

## Carnatic Music- Importance of Listening

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, in this week's column we look at the importance of listening to music and the role that listening plays in both education as well as appreciation of Carnatic music. Classical music, including Carnatic music, in general gains an appreciation with increased listening as one is able to understand and appreciate the complexities involved. For a student of Carnatic music, listening is an imperative part of learning- the more one listens, the more one is able to observe nuances and incorporate them positively into the singing style.

Carnatic music learning can be broadly divided into *kalpita sangeetham* and *manodharma sangeetham*. *Kalpita sangeetham* refers to preset compositions- as an initial learner, students of Carnatic music are taught structured compositions such as *geethams*, *swarajathis* and *varnams*; subsequently, the student learns *krithis*, which are also preset compositions but offer scope for the performer to showcase creativity. *Manodharma sangeetham* forms the other portion of Carnatic music education. *Manodharama* refers to creativity or improvisation- this improvisation usually occurs as *alapana* (elaboration of the *raagam*), *neraval* (spontaneous improvisation of a preset line in a *krithi*), *kalpana swaram* (spontaneous improvisation in *swaras*), *tanam* (method of *raagam* improvisation using rhythmic syllables) and *pallavi* (another method of *raagam* elaboration where a single line is chosen for elaboration and sung in various tempos).

While *kalpita sangeetham* is taught, *manodharma sangeetham* develops not only by learning but more so by listening to various renditions. For example, when a student is being taught an *alapana* in Bhairavi *raagam*, the *guru's alapana* rendition is different each time since it is spontaneous improvisation. The student's interpretation should not only be based on what is taught by the teacher but also by listening to as many interpretations of Bhairavi *raagam* as possible. This not only increases the understanding of the *raagam* but also fuels creativity in the student to interpret the *raagam* in newer ways while still adhering to the rules that govern Bhairavi *raagam*.

A discerning listener of Carnatic music, also referred to as a *rasika*, can vouch for the increase in appreciation of Carnatic music with increased listening. As a *rasika* attends and listens to various concerts and renditions of the same *krithi* or *alapana*, s/he begins to develop personal preferences not only for artists but also for *ragams*, *krithis*, particular renditions, etc.

Till we meet next time, I would encourage all readers, more so Carnatic music students, to develop listening to Carnatic music. There are so many free sources of music on the Internet- all that is required is the discipline to incorporate listening as a part of one's daily routine.

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