



05/07/2009

Indian concert offers insight to culture

By: Glenn Griffith , Community News

CLIFTON PARK - A Clifton Park-based vocalist with roots in the classical music of India brought her cultural heritage to life recently with a performance at the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library.

Indian vocalist Vidya Subramanian was joined by fellow performers Ravi Srinivasan on violin and Ganesh Sankaranarayanan on drum for the April 25 performance in the library's second floor conference room.

The 90 minute peek into the historic, melodic, and harmonic nature of south Indian classical music was a fragrant bouquet to the eyes, ears, and mind. Subramanian gives vocal lessons to students throughout the world from her Clifton Park home using Internet podcasts.

Advertisement

A new driving force is in town!



searchNYcars.com

She also gives lessons to students one on one using specialized programs available from several Internet sources.

The free library performance was part workshop, part lecture, and part concert. To increase appreciation of what her audience was about to hear Subramanian first described the differences between northern and southern Indian classical music.

Carnatic music, she said, is the name given to the classical music of south India. Most of the compositions in this style played today were composed in the 18th century. Much of the work being performed was written by three major Indian composers.

For her performance Subramanian and her accompanists played only Carnatic music though her vocals were performed in several different languages, Teluga, Kanada, and Tamil.

As they performed the compositions Subramanian, Srinivasan, and Sankaranarayanan sat cross legged on pillows placed on a small riser at one end of the room. Subramanian's vocals rose and fell in the centuries old Indian vocal patterns as Srinivasan and Sankaranarayanan at first followed and then improvised individual variations off the counted beats.

As the two musicians strayed from the tune's structured composition some audience members kept syncopated time along with Subramanian counting out the beats using their hands on their thighs, first a fore hand, then the back hand, a thumb, and finally the ring finger.

About 25 people attended the performance listening intently to the lecture portion and moving their heads occasionally throughout the musical portion. "I enjoyed it," said Bernie Gorowitz afterward. "I have several CDs of Indian music at home."

Gorowitz's wife Alice gave Subramanian's vocals a rave review. "I thought she was wonderful," she said. "The music is very complex."

Indian Carnatic music sounds unusual to a Western ear trained in simple melodies with a repetitious vocal chorus. The Indian music puts less emphasis on harmony, a feature in Western music. Indian vocalists also use gamakams, micro tones that embellish one note. This is the familiar wavering notes heard in Indian vocal music.

To accompany the vocalists more closely many Indian musicians have gravitated to the violin. The use of the violin has become so prevalent a traditional native Indian instrument has fallen out of favor and is now nearly an historic artifact. "It's lack of frets and its similarity to the human voice has made (the violin) indispensable to a classical concert," Subramanian said.

Srinivasan, the group's violinist, described Carnatic music as very spiritual. "The songs have lyrics with religious significance. The whole music is suppose to be part of yoga. It's because of the breathing."

Drummer Sankaranarayanan was given a chance to demonstrate his technique as he followed Subramanian with his double sided drum. One end was tuned to a bass note and the other tuned to a treble note. Using both ends he could match Subramanian's voice or drum against her with multiple tones per beat.

Subramanian said the Indian community in the Capital District is expanding and that includes Saratoga County and southern Saratoga County. She viewed performances like this one in addition to her podcasts as a possible bridge between Western culture and Indian music.

She will perform another concert and workshop at 2:30 p.m., May 16, at the Saratoga County Arts Council, 320 Broadway, Saratoga Springs. There will be an admission fee for the event.



From left, Ganesh Sankaranarayanan, Vidya Subramanian and Ravi Srinivasan perform at teh Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library. (Glenn Griffith/Community News)

From left, Ganesh Sankaranarayanan, Vidya Subramanian and Ravi Srinivasan perform at teh Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library. (Glenn Griffith/Community News)

A new driving force is in town!

searchNYcars.com

A horizontal banner featuring three vehicles: a bright yellow sedan on the left, an orange SUV in the middle, and a dark blue sedan on the right. The vehicles are shown from a front-three-quarter perspective against a white background with a subtle reflection effect.

©Community News 2009