

# Music Has No Boundaries

*By: K.K. Ramamurthy*

What happens when a 1000 year old, highly traditional, highly complex music is transported and replanted 10,000 miles away in a completely different soil and cultural conditions?

Can that music survive in the new environment? Can it retain its beauty, grandeur and its pristine purity in a land where the language, people, religion and mainstream musical tastes are different?

The answer to all these questions is a resounding “yes”.

I got this answer when some 20 years ago, Arun Ramamurthy played “Eti janmamidi” flawlessly. I got this answer again and again numerous times including recently, when Varun Ganesan, Arthi Suresh and Neha Krishnamachary together, performed the RTP incredibly well.

I remember the day when Arun played Eti *janmamidi*. He was barely 12 at that time. It was in a CMANA children’s program and the hall was full. When people heard Arun play the kriti so beautifully and with such feeling, they were moved. Uma Roy, then the president of CMANA walked up to me and said, “How could he get all that bhava at this age?” How do these things work really? Do the kids just imbibe the emotional content while learning the song or it comes from somewhere within?

I don’t have the answers either.

These youngsters, who are so good in music, did not have the kind of childhood that most of us had growing up in India. They did not listen to music bombarded on them – classical or film- constantly almost always and almost everywhere and not just in the house. They did not grow up listening to mythological stories at the proverbial “mother’s knee” or on TV or in the movies or read in the school books. They could not share their musical interests with all their friends, schoolmates or sports associates. Sure, the Indian community is large today, yet it is not the same as growing up in India soaked in Indianness.

*Apparently none of these seem to matter as is proven by some of the youngsters here.*

Music is completely independent and stands on its own two feet. It needs no props or trappings. Music can soar above the language, the words or the story line. A good artist could absorb music with all its emotional content, completely in musical terms, without having experienced it or even understanding it.

Music along with dance, are the two art forms beloved to all of us, that we want our children to learn. They are the gateway to our culture and can be made available to the kids comparatively easily. Religion and Literature which are the other two cultural pillars are not enticing to them.

It is very heartening to see so many youngsters doing so well in music. Of course, it did not just happen- *it took concerted efforts of students, teachers and the parents.*

For me, listening to Shyamala Ramakrishna at our Purandara Dasotsavam in 2007 or Vijay Narayan or Bhargavi Ganesh at our Dikshitar Utsavam in 2012 were pleasant revelations. Besides the “Magnificent 16” of the YSL, we enjoy listening to so many other youngsters such as Ananth Padmanabha Rao, Keerthi Venkataramani, Rishikesh Tirumala and others. Naveen Basavanahally may not be a kid anymore but he has been there for several years both in minor league and major league.

Music ultimately is a performing art. Artists need to be heard and appreciated. It is their nourishment. So, providing opportunities to the kids to perform in public is also a necessary component in the growth of music. There again YSL and organizations like Nandalala are doing a fine service by arranging such concerts periodically.

I like to take this opportunity to thank on behalf of all of us, all the music and dance teachers in New Jersey who are doing a great service to our community. I like to start off with Late Padma Srinivasan and Anantha Krishnan, the two senior most musicians here. Along with the teachers mentioned in the YSL website who are Suresh Ramachandran, Rajeswari Satish, Neyveli Ramalakshmi, Ashvin Bhogendra and Radhika Mani. I like to add few more that come to my mind immediately, such as Kalyani Ramani, Bhavani Prakash and others.

I also like to congratulate all the boys and girls who are putting great effort learning this great art form.

*One word of caution to the kids.*

The knowledge that you have acquired through your hard work (and your parents' and teachers') can also dissipate easily if you do not keep up on a regular basis. The true test comes when you leave home and go to college. It is indeed possible to keep up the practice and learning as some of your predecessors have proven.

I remember Anantha R. Krishnan (Anand) telling me how he used to carry heavy mridangam, from his dorm to music hall half mile away, through foot of snow while in Dartmouth. It was easier for Arun as violin weighs less and you could use a sound mute in the dorm during practice. I don't know how Roopa Mahadevan did or Rajna Swaminathan did. The point is "where there is a will, there is a way".

Good Luck to all youngsters and salute to YSL and all the teachers.