



Tribune photos by Milbert Orlando Brown

C.S. Ainkaran evokes images of Indian cinema and culture at Triton College in River Grove.

Indian gems

Chicago Tamil Sangam simply brilliant at 25th year concert

The cultural organization Chicago Tamil Sangam capped a weekend celebration of its 25th anniversary with melodic, wafting music that conjured up scenes from Indian cinema and culture.

The four-hour silver jubilee concert, at Triton College in River Grove, ran into early Monday morning as C.S. Ainkaran's emotive and expressive multi-octave voice washed over the hushed crowd at the Richard Burton performing Arts Center.

Unlike on previous occasions, when he just added flavor to an already planned evening, Ainkaran was the main course and anchor for this concert, even as he shared the stage with a variety of performers and a 10-piece orchestra that include mandolin, tablas and mirdangam, a double-headed drum.

Delivering in his native Tamil, in a voice that ranged from round, rippling baritone to thin, wispy falsetto, Ainkaran led an often-visceral tour of Indian movie, romantic and folk music. (Tamil Nadu is a state in the south of India formerly called Madras.) And with his singing, often in the same song, he evoked most of the movie screen images, whether galloping westerns, blustery epic or seaside romances.

There was much to empathize or sympathize with in his many sets. And when his vocals soared, over the mystical, though secular, musical settings, he often created a chiaroscuro of sound, especially when he alternately blurred the words in a rumbling baritone and trilled in airy tones.

When Ainkaran sang solo and in duet and trio combinations with Devi Krishna, Shanthi Ramkrishna, Anuradha Srinivasan, Ram Prasad and C.S. Baskaran, who was the master of ceremonies, his choices were not without humor. The popular and risible folk song "*Octakathe Kattiko*" ("It would be Better to Marry a Camel") provoked laughter and riotous applause—so much so

much so that Ainkaran, Devi Krishna and Krishna felt obliged to sing it again.

The musicians have had the strongest stage presence, particularly they were tied to their music sequence sheet, but they were still managed to be expressive.

If one listened closely, one could hear many other musical forms from around the world in Ainkaran's repertoire, including the roots music of Ali Farka Toure's Mali, hints of Andean religious chants as well as the accordion-colored tones of Louisiana on such a romantic number as the ever-popular "*Ean Sirithaai Ennai Parthu*" ("Why you Smile at me? I'm In Trouble Now").



By Rohan B Preston
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