallavis by vidwans T N Seshagopalan and T R Subramaniam, 4 note ragams like, Lavangi, Mahathi created by Dr M Balamuralikrishna (which even featured in Tamil movie of the 1970s, Apoorva Raagangal) and how the veteran musician G N Balasubramaniam perfected the art of shruthi bhedom for the performance stage, by demonstrating Todi to Shankarabharanam shruti bhedom. Citing the example of TR Subramaniam style of swara singing for 'Sundara tara deham' at 'agama sancharam,' Saketharaman emphasised that all the innovations in the past have been in line with Carnatic music's Bhakthi based traditional roots and hence future innovations must also maintain that. Saketharaman recalled how Vidwan Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman showcased rare vivadi ragams, saying there was "no dosham, only santhosham," a wordplay that drew warm applause from the audience. Concluding the first part of



his talk, Saketharaman stressed the importance of presenting compositions in the appropriate kalapramanam to preserve the sahitya bhava and the composer's intended mood. He illustrated this with Lalgudi Jayaraman's tuning of ashtapadis such as 'Yaaramita Vanamali' in Hindustanibased ragams like Hamveeru/Hameer Kalyani.

He noted that tuning compositions demands both insight and innovation, and that

tunesmiths should chose tunes responsibly to reflect the sahitya bhava. To illustrate this, he demonstrated Annamacharya's last keertanam, showing how Lalgudi Jayaraman's use of ragam Vaasanthi conveyed the raga bhavam, far better than a brighter Athana. He also urged artistes to avoid excessive laya acrobatics and maintain 80% musical sowkhyam and only 20% rhythmic display—and to render shrungara-based padams, javalis and devotional pieces in the appropriate kalapramanam, without fast paced akaarams or brigas that compromise their meaning.

Mahesh Raghvan began by recalling his growing up years in Dubai, where he learned Carnatic music and drew inspiration from Mandolin U. Srinivas's playing. He went on to describe how he overcame the limitations of gamakams (glides) in keyboard by developing the GeoShred ipad application over the years to produce Carnatic music gamakas. Saketharaman sang a few phrases of Ananda Bhairavi raga and Mahesh followed him on GeoShred to the appreciation of the audience.

Saketharaman demonstrated how hasya rasa can find a place in Carnatic music by singing a humorous "upuma" piece in Saranga, much to the audience's delight. The session also featured video clips - from Carnatic acapella and a Kanakangibased choir piece set against James Bond and Kantara movie visuals to Mahesh Raghvan's ensemble productions such as 'Rara Venu Gopa Bala'—as examples of reaching new audiences. It concluded with a clip of Carnatic choir youngsters singing "Harivarasanam," after which Saketharaman remarked that only innovations that appeal to the heart of the rasikas will stand the test of time.

In his closing remarks, Shashikiran shared an interesting trivia that a Carnatic piece had been recorded on the piano as early as the 1900s. He thanked the presenters and reiterated that today's artistes must innovate while upholding the aesthetics of the art form. It was heartening to see a sizeable audience for this early morning lecdem.

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Malladi Suri Babu – soaking in Nadha Sudhaarasa paanam

❧ SIVAPRIYA KRISHNAN

What do you write about a veteran musician whose sole existence is to sing, experience Naadaa and be enveloped in the beauty of ragas on a daily basis?

We as audience experienced bliss, in a melodic and meditative state at Malladi Suribabu's concert for Parthasarathy Swami Sabha at 125th year Samskriti Utsav, at the Madras Sanskrit College Hall on Monday the 22nd December 2025.

The joy of listening to an Asaveri, Vasanta, Khamas, Mukhari and other ragas is inexplicable beyond words. Asaveri varnam composed by Lalgudi Jayaraman set the tempo for the concert that was followed by an Annamayya composition in Vasanta. Ravikriya raga exposition and the Muthuswamy Dikshitar kriti 'Himagiri Kumari' was a class in itself. Mukhari and 'Emaninne' by Subbaraya Sastry was the main song. Subbaraya Sastry has composed only a few, but every one of the few, is a magnum opus leaving no room for any more raga exploration after the song. Subbaraya Sastry's songs unfold like a magnificently woven carpet that is filled with raga nuance, lyrical beauty and



tala intricacies and sung by someone like Malladi Suribabu with the advantage of being a native Telugu person, the entire appeal leaps several notches up. 'Nahi re nahi sankasam,' a Sadasiva Brahmandra kriti tuned by Voletigaru in Kalavathy and 'Udayadripai Divve,' a song that has gone viral these days, a song that only Suribabu can rightfully own, were the crown jewels in the offering that evening.

