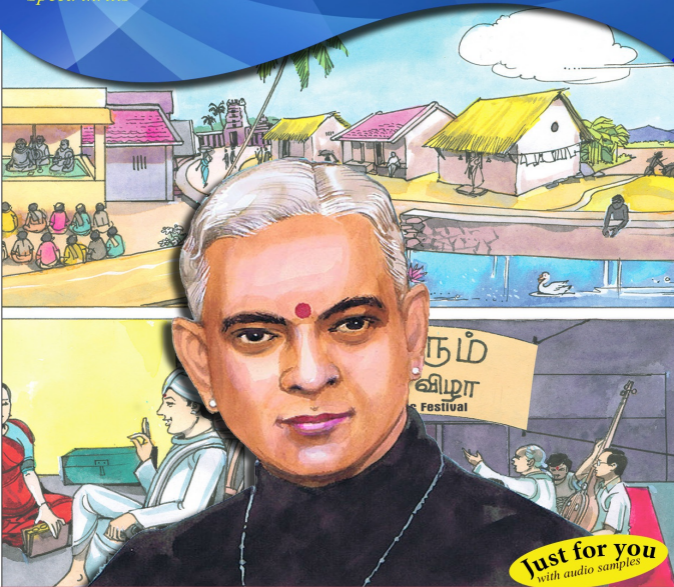


PICTURES
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Centenary Special - 2010

G.N. BALASUBRAMANIAM

Speed thrills



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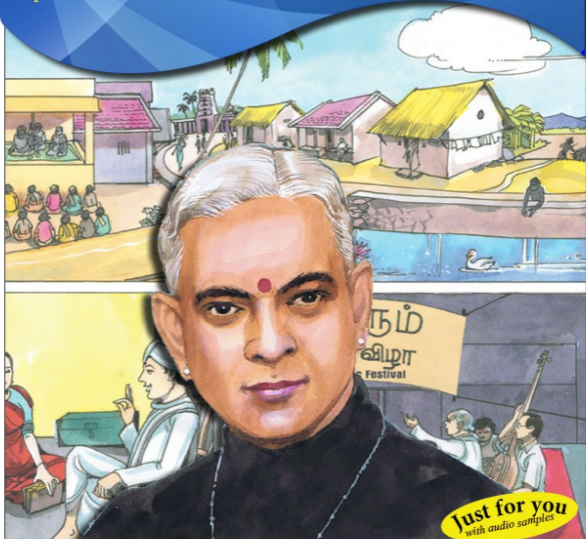
CONCEPT, RESEARCH & TEXT: LAKSHMI DEVNATH

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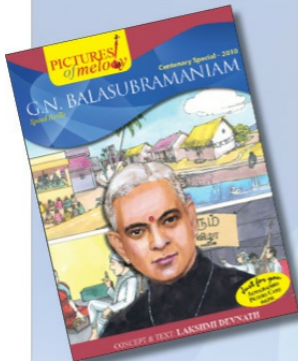
G.N. BALASUBRAMANIAM

Speed thrills



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CONCEPT, RESEARCH & TEXT: LAKSHMI DEVNATH



G N Balasubramaniam Carnatic music was never the same after him

At the Kapali temple...

"Vatapi Ganapatim"

"Sabash!"

"What a voice!"

"Brigas at the speed of lightning."

"And he is so handsome!"

"Who is he?"

"GNB"



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Gudalur, a small village near Tanjavur... the hotbed of Carnatic music.



Sabash ! You sing so well.

Getting a compliment from him is like winning an award.

GV Narayanaswamy Iyer and his wife Visalakshi belonged to Gudalur.



Even vidwans* were in awe of Narayanaswamy Iyer . Such was his musical knowledge.

*expert musicians

Remarkably, he was not a professional musician. He was a school teacher in Kumbakonam...



...and spent his spare time interacting with musical greats like Tirukkodikkaval Krishna Iyer* and Sarabha Sastrigal.**



*Violinist (1857-1913) **Hautist (1872-1904)

One day...

By the grace of God, a son has been born to us. We shall call him Balasubramaniam.

