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## **Transcending barriers**

Sudha Raghunathan recently shared a platform with musicians from six countries. LAKSHMI DEVNATH describes the unique event.



“MUSIC IS melody and does not have a language or any other barrier...” Sudha Raghunathan asserts. She talks from experience for she has, in July at the Stimmen festival, shared a platform with artistes from six countries — Madagascar, Mali, the United States, Switzerland and Hungary. This cultural summer event has been taking place annually since 1994 at Lorrach in the southwest of Germany, close to Switzerland and France. The blurb of the two-page brochure on the programme proclaims ‘Global Vocal Meeting’ featuring Sudha Raghunathan (India), Mitsou Juhacz Miczura (Hungary), Corin Curschellas (Switzerland), Abdoulaye Diabate (Mali), Rinde Eckert (U.S.), Senge (Madagascar). It was in 1999 that Helmut Buerger, Director of Stimmen, and executive producer, Marion Schimdt-Kumke, struck on this novel idea of featuring different voices together on stage. Helmut chanced to hear Sudha's concert in Bangalore and the ‘seeker’ of voices was charmed. Discussions followed and soon Sudha was representing India at the popular Global Vocal Meeting.

For the first concert in 2000, she had as her accompanists the late Durai Swaminathan (violin), Palladam Ravi (mridangam) and R. Raman (morsing). “At my request they allowed me to sing with accompanists. I think Carnatic music is best projected that way. Some of the other participating musicians played their own instruments,” Sudha discloses. This year her accompanying violinist was Vittal Ramamurthy along with Ravi and Raman on their percussion instruments. In this programme of two hours, each artiste presented his or her own individual style of music with the other participants joining in. Says Sudha: “My first item was a Tillana of Lalgudi Jayaraman in Rageshri. This was a solo piece. The second song was Annamacharya's composition in Misra Bauli. The reason I chose this piece was its simple lyrics and tune.” Sudha had chosen right. The participants from the other countries grasped the nuances of this raga very well.

The *crème de la crème* of the show was a novel item conceived and imaginatively christened by Sudha — “Wedding in the forest.” The central point of this item was Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavata's popular western note. Sudha explains: “The whole idea was to effectively use the different voices to recreate a forest atmosphere on stage and also to depict a wedding taking place there.” Sankarabharanam swaras, korvais and the popular wedding song of Tyagaraja “Pavanaja sthuthi...,” were intelligently and effectively used by Sudha to create the effect of a wedding. “We even created the effect of a waltz when the slower portions of Muthiah Bhagavata's ‘note’ was sung.”

It was now Sudha's turn to participate in their songs, which she did with great aplomb. Whether it was African music or gypsy music or church music, Sudha and her entourage enthusiastically mastered the pieces.

Not only did she join in the chorus but also displayed ingenuity by fitting in charming raga phrases at the appropriate places in their songs. “The one striking point about the music from the West is

that both the entry into the song and the exit from it has to be extremely precise," Sudha says. They had rehearsals for five days at the auditorium of their organisation called Burghof.

It goes to the credit of the artiste that the first time around in the year 2000, she learnt the songs just by listening to the artistes or their recordings and not by singing them for she was struck by laryngitis and recovered only in time for the show!

The western artistes and the audience went into raptures when they experienced South Indian Music. ``Refined, melodious, divine..."— these were the adjectives they employed to describe our music. The morsing also fascinated them.

In fact this instrument became a regular feature even for their presentations. All doubts on the success of this experimentation are dispelled when one looks at the rave reviews that the programme has evoked.

Encouraged by the enthusiastic response, this group of skilled performers, participated in four cities at the United States in November 2001.

The same year Sudha also gave a solo Carnatic music recital at the Stimmen festival. In July, apart from participating at the Stimmen Festival, Sudha's mellifluous voice along with her expertise in the art secured her concerts at several European venues as well as an invitation to participate at the international Sfinks festival at Antwerp.

This festival has to its credit 1,200 concerts with an audience reach of 1,800,000! Sudha is the only South Indian artiste to have participated in these two festivals — Stimmen and Sfinks.

This innovative artiste is more than willing to participate in similar programmes on home turf, but with the clause — that they run parallel to her classical singing and not interfere with it.