



Tune in for some discourse

and data at this year's Science at the Sabha **P3**

WHAT MUSIC MEANS TO

SIVASRI SKANDAPRASAD **P4**



As a series of re-releases emerges on big screens across the State, theatre owners and industry sources tell us what this means for Tamil cinema

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A dimly-lit theatre suddenly drowned in light revealed hundreds of fans crowding the aisles. Chatter and hooting reverberated through the hall as the film paused, only to replay a song that had just made the audience sing and dance. With the lights on, you could see it all – phones recording the unruly audience, women singing at the top of their lungs, a coy couple making eyes at each other. A celebration ensued.

'Anjala' from actor Suriya's 2008 film *Vaaranam Aayiram*, a *kuththu* song about a heartbroken man singing from remorse and despair, had made audiences move their feet. The weight of the plot point faded away for a brief moment, as people celebrated their memories.

"Back when we made 'Anjala,' we did feel that this was the kind of song that would make people dance," says director Gautham Vasudev Menon, whose *Vaaranam Aayiram* re-released recently to much fanfare in Tamil Nadu. "Harris (composer Harris Jayaraj) was intrigued with the descriptions of how I wanted the song to be – I wanted a folksy beat; the *saavu melam* one to be precise. I am happy that we tried to do something different and that it has worked," he adds.

Vaaranam Aayiram is one among the many other Tamil films – like 3, *Aalavandhan*, *Muthu*, *Baba*, *Siva Manasula Sakthi*, *Vallavan*, *Minnale*, *Vinnaithaandi Varuvaayaa*, and *Vettaiyaadu Vilayaadu* – that saw a re-release in theatres in the last one year. Four of these are directed by Gautham, and he is elated that audiences are choosing to re-live his films more than 15 years after they were released. That their films transcend time and stay relevant is what every filmmaker dreams to achieve, he adds.

Arunkumar Sekhar, a Chennai-based freelance writer, caught a show of *Vaaranam Aayiram* recently, and he is in awe of the community experience it gave him. "Laughing, singing and crying with everyone is an experience you do not get when you watch a film alone.

Catching these films on a large screen evoked a lot of memories from the old times which I cherish even now," he says.

Emerging micro trend

Re-releasing films is nothing new. However, thanks to the efforts of a few theatres in the city, a micro trend boosted by social media users has emerged. There are some very specific markings to this trend – these are films that target youth, and theatres are encouraging people to shoot videos on their mobile phones and dance to marquee songs, some of which get an encore, like at a concert.

After seeing the fanfare that re-releases of films like *Vada Chennai* and *Vellai Ila Pattadhaari* got on actor Dhanush's birthday last year, Vishnu Kamal, owner of Kamala Cinemas in Vadapalani, played *Vada Chennai* once again in October in the weeks ahead of Vijay's *Leo*. "And in the run that *Vada Chennai* had, we sold 21,000 tickets."



It's more about what these films meant to people. And so, when it comes back even after a decade, they want to go back to that space to re-live those moments

GAUTHAM VASUDEV MENON
Director

Skip to the flashback



Silver screen nostalgia (Below) Stills from *Vaaranam Aayiram*, 3 and 96; (right) audience record memories at a movie theatre. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND REUTERS



Vishnu decided to re-release 3 (*Moonu*) and actor Dhanush agreed despite the film not doing well after its original release in 2012. What really made this a success was not just the decision to re-release *Moonu* but, as Vishnu recounts, when he instinctively decided to turn his theatre hall into a mini-concert. "When 'Kolaveri' was playing, I thought, 'Everyone knows the lyrics to the song by heart. Why not play it for a second time but dial down the volume to let them sing?' That was a difficult call to make because what if they don't end up singing with you? It worked. People started to post videos on social media, and that's when it all started," he shares.

In Kamala Cinemas, *Moonu* ran for over 50 days, selling over 81,000 tickets, according to Vishnu. As it turns out, this is also working well as a business strategy for the makers, according to producer Kalaipuli S Thanu, whose *Aalavandhan* and *Baba* were digitally remastered and released recently. "Firstly, people who are watching these films are watching it on the big screen for the first time, and so they get a fresh experience. Moreover, these are digitally remastered versions and not the film prints that were used in those days." Being able to distribute more prints per film than when it was originally released, and releasing using the far-evolved distribution system also helps producers, he adds.

