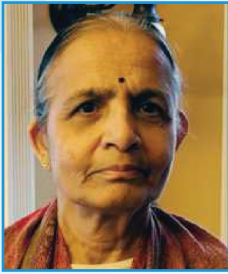




When CMANA was a teenager



Uma Roy

When a milestone such as 40th anniversary is celebrated of something or someone, thoughts often go back to the birth, childhood or growing pains or adolescent years and so on; I started musing upon its rocky growth and spurts, hence this travel back in time down the memory lane; as such it may not mean much to anyone other than my fellow trustees and office bearers two or three decades ago; but that is when I got into the picture in CMANA's life as also that of its publication SANGEETHAM.

In 1985 or so I wrote a letter to DR. P. Rajagopalan, the founder and President of CMANA, a little critical of CMANA for not publicizing its activities sufficiently, hence got drafted as trustee!!

CMANA was just nine years old, not even double digit years in age, and it was just getting back on its feet to recovery from a malady called 'declining funds and declining interest/involvement'. Thanks to the determination of the then trustees and as a part of ongoing recovery efforts, in 1987, Dr. V. Ramaswami, then a fellow trustee, President (1993-1995) brought out a small souvenir celebrating "Eleven Years Of Music" on the occasion of CMANA sponsored concert by Sri Kadri Gopalnath at Rutgers University. The souvenir successfully had collected a lot of advertisements, but no other articles. Prompted by Dr. V. Ramaswami, 'RAM' as known to us, I wrote something chatty on Music for and by Indians for it. For lack of any other contributions this article got printed in the souvenir and became the first step in my getting drafted, once again – this time to edit "SANGEETHAM".

They say "fools rush in where angels fear to tread", my only qualification into rushing in was my desire to publicize CMANA and increase its visibility amongst the growing population of Indians in USA particularly in New York/ New Jersey area. Having no literary experience in writing or publishing manuscripts or musical knowledge to write on, sticking one's neck could not be a more foolhardy venture.

My virginal attempt at bringing out a 12 page issue was in the fall of 1987 (Vol 5 – first four volumes had been published on and off as souvenirs in honor of visiting artists, their tours, etc.) ; methodology used would be scorned by even a preschooler today since they can produce a fancy power point presentations on less lofty topics! All I followed was my preschooler kid's method of cutting and pasting pictures, articles banged away on a typewriter with no erase function even. You had to use a white tape roll to correct a spelling error! I was bent upon using every millimeter of space to fill in in every direction, so used the smallest print possible by reducing the size in a photocopy machine.



As far as topics went, I seemed to have no problem - I contacted the few teachers and other members, other people I knew including my own parents for articles, puzzles, news of members, anything, anything at all connected to Music. It got filled with news of members, their kids' achievements, events (GCD, results, upcoming Thyagaraja Day), articles basic to art and science of music and of course about CMANA every other sentence seemed to have the name 'CMANA' either as a subject or an object (and may be other parts of speech too) in it. I could have filled 24 pages, but CMANA's budget may not have borne it. Now came the several trips to different local printers for advice and quotes. Everyone wanted nice wide margins and I wouldn't budge, since the margins also had content. I thank late Dr. Kidambi Ragunathan, sole editor of Telugu Jyoti of TFAS for a lot of guidance in layout, printing, etc., and Dr. Srinivasan Rajagopalan for teaching me basic elements of word processing.

One small shop printed that Volume # 5 which was a sight for sore eyes; it came off the presses; I need magnifying glasses 30 years later to read what I wrote in those margins; these were distributed, address labels pasted / mailed (in an assembly line fashion in my living room). Surprisingly either I was thick skinned or the readers were kind or generous in spirit or very broad minded, many of them appreciated the efforts and encouraging to see its revival - many commented on the size of the microscopic print, one of my long time non-musical friends told me to go back to my own normal lucid style and diction and stop writing in a juvenile fashion! Anyway, this was gratifying to see it not failing right at the outset, on the other hand with concrete suggestions for improvement; some of them were easier to give than to follow - "CMANA should give you a computer, a laser printer, should have an asst. editor" and so on and so forth. I bought with my own money a \$400 Brother combo typewrite/computer with some word-processing capability. You could type a whole page, store it, erase, edit, etc. and print it at will. To me, that was modernity only next to sliced bread as they say. When it was spewing out the articles I typeset line by line, it chugged along and sounded like subway # 7 or RR line chugging into Queens as it emerged out of underground Manhattan!

Sources for articles were many; local teachers and students of music, well known Publishers such as SRUTI, HINDU, INDIAN EXPRESS, GARLAND, who gave CMANA permission to reproduce their articles as long as they were given proper acknowledgement, visiting artists such as Late Prof. T.R. Subramaniam, S.R. Janakiraman, all were such excellent sources. It was amazing to find so many members with a wealth of musical knowledge or writing ability, translating ability. We tried to tap children's talents through Great Composers' day essay competitions on composers, on other creative topics such as "If I were a composer". Many friends with laser printers helped me typeset whatever articles I had gathered. As far as the topics went I could not believe that there were so many aspects of Carnatic music, almost as much variety as the no. of ragas in use - composers, theory, ragas, talas, style,



meaning of compositions, lyrics, notations, appreciation, musicians of the past and present and on and on.

Many readers said they looked forward to getting SANGEETHAM, some people liked the upcoming news, artistes' bios, puzzles, some liked the members' lists even, and some liked those tidbits called TNTs (Trivia-Non-Trivia) on the top margin. Spurred by its success CMANA did buy a computer and a printer dedicated for SANGEETHAM in early 1990s. CMANA membership increased each year (from 179-711 from 1985 to 1997) through publicizing about events including starting new ones like Teachers' day, tapes of artistes and prompt delivery as did the size of SANGEETHAM – it grew often into a 28 -40 page publication. A little later, in 1993, participation by children was high, hence a JUNIOR SANGEETHAM was created as a part of the main issue under the editorship of (Late) VINAY VENKATESH. Kids played a main part for its eight pages. Kids published their interviews of artists with their frank questions.

Personally between being the president of CMANA for 4 years, organizing very successful two annual tours, and bringing out 3-4 issues of SANGEETHAM was a full time endeavor from me and my family members. Many of the other trustees pitched in, but looked like we always could use more time and resources. Appearance improved, there was a cover for every issue, did not write in margins anymore. Under my editorship it continued till spring/summer of 1997 when my energies started waning too. It was gratifying that after eleven years that SANGEETHAM I felt that the contents seemed to make members feel connected.

Today with so much resources available literally at your fingertips and available instantly, much of the contents which were appreciated in the SANGEETHAM format two decades ago may not have the same effect today. But as a publication of CMANA, it can serve the community even if not a printed format by giving an expression to original articles and thinking expressed by its members, visiting musicians, scholars, upcoming music students who are so many times more in number and stages of learning too. Future belongs to them, as do future Birthday celebrations. My best wishes to all the present organizers and future ones.