

MEDIA PRODUCTION REVIEW

Sant Chavara: Devotional Songs; Genre: Audio Music CD; Production: Anto Amarnad CMI and James M. L. CMI for Navchetana, Bhopal; Music: Anto Amarnad CMI; Language: Hindi; Price: Rs. 150.

Sant Chavara is considered to be the first music album on Chavara, which was placed before the public as a tribute to the great saint on the occasion of the canonization. It is a joint musical initiative made by Anto Amarnad and James M. L. This 19-track album, like several of their previous albums, has Christian worship in focus. However, this one is a bit different in the sense that the album comprises of tracks, the lyrics of which are inspired by the mystical experiences, life and activities of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. It is presented as a musical tribute to the Saint.

The album that is dedicated to Chavara consists of various musical genres like Carnatic, Hindustani, and Western pop music. The melodious and soothing blend of the Eastern and Western styles is often noteworthy in some of the tracks. The musical expertise ensues from many years of experience of the composers. The music composition of the entire album is done by Anto Amarnad. The tracks are mixed and mastered well. The orchestration is done by Ciliston Stephen and Praveen. The lyrics of the tracks are by Anto Amarnad CMI and James M. L. CMI, who are accomplished lyricists; in this project, they have joined forces with Joshy Kannookkadan CMI, who is a young and promising lyricist and composer.

Out of the 19 numbers, at least 9 are somehow directly related to Chavara and either as a prayer through his intercession (1, 10, 12, 17) or based on one of his several writings (2, 6, 7, 9, 14, 16). The adaptation of *kanakenam*, the famous poem of Chavara is seen at least in three numbers (1, 6, 7, 18). Similarly, a touch of *atmanutapam* in number 16 has a shade of the teaching of Chavara regarding the meaninglessness of the day on which you have done no good to your neighbour. The endearing words of Abba that he used to employ to address the heavenly Father are seen in number 9. The album is complete with a Marian hymn (8). One of them is a combined tribute to Chavara and Euphrasia, the twin saints (19),

Opener is great as it has an inviting touch of pop rhythm. The combined tribute to the twin saints is almost an anthem and the tune is jumpier than the opener, which would impress especially the youth. The producer has also made a number repeat, first given in female voice and repeated in the in the male voice (2, 18). However, out of the 19 beautiful numbers, the ones that capture your attention as you listen to them at your leisure are numbers 2, 13, 14 and 19.

The producer has explored various styles music in the album including semi-classical (2, 18) and gazal (16). The album presents an array of popular male and female vocalists. Some of their distinctive voices are familiar to the listeners of North Indian Christian devotional music. Several of them are accomplished as cine artistes known for their works. Practically, no stone is left unturned as vocalists including Dilip and Meghdeep Bose who are father and son, Prachi, Sadhana, Kirti, Anupama and Usha rendering enchanting female voices and Aziz, Vinod, Prassan, Yash and Shiv have rendered their warm voices making their own artistic stamp on modern worship, in turn, making the album a notable one.

The rich lyrics have been made melodiously richer with soothing voices that carry them. The masterful orchestration encourages listeners to glide into the reverential love for the divine. Some of the lyrics inspired by the life and teachings and writings of Chavara deal with the challenges of life, joy and despair. Others take you on a journey through the memory lane, making you nostalgic.

Although the above-mentioned features of the album are really admirable, I am inclined to point out a few downsides without which it would have a better reception. First of all, the producers go for a recast of three of his oldies (tracks 4, 5, 12); he should have left them in their original albums, albeit they are beautiful numbers to listen to, and they are somehow related to the writings of Chavara, to the experienced ears, they are transferred from previous albums of the producer and they give the feeling that they are placed there as fillers. Moreover, the audio quality of the recording of these songs, compared to the new recordings done in some modern studios, seems to be of a poorer quality. Secondly, there is track by a female vocalist (2) re-rendered by two male vocalists (18). Thirdly, the lyrics and wordings of some of the numbers sound to be so contrived that it seems that they are translations of the originals from Malayalam (3, 9, 17 and several others) with the result that some of these are rendered voice with effort by the singers. From

the poetical point of view these lack the rhyming of the words and their effortless gliding. Moreover, some of them lack grammatical precision which is aggravated by the fact that they have appeared in the titles - suraj *ki* kiran! (3). Finally, presentation-wise, there are spelling mistakes in the table of content (13), in the subtitle repeatedly used on the face of the sleeve *Foot Prints* should have been one-word (2). A mention of the studios where these were recorded would have been in place.

However, in spite of these insignificant flaws, *Sant Chavara*, the presentation of the musical production by James M. L. and Anto Amarnad is a smooth spiritual experience to the listener's heart. The presentation of the album is excellently done with elegant sleeves. As the music is great, lyrics could have been provided with the sleeves for liturgical use. Perhaps this omission is filled with the rendition of eight of the numbers in karaoke for liturgical use. The album comes in a double pack with a video CD. I wish all the listeners of the album sheer joy of musical experience and blessings of the Abba through the intercession of Saint Chavara.

Benny Paul Thettayil CMI