

# Seasoned musician

ONETS taken aback to see T.M. Krishna dressed in Bermudas and T-shirt, looking like a school boy and quite unlike the seasoned classical musician one encounters on the concert platform. But when he starts speaking on his favourite theme, music, the boyishness disappears.

His answers show maturity and poise. Obviously, Krishna has spent a lot of time reflecting on his art.

## Training

"I started learning music from my mother's teacher, Sree Seetharama Sarma, when I was six years old. I still consider him my primary guru. From 1996 onwards, it was my good fortune to be accepted as a pupil by the late Semmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer. I continued to be taught by him till 2002, when he became too ill to teach," he recalls.

He says that his busy schedule leaves him with little time to do any kind of formal training now. "But I have this," he says showing his Apple i-Pod capable of storing thousands of songs. "I carry this along with me all the time and I am learning from it whenever I can, in the train, during flights, when I am in a hotel room.

"It has the songs of Musiri, Ariyakudi, Semmangudi, Brinda, Mukta, M.D. Ramanathan, Palghat K.V. Narayanaswamy, all the great masters of the past are here, and each of them has something for me.

## Favourites

Is there a favourite?

"Yes! The musician who has influenced me most is Semmangudi. But one musician whom I admire very much indeed, with whom I have never had an opportunity to study or even interact, is the one and only T. Brinda. You could say that she's a 'musician's musician'."

As you chip in to suggest that she excelled in singing padams, he adds, "Padam, yes, but not only padams. She was an impeccable artiste whose repertoire covered the whole canvas of Carnatic music. She was simply wonderful!"

Laughing, he agrees with you that Brindamma was a "tough lady." And she refused to compromise on the purity of her music for anyone or anything. "Even Semmangudi mama held her in awe. She is no more, but



## T.M. Krishna on the importance of finding the right mix between tradition and innovation.

her sister, Muktamma, lives in Chennai, very old but still a great musician."

Krishna's wife, Sangeetha, is also a professional singer. "She lived for a long time in Kochi and she was a pupil of Charumati Ramachandran."

## Style

One wonders if the GNB 'baani' of Charumati Ramachandran, which is totally different from Krishna's, has influenced his style of singing.

"I don't know. There may be some influence. People can usually make out that I am a Semmangudi pupil when they hear me sing, and some say they can see the influence of K.V. Narayanaswamy. But it is all basically music, you know. I feel that there is a place in music for all these elements.

You need 'briga', but only like you need pickles with your meal, it adds to the taste but it cannot be the main meal! You need tradition and you need innovation. I feel, ultimately, that it is all a matter of balance."

He adds, "Your balance need not be mine. It is very important to realise that. Every musician must find his own balance, and if he is to succeed in what he does, he must keep finding this anew from concert to concert. You can't, for instance, sing in the same way all the time. You have one kind of audience in the Navaratri Mandapam and another for a Soorya festival. You must find your balance with each of these different audiences. If you don't, you are lost."

• S. VINAYA KUMAR