This son of Narayanaswamy Iyer and Visalam would grow up to be the famous musician Gudalaur Narayanaswamy Balasubramaniam - **GNB**

Soon after, Narayanaswamy Iyer made an important decision.

Visalam, I think we should move to Madras. It will benefit us in many ways.

As you wish.

In Madras, Narayanaswamy Iyer joined Hindu High School, Triplicane*, as a Math teacher. The family moved into a house in the same area.

Visalam, our neighbours are the great violinists Karur Chinnaswamy Iyer** and Madurai Subramanya Iyer!***

Music all around us.

Visalam was absolutely right.

*Tiruvallikeri; ** & ***date not known

A few days later...

Sabash! Parthasarathy Swami Sabha* conducts its music programmes at my school. An added bonus.

I would like to serve the Sabha.

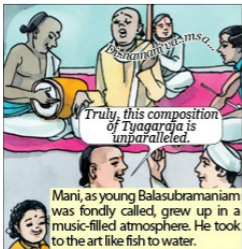
Narayanaswamy Iyer became a secretary of the Sabha.

*oldest sabha in Chennai, founded in 1901

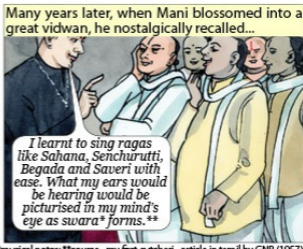
His musical knowledge was such that the Madras Music Academy invited him to be a member of their Experts Committee. He wrote many articles for their prestigious journal.



The front hall of Narayanaswamy Iyer's house was always filled with musicians. They had a great time, singing and comparing notes.



Mani, as young Balasubramaniam was fondly called, grew up in a music-filled atmosphere. He took to the art like fish to water.

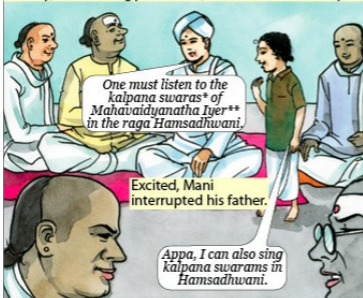


*musical notes; **source - my first cutcheri - article in tamil by GNB (1957)



Mani's voice had a natural roll to it. It sounded fabulous.

One day, while walking past the hall, Mani heard his father say..



One must listen to the kalpana swaras* of Mahavaidyanatha Iyer** in the raga Hamsadhwani.

Excited, Mani interrupted his father.

Appa, I can also sing kalpana swarams in Hamsadhwani.

Shhh! How many times have I told you not to interrupt when elders are speaking!

Narayanaswamy don't curb the child's enthusiasm. Mani, come here. Sing a few swaras.



But Sabesa Iyerval*...

*imaginative patterns of musical notes presented as part of a concert; **vocalist and harikatha exponent (1844-1893)

*vocalist (1872-1948)



Besh, Besh! Narayanaswamy, start music lessons for this boy immediately. He is very gifted.

Garu ni nini

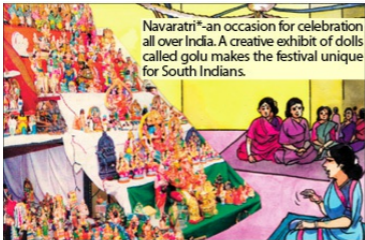
Narayanaswamy Iyer forthwith started music lessons for his son.



He also arranged for him to learn from Madurai Subramania Iyer and Karur Chinnaswami Iyer.



Indeed, Mani's childhood was filled with joy and melody.



Navaratri*-an occasion for celebration all over India. A creative exhibit of dolls called golu makes the festival unique for South Indians.

*nine-day festival in honour of Devi, the mother Goddess

Visalam never kept a formal golu but had her own way of celebrating the festival.



Mani, don't shake your head. Let me fuck in this peacock feather. There is my little Krishna!

Everyday, Visalam would dress her little boy up in imaginative costumes and send him to visit houses in the neighbourhood.



Young Mani loved these jaunts. It was not just about the costumes. He looked forward to singing at every house that had a golu*.

*it is a common practice for visitors to sing at golus

One day however, he returned home, weeping.



