

## BOOK AND DISC REVIEWS

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*Sri Tyagaraja Kirtani Porul Vilakkam ;* Keezvelur  
Meenakshisundaram Pillai ; *Sri Tyagabrahma Ganopadesa Sangam,* Madras-17.

One of the most striking characteristics of the songs of the immortal bard of Tiruvaiyaru, Sri Tyagaraja, is the universality of their appeal which transcends linguistic and geographical barriers. Even during his time his *kritis* had become remarkably popular not only in the Tamil-speaking areas but in Andhra, Kerala and the Kannada regions. Tyagaraja composed in Telugu and Sanskrit but the magic of his music was such that all over the South his compositions were taken to be synonymous with the quintessence of Karnataka Sangita, and even the mere mention of the refrain of songs like "Nagumomu", "Kshirasagara Sayana" and "Evarimata" suffices to conjure up visions of the melodic grandeur of these masterpieces before the mind's eye of the musician and the layman alike. In fact the music-lover and the artist more often than not are engrossed in the liveliness of the composition and the chiselled perfection the master has imparted to it and the Sahitya and its significance are not so readily perceived. This means that the composer's work is revealed only in part and some of its precious aspects may be said to suffer an eclipse thereby. This is especially so when the words cannot be made out owing to a lack of knowledge of the language.

The work under review aims at providing the necessary assistance for a full appreciation of Tyagaraja by bringing out an excellent render-



ing of the original texts of the songs with very lucid and attractive commentaries in Tamil. The author is a reputed composer and distinguished vocalist. He is imbued with profound devotion and reverence for the inspired utterances of Tyagaraja and he shows a deep understanding of the manifold subtleties of thought and expression imbedded in the songs. In the preliminary section of the book, Shri Pillai has included his own compositions in adoration of the Master. The meaning of the *kritis* of Tyagaraja is given word for word and the notes containing excellent Commentaries add to the value of the interpretation. Fifty songs have been included in this volume in alphabetical order and well-known items like "Anupama Gunambudhi", "Uyyalalugavayya" and the Sri Raga Pancharatna Kirtana, "Endaro Mahanubhavulu" are to be found amongst them. The interpretation of the not so familiar pieces adds to the valuable information given in such eminently readable form. The author richly deserves to be congratulated on the success of his achievement, and it is to be hoped that he will follow up his laudable endeavour to cover all the extant works of Sri Tyagaraja.

N. S. Ramachandran

*Introducing Indian Music* ; Joshi and Lobo ; Bhatkal Books International, Bombay, Rs. 350 (4 L Ps).

Answering a long felt need, the set of 4 Lps prepared by Baburao Joshi and Antsher Lobo to aid the initial appreciation of Indian classical music have an excellent format and preparation. That this work was done marks an important step forward in the publicity of Indian music. The lecture demonstrations on these 4 records are far superior in extent and system to any previous efforts in the same direction. From the point of view of what the Westerner needs to find in an alien form of music, however, there are omissions that demand constructive attention.

Since the material is restricted to Hindustani music, word to this effect would have been in order, perhaps stating that Hindustani music



is practiced from Kabul to Calcutta and Delhi to Dharwar. There was too strong a Marathi element in the examples used for illustration, and since the lectures were to a fair extent for use in India as well as outside, a fact attested by the interest of Indian institutions, due allowance could have been made.

A highly creditable explanation of the function of the concept of *swaras* was ably illustrated, but the all important element of tonality that is so vital a part of the Indian classical melody was left solely to the imagination of the unguided listener. It was, however, very gratifying to note the pains taken to justify and render comprehensible the essential character of sliding tone and grace notes, together with the basic forms of ornamentation. Most Western listeners need to be convinced of these ornamental necessities.

*Alapa* is the very foundation of Indian classical melody, and the account of this was unfortunately brief. *Tala* is distinguished in Hindustani music by *theke*, but the lectures wrongly emphasised the aspect of counting *matras*. The dignified and profound depths of *dhrupad* were not even mentioned. The listener is treated, however, to a nicely rendered *thumri* and *kajri* by Lakshmi Shankar, this being the highlight of the lectures.

There was no reason for the interposition in the lecture dealing with *tappa*, *dadra* and *bhajan*, of a *chhotakhyal* in *raga purvakalyan*, nor was there any justification for the *sargam* in a cracked voice that preceded it. Apart from this the coverage of various forms in descending order of classicality was a very positive point of the lectures.

Instrumental music was confined to the eighth and last lecture. With the aid of the sitar alone an account very useful to the beginner was given of the phases of instrumental performance. If, however, the Westerner is to be introduced to Indian instrumental music in a lecture, there is no better way of doing it than to employ a few of the many existing excellent 78 RPM recordings. From these performances of *sarod*, *sarangi*, *vina*, *shehnai*, *bansari*, *tabla*, *pakhawaj* and *jaltarang* could be an ample basic representation.



Most Indian lovers of Indian classical music care little for the technique and respond mainly to its ethos. This applies also to most of the Westerners who have begun to take a sympathetic interest in Indian classical music. The need is therefore much more for explanation of the philosophy and expression of mood than for prolonged accounts of technique, the latter being of interest only to the specialist. As an account of technique, nevertheless, the recordings are well worth the acquisition by any interested Western institution.

The authors are to be congratulated for omitting, from their lectures any mention of the ancient musical texts of which the mention is usually employed as a means of creating needless confusion. Attention to musical forms as they are now constituted is the only meaningful approach for expounding Indian music, and Messers Lobo and Joshi are to be credited for applying it.

*Roger Ashton*