

# The Importance of Music Culture

*By: Naveen Basavanhally*

It is said that you do not know the true value of something until you no longer have it. In that spirit, my recent relocation from New Jersey to San Diego has shown me the importance of having not just a musical community, but an active **music culture**.

Growing up in New Jersey was a blessing, especially for someone coming from a non-musical family. In addition to having a fantastic guru in Suresh Uncle, I had countless opportunities to listen to live concerts, especially those featuring my guru and other local artists. The services provided by local music organizations, such as CMANA and the Nandalala Youth Music Group conducted by Smt. Anandhi Venkat, are invaluable and can not be underestimated. By hosting monthly concerts, Nandalala offers a platform for upcoming youth artists to perform. These opportunities allow students to make the transition from the classroom to the stage in a low-pressure environment. In addition, students have incentives to practice, and opportunities to see their peers perform; this helps foster healthy competition among students. Most importantly, these concerts signal to the community which students are most likely to succeed as performers; those that perform well in Nandalala concerts gain the confidence to take on more challenging opportunities. The system is an efficient one for cultivating youth talent. In addition, by bringing in high caliber musicians to the local arena, organizations like CMANA give budding students a way to continue to observe, learn, and remain motivated.

Many opportunities for today's youth come in the form of group performances, which generally involve students collectively singing choreographed pieces. While the parents of the performers might be satisfied with such programs, they are relatively ineffective for cultivating talent, as they primarily rely on rote memorization. While group singing has its place (especially for beginners), I do not think it can be relied on as a long-term solution to nurture talent. This is because it does not encourage development of *manodharma*, strong stage presence, and overall *sangeetha gnana*, all of which are required for a competent concert performance.

San Diego certainly has a large musical community. There are several local artists, all of whom have many students. Despite such a large community, there are very few opportunities for local artists to flourish. The Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego has done a fantastic job in bringing artists from India to our front door with regular concerts featuring artists on tour, but their interaction with local artists is minimal. Since my arrival in San Diego, I have been fortunate to find a group of like-minded students who share a passion for Carnatic Music. It is our hope that we can use the local SPICMACAY chapter at UC San Diego to provide a platform for local artists to share their talents and knowledge with the community. I believe if we support local artists and engage the community, we can produce high quality music right here in San Diego.

No matter how far we travel, it is important to remember where we started from and those that were generous enough to give us our first opportunities. For my own opportunities, I owe a debt of gratitude to my gurus, to Smt. Anandhi Venkat of Nandalala and to Sri Sankar Narayanan of CMANA. I truly believe the best way to thank them is to pay it forward and ensure others are given the same opportunities to flourish.