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The art of presenting a duo concert



Ranjani and Gayatri... perfect understanding.

IN THE Carnatic music concert scene, duo singing has a niche of its own. Every music festival has at least two sets of duo singing or duo playing of an instrument to the delight of the audience. Duo singing brings out many facets of this crafty art to the forefront. It needs great discipline and coordination from the angle of the performers. Though the whole exercise may seem effortless, talent has to be honed to perfection.

We have had masters in duo singing in the past such as the Alathur Brothers and living artistes such as Radha and Jayalakshmi, C. Saroja and C. Lalitha and of course, the Sikkil sisters, flautists, just to mention a few. The most obvious thing one notices in the case of duos is that they are mostly siblings, sisters or brothers or disciples of the same guru as in the case of the Alathur Brothers. In the Gurukulavasa days, the disciples lived with the guru learning the art.

During Gurukulavasam, the atmosphere in the house enabled them to listen, learn and practise music simultaneously and this interaction encouraged them to pair as duo singers. Initially the kirtanas must be

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perfected, so that there is synchronisation. The sangathis have to be brought out in total unison, with absolute precision. Each sangati is normally rendered twice, so that there is no flaw in the order of sangati presentation. It needs vigorous practice to ensure that both the singers render the same sangati so that there is no clash. It requires a deep understanding between the two in order to achieve a harmonious blend of rendition. Kirtana patantara should be strictly adhered to. Their respective manodharma should be exhibited in raga and swara singing. Though the duo is bound by a disciplined approach in rendition, their individuality is unhampered. Ego should be brushed aside if the concert has to be a success. The two have to complement each other at every stage.



C. Saroja and C. Lalitha... masters of the art.

It is generally observed, in a vocal duo, that one of the artistes has a comparatively weak voice and this gets complemented by the strong voice of the other. They need to plan the concert meticulously taking into account their strengths and weaknesses. It is invariably noted that the artiste with a weak voice has a better musical insight and so makes the maximum effort to exhibit all the talent. It would be unjust and uncharitable to compare because they try to set off the handicaps by judiciously supplementing and complementing each other. The major advantage of duo singing is, the music is a continuous flow of beauty and the gaps that are found in solo singing are absent. In solo singing, the singer has to necessarily pause for breaths breaking the continuity. The additional voice in duo singing compensates this lapse.

While the major raga is handled, both the artistes participate in the raga rendition in stages, each giving a different facet of the same raga to the rasika's delight. In their over enthusiasm there is, sometimes, an overdose of neraval and swara singing with the violinist also chipping in. Care should be taken to curb this temptation.

In the case of instrument duos, the playing technique has to be similar to avoid disharmony. Duo rendition, whether vocal or instrumental, is an exacting art form that entails assiduous and meticulous practice.



Kunjumani and Neela ... flautists of rare calibre.

The sisters, Ranjani and Gayatri, were featured in a concert recently for Hamsadhvani. They can be easily rated as the best duo singers in today's cutcheri circuit.

The sisters excelled in their performance. There was never a dull moment. The kalapramana was neat and tidy. There was healthy competition between the sisters taking up the challenge to outwit each other at every opportunity. Naturally this made all the rasikas present happy and fulfilled. It was verily a healthy demonstration of how a duo concert has to be presented as cutcheri fare.

KRIPA SUBRAMANIAM

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