Kanna*, what happened? Why are you crying?

Why have you come here to sing uninvited?

That mami in the next street scolded me.

*a term of endearment

Visalam was hurt.



Wipe your tears, kanna. You don't have to go anywhere. From now on, we will have our own golu. Sing at home to your heart's content.

Thankfully, that Mami was an exception. Almost everyone loved Mani's music.

Soon eleven-year old Mani became a favourite at school plays. In those days dramas invariably included songs.



Once more!
Once more!!

God! This is the fifth encore. Will we ever get to watch the rest of the play?

Enthused by such appreciation, Mani worked harder at his music.



Chari... ni... Te... Jusu...
fo... ni

He delighted in rolling out phrases at breathtaking speed.

Mani, how many times have I told you not to sing at this breakneck speed!



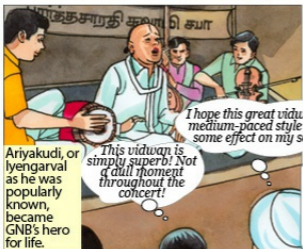
That's a wind instrument!

But...

I give up. Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar* is singing at the Sabha today. Hurry up and get ready.

But yesterday, didn't a nagaswara vidwan play the same song at this speed dppa?

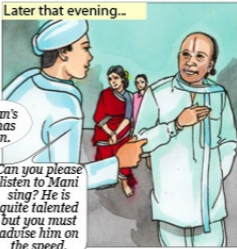
*vocalist (1890-1967)



Ariyakudi, or Iyengarval as he was popularly known, became GNB's hero for life.

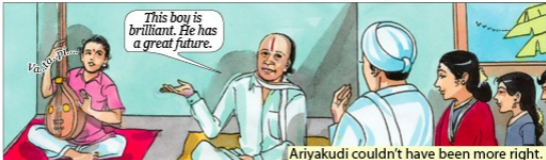
This vidwan is simply superb! Not a dull moment throughout the concert!

I hope this great vidwan's medium-paced style has some effect on my son.



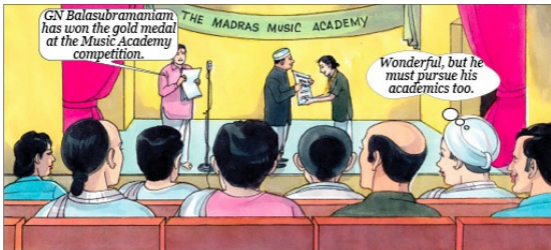
Later that evening...

Can you please listen to Mani sing? He is quite talented but you must advise him on the speed.



This boy is brilliant. He has a great future.

Ariyakudi couldn't have been more right.



GN Balasubramaniam has won the gold medal at the Music Academy competition.

Wonderful, but he must pursue his academics too.

Much as Narayanaswamy Iyer loved music, he did not want his son to become a professional musician.

One day, Vidwan Sabesa Iyer paid one of his customary visits to Narayanaswamy Iyer's house.



He enrolled Mani for the three-year BA English (Hons.) course at the Madras Christian College (MCC).



Send Mani to the Annamalai University at Chidambaram. We have a music college there.

Sabesa Iyer was the head of the music college at the University. Out of respect for the great vidwan, Narayanaswamy Iyer agreed.



He is no ordinary student and his is no ordinary music.

At the college, Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar* who heard Mani sing was so impressed that he rewarded him with a silver plate heaped with silver coins.



Unfortunately, Mani fell sick at Chidambaram and had to return to Madras.



Much to Narayanaswamy Iyer's satisfaction, he continued his English (Hons.) course at the MCC.

*Raja of Chettinad and founder of the Annamalai University. He was a philanthropist, industrialist, banker, educationalist and patron of the arts (1881-1948)

In 1928, at the Kapali temple, Madras...



Why is everybody tense? What's happening?

Musiri Subramania Iyer* is unwell and has cancelled his concert.

Oh my God! What do we do now?

Here comes Madurai Subramania Iyer. Maybe he can help us.

*vocalist (1899-1975)



Well, what about GVN's son Mani, my student? He is very talented.

Soon, the agitated organisers were at Narayanaswamy Iyer's house.



