

# Quest for quiet

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T.M. Krishna's "A Southern Music" was the subject of a lively discussion recently

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In "The Empty Space", Peter Brook's study of the different forms of theatre, he recounts an interaction with an actress. Calling her "one of the greatest of our time", he remembers how she would map her progress in any role in baking metpahors - "Putting it back to bake a bit longer", or "Need some yeast now", for instance.

Last week, at a book discussion in India International Centre, this episode was recalled to highlight how even the greatest of artists find it difficult to articulate their creative process. The book under discussion was Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna's "A Southern Music", which panellists hailed as a rare and welcome exception to this rule.

Published by Harper Collins last year, A Southern Music is a survey of the experience, context and the history of Carnatic music. Calling the book a product of his journey in music, the author said, "I never expected to write a book about music as such. I did all the things a musician should be doing, but over a period of time the journey of music took me to questions..." While a certain restlessness is often at the heart of an artist's new endeavours, Krishna said the book came from a desire for 'quietness'. "I was very comfortable with what I was doing... and I had questions



**CARNATIC UP HERE** T.M. Krishna's book is a product of the questions his journey in music has birthed PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

about why I was doing what I was doing."

For the discussion, the

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author was joined by Ashok Vajpeyi, former Chairman of Lalit Kala Akademi, Ramaswamy Iyer, former Secretary, Water Resources, and Vidya Shah, singer and composer. It was moderated by Bhaskar Ghose, former Doordarshan Director General.

"I regard this book as a masterpiece. I will not be surprised if it becomes a classic in the lineage of the 19th Century work 'Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini,'" said Ramaswamy Iyer, add-

ing that he hoped the book would be translated into all South Indian languages.

Singling out Krishna's departures from the traditional concert format, or the paddhati, Iyer suggested, "Instead of changing bits and pieces in the old paddhati, causing a sense of discomfort or disorientation to some members of the audience, he should work out an alternative pattern in totality..." The author, however, said this wasn't his intention at all.

For his part, Vajpeyi saw the book as one that tries to "establish the absolute autonomy of art". An aficionado of Hindustani Classical music, Vajpeyi was particularly appreciative of the distinctions between Hindustani and Carnatic music that the author has delved into in the book.

Providing a lively counterpoint to Vajpeyi and Iyer, Vidya Shah shared her "areas of discomfort" with the book. Referring to Krishna's preoccupation with the manner of vocal training - through Skype lessons, for instance, or abbreviated classes - Vidya said, "yes these are very real questions, but Ashok Ranade, the great musicologist, had said you cannot take away music from the social fabric in which it is created, and therefore music evolves, it changes...Because audiences have different expectations, organisers have different expectations, patrons are more impatient..."

Towards the end of the evening, in a variation on this theme, a member of the audience asked Krishna about the responsibilities of the listener, and why mere surrender on his part wasn't enough. "That's the biggest problem, right? I have you in a hook...That's why musicians and artists need to be more responsible," Krishna replied, leaving everyone with more than a little to think about.