

## My Guru

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It is my treasured privilege to write about my guru Shri Lalgudi G. Jayaraman on the occasion of his Sashti Abda Purti—a privilege that is mine, thanks to more than eleven years of continuous association in the capacity of a student. From the very beginning, I, like all his students, have been regarded as a member of the family as well. Thus, I have had ample time and opportunity to get to know the various facets of my guru—the performer and musical genius, the teacher and the man. These are the aspects that I have tried to portray here.

### Lalgudi—the artiste and genius

This is probably the best known facet of Shri Lalgudi. His concerts are truly unique. The best description of his concerts would be to call it an enjoyable, enlightening, enlivening as well as an enriching experience. The genius in him is revealed in every one of his concerts, as well as in the numerous varnams and thillanas that he has composed. These compositions are quite unrivalled in their sheer musical value. The very sound of his violin is sweet and mellifluous. His music is melodious and rhythmically perfect at the same time. He is a thorough perfectionist, and demonstrates excellence in his music while demanding it of others.

I have thought for long on what makes the “Lalgudi Bani” what it is, and have compiled a list of the important details.

(i) From the very beginning, his style of “fingering” (the manner in which the fingers of the left hand are used to produce the various notes and gamakas) has been different—one that is tailor-made to the requirements of Carnatic music. The style

is characterised, by high precision and economy of movement. There is no movement (up or down the fingerboard) made, that can be replaced by a lesser one without loss of precision. This makes it possible to execute sangathis that would otherwise not be possible. I do not think ragas like Thodi, for instance, can be played to perfection in any other style. In short, if one tried to evolve a style of fingering with the objective being the absolute reproduction of vocal music, and trying to overcome human limitations as well as the limitations of the violin, then one would arrive at the “Lalgudi Bani.”

(ii) His style of fingering is well complemented by the bowing. He has time and again told me and other students that, it is this that produces the sound. Emphasis is on volume without harshness and softness without inaudibility. He has designed the style of bowing to be the least demanding physically, making full use of the shoulder, elbow and wrist points.

(iii) The “Lalgudi Bani” recognises the fact the Gamakas are nuances and that a surfeit of these upsets the harmony. In this style therefore, a gamaka is included only if it enhances the melody, and it is here that his genius is revealed—in knowing where to draw the line.

(iv) Another important factor is his approach to ‘krithis.’ To him, a composition is not simply the rendition of a song from the available notation. He first settles the sangathis and gamakas so as to highlight the meaning of the lyrics. The lyrics are of utmost importance, and decide whether or not ‘Niraval’ or ‘Swarams’ are permissible for a particular kirthana.

(v) A factor that is no less important is the attention paid to posture and facial expression. He has repeatedly instructed me to bear in mind that a concert is an audio-visual experience, and that a majestic posture and pleasant disposition do go a long way.

These are only some of the attributes that make Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman the outstanding violinist that he is. There are undoubtedly innumerable other factors that I have not had the vision to perceive.

### **The Teacher and the man**

These are two facets of his personality that cannot be separated—you cannot see one without seeing the other. Like all men of knowledge, he has a strong drive to teach. He is never happier than when surrounded by his students during a lesson. Such teaching sessions please him most and also bring out the very best in him. These are the times when we students realise how fortunate we are in having him for a teacher.

His prodigious outflow of sangathis when teaching alapanas or niraval, the rapidity with which he produces korvai after korvai make his lessons enjoyable as well as enlightening sessions.

He is a simple man who loves puzzles and problems of all sorts (he always asks his students to come up with brain-teasers) and has a quick sense of humour. Puzzles and brain-teasers are one way to keep the brain sharp and increase one's concentration.

He always insists that a high degree of concentration (Ekagratha) is essential for good studentship. There were innumerable occasions when I was to witness in sheer astonishment, his power to concentrate.

He would talk animatedly over the telephone, pacing up and down the room, yet his mind would silently keep filtering the strains of music drifting from his disciples, as they practised in different rooms of his house. He would then hang up the phone, call each one, and pinpoint the errors with stunning accuracy—An ashtawadhani, when it comes to concentration in music.

He seldom gets angry, except when his students commit mistakes they have no business committing. In eleven years, I have never known him to lose his temper without there being a really good reason.

I have frequently been told that I am an ardent fan, admirer and rasika of my Guru only because of conditioning from a young age. I have spent a lot of time thinking about this and have come to the conclusion that there is as much truth in this as in saying that a five-year old needs 'conditioning' to like ice-cream! Some things are just meant to be loved.

I have endeavoured to write here not words of praise - praise can only be between equals—but a cold analysis. That this analysis takes the form of a eulogy is a reflection on the calibre of the man.