Iyerval, we have heard a lot about your son. You must permit him to perform today at the temple.



Me, in place of the great Musiri?? Unthinkable!

Mani was aghast on hearing the proposal.



Mani, let me tell you a little story about your hero, the great Ariyakudi.

All present looked at Madurai Subramania Iyer with surprise.

In 1929, GNB graduated from MCC.



Now that you have got your degree, I recommend that you join a law college. Law would be a good profession for you.

Why do you insist that he study law? Allow him to decide what he wants to do.



My heart is in music and music alone.

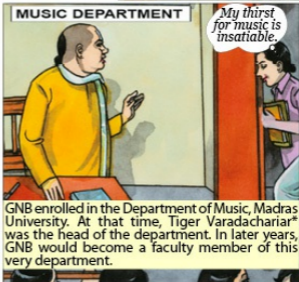
Narayanaswamy Iyer accepted the suggestion of his good friend, the great scholar VS Srinivasa Sastri.*

*politician and administrator. He was acclaimed for his oratorical skills and command over the English language. This earned him the epithet "Silver-tongued" (1869–1946)



I must thank Mr. Sastri for convincing my father.

Though all the seven children of Narayanaswamy Iyer were musically inclined, GNB was the only one who took the art up, professionally.



MUSIC DEPARTMENT

My thirst for music is insatiable.

GNB enrolled in the Department of Music, Madras University. At that time, Tiger Varadachariar* was the head of the department. In later years, GNB would become a faculty member of this very department.

*vocalist (1876-1950)

Gradually, GNB's music began attracting wider attention.

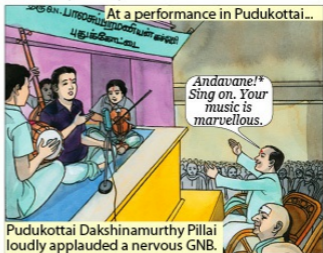


சரசுவதி காரா சபா

A refreshingly new style!

Such clarity despite the speed!

The GNB brand of brigas set a new trend in Carnatic music.



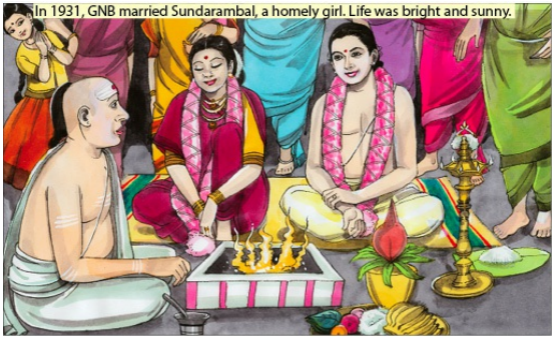
At a performance in Pudukottai...

Andavane!* Sing on. Your music is marvellous.

Pudukottai Dakshinamurthy Pillai loudly applauded a nervous GNB.

*Oh God

In 1931, GNB married Sundarambal, a homely girl. Life was bright and sunny.



By the grace of God, you will quickly attain great heights in the music world.



Around this time, GNB also shaved off his tuft. He looked a modern, young man.

God's grace on GNB took unexpected forms.



We would like you to act as Narada in our next film *Bhama Vijayam*.

In 1934, the tall and handsome GNB became the first established Carnatic musician to act in films.



This was how the film's song books announced his name. All the songs sung by GNB were super hits.

*Hutchins was a gramophone company based in Madras.

Alongside, he was becoming increasingly popular on the concert platform.



Tickets for GNB's performance are sold out.

Pity, but I am not surprised.

The orthodox however, disapproved of GNB for many reasons.



They found it unthinkable that a musician of GNB's stature could act in movies.

He is a talkies* vidwan.

His is English music.

That was a snide remark made at his degree in English. It was rare in those days for a Carnatic musician to have a college degree.

Moreover, he hasn't undergone any gurukulavasam**

As these comments reached GNB's ears, he was deeply hurt.

*an old-fashioned term for movies; **where a student lives with his guru and learns from him

In 1928, at the Kapali temple, Madras...



Why is everybody tense? What's happening?

