

Presidential address by Sangita Kalanidhi designate

Vidwan Sri. R K Shriramkumar

**at the 99th Annual Conference and Concerts
at the Music Academy Madras (15-12-2025)**

Shri Ganesha Sharada Gurubhyo namah.

Namaskarams and a very good evening to all of you.

Respected President of The Madras Music Academy Shri N Murali, esteemed Chief Guest, master composer, Oscar Awardee, Vidvan Shri A R Rahman, members of the executive committee, members of the experts' advisory committee, venerable Vidvans, Vidushis, dear friends and ardent rasikas, I deem it a great honour and blessing to stand before you today on this prestigious stage of the Music Academy, an organisation that has fostered the arts for nearly a century now. The honour of being chosen to preside over its 99th annual conference and receive the prestigious title of Sangita Kalanidhi makes me profusely elated and deeply humbled.

This great honour is due to the grace and blessings of Sri Sharadamba, all my gurus, and numerous well wishers from all over the world. Anantakoti namaskarams at the lotus feet of my revered Acharyas, Shri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Mahasvamigal, Shri Bharati Tirtha Mahasvamigal and Shri Vidhushekhar Bharati Mahasvamigal, the Jagadgurus of Dakshinamnaya Sringeri Shri Sharada Peetham, Their benevolent blessings, words of wisdom and unconditional kindness have always been my guiding force. Anantakoti namaskarams to Sri Vimarshanandanatha Sarasvati Mahasvamigal and the Acharyas of Bhaskara Prakasha Ashrama, Sri

Jnanananda Tirtha Mahasvamigal, Sri K R Yajnaratna Dikshitar and Sri K R Ramakrishna Dikshitar, in particular, for their generous, affectionate and profound guidance.

I bow my head in utmost reverence to my parents Smt Kusuma Krishnamurthy and Shri R V Krishnamurthy and to my gurus Vidushi Smt Savitri Satyamurthy, my grandfather Vidvan Shri R. K Venkatarama Shastry, Sangita Kalanidhi Shri D.K. Jayaraman and Vidvan Shri V.V.Subrahmanyam each of whom has sculpted me into who I am today.

Music, Carnatic music in particular, has been an integral part of our household. I am extremely fortunate to have been raised in an ambience of this wonderful art form. Growing up with music has been one of the greatest gifts in my life. An engineer by profession, my father was also a fine vocalist and my dynamic mother was a vina player. They sowed the seeds of this art form in me at a very early age. My sisters Srimathi, Lakshmi and Matangi have heartily supported my journey in music. My wife Akhila is my immense source of inspiring strength and support. I'm very thankful to all of them.

It was Smt Savithri Sathyamurthy who laid the foundation for my violin playing. Holding my hand with love, she imparted the early lessons and exercises.

Later, coming under the wings of my illustrious grandfather Vidvan Shri R

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K Venkatarama Shastri opened up a panoramic view of the world of carnatic music. He was not just a violinist. A highly respected Vidvan of his times, his holistic knowledge and vision of the art was amazingly inspiring. A strict disciplinarian and a rigorous teacher, he imparted focus and discipline, while also setting the tone for my musical integrity. A deeply devout and spiritual man, his reverence in performing the Shri Tyagarajavasmi Aradhana at Tiruvaiyyaru for many years has blessed our family with a lot of goodness. It has also subsequently brought the good fortune of me performing the Aradhana for many years now. His deep insight into carnatic music, be it about the colossal compositions, or manodharma, has inspired me to appreciate and delve deeper into the nuances of the art form in its varied dimensions. His presence gave me the opportunity to interact with several maestros of the carnatic world and benefit from their musical erudition. The guidance I have received from reputed musicians within my own family such as my grand uncles Shri R K Narayanaswamy, Shri R K Ramanathan, Sangita Kalanidhi Shri. R. K. Srikantan, my uncles Sangita Kala Acharyas Shri R N Thyagarajan and R N Taranathan, Shri R S Ramakant, my aunts Dr R N Srilata, Smt Ratnamala Prakash has been invaluable. With this kind of exposure into the hallowed world of Carnatic music, in-house, as it were, began my fledgling steps into what has blossomed into a lifelong passion, something that defines me, and verily gives meaning to my existence.

It was again my grandfather's vision for me that eventually led me to seek the guidance of other musicians to broaden my vistas.