I am truly grateful to God for my being a disciple of Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman. On this Shastiabdapurthi occasion, I offer my obeisance to him and pray to God that He may be pleased to bestow upon him long life, robust health and eternal expression of his creative genius through violin. ♥

## Responsibilities of Performing Artistes

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Speech delivered by R. YAGNARAMAN on 30-11-90 at the Convention of Classical Music and Dance fraternity of India convened by Sangeet Research Academy, Calcutta (An ITC Trust) with Shri Vasanth Sathe, Chairman, Shri Vijay Kichulu Co-Chairman.

I am not going to indulge in platitudes or offer sermons while dealing on this topic 'Responsibilities of Performing Artistes'.

My observations here are borne out of my close conduct and experience and direct knowledge of the musicians for over 35 years. Whenever I refer to Musicians it includes a reference to dancers also. The responsibilities of musicians are very great and they are varied and many.

- a. Responsibility to themselves
- b. Responsibility to the art and cultural institutions.
- c. Responsibility to the country.

I have said at the outset they have a great responsibility since they kindle and play with the emotions of thousands of listeners or Rasikas by their enchanting music, creating for themselves a band of admirers consisting of good and bad elements ultimately resulting in hero worship while the musician is at the pinnacle of his glory. Though these aspects are very essential to boost the the image of the musicians, the close association of the bad elements in the group of admirers influence the musicians to a great extent to indulge in the bad habits not conducive to the art and the profession resulting in the complete destruction of the image they had built

up, ultimately leaving them to dig their own grave. I say this with all responsibility that the musicians should never lose the balance by intoxication of their popularity while at the height of their popularity and they should strive to maintain their dignity and self respect at all times.

Secondly the word sampradaya or tradition is a most oft repeated one in music circles. The musicians while performing should not repeat the same set of compositions and ragas in each and every of their concerts under the garb of Sampradaya resulting in boredom without increasing their repertoire and employing innovative skill. At the present day we witness the trend of dwindling audience due to the influence of TV, light music and cinemas. To arrest this trend and to consolidate his position the musician should enrich his repertoire and embellish his performances by atleast singing a new item in his concerts. He has a responsibility to improve the audience attendance by his skilful and artistic presentations in fusing interest in his concerts. Irrespective of the size of the audience whether big or small he should strive to give his best with dedication, maintaining the high standards of the art. This attitude will certainly help him always to maintain the top level in his profession and to gain the confidence of rasikas and to maintain it to the end is itself an art.

Next his responsibility is to treat his side men-accompanists with decency and dignity. A good and successful performance is always the result of the artists, mutual understanding and co-operation on the platform. His attitude of one among the equals on the platform would be

highly productive in the presentation of uniformly successful programmes. Care also should be taken while sharing the popularity and the success of the programme a rightful share in the benefits of the concerts also should be shared with them to match them to lead a life of dignity and self respect.

They also owe a duty to create the second line of musicians by imparting to their sishyas their knowledge without reservations. This is the real service to Music if a cadre of competent musicians are trained.

The gradual disappearance of Gurukula system has resulted in immaturity and lack of adequate preparations and practise on the part of ambitious yet talented young musicians. Cultural organisations have no option but to feature them to keep going since the senior musicians would not be featured due to age and physical affections. As is done for Hindustani Music guru-sishya training could also be extended to carnatic music by Sangeet Research Academy.

They owe a duty to the institutions which were mainly responsible to project them at their early formative stages. The Sabhas in the South play a dominant role in projecting the musicians when they were not known to Rasika Public. These institutions take a very great risk in undertaking this venture. Many a great musician of today owe their eminence and popularity to the sabhas. It is the responsibility of the musicians not to forget their indebtedness to these institutions

that encouraged them by demanding high remuneration when they are invited to perform. The quality of music obtaining from the sabha platform is far superior to performances held elsewhere. The sabha platform determines their destiny.

The last but not the least responsibility of the musicians is with regard to their cultural visits abroad. When invited to perform in foreign countries our musicians should not forget that they are our country's cultural ambassadors to propagate our music, cultural heritage etc. They should project our art in its pristine purity doing full justice to it and not adopting an attitude "what do the foreigners know about our art and this is sufficient for them" Musicians should not underestimate their (foreigners) knowledge and even if they are un-informed it is their duty to educate them and make them involve in our art and culture. They should not also forget that surprisingly foreigners are better informed about our arts than we are here. Apart from performing with dedication and sincerity they should conduct themselves with dignity and self respect since we are assessed by our conduct and behaviour.

Since many of our outstanding artistes have already established and laid the foundations of high standards of our arts in foreign countries and made it popular, it is the duty of the artistes to maintain the high standards established and keep our cultural flag fly aloft beyond our frontiers. ●

