

FRIDAY REVIEW

FRIDAY, JULY 24, 2009

... a class apart

... felt a profound ... DKP's frail figure to ... A tribute to the ... ed away on July 16.



The end of an era. How else do you describe the passing away of Damal Krishnaswamy Pattammal (1919-2009)? Has her death not restored power and poignancy to a well worn cliché?

Musicians and scholars, artists of every genre, and music lovers of three generations, rushed to pay their last respects to the grand old lady of Carnatic music. Each felt a profound sense of awe in linking the frail figure to her singularly pioneering achievements. The television cameras and soundbyte searches seemed wholly alien to the austere spirit that permeated her life and art.

Her journey is widely known and well recorded. No girl of her generation, born in an orthodox Dikshitar family, could hope to pursue singing, even as a hobby. Rasikas though they were, her parents had neither musicianship nor financial means to develop her talent. But they supported her in overcoming the mounting hurdles.

Patta's love of music was inflamed when she heard the stalwarts of Carnatic music in hometown Kanchipuram at temples, weddings and at the Tyagaraja festival organised by titan Naina Pillai. Pillai's laya mastery made him a legend in his time.

his full bench of accompanists. Rather, she would announce proudly, "He was a lion. Naturally he towered over everyone!"

Stories are told of how she and her three brothers jotted down kritis with notation during live concerts, practised and perfected them at home. Even in those days of little publicity, Patta's gifts were recognised early in life. Her live singing in a school drama brought an offer from the Columbia Recording Company and drew the ire of family elders: Who will marry a girl who sings in public? The criticism continued through the process of learning from sources as disparate as the unknown Telugu musician who volunteered to teach little Patta, and Ambi Dikshitar, scion of the Muthuswami Dikshitar parampara. All her life, DKP was to accumulate her vast multilingual repertoire from teachers such as Tiruppugazh expert Appadurai Acharyar, pallavi specialist Narasimhalu Naidu, composers Kotiswara Iyer, Periyasami Thooran and Papanasam Sivan.

She never mentioned T.L.Venkatrama Iyer, from whom she imbibed an imposing heritage of Dikshitar's compositions, without shedding tears, especially when she recalled how he refused to di-

law Lalitha, granddaughters Gayathri and Nithyashree, great granddaughter Lavanya, and on the mridangam by son Sivakumar.

Long-term violin accompanist T. Rukmini never found the least trace of the superficial in DKP. "Whether khanda nadai in tistra Tripudai, or misra nadai in Adi talam, every part of the pallavi was shaped with finesse, precision, commanding total silence, often with seniors seated upfront Semmangudi, Musiri, MS, Dr.S.Ramanathan. After that masterly exposition she would launch 'Petra Tai Thanai' and melt into tears. I too found myself crying. Suddenly I saw every eye in the hall was moist."

As DKP's sole male accompanist besides her brothers, Vijay Siva (disciple of both DKJ and DKP) was astonished by her energy. "She was not conscious of the mike, but her voice sounded as electrifying as if amplified on a bass speaker. At age 82 she was able to bring off 'Dharma samvardhini' (Madhyamavati) with a sense of fullness and depth." Siva found her evolving everyday, investing old songs with freshness. He explains, "While she made adjustments in the old patanthara to improve and correct, there were authentic reasons for her refusal to change some sangatis. For example,

gravity as a 'Minalochana Brova.' Listen to her Syamaladandakam. Each ragam has a regal gait. Like the veena, DKP's music sounds divine, not because of her obvious technical perfection, but from her visranti, nidaanam and disciplined faith."

Her accompanists found Pattammal an affable travel companion, ready to enjoy jokes, but talking always about music. "Naina's Bhairavi was pure essence," she would say, or, "Rajaratnam Pillai made you wonder if his music came from heaven."

Pattammal's own music had that impact on the young. After a DKP recital at the Music Academy, the adolescent T.M. Krishna came running down from the balcony. "I was crying. I became aware then that music is more than mere excitement."

Bombay Jayashree is amazed by the equanimity with which the senior musician faced everything in life: remaining graceful, contented, with a lifelong commitment to her ideals. "Listening to DKP is to feel secure, knowing we are not alone. Seeing how successful she was as wife, mother, homemaker and musician, we felt we could do it too."