Special mention must be made of Dr. Nishanth Chandran on the violin, Sai Raghavan on the mridangam and Udupi Srikanth on the kharjira. All youngsters with so much energy and verve, added such rhythmic value to the concert that made it an unforgettable evening.

Nanditha Ravi: Torch bearer of Veenai Dhanammal bani

❧ R BHARATHWAJ

An artist coming from a family of artists and a lineage, it adds a lot of responsibility. And when the artist also represents a unique bani, it adds more importance to being true to the style and music they represent. Dr Nanditha Ravi is one such musician, who comes from a family related to music for generations and presents the Veenai Dhanammal bani as it should be known for today's music world.

Nanditha started with the Suddha danyasi varnam 'Sri Rajamathangi,' a composition of Muthiah Bhagavathar. 'Ganapathe mahamathe' in Kalyani was presented with a crisp sketch of the raga and a few rounds of swarams next. A slow 'Guruguhaya bakthanugraha' in Sama gave a sedate mood. The next was a classical and elaborate alapanai of Begada. Muthuswami Dikshitar's Thyagarajaya namaste was presented in a grand manner.

Nanditha mentioned that she would be presenting more compositions of Dikshitar and his sishya paramparai in her concert. A classy Sriranjani alapanai was followed by 'Balambikaya' and a few rounds of swarams which showed some intricate patterns. The main course was Poorvikalyani. A very enjoyable expanse of the raga was followed by Ponniah Pillai's 'satileni guruguha.' Neraval and swarams were presented with absolute finesse, followed by a Tani avarthanam. Chinnaiah's Bhairavi Javali 'Elaradayane kamini' and 'Samayamidhe ra ra na



sami' in Behag were presented with the stamp of her school. Who else could sing it better! She concluded with the Tiruppugazh 'Uruvai aruvai'

Nanditha's music is the testimony of what traditional music is. She presented with absolute clarity and was truly faithful to her training. The gana-naya aspects were brought out effortlessly making the music very much enjoyable. The 'sogu bigu' was evident. She could bring out the best of gamakam laden sangeetham and weaved very classical patterns throughout the concert. MA Krishnaswamy was his usual self and accompanied with his style. Manoj Siva on the mridangam played in an apt manner. The many variations he managed to show while enhancing this classical style of music deserves special appreciation. Satish Gowtham on the ghatam played with anticipation. He ably supported the concert and added to the overall listening experience. It was a very much enjoyable concert for the sticklers to classicism and traditional music. Some sort of timestamp for music.

Aditya Madhavan- Young blood , Old values

AA

Aditya Madhavan is a rising star today and one of the promising vidwans of tomorrow. Backed by an impressive lineup of gurus, his commanding voice and confident on-stage presence all provide fuel for his career to advance in rapid strides. His choice of pieces was conservative yet enjoyable. There were no 'boring' stretches and the concert went with a swing from beginning to end.

'Seshachala Nayakam' (Muthuswami Dikshitar) is a hot favourite for every singer and Aditya handled the Varali with gusto. The neravel and swara patterns were sensitive but also energetic with tightly packed phrases. The fullness was more like a Mumbai monsoon than a drizzle on a Margazhi morning especially towards the end of the neravel when he unleashed a battery of variations at the conventional line 'Aravinda Patra Nayanam' lavishing attention on each swara while ascending the scale before descending in a dramatic finish. Certainly, he was able to keep the audience on its toes, rather than send them into slumber, a common occurrence at the post lunch sessions!