One of the most precious moments in my life was coming under the tutelage of

Sangita Kalanidhi Shri D K Jayaraman . A guru whose care and concern for his students remain unmatched, Sri DKJ imparted more than music. The strong foundation in vocal music that he laid and the care he took in building my repertoire with the numerous compositions that he taught without holding back, have enriched me profusely. His unbounded generosity in having me, a youngster at that time, as his violin accompanist for most of his concerts, brought me into a space where the carnatic world set its eyes on me. Introducing me to many senior musicians that included his own eminent sister Sangita Kalanidhi Smt D K Pattammal, teaching me life lessons, providing me with every kind of support, be it musical, professional or even emotional, and radiating the joy of music and life are among the countless ways he has blessed me.

Learning from Vidvan Shri V V Subrahmanyam has been priceless. A Nada yogi that he is, his music transcends the mundane and transforms into an everlasting blissful experience. A complete musician, his playing defines the art of violin playing, showcasing perfect technique and profound music. Apart from his mellifluous solo renditions, the experience of his violin playing merging in unison with the vocalist, resonating like a second voice stands unparalleled. This has been one of my deepest influences, impressing upon me the need for immense sensitivity and poise, while accompanying and performing solo.

Sangita Kalanidhi Smt M S Subbulakshmi has been a constant presence in our household. Right from when I was in my mother's womb, I have soaked in her blissful music all my life. Her presence in my life has been ubiquitous. Learning from her, performing with her and being

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a recipient of her limitless affection and care is a huge privilege for which I'm very grateful.

I have also had the exceptional good fortune to be associated closely and accompany in concerts doyens such as Sangita Kalanidhis Shri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Smt D K Pattammal, Smt T Brinda and Shri K V Narayanaswamy. To sit at their feet and learn music, that was burnished with their long-lasting experience, was something very special. The collection of compositions and the artistry of music that each one of them has imparted, so meticulously and lovingly remain with me as priceless treasures for which I'm ever grateful. These were all moments of intense engagement with the art form. The love and care they showered on me in addition to generously sharing their vidvat, shaped my sensibilities, both musical and otherwise.

I have also received reflective counsel from Sangita Kalanidhi Shri T N Krishnan. Having grown up idolising his style, his music has left indelible imprints on my own. Also, I have drawn much from the spirit of Vidushi Smt N Rajam's exquisite violin artistry.

Words cannot do justice to the role that my Gurus have played in moulding me. It fills my heart with immense gratitude to reminisce about them.

I am very thankful for the support that I have always received from senior musicians such as Sangita Kalanidhis Smt R Vedavalli, Shri N Ramani, Sri T Viswanathan, Sangita Kala Acharyas Smt T Mukta, Smt Rama Ravi and Smt Suguna Varadachari, Shri V Subrahmaniam, Smt Ritha Rajan and Smt R S Jayalakshmi ; Vidushis Smt Nirmala Sundararajan, Smt Sugandha Kalamegham, Smt Parassala Ponnammal, Sangita Kalanidhis Smt Sudha

Ragunathan, Smt Aruna Sairam, Vidvan Alepey Venkatesan and others. I have also enjoyed the privilege of sharing the stage with esteemed veteran percussionists.

To have a good group of peers with whom one can have a meaningful and symbiotic relationship is a joy and delight - Vijay, (with whom I performed my very first concert on a Shankara Jayanti day), Sanjay, Unnikrishnan, Jayashri, Sowmya, Nityashri, Sangeetha, Krishna, K K Ravi, Vittal Ramamurthy, J Vaidhyanathan, Arunprakash, Manoj, Varadarajan, Karthick, Purushotham, K R Subrahmanyam, V Lakshminarayanan, Savita & V Kartikeyan, and Nandini & Harish are amongst those with whom I have shared music passionately. The numerous discussions and debates, sharing the stage with them, listening to concerts and simply spending time with them are memorable moments that I deeply cherish.

The Youth Association for Classical Music, that we were all part of, was a splendid movement that united us with music and a spirit of camaraderie.

My music was also much nurtured and encouraged at my school, Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan and later at the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda college. Mrs YGP, my teachers at school and my professors at college always urged me to pursue my passion.

