

**An excerpt from the newsletter 'Keertana' (May 2007) of the CMC  
(Community Service through Music, Australia)**

**Chitra Sudarshan spoke to Padmashri Sudha Ragnathan (camp Sydney) last week and put this together from that interview and others.**

**On performing..**

**Padmashri Sudha Ragnathan is an extremely intelligent musician who gauges an audience's response and calibrates each of her performances accordingly. Indeed her repertoire is so vast and her versatility legion, that she can do it almost impromptu and think on her feet.**

**In a recent interview, she reiterated this point - saying that singing what an audience wants is important. "I have trained myself to like an audience that I perform for on any given day", she said. Firstly, she finds it equally challenging to perform before carnatic music connoisseurs as well as total novices. Both require deft handling of a totally different sort. Second, there is a question of what repertoire to choose; when she performs in Karnataka, she often sings exclusively in Kannada; as she sings mostly Tamil kritis in Tamil music festivals, When she toured South Africa and performed before a largely ethnic Tamil audience, she had to include Tevarams and Tiruppugazhs to cater to their tastes. She does not try to dwell on the question of whether she would be able to give a balanced and solid performance without including Tyagaraja or Dikshitar kritis and tries to remain positive.**

**At another level, when she is on the stage performing, Sudha usually gets a feel for an audience's taste within the first few items she sings and tailors her choice of music accordingly.**

**On her guru M.L.Vasanthakumari (MLV) and grand guru G.N.Balasubramaniam (GNB)**

**Sudha Ragnathan lost her guru MLV quite early in her career - and the void that was left was too great to be filled - she had such an extraordinary relationship with her, and was in such awe of her musical prowess and genius. She has by and large tried to adhere to the MLV-GNB parampara, which has been demanding; although she has taken a few things that she has liked from others, and has evolved her own style.**

**On perpetuating the GNB heritage, she said she has been working to bring out the numerous kritis that the great musician-composer had created, and has already released about 7 CDs on his numerous compositions. His varnams have been included in several other CDs that she has released over the years. It is a slow and arduous process: "although I have the notations to his compositions, it is not enough. One needs to listen to the music to get a feel for the bhava. It has been a difficult project. I am trying to listen to tapes of GNB kritis sung by Sri Kalyana Raman and Sri Trichur Ramachandran to understand the kritis better..."**

**On global and local audiences**

**Sudha has always been interested in taking carnatic music to worldwide audiences - and should the route involve 'fusion' and other genres of music, so be it. Having taken part in different music and 'Voices' festivals around the world, she enjoys the experience of sharing the stage with artistes from everywhere. She is engaged in many projects that involve the 'fusing' of musical genres, and loves to represent carnatic music globally.**

**Increasing international opportunities put enormous strains on the schedule of artistes of Sudha's caliber - so many simply cave in to the pressure and perform exclusively in Chennai if they are not touring overseas. Sudha is one of the few who tours extensively in the smaller cities and towns of Tamilnadu despite family commitments. She said that 'link-concerts' or 'chain concerts' are being increasingly sponsored by corporations, big companies and Sabhas that make it possible for an artiste to do a series of performances around a cluster of towns within a limited geographical area (like Coimbatore, Pollachi, Pazhani, Tiruppur, Ulundurpet etc). This enables the organizing of 'kachcheris' in smaller cities and towns more feasible and cost effective.**

**On whether her children are following in her footsteps.**

**Having learnt music for more than seven years, from her very talented mother Choodamani, one was keen to know if Sudha's children were following in her footsteps. Her son was interested in all genres of music, she said. Her daughter is a bharatanatyam dancer, having completed her arangetram recently. She is interested in music as well, and shows promise, but is not altogether sure if she is ready to put in the hard work and commitment right now. "I came to professional music relatively 'late' in my life, so I wouldn't completely write it off", laughed Sudha.**