After a crisp and neatly rendered 'Amba Paradevatey' (Rudrapriya, and what a beautiful chittaswaram passage!), the vocalist embarked on a Kambhoji that was both elaborate and tasteful. Aditya has a voice that is pitch perfect, and capable of giving long karvais. He used this to the fullest like his guru Sanjay Subrahmanyam. The effect was not only electric but highlighted the beauty of the sancharas that preceded and succeeded them. Such was the effect of the long notes that one felt if only this young vocalist utilised his powerful voice to prioritise this aspect, he would soon be at the top of the heap.

Aditya was aware that time was getting on and so embarked on a rushed

'O Rangasayee' followed by a barrage of swaras exclusively in the 2nd speed. Special mention must be made of the vibrant kuraippu that sparkled with interesting variations.

Bhargav Tumkur has an extremely sweet tone and gave a beautiful version of Kambhoji that entered the very nerve of the raga. The percussive team of Vijay Ganesh and D.V. Venkatasubramanian made a lively duo and presented a bright thani.

This concert was a perfect sample to show just how today's generation skilfully handle the perpetual conflict between modernity and tradition and come out with their values intact. A welcome trend!

Bargav Hariharan & Krupaa Lakshmi: Musical couple in harmony

R BHARATHWAJ

Duet concerts are known in many combinations - with siblings, cousins and even students of the same guru, father and son, mother and daughter, there are many examples. However, we had a husband and wife, couple sing a duet concert. Barghav Hariharan and Krupaa Lakshmi are a couple who sing concerts as a duet. It is usually a difficult task for a man and woman to sing together, as the natural pitch of their voices would not always sink. This couple have identified a good matching to sing. They are gifted in that way, that they have common Shruti to sing at.

Starting off with the Neelambari varnam of Lalgudi Jayaraman, they went on to present 'Karpaga Manohara' in Malayamarutham with rounds of swarams. The next was a detailed alapanai of Varali, for which Thyagaraja's 'Eti janmamidi ha' was sung with neraval and swarams. Muthuswami Dikshitar's 'Rangapura vihara' and 'Vanchathonu na' in Karnarajani were chosen as the next two pieces. The couple sang Thyagaraja's 'O rangasayee' as the main piece with an alapanai and several rounds of swarams. After the Tani, they presented the ragamalika 'Udayadri pai,' and a tillana in Bindumalini.



The couple seem to have come with a good plan. They did not even talk to each other on stage. They present kritis in unison. Taking advantage of the voice and sruti difference, they present novel things such as harmony and synchronous singing, which are not often heard in Carnatic concerts. The accompanying artists were so sweet and played their parts very well. Madan Mohan on the violin gave classical responses during his playing. It was soothing to hear him playing. Trivandrum Balaji played with so much gait. Each stroke was precise and crisp. He showed many variations in his playing for the kritis and the Tani. As the senior artist on stage, he elevated the overall concert experience. He was aptly supported by Samyuktha Sreeram on the ghatam. The team provided a new kind of experience overall.

Amrita Murali's Kutchery Amirtham

R BHARATHWAJ

Each musician has his or her own outlook for music. It comes in their training and attitude. It is further dependant on what they wish to achieve. Here we have a musician who has earned herself a special place and stardom by singing solid traditional music.

Amritha Murali began her concert with the slokam 'Sadguru gajasya vani' and went on to sing Shyama Sastri's Begada varnam 'Dayanidhe'. Following a very elaborate alapanai of Kanada, Thyagaraja's 'Sri narada' along with detailed neraval and swarams was the second item presented.

Muthuswami Dikshithar's 'Sri guruguhasya dasoham' and Periyasaamy Thooran's 'Thaaye tripurasundari' were the next 2 urupadis sung. The importance of singing a kriti alone, without any manodharma was well realised during this part of the concert. The main part of this concert was a RTP in three ragams - Khamas, Lalita and Sriranjani, were sung in detail. Amrita's effortless shifting from one ragam to another deserves a mention. The tanam was also sung in



a similar manner. L Ramakrishnan on the violin followed Amritha throughout this part and gave very apt responses. The pallavi composed by RK Shriram Kumar with the evocative line 'Ananda karakama sahita lalita kaladi sammodhita Sri ranjitha mamava', was set to Khanda jati ata talam. The treatment of the pallavi was expansive and thoughtful as Amritha unfolded it through multiple kalams, allowing the line to breathe in different rhythmic densities. This was followed by a lively and wellcrafted sequence of swaras, culminating in an engaging tani avartanam that showcased the percussionists' finesse.