Jayashree is inspired by the chiselled perfection of DKP's music in compositions both resplendent and

DANCE



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CHENNAI

THE HINDU • FRIDAY, JULY 24, 2009

Pivotal moments in their lives

BHARATANATYAM Srinidhi Raghavan and Sahasra Sambamoorthi brought alive the story of four women in 'Her Story.'

SAVITHA GAUTAM

The stories of four powerful women from Indian mythology unfolded at a graceful Bharatanatyam presentation on Saturday when the U.S.-based Srinidhi Raghavan and Sahasra Sambamoorthi took the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan stage. Their version of the lives of Kaikeyi, Andal, Devaki and Kannagi was simply titled 'Her Story.' The performance, presented under the aegis of Kartik Fine Arts, has already toured the U.S. and the U.K.

What was distinctive to this presentation was the format. It was traditional all the way, but by adding English narrations before each episode, the duo gave it a global feel, targeting non-Indian audiences in the process. The innovative choreography by the duo and Usha Raghavan's artistic direction, which seamlessly blended storytelling with nritta and nrithya, deserves special mention. In each episode, while one dancer played the main character, the other played an important secondary character. So if Srinidhi played Kaikeyi, Sahasra was Manthara; to Sahasra's Andal, Srinidhi was Periazshwar.

The duo began with a pushpanjali. One thing came

through... the superb coordination between them. That they have had solid training under their respective gurus (Usha Raghavan, Malathy Thothadri and Ramya Ramnarayanan) was evident through their precise nritta and apt abhinaya.

Marked by maturity

The first character the duo dwelt upon was Kaikeyi. When she hears of Rama's coronation, she is elated. But her mind is poisoned by Manthara. After many moments of dilemma, her love for Bharata takes over and she finally confronts Dasaratha, thus lending the turning point to the Ramayana. There was maturity in Srinidhi's portrayal, whether it was depicting Kaikeyi's joy on hearing about Rama's coronation or doubt when Manthara convinces her that Bharata ought to be king.

Next, the spotlight was on Andal. As 'Om Namo Narayana' played on, Andal came to life once again as Sahasra became the saint-poet. Along with her father Periazshwar, the young Andal worships Lord Vishnu. But when her father hears that she wants to marry Him, he is distressed. But soon he understands his daughter's love for the Lord and all ends well.



MYTH MAGIC: Srinidhi Raghavan and Sahasra Sambamoorthi
PHOTO: S.R.RAGHUNATHAN

Srinidhi as Periazshwar was amazing.

Devaki was tragedy personified. She was a mother who never was! She gave birth to the beautiful Krishna in prison but could never watch him grow up.

Giving up her baby to Vasudeva was a heart-wrenching act for her. She could only imagine rocking baby Krishna to sleep to the lullaby 'Aalal Neel Karumbu,' she could visualise Krishna stealing butter and being punished by Yasoda. Srinidhi as Devaki brought out a mother's anguish through her eyes.

And finally, Kannagi. The

wife of an innocent man, wronged by the king turns into a woman possessed and her rage leads to a city's destruction... a powerful and riveting tale which always captures audiences' imagination. Sahasra as Kannagi brought the contrasting emotions with aplomb. The finale where both the dancers - one as Agni and the other as Kannagi - burn Madurai, stood out for its choreography.

After two solo items ('Nerandi Nerathile' in Huseni and 'Smara Sundaranguni' in Paras), Srinidhi and Sahasra concluded with a brisk till-

ana in Revathi.

The support group comprised Usha Raghavan (nattuvangam), Sudharshana Arunkumar (musical score), N. Sasidharan (vocal), V. Vedakrishnan (mridangam), R. Kalairasan (violin), C.K. Pathanjai (flute) and B. Siva Ramakrishna Rao (sitar).

As chief guest N. Murali, MD, *The Hindu*, and president, The Music Academy, pointed out, "The characters depicted by the two dancers transformed the worlds they lived in through their unconditional love." True, and in the process, they attained immortality.