

Vocalists reign supreme



ALAAP

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The recently concluded ITC Sangeet Sammelan, held at the Siri Fort Auditorium was a well-earned silver jubilee event for the Capital's most sought for annual festival of classical Indian music. Interestingly, this year's Sammelan was notable for the superb performances by the three vocalists from the Calcutta-based ITC's Sangeet Research Academy, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, Rashid Khan and Shashank Maktedar. The fourth Hindustani vocalist to perform was Pandit Jasraj. The festival was inaugurated by the elder Kirana doyen, Dr Pandit Firoz Dastoor who was honoured with this year's ITC Sangeet Sammelan Award for his valuable contribution towards the enrichment of Hindustani classical music.

The Sammelan commenced with young Shashank Maktedar's vocal recital with Khayals in ragas Chhayanat and Bahar. Maktedar is endowed with a mellifluous voice and good lung power, if his manner of full-throated singing, with neat diction, is any indication. Presently under the tutelage of Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar at the SRA, Maktedar showed much promise as a vocalist. Khayals in raga Chhayanat was a welcome change from some of the hybrid ragas which one had been frequently listening to in recent times.

The slow Khayal, "Karata ho mo se" was delineated with pleasingly inserted sequences in *alap-sargam-bole-taans* with good awareness of the raga's basic structure. One would have however liked the Chhaya-ang to be a bit more prominent and the Nat-ang a bit subdued. This famous composition, of Gwalior's repertoire, is usually handled in slow *ektal*. Rendering it into a medium tempo *jhumratal* did not fully reveal its charming structure. With four single-beat *tirakats* within the four bars of

the 14-beat tune cycle of *jhumratal* sounded a bit odd though. Raising the tempo latest on two or three occasions further marred the beauty of the composition. The tempo with which Maktedar commenced, continued and concluded the *jhumratal* composition would have better suited either in *ektal* of 12 beats or the *tilwadatal* of 16 beats with which the Gwalior singers handle such compositions.

Another factor which Maktedar would do well to observe is to handle the songs with balanced proportions. His renderings in slow composition seemed rather prolonged and the subsequent ones in faster tempos comparatively too brief. One *tarana* in raga Bahar would have been ideal and just adequate instead of another one in



Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar: showstealer

raga Chhaynat. He had commendable support on the harmonium by Jayram Potdar and on the tabla by Anand Gopal Bandopadhyaya.

Rashid Khan is now a fully grown and a well-matured vocalist to reckon with. Trained by the late Ustad Nissar Husain Khan of Badayun at the SRA, Rashid had the good fortune of being meticulously looked-after by the senior gurus in residence at the SRA. Singing with his rich-toned voice and confident mannerisms, Rashid provided a befitting treatment to the Khayals in raga Bageshwari. The reposedly rendered *alap-badhat* followed with brilliantly executed *taans* and *sargams* culminated into a well-architected image of the raga. All the three compositions, "Piyari piya

sang" in slow *ektal*, "Piyarawa ghara laage" and "Apani garaja" respectively in *drut tintal* and *drut ektal* were handled with compactness and intense melodic charm. Rashid's concluding number in Maru Bihag "Tarapata raiena dinaa" was however a weak finale to his otherwise impeccable rendering for which he had able support on the harmonium by Jyoti Goho and on the tabla by Tanmoy Bose.

The star of this year's Sammelan was the young SRA guru, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, who is today one of the highly proficient vocalists of the Gwalior style in Khayal singing with equally able grasp over the Jaipur Atrauli idiom as well. He has been fortunate in being meticulously trained by the late Pandit Gajanan Rao

Joshi of Aundh and by late Dr Ram Marathe. It was a rare privilege to listen to Kashalkar's full-throated renderings in raga Hamir, particularly the famous Khayal of Gwalior gharana, "Chameli phooli champa", which he embellished with many a refreshingly inserted phrasings in *badhat-taans-sargams*, all in balanced proportions. Season's raga Basant was a sheer delight for being sung with colourful nuances.

The *tilwadatal* composition ("Nabi ke Darbar") also a favourite of the Gwalior singers, followed with "Phagawa Brij dekho ko" in *madhya tintal* and the brisk tempo *tarana* in *tintal* came in handy to create the mood and spirit of the prevailing Basant or the spring season. Two compositions in raga Tilak Kamod set to *madhya jhaptal* ("Tiratha to sab karen") and the fast *tintal* one ("Aawata ghar"), both sung with intense melodic charm culminated into an excellent finale to Kashalkar's most memorable renderings at this silver jubilee Sammelan of the ITC.

Appearing as a last-minute substitute for Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, the Mewat vocalist, Pandit Jasraj, was a disappointment for his dull performance.