Tried and tested

Whether these films can compete with new releases is subjective, but

people are more willing to watch tested content in theatres than new content, says Ruban, the owner of GK Cinemas, Chennai.

The reason why these films are working has less to do with how new films are working, says Gautham. "It's more about what these films meant to people. And so, when it comes back even after a decade, they want to go back to that space to re-live those moments." Arunkumar concurs. "Movies are like a time capsule; they are a reflection of the time they were made in, but some movies stand the test of time. Not only do they give you the memories of past years, but show you how timeless some of those movies are," he says.

However, this aspect is also a major reason why you cannot be sure if this trend is here to stay. Ruban believes it will fade away, because, only a few films are available on digital for a re-release, and out of them, only a handful guarantee such an experience. Additionally, not all producers are willing to re-release or invest to digitalise their films.

Vishnu disagrees. However, he admits that the unavailability of digital versions is a disadvantage. "So many people want to watch *Ghilli*, *Sachein* or *Poove Unakkaga* but none of them are re-mastered digitally." Hence, this is possible only for those films that came out after 2007 or 2008, when digital cameras took over film cameras, or if the films' digital versions are available.

"Only four or five films have worked well in these re-releases, like *Pudhupettai*, *Aayirathil Oruvan*, *Moonu* and *Vaaranam Aayiram*; of these, the first two are films that didn't do well initially and later gained popularity," Ruban explains. As Vishnu says, films like *Vaaranam Aayiram*, *Moonu*, and *Siva Manasula Sakthi* draw college-goers and young couples. Theatre owners also cannot do much if even the three to four other films that adhere to all these parameters do not get re-released as the producers don't seem to be interested or are unable to invest in digital remastering of their films.

Whether this trend is here to stay or not, only time will tell. For now, the month of love will see a city-wide re-release of *Premam* and 96, adding to the list of classic romantic films like *Vimmaithandi Varuvaayaa* that have been running for a while now. Witness the romance that is cinema with a date down memory lane.



An ode to the fandom

Comic Con India launches in Chennai with cosplay, comic strips and pop art merchandise

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When Akshara Ashok created Happy Fluff Comics at 19, most imagined her to be a comic from the West as her account was anonymous. It was during a random question and answer session on Instagram that she finally revealed that she was an artist from Chennai. "The reaction was mixed. Some were happy to hear this but some others were mad. They didn't like a brown girl talking about body image, sex and menstruation," she says.

On February 17 and 18, the artist will come face to face with city-folk who have followed her work for years at Comic Con India's maiden sojourn in the city. She is nothing short of excited. "Following an artist online is one thing but meeting them in person is entirely different," she says.

The weekend event promises two interesting sessions with international artists Dan Parent, best known for his work on the Archie comics (including the book *The Archies in India*) and John Layman who wrote several works including *Chew*, on their process and techniques. The event will also have VFX artist

Going by the panels Cosplay artists from the Bengaluru edition of Comic Con. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pramita Mukherjee who will speak about the making of the animated film *Kung Fu Panda 4*.

Comic Con India also promises face time with over 15 Indian artists who have created a wide range of characters drawing from mythical superheroes to well-loved Indian comic superstars from *Tinkle* and *Amar Chitra Katha*.

Rahil Mohsin, a Bangalore-based comic book artist and the co-founder of *Hallubol*, the first Dakkhni motion comic series, is looking forward to showcasing *Hallubol: Mard Bann*, the first work in the series, adding that he is excited to meet audiences and visit the beach.

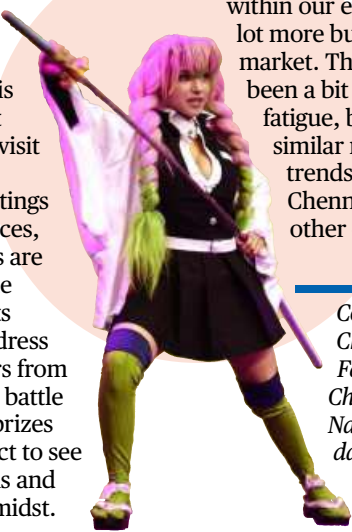
Besides meetings and performances, massive crowds are expected for the cosplay contests where artistes dress up as characters from comic books to battle it out for cash prizes each day. Expect to see several Batmans and Jokers in your midst.

