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Peruman, Ravi

Magic was in the air that spring night as the First Congregational Church in Santa Cruz, California, slowly filled to capacity. Across the altar, a blue and white banner defined our imminent experience: "Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda, Healing and Meditation Music."

Swamiji sits on a raised dais surrounded by electronics. "I use a synthesizer," says Swamiji, "because it facilitates so many sounds." To his right are tabla and mridangam players. To the left, another synthesizer and harmonium, and a violinist. "This is not a concert," Swamiji explains, "It is not religion. It is music, healing music."

And indeed as the notes flow from the amplified sound system, the audience is bathed in a beautiful blend of traditional South Indian raga and rhythm, while Swamiji evokes sounds ranging from strings to santoor to bells. For nearly three hours our nadis are bathed in the tones of ragas specially selected by Swamiji to benefit this particular audience. "I sing mostly in Sanskrit," he tells me, "because it is an international languages."

During a stunning 20-minute mridangam solo, Swamiji walks slowly through the audience, healing some, touching the foreheads of a few, loving all. "Swamiji came only to pass along grace," he explains. "I am acting for the Datta [the eternal guru] as ordered."

Before the concert, I spoke briefly with Swamiji on several pressing issues of the

day. Asked about children, he advised, "You are spoiling them. You go, 'freedom, freedom, freedom,' and then one day you go, 'What happened? Their mind is crazy.' Then the child is blamed. But you gave them such a training. So be careful. Sometimes it is hard to tell children, but that doesn't matter. You are in control."

Regarding the present situation at Rama's birthplace in Ayodhya, Swamiji said, "Sit all the religious leaders on one platform, because Indian people believe in the religious leaders. They can decide it. The government will not." Regarding the question of India's becoming a Hindu land, Swamiji said, "It is preferable to have a Hindu state. Most of the Western nations belong to some Christian tradition. The people want religion. So in my opinion it will go to a Hindu rastra."

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