She then transitioned into the slokam 'Sachidananda Rupaya,' exploring it through multiple ragams, each chosen to highlight a different shade of devotion. This

seamlessly led into M. D. Ramanathan's 'Sagara Sayana Vibho,' rendered with the meditative depth that the composition invites. The concert drew to a close with "Sindu Taran Siya" from Hanuman Bahuk, bringing the evening to a serene finish.

Amritha presented an excellent concert with a classy presentation of items she took up and it was very much enjoyable. L Ramakrishnan on the violin provided excellent support. His accompanying and solo parts were both wonderful. NC Bharadwaj on the mridangam and Anirudh Athreya on the kanjira handled the percussion department with utmost brilliance. They played very thoughtful strokes and patterns that suited the item that was presented. The Tani in ata talam was very beautiful. The concert was given a much-deserved standing ovation.



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The instrumental evening at the Madras Sanskrit College on 21st December continued gracefully after Sruti Sagar's flute recital, with the Iyer Brothers—Ramnath and Gopinath Iyer—presenting a veena concert steeped in tradition. Upholding the rich legacy of the legendary 'Veenai' Pitchumani Iyer, the duo showcased their long years of experience through poised, unhurried playing and a deep commitment to classicism. Their synchrony, tonal purity, and measured exploration of ragas created an atmosphere of quiet dignity and musical depth. Mavelikara Balachandran on the mridangam and Ravi Balasubramaniam on the ghatam offered sensitive and also a vibrant support, enhancing the veena's resonance. Together, the team delivered a refined and fulfilling concert that left the audience deeply appreciative.

Sooryagayathri: A Voice Blessed for Bhakti

HARISHANKAR K

Young Sooryagayathri possesses a beautifully cultured voice and knows exactly how to project it to wow the listeners. In her case, it feels like a blessed union of a gifted voice with divine devotional music. Despite having been unwell with fever and a sore throat in the days leading up to the event (as she herself announced), she delivered a beautiful 'Bhakthi Sangeeth' performance on Christmas Day.

Siddhi Vinayakam in Chamaram (announced as Shanmugapriya) was the opening kruthi, decorated with porutham swarams at 'prasiddha gananayakam' by the vocalist, violin, and keyboard. This was followed by Mahavaidyanatha Sivan's 'Pahimaam Sri Rajarajeshwari' in Janaranjani, presented in full grandeur. Her neat, emotive singing and clarity in sangathis and saahitya created an immediate connection with the sizable audience, including many youngsters.

Next came 'Neerajadala Nayana' in Vasanthi and 'Pibare Ramarasam' (Sadasiva Brahmendra) in Aahir Bhairav, each preceded by shlokams on Krishna (from Mukunda Mala) and Rama (from Vishnu Sahasranama). These culminated in sweet naamavalis that had the audience joyfully clapping and singing along. Soorya introduced the naamavalis in slow speed to ease the audience into the lyrics before moving to a slightly faster tempo, a thoughtful touch that made the entire hall



burst into chorus.

Vasanthi (or Vaasanthi) is essentially Mohanam with Shuddha Dhaivatam, while Aahir Bhairav is the Hindustani equivalent of Chakravakam. In all the shloka and viruththam segments, the violin and keyboard followed the vocalist closely and also offered their own ragam interpretations. The brisk exchanges in Vasanthi between violin and keyboard drew genuine applause. Soorya's voice remained clean and crack-free from lower panchama to upper gandhaara - an essential quality for devotional music - and she used the microphone to her advantage. Though she coughed and cleared her throat between songs, her singing remained remarkably clear, supported beautifully by her accompanists, almost as if aided by divine grace.

Audience requests soon followed. 'Kurai Ondrum Illai' (Rajaji, ragamalika, tuned by Kadayannallur Venkataraman) and R'adha Sametha Krishna' (G. N. Balasubramaniam) were rendered

promptly with gusto, showcasing neat bhaashanga touches at Gopi Manohara in Mishra Yaman.

