

Responsibilities of Sabhas and Musicians

R. Yagnaraman

Often, we hear that Carnatic music concerts in the sabhas do not attract an audience and consequently they are dwindling in number. Defects, on the part of organisation and the performing artistes give room to this complaint and we cannot entirely blame the rasikas.

It is my firm conviction that sangeetha sabhas carry a great responsibility in the matter. From the very inception of a sabha, the organisers should nurse the audience on classical music. Without feeling disheartened at the thin attendance in the beginning stages, if one were to arrange really classical music concerts, the audience will certainly get trained to hear good quality music, appreciate and attend in large numbers, sitting right through the concerts. It requires a great deal of patience and perseverance on the part of the organisers to achieve this end. It is no service either to the institution or to the art or to the public if the aim were to be only to organise some programmes periodically having an eye on the box-office. A very onerous responsibility lies on the sabhas to create a taste in our classical music and also develop the atmosphere for it. Without attempting anything sincerely in a spirit of service, it would be irresponsible to say that the present day audiences have no taste for music.

Vidwans' Terms

Much more than the institutions, our musicians have a duty to retrieve the situation. The top-ranking vidwans should make an honest attempt to please and hold their listeners, by bringing out their best. But in actual practice while accepting performances, as a rule they dictate as to the accompanists they would like (of course reputed ones) having an eye on the crowded audience the renowned team would draw. It gives the impression that but for the favourite accompanists the concert would not be successful and well attended. They forget the audience gets fed up with the same set of artistes on the platform and they would like to have a change in the combination. That good attendance is only due to reputed accompanists will be evident when the same vidwan performs with less famous accompanists, drawing a thin audience. The competence to attract and hold the audience by the intrinsic merit of the performing musician, irrespective of the rank of the violinist and the mirdangam player would really be the test of a successful concert.

The same set of songs (about fifteen in number) are repeated in concert after concert. A regular visitor to the sabha can always bet with certainty what the vidwan would sing in that concert. The repetition of the same kritis, however popular, in successive concerts tires the listeners and that to an extent explains the dwindling attendance. Every honest effort must be made to include one or two new compositions in each concert to evoke the interest of the listeners.

Pitfalls of the Aspirants

The aspiring youngsters have the only ambition of capturing the platform by hook or crook. They lack concentration and their equipment is inadequate. Singing

the same items and frantically attempting to win applause from atleast a section of the audience, with the help of the accompanists, at punctuated places is the order of the day with them. How long can the public be treated so lightly and indifferently? Lack of practice, lack of sincere effort and lack of devotion to the art and to the *Guru*, leave the youngsters without a sound foundation for building a successful career, I am pained to see and am surprised to learn that some youngsters get by heart a few items, just enough for a concert, without any proper training in the fundamentals and aspire to make a mark as a vidwan. The present day audience is intelligent and discriminating and it is high time the youngsters realise that only the fittest will survive.

Again the youngsters like their senior counterparts exhibit lack of confidence in their own capacity by requesting top-ranking accompanists, just to gather full audience and more to cover up their denciciencies with the help of the violinist and mirdangam player than to put before the listeners their talents. There is also the vanity of having had big *Pakkavadym*. It is irritating and pathetic to see an youngster approaching an organiser with the plea that the reputed accompanists are ready to accompany him, thus putting a claim his merit has been recognised!

I should not be mistaken as decrying reputed accompanists and I am only driving home the point that one should not be dependent upon them for the success of their concerts.

Time Factor

The time factor in the concerts is very essential. In these days of stress and strain, entertainment and recreation are much sought after. On a Sunday evening, if one snatches some time to forget his problems by attending a concert, he would very much desire to hear a balanced concert lasting a maximum of three hours. Any cutcheri beyond that limit of three hours is a strain both on the performer and on the listener. Unfortunately, most of the Vidwans, junior and senior, do not know to balance the items and present it effectively within the three hours. They take up the Pallavi at a time when people start going home at 9 p.m. To present the best in the minimum time and to make the listeners ask for more is the essential quality of a successful concert.

It is said financially music concerts are not helpful to the institutions, and it is also true. The Vidwans make demands without understanding the reality of the situation. This is a major factor for the fall in the number of cutcheris. There is a complaint about lack of support to music and musicians. Once approached their rates are pitched very high. It is also high time our musicians give up observing irritating formalities, quite out of tune with the present day. It would be laudable if they follow *sampradhaya* in their music and not in their behaviour towards the organisers.

Rasikas are still there and it is the paramount duty of both the sabhas and the Vidwans to hold them.