

MEDIA PRODUCTION REVIEW

Visudha Chavarayachan: A Loving Tribute to St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a True Icon of Christian Witnessing. Genre: Audio Music CD; Production: Dr Joy Kakkanattu CMI for Dharmaram College, Bangalore; Music: Joy Kakkanattu and Alleppey Benny; Language: Malayalam; Orchestration: R. S. Binu; Studio: Kalai DG Studio, Kochi; Price: Rs. 80.

Yet another session of Joy Kakkanattu's orchestral rhapsody comes with the title *Visudha Chavarayachan* in Malayalam. The album could be aptly called a zeitgeist production, defining the spirit and mood of the period of history as shown by euphoria of the time set in motion by the canonization of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. To all those who have enjoyed Joy's earlier creations, the present project will come raise the level of joy a notch up. The new album showcases the superb range of work - both from musical and lyrical perspective and adds yet another bright feather to the already crowded cap of Joy.

Dharmaram is rooted in rich musical tradition and has many successful musical accomplishments to its credit and Joy is revelling in the musical milieu with his unique touch that any great composer would definitely approve of his musical interpretations of the life and personality of Chavara, to whom Dharmaram owes its existence. Just in time for the canonization season, Dharmaram announces the release of the tribute to Chavara, the new Saint to the Church, Joy's newest album, which is available at various Catholic bookstalls in the South India. This is the first time in his bright musical career that Joy has recorded an album of hymns exclusively on a saint, including many of his friends' compositions. The album features timeless feelings, with songs ranging in creation - meditation to memory. With almost the entire history of Chavara given in lyrics by various writers, Joy gives the listeners the unexpected means of listening to the history of the saint in musical compositions and makes the album a Chavara rarity. All the twelve songs are newly composed.

The 12 songs includes not only a Sanskrit poem but also a range of poetic compositions carved out from the history of the saint, his teachings, his own prayers and aspirations and rich tribute to him. The introductory tribute to Chavara in Sanskrit sets the tone for this musical collection, the rest of which is directly or indirectly connected

with the life and memories of Chavara. Cyriac Kanichai, a Carmelite himself, is an Indologist. It is only fair to note that he has paid a rich poetic tribute to the founder of his congregation with this composition in an equally rich voice of Sharath. Joy is one of the finest Indian Carmelite songwriters and the lyrics from him in this project in Kester's voice shows flashes of his brooding, and meditative lyricism. Kester takes a beautiful lead on 'in silence', which provides a little lift to the divine musical air. Markos leads on just one track; there is a fuller baritone in his voice. You can almost hear him smile through his voice as he gives expression to the words of Br Shinto, a baby lyricist!

The two female vocalists are very intelligently spaced between the varied baritone soloists makes the album unique and a significant addition to the Joy catalogue. Elizabeth is in her finest voice in soft musical accompaniment in her reminiscing rendition of the teachings of the *karmayogi* that Chavara was. Sr Ivy Jose's feelings that have phrases from Chavara's *Chavarul* woven through it, in Midhila's voice is introduced with a rather long orchestral prelude.

There is a range of musical influences evident throughout the album, there's a strong Karnatic feel to several of the numbers and even the influence of folk music in some numbers thus showcasing the ability of Alleppey Benny as the master of Southern musical soul. Songs and solos are divided up fairly equally and spaced fairly in an even manner. The manner in which some of the instruments are used in the orchestration liven up the presentation and bring it into modern focus making it pleasant to a variety of listeners. It's his ability to blend in on certain arrangements that makes Benny such a valuable member of the group as a musician.

This album proves to be another genius move by Joy as he fans different generations into one collective venture. It is the unmatched dynamism and almost fanatic interest of Joy in music that brought various artists together in harmony. It is a project which showcases the effect of the gelling of a group. They really blend together into what they produced on this project. I think it is a great way to salute their founder Saint Chavara. It sets up a new line of writers giving them a fresh platform to write compositions ranging from fresh material to downright debut.

There are, like in any album, a few numbers that are never totally convincing. Some of the compositions, especially from the armatures seem rather contrived and routine. This is Joy's seventh album and because some of the songs are slickly constructed, you cannot help feeling that you are in a familiar territory and not on a patch of some

of his past triumphs. However, the ability of the producer to induct young and new talents to give them a forum of poetic expression is praiseworthy.

My only criticism would be (1) the use of the presentation of what sounds like an angry nature in the prelude of '*karunyanathanam*'. I would have enjoyed it more if it had been as soft as the subject matter of the poem. (2) The unbalanced ratio of the male and female voice, which is 10:2! Blame it on my being a man – I cannot help it – a few more female voices would have made the album richer. (3) A technical hitch in the presentation that has crept in is the discrepancy in the list on the sleeve, which does not match the actual presentation in the album.

That still leaves 12 stellar tracks to underline as a contribution to the world of divine music and another in the series of tribute to St Chavara. For me – I am sure others will contest this – Joy has been at the pinnacle in terms of harmony arrangements and individual excellence when it comes to the overall final product. The level of quality, in production terms, is always impeccable. In my humble, novice's opinion, it's that good. The variety is impressive and attractive, keeping the listener on toes as they involuntarily keep the beat. Most importantly, the musicianship is outstanding. In brief, *Vishudha Chavarayachan*, the album is a pleasure to hear and it is definitely an album worth checking out.

Benny Paul Thettayil CMI