

# Kutcheri Kaleidoscope

*By: P.P.Kanthan\**

Having had the good fortune to savour for many years the sublime (and occasionally not so sublime) Carnatic music that is heard in Chennai and elsewhere, I have been struck by the bewildering variety of audience types and audience behaviour observed at concerts. The following observations on the audience types and their reaction may interest the general body of concert-goers. I would, however, like to stress at the outset that no offence is meant towards anyone and that the sole aim of this article is to help enhance the musical joy of concert-listeners.

The most passive type of audience member can be called the 'reading type', who keeps reading a book or a magazine quietly, although sometimes whispering the words or turning the pages audibly. Then there is the 'encroaching' type, who would like to rest both hands on his chair handles, allowing no elbow space for neighbours; the 'finicky' type, such as the lady who is reported to have insisted on being flanked only by ladies on both sides; the 'annoying' type, who claims another's seat on the ground that his own defective vision requires his sitting close to the artistes, or his weak hearing demands sitting straight in front of the loudspeakers; the 'garrulous' type, who keeps chatting away somewhat loudly on all and sundry matters; the 'singing along' type, who hums the ongoing raga or the krithis, often at a tangential Sruti; the 'guessing' type, whose audible guess of the raga has a broad spectrum; the 'inquisitive' type, who keeps asking for the names of the ragas or other information; the 'critical' type, who openly criticizes the performers; the 'nostalgic' type, who bemoans the disappearance of the artistes of a former era; the 'thala enthusiast', who cannot help keeping an aggressive thala count, that perilously extends to the neighbour's lap; the 'tit-bit munching' type who acts as a catalyst in switching the thoughts of those nearby from the music to the canteen; the 'bad odour radiator', who unwittingly sends out bad odour, when you have to take an evasive action and turn your face towards the other side; the 'showy' type, who, if a woman, wears the latest fashion attire, a dazzling sari or a sparkling ornament and hair over-decked with flowers, and if a man, prominently browses the latest model of mobile phone, occasionally showing off his gold chain or wrist watch, sometimes with an unsolicited chat about when and where the item was bought; the 'seat reserving' type, who keeps a handkerchief or other personal item on a seat and turns up at his or her own sweet time to claim the seat; the 'VIP' type, who invariably walks in after the performance starts and makes sure he is escorted to a front row seat; the 'walk out' type who walks out at will, such as when the thani avarthanam starts and comes back either when it is over or whenever he chooses.

Fortunately for Carnatic music, there are many genuine rasikas forming the majority of the audience, who are well conversant with the nuances of the melody and the intricacies of the rhythm, who gently sway their heads in unison with the music and break into an occasional, muffled 'aha' or 'shabash', deriving a supreme bliss in the process.

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