Musiri Subramania Iyer* is unwell and has cancelled his concert.

Oh my God! What do we do now?

Here comes Madurai Subramania Iyer. Maybe he can help us.

*vocalist (1899-1975)



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Mani, let me tell you a little story about your hero, the great Ariyakudi.

All present looked at Madurai Subramania Iyer with surprise.



Sir, I have been trying to get him to sing at our Sabha for the past six months but he doesn't have a single free date.

The 1940s was truly the GNB era.



Your music is scintillating.

I feel honoured. The Mysore Maharaja* has departed from tradition to pat me on my back.

*Krishnarajendra Wodeyar the fourth



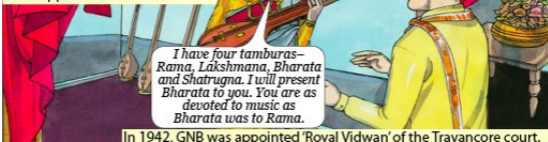
In 1941, the Zamindar of Ettayapuram* honoured GNB.

*a town in the Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu

Through all these happy tunes sounded a tragic note. GNB's father passed away in 1941.



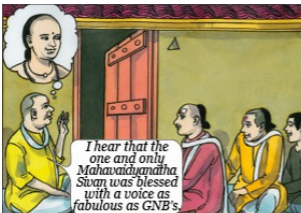
But the happy tunes continued to sound. At the Travancore* palace, Royal Vidwan Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavata** was vocal in his appreciation of GNB.



I have four tamburas—Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrugna. I will present Bharata to you. You are as devoted to music as Bharata was to Rama.

In 1942, GNB was appointed 'Royal Vidwan' of the Travancore court.

*the kingdom of Travancore was a princely state with its capital at Trivandrum. It comprised much of modern-day southern Kerala, the Kanyakumari district and the southernmost parts of Tamil Nadu; **musician, composer & harikatha performer (1877-1945)



I hear that the one and only Mahavaidyanaatha Sivam was blessed with a voice as fabulous as GNB's.

Tanjavur Vaidyanatha Iyer, one-time critic of GNB, was now full of appreciation for this star performer.



GNB is a very great artiste.

That was whole-hearted praise from Kallidaikurichi Vedanta Bhagavata.*

*vocalist and harikatha exponent (b.1879)

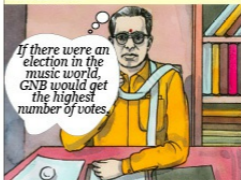


GNB ayya, Todi ragam is not with me but with you.

GNB was the first to successfully reproduce, vocally, the nagaswaram gamakas* of TN Rajarathnam Pillai,** famous for his exposition of Todi.

*musical ornaments; **nagaswaram vidwan (1898-1956)

If vidwans admired GNB, the public adored him.



If there were an election in the music world, GNB would get the highest number of votes.

So wrote litterateur and journalist Kalki Krishnamurthy.*

* (1899- 1954)



I suggest that instead of me you ask GNB to sing this new song. It will become popular overnight.

Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar was not just being magnanimous. He was absolutely right.

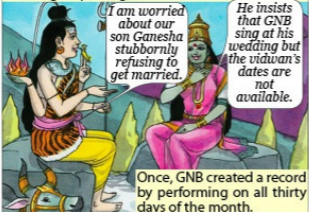


GNB has the largest fan following amongst vocalists, both men and women.

Violin vidwan Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu was all admiration.*

* (1893-1964)

In 1946, the Tamil magazine Ananda Vikatan carried this imaginary dialogue.



As he walked in wearing a sparkling white dhoti and shirt, diamond ear studs and an exotic perfume, people stood in queues to catch a glimpse of him.



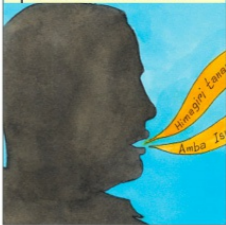
GNB wore a custom-made blend of perfume that became famous as the 'GNB Kadambham'.

Rare ragas like Malavi, Gauda Malhar and Kapinarayani... he introduced them all on the concert platform.



With his silvery voice, great music and striking looks, GNB was truly the Prince Charming of Carnatic music.