Jatin Varma, founder, Comic Con India, says that the events in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru have seen great footfalls over the last decade. The event at Hyderabad comes a close second. Although Chennai has been on their radar for several years now, pandemic-induced delays caused them to plan their entry only in 2024.

"Chennai has a strong and active fan community, I feel fans will love the sessions on the main stage," he says, adding that they are expecting to see enthusiasts between the ages of 18 and 36.

On trends that one can expect to see at the event, he said, "There has been a massive increase in interest for anime and manga content as we also see it within our exhibitor base with a lot more business catering to this market. There certainly has been a bit of a superhero fatigue, but overall I expect a similar response in terms of trends and crowds, in Chennai as we have seen in other cities."

Comic Con India's Chennai edition is on February 17 and 18 at Chennai Trade Centre, Nandambakkam. A single day's pass costs ₹899. Register at www.comiccon.in.



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Beachville Coffee Roasters opens its second branch on Khader Nawaz Khan Road. Try classic espressos and experimental coffee popsicles at the new 65-seater cafe

A whole latte love



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As our filter kaapi loving city slowly opens up to try cortados and macchiatos, cafes and roasteries are coming up with more innovative ways to serve coffee. At the newly opened branch of Beachville Coffee Roasters on Khader Nawaz Khan Road, a bright red watermelon popsicle is dropped into a glass filled with ice, over which a heady brew of espresso is poured, and topped with sparkling water. The drink is refreshing, and is surprisingly delicious for something made with two polarising ingredients – watermelon and coffee.

“We make this drink with single-origin beans from the Attican estate. Watermelon is used by many growers in processing the beans. These are two flavours that seem strange, but pair well, especially with a darker coffee like this one as the acidity from the watermelon and the bitterness from the coffee hit different parts of your palate,” shares Divya Jayashankar, founder, Beachville Coffee Roasters.

Much like their coffee pop and jelly latte, the bright



ambience of this 65-seater cafe is refreshing, featuring a bold facade that encourages you to ‘Come find your coffee’.

“There is a lot of interest in specialty coffee, and people are keen to try new blends and brewing techniques. We conduct workshops and sessions around coffee, but even on regular days, our customers tell us how they want their coffee to taste and how they want to brew it. We then give them the right kind of grind. When 85% of the country are tea drinkers, a lot of education and reimagination is needed to improve the consumption of coffee,” shares Divya.

She suggests that we try the Dark White, which has

steamed coconut milk and a thick decoction made with Dark Horse, a new blend at Beachville. The drink is light, yet creamy with a mild zing from cardamom. “I had coconut payasam in mind when we created this drink,” says Divya.

The new Beachville also offers an expanded menu, with food crafted to be paired with the many varieties of coffee they brew. We give their panuozzos a try, and these thinly rolled-out sourdough flatbreads come with a variety of filling. The caprese variant is fresh and tangy with ripe tomatoes, soft mozzarella cheese, pesto, and basil. We also try the fig, ricotta, and honey version with arugula which is flavourful without



being too sweet.

“Many cafes have opened up in the city in the last few years. While we spend a lot of time in cafes, we take our own sweet time to eat. But



Fresh beans Panuozzos and coffee at Beachville's second outlet. THAMODHARAN BHARATH, S SHIVA RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

not all dishes taste good when they get cold. The Italian panuozzos taste good even if they aren't eaten hot. We also have idli arancini, a dish inspired by how my mother would repurpose leftover idlis from the morning, as an evening snack. It is the perfect side for our customers who are here for the strong filter coffee,” says Manoj Padmanaban, partner and head of experiences at Beachville Coffee Roasters.

The idli arancini is spicy and crunchy on the outside and underneath the panko crust, is fluffy, and garlicky.

Apart from coffee and bites to go with it, there are yogurt parfaits, oat jars, and chia puddings that pair well with your morning caffeine hit, but are available through the day. Much of this menu will soon find its way to the popular original Beachville, set on St. Mary's Road in Alwarpet.

Beachville Coffee Roasters is at 11/19, Khader Nawaz Khan Road. A meal for two is priced at approximately ₹1,000.

