

Musical Musings

By Smitha K. Prasad

An introduction to Carnatic Music

It is with great pleasure that we begin a new column on Carnatic music- a system of classical music that is mainly practiced in South India. At a time when all forms of classical arts from almost all cultures, including Carnatic music, are facing a lack of resources (the economy is not helping much either!) and dwindling audiences, it is commendable that Saathie magazine has continued to carry columns focusing on various classical arts and is expanding its coverage of classical arts. As a practicing Carnatic classical musician, it warms my heart to see the support extended by such organizations, which ensures the continued propagation of traditional arts.

Carnatic Music or Karnatik Music is one of two styles of Indian classical music, the other being Hindusthani Music. The origin of Indian music can be traced back to the Vedas (a large body of text originating in ancient India), particularly the Sama Veda. The Sama Veda consists of hymns set to musical tunes; these musical tunes initially had 3 notes or swaras and then later included 7 swaras. Until the 12th century A.D., only one form of music prevailed all through India. With the establishment of the Islamic Sultanates in Delhi, musical practice in North India came under the influence of Persian and Arabic cultures and this became known as Hindusthani (Uttaradi) music. In southern India, the original music was preserved and handed down to the current generation and is known as Carnatic (Dakshinadi) music.

Through the centuries, Carnatic music has undergone considerable changes. It has been influenced by historical events, cultural revolutions and also by other streams of music such as Western music, folk music and of course, Hindusthani music. While a number of innovations and changes have taken place, the basic principles and tenets on which Carnatic music is based has remained largely unchanged through the years.

In this column, I hope to take you, the readers, on a journey into the beautiful world of Carnatic classical music. We will begin by exploring basic elements and concepts and then progress to more complex features, which are a part of any Carnatic music concert. I also hope to bring you interviews from well-established Carnatic musicians visiting North Carolina as well as update you on innovations and creative presentations that we see taking place in Carnatic music. At the same time, I would encourage you to let me know of topics that you would like to see discussed as well as any feedback you may have regarding the column.

Till we meet next time, do listen to music- good music, preferably classical music.

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