

THE MAGIC OF MADURAI MANI IYER

by Sanjay Subrahmanyam

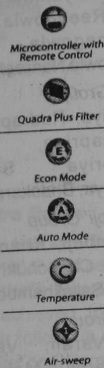
The world's first Air Conditioners to clear an I.Q. Test.

Presenting Vertis from Voltas. The world's first range of air conditioners with Intelligent Cooling™. Not only do they cool instantly, they also remember the temperature you're most comfortable with. Their intelligent micro controllers switch to economy mode to save electricity bills, shut the unit off on a pre-set timer and even regulate the weather in your room from warm

Intelligent Cooling

- 1 Power Saver Mode
- 2 Quadra Plus Air Filter
- 3 Timer
- 4 Uniform Cooling

to cool and humid to dry. Their 4 stage Quadra Plus Air Filters purify the air you breathe, leaving it healthy and crisp. Backed by state-of-the-art technology from Fedders, USA, these beautiful machines come to you with an easy to use remote control. They'll probably be the most intelligent thing in your house. With the exception of you of course.



A TATA Product

vertis from **VOLTAS**
ACs WITH I.Q.

My house was a GNB bastion. It seems he used to visit us. He was supposed to have sung for my mother's wedding but unfortunately he passed away. We kids grew up listening to his "Brochevarevarura". But we were exposed to so much of his Music at home that names like Ariyakudi, Semmangudi, Musiri, Rajaratnam, Mali and the likes never figured in discussions.

Madurai Mani Iyer was one such name I had heard about as a young kid. Once on a holiday at my uncle's place in Bangalore, I heard Madurai Mani Iyer for the first time. As a boy of 7 to 8, I was fascinated, hooked by the sheer magic and the unusual delivery of his music. The accent was amusing. The tempo was fascinating and the neraval at "Kaaliniil chilambu" in "Tayae Yasodha" made one feel like dancing. And going up down, note by note and singing only "Kaaliniil chilambu" was a real delight. I then forgot about him for sometime.

We then bought our first tape recorder. This must have been the early eighties. Vividh Bharati was banned in our home and the only music we were allowed to listen, record or play was Carnatic Music. That was

also the time when FM was introduced by All India Radio. Thus we used to get about two hours of Carnatic Music everyday, which meant that everyday, I would look up the radio programmes in the newspaper, then decide whether any of the programmes should be recorded or not. We recorded the first Madurai Mani Iyer broadcast that we heard. It was a record with most of his hits like "Maa Janaki", "Nijamarmamulanu", "Kapali", and of course the immortal "Eppo Varuvaaro" and the English note. This was a big favourite of mine at that time and I used to listen to the tape regularly. But it was all fun then. As for my music classes, I considered it purely an impediment for me to make it to the Tamil Nadu Ranji squad! But with no television those days, these recordings were my main sources of entertainment.

Then again Madurai Mani Iyer sort of went out of my life. As I began performing, I did not consider MMI serious enough to emulate. The intellectual likes of GNB, Ramnad Krishnan, Alathur Brothers were more important. And then it happened once again, when a friend of mine called K.R. Subramaniam passed me a tape of MMI.



PHOTO COURTESY : THE HINDU

That was one hell of a recording. It had "Vallabha", "Narada Gana Lola" "Mohana Rama" and an RTP in Bhairavi. The start of the Athana swara sequence "mmmm pa ri - Narada!!!" just made me sit up as if struck. Here was a man who was dishing out sublime music in such a simple form. He made things look so easy and his music was just flowing. Swaras came through like a torrent. The upper gandhara in Mohanam just swayed like the trees along the shores of the Cauvery. This was music like nature to me. It was just there! It was just moving and flowing and taking everyone with it. No wonder even rickshaw wallahs stood and listened to his "Kaanakkan Kodi" when he sang at the Kapaleeswarar Temple.

Then I was just hooked. For me this man came to stand for the most naturally flowing music that I had heard. There was hardly any effort. The difficult Jayantasena or the even more difficult Saraswati Manohari was made to look absurdly simple.

My guru started giving me pointers. He used to say, that when someone finds true sruti sense like MMI did, one did not bother about satisfying intellectual needs. He said MMI used to reach out to notes from the higher swara than from lower one. He would hit the upper Sa from the Rishaba rather than from Nishada. He could sing continuous avartanas of

sarvalaghu swaras without being boring or repetitive. And his viruttams especially "Veyuru Toli Pangan" were wonderful. And then the songs that one thought only others could sing, like the ones when I heard "Jayati Jayati" in Khamas (a GNB patent), or his "Brochevarevarura" (again another GNB patent), the man, the genius introduced such subtle sangatis that went in tune with his flow of thought and his tempo, sounding so fresh and new!

One wonders why people don't sing some of the songs he patented. Songs like "Paamaalai" in Harikambhoji, "Kandan Karunai" in Bimpalas, "Tookiya Tiruvadi" in Sankarabharanam are hardly being sung by anyone except probably TVS, his nephew.

Today I am an MMI fanatic. His music and his unique approach have not been emulated by anyone. His simplistic approach cannot probably be imitated at all. And finally a single statement he made about 'kanakkus' in concerts symbolizes the man - "We sing swaras for Manikkam Vairam, instead we have to sing swaras for Ga Ri Sa Ni Da!!!" What he meant was that the kanakku pattern being already learnt and memorized, the actual swaras were being sung spontaneously only upto the start of the korvai or "ga ri sa ni da"! How different was it from singing swaras upto "Manikkam"? It just was a different place or eduppu! □

(Courtesy : Sangeetham.com)



CHOWDIAH, THE MAGNIFICENT by 'Garland' N. Rajagopalan

"A concerted effort to wean him away from music while young was of no avail. Astrological prediction of a non-musical career had proved wrong. His heart cried, even as Yehudi Menuhin's did when he wrote, "Would I have preferred a different job? No, I suppose, because I am, as much as it is possible to be, a free man, slave only to the instrument of my early choice, the violin". - [A Garland]. A charming personality, unparalleled guru bhakti to an unexcelled fault, an iron heart that withstood provocation, an irresistible will to take to the best and the novel and immaculate dedication to the art qualified the glamorous life of violin virtuoso Trimakuta Chowdiah of lavish popularity, name and fame. While the name of his place meaning 'three crowns' is also significant in his life, he was born on the First of

January in 1895 and crowned most deservedly with the rare, coveted title of Sangita Kalanidhi on the same date in 1958. [It is interesting to note that the same four numbers get repeated in both the years, though jumbled.] What a great title of fabulous merit it was then, with very few sabhas, fewer titles, stringent scales of selection vis a vis competing inter se merits of a galaxy of 'all-time greats' most of whom stood eligible for it, though the title had unfortunately eluded many?

Chowdiah did not stand committed to the status quo in everything, his

apprenticeship itself being a specimen. Though he was proficient to take the concert stage, Guru Bidaram Krishnappa would not permit him for nearly a decade and a half though the ward had a family too to look after. Nay, the guru went to unprecedented extremes of violent rigour



COURTESY: SRUTI