

THE HINDU

Online edition of India's National Newspaper

Sunday, Dec 12, 2004

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Epitome of bhakti

By Sulochana Pattabhi Raman

CHENNAI, DEC. 11.

"I dwell not in Vaikuntha, not in the hearts of Yogins or in the sun, where my bhaktas sing, there be I, Narada," said the Lord.

M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI, the nightingale of Carnatic Music, was an epitome of bhakti in every sense of the term, expressing with the grandeur of her music, her humility, her simplicity, her humane nature and other countless attributes, that she was not merely a musician born but a devotee ordained by divine decree. M.S. has flown into eternity, but the precious legacy of her song will remain immortal. The entire spectrum of Indian art and culture has suffered a colossal loss in the passing away of the diva who had the world from the time she was 10 years old till the age of 88. Her magical, mesmerising vocal chords that flowed like liquid gold capturing the hearts, senses and minds of millions of admirers through an amazing time span has finally been stilled.

It is given only to a chosen few to leave indelible,

RETIREMENT HAVEN !!!



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impressive imprints in the verdant spheres of any art form. M.S. was an artiste extraordinaire whose music had a powerful impact on one's consciousness, and had the quality to transform the ambience from the mundane to the divine. She, who personified the quintessence of south Indian music, enhanced performance levels to realms of greatness underlining the quality of bhakti and devotion to the Godhead in no uncertain terms. Her music exemplified the fact that mere technical virtuosity can only overwhelm the mind, not give peace and solace to the soul. M.S. consciously moved away from overbearing calculations, for she firmly believed that plebeian ostentation was not in keeping with the splendour of Carnatic Music.

To be an artiste is itself a blessing but to be an artiste of the calibre of M.S., one has to be thrice blessed. The rich, resonant timbre of her voice, total sruti alignment, diction as pure as the Queen's English, performing perfection, an immediate rapport with the audience whether the scholar or the layman, have solidly placed her in an exclusive zone. Her music reflected a myriad of moods — joy, contemplation, anguish, acquiescence, but above all total surrender to the Almighty. Her art was never intoxicating; it was smooth and sublime, soft and serene. The key words to the success of her magnificent career were efforts to constantly widen her horizons, hours of practice, unceasing focus, a consuming passion for percentage presentation and an all-pervasive searing intensity in her musical articulation. Her repertoire was prodigious, packed with songs of every genre, classical, light classical, devotional, folk music, bhajans in Hindi, abhangs in Marathi, patriotic verses et al.

She was a stickler for perfect enunciation, checking and rechecking the diction before taking any composition on to the concert platform. Her dedication to her vocation and art was such that during her long innings as a performing musician, she hardly ever felt the need to refer to notes or books on the stage. Her homework was faultless, and indicated absolute, disciplined commitment. M.S.' art was beautiful and there was art in all aspects of her musical idiom. It was as though she had taken a holy pledge to prove that our system of music was a sure means to liberate man of his earthly shackles and elevate him to exalted standards of bhakti and renunciation.

If a face in history could have launched a thousand ships,

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the face, the glow, the winning smile and inherent charm of M.S. had the magnetic quality to launch a thousand more. Her dignified stage presence, her instinctive perception to gauge the mood of her audience, her alertness to the requirements of the occasion and her spontaneous response to listeners' requests were some of the reasons for her stature as an artiste of pre-eminence.

How does one describe her music — sublime, serene, aesthetic, harmonious, mellifluous, impressive? None of these superlatives would adequately portray or do justice to her singing that helped a rasika enjoy the bliss of communion with God.

The benefit of guidance from a guru of the distinction of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer must have been due to the divine favour bestowed on her by the Lord of wisdom and learning, Sri Dakshinamoorti. To repeat the same concept in different words normally does pall, but in the case of M.S., to emphasise that she had no parallel in the firmament of Carnatic music in terms of stupendous achievement, monumental popularity, charisma and as a saviour of noble causes is absolutely justified. One must also remember with gratitude the love and devotion of T. Sadasivam who did not spare himself to help M.S. occupy the highest rung in the ladder of recognition. Ordinary people earn to keep but M.S. earned to give.

The timeless, priceless quality of M.S.' music would always remain a glorious chapter in the history of Indian music. The Lord most certainly has lived in the sanctum sanctorum of Sangita Kalanidhi M.S. Subbulakshmi's heart.

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