

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, last month we looked at changes in the field of Carnatic music in the post-independence era. This month, we will take a look at the changes that technology has brought into the field of Carnatic music.

Like other fields, technology has played quite a large role in many aspects of Carnatic music. Many *rasikas* may remember concerts from the 1940's and earlier without the use of the microphone. Chamber concerts- concerts that take place in an intimate setting with a reasonably smaller group of people- were quite popular and given the smaller scale of the audience and the venue, mikes were not used for the concert. As concerts have moved out of the chamber settings and temples to bigger venues such as theaters and auditoriums, the size and scale of the venue dictates the use of a sound system with mikes used for all the artistes in the performance. Singers have had to change their tonal quality to accommodate the use of a sound system. Sound balancing is also an important part of ensuring that the concert is heard at its best. Good sound engineers and technicians are now very much sought after, since balancing is best done by technicians who are familiar with Carnatic music concert arrangements. Sound balancing is actively done through the duration of the concert to ensure that the main artistes as well as the accompanying artistes are heard without one overshadowing the other.

Technology has also found its way into traditional instruments. The *tanpura*, a wooden instrument with strings used to provide *sruthi* (drone function), is a fundamental staple for all Carnatic classical musicians. Today, it is more common to find the electronic *tanpura*- an electronic instrument that mimics the drone of the traditional *tanpura*. There are many reasons for the rising popularity of the electronic *tanpura*- ease of maintenance, ability to transport over long distances in aircrafts, trains, etc., less expensive than having a person play the *tanpura* for the pitch- all of these have contributed to the popularity of the electronic *tanpura*. I must mention though that in terms of sound, the electronic *tanpura* does not sound as beautiful as the real instrument.

A step further into the world of *sruthi* has come about with the development of Apple TM and Android TM *tanpura* apps. As these devices are even smaller than the electronic *tanpura*, quite a few concert musicians use only the *tanpura* apps or in combination with the traditional/electronic *tanpura*. Both the Android *tanpura* app and the iTanpura app from Apple are free apps and can be downloaded to the device of your choice.

Next month, we will take a look at some more effects of technology on Carnatic music. Till we meet next time, I look forward to hearing your questions and comments as I plan to devote a column to answering these- you can reach me via email or Facebook.

Smitha Prasad is a Carnatic vocalist based in Cary, NC and can be reached at smitha_prasad@hotmail.com or www.facebook.com/smitha.k.prasad