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Across

- 1 Teapot cover (4)
- 3 Lens maker (8)
- 9 Portable heater (7)
- 10 Permit (5)
- 11 Mindset of a group (5)
- 12 Get-up-and-go (6)
- 14 Without thinking (13)
- 17 Wall painting (6)
- 19 Acute (5)
- 22 Corny (5)
- 23 Rough (7)
- 24 Sums used to settle debts (8)
- 25 Restrain (from indulging in some pleasure) (4)

Down

- 1 Suspended mountain conveyance for passengers or freight (5,3)
- 2 Hoard (5)
- 4 One wants nothing but the best (13)
- 5 Mad (5)
- 6 Criminal (7)
- 7 Small amphibian (4)
- 8 Bite-sized Chinese dumplings (3,3)

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- 13 Fellow-feeling (8)
- 15 Intimidate (7)
- 16 Cavalry commander killed at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, 1876 (6)
- 18 Leather with a napped surface (5)
- 20 Mindful (5)
- 21 Leave off (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated February 22, 2024.

Solution No. 13571

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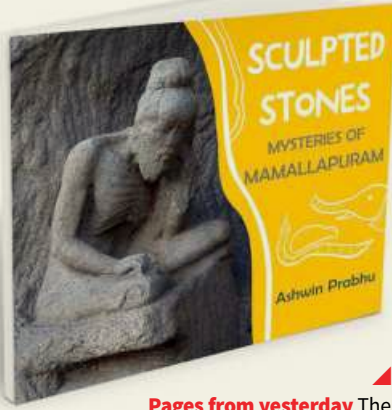
Where stones speak

A book on Mamallapuram helps children navigate its Pallava-era architecture

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On a crescent-shaped beach where waves build along the coastline stands the ancient Shore Temple, some 60 kilometres South of Chennai. The lone survivor from a row of temples that dotted the sands of Mamallapuram, it is one of the oldest structural monuments in peninsular India. Along with the other marvels of the port town built, carved and chiselled from granite in the 7th and 8th centuries, the Shore Temple has gazed out into history for eons. Named for the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, also known as Mamalla or the great wrestler, the town known fondly as Mahabs, and its host of UNESCO world heritage sites, have found mention in ancient literature such as *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and been written of extensively since. Now, a new book *Sculpted Stones: Mysteries of Mamallapuram* (published by Tulika Books) by Ashwin Prabhhu, introduces children to ancient sculptural art through interactive engagement.

“How do you get children to engage in something that is more than a thousand years old?” asks Ashwin, who writes, teaches and volunteers on everything history. “History is not popular with many kids because of the undue stress on dates and periods. Instead, the book aims to explore Mamallapuram through observation of its structures and raise questions to engage with its material heritage. The same can be applied to the Qutb Minar, San Thome church...



Pages from yesterday The book; (below) Ashwin Prabhhu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

even though it's such a momentous heritage site,” he adds.

The 65-page book delves into Mamallapuram's architecture with a factfile that seeks to make the child imagine life in its heyday and question how or why Arjuna's Penance, the rock caves, and the relief sculptures came about. It highlights the difference among cave, monolithic and structural temples; answers who gifted sculptors like Mandhatar were; and how the Saivite saint Appar pieced together Arjuna and Bhagiratha's penance in one of his hymns.

The book also draws the attention of the reader to relatively unknown facts such as the deer that features in an old ₹10 note and that the painting of the sculptural rock face by English painter Thomas Daniell is probably the first accurate visual of a Mamallapuram site.

All this and more will be discussed at a talk organised by the Tamil Heritage Trust (THT), a non-profit history interest group founded in 2010 to raise awareness on Indian heritage. At the event, Ashwin will connect the dots between viewing and understanding the stories of yesterday with Gopu Rangarathnam, a heritage enthusiast and long-time volunteer at THT.

At Nahar Hall, Deshabandhu Plaza, 47, Whites Road, Royapettah on February 17, 5.30pm. Entry is free and open to all.



