

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, over the past few columns, we looked at changes in the Carnatic music scene in the post-independence era in India. We examined how the shift in music patronage from royal courts to the general public influenced some changes; in the past two columns we looked at the influence of technology on Carnatic music. This month we look at other changes that have come about in Carnatic music as the years have gone by.

One of the newer formats of presentation today is the “*Ghoshti Gayana*” or group presentation. In this format, groups of people learn *krithis* or *bhajans* and present it in a coordinated effort. Sometimes there are as many as 500 people coming together and singing in a unified presentation with multiple accompanying instrumental artists as well as percussion artists.

We have also previously looked at how the Carnatic music concert format changed with Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar introducing the *kutcheri paddhathi* (concert format). Not only have Carnatic music concerts undergone a change in the format, but also in the concert duration. Previously concerts would start later in the evening with the audiences having finished their dinner and assembling to listen to the concert. The concert would last a couple of hours and go on into the wee hours of the morning. Fast forward to today when many concerts are 90 minutes long and the “long” concerts are about 3 hours in length; concerts also usually start earlier in the evening and also wrap up earlier.

Non-conventional instruments such as *nadaswaram* and *jalatarang* are now being featured in concerts as audiences not only look for variety but also are more conscious of supporting diverse artistes. Even western instruments such as piano, keyboard, saxophone and the like are now popular in Carnatic concerts either as soloists or as accompanying artistes to conventional vocalists or instrumentalists. As a result, a number of collaborative concerts featuring traditional artistes paired with non-traditional instrumental artistes have come about. Many of these concerts are excellent examples of how music, in general, transcends various boundaries that are in existence.

Till we meet next time, do listen to Carnatic music recordings of the saxophone artist Sri Kadri Gopalnath- he is a pioneer in the field of Carnatic music on the saxophone. Many of his recordings are easily available on the Internet.

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