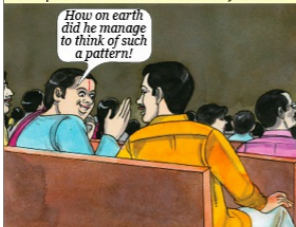
Every concert of GNB became an experience to look forward to.



GNB popularised many previously unheard songs of Saint Tyagaraja.



His kalpana swarams were absolutely brilliant.



While singing a particular raga, he would alter the pitch to derive new ragas.



He sang elaborate raga alapanas,* step-by-step, in three parts.



Such were the new features that GNB introduced in his concerts.

*melodic essays; **GNB is credited with a systematic and gradual approach to raga elaboration



*light classical songs



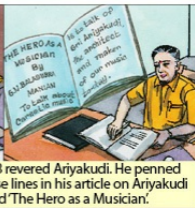
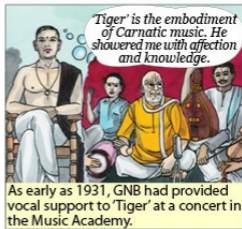
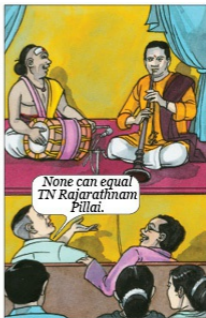
The crowd applauded rapturously.

*vocalist (1912-1968)



*this initiative taken in the 1940s was officially called 'The Tamil Isai Movement'

With very little formal training, GNB's music was largely the product of his own genius. Remarkably, he remained unaffected by his success.





GNB was generous in his appreciation of Hindustani musicians too. In the 1940s, the Music Academy, on his recommendation, invited Roshanara Begum to present a concert.*

*admired as the Queen of Hindustani music (1917-1982)



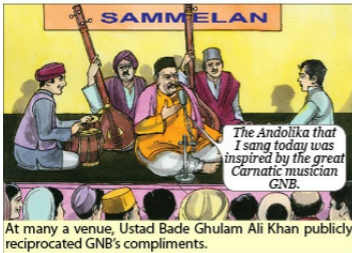
In 1954, he helped organize a grand South Indian musical tour of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan.*

*hindustani classical musician (1902-1968)

That year, at the Parthasarathy Swami Sabha...



GNB was deeply hurt by this accusation.



At many a venue, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan publicly reciprocated GNB's compliments.



GNB loved Western classical music too.

*western classical music composer (1756 - 1791)



GNB was an inspired composer as well.

He composed in familiar as well as rare ragas, in three languages, Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil.



GNB composed a varnam* in this Hindustani raga.

*a compositional genre of carnatic music



GNB composed almost 250 songs.



Further, GNB rarely sang his own compositions on stage.

*18th century composer



In 1958, the Music Academy honoured GNB with the most prestigious of Carnatic music awards, 'Sangita Kalanidhi'.



GNB's speech reflected utmost humility.

In 1959, GNB won the President's Award.



Dr. S. Radhakrishnan* had been a friend of G V Narayanaswamy Iyer.

*President of India (1962 - 1967)

The same year...



During his tenure at AIR, GNB introduced many innovative programmes.

As a senior musician, he actively encouraged his young accompanists.



He was very fair even in money matters.

GNB was a great devotee of the Mother Goddess.* He declined the honour of being the court vidwan in the Trivandrum palace because it interfered with his Devi Pooja.



*the black & white photograph is the very picture of Goddess Nadaroopasundari that GNB had in his pooja



No concert is more important for me than my Navaratri pooja.

Above all, GNB was a wonderful human being. He never spoke ill of anyone.



He loved animals too.



You give me great solace when I am distressed.

GNB was also a skilled painter and poet.



Art, its Dawn, Perfection and Future Role



He wrote many learned articles on music as well. His English was excellent.

This multi-faceted genius was a generous teacher too. Many of his students became great musicians.



TR Baalu



Understand every facet of what you are singing.



Tanjavur S Kalyanaraman



M L Vasanthakumari

However, none of GNB's own children took music up as a profession.