Chennai's newest recreational sports complex boasts of a chlorine-free, ozone-treated semi-Olympic swimming pool, open to the public

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While Chennai now has the answer to every novice's want for physical activity and love for sport, in the form of turfs, courts and outdoor spaces, swimming pools are still hard to come by. Recreational swimmers are almost always in search of accessible pools. Save a few public pools that have stood the test of time, clubs and luxury hotel chains are an option, albeit at a roaring monetary cost. At Blues by Tiki Taka, the city's latest sports recreational facility located in Saidapet's peaceful residential neighbourhood of Srinagar Colony, a chlorine-free, ozone-treated, semi-Olympic swimming pool tackles this dilemma head on. The facility is also home to four wooden-floor badminton courts.

Officially launched in January, the facility spread across two floors, follows a sleek design replete with box lights, with a largely blue-grey colour palette. While the ground floor houses the semi-Olympic pool with a depth of three-and-a-half to five



feet, including the spick-and-span, dry changing and shower rooms with lockers, the first floor has three wooden badminton courts with a designated space for a sports equipment kiosk. The court with no air conditioning has vents running all around to facilitate free flow of air.

“It is an ozone pool, there is no chlorine. Usually we hear a lot of complaints from swimmers about eye burn, rashes and itchy skin, which is why we wanted to keep it chlorine free. We believe that this is the first no-chlorine, public pool in Tamil Nadu,” says Lakshmi Palaniappan, director, Tiki Taka, a recreational sports centre that hosts seven facilities

In three to four months, an L-shaped cafe that would overlook the pool, would also be part of the facility

in Chennai for football, basketball, badminton, pickleball, cricket and now swimming.

“We started Tiki Taka in 2015. It has been almost eight years in this field. We have always wanted to do a swimming pool because the only pools that are available are in clubs that are restricted to members or hotels which are expensive. On the other hand,

It's time for a dip (Left) The swimming pool; and (below) badminton courts. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

other public pools are not very well maintained,” says Lakshmi. In partnership with Vishnu Alagappan, who scouted the land for the facility, the decision to set up a badminton court along with the swimming pool was made. The location also makes the facility accessible to Guindy, Kotturpuram, Adyar and Alwarpet. From the response, Lakshmi gauges that swimming is the most popular among all age groups and genders in the city.

Being chlorine-free also means more hours and layers of maintenance. “We have an ozone machine that has to be run for five to six hours a day. We also do a daily vacuum cleaning of the floor of the pool. That's done in the morning when all the dust settles, apart from the regular filtration which takes out debris,” explains Lakshmi. Ozone-treated water is akin to potable water. “We have a TDS (Total Dissolved Solids) meter that checks the cleanliness. We maintain the level up to 110 to 115 – up to 150 is the level of potable water,” adds Vishnu.

The idea is to encourage a flow of physical activity – “People can play, and head for a swim after,” says Lakshmi adding, “A lot of adults also come with their kids. They would be running around while the parent is playing, but here, you can engage the kids as well.” The facility also plays music to contribute to the swim experience. Lakshmi says that in three to four months, an L-shaped cafe that would overlook the pool, would also be part of the facility. Sharath Mukundan's swim academy Wild Swim offers swimming classes for both adults and children at the facility from 6am to 9am and 4pm to 7pm.

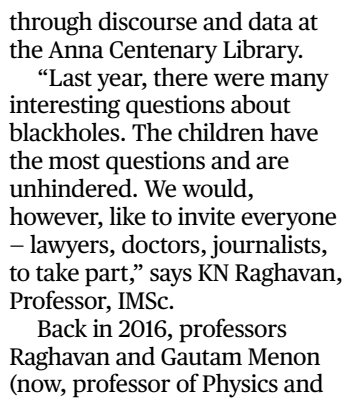
Blues by Tiki Taka is located in South Mada Street, Srinagar Colony, Saidapet. The pool is open from 6am to 11pm. Call 7339546671 for details.



All through the year, the campus of the Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSC) in Chennai's Taramani sees young school-going students attempting to improve their scientific acumen by trying their hand at experiments. However, this is usually never enough. The lot is uncontained at IMSC's annual disquisition, Science at the Sabha. Here, the lectures are about a wide range of topics, held for free and open to the public.

