

Homage to vainika Mangalam Muthuswamy

GAYATHRI SUNDARESAN

Homage to veena vidushi Mangalam Muthuswamy was organised at Narada Gana Sabha (Mini Hall) on 4th June 2010, on her third death anniversary by her daughter, vocalist Padmini Ravi.

Mangalam was born to Lakshmibai Ammal and S. Subramaniam in 1935 at Toothukudi in Tamil Nadu. It was her mother's passion that brought young Mangalam into Carnatic music. She began with vocal music but switched to the veena when she started complaining of stomachache while singing! She learnt in the gurukulavasam mode from Veenai Visalakshi of the Dhanammal school.

Mangalam moved to north India after marriage. She settled in Mumbai in the early 1980s and spent the rest of her life there. After listening to Mangalam's recital on the radio, A.S. Panchapakesa Iyer invited her to teach at the Bharatiya Music and Fine Arts Society, where he was the Principal. She taught there for ten years. Then tragedy struck in the form of her husband's paralytic stroke and she could not leave him and commute to class. She then joined Shanmukhananda Sangeetha Vidyalaya, which was closer to home, and she was on the faculty for 12 years.



As a teacher she was not only very popular in both the institutions, but also taught private tuition to many students. To them she was not just a teacher, but more of a mother, guiding them even in matters other than music. She encouraged them to participate in competitions and prepare for examinations, thereby helping them to become professionals.

She adhered to the Tanjavur style of playing the veena. The dexterity and depth displayed by her in the typical 'gayaki' style, involving the use of complicated gamakas, virtually made the veena sing during her concerts. This won her accolades from many stalwarts of Carnatic music, such as T.L. Venkatarama Iyer, D.K. Pattammal, Maharajapuram Santhanam, Emani Sankara Sastry, S. Balachander and Dr. V.V. Srivatsa.



Padmini Ravi (daughter of Mangalam Muthuswamy) accompanied by Shruthi Ravi (granddaughter)

Veena S. Balachander would often visit her to listen to her veena playing. He also used to give her valuable advice after listening to her radio programmes. Mangalam was also well-versed in playing the sitar which she learnt from Kartik Kumar.

She was an “A-Top” grade artist of All India Radio and won many awards from institutions in Mumbai. She raised her three daughters to become performing musicians – the eldest Shobha Shekhar, and the youngest Jayshree Ramachandran, are living in Melbourne and run their own music schools; Padmini Ravi is a vocalist residing in Chennai.

Chief Guest C.V. Karthik Narayanan, a Vice President of the Music Academy, and Chairman, UCAL Products Pvt. Ltd., spoke warmly about ‘Mangalam Mami’, who was a friend of the family. He recalled the musical talent of Mangalam’s mother Lakshmibai Ammal, who was instrumental in initiating Mangalam into music at a very young age. He recalled having accompanied her on the mridanga at a wedding concert!

R. Krishnaswami, Secretary, Narada Gana Sabha, said he had known Mangalam Mmmi from the time she came into his family after marriage. He spoke highly of her music and her contribution as a teacher.

Special guest K. Subadra Murthy flew in from Bombay to offer her tribute. She spoke movingly and at length about how ‘Mangalam Mami’ brought her close to the veena’s music.

The musical tribute comprised a vocal recital by Padmini Ravi, and two brief veena recitals by Mangalam Muthuswamy’s students from Mumbai. The concerts highlighted the fact how each student’s innate nature and understanding can shape the music in spite of having learnt from the same guru. While Vidyanandi Narayan’s music and demeanour were soft and calm, Gayathri Govindarajan’s presentation was exuberant and lively. Anayampatti Venkatasubramanian (violin) and Shyam Sundar (mridanga) provided accompaniment to all the three recitals.