'Pettra Thaaai Thanai' verse of Ramalinga Adigalar, which always ensures to leave the listeners teary-eyed, was rendered in the rare raga Paalini (as announced), segueing into 'Kapaalee Nee', a Tamil composition of Smt. Lalita Sivakumar (mother of the renowned vidushi Nithyasree Mahadevan) with the raga mudhra embedded tastefully into both pallavi and anupallavi. The raga's closeness to Revathi made many expect 'Bho Shambho,' making the Paalini piece a pleasant surprise. Soorya deserves credit for choosing Tamil keerthanams and for her clear, accent-free pronunciation—something many non-Tamil vocalists struggle with.

The only minor drawback was the predominance of medium-to-slow tempo pieces; a few faster items and alternating raga alapanas for violin and keyboard might have added variety. After more requests, Soorya apologised for lack of time and concluded with 'Sarvam Brahmamayam' (Brahmendra) in Madhuvanti, followed by a lilting Rageshri tillana. Mridangam (P. V. Anil Kumar), tabla (V. Ganapathy), and keyboard (V. G. Vigneshwar) provided warm camaraderie throughout, with special mention to violinist S. Rangapriya for bringing out raga bhava in concise essays and supporting in the BGMs and interludes.

Sooryagayathri's confident stage presence, enjoyable interaction with the senior accompanists, and easy rapport with the audience have firmly cemented her status as a youth icon and devotional vocal star. Bonus she made the audience sing to her tunes during all the naamavalis - the purpose of Bhakthi sangeetham fully realised!



The afternoon concert on December 22 featured Sudarshan Muralidharan, son and disciple of vidwan Nagai R. Muralidharan, presenting a vocal recital that reflected his strong grounding, sincerity and respect for his lineage. His music carried the clarity and classicism, characteristic of the bani. Dr. Badri Narayanan on the violin offered sensitive, aligned support, echoing Sudarshan's phrases with finesse. Rohit Prasad on the mridangam and Vishnu V. Kamath on the kanjira added rhythmic brightness without ever overshadowing the vocalist. Their coordination enhanced the manodharma segments and brought a gentle vitality to the concert. It was a neatly presented recital, elevated by the wonderful support of all accompanying artistes.

Vignesh Ishwar's concert - Team of Four Gems

AA

Vignesh Ishwar's voice is a gift to Carnatic music and it is a greater gift that he has not moved away to other more lucrative genres! Not too loud, effortless, springy yet full - this set of contrasts is what makes his voice and from there, his music, unique.

The artiste opened his concert with a beautiful 'Janaki Pathe' (Karaharapriya) that had an energy packed neravel section too. With the chittaiswaram of 'Sobhillu Saptaswara,' the audience's thrill increased and when the swara passages arrived, it rained Saptaswaras in the hall! As an innovative highlight, some swara sequences culminated in the chittaswaram passage too! Just when the rasika's pulses were racing with the euphoria of rhythm and tempo, Vignesh took a U turn, dived deep into the sedate contours of Brindavana Saranga, and some of his phrases, having the Hindustani slant, caught at the throat. 'Soundarajam' was the piece, and he treated it with the respect and dignity it deserved. A true connoisseur's delight!

The main raga was Bilahari for which, Vignesh Ishwar gave a lengthy, exhaustive alapana. One should rather say 'Thanapana' for thanam phrases were interpolated and exchanges made with the violinist on the spot, giving a



unique effect indeed. 'Naa jeevadhara' was the Thyagaraja composition. Ishwar finished off the concert with a delicious set of 'thukkadas' - 'Karpooram Narumo,' the abhang, 'Majhe Mehar Pandhari' and then the very traditional Thillana in Suruti bringing the curtains down on an exhilarating two hours.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that every single accompanist on stage was a precious gem. Sayee Rakshith was unbelievable. With a perpetual smile on his face, he bewitched the audience with his effortless replies, his nuanced playing, his sweetest of tones and complete portrayal of raga bhava at every instance. He was a perfect player in the 'serve and volley' sequences of kalpana swaras, neravel, and thanam too and though his talent is well known, he never ceased to delight with his magical bow and strings.