The seventh edition of Science at the Sabha is back, this time with a change in venue. Mid-career scientists who are experts on the subject, will be attempting to make astronomy, plastic, puzzles and the seas around India, accessible

Solve a puzzle at the sabha



Biology at Ashoka University) were discussing how India lacked an 'open Science day' where the public could freely access the country's top institutions and understand their inner workings. This was unlike the West where cities like Munich would throw the doors of its universities open to the scientifically curious. Ahead of National Science Day (February 28) that year, the institution decided to throw their resources

Although there has been a change in the venue, the format of Science at the Sabha remains the same. There will be four sessions of 40 minutes each, with five minutes of questions at the end. Raghavan says that they expect active participation in the session titled The Art and Math of Puzzle Solving by Saket Saurabh, a professor at IMSc. There will also be sessions on understanding the dynamic nature of the North Indian Ocean by D Shankar, chief scientist at CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography; on an update to the frequently used adage:

A poster exhibition titled Climate Change in India: What do we know and how? about scientific models and data highlighting the effects of climate change in the subcontinent will also be part of the event.

“It would be nice if there is a Chennai Vignyan Sangamam much like the Chennai Sangamam, where the city comes together to celebrate the sciences,” says Raghavan. Until then, Science at the Sabha will have to do.

The event is on February 18, 4pm to 8pm at the Anna Centenary Library auditorium. Entry is free. To register, log onto <https://www.imsc.res.in/triveni/2024/>

Idli on wheels

in Kanchipuram by his childhood friend who has been in the business for more than a decade now but prefers anonymity. He prepares it at 5am in Kanchipuram, and sends it through a bus service to Koyambedu. This is where Nethaji picks it up. Each of these idlis weighs around two to two-and-a-half kilos, and is priced at ₹240 for 500 grams.

Every morning, he stations his two-wheeler at a prominent spot in a particular neighbourhood; West Mambalam on Tuesdays, Triplicane on Wednesdays, Besant Nagar on Thursdays, Mylapore on Fridays and Nanganallur on Saturdays.

With such an overwhelming response, is he planning to increase the number of idlis or even set up a permanent shop? Says Nethaji, “Not at the moment. The biggest draw for this product is that it is rare to get and available only occasionally. That is what makes people look forward to it.”

For orders and details,
call 8667871438 or
9884256599.

different from the popular idli that is a regular on the breakfast menu in most South Indian households. "And much tastier," smiles Nethaji, "You do not usually get this in hotels in Chennai. Even in Kanchipuram, the few hotels offering it do not prepare it the authentic way."



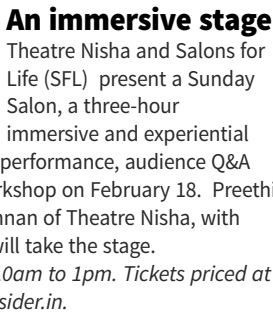
Amidst the hustle and bustle of a busy morning, Nethaji Durai has parked his two-wheeler outside Srinivasa Perumal Koil in Besant Nagar and is placing a hefty piece of Kanchipuram idli atop a *manthara elai*.

He slices the cylindrically-shaped idli in two, and further cuts them into neat smaller pieces, much like a cake. All this in front of the customer who has pre-booked his order.

Nethaji Durai's 'shop on wheels' sells Kanchipuram kovil idli, famously associated with the Varadaraja Perumal temple in Kanchipuram.

Made using raw rice, urad dal and par-boiled rice with fenugreek seeds, along with pepper, jeera and other ingredients, the Kanchipuram idli is

Vibe with music
Cultr Festival, organised by Kappa Digital, is having a pre party in Chennai on February 17. The artists featured include Dopedaddy, hailing from Mumbai's Dhruvi and Rhythm, a Kочи-based DJ and producer. @Barracuda Brew, Nungambakkam, 7pm onwards. Tickets on insider.in. Contact 9995247407.





University, on How Civil Society Can Transform India. Dr Soumya Swaminathan and diabetologists Dr V Mohan and Dr Lakshmi Vijaykumar will also speak.
@The Music Academy Mini Hall, RK Salai, on February 17, 4.30pm onwards. For details, call 7358588822.


