

Some enchanted evening



The Hindu

SPIRITED RENDITION: The MMA concert. Photo: K. Pichumani

Musical Montage 2010 was an exhilarating amalgam of Broadway, Pop, Jazz and Country and plenty of verve

It was as if the Madras Musical Association choir had lovingly restored a vintage portrait. A rose-tinted interpretation of Broadway classics, Musical Montage 2010 at St. Christopher's College of Education was a triumph of great music, good singing and the apogee of a craftsmanship that mirrored the best of mid-20th Century mass entertainment.

Conducted by Augustine Paul and compered by Roshin and Aarti, the opening strains of Richard Rodgers' 'The hills are alive' brought home the remembrance of favourite things. The medley from "Sound of Music" rolled on with 'Raindrops on roses' to 'Doe a deer' to the formidable message of 'Climb every mountain' with the choir singing in voices.

It was followed by the poignant, action-filled 'Ol' Man River' from "Show Boat". With its sad love stories and glimpses of African-Americans sweating it out on the Mississippi, the choir splendidly showcased the song of protest, with its central metaphor that life, like the river just rolls on.

The primal wilds of Africa crept up on the audience at the balmy open air theatre with Elton John's classic 'Can you feel the love tonight' from the lovable "Lion King" opening as it did with Nina Simon's soulful flute strains, followed by the adventures of the masked and lovelorn "Phantom of the Opera" in 'Music of the night'. But the choir's voices in this song did not "secretly possess you" like a glorious solo rendition would have!

The first part of the concert rounded off with the funny yet intoxicating 'Nothing like a dame' from the Pulitzer-prize winning "South Pacific." The song, sung by six male voices, brought out

the loneliness of a sailor's life as it was meant to be in James A. Michener's war classic, *Tales of the South Pacific*.

Soulful solos

The second part of the concert was crowded with memorable solos — Tanvi Shah, Ebenezer Arunkumar, Nadisha Thomas and Sangita Santosham and good music from the band Blue Note — Shyam Benjamin on the keyboard, Naveen Kumar on the bass and Jeoraj George on the drums.

Tanvi Shah took centrestage first to sing the popular 'Memory' from "Cats". Her voice soared, taking with it nostalgia for Grizabella, the one-time glamour cat. Dressed like Audrey Hepburn was in 'My Fair Lady', Tanvi sang 'I could have danced all night' with much of Eliza Doolittle's freshness and charm and Holly Golightly's ("Breakfast at Tiffany's") sophistication. From the same musical, Ebenezer Arunkumar sang the passionate Freddy Eynsford-Hill's 'On the street where you live', warmly and lustily, in a way only seasoned tenors can.

Nadisha Thomas sang a remarkable improvisation of 'Over the rainbow', Judy Garland's signature tune from the "Wizard of Oz". This one packed punch and was more Ella Fitzgerald's version of the Harold Arlen ballad than Judy Garland.

Ariel's voice floated up from the depths of her secret grotto in the sea when Sangita Santosham sang 'Part of your world', the musical bulls-eye from "The Little Mermaid". A difficult piece of music interspersed with conversation, Sangita pulled it off with panache. "Sure she's got everything", including tremendous stage presence because Sangita managed to swing genres with ease when she sang the Duke Ellington jazz standard 'It don't mean a thing'.

The other three solos — Kalyani's honey-voiced 'Killing me softly', Ravi Santosham's breezy 'Things we used to do' and Megha's powerful farewell version of 'Thank you for the music' along with 'Love Story' and 'Heal the world' — completed the repertoire.

Beautiful amalgam

The talented Edwin Roy's pianism was a source of wholesomeness and cheer lending more than just background score to the evening's music. Under Augustine Paul's baton, the choir breezed through an exhilarating amalgam of Broadway, Pop, Jazz and Country with no inhibitions and plenty of verve. It is to his credit that the voices chosen for the solos sounded as fine as the originals.

Musical Montage was more than just a mirror to the uncertainties of life, emphasised and elucidated by song. It was a solid touchable survival of music from the best years of our lives.