

23RD Tyagaraja Aradhana at the Balaji Temple, Aurora

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Chicago IL: Sri Venkateswara Swamy (Balaji) Temple, Aurora, Illinois observed Tyagaraja Aradhana on Saturday, January 21; this was the 23rd year of this event at the temple. On the Indian (Hindu) calendar *Pushya Bahula Panchami* marks the day *Carnatic* music's Saint-Composer Tyagaraja attained Samadhi in the year 1847 at Tiruvaiyaru in Tamil Nadu, India. Accordingly, devotees of *Carnatic* music and Saint Tyagaraja all over the world observe the Aradhana around this time. On Saturday about a hundred and forty people performed Saint Tyagaraja's Kritis in programs that lasted about eight hours.

Balaji temple follows its own unique tradition of the Aradhana. The program started promptly at 11 AM with Sita Rama Kalyanam. At appropriate points during the Kalyanam, a group of seven children rendered four Utsava Sampradaya Kritis (USK) of the Saint – Shobhaane (*Pantuvarali*), Nagumomu galavani (*Madhyamavati*), Kouvai unnaade (*Devagandhari*) and Sita Kalyana Vaibhogame (*Kurinji*). These haunting melodies elevated the Sita Kalyanam to a delightful marriage of music and ritual.

After the Sita Kalyanam, the program continued at the *Sannidhi*, as done in Tiruvaiyaru, with Chelulara (*Kharaharapriya*) performed by a violin-led group, followed by Guruleka (*Gouri manohari*) violin solo. The Pancharatna Kriti group was next, in which about fifty people participated – including three veenas, a violin, a flute, a mridangam and a khanjira. At the end of this the children's group offered the mangalam Avani suta (*Nadanamakriya*).

Tyagaraja Ganotsavam started at 1:30 PM in the Veluchami Auditorium of the temple. This program consisted of groups and individuals each doing one Tyagaraja Kriti. About ninety people participated, many of whom were highly placed in Jaya TV's *Carnatic Music Idol of USA* program broadcast from Chennai, India. There were also a very large number of children just taking baby steps into the ocean of *Carnatic* music. To infuse confidence and to nudge them along, one of the teachers employed an audacious technique – that of sitting directly in front of the group and audibly vocalizing the songs while explicitly slapping the *tala*, as the little ones followed their leader note for note– the bolder and more strident ones carrying along their timorous brothers and sisters. There was a preponderance of video and still cameras carried by young parents tearfully shooting every syllable uttered by their precious offspring, often tripping over one another to secure a vantage point.

As everyone performed, their names, songs, *ragas* and *talas* were projected on a large display, keeping the neophytes better informed of what was going on. Every proud participant got a printed certificate.

The list of performers and their time slots was posted on the walls and it showed that the *Ganotsavam* progressed like clock-work. The end came ahead of schedule, with Gitarthamu (*Surati*), *Madhyamavati* and the Nee nama rupa mulaku (*Sowrashtram*) mangalam.

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