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KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI | THAMBAM- VIDHYA | CHORMPET- VETRI | THIRUVALUR - RAKI PADI - GREEN CINEMAS & SIVA SAKTHI
CHELVALPET - SRK | KANCHIPURAM - SRI BALA SUBRAMANIAM | THIRUNELVARI - VELAJINEMAS | POCHAMMAL - SRI VIGNESHWAR

SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX VEDS | SANGAM | WOODLANDS | KRISHNANAVI | PVR - AMPA | PVR - PALAZZO
KAMALA | THIRAGAR AGS | UDHAYAM | S2 PERAMBUR | ASHOK NAGAR KAS | TALUKES | INOX LUX | PVR - PALAVANAM
PVR MAL PVR - ANNAMANGAL REDHILLS - PVR ECR - PVR INOX MARINA | ECR - MAYAJAAL | ECR - VIJAY PARK
OMR - CINIPOLIS | AMBATHUR - RAKI | MURUGAN | VILLIKANAKAM | AGS | OMR AGS | MADURAVANTAL - AGS
KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI | PIVR - GK | THAMBAD - VIDHYA | CHORIMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA | S2 THYAGARAJA
PATTI - LAXMI BALA & SURA SAKTHI | CHENGALPET - SRK & LATHA CINEMAS | KANCHIPURAM - BABU & ARUNA
GUDUVANCHERRY - VENKATESWARA | VIRUGAMKOTTA - DEVI KARUMARI | POONMADALA - SUNDAR | THIRUVALLUR - RAKI
THIRUPUR - GANESH & VELCO | THIRUVOTRIYUR - MSM | THIRUTHANI - SRINIDHARA | SRI DURGA | THIRUNINRAVUR - VELU CINEMAS

SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX WILLAGES | DEVI | ALBERT | SANGAM | EGA | PVR nani | PALAZZO | KAMALA | UDHAYAM | BARATH
S2 ROBINSON | PANGAR | KRISHNAYANI | JEWELLERY RAKKI & MURUGAN | KILANKANNAM AGS | DMS | INOX NATIONAL
S2 ROBINSON | RABAI | SANGAM | IRUNA | FC | SANGAM | ROHINI | KANDAS | LUX | KELLER PARK | KELLER PARK
MULLAIKANDAVUR PVR | S2 PVR | SANGAM ROAD PVR-V | FC | CINEPOLIS | CHENNAIMANAGER EYP | KANDAS KASI | MAYAJALA | CHENNEY VETTRI
MULLAIKANDAVUR PVR | S2 | SIVASAKTHI | S2 | LAKSHMI KAMLA | ROBIN KIN CINEMAS | REGGILL SRI RADHA PARK | TAPASWARI VIDHYA
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‘Stand-up comedy is a weapon’

Chennai-based comedian Vikram Arul Vidyapathi is currently touring his special titled ‘Vikkals of Vikram’

Srinivasa Ramanujam
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“Vikkals,” someone calls out. Vikram turns – because he is quite used to the name. Chennai-based stand-up comedian Vikram Arul Vidyapathi aka ‘Vikkals Vikram’ has just returned from Amsterdam, where he was touring his stand-up comedy special, and is gearing up for his Chennai show this weekend.

Known for his relatable style of humour and fun music-based Instagram reels, Vikram loves the limelight. It is something that this once-introvert boy who had a chance tryst with the theatre world thrives on. “In theatre, I used to get small roles, but in stand-up, the focus is entirely on me,” he explains.

In his latest special, Vikram will take on a subject that is based on his life experiences – how college changed him as a person. “It will be shockingly funny,” he stresses. An adult comedy show for about 100 minutes, it will talk, among other things, about caste and sexuality. “But it will make sense,” he assures.

While some comedians opt for safe topics, Vikram’s strength, is to take on a bit of social commentary in his sets. “I got inspired after watching American comedians George Carlin

and Dave Chappelle talking about issues like police brutality. Stand-up comedy is a weapon of sorts; when you weave in a societal issue, the audience will start a conversation after laughing.”

But it is not all serious business alone; Vikram does a fair bit of ‘amma appa’ jokes, as he refers to it, and ‘when you speak Telugu in Chennai’ kind of videos. When it comes to Reels, Vikram’s comedy is often exaggerated. “I rely more on honesty than relatability. The emotional honesty at its core makes it believable.” Vikram and Vikkals, which is close to clocking a two million subscriber base on YouTube, also has a separate fan base for their ‘recording session’ Reels.

The stand-up comedian is also eyeing the film industry for comedy roles. “I’m hoping something clicks,” he says, “I hope I become someone like Koundamani or Vadivelu or Santhanam. I don’t think content creation or stand-up comedy is any less than cinema, but the film business is big business.”

