



Canada-based brothers, Ashwin and Rohin Iyer, perform for an Indian audience after having trained abroad for nine years

Carnatic music today. But I am afraid the quality is far from satisfactory because of the lack of individuality of singers like MD Ramanathan, Madurai Mani Iyer or Musiri Subramania Iyer," the brothers make a candid statement.

True, so what do they plan to do? "We will strive to establish our character significantly in our presentation with the help of a thespian like SRJ *mama*," answers Ashwin. SRJ introduced the singers with his remark that the brothers have no knowledge of even Tamil, leave alone Telugu and Sanskrit. But he added that their pronunciation is impeccable. Might be the hyperbole of an enthusiastic teacher. Nevertheless, their *Vachanagocharam* (kaikavasi) and the fast-paced *Sivakamsundari* (jaganmohini) to some extent corroborated SRJ's statement.

If Pakkala Ramadas on the violin supported the duo with encouraging passages, Kallidai Kuruchi Sivakumar was exuberant in keeping the rhythm, muffling the voices of the singers at times.

"The group assembled here might be small," accepted Rohin. "But we get the satisfaction of performing before an elite audience who really respect our music." So how does it feel to learn an art that is alien to their ambience in Canada? "It feels great. In fact, it is our connection to India, our culture and heritage. We enjoy it," pat comes the reply. So do we.

— G Swaminathan

Making the classical connection

What exactly is the binding force between two Canadian-based Indian youths, Professor S R Janakiraman and Thyagaraja Vidwat Samajam? The answer is Carnatic music.

Toronto Brothers Ashwin K Iyer (a PhD scholar in Electrical Engineering), Rohin K Iyer (undergraduate of Biomedical Engineering) avidly trained themselves in classical Carnatic music earlier from local teachers of Toronto and underwent a short term tutelage under Professor T R Subramaniam and T K Govinda Rao at Pittsburg, USA.

For the past nine years they have been honing their skills under the guidance of Professor S R Janakiraman. "The duration might be short but the exercises are vigorous," confides Ashwin. "SRJ *mama* is the window to the history of classical music and an amazing guru." Their level of understanding could be felt in their performance in the Thyagaraja Vidwat Samajam. The brothers' comprehension speaks not of just their talent but their guru's ability to sharpen his disciples' skills. An unique varnam in manirangu by Tiger Varadachari or the not so heard *Swethaganapathim* in ragachoodamani by Diskshitar or the unfamiliar

Karuvellu in kalyani by Thyagaraja and a methodical *O Rangasoyee* (especially the breathtaking sangathis in kamboji without the prelude of an alapana) place their concert on a different plane.

Unison is important for combined singing. "It is true that scheduling our activities to suit joint practice sessions is undoubtedly arduous. But we manage it," admits Ashwin. Rohin's voice is slightly robust while Ashwin is soft. But they share perfect understanding even in delibating begada (*Bakthunee charitramu*) and kalyani (*Karuvellu*) alternatively. "There are plenty of youngsters singing