If the violinist was amazing, the percussion wing was spectacular. Delhi

Sairam seemed specially charged that evening. His accompaniment complemented the music, beautified it, he alternated between the soft and the sharp, the former leaving the rasikas lost in an ocean of sowkhyam, the latter thrilling the audience to unimaginable heights. Guruprasad, the ever reliable, was up to every trick Sairam dished out and the thani was thunderous, receiving an equally thunderous applause! Special mention must be made of Guruprasad's accompaniment to the abhang too. He created the perfect ambience with a set of sharp, flat beats that enhanced the atmosphere of bhakthi pervading all-round the hall.

When the concert concluded, it is safe to say, in true TMK spirit that there were four main players holding their own on stage for the vocal concert of Vignesh Ishwar. All captains too!



Papanasam Ashok Ramani's evening concert on 21 December 2025, with B. U. Ganesh Prasad on the violin, Thiruvallur Vaidyanathan on the mridangam and N. Guruprasad on the ghatam, reflected the depth of a musician shaped by a formidable lineage. A grandson of Papanasam Sivan and a disciple of stalwarts such as Dr. S. Ramanathan, Palghat K.

V. Narayanaswamy among other greats, his music carried the weight of scholarship in every rendition. His phrasing, diction and raga architecture demonstrated both tradition and rhythmic grandeur, while the team's sensitive support enhanced the concert's clarity and poise. It was a performance marked by authority, polish and deep musical grounding.

Ashwath Narayanan's concert: Bhava Raga Tala Maalai

SARADHA VENKATAKRISHNAN

Ashwath Narayanan, along with Kamalakiran Vinjamuri, N C Bharadwaj and K V Gopalakrishnan pleased the audience with his powerful performance on the evening of 24th December, 2025. This remarkable quartet are into their respective music fields from their early childhood. Starting from Kaanada ata tala varnam to Silappathikaram, rasikas were captivated by the infectious smile of the vidwans on stage. Kamalakiran with his enthusiasm, extended his utmost support to Ashwath to explore raga alapana, niraval and kalpanaswarams.

The two melakarta Ragas Pantuvarali and Mayamalavagowla had a sandwich of Nayaki and Devagandhari. Poochi Shreenivasa iyengar's ata tala varnam 'Nera nammitinayya' in Kanada was followed by Thyagaraja's 'Raghuvara nannu marava taguna' in Pantuvarali. Niraval and kalpanaswarams in 'Manasuna niki marulu konnanu' was commendable. Soon after the bright Pantuvarali, Dikshitar's 'Ranganayakam bhavaye' (Nayaki) was rendered soothingly. Devagandhari alapana further enhanced the mood with Thyagaraja's 'Na moralakimpa vemi shrirama' in Rupakam and Ashwath sang the first charanam of the song.

Muthutaandavar's 'Adikondar antha vedikkai kana kan ayiram vendamo' in Mayamalavagowla set to Adi talam fascinated the audience and made them tap their feet while kalpanaswarams were rendered. Kamalakiran played well his dual role of prompt adaptability and versatility. The rasikas would have surely needed thousands eyes to enjoy the team spirit (ayiram kan vendamo?)



The masterpiece of the day was Shankarabharanam. Shyama Sastri's 'Sarojadalaneetri' in Adi was celebrated by the quartet. Ashwath's artistic growth and exploration reflected well in this presentation. He has imbibed K. V. Narayanaswamy but he presents in his own style. Kamalakiran is a gifted violinist. He is an adaptable musician often appreciating his co-artists and admires their skills. Niraval and kalpanaswarams poured in at 'Sama Gana vinodhini gunadhama shyama krishnanuthe.' The swaraksharams were emphasized and well handled with the smooth transition from madhyama kalam to durita kalam. Vidya Bharathi hall witnessed Shiva thandavam in 'Adikondar' and heard the Sama ganam now. The seamless support by Bharadwaj and Gopalakrishnan intensified the manodharma part.

Shiva thandavam and sama ganam were then taken over by nandi mathalam. Bharadwaj and Gopalakrishnan through their exceptional skills and intricate rhythms enthralled the audience and received appreciations.