But wherever he goes, ‘Vikkals’ is a title that is bound to travel with him. It is a sobriquet he got in 2019, when he was crowd-sourcing a name for his YouTube channel. “Someone suggested this interesting word ‘Vikkals’, which was a combination of Vikram and *nakkals* (sarcasm in Tamil).” It continues to be his calling card.

Vikkals of Vikram will be staged on February 17, 7.30pm, at the Music Academy



THAMODHARAN BHARATH

When you weave in a societal issue in comedy, the audience will start a conversation after laughing. If my art makes people converse about it, it will live on for a long time

VIKRAM ARUL VIDYAPATHI
Stand-up comedian



The stage is set

Singer Sivasri Skandaprasad, a familiar face for fans of devotional and classical music, on her recent film music debut

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A squirrel scampers to its home atop a tree, while a jogger breaks into a run.

It is a rare overcast day at the picturesque Senganthal Poonga in Chennai, where singer Sivasri Skandaprasad is chatting about her eventful last few weeks. She recently returned from Mauritius and Reunion Island, where she performed classical concerts for the Thai Poomsam festival. Back in India, she toured a few cities for mystic music festival Ruhaniyat, in which she musically sojourned the Tamil poems of the Nayanmars and Azhwars of the Saiva and Vaishnava traditions.

Sivasri is a familiar face for fans of devotional and classical music, but the singer recently added another facet to her personality: film music. Her voice featured in ‘Vanathi’s

Message’, part of AR Rahman’s *Ponniyin Selvan* original score that was released recently.

“That came out of nowhere,” she smiles, “AR Rahman started following me on Instagram after watching some of my videos, and one of his sound engineers reached out to me. I was surprised when he politely asked me if I was interested in singing for *Ponniyin Selvan*. I was shocked because well, who says no to Rahman sir!”

A few days later, she recorded the ‘Helhe Neenu’ track for the Kannada version of the film and subsequently, ‘Vanathi’s Message’ in Tamil. “I have this vibe of being a traditional, devotional songs musician, but I was ready to try out something new. Recording these songs was a moving experience,” says Sivasri, who is a fan of international music stars Bruno Mars, Adele and pop band Maroon5. “I listen to all types of music, including Bollywood and pop. All this helped me in my own

manodharma.” She explains, citing an example, “I remember once being addicted to this track called ‘Jaag Musafir’, and listening to it on loop. Later, when I sang the popular classical song ‘Pibare Rama Rasam’, I spotted the same musical phrases in it. I was taken by surprise. It made me realise that any kind of music we listen to has a great impact on how we deliver our songs.”

A big step

Sivasri had an early entry into the creative arts as she hailed from a musically-rich family, her grandfather was Carnatic vocalist Seerkazhi Jayaraman, and her father, mridangam vidwan Skandaprasad. “I grew up with artistes visiting home and discussing music. There was a

natural inclination towards it, and my *appa* ensured I practised music from when I was three. I even remember watching him record and edit a CD, which was fun. Music was a natural *mahol* in which I grew up.”

But vocal music was not her first draw and in fact, came into life just a few years ago after the



onset of the pandemic. “Earlier, I was a dancer who enjoyed music. Now, I am a singer who dances through music. A lot of people talk about how my face expresses the *bhaava* of the *sahitya*, and I realised how dance has helped me become this musician.”

Bridging the gap

Sivasri is also a popular exponent of the *namasankirtanam* tradition, which refers to the practice of congregational chanting of sacred expressions associated with a given deity. “The base for any Indian art form is surrendering to the divine. Many students are deviating from this concept, and separating the art from divinity. Namasankirtanam will bridge this gap,” she states, “When we chant, people from all states, whether they are agnostic or atheist, forget themselves and join in.”

She plans to do more of that through her music school Ahuti, which aims to make all Indian art forms relevant to the younger generation. “I believe that it will make us rooted to our culture,” she opines.

Sivasri’s dream is to spread the various aspects of music far and wide. “I want to remove all bifurcations that exist between genres of Indian music. I also want to make art simpler.

There is so much complexity in music today that it has become as superficial as finding out what raga a composition is based on. That should not be the ultimate goal of a concert. As artistes, we should elevate audiences.”

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