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SIMA: Second-generation displays virtuosity

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Lakewood, CA

THE South Indian Music Academy of Los Angeles' first Youth Music Festival was a grand success.

Second generation Indian-American children have proven to be conduits of every aspect of Indian culture. This concert was no exception. Nine teenagers, born and raised in America, gave a three-segment performance at the Hoover Middle School on October 29.

The pieces performed were all classical compositions by the masters of Carnatic music like Sri Tyagaraja, Mysore Vasudevachar, Dikshitar and Papanasha Shivan.

The festival started with a Carnatic classical vocal performance by 14-year-old Anirudh Venkatesh. He was accompanied by Shiva Ramamurthi (13) on the violin and Arjun Narayanan (18) on the mridangam. Arjun is University of California, Irvine sophomore.

This was followed by a unique rendition of Carnatic classical music on the western keyboard by 16-year-old Amrithavarshini.

Vani Ramamurthi (16) gave a Carnatic vocal classical performance accompanied by Arun Ramamurthi on the violin and Shubha Chandramauli on the mridangam.

Anirudh, began his formal musical training at the age of six and initially wanted to play the mridungam. However, it was his teacher, Padma Kutty, who advised that having some command of vocals would later help in mridangam training.

Anirudh soon started taking vocal lessons and his voice quality, intonation and precise pronunciation in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit compositions led his teacher and parents to encourage him to continue as a singer.

In 2003, Anirudh—then only twelve-years-old—won the first place at the Cleveland Tyagaraja Music Festival. Since then there has been no looking back for this teen. He has performed at the prestigious Bharata Kalachar in Chennai, at the Chembur Fine Arts Society in Mumbai and at other venues in India and the US.

Accompanying Anirudh on the violin was Shiva Ramamurthy, who also had his initial



Clockwise from above: Vocalist Vani Ramamurthi; Amritavarshini Muralikrishnan playing the keyboard; Anirudh Venkatesh performs with Shiva Ramamurthy on the violin and Arjun Narayanan on the mridangam.

training in classical Carnatic music from Guru Krishnan Kutty at the age of six. He was later trained by Delhi-based Sundarajan.

Shiva started taking violin lessons on his parents insistence. However, he soon began to enjoy the lessons and going to India each summer to learn from his guru in an intensive setting. Today, Shiva practices daily for a minimum of 45 minutes. Asked if he enjoyed playing for Anirudh, Shiva said: "Anirudh is my best friend. It was really nice playing with him since he sings so well."

Amrithavarshini Muralikrishnan started playing the keyboard at the tender age of two under the tutelage of her father and guru N. Muralikrishnan—a vina player and keyboard virtuoso. She accompanied her father and mother, Rose Muralikrishnan, on all their concerts and tours from her childhood.

Hailed as a child prodigy, Varshini, as she is popularly known, recently got an opportunity to play for violin maestro Lalgudi Jayaraman, who was so impressed with this youngster that he actually invited her to join his



music school for advanced training. This SIMA concert also served as the occasion to release a two-album cd by Varshini called *Keyboard Expressions*.

Varshini father said, "Our children are no longer immune to the beauty of Indian classical music. They now have opportunities to learn, and perform just as well as their counterparts growing up in India. SIMA has set up a landmark with this youth festival wherein the teenagers proved that western environment is conducive for excellence even in a traditional music form like Carnatic music. The time has come wherein Indian-American artists will be invited by Indian Kalakshetras to perform there."

Vani Ramamurthi was one of the other vocal performers for the evening and gave new meaning to the phrase "sweet sixteen" by dis-

playing what a teenager can achieve growing up in America. Vani also began her music tutelage under Padma Kutty at the age of five and admits that initially she just went to the classes to please her mother. As time went by, Vani discovered that Carnatic classical music had become an integral part of her life and began to practice everyday. Eventually, following her talented brothers Arun and Shiva, she also ended up spending summers in Chennai taking intensive lessons from teachers Gayatri and Ranjini.

Besides, singing, Vani is also a trained Bharata Natyam dancer and this has further enhanced her knowledge of the arts. Talking to Vani, one realizes that she is still an American teenager who loves to listen to Hindi filmi music and does not really know what subject she wants to major in.

'Security common strategic interest to India, US'

SAM RAO

Paso Robles, CA

OVER 20 members of two major India-centric internet community groups including Bharat-Rakshak and India-Forum met here last week to discuss the geo-political, military and economic forces affecting the Indian subcontinent and the world. The first of its kind in the US, the day-long conference was held on October 29.

"We believe this was the largest gathering of its type for the NRI community, and definitely the first one organized by individuals with no connection to any governmental organization," said organizer Rathnender Pandey.

The agenda for the meeting was "Geo-political, Military and Economic forces driving change in Indian subcontinent and the world."



Arun Sharma's presentation on "Ballistic and cruise-missile defense" provided technical insight to the nature of the issues, including options, challenges and risks that the Indian and US defense planners face from new and evolving missile defenses.

'The South Asia File' research paper presented by Kaushal Vepa was based on information collected from a variety of sources over two-years. The main focus of the presentation was the genesis and evolution of the notion of an alternate Sunni power center in South Asia,

which was actually cultivated by the British. "This culminated in the formation of the state of Pakistan—an alternate power center to the one represented by the Arab Ummah," said Vepa.

Ramana's research paper on 'Arab Nationalism and Islam in Mid-West' explained the difference between Islamism and Pan-Arab nationalism. The presentation methodically described the various Islamic streams (like Deobandi, Wahabi, Muslim Brotherhood) in a timeline to show their interplay which, according to him, has gradually turned lethal.

The paper also traced traits Islamists took from fascist and communists in the 1940's. It highlighted the importance of the Islamist doctrine of Maulana Abul Alaa Maududi (Jamaat-e-Islami) and how it is perceived as the fountain-

head of all current Islamist terrorism against non-Islamic people.

Acharya presented an interesting analysis of social engineering experimented on India by Anglo-Saxons from 1794 to 1980. Titled 'Sociology and Security', this paper tracked its evolution and importance to the experimentation in modern times. Keeping in mind the present times, the participants also discussed in detail the political and security ramifications of the recent earthquake in Kashmir and its impact on related terrorists activities in Pakistan.

"The participation was outstanding and the discussion was animated and intense. There was more than enough bonhomie to make it a memorable occasion," said Pandey. Plans are now underway to sponsor a few talks and hold such conferences bi-annually.



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