

Musical Comedy

You thought music was a serious business where there was no place for a few laughs? Think again. Open any music magazine, programme invitation, or newspaper review and announcements column, and, if you read the print carefully enough, mark my words, you'll be in splits! My mother and I can safely vouch for the fact that there is no better way to spend a lazy Sunday afternoon than to take the stack of music-related post that comes home and spot the typing errors- they can be quite hilarious.

The most common error in newspapers is where they make musicians magically change their specialities overnight. According to the newspapers, Chandana Bala (actually a vocalist) is a veena artiste, B. K. Raghu (violinist) is an excellent vocalist, and Pavandeep (vocalist) plays the flute! We appreciate that these musicians may have other hidden talents, but it would be good to check with them beforehand- I had one excited audience member come up to me once and say "I have heard you sing, and when I read in the paper that you were playing the violin today, I just HAD to come!" It was difficult to explain to her that on the one occasion that I have tried playing the violin, my mother had tears in her eyes- no, not from joy, but from pain! Sometimes, it is not just human beings who become instrumentalists. Sample this: "Vocal by Vid. so-and-so, violin by Ravindra Kalakshetra". Interesting, one would say. Where would they find a violin big enough to be played by a building? Simple-use Chowdiah Memorial Hall- it is shaped like a violin after all.

Another common occurrence is when names of people are mutilated beyond recognition. In all honesty, is my name –Manasi- very difficult to get right? But the invitations insist on having my name printed as Manasa, Manisha etc. Sometimes, they even change my gender and make me Manish. On occasion, my name has been misprinted in newspapers as that of fellow vocalist and friend, Maruti Prasad. Imagine the fate of poor fans of Maruti Prasad, coming expectantly, and finding me there! If this is the case with even a simple name like mine, I shudder to think what would happen if I had a name like Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar! I hope they did not have newspapers in his time. However, what had me in laughing out loud recently was when the name of one of the extremely gifted flautists of our generation was printed in an invitation as Vid. Chandan Sumar! I mean, Chandan Kumar's playing is as far from (Kannada) Sumar as can be, but I'm sure there may be some people who understandably would not want to attend a concert by someone whose name means 'very ordinary' !

It's not just artistes whose names are distorted. Have you heard of the great composers Muniswamy Dixitar and Shapa Shastry? I hope those great composers would see the lighter side of their names thus changed! One recent review proclaimed "the excellent Topi of Vidwan so-and-so left the audience spellbound". I started thinking that probably wearing caps (topis) was the new fashion statement of Carnatic musicians, before realising that the reviewer was just praising a good rendition of raga Todi!

Sometimes, organizers like to spice up their invitations by creating new musical instruments like Mrudanagam and Mrundga. Other times, there is "Grand Tala Vada" (instead of Tala Vadya). There are probably some people out there musing "I love Medu Vada, I should sample this Tala Vada also".

My guru, Vidwan R. K. Padmanabha has been at the receiving end of many printing errors, but being the good sport he is, he always takes it in his stride and laughs the loudest. On one of the numerous citations that he has received, he has been credited with establishing Sharada Coffee Kendra. Sometimes I think he would excel at that too, just as he has with Sharada Kala Kendra. A newspaper review once reported that "thousands of people gathered at Vadiraja Kata Bhavana for a concert". It is indeed ironic that people come to the divine environs of Vadiraja Kala Bhavana to forget their Kata (trouble)! Our dear Ananya has not been spared either. It has also been known as Anaya, Anya and even Anyaya!

Finally, Abhivyakti has also not been blameless. Particularly amusing was when the magazine reported a "wonderful dance trio recital by Sri Kiran Subramaniam, Smt. Sandhya Subramaniam and Sri Prasanna Kumar". Now, not only has Prasanna never danced in his life (he is a talented percussion artiste), but he was suffering from a leg injury at that time, making the report even funnier!

So organizers, reviewers, and newspaper editors, please continue with your good work. Without your knowledge, you have brightened up the lives of *rasikas* with the best medicine- laughter!

-Manasi Prasad

2nd December, 2006

Disclaimer: This article is just a light-hearted attempt at highlighting the inadvertent humour arising from printing errors. Any insult or offense is purely unintentional.