

The man and his music

The award came to Semmangudi all the way from the U.S. And it did enhance the prestige of the North American Association.

The atmosphere in the Narada Gana Sabha auditorium last Saturday was filled with joy and cheerfulness. The cream of the city gathered there felt exhilarated as the octogenarian musician Semmangudi Srinivas Iyer sat on the dais, slightly bent with age, to receive along with his reputed sishya T. N. Krishnan the award of Sangeethasaagara instituted by the Carnatic Music Association of North America. Guru and disciple being the recipients of the same award on the same day is a unique phenomenon, which was shared ecstatically by the cultured audience present on the occasion eagerly awaiting the feast of music by Semmangudi at the end of the function. Unlike the many awards and titles going the Carnatic music round today nineteen to a dozen, the Sangeethasaagara award is a prestigious one that is not conferred lightheartedly on any musician. The criteria of the association says 'The recipient should be a Carnatic musician, musicologist or composer who has made lasting and archival contributions to Carnatic music. In addition to being talented and highly accomplished the recipient should have rendered significant service to the larger community of Carnatic music and demonstrated an exemplary level of professionalism to the extent of being called a Role Model. It is anticipated that such a person shall have many decades of service to Carnatic music.' Tough conditions, no doubt, to deserve the honour of a Sangeethasaagara.

The uniqueness of the function rests on the fact that the award is normally presented to a recipient who has toured the US at least once under the banner of the Carnatic Music Association of North America and the award should be presented at a concert of that musician. Exception to this rule shall require the unanimous approval of the Board of Trustees. Semmangudi was prevailed upon to make a trip to the US. His age and health factors stood in the way. The association waived its stringent rules in the case of Semmangudi for it probably was quite aware of the esteem the Madras listeners have for Semmangudi and such a gesture of presentation coming all the way from the US to the Narada Gana Sabha would enhance the prestige of the association itself. And it did.

As the function was proceeding, the mind's eye of the listeners turned the clock back to the Forties and Fifties with a middle aged Semmangudi on the dais of a music hall pouring forth in profusion his Aarabhi 'Chalagallaladu' or Sriranjani 'Marubalka' or the Chayatharangini 'Maye'. The claps he received on Saturday was a reverberation of the audience applause he received during his concerts years ago in the Rasika Ranjani Sabha Hall or at the Music Academy December season. That was the way the music lovers expressed their gratitude to one who, even in his 87th year was confident



Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer receiving the Sangeethasaagara Award. T. N. Krishnan the other recipient is to his left.

depending too much on the two voice support provided by V. Subramaniam and Palai Ramachandran, Semmangudi Srinivas Iyer sang in such a way as to proclaim that age might lay its hand on him but could not take away the infinite variety of his music.

With robustness Semmangudi began the concert with the Hamsadwani Kirtana 'Vatapi Ganapathim' and peppered it tastefully with a few avaranas of swaraprastharas. His next favourite 'Merusamana' in Mayamalavagowli and the Poovikalyani song 'Ananda Natamadinar' had almost a mesmeric effect on the listeners. The loving way he built the trellis of swaraprastharas for 'Merusamana' and later 'Divakaratanujam' in Yadukulakambhoji around the moorchana swaras enhanced many times the lyricism of the ragas. The Yadukulakambhoji raga alapana truly reflected an inward looking

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serenity and T. N. Krishnan, during his solo version, sprinkled pannee-like sancharas to make the whole piece memorable. The Bhavapriya Kirtana 'Sri Kantane' of Tyagaraja gained an exclusive touch of Semmangudi's overwhelming briskness. His major raga was Kambhoji, which appeared simple, but was stupendous in appeal. In his neraval for the line 'Bhooloka Vaikuntam idiyani' in the song 'O! Rangasayi', deepest feelings were purveyed through subtle moving expressions. Semmangudi stamped his personal identity on every item he sang age notwithstanding and his style was not just artistic, but evoked a sense of sublimity of Carnatic music.

It was impossible not to be stirred by admiration for the gorgeous sancharas that T.

to internalise the charms of melody. The rhythmic patterns of Guruvayoor Dorai and Vaikkom Gopalakrishnan on the mridangam and ghatam came out with a clean image without any fumbling.

For the Kapali Fine Arts, which had arranged a series in memory of Papanasam Sivan, Ashok Ramani, the composer's grandson sang some songs not in current use. In the cutcheri Ashok Ramani seemed to have preferred the software to tonal strength and solidity. He intentionally thinned his voice while negotiating fast-phrased sancharas and the aid of the mike covered up his easy approach to singing technique. It looked as if he had tailored his style to accommodate the changing sensibilities in music. With slow soft steps he vaulted the Darbar, Lathangi and Kambhoji alapana edifice. There was merit in it but not solidity. He visualised a cohesive design of the raga structures and dished out the sancharas foam-like. Of the ragas he delineated in detail Darbar was luminous. The violinist Tirupparkadal Veeraraghavan displayed in his solo version pidis that made Darbar a real Darbar. It was nursed with great care. The song in this raga 'Ennai-palanam-purivathu' was also good. After the Lathangi kirtana 'Sri Jagadambike' Ashok Ramani took up Keeravani, The raga had not much depth in the alapana parlance, but this deficiency was made up with a good Kambhoji that followed. The latter raga was ornate in expansion. The picture Veeraraghavan presented had almost a pastoral simplicity. The Keeravani song was 'Nee Arulpuriya Vendum' and the Kambhoji piece was 'Aadum Deivam.' Srimushnam Raja Rao has the knack of supporting kirtana rendition with garrulous rhythmic beats.

Susheela Raman gave a sedate account of her musical qualifications in her recital for Nadopasana. Her style does not believe in