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## Life

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### IN CONCERT: Brothers take audience to roots of Indian ages

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"Roots music" is an oft-used term when describing musical traditions with deep historical lineage. It also is a highly relative term. In American folk and blues music, the historical time frame is decades. In European and Western "art" music, roots run into centuries, with seeds sown in Gregorian chants.

And in Indian classical music, the historical expanse of roots runs into the millennia, a factor that might help account for the remarkable sense of its depth, especially when it's being performed by such masters as violinists Ganesh and Kumaresh, heard at Lotte Lehmann Concert Hall on Friday night.

From these famed siblings, Santa Barbara got a pure taste of South Indian carnatic classical music, a style with a root system that is 3,000 years old. In their captivating concert of ragas and folk songs, presented by the Raagmala organization on campus, the three-hour event was at once transcendent, virtuosic and very much rooted in the excitement of the live, present-tense interplay of great musicians.

Crossover situations are not foreign to these musicians, who have, like other well traveled Indian players, been involved in various poly-stylistic and electronic-textured musical projects. But Friday's event was a virtually pure encounter with the same language of tonally and rhythmically defined ragas and tales of their ancestry.

On this stage, the only electronic components were a laptop computer that provided a droning tambura sound, and the violin pickups, that compressed and processed the sound, perhaps more than we'd like. But once the duo began playing, their self-evident mastery overcame the minor equipment quibbles.

Having played together since childhood, the brothers project an uncommon degree of dialogue in the heat of musical action. When they're not falling into harmonized lines or tight unison parts, Ganesh is in the lead role, playing the more dynamic parts and the high parts, while his brother answers in a lower range.

Joining the brothers, and making for an even pairing onstage, were two percussionists -- B. Sivaraman, on a two-headed drum called a mridangam, and Adambakkam Shankar, on a clay pot called a ghatam. The percussionists are highly accomplished in their own right, whether contributing to synchronous syncopations or taking improvisational flights of their own.

During the concert, Ganesh occasionally sang, a natural impulse given the vocal emphasis of much carnatic music. But his most moving form of "singing" was on violin, with a specific carnatic style of fluid ornamentations and nuances. Melismas glided around and swooped under notes, giving an impression of human voice translated into instrumental form, which Ganesh did with a special flair on an achingly beautiful solo, both mournful and life-affirming.

On this night, time stood still and the music resonated with wisdom of the ancients. In short, it was another night in the unstoppable history of carnatic music, on a high level.

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