Trichur V Ramachandran

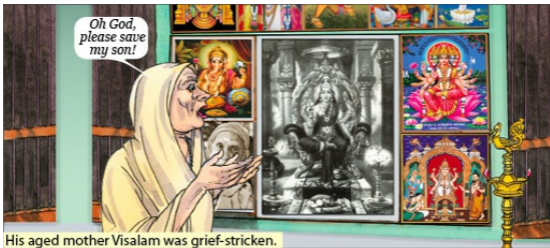
In 1964, GNB took over as the Principal of the Swati Tirunal College of Music, Trivandrum.



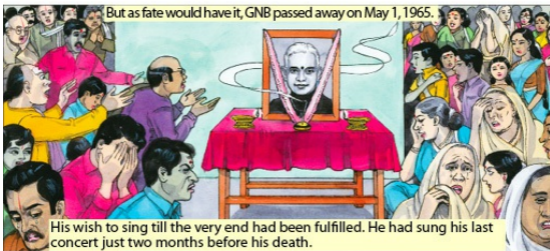
My only desire is to sing fill the very end of my life.

Unfortunately, the very next year, GNB suffered a massive heart attack.





His aged mother Visalam was grief-stricken.

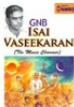


His wish to sing till the very end had been fulfilled. He had sung his last concert just two months before his death.

GNB was just fifty-five when he died. A short life maybe, but one glittering with achievement. Posterity would describe his revolutionary style of music as...

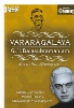


*bani - a style of rendering music



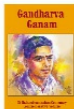
1. GNB - Isai Vaseekaran (The Music Charmer)

G N Balasubramaniam, (1910 - 1965), the Yuga Purusha, masterminded a True Revolution in the field of Carnatic Music that marked the indelible Pre GNB and Post GNB eras. G N B is a stunning example of how intellect can be judiciously combined with on the spot creativity to transfix the audience senses in to a new galaxy. Voice culture researchers have opined that GNB's gifted voice is the best among Indian Classical Music singers of the 20th Century. Analysis by Carnatic Music Legends, Maestros as also Musicologists with fitting musical tracks of the legend over exciting visuals is the Hallmark of this DVD.



2. Vararagalaya - G. N. Balasubramaniam (Live At Music Academy 1964)

This concert of GNB is one of the most memorable and significant ones as it was the last concert performed by the legend at the Music Academy in 1964 along with legends Lalgudi G. Jayaraman on the violin and Palghat R Raghun on the mridangam. A superb delineation of Begada with a rare kriti Kalyani Raguramam of Swathi Thirunal and an enchanting Saveri with enchanting responses from Lalgudi Jayaraman are mindboggling. The evergreen Vararagalaya in Chenchukambhoji in true GNB style is a treat to the ears. GNB composed the chittaswaram for this kriti and popularized it among many other rare Thyagaraja compositions. The hallmark of this concert is undoubtedly the RTP in Kalyani. The astounding Thanivarthanam lasts for nearly 30 minutes by the mridangam virtuoso Palghat Raghun, which has a spellbinding effect on the listeners. This is a concert that will remain etched in the memory of the listeners for a long time. This concert is from the private collection of the GNB family.



3. Gandharva Ganam - GN Balasubramaniam Centenary (Commemorative Volume)

The articles are grouped under four segments-Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi and Post Pallavi. The first section, Ragam, contains critical analysis by experts on various facets of GNBs music. These facets include his voice, concert plan, intellectual approach, grahahbedam and his compositions. GNB and his father GV Narayanaswami Iyer were profound thinkers and exceptional writers. The second section Tanam is an attempt to consolidate their writings. The third section-Pallavi-consists of the personal reminiscences of friends, colleagues, family, disciples and followers of GNB. It also documents his brief innings in the film field. The Post Pallavi segment documents the efforts towards keeping the GNB name glowing after his demise. A CD containing a rare collection of GNBs music recorded during his final days is offered free with this book. Recorded without accompaniment at the request of a foreign rasika on a visit to Trivandrum to listen to GNB, it represents some of the maestros best music.



