

A Journey Down Spiritual Lane

Hail to our Musical Charioteers

By Dr. Tara Singh

Bhakti Sargam was billed as the most spectacular Indo-Caribbean cultural show in New York for the decade. And it lived up to the organizers' as well as, the audience's expectations.

Over 600 devotion-proned song enthusiasts, watched and listened with rapt attention to the captivating and soul-stirring renditions of the irresistible dynamic trio, Pt Shri Prakash Gossai, Pt Rajin Balgobind, and Pt Munelal Maharaj, referred to as "Spiritual and Musical Ambassadors of Hinduism," on an evening that turned out to be unforgettable. It was the first time that the three cultural stalwarts, who also share a common experience of being trained in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Hindu Philosophy in India, had performed on the same stage in New York.

Who said that only Bollywood can produce such a classic! They were wrong. They had underestimated the creative capacity of our people. Bhakti Sargam was produced by an Indo-Caribbean "visionary," Mr Vijay Bisram, who, with the help of the Angels Caribbean Group of Companies (ACGC), pulled all the stops to help make his first cultural production a remarkable success. Even the heavens smiled on this project, as the erratic cold and windy weather of the past days, gave way to less chilly and more typical spring weather on Saturday, April 5, 2008.

And nature's bounty did not stop there. It also crept into the Rich-

mond Hill High School Auditorium where the Bhakti Sargam's stage arrangement--with mounted dais for performers and flood lights for greater resolution--lent class and professionalism to the proceedings. The audience also had the luxury of watching the program transmitted simultaneously on the wide-screen monitors that were installed at the front on each side of the auditorium.

According to Vijay Bisram, the main motive for doing Bhakti Sargam was to "bring together some of the great leaders of Hinduism, and to spread the teachings and philosophy of Sanatan Dharma in the community." Others viewed the occasion as a great moment to ascend into musical and perhaps, spiritual ecstasy in the company of their favorite devotional singers. Whatever the motive, it was a triumph not only for the organizers, but also, for the Hindu community, which had admirably demonstrated that there will always be an exalted place for devotional songs in our hearts.

The audience's appetite for uplifting moments, was spruced up by scintillating dance performances. An elegant invocation, the "vandana," performed by the Sahara Dance Troupe, set the program into high gear. That was followed by another richly choreographed devotional dance by Nanda Ashley Rai. Popular Trinidadian singer,

Rooplal Girdhari, suppressed his urge for chutney, and rendered instead, four bhajans in keeping with the theme of Bhakti Sargam. Rooplal was accompanied by the Angels Orchestra, with Venod Bisram on keyboard 1, Atma Balkarran on Keyboard 2, Vikash Misir on Percussion, Ramesh on Guitar, Narendra on Harmonium, and Dexter Raghunandan on the tabla. Geeta Bisram of ACGC sang two bhajans, one of which was dedicated to her Mom.

To build further on the momentum, two young ladies of the Sahara Dance Group performed, with deftness, the "tarana." Not to be outdone though, the Natraj dancers (comprising 7 young ladies), maintained the high standard by displaying their usual finesse, when rendering a devotional dance in semi-classical fashion. All the dancers received resounding ovation from the capacity audience. One could have sensed though that the audience needed more sparks and seemed anxious for the appearance of the featured artistes. But their misgiving would not last for long.

The Emcee, Mr Kishore Seunarine, witty and fully engaged, eventually introduced a featured artiste, Pt Rajin Balgobind, who rendered over six well known bhajans, and offered brief explanations, paying bountiful adorations to Lord Krishna, for the benefit of those of us who don't know Hindi. He was accompanied by two female backup singers. As Pt Rajin sang, he moved his hands and head in symmetry with the music, something which helped to further animate the colorful and mixed audience. Pt Rajin was enthusiastically received, and so were Pt Munelal and Pt Prakash.



Pt Prakash Gossai & Pt Munelal Maharaj



Pt Rajin Balgobind

Time was running out, so organizers had to cut out a few dances to allow the two other featured artistes reasonable time to perform, so as not to disappoint the huge audience. Pt Prakash and Pt Munelal shared the stage, and quickly recognized that they must continue the journey into ecstasy, and therefore, rendered alternately, well-known bhajans that maintained the electrifying atmosphere. It was also fitting that they joined together to sing a famous bhajan, "Mailee Chaadar," as a tribute to the late Hari Om Sharan, and also, to bring the program to an end on a high note.

Pt Prakash and Pt Munelal were accompanied by three female backup singers. They too, explained the meanings of their bhajans and encouraged the audience to proudly uphold their culture and dharma.

What else can one ask for having a marvelous evening of entertainment? Or, as others call it, a journey down the spiritual lane? There were excellent dances, great devotional songs, expert musicians, and a professional production, all of which moved in harmony. And the talented artistes were hurled onto a pedestal, with the fervent hope that they will remain there for a long time.

It's no exaggeration to say that they (artistes) and the audience would rather be at no other place in the world at that time, than at the Bhakti Sargam Program. One could sense the elation, as well as, the aesthetic craving of the audience for the journey to continue.

The producer, Vijay Bisram, commended all the artistes, his advertisers, sponsors, ACGC and its musicians, and the audience for their magnificent support. Vijay also apologized for the 200+ patrons who

were turned away because the auditorium seats were sold out.

In addition, he announced an upcoming event, called Kirtan Sammelan, that is scheduled for June, 2008 at Smokey Park, with the help of Frank Singh. For our part, we congratulate Vijay Bisram, the producer, and all the wonderful artistes and musicians who joined together to make Saturday, April 5th a memorable and historic day.

Keep on shining!



Geeta Bisram

A section of the audience