Performing at diverse famed venues, around the world, including the United Nations at New York, where I performed alongside Smt Sudha Raghunathan for the centenary of Sangita Kalanidhi Smt M S Subbulakshmi, presented by Sankara Nethralaya, has been a rewarding experience that has drawn me close to several connoisseurs of art.

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I acknowledge with thankfulness the unflinching support extended to me by various sabha organisers and knowledgeable rasikas world over.

My association with the Music Academy goes back a long way. Since my school days, every single day of the December season would be spent at the academy along with my grandfather. I have literally grown up here listening to several concerts at this wonderful auditorium. In fact two photographs taken at this venue are very dear to me. One, me as a 10 year old, seated with all the greats during the group photo session in the year Smt T Brinda was awarded the Sangita Kalanidhi. The other, me as an 11 year old, with Smt M L Vasanthakumari just after she received the Sangita Kalanidhi.

Participating in the music competitions conducted by the Academy was joyfully challenging and something that I looked forward to. It was in the year 1986 when I was singing, at the behest of the judge Vidvan Shri Tanjore Upendran, for the participants of the mridangam competition, that something interesting unfolded. I was led away from the competition room and ushered on to this stage to accompany Smt Nagalakshmi Lakshmanan as the scheduled violin accompanist did not show up. It is quite interesting that I played my first concert at the Academy with a borrowed instrument and even borrowed attire! From then, my performances at the Academy has been an unbroken sequence.

This year marks the 250th birth anniversary of Shri Muttusvami Dikshitar. It is my blessed fortune that I belong to Shri Dikshitar's illustrious shishya parampara through my esteemed gurus Sangita Kalanidhis Shri D K Jayaraman & Smt D K Pattammal and Vidvan Shri V V Subrahmanyam. Having had

an opportunity to learn in depth and internalise the compositions of Dikshitar, I deem it a great blessing to receive the honour this year. The music of the Trinity is beyond compare. Their music has been preserved and passed on to the future generations by their shishya paramparas to which the world of carnatic music should be ever indebted. Shri Subbarama Dikshitar, hailing from the family of Muttusvami Dikshitar, has gifted us with the magnum opus Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini. It is an authentic treasury of the compositions of Shri Muttusvami Dikshitar and other great composers, as well as a comprehensive treatise on sangita lakshana. The study of the Pradarshini is very vital to the understanding of the Dikshitar parampara in particular. Thanks to the Music Academy, the original Telugu edition has been translated into English, thereby enabling a wider access to this monumental publication.

The Dikshitar tradition is also an inspiration to the art of violin playing. Contributions from countless musicians down the ages have shaped and perfected the art of violin making and performance. We owe much to all those who have put in their life and soul into perfecting this. That the violin complements vocal music in all its gamaka subtleties has made it an integral and indispensable part of carnatic concerts today. One style of playing emphasises the gayaki bani on the violin - to play in the manner in which one renders the music vocally. The other style is focussed towards exploring the violin in its instrumental dimensions. While the latter is also charming in its own way, with great musicians having mastered it, I personally resonate with the gayaki bani. As with any instrument, the violin also demands specific fingering and bowing techniques to play the gayaki bani. Students who wish to adopt this

bani should learn and practice, in the appropriate manner to bring out all the nuances of this style. Also, training in vocal music is absolutely essential for the violinist to bring out the bhava or emotion in the playing.

Every genre of music has its greatness, its intrinsic beauty- something that makes it rare and special. Carnatic music, as a genre, is characterised by its unique soundscape, gamaka structures, compositional masterpieces and rhythmic intricacies. It is of paramount importance that this beautiful soundscape is never sacrificed in a performance. Cross cultural, multi genre concerts are interesting experiments. They do serve as a conduit to taking Carnatic music to a global stage, to varied audiences, earning their adulation and applause. But one must be careful to ensure that the integrity of the Carnatic sound, the crest jewel of the art form remains intact.

Every raga is beautiful. The realm of carnatic music is defined by a deeper understanding of raga. While we have seen the emergence of multiple new scales, garbed into a raga form we have several ancient rakti ragas that are shelved for reasons unknown. It would be heartening to listen to these ragas being delineated and presented in all their grandeur in concert performances. Likewise, several beautiful compositions by great vaggeyakaras that have never seen the light of day, should also be presented in concerts.

Carnatic music has the most enjoyable blend of the kalpita and kalpana elements. The ability to blend both these elements in good measure is the true hallmark of a musician.

