

## The mesmerizing music of Madurai Mani Iyer

*An inspiring article by Saty Seshan.*

His music grows on you. Like the glorious sun that appears slowly over the horizon, inches its way up past the heads of tall trees, reaches its midday splendor and blazes forth in all its regal majesty; like the great river that springs forth from tentative rivulets, grows bigger and broader as it travels on its way to the ocean, spreading wealth wherever it goes. From the first golden sounds of the humming of the alaapana, you were in for an exhilarating experience -- a joyous journey along the traditional as well as uncharted waters of Carnatic music, a journey that truly exemplified the purpose of music: to broaden, enrich, help transcend the listener to another plane. With a perfect blend of the accompanying strains of the violin and the rhythmic cadence of the mridangam, with the singing always on key, with the pouring out of the kalpana swaras, with clear enunciation and complete knowledge of the sahitya, with all his heart in his singing, you would indeed feel his music, be drawn to its every nuance, respond to its every crescendo and flow, truly lose yourself in it and enjoy yourself. His music captivates you, mesmerizes you.

Madurai Mani Iyer ( 1966)



C.Lakshminarayana, T.V.Gopalakrishnan and Alangudi Ramachandran

To be on key (shruthi) was important to him, and being on key was certainly his forte. In every concert, he always sang one composition of his guru, Muthiah Bhagavathar. Though his fame and stature in the field of Carnatic music grew, he remained the man of music, one who accepted engagements for singing at temple festivals, "sabha" concerts, weddings, and for charity, and one who sang with his heart, all his genius, all his musical prowess for his audience's enjoyment. Indeed, the most telling characteristic of his talent was that he could hold his listener's attention.

The singer brings a composition to life, and many songs, become recognized by a singer. This was certainly the case with Madurai Mani Iyer. Songs that he sang often have come to be known as "his" songs, not Tyagaraja's or Dikshithar's -- he not only sang them often, he sang them extremely well, in his own inimitable style, and with every rendition, found new facets, other nuances that made each song different and more enjoyable each time. Songs like "Maa Janaki", "Nijamarmamulanu", "Sarasasaamadhana", "Eppo Varuvaro", "Thaye Yashoda" all have the Madurai Mani stamp on them.