

Here is a review of a Madurai Mani Iyer concert in 1965 by 'Arabhi' appeared in the 'Indian Express'

The hall, its acoustics vastly improved after the provision of a false ceiling, was full of good music and goodwill. After an years absence from performances owing to illness, Sri Madurai Mani Aiyar captivated his fans at the Ramarao Kalamandapam last Sunday under the auspices of the T.Nagar Arts Academy. Mayuram Govindaraja pillai was to have accompanied him; but the recent over-abundance of rain prevented his reaching the City and Sri Seturamaiah filled the breach admirably. Sri Ramabadrn, who seems to take a special pleasure in accompanying Mani Aiyar, provided a beautiful mridangam, full of sukham especially during the tani in "Sukhi Evaro", which seemed to be a continuation of Mani Aiyar's mellow melody.

The style is the man, in a special sense, in Mani Aiyar's case he have others trying to sing like him, from .A.I.R. and even from Tiruvayyar. But they only irritate us. From him it all comes with a special individual charm which has delighted us for so many years. For one thing, few, if any of his, imitators have his sruthi suddha. Opposed though I am to speeches in the middle of cutcheries I think the TN. Arts Academy did well to felicitate him on this memorable occasion and wish him more years of service to music and pleasure to us. One hopes, however, they wont repeat this business of interrupting the mood of music. The songs were familiar but after an year they came with a peculiar poignancy from the frail figure on the dias. And their technical skill and capacity to enthrall were undiminished. The neraval in "Sarasasamadana" and "Thaaye Yasoda" was remarkable. "Tatvamariya" and "Sevikkavendum" were the Tamil pieces in the programme in addition to a moving ragamalika, starting with the familiar invocation of the Navagrahas (Suryamurthe had come earlier,sung with glowing fervour). Ranjani was absolutely charming here. The subtle nuances of Arabhi (Joothamurare) enthralled the audience. As the cutcheri could start only about half-past-seven, there was no pallavi in a performance which lasted almost till ten. Yes, of course, we had the "English Note" too - not to mention Sri Vembu Aiyar!

The whole performance was followed which special interest because people wanted to know how Mani Aiyar had recovered from a long illness and whether they could hear him during this years music season. Those, who accompany him generally provide him their best, as a labour of love. His enunciation has steadily improved over the years, like Semmangudi's so that now he moves listeners emotionally with the sahitya of songs. His neraval is always a characteristic strength of his music and the phrase he chose in "Thaye" and the half-Hindustani touch he gave it drew 'Haas' of appreciation from us. The swaras came as ever as if in cascades, luminous, graceful and lyric, edifices of strength and lightness built upon foundations of deep knowledge and immense technical skill. May we listen to him for years!.

-Arabhi