4. Ragamrutham -G. N. Balasubramaniam - 4 ACD (Live at Mysore -1957 with T.Chowdiah C.S.Murugabhoopathy)

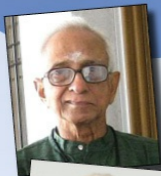
G.N.Balasubramaniam, one of the greatest legends and superstars of Carnatic Music, enthralled and mesmerized the old and the young by his unique fluid voice and by his exceptional music. This magnificent concert showcases his refreshing and immaculate style of music impregnated with novel ideas, scintillating Brikas and striking Sangathis. His golden voice with its rich timbre captivates the listener beyond imagination. He was a trailblazer and his music is immortal. In this superb concert, he has rendered an enchanting Kalyani, followed by a beautiful composition of Thyagaraja. An imaginative portrayal of Suddha Saveri followed by his masterpiece Dharini thelusu with the cascade of Sangathis flowing like an endless river. A soul stirring Kanada followed by Sukhi Evaro add color to this concert. The highlight of this concert is a peerless rendering of RTP in the Raga Bhairavi. The Ragamalika Viruttam is exquisite. The combination of GNB and the legendary violinist from Karnataka, T.Chowdiah and the rapport they shared on stage was incredible. The accompaniments for this glorious concert are T.Chowdiah and C.S.Murugabhoopathy another legendary mridangam artist of yester years. This concert is from the private collection of the GNB family.



5. Sangeethamrutham - G. N. Balasubramaniam - 4ACD (Live at Kallidaikurichi -1954 with Lalgudi G. Jayaraman Palghat Raghun)

G.N.Balasubramaniam, one of the brightest shining stars of Carnatic Music of yesteryears, enthralled and awe struck his audience by his exceptional music. This excellent concert is richly laden with his immaculate style of music impregnated with Bhava, lightening Sangathis and rich innovation in the true golden tone of his voice in perfect alignment with sruthi. He was a trailblazer and his music is immortal. In this superb concert of almost four hours, he has rendered a captivating Panthuvarelli, followed by a not so often heard composition of Thyagaraja, Sundarataradeham. An artistic portrayal of Abogi followed by an excellent exposition of Kalyani, are added attractions of this concert. The highlight of this concert is an inimitable rendering of RTP in the Raga Todi. The Ragamalika Viruttam is soul stirring. The specialty of this concert is the coming together of the three doyens of Carnatic music. The accompaniments for this glorious concert are Lalgudi G. Jayaraman and Palghat Raghun who are legends in their own rights.

PICTURES of melody



Carnatic music, which seemed to be losing its appeal, has now found a new fervour. To preserve this interest and develop it further, it is essential to capture the history and the contributions of various artistes in an attractive and easily absorbable form for the new generation. In this pictorial presentation, Smt. Lakshmi Devnath has rendered yeoman service to recapture the glorious era of GNB and it will go a long way in kindling the interest of modern youngsters to ferret out the rich heritage of South Indian Carnatic Music. Lakshmi has not missed any significant event and her wonderful script along with the excellent pictorial presentation by Shri Thangavel brings back vivid memories of the legend and makes us relive the past.

G.N. Balakrishnan & G.B. Bhuvaneshwaran
(the former is the younger brother of GNB and the latter, the maestro's son)



LAKSHMI DEVNATH is a well-known researcher and writer in the field of Carnatic music. Her articles and features numbering close to 200 have featured in leading publications like The Hindu and Sruti – India's Premier Magazine for the Performing Arts. Her passion is to familiarise the young with India's glorious heritage through innovative stories. An earlier effort of hers in this direction, Poorva – Magic Miracles and the Mystical Twelve, that narrates the stories of the Azhvars and released in 2007 was a runaway success. The projects that she is currently involved in include Poorva in the Vedic Age; Sargam – a fascinating journey into the world of Carnatic music and this pictorial biographies series. Her other books include – A Class Apart, the biography of the educationist Dr. (Mrs.) YG Parthasarathy and Lotus – a monograph written for danseuse Anita Ratnam. Lakshmi's full-fledged biography of the living legend Sri Lalgudi Jayaraman is due to be published by Harper Collins shortly.

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