



Durga Krishnan and the New England School for Carnatic Music

South Indian *veena*

Marlborough, Massachusetts

At the heart of South Indian sacred traditions is Carnatic music, Hindu devotional songs accompanied by the sweet drones and tones of the *veena*, India's oldest stringed instrument. Predecessor of the sitar, the *veena* dates back to the Vedic period (1500 – 500 B.C.). It has a wooden fingerboard with 24 frets and seven strings that sit atop two resonating gourds. The four main strings are used to play the melody, while the other three are sympathetic and produce the drone. New England is home to a masterful player of this instrument, **Durga Krishnan**.

Starting *veena* lessons at age ten, Krishnan describes herself as a dreadful student who resented her father's insistence that she learn and sing the lyrics associated with each tune she played. Looking back, Durga is now thankful for her father's persistence, as she believes it gave her a better understanding of the *veena*'s role of embellishing the emotive texts found in Carnatic songs.

By 16, Durga had already begun to establish a reputation as a gifted musician, and taught adult students while attending music school in India. Under the tutelage of the legendary Dr. Chittibabu, Durga refined her knowledge of the instrument and launched her career as a musician, performing on All-India radio and recording with her mentor.

Krishnan's career took a new direction when she came to the United States in 1974. After living in Texas and then New York, Durga and her family finally settled in the Boston area in 1977. Since then, her skill and knowledge has held her in good stead. She is so beloved and respected as a teacher that students will travel 60 miles or play over the phone for a lesson.

Durga's mission is to make Carnatic music a household name. In 2004, she founded the New England School for Carnatic Music and devotes her time to teaching and performing the ancient music of South India. At the festival, Durga performs on Saturday with **Dan Reck**, who plays an ancient rhythm instrument called the *ghatam*. On Sunday, she has organized a special program featuring students from the **New England School for Carnatic Music** who will accompany students trained in Bharata Natyam dance at master dancer Jothi Raghavan's school **Nrityanjali**.