



## **CMANA – DOWN MY MEMORY LANE**



Dr. P.N. Aruna

What do I say or what can I say about CMANA? It is like talking about your child or your family. My thoughts as I write this will no doubt be a bit biased and skewed, in spite of my best intentions to be objective!

In mid 1970s, my husband and I had recently migrated and Dr. A Jayaraman and his wife, Kamala Mami, who knew my husband from his boyhood days, took on the role of in loco parentis to us. We soon found they both had a great interest, nay passion, for Carnatic music and it was thru Mama and Mami that we met Dr. Rajagopalan and the fun-loving Vasanta Mami, who lived in Garden City, Long Island. Concerts were few and far between, but whenever there was one, I found out through the two Mamas and Mamis. Rain or shine, my husband and I would show up at the venues were usually in NYC or Long Island.

It was in early 1976, that Dr. Rajagopalan and a small group started having conversations about forming a music organization dedicated to the promotion of Carnatic music in the US. Dr. Rajagopalan was passionate about carrying out this idea of spreading the art form here for the upcoming generations of the Indian diaspora . He also wanted this organization to help promote young artists from India and to set up competitions here to generate greater awareness and interest among the second generation. The many young artists to whom CMANA provided a platform and a breakthrough is a veritable Who's Who List of stars in the Carnatic music firmament today! All this sounded a pipe dream at first, but how wrong we were! Obviously the idea was percolating in Mama's head, because soon after, I got a call from him asking me to show up at a meeting he was convening of a band of music lovers from NY and NJ. His idea was taking shape and form and he was going to request seed money from this small gathering. I made out a check for \$100 in his name (the organization had no name yet!) thus becoming a founder member.

That day was the birth of CMANA, with the middle "A" standing for Academy, but when registering, it was changed to Association as we were not actively planning in entering the teaching of Carnatic music. Mama, a great fan of Sri GNB and would have been happiest if CMANA's inaugural concert had been kicked off by Sri GNB, but this was not to be. Mama often rued as to why he waited all these years to start an organization when he could have done this a dozen years earlier and brought Sri GNB to perform. But then, Mama invited Smt. M.L. Vasantakumari, a gracious and generous lady and of course Sri GNB's prime disciple. Not only did she accept this invitation, she also said she was willing to accept whatever CMANA could provide as remuneration.

With this fledgling organization now in place, concerts and tours were booked, mostly single-handedly by Rajagopalan Mama and ably assisted by the tireless Vasanta Mami, who along with



Mrs. Janaki Krishnamurthy did all the logistical work that required miles of driving, hosting and seeing that artists were properly fed.

In December 1976, as luck would have it, I met D.K. Nagarajan at a party in our friend's place in Maryland. He was Smt. Pattammal's brother and told me that Smt DKP was on a European tour and asked whether a concert could be arranged in NYC. It was taken up with Dr. Rajagopalan who immediately made the necessary arrangements. At that time CMANA had a Washington, DC chapter headed by Dr. K. Nagarajan, who too stepped up and arranged a DKP kutcheri in Maryland.

In 1977 Mr. C.V. Narasimhan had arranged a tour of M.S. Subbalakshmi when she performed three concerts in the New York area, including one at Carnegie Hall. The CMANA chapter in DC was able to arrange her concert there and being an MS concert, the financial shortfalls of CMANA's earlier tours were pretty much wiped out!

CMANA's DC Chapter eventually merged with the Siva Vishnu Temple as this became financially easier for them with a built-in venue to hold the concerts. We cannot thank the DC/MD members and music lovers enough during CMANA's infancy days in stepping up and helping and hosting concerts and artists.

A Patron Member element, with a fee of \$500 was added in the eighties as a vehicle to help overcome the financial uncertainties CMANA faced. The members who signed on to this immediately were

Dr Rajagopalan, Dr. Jayaraman, Dr. H.K Chandrasekhar, Dr. V. Ramaswami and myself.

As in any organization, the team of Trustees functioned due to the dedication and efficiency of a few and these individuals stepped up to the plate uncomplainingly.

Volunteering came in many forms with some members opening up their homes for a performance and underwriting expenses – all serving the cause of CMANA. For this special thanks must be offered to the Rajagopalans (as always), Dr. Chandrasekhar & Dr. Sreedevi Chandresekhar, Mangalam and Arun Chidambaram, Mr. & Mrs. Sury Subban and others that included my household in a small way.

The children's competitions that were initiated were a big hit with some very good quality music from the kids ably taught by a growing number of music teachers in the tri-state area. This would, in the coming years, become the very popular Great Composers Day (GCD) which provided a platform for the young and very talented.

I did not become a Trustee until 2001 when my children became more self sufficient which also meant that they – Ashvin & Shubha – had to commit to volunteering for CMANA, which they did typing minutes, duplicating CD's and packaging them for sale, providing quorum at General Body meetings and such. I served as Secretary and two stints as President and was fortunate to have a team that worked cohesively where we were able to do some good work, such as providing a forum to local artists.



CMANA



a thriving institution and a continuing journey

CMANA has had some outstanding office bearers who brought energy and passion to the running of CMANA. I would be remiss if I do not make special mention of Dr. Uma Roy and her parents the Visweswariahs. She was a tireless worker and pretty much single-handedly increased the membership list, including that of Patron Members. Her parents and daughter saw to it that our magazine, Sangeetham, was published with interesting contributions and quizzes and other puzzles. Her mother taped concerts from the originals which then became available for sale to our membership. Likewise, Dr. Ramaswami and his wife, Dr. Soundaram Ramaswami, both as Secretaries and Presidents and who with their children contributed immensely to the organization. I have mentioned a couple of names here, but this is not to take away any luster from the many Presidents and Office Bearers who have done monumental work in the growth of this organization and our thanks should go out to them as well.

In terms of finances, the organization is in a much sounder footing thanks especially to Mrs. Mangalam Chidrambaram and Mr. Sowmyan. The CMANA constitution has also undergone several revisions since the time it was first adopted.

Since the last three years I am enjoying Emeritus status but always willing to help in any manner when asked by the current Board. The Board is a younger lot and doing a wonderful job and second generation trustees have served on the Board – Nithya Nagarajan and Rajesh Nathan come to mind. This is all encouraging in terms of the continued good health of CMANA. Technology has also come in with an active website, on-line tickets, on-line voting, and on-line donations and so on. Too bad for the electronically challenged like myself, but who would have thought these things were possible when Rajagopalan mama made a phone call to some die-hard aficionados back in early 1976!

**Dr. P.N. Aruna**

Past President & Honorary Patron Member