Sadashiva brahmendra's 'Pibare raama rasam' in Yamuna kalyani and Ilango Adigal's 'Vadavaraiyai mathaakki' in Raagamalika concluded Ashwath's grand concert.



The concert by Kunnakudi Balamurali Krishna, accompanied by Sruthi Sarathy on the violin, Sreesundar Kumar on the mridangam and Sivaramakrishna on the kanjira offered a well-balanced and engaging evening of Carnatic music. It opened with a Nattai kurinji varnam, followed by a poised 'Samaanamevaru' in Karaharapriya. A spirited rendition of the Thiruppavai 'Aazhi Mazhai Kanna' in Varali added vibrancy, while 'Saarasamukhi Sakala Bhagyathe' in Gowdamalhar provided contrast through its measured improvisations and lively kalpana swaras.

A major highlight was the Pantuvarali, featuring expansive alapanas by both vocalist and violinist, the kriti 'Saaramegaani,' and a dynamic rhythmic exchange sparked by tistra nadai patterns from Sreesundar Kumar, followed by a crisp tani shared with Sivarama krishna. The Kannada RTP, set to a Panchamukhi variation, formed the structural centrepiece, and the ragamalika 'Anumanai Anudinam Ninai Maname' concluded the evening with thematic resonance.

Amrutha Venkatesh: Morning music of raga and rasa

SARADHA VENKATAKRISHNAN

Amrutha Venkatesh, Rajeev Mukundan, Patri Satish Kumar and Chandrasekara Sharma together stole the heart of hundreds of rasikas on Wednesday, 23rd December, 2025. Her seamless sangeetham was very well planned and executed. Hamirkalyani varnam 'Sendil vaazh Murugayya' by T.R. Subramaniam set the platform for the morning concert. Thyagaraja's 'Rama bhakti samrajyam' in Suddha Bangala established Amrutha's empire. She ruled Mangalakaisiki, Latangi and Kapi, thus hypnotised her rasikas. There were plenty of half avarthanam and full avarthanam kalpanaswarams in Rama Bhakthi. Rajeev Mukundan was in unison with Amrutha. Muthuswami Dikshitar's rare gem 'Shri Bhargavi Bhadram me dishatu' in Mangalakaisiki, the kriti with the Raga Mudra was neatly presented.

Latangi and Kapi were wholesome package. Amrutha's approach, voice modulation, swift yet perfect prayogams and pleasant body-language are praiseworthy.

Patnam Subramanya Iyer's evergreen 'Aparada mulanniyu manninci' was in its full glory. Amrutha and Rajeev explored all best possibilities during niraval and kalpanaswarams in 'krupajesi na manavyalakinchin'.



The rhythmic support by Patri Satishkumar on the Mridangam and Chandrasekara Sharma on the Ghatam added depth and enhanced the musical moods.

As Amrutha enhanced her empire she crowned herself with Kapi raga alapana and 'Inta Sowkiya Manine' of Thyagaraja. The raga resonated through Vidya Bharathi Hall blissfully. The kriti and kalpanaswarams were rendered with tranquility. Rajeev collaborated effectively with Amrutha throughout the concert. Patri Satish Kumar and Chandrasekara sharma from the subtle support to energetic Thani avarthanam adhered to the song's structure and mood. Their thundering blast during thani was appreciated by long-lasting applause.

Amrutha concluded her concert with Balamurali Krishna's Tillana in Behag, which was in praise of Sri Thyagaraja. The curtain was brought down amidst a big round of appreciation by the audience.



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Sowmya Acharya, a dedicated musician and disciple of guru 'Chitravina' Narasimhan, whose school is known for its emphasis on purity, precision and unwavering classicism. True to her training, Sowmya offered a pleasant recital rooted deeply in tradition, allowing the music's inherent beauty to speak for itself. Sahana Sriram on the violin provided sensitive support, mirroring Sowmya's phrases with clarity and maintaining the concert's classical integrity. Burra Sriram on the mridangam added rhythmic depth with his measured, unobtrusive accompaniment, enhancing the overall appeal without disturbing the concert's serenity. Together, the trio delivered a graceful, tradition-centred performance.



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