

The second in CMANA's Spring series of concerts got off to a lively and impressive start with Ramakrishnan's energetic presentation of the ata tala varnam in Kalyani. This was followed by Janaki Ramana in Suddha Seemanthini, which was embellished by a vigorous sequence of swaras, and Evarani in Devamritavarshini, which was well presented at an unhurried pace.

The next piece was Ramanatham in Pantuvarali. The alapana, though rather measured, was a satisfactory exploration of the raga. It demonstrated the singer's facility of voice as he explored the higher reaches of the upper sthayi with great ease. The neraval at kumara guruguha mahitam was followed by a robust progression of swaras that were evenly matched by the violinist.

In a departure from the norm, Ramakrishnan began Marimutha Pillai's Kaalai thooki in Yadukula kambodi with the anupallavi. He cast a spell upon the audience, slowly drawing them into the leisurely nuances of the raga. His rendition of the lyrics highlighted the beauty of their meaning and showed how the composition is perfectly suited to the pace at which the raga is best explored.

Coming right after this, the brisk pace of Sri Shyama Sastri's Triloka mata was a pleasant contrast. This delightful song in Paras is not heard often and set the stage perfectly for Bala gopala in Bhairavi. Befitting the main piece, the Bhairavi alapana was thorough and the neraval and swara prastharas quite exhaustive, even though they held no surprises. However, if anyone was still left wondering, this segment proved Ramakrishnan's complete mastery over the medium.

Perhaps because of the pressure of time, the ragam-tanam-pallavi in Nata followed immediately after. It was interesting that the ragas were determined by the context and lyrics of the composition. Ramakrishnan handled the progression of ragas well and introduced Chalanatai a manner that added great beauty to the RTP. The piece was set to khanda adi, which, however, proved to be too tricky at times for the singer. The skill of the violinist was evident in his experienced handling of the RTP.

The 'tukdas' following the RTP included a tillana and demonstrated good variety in speed, language and raga. Kalaya Yashode in Suddha Sarang was particularly beautiful, and the concert concluded with a mangalam in Navroj composed by Sri Bhadrachala Ramdas.

Ramakrishnan is gifted with a melodious voice and the ability to traverse between the octaves effortlessly. Given that he is American born and schooled, his enunciation is notably deliberate and precise. His strength is his perfect blend of melody with technique, and energy with subtlety.

Sri VVS Murari exhibited the skill and experience of a noted violinist. His controlled playing was a perfect match for Ramakrishnan's exuberance.

Not many in the audience knew that the RTP was composed by none other than mridangist Arun Prakash. He is well known and a 'regular' at CMANA, and it was good to see him accompany the next generation of musician.