

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, as we continue looking at the evolution of Carnatic music through the years, this month, I will address the format of a Carnatic music concert and the changes that have occurred over time.

The modern day Carnatic music concert format, called *kutcheri paddathi*, was introduced by one of the stalwarts of Carnatic music- Sri Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar in the 1920's. Prior to this time, most concerts were unstructured and extremely expansive. Often times, the first piece in the concert presentation would itself take up several hours. As concerts moved out of the royal courts and temples and more into the mainstream audience, concerts also came under a time constraint to accommodate audience interest and constraints.

Today, most of the Carnatic music concerts follow the format pioneered by Sri Ariyakudi:

Concerts usually commence with a *Varnam* which serves as a warm up for the singer and the accompanists and sets the pace for the concert. This is then followed by *krithis* (compositions) rendered in various *ragas* (melodies) and *talas* (rhythm cycles). A combination of slow and fast tempo *krithis* provides variety from the listener's perspective and keeps the audience engaged in the concert.

The main presentation in a concert is either a *krithi* with expansive improvisation or *ragam-tanam-pallavi* which again allows for elaborate improvisation. The main presentation also provides scope for *thani avarthanam* where the percussionists perform a solo.

Following the main presentation, the concert consists of 'lighter' items popularly known as *tukkadas*. *Tukkadas* include *slokas*, *bhajans*, patriotic songs, compositions which are not very technical in nature. The concert usually ends with a rhythmic *thillana* and *mangalam* (concluding piece). The *mangalam* is usually completed in the *raga Madhyamavathi* as it is known to impart tranquility to the listener.

Carnatic music concerts have usually been about 2 ½ hours long; again these days with concerts being televised, keeping in mind the audience attention, etc. it is also quite common to find concerts that are an hour or an hour and a half in duration- a far cry from when concerts used to start late in the night (past 9:00 pm) and carry on into the sunrise on the following day!

Till we meet next time, do try and attend a live Carnatic music concert. Many local organizations host Carnatic music *kutcheris*; you may actually find some concerts which are free and open to the public.

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