

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, last month we looked at the effect of technology in some areas of Carnatic music; this month we continue to explore more changes that have been brought about in Carnatic music due to technological advances.

Similar to the invention of the electronic *tanpura* (late 1970's by Sri. G. Raj Narayan), other instruments such as the *veena* and the violin also have their electronic counterparts. These electronic versions are not as popular as their acoustic counterparts and are used by a relatively small percentage of instrumental artistes. While the electronic *tanpura* has become ubiquitous among students as well as performers of Carnatic music, the electronic *veena* and violin are still relatively less popular among performing artistes. Like the *tanpura*, acoustic instruments have a tonal quality which radiates a warm feeling as the notes are played; the electronic versions seem colder in comparison. However the electronic instruments do have some advantages- for instance the electronic *veena* "Sunadavinodini"TM can actually be dismantled and later reassembled with ease by the *vainika* (*veena* player). Today, as musicians travel to various countries across the globe to perform, having compact instruments can indeed be an advantage, given the airline luggage restrictions and the tight spaces in the aircraft.

Perhaps, the Internet has had one of the most singular impacts especially on students of Carnatic music. Traditionally, Carnatic music was learned in *gurukulam* tradition where the students lived in strict obedience with the *guru* and learned his lessons. The *gurus* typically would not charge the student any fees; instead the students helped out with chores and errands around the house. Lessons were conducted whenever the *guru* felt like teaching. Fast forward a couple of years and most learning took place with either *gurus* visiting the student's house to teach or today when most students visit the *gurus* house to learn their lesson at a preset time based on the convenience of the *guru* as well as the student.

With the advent of Skype TM, teaching of Carnatic music has undergone a revolution. Many students today use Skype sometimes exclusively to learn from their *guru*; others use it in conjunction with their personal learning sessions from the *guru*. While it is true that Skype and tele-teaching has made it easier for students in any part of the world to learn from a teacher based in any part of the world, there is something to be said for the benefit of receiving training in the 'old fashioned' format of in-person learning. The air of informality and spontaneity, to a certain extent, is missing in these tele-learning sessions.

Technology is also making it easier to listen to Carnatic music concerts. A number of websites offer live streaming of Carnatic music concerts thus making it possible to listen to concerts without leaving the comfort of your house. Again, the atmosphere that is created when listening to a live concert in-person simply cannot be obtained when listening to the same over the Internet. However, it is certainly beneficial to listen to concert streaming and recordings rather than not listen at all!

Till we meet next time, I look forward to hearing your questions and comments - I plan to devote a column to answering these- you can reach me via email or Facebook.

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