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| **Music Season** | **The Chennai December Festival** |

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**UNUSUAL BLEND: Swaralaya group. Photo: S. Thanthoni.**

Some exercises in music can astonish you. Tyagaraja kritis unfolding on sitar with the violin for an associate! The collaboration fascinates you further - Thavil, mridangam and tabla striking high on a rhythmic thoroughfare.

Kalarasana concerts featured `Swaralaya' — a rare experiment in their prime time slot Monday last at Rani Seethai Hall. The programme, dominated by Tyagaraja's kritis, was the brainchild of Thavil maestro Haridwaramangalam Palanivel, who led the musicians on stage — Kalpana Venkat on the violin, B. Sivaramakrishna Rao on the sitar, D. A. Shrinivas on the mridangam and B. Ganesh Rao on the tabla.

A varnam in Hindolam, ``Mriganayanam" composed by D. Sashidhar, flagged off the curious blend of instruments, the rapid precision of each medium blending perfectly for a flashy finish.

"We chose many of Tyagaraja kritis as the Saint's work is adaptable for the shrill instrument, sitar, and could be offset with a variant sound of the non-reed violin. The blend helps in enhancing the experience of the subtle gamakas of Tyagaraja's compositions better," said Kalpana. Sivaramakrishna was as dexterous with alapana, kriti, and kalpanaswaras as he was with alaap, jod, jhala and gath. Not just playing the raga or kriti together, Kalpana had to establish those vital links to take every segment across.

In was in the fast exposition of `Shobillu Saptaswara' in Jaganmohini, especially the jubilant chittaswaram, that the stage sounded perfectly orchestrated. The base strings alternated with the violin and the sitar in the Ghana-raga pancharatna `Endaro Mahanubhavulu." Hamsanandi and the Hindustani equivalent, Poorya were elaborated in a pace that helped one enjoy the fine lines of distinction in swara prayogas in different mediums. The rhythmic exercises of the thavil and mridangam in the tani avarthanam in Adi talam also included tisra and khanda nadais that gained them a long round of applause.

Sindhumandari and Brindavani are ragas that lend themselves to instruments for a fast kalapramanam. Tyagaraja's kriti in the former and Dr. Balamurali Krishna's tillana in the latter were choices that served the purpose.

Kalpana runs the non-profit organisation, Saama Gana Heritage Foundation, in the U.S., for promoting classical arts. "The credit for such a mingle was made possible only because of Mr. Palanivel's passion for rhythm," agree the members of the group.