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The art of team work

'Ekadasa Vishnum' brought together the nuances of a natya natakam **p2**

Ilayaraaja's new project

The maestro has set to tune a few pasurams in his latest album **p3**

THE CALL OF A CHOIR CONDUCTOR

Nadezda

Balyan

on mentoring
singers of the Delhi
Chamber Choir **p4**

S.B Vijaya Mary
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Anoushka Shankar has impacted the world of music with a style of her own and engages with the art in a way she likes to. Daughter of the trailblazing sitarist Pt. Ravi Shankar, Anoushka's ability to blend Indian classical music with genres such as jazz, electronica, pop and western classical has contributed to her evolution as a musician.

Anoushka's latest project – a trilogy album – exemplifies this. The first two installments of her mini-album comprise *Chapter I: Forever, For Now*, released in October last year, followed by *Chapter II: How Dark It Is Before Dawn* in April.

During a video call from London, Anoushka delves into the intricacies of her creative process, collaborative experiences, and her musical legacy.

Excerpts from the interview:

Question: What inspired the trilogy?

Answer: The chapters depict a musical journey split into distinct parts. *Chapter One* evokes a sunlit garden with

Anoushka Shankar on the making of a trilogy album, global collaborations and living up to her father's legacy

Shankar and the *sitar*

melodies, and the evening raag Madhumati, while *Chapter Two* is about the night and healing through ambient textures. The upcoming *Chapter Three* promises a culmination with themes of strength and joy.

Q: Do situations lead to music or music is created to define a situation?

A: When I'm alone and writing, strong emotions – whether personal or from external events – drive my creativity. It could be anything from anger to heartbreak. These emotions find their way into my music. Additionally, collaborating with others is an inspiration too. The connection between musicians

allows ideas to flow, creating something larger than I could have achieved alone, which is one of my favourite experiences.

Q: How challenging is it for instrumentalists to make their music interpretive?

A: I choose to work with vocalists when specificity feels important for that piece of music. When I was going through heartbreak, not long ago, the songs I was writing felt important to me. So, they were songs with vocalists and lyrics, and it felt like that needed to be clear. Sometimes, instrumentalists have a challenge, but that could be

beneficial too. Someone listening to a song might be listening to another person's storytelling. They identify (with it) if they're going through or have gone through a similar situation. Otherwise, they're listening to the song of someone else telling their story. Whereas with melody, it doesn't matter why I'm sad or you're sad; if you feel sadness in this music, it will help you. Music transcends emotions and binds us; it could be a source of comfort even without vocals. Sometimes, vocals could be a hindrance.

CONTINUED ON
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String theory
Anoushka Shankar during a performance.
PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



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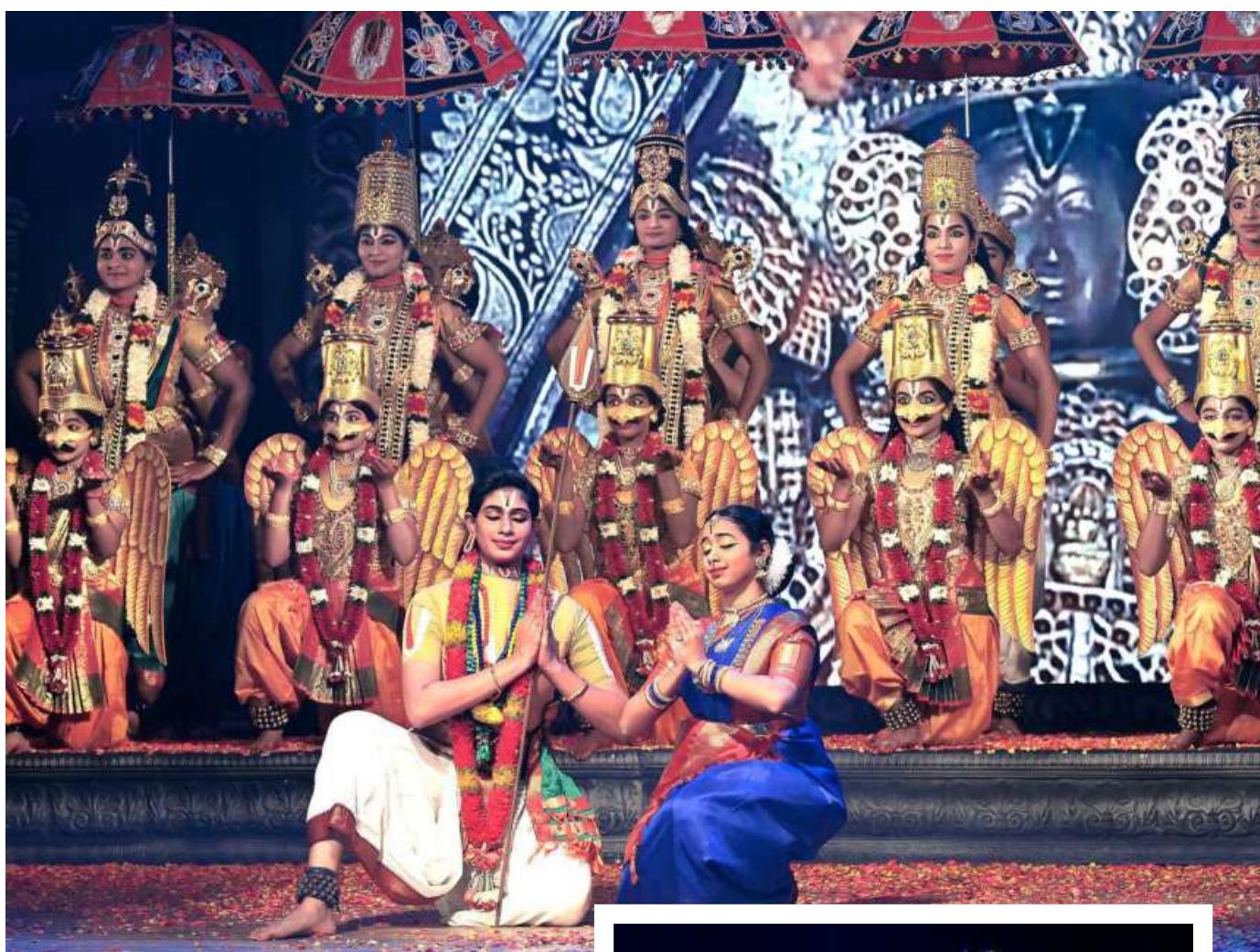
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Well-curated
'Ekadasa Vishnum'. PHOTOS:
M. SRINATH

Scoring as a team

Every aspect of a natya nadagam was handled with finesse in 'Ekadasa Vishnum'

V.V. Ramani

It is an annual ritual for Asha Krishnakumar. Year after year, she chooses a Vaishnavite theme and after extensive research translates it into a full-fledged multimedia natya nadakam. Choosing 11 Vishnu temples referred to as Tirunangur Divya Desams, which form a part of the 108 Divya Desams, she recently presented 'Ekadasa Vishnum' under the banner of her Darshanam Art Creations at Narada Gana Sabha.

Conceptualised and curated by Asha, the grand spectacle was visualised by Sheela Unnikrishnan along with the students of her Sridevi Nrityalaya. Music was by Rajkumar Bharathi, soundscape by Sai Shrawanam, lighting by Murugan and creative LED display by Chella videos. Malola Kannan did the narration and chanting while Chitra Madhavan, Rangan Bhattar, Vedharajan and Damal Ramakrishnan were the script

consultants. Shanmugam was the man behind the beautiful temple sets.

The 11 temples were divided into small groups, highlighting their association to legends of Rama, Krishna, Thayar, Perumal, Varadar and Srinivasa.

A tandavam performed by Shiva and 11 Rudras (emerging from the follicles of his hair) in the opening sequence portrayed the fiery form of Shiva with dramatic effect. The early life of king Tirumangai Mannan and his transformation to Thirumangai Azhwar formed the introductory narrative, after which the production travelled through the Kshetras with Azhwar and his wife Kumudavalli Nachiyar.

Engaging narrative

The pride of the ruler while feeding thousand devotees each day, the dilemma he faces when his treasury becomes empty, the wily ways of a dacoit, and the king's transformation to a sublime state of surrender when he meets Perumal came across with clarity in the way the scene was

choreographed and performed. It was truly commendable that Sheela sustained the interest throughout, weaving a riveting presentation despite limited information available on the sthalas puranas of the temples.

Stories or incidents pertaining to the deities relating to each segment of the production such as Govardhana Giri, Varaha Avataram, Rama Ravana Yudