

# fridayReview

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Sreyashi Ghosh

In a vibrant tapestry of history and heritage, the creative collaboration between Ileana Citaristi and sisters Mrinalika and Akshita Bhanj Deo stand as beacons of hope and inspiration. The Italian-born Odissi and Chhau exponent Ileana and Mrinalika and Akshita, who belong to the erstwhile royal family of Mayurbhanj in Odisha, together have woven a narrative of cultural preservation, artistic innovation, and sustainable living.

Moved by the environmental degradation and the cruelty inflicted on animals, such as the unnatural deaths of elephants in the state, Ileana has channelled her emotions into her art. Her performances at the Natki Festival, an international Indian dance event organised by Project Chhauni in Bhubaneswar, often reflect themes of human interaction with Nature, highlighting the delicate balance between humanity and the environment. Through her dance, she raises awareness about these issues, using her art as a powerful medium for social change.

Ileana’s journey in India began with her deep passion for Odissi, which she mastered under the legendary guru Kelucharan Mohapatra. Her dedication to the art form led her to explore and revive Mayurbhanj Chhau. She has brought global attention to the martial art form, ensuring its survival for future generations. Her Art Vision academy, which she started in 1996 in Bhubaneswar, became a sanctuary for the arts, blending dance, painting, cinema, and literature. But Ileana’s vision extended beyond the practice space and stage. Armed with a PhD in Philosophy, she began to look at the larger picture of life. Turning her focus towards major social issues, she launched the



# Heritage revivalists

Dancer Ileana Citaristi and Mrinalika and Akshita Bhanj Deo of the erstwhile Mayurbhanj royal family are working to preserve the region’s art and culture

Novel collaboration Mrinalika and Akshita Bhanj Deo; a chhau performance; and Odissi and Chhau exponent Ileana Citaristi. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



‘Say no to plastic’ campaign. The senior dancer highlights these causes in her choreographies.

Parallel to Ileana’s efforts, Mrinalika has been making strides in sustainable living and wellness. She has launched Hasa Atelier, which aims to harness the richness of the state’s natural resources. This initiative not only promotes wellness but also supports local farmers and artisans, ensuring that the community benefits from sustainable practices.

The 200-year-old Belgadia Palace in Mayurbhanj, the sisters’ ancestral home, harmoniously blends the past and the present. The palace not only offers travellers an immersive experience of the

The 200-year-old Belgadia Palace in Mayurbhanj, the sisters’ ancestral home, harmoniously blends the past and the present. It offers travellers an immersive experience

region’s rich heritage but also ensures that the local community thrives. As Akshita says, “In the olden days, people fought wars; now we are waging battles such as climate change.” By sourcing ingredients locally, employing artisans, and promoting traditional dance, the palace creates an ecosystem where tourism bolsters community livelihoods.

One of the palace’s flagship initiatives, ‘Chhau for a cause’, provides a platform for Mayurbhanj Chhau performers, connecting them to global audiences and a sustainable income. Chhau is the rhythm of Mayurbhanj – a tradition that combines powerful movements and storytelling. Unfortunately, many of its practitioners struggle for recognition and livelihood. ‘Chhau for a cause’ was born from this need to preserve the art form. “We integrated it into the palace experience for visitors. We also support artistes by ensuring better training, and connect them to audiences across the world. The initiative ensures that every performance is a step toward preserving this cultural treasure. We hail from a family that has a deep understanding of our roots. Though we went abroad to study, we came back to use that knowledge to make the art and culture of the region resonate in contemporary times,” says Akshita.

## An ode to Krishna

Krithikaa Shurajit chose a conventional theme for her recital

V.V. Ramani

Krishna continues to be a constant favourite for dancers, and thematic presentations are often based on him. ‘Krishna Premee’ a thematic performance was presented by Krithikaa Shurajit as part of the Trinity Arts Festival of India.

A selection of popular compositions was chosen for this show. ‘Adharam madhuram vadanam madhuram’, penned by Vallabhacharya, speaks of Krishna’s beautiful form. Krithika went through the descriptions with ease, so she could communicate the ideas better.

The Jayadeva Dasasvatara Ashtapadi highlighted the stories of the 10 avataars of Vishnu, and the dancer moved from one to another with brief sancharis that brought out the essence of each

avatar. Purandaradasar kriti ‘Jagadhodharana’ had some moments of vatsalya bhava, where the unconditional love of a mother for her child was portrayed. It was in the Jayadeva Ashtapadi ‘Sakhi he’ that the dancer’s penchant for abhinaya came across.

This show once again brings back the question – what constitutes a thematic performance? Should it not aspire to move beyond stringing together popular compositions on the theme?

Radhika Shurajit did the nattuvangam. Nandini Sai Giridhar on the violin, Muthukumar on the flute and Nellai D Kannan on the mridangam were the accompanying artistes. Archana and Aarathi, talented Carnatic musicians provided vocal support.

Singing for dance needs a different focus of expression and delivery and the sisters need to fine-tune this aspect.



## Celebrating Rasa

Kanakavalli in collaboration with Aalaap presents ‘Rasa: The Margazhi Edit’, a four-part performance series every Friday in December. It will be held outdoors at Kanakavalli’s signature store at Kingsley in Chetpet.

On December 6 (6.30 p.m.), Bharatanatyam artiste Nilava Sen will present Entheos that draws from the mystic philosophies of Baul minstrels and Sufism. This will be followed by Bharatanatyam artiste Prachi Saathi’s ‘When Walls Dance’ (7.30 p.m.), which will weave together dance, spoken word, music with animation and Warli tribal art and talks about the story of a little girl Champa and her beloved tree. On December 13 (6.30 p.m.), Bharatanatyam artistes Eesha Pinglay and Swarada Bhawe will present ‘Putanna’. This will be followed by Kaal-Taal (7.15 p.m.), a Kathak performance by Mahima Gulechha. On December 20 (6.30 p.m.), Rasa will host the Madras Mehfil led by Vandana Srinivasan, and at 8 p.m. Gurupriya Atreya and Vedanth Bharadwaj will present ‘Sing a lullaby’. The series will conclude on December 27 with ‘Vanamala’ (6.30 p.m.) curated by Bharatanatyam and contemporary artiste Mavin Khoo. It will feature varnams by Pallavi Anand, Divya Nayar and Pritam Das.



Syncretic tune The choir consisting of 100 priests and 100 nuns; and K.J. Yesudas. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND M. KARUNAKARAN

# When a choir sang in Sanskrit

Sarvesa, a musical track led by veteran singer K.J. Yesudas and drawn from Krishthubhagavatham, was launched recently

S B Vijaya Mary

You have heard him sing Carnatic kritis and devotional songs. Now K.J. Yesudas breathes life into Asmaakam thatha sarvesha/ swarga lokam adhishtitha (Our Father, the Lord of all, Living in heaven above, Holy is your name, May your kingdom come) in his inimitable style. He is joined by a chorus of 100 priests and 100 nuns.

Bengaluru-based violinist and composer Manoj George and Carnatic vocalist Fr. Paul Poovathingal CMI, a disciple of K.J. Yesudas, recently released Sarvesa, a Sanskrit rendition of the Lord’s prayer. The lyrics are from Krishthubhagavatham, a work by renowned Sanskrit scholar Prof. P. C. Devassia. Pope Francis formally released the track during a special audience at the Vatican on

November 20, 2024.

“Meeting Pope Francis was a divine experience,” says Manoj. “The Pope listened attentively to the song as we explained its essence and graciously signed the album cover.”

Manoj credits Fr. Paul with the concept of Sarvesa. “He called me one day to share the idea of composing ‘Our Father in Heaven’ in Sanskrit. We decided to set it to tune in raga Natabhairavi using Indian and Western orchestration. The goal was to create a universal appeal by merging diverse musical elements.”

Next came the challenge of ensuring perfect pronunciation. “For this I approached Sanskrit scholars, including Professor Neelakanta from Kerala University.”

After finalising the melody, Manoj began writing the orchestral score, incorporating strings, woodwinds, and choral



arrangements. “The polyphonic structure was designed to complement the melody while enhancing its spiritual essence,” says Manoj.

**Conveying the essence**

The choir, consisting of 100 priests and 100 nuns, was carefully put together. “We wanted a powerful collective voice to convey the essence of the prayer. The priests and nuns, primarily from Kerala, were trained for the performance. We then conducted rehearsals in a studio in Cochin.”

On the decision to collaborate with Yesudas, Manoj shares, “After

recording the main track, we felt the song needed a legendary voice to anchor it – someone who could truly embody the spiritual gravitas of ‘Our Father in Heaven’. Fr Paul, a former student of Yesudas, reached out to him, and he graciously agreed.” Yesudas’ vocals were recorded in Florida and later combined with the orchestral arrangements performed by the Los Angeles Orchestra, whose musicians are renowned for their work on Hollywood scores.

The result was a moving opening that set the tone for the entire track. “The Los Angeles Orchestra comprises top-tier musicians who play for prestigious events such as the Oscars and Grammys. My friend Ricky Kej connected me to their coordinator, Rocio Marron, who helped assemble the ensemble.”

The video was filmed across three locations: Little Flower Church in Elamkulam, Kochi; recording sessions with the Los Angeles Orchestra in LA; and a special segment featuring the veteran singer in Florida.

“The biggest challenge was to bring together such a large group within a tight timeframe,” recalls Manoj.

While the primary goal is to ensure a wider reach for Sarvesa, Manoj reveals that this project marks the beginning of Fr. Paul’s effort to start a space where music therapy can be used to heal children with autism.



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**Novel expressions**  
Five dancers explored life and literature in their solo performances **p2**

**Tribute to a legend**  
Ustad Ashish Khan was the last link to a great legacy **p3**



**TWO BROTHERS AND THEIR CINEMATIC OEUVRE**  
Dev and Goldie Anand worked together on some of the finest Hindi films **p4**

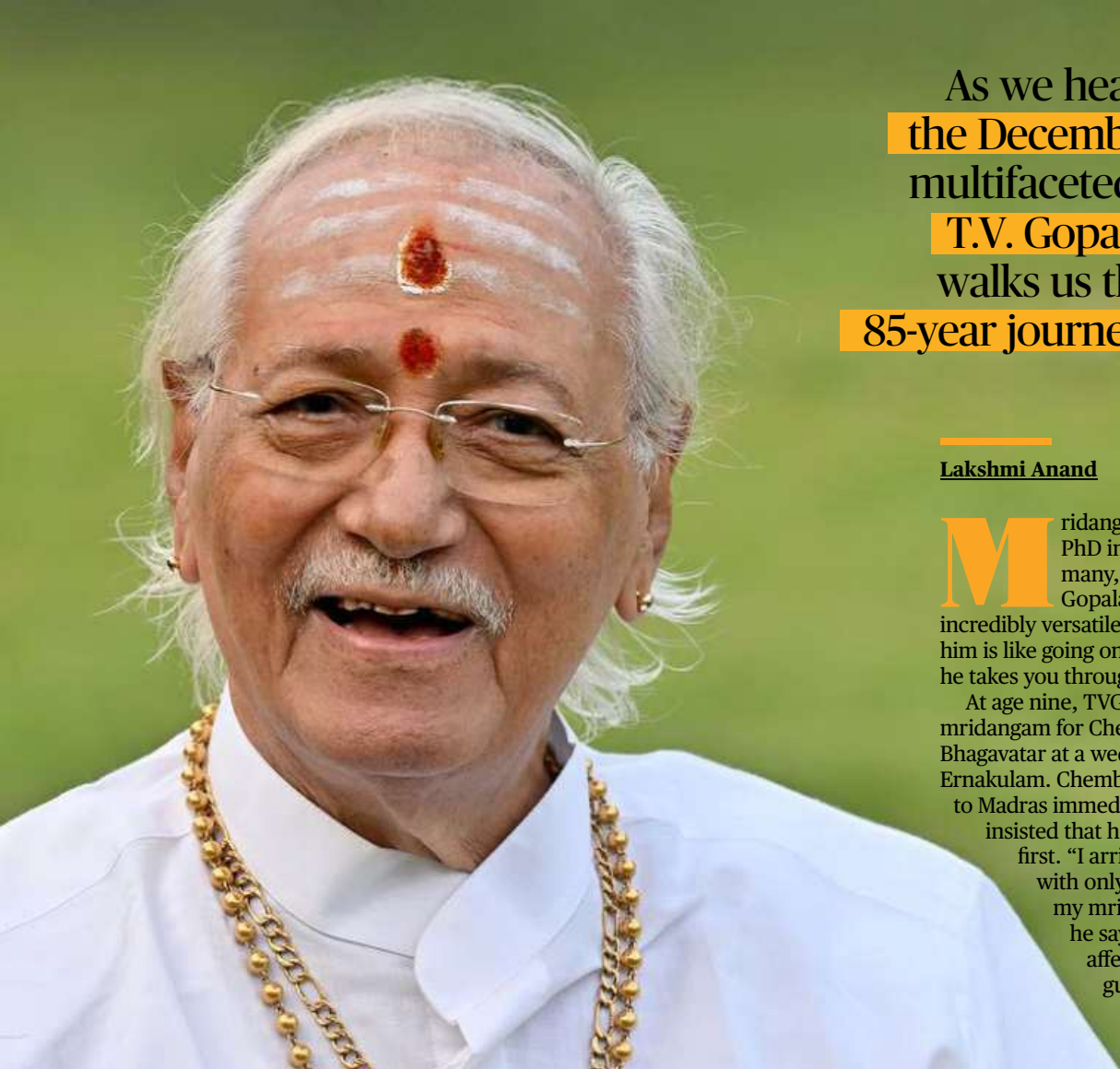


PHOTO: R RAVINDRAN

As we head towards the **December Season**, multifaceted musician **T.V. Gopalakrishnan** walks us through his **85-year journey in music**

## Notes from a Master

**Lakshmi Anand**

**M**ridangist, vocalist, violinist, PhD in music and guru to many, 92-year-old TV. Gopalakrishnan (TVG) is an incredibly versatile musician. Speaking to him is like going on a nostalgic trip, because he takes you through 85 years of music. At age nine, TVG played the second mridangam for Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar at a wedding concert in Ernakulam. Chembai wanted TVG to move to Madras immediately but TVG's father insisted that he finish his B.Com degree first. "I arrived in Madras in 1951 with only Rs. 100, a few clothes, my mridangam and sruti box," he says. Chembai was an affectionate and nurturing guru who fostered TVG's

individuality whilst pointing out what to glean from other masters.

TVG joined the Accountant General's (AG's) Office, Madras, in 1952, and worked in the department for nine years, first for Madras State and later for Andhra, following the State split in 1953.

"One more year, and I would have got a lifelong pension," he remarks.

At the inauguration of the Andhra AG's office, violinist Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu performed, and TVG accompanied him on the mridangam. "After the concert, he told me that I would be his choice, after Palani Subramania Pillai and Palghat Mani Iyer."

**Bond with Mani Iyer**

TVG shared a special bond with Mani Iyer, who played the mridangam for 50-60 of his vocal concerts. "He himself offered to," says TVG. "He would ask me what I was going to

sing. I would, in turn, request him to suggest." Today's headliners do not expect co-artists to be synchronised, he shares, recollecting how, in the past, many would insist on practising together.

Mani Iyer would tell him to practice songs a thousand times prior to performance. "Frequent repetition is essential for perfection, and for every note to adhere to sruti," says TVG. He advises musicians to fret less about new repertoire and focus more on how they execute their music, particularly on understanding lyrics and proper word splits. "While freshness should be infused with a new piece or two, the repertoire should never be completely overhauled," says TVG, who is also a trained Hindustani musician.

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**Shilpa Nanjappa**, a Kodava, brought out the rich culture and ways of worship of her people and the greatness of River Cauvery (whose origin is in Coorg) through her ‘Tales in Kodava’. She gave a clear, comprehensive introduction, as the songs were in Kodava.

This was presented as part of the 10th edition of Manthana, organised by Mangaluru’s Nrityaangan, and which featured solo performances.

Shilpa’s entry was full of zest and she lit up the stage with her expressive face and powerful movements. She began with a Kauthuvam in ragamalika that narrated the tale of Ayyappa, with keen focus on Mohini. It was an adaptation from ‘The song of Saastaavu’, a part of the *Pattole Palame*, a compilation of folklore passed down orally through ancestral songs. She beautifully presented the contrast between the clumsy movements of Bhasmasura and the graceful dance of Mohini.

‘Sri mula kanniye, pommale kodu male’, a patriotic song accepted as the anthem of independent Kodagu, blended the legends about the river goddess Kaveri and her present condition. The way Shilpa portrayed the callousness with which people pollute her pure waters would have melted anyone’s heart. When she stated that this is also the story of every single woman, manipulated and silenced through history, one nodded in agreement.

Before concluding her performance with a self-composed thillana, Shilpa presented a sringara pada ‘Aye, thumbi’, portraying an enraged Kanditha Nayika who is scorned by the man she loves. Her thillana was on the Puthari festival, a ‘harvest festival’ of the Kodavas when they dedicate their rice harvest to Igoothappa, who, centuries ago, taught them the method of cultivating paddy. The choreography of this piece had movements inspired by the indigenous dance forms of the Kodavas.

Shilpa’s performance was followed by four vibrant solo presentations on important female characters from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

# The expanding stage

Five dancers showcased the increasing flexibility of the art form

**B. Ramadevi**

**Indu Venu** transformed into Kaikeyi, who is torn between her intense love for Rama and her unbearable jealousy when she hears that he will be made king. Kaikeyi fears that once Rama becomes king, she and her son Bharata will have no identity. With Tulsidas’s ‘Tumak Chalat Ramachandra’, Indu Venu brought out the essence of motherly love. Along with Tulsī Ramayan, verses penned by Dr. Himanshu Srivastava were used for Indu Venu’s portrayal of Kaikeyi. Music and rhythmic composition for this was by Sujesh Menon and Vinay Nagarajan.

**Manjula Subrahmanya** portrayed Hidimba, the beautiful demoness, who is besotted with love for the tall and well-built Bhima and becomes the eldest daughter in law of the Kuru clan. Her life with Bhima is brief, and when he goes back to his family, she is alone again. When Gatotkacha is born, her motherly instincts are awakened and she is a happy mother. When Bhima returns after many years, she is delighted but soon finds out that Bhima wants their son to participate in the war. Hidimba makes her supreme sacrifice as she willingly gives her son to Bhima and goes back to her life of lonely wandering.

With an intensely expressive face and strong masculine movements, Manjula brought alive Hidimba as a demoness. At the same time, by throwing light on her soft motherly feelings and her sacrifice, she made Hidimba’s personality soar high. Manjula painted a clear picture of the complex character of Hidimba, who is only briefly mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.

The lyrics for this presentation were by Kavitha Adooru, music by Vineeth Purvankara and jathis by Manjunath Putturu.

**Radhika Shetty**, founder of Nrityaangan, presented ‘Manthareya Antharala’, a glimpse into the inner world of Manthara. Not conventionally beautiful, and abandoned by her parents, she finds refuge under Kaikeyi’s father and turns into a mother figure for Kaikeyi. Her actions are based on her boundless love for Kaikeyi and Bharata, who is like her grandson. Did she want anything for herself? Radhika’s expressive gestures and sensitive portrayal presented a different picture of Manthara. By the time Radhika concluded, the spectators were ready to understand Manthara and even sympathise with her.

Radhika’s presentation was based on Kuvempu’s *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* from which she had taken the lyrics that were set to music by Karthik Hebbar, Bengaluru.

The music ensemble was absolutely stunning. Vidyashree Radhakrishna’s impressive nattuvangam had dignity, strength, clarity and deftness. Nandakumar Unnikrishnan sang with emotion and gave life to the characters portrayed by the dancers. Mridangam by Karthik Vydhatri maintained the liveliness and flute by Nithish Ammannaya added melody and sweetness.

**Divya Nair** was convincing in her portrayal as Chitrangada, the princess of Manipur and the only heiress to the throne, who was brought up by her father as a strong warrior and an able ruler. Though her thoughts and behaviour are unlike those of a woman, tender feelings of love blossom in her heart when she meets Arjuna, the Pandava prince. When her son Babruvahana is born, she transforms herself into a fond mother, too. Divya brought out the nuances of Chitrangada’s character with her lively movements and striking abhinayas. She left the spectators wondering, ‘Who are you, Chitrangada -- a warrior, a lover, a mother, or all of these?’ The lyrics had been composed by Dr. Suneel and were set to music by Sankaran Menon.



CONTINUED FROM  
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TVG performed regularly for All India Radio from 1949, and says playing for specific durations enforced discipline. “In radio, I never asked who I was assigned to. As a senior artiste, I have played for Sikkil Sisters and D.K. Pattammal.”

**Accompanying stalwarts**  
After a couple of concerts in other slots, from 1962, TVG played at the senior slots for his guru M. Balamuralikrishna, S. Kalyanaraman, the Sivanandams and M.D. Ramanathan. Since Chembai preferred TVG playing mainly for him, he performed only sporadically with other musicians until Chembai’s demise in 1974. The others he performed with include M.A. Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar, S. Balachander and T.K. Govinda Rao.

TVG also gave vocal concerts at The Music Academy in the senior slots. Years later, in 2014, he received the Sangita Kalanidhi. “The Academy stands for the cause of musicians and has instituted a title that is as respected as any national award,” he says.

TVG’s many programmes alongside violinist M.S. Gopalakrishnan (MSG) were memorable. He collects one where the two of them performed with D.K. Jayaraman. “Jayaraman was having voice trouble. I gently suggested he utilise MSG and me. Within a few minutes, he found his groove. Co-artists should do everything they can to help the headliner. They should work on developing discernment (‘ruchi’). Violinists should not distort or twist the headliner’s music. Percussionists should learn moderation, carefully analysing the intensity and density of play and executing it appropriately.”

On the duration of the tani



## Notes from a Master

avartanam, TVG believes less is more. “Mani Iyer rarely played for more than seven minutes.” What if a mridangist exceeds time significantly? “I would just pick up the refrain.”

Varying accompanying rubrics explain why many headliners prefer specific co-artists, he remarks. “I don’t sing without Varadu (violinist S. Varadarajan), for instance. Sanjay (Subrahmanyan) also uses a specific set.” He simultaneously implores headliners to give space to co-artists. “It is a sign of both skill and lack of ego.”

“Percussion for instruments is difficult and different.” This, he stresses, is why certain mridangists, such as Thanjavur Upendran, Guruvayur Dorai and Umayalpuram Sivaraman, were preferred for instrumental

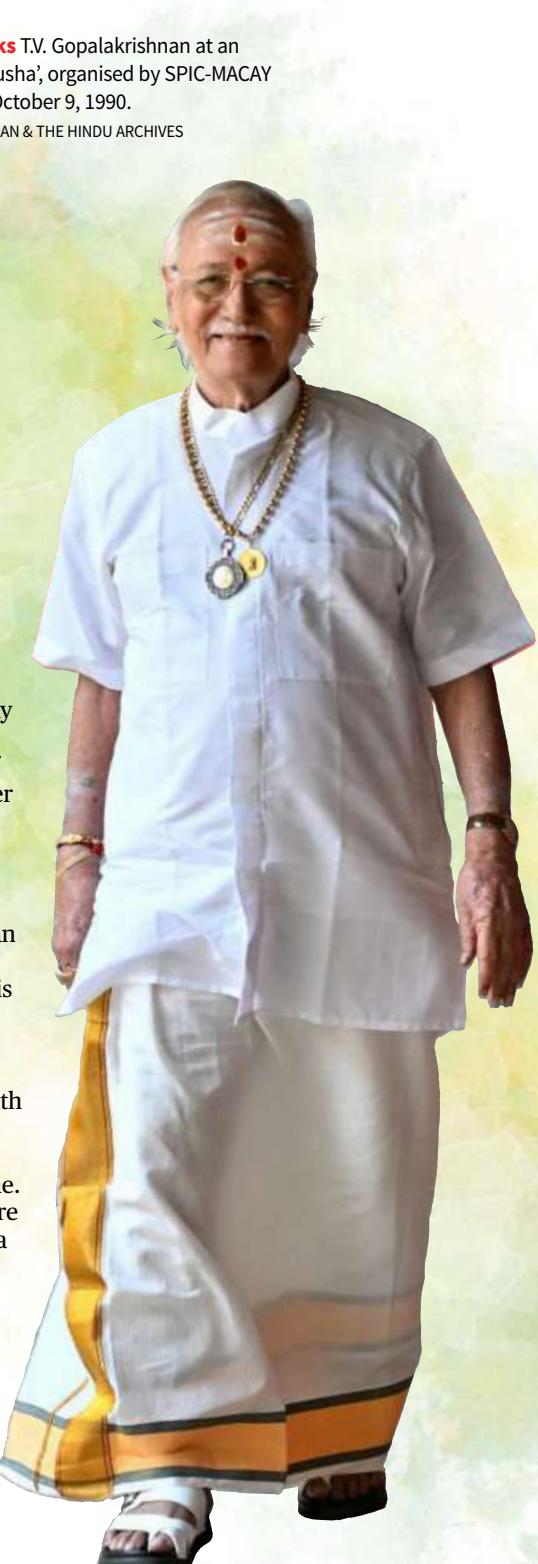
concerts. “You cannot bang the instrument and get applause. The decibel level has to come down significantly, and even in that lower volume, each syllable should ring clearly.”

Known for his nuanced, song and instrument-appropriate mridangam playing, TVG says, “Noise is injurious to the mind, psyche and ears, and diametrically opposite to aesthetics – yet today, that is what generates applause.” The master musician cites inadequate mridangam maintenance for percussive cacophony. “Getting a mridangam’s meettu and chaapu perfectly aligned is both difficult and time consuming. Only a well-maintained and perfectly tuned mridangam can be played melodiously. In instrumental concerts, discordances are even

more discernible.”

He teaches all his students kutcheri dharmam (concert etiquette), he says. Mentioning Varadarajan and mridangist Vijay Natesan, he adds, “I have mentored the largest number of performing musicians world over in so many fields – keyboard, saxophone, violin, mridangam and voice.”

“We have limitless opportunities now – anything can be sung by anyone in any way, wearing anything. Who exactly is getting benefited, though?” wonders TVG. “Since today’s rasikas are diplomatic, a frank guru/mentor is critical, along with self-assessment and self-effacement. Our music is conversational now that has gone. People say it is ‘my music’. We are creating our own listeners with a mailing list. How does one generate new listeners then? When will you exercise, meditate or practice if you are cultivating a media image? Spend time on yourself. Cult followings are fashion – not passion. Perform as Iswara arpanam – then humility, moderation and pacing will manifest,” TVG concludes.



**A mentor speaks** T.V. Gopalakrishnan at an intensive ‘Pratyusha’, organised by SPIC-MACAY in Chennai, on October 9, 1990.

PHOTOS: R. RAVINDRAN & THE HINDU ARCHIVES

### CALENDAR



#### Inspired by the kites

Anita Ratnam and Narthaki Global Media present ‘Kattam Katti’, a thematic production by Uraja Desai Thakore’s Pagrav Dance Company on December 4, 7.30 p.m., at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao concert hall, Harrington Road. Urja Thakore brings the production from the U.K. to Chennai as part of her dance company’s all-India tour. Tickets (₹ 300) are available on Tikkl.com.

#### Thematic production

Sathvikaa Shankar, senior disciple of Anitha Guha, will present ‘Skandaanubhavam - The World of Blissful Consciousness’ on November 30, 6 p.m., at Alliance Francaise of Madras.

The production explores the life of Muruga, drawing references from Kachiappa’s Kandhapuranam, Adi Sankara’s Subramanya Bhujangam, Arunagirinathar’s Tiruppugazh and Kanda Sashti Kavacham.

#### Annual dance camp

Natarangam invites applications for Natya Sangraham, its annual camp for dance teachers and senior Bharatanatyam dancers to be held at Thennangur from January 24 to 26.. Participants will learn nuances of the art form from invited experts. Those interested can download the application form from <https://natarangam.in/natyasangraham>. The last date to submit is December 31. Completed forms should be mailed to [natarangam.ngs@gmail.com](mailto:natarangam.ngs@gmail.com). Convenor: Chitra Dasarathy (satvika abhinaya and aharya). Faculty: Manjari Rajendra Kumar (angika abhinaya and aharya); Nrithya Jagannathan (yoga); Kunnakudi Balamuralikrishna (vachika-music) and Sudha Seshayyan (vachika-poetry).



#### Honour for artistes

Aatmalaya Academy, Bengaluru, will present the annual memorial awards followed by dance performances at Narada Gana Sabha, on November 30, 6.15 p.m. The list of awardees include: **Chakyar Rajan memorial award** to K.N. Krishna Kurup (Puja Kottu, Kochi). **Dr. Rajaram Shastri award** — R. Krishnamurthy Shastrigal (Vedam - Sanskrit) **Melattur S. Natarajan memorial award** — to Jayaram Ganesan (Music and Dance).

**The Aatmalaya special award** will be given to Thanjavur V. Padma (Mridangam).

This will be followed by thematic presentations based on Padmaja Suresh’s book *The dance of Tantra and a Satguru* by Darshan Shankar; and students of Shantala Natyalaya Institute, Sri Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning and Aatmalaya Academy.

#### Parampara series

Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha takes rasikas on a musical journey through kshetras, composers and kritis by different vaggeyakaras, in its 124th year festival, to be held from November 30 to December 7 at Srinivasa Sastri Hall, Luz, Myslapore.

Titled ‘Parampara series’, it will feature 29 concerts by young musicians who will render kritis based on the chosen themes. The themes for tomorrow’s concerts are: ‘Numerically Dikshitar’, a veena concert by Veena Venkatramani (4 p.m.); ‘Purandaradasa’ by Niranjan Dindodi (5.30 p.m.); and ‘Surya’ by Iyer Sisters (7.15 p.m.).

#### Book fair

Giri Trading, Chennai, will hold its 10th annual book fair from December 29 to January 5, 2025, at the store’s Sannathi Street Branch (Near Kapaleeswarar Temple), Myslapore. The fair will have on display books on religion.





# The Maihar scion

Sarodist Ustad Aashish Khan, who passed away recently, was the last link to a great legacy

Shailaja Khanna

Ustad Aashish Khan was not just the grandson of Baba Allaudin Khan, the founder of the Senia Maihar gharana, but he was also the last of the musicians to have received *taalim* from the doyen. Born in Maihar, Ustad Aashish Khan was initially trained by his grandfather, and then his inimitable musician-aunt Annapurna Devi, before learning from his father Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. He remained in Maihar until he was 17, and later joined his father in Calcutta, in the mid 1950s. His close interactions with Pt Ravi Shankar also left their imprint on his music. From 1968, he made America his home.

Apart from being a link in this venerable chain, Aashish Khan was a magnificent musician in his own right. He moved out of the shadow of

his great gurus, and carved his own style on the sarod – he was bold yet traditional. Just the way he held the sarod – with perfect positioning of his hands – revealed his mastery. Aashish Khan’s interactions with several western musicians, including George Harrison, Alice Coltrane, pianist John Barham and Eric Clapton, brought in a new perspective to his playing.

Aashish Khan was a confident musician, secure in his music and open to jugalbandis with his peers and seniors. Some of his popular collaborations have been with sitarists Pt. Nikhil Bannerji, Ustad Shujaat Khan and Pt Indranil Bhattacharya, flautists Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia and Pt. Ronu Mazumdar and sarangi maestro Ustad Sultan Khan. The ustad was also well-known as a composer – he had scored for some Bengali and Hindi films, and also assisted both his father and Pt Ravi Shankar. Some

popular films he worked on include Satyajit Ray’s *Apur Sansar* and *Porosh Pathor*, Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi*, Tapan Sinha’s *Aadmi aur Aurat* and Tapan Mazumdar’s *Balika Badhu*.

During an interview with this writer last year, the Ustad spoke about composing for films. “Those days, the directors were hugely influenced by classical music. They were quite discerning. So, film music was mostly raga-based and I really didn’t face a problem. My biggest success was Tapan Sinha’s *Jatu Griha* (1964). I was in my late twenties then. So it was a big break for me.”

This experience helped the Ustad in forming the band

**Like the great musicians in his family, he was an amazing ‘layakaar’, playing unusual taals with half and quarter beats.**



**All in the family** Ustad Ashish Khan; and (below) with his father Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and brother Alam Khan.  
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Shanti, when he moved to the U.S. When it disbanded, Zakir Hussain went on to launch Shakti on the same lines.

Ustad Aashish had collaborated both with his father, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, and his uncle Pt. Ravi Shankar. He shared how Pt. Ravi Shankar and his father had a different approach to composing. “Panditji lent a western touch to the pieces while my father stuck to simple harmonies.”

The veteran carried with him the traditions of an earlier century. He had a treasure trove of rare ragas, including Sharad Pancham, Shubhavati and Kaushi Bhairav. Like the great musicians in his family, he was an amazing ‘layakaar’, playing unusual taals with half and quarter beats. Sarodist Debanjan Bhattacharjee recalls learning the rare 13-beat Jaitaal and the 11-beat Ashtamangal.

Simple and affable, the Ustad also had a great sense of humour. Once, when he was at an intimate event in Delhi, the hostess’ dog sitting under the couch kept barking at him. He jokingly remarked, “Her sur doesn’t match with mine.” A wonderful cook, he could make Bengali, Mexican, Chinese and Thai cuisines.

Ustad Aashish Khan was ever ready to share his musical insights with the younger generation. Some of his well-known disciples include his nephew Shiraz Ali Khan, Aatish Mukhopadhyay, Debanjan Bhattacharjee, Dishari Chakraborty and Dwiptanil Bhattacharjee.

# Big brass moments

## Grammy-winning trumpeter Ibrahim Maalouf and his interesting French-Arabic soundscape



Narendra Kusnur

Trumpet player Ibrahim Maalouf has an interesting way of describing himself. “If you call me 100 per cent Arabic, that’s true. But if you call me 100 per cent French, that’s also true,” he says. Born in Beirut, Lebanon, the 44-year-old musician had to shift to Paris as a child during the Lebanese Civil War in the 1980s. Since Arabic music ran in the family, he was raised on two diverse cultures.

Ibrahim will perform at Mumbai’s Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre’s (NMACC) Grand Theatre today in a show titled ‘Sounds Of Jazz’. He and Cameroon-born American bassist and singer Richard Bona will be doing separate sets. Ibrahim will be accompanied by his nine-member group Trumpets of Michel-Ange, which will also include a guitarist, saxophonist and four other trumpeters. “My playing uses a lot of Arabic elements and though it took time, the other trumpeters did a great job adapting to my style,” he says.

**Latest album**  
*Trumpets Of Michel-Ange* is also the name of Ibrahim’s latest album, released in September this year. It is a tribute to his grandfather, a musicologist, and father

Nassim Maalouf, who invented a quarter-tone trumpet, which could play Arabic modes not possible on regular trumpets. “The idea was to fulfil my father’s dream of sharing his quarter-tone trumpet with the rest of the world,” says Ibrahim.

Ibrahim’s other achievements include playing alongside Sting in Paris, in memory of victims of the 2015

**I have followed the work of Ravi Shankar and the new projects of Anoushka. I love the voice and singing style of Sid Sriram. On my India visit, I hope to meet some musicians and discuss ideas.**

Paris terror attack, and collaborating with Beninese-French singer Angelique Kidjo on the Grammy-nominated 2022 album *Queen Of Sheba*.

What’s interesting is that Ibrahim started off by playing western classical baroque music. As a teenager, he accompanied his father on tour and learnt the rudiments of Arabic music from him.

“While those were the basics, but being a trumpet player one has to follow the work of jazz legend Miles Davis at some point. It was the first time I heard someone play so

softly and yet create such an impact.”

**Music collaborations**  
Ibrahim says one of his motives is to keep experimenting with new sounds. Thus, *Queen of Sheba* is a seven-song record linking Africa and the Middle East, with Angelique writing songs in the Yoruba language and Ibrahim composing and arranging the music. His 2022 album *Capacity To Love* took him to another zone, as he collaborated with a range of hip-hop and pop artistes. The title track features famed singer Gregory Porter.

Among Indian musicians, Ibrahim has worked with London-based tabla exponent Talvin Singh and Tunisian-French oud player Smadj on the 2009 live track ‘Fougueuese’, and with drummer Trilok Gurtu on the 2020 track ‘Diaspora’. He says, “I have also followed the work of Ravi Shankar and the projects of Anoushka. I love the voice and singing style of Sid Sriram. On my India visit, I hope to meet some musicians and discuss ideas.”

Ibrahim says one of his biggest influences has been Pakistani ghazal maestro Ghulam Ali. He even hums the opening lines of the hit song ‘Awaargi’. “It’s been said far too often that music has no boundaries, and that’s very true. In these times of conflict, music can play a major role in bringing about peace.”

Though he and Richard Bona are doing separate sets at the Mumbai show, Ibrahim hopes they will play a number or two together. They have earlier collaborated on the tune ‘Meeva In Wonderland’ from Ibrahim’s album *40 Melodies*.

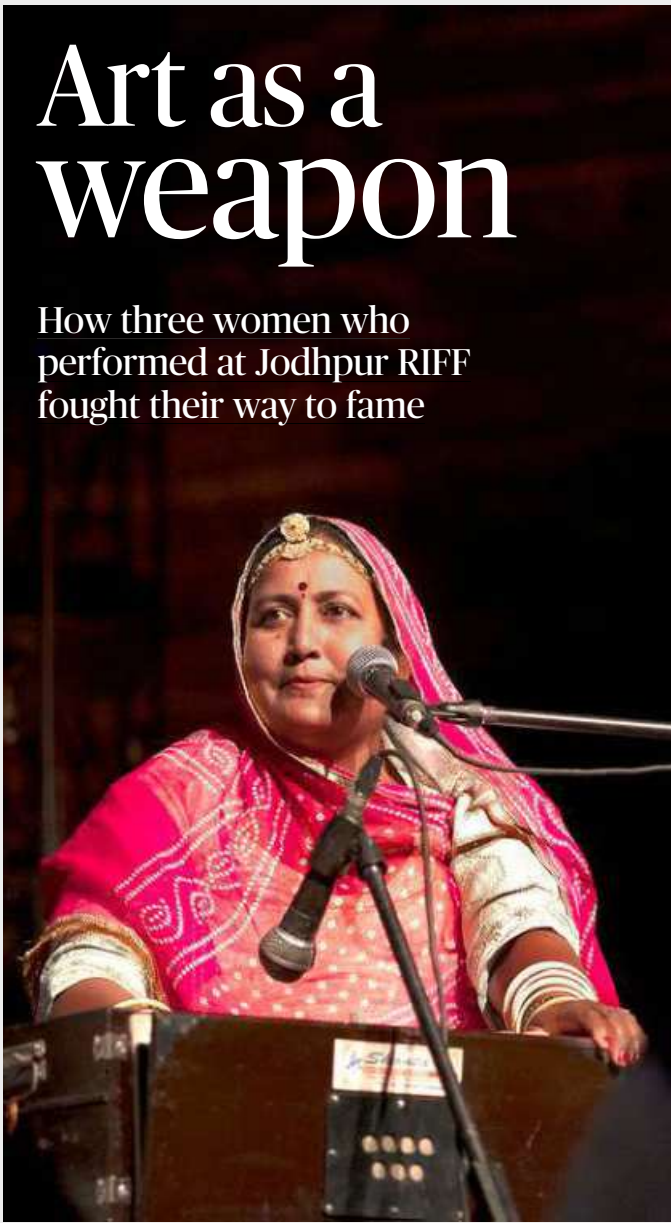
Richard has played with frontline musicians such as keyboardist Joe Zawinul, guitarists Larry Coryell, Mike Stern and George Benson, and saxophonists Michael Brecker and Branford Marsalis. Jazz fans in Mumbai are in for a treat today.

Charumathi Supraja

Picture this: A percussionist has arrived at the concert venue, but is asked to leave because the other percussionist has declared, “I do not play concerts with or for women.” The organisers and “main artiste” (as the artiste sitting centre stage is called) make a hasty apology and send her home. Enraged, she cries loud enough for her neighbours to gather and find out what happened. She vows to bring her work and instrument – the ghatam – to the centre of the stage. And, that is where Sukkanya Ramgopal, the musician who has paved the way for other women in percussion, sat when she performed at Jodhpur RIFF’s 2024 edition.

The genre-agnostic festival does indeed offer varieties of music but, remarkably, also brings to the fore women who have crossed many hurdles to get to the stage.

Sukkanya Ramgopal has taken, not one, but an array of earthen pots to the centre of the stage in the last five decades of her musical career. Her ghatam ensembles have broken notions and hierarchies – blending melody with percussion and poetry with classical music. “From the beginning, there were many hurdles to cross. So, I have come past with a lot of feeling. I don’t know what to call that emotion – anger, determination? I have fought a lot. Even now, some people tell me, ‘You are always fighting... try a softer approach’,” she says, laughing.



How three women who performed at Jodhpur RIFF fought their way to fame

Though Sukkanya has faced many rejections for being a woman percussionist, she sometimes chooses to reject opportunities that come her way just because she is a female percussionist. “How long are we going to keep

playing all-women ensembles? Have you ever heard anyone say ‘all-men’ ensemble?” She shares her Utopian vision of a hierarchy-free classical music world where artistes view each other as equal professionals. “So what, if you play the ghatam and I sing or

**Finding their space** (From below) Emlyn; Sukkanya Ramgopal; and Sumitra Das. PHOTOS: JODHPUR RIFF/OJIO



play any other instrument?” she asks.

Internationally acclaimed folk singer Sumitra Das Goswami, who also performed on the festival’s main stage, was only five when she started learning bhajans from her father. Having lost her mother and seen her father struggle as a construction worker by day and a bhajan singer by night, she told him they could earn more if she sang with him. He said it would be hard work but started teaching her, even

making a harmonium by hand (and a wooden seat so she could reach the keys). The lustre of her voice shone. She gained recognition well before she turned 14, but it was the connection she felt with mystic poets such as Meera, Kabir and Guru Gorakhnath that drew her in deep.

“As a child, sometimes, I would fall asleep at the *jagrans*. Sometimes, I would stay awake and sing with my father,” recalls Sumitra. “In all innocence, I believed that my singing would keep my family

safe from hunger. We lived on leftovers, shivered in rain and cold, and sweated in harsh heat – sometimes even longing for water,” says the artiste credited with being the first female Rajasthani folk singer to perform at the Berlin Philharmonic.

An invitation to perform in Jaipur changed Sumitra’s life, with art curators such as John Singh and others encouraging her to keep growing her artistic practice. The appreciation and acceptance she received nationally and internationally contrasted sharply with the rejection and harassment she, and her family faced from their community. Her father egged her on to sing and ignore her detractors. Yet, she still remembers him standing – hands folded, head bowed – before their community, saying: “Take what you want from me. Just let my daughter sing.”

The community levied a fine of Rs 50,000 for Sumitra’s choice to hold on to her musical career. They paid it by selling the 20 goats they owned, besides emptying out their meagre savings. When the community further demanded that she refrain from singing nearby or in any

**Though Sukkanya has faced many rejections for being a woman percussionist, she sometimes chooses to reject opportunities that come her way because she is a female percussionist**

of their homes, she hit back saying, “Now that we have paid the fine, I will sing exactly where I please.” Though her music cost her heavily (all except one sibling distanced themselves from her after their father’s death, and she had to find a partner outside her community because she was ostracised within hers), Sumitra says she feels only joy when she sings.

Sumitra now teaches music to her widowed sister-in-law and young niece, also encouraging them to “make a mark in the world so you are known for who you are.”

**Experimental music**  
Another voice that stood out at the festival was that of Emlyn from Mauritius. Her vibrant music brought the vastness of the Indian Ocean to Rajasthan. “The base of my music is traditional drumming and Sega chanting from my island,” says Emlyn. Her musical experiments are also influenced by rock, blues and fusion music she heard growing up. Addressing divisions created by colonisation and making instruments from trash or plastic washed up by the ocean she holds dear – is all in a day’s work for her.

“My love for my country and Nature are at the root of my work as an activist,” says Emlyn. She believes in making music that “conveys resistance but offers hope”. Having earlier harboured “a lot of insecurities about being a woman in the music industry”, she now chooses to focus on how women can do anything. “We have the power to give birth and can be very strong in our minds,” she says.





Happy times (Clockwise from extreme left) Dev and Goldie; a still from *Guide*; and the brothers and Vyjayanthimala during the shoot of *Jewel Thief*. PHOTOS: COURTESY TANUJA CHATURVEDI AND THE HINDU ARCHIVES



# Brothers in arms

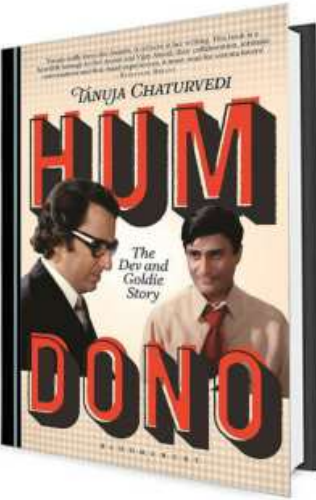
The book *Hum Dono: The Dev and Goldie Anand Story* shines a light on how they bonded over cinema

Anuj Kumar

In the realm of cinema, the enigmatic bond between a director and an actor holds an enduring charm. Over the years, the collaborations between Satyajit Ray and

Soumitra Chatterjee, Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune, Federico Fellini and Marcello Mastroianni have become part of film lore. One more collaboration that falls almost in the same league but is not spoken about in the same breath is the one between brothers Vijay and

Dev Anand. Over the years, their films have acquired a cult following among different generations of filmmakers. It is time to look back at their association that resulted in gems such as *Hum Dono* (1961), *Guide* (1965), and *Tere Mere Sapne* (1971). Dev had a healthy



Chaturvedi, who worked closely with Navketan Films, the production house of the Anand brothers, shines a light on the men and their methods and intersperses the book with anecdotes and inside stories to assess their creative journey. Like the track shot ingeniously used by Vijay in his thrillers, Tanuja aligns the charismatic Dev in the foreground while her gently probing lens tracks Goldie, as Vijay was popularly called, and his understanding of cinematic craft. Adding zing to *Taxi Driver* and *Funtoosh* with his inputs, Vijay showed signs that he would outgrow the giant shadow of Chetan, the eldest Anand who had developed a following among the intelligentsia with *Neecha Nagar* and *Aandhiyaan*. Starting with thrillers and crime capers such as *Nau Do Gyarah* (1957)

chemistry with other directors and Vijay directed other actors with distinction but when they came together it was magical. A recent book, *Hum Dono: The Dev and Goldie Anand Story* (Bloomsbury) traces their fascinating journey under the arc lights. Tanuja

and *Kala Bazar* (1960), Vijay lent Navketan a modern outlook, and together with Dev, brought an element of fun, intrigue, and Western sophistication to Indian cinema in the late 1950s. Their films were marked by noirish themes and chatty conversations where the hero could be a hustler, female characters had some agency and the songs reflected the story's soul. Known for his technical flourishes in creating the mise-en-scene, Vijay attempted a youthful road movie when there was no concept of sync sound in the Bombay industry with *Nau Do Gyarah*. To set the stage for the character of a black marketeer in *Kala Bazar*, Vijay shot the premiere show of Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* with top stars and filmmakers of the time walking the red carpet. Later, with *Johnny Mera Naam* and *Jewel Thief*, he established the template for crime thrillers. Dev was a rare Hindi film hero whom lyricists such as Majrooh Sultanpuri described as *hasen and khoobsurat* in songs. But beneath that carefully constructed demeanour of a breezy romantic actor who could play grey shades with conviction, there was a philosophical side to Dev that he was eager to express once he found a firm footing in the competitive industry. Vijay, who had a grounding in spiritual texts, gave this urge a concrete shape without taking away the mass appeal of the star. This marriage of art and entertainment was best reflected in *Guide*, their path-breaking collaboration. Vijay not only took liberty with the literary source on which the film was based, he also moved

away from its English cinematic adaptation. Finally, he came up a magnum opus that rang true to India's soul and remains relevant both in terms of its progressive text and context. *Guide* begins as the story of a tourist guide Raju, who comes across a woman whose bad marriage has made her an emotional wreck. He shows her the way to discover her inner strength. Ironically, in the process, Raju's own complexes come to the fore and the guide loses his way only to find redemption towards the end of a poignant climax. As Tanuja, who teaches film interpretation, says, Vijay had this amazing ability to play with the story's subtexts to construct the character's interior. "For him, cinema was like a piece of architecture — a means to show, not tell, express or explain." This came through again in *Tere Mere Sapne*. Not to forget Dev's neatly etched double role and Sadhana's magnetic appeal in *Hum Dono*, which Vijay co-directed with Amarjeet, the public relations man at Navketan. A war film with a tender core, Vijay's positioning and treatment of Sahir Ludhianvi's songs to generate moments of epiphany make *Hum Dono* a film for the ages. The depth of their endeavour is reflected in their legacy as well. There is hardly any similarity between Sriram Raghavan and Sanjay Leela Bhansali. But both swear by the art of Goldie. If one follows the art of creating a crime scene and credit rolls, the other pays tribute to his song picturisation. Like R.D. Burman's music, Vijay Anand continues to live on through a new generation of filmmakers.

music&dance

Look out for Friday Review's special Margazhi festival supplement on December 1.

SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX | DEVI | SANGAM | WOODLANDS | EGA | PVR - AMPA MALL | PALAZZO | S2 - PERAMBUR  
KAMALA | TNAGAR AGS | ASHOK NAGAR KASI TALKIES | INOX LUX | PVR GRAND - VELACHERY | PVR GALADA - PALAVARAM  
VR MALL PVR - ANNANAGAR | REDHILLS - PVR | ECR - PVR | AIRPORT - PVR AERO HUB | INOX NATIONAL  
INOX MARINA | MAYAJAAL | ECR - VIJAY PARK | MAMANDUR - C3 CINEMAS | OMR - CINEPOLIS | EVP CINEMAS  
S2 - THIYAGARAJA | AMBATHUR - RAKI & MURUGAN CINEMAS | VILLIVAKAM - AGS | OMR AGS | MADURAVAYAL - AGS  
KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI | PORUR - GK | CHORMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA CINEMAS | PADI - GREEN CINEMAS & SIVA SAKTHI  
CHENGALPET - SRK & LATHA CINEMAS | KANCHIPURAM - BABU & ARUNA | TIRUVALUUR - RAKI | CITLAPAKKAM - VARDHARAJA  
REDHILLS - RADHA MOVIE PARK | POONAMALLE - VIGNESHWARA | MADHURANTHANGAM - SR & ANAND | TIRUNINRAVUR - VELA | MAPPEDU - AVK



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OMR - CINEPOLIS | EVP CINEMAS | S2 - THIYAGARAJA | AMBATHUR - RAKI & MURUGAN | KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI  
PORUR - GK CINEMAS | CHORMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA CINEMAS | TIRUVALUUR - RAKI & ROJA & THULASI