The intricacies of myriad languages are seen in compositions. One has to appreciate the beauty of every language.

Sahitya and sangita are of equal importance in a composition. It is only in taking due cognizance of both that one can experience a composition in its entirety. Great vaggeyakaras have given us much to marvel at in their works - raga, tala, bhava, yati, prasa, shlesha, prayoga etc.

Art thrives on imagination and interpretation. But, it is important to temper one's freedom to improvise with restraint and respectful refinement. The pinnacle of creativity should be laced by the golden arc of thoughtful discernment, a quality that defines the true calibre of a musician. Kalidasa in his *Malavikagnimitram* says

पुराणमित्येव न साधु सर्वं
न चापि काव्यं नवमित्यवद्यम् ।
सन्तः परीक्ष्यान्यतरङ्गं जन्ते
मूढः परप्रत्ययनेयवुद्धिः ॥

Not everything that is ancient is necessarily sacrosanct nor are newer ideas to be summarily rejected. To eschew simplistic dichotomy and adopt an unbiased introspective bent of mind will undoubtedly open up delectable dimensions of the art, never experienced before. Any meaningful artistic pursuit needs both roots and wings. True intellectual and artistic maturity lies in the dexterous balance of these polar opposites. The path to this inner search for a musician lies in complete surrender and implicit devotion to the tenets of the art form. This attribute enables musicians to carve a niche for themselves.

When one submits oneself respectfully and with a sense of joyous abandon to the art form, the psyche of the musician naturally transcends all disparities. In the sublimity and the ecstatic heights that the music uplifts them to, mundane and trivial differences lose their ground. It will be a milestone when the artistic fraternity

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achieves this state and I am supremely optimistic that the day will dawn soon.

The musician or an artiste is not merely a performer. A concert is as much an educative experience as it is entertaining. It is the responsibility of the musician to retain the integrity of the art form, not compromise on values, elevate the rasikatvam and create an experience that is ethereal. A concert is a beautiful space where artists blend, with their skills, thought processes and imagination, to create in tandem, an atmosphere of pure joy. It is neither a cacophonous war zone, nor a competition to prove one's mettle, pitching oneself against the other. It is a mutually respectful dialogue with one another that stimulates each of the artists to give their best, and engages the audience. Such a concert will pave the way for the audience to receive the music happily sans any kind of pre-conceived notions.

Each musician has a streak of creativity to compose. That can be inspired by an exquisite raga phrase or a rare linguistic find. My tryst with composing and setting to tune has been unequivocally inspired by the Sangita and Sahitya of the greats. It is important to internalize the grammar of composing. Designing a musical attire to poetry is an art by itself, one that involves understanding the spread of the lyric, the spirit of the language and most importantly the emotion of the poetry that is to be set to music. Perhaps the most important thing to remember in this context is to understand that this is an exercise to give shape to our creative instincts and not an arena to proclaim one's prowess.

We live in the era of social media. It is an undeniable fact that while it has its advantages, it also serves to influence and shape reality, in rather unfortunate ways.

It is not uncommon to see instances where a frenzied hype is created, or mediocrity is fanned and even worshipped. Young minds are swayed, intimidated by this force. There has been many an instance when I have seen youngsters, depressed, desperate, and disillusioned by the overwhelming impact of social media. One moment of thoughtlessness can have far reaching implications. It is important for both artists and rasikas to be cognisant of the ramifications of their actions when engaging with social media.

We owe it to our students to make their musical journey a safe, and pleasant experience. I have been blessed with extremely talented students, most of them professional performing star musicians. Sharing music with my disciples is always soul satiating. Basking in their love and affection is one of the ineffable joys of my life.

Art, especially carnatic music, has been chiseled and crafted by the Gods and the greats. To partake of this ambrosia that is Carnatic music is inexplicable bliss.

“svara rAga sudhA rasa yuta bhakti svargApavargamurA”

I thank the President and the committee members of the Music Academy for bestowing me with this prestigious honor. The morning sessions this year are dedicated to Shri Muttusvami Dikshitar. We have a fascinating line up of lecture demonstrations that will be presented by eminent musicians and scholars, promising a fund of information and learning. I seek the grace of God and my Gurus, and everyone's good wishes for the successful conduct of the 99th annual conference and concerts of the Music Academy.

Namaskarams once again.



R K Shriramkumar Sangita Kalanidhi Awardee

Born on October 4, 1966, at Madras to Kusuma and R.V. Krishnamurthy, Shriramkumar comes from the Rudrapatnam lineage that has given us many great musicians. He holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the Vivekananda College, Madras.

Shriramkumar had his training on the violin first under Vidushi Savitri Satyamurthy and then came under the tutelage of his grandfather, Vidwan R.K. Venkatarama Shastry who was a disciple of Sangita Kalanidhi-s Mysore Vasudevachar and T. Chowdiah and Vidwan Veena Subbanna. He thus traces his musical lineage to Tyagaraja. He then trained on the violin under Vidwan V.V. Subrahmanyam and in vocal music under Sangita Kalanidhi D.K. Jayaraman.

Embarking as a concert violinist, Shriramkumar possesses a remarkable record – he has shared the stage with 37 Sangita Kalanidhi-s and 26 Sangita Kala Acharya-s and one lifetime achievement awardee of the Music Academy. He continues to remain a much sought after violinist who accompanies a wide range of artistes.

Apart from his concert career, Shriramkumar is known for his vast repertoire and in particular his in-depth knowledge and emphasis on the pathanthara of compositions of the Carnatic Trinity. He is much in demand as a presenter on various topics related to music. He has set to tune several songs available only in lyrical form, starting with those of the Jagadguru-s of the Sringeri Sarada Peetham. He is a vaggeyakara himself with compositions to his credit. He is a much sought-after guru, with several students of his being busy concert artistes themselves.

The Music Academy, Madras, confers on him the title of Sangita Kalanidhi.

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Sangita Kalanidhis, Kala Acharyas and
Lifetime Achievement Awardee with whom
Vidvan RK Shriramkumar has shared the stage
Accompanied Sangita Kalanidhi -s

Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer	Smt S Sowmya
Smt M S Subbulakshmi	Sri Neyveli Santanagopalan
Smt D K Pattammal	Smt Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi
Smt T Brinda	Smt Bombay Jayashri Ramnath
Sri M Balamuralikrishna	Sri T M Krishna
Sri K V Narayanaswamy	Shared the stage with percussionists
Sri B Rajam Iyer	Sangita Kalanidhi-s
Sri T Vishwanathan	Sri T K Murthy
Sri D K Jayaraman	Sri Umayalpuram K Sivaraman
Sri Nedunuri Krishnamurthy	Sri Vellore Ramabhadran
Smt Mani Krishnaswami	Sri Palghat Raghu
Sri R K Srikantan	Sri Trichy Sankaran
Sri N Ramani	Sri T V Gopalakrishnan
Sri T K Govinda Rao	Sri Thiruvaarur Bakthavathsalam
Smt R Vedavalli	Accompanied Sangita Kala Acharya-s
Smts Sikkil Kunjumani and Neela (Sikkil Sisters)	Sri S Rajam
Sri T V Sankaranarayanan	Smt T Mukta
Sri M Chandrasekaran	Sri Tanjavur Sankara Iyer
Sri T N Seshagopalan	Sri S R Janakiraman
Smts C Saroja and C Lalita (Bombay Sisters)	Sri Kolkata K S Krishnamurthy
Sri Trichur Ramachandran	Sri P S Narayanaswamy
Smt Sudha Ragunathan	Sri Chengalpet Ranganathan
Sri T V Gopalakrishnan	Smt Kalpakam Swaminathan
Sri Sanjay Subrahmanyam	Sri T R Subrahmanyam
Smt Aruna Sairam	Sri B V Raman
	Smt Seetha Rajan

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Sri V Subrahmanyam	Smt Ritha Rajan
Smt Suguna Varadachari	Smt R S Jayalakshmi
Smt Neela Ramgopal	Smt Geetha Raja
Smt Rama Ravi	With percussionists Sangita Kala
Smt Alamelu Mani	Acharya -s
Smt Nagamani Srinath	Sri T H Vinayakaram (also lifetime achievement awardee)
Rudrapatnam Brothers Sri R N	Sri T H Subhash Chandran
Tyagarajan and Sri R N Taranathan	Sri Kamalakar Rao
Sri K Venkataramanan	Sri Tanjavur Ramdas
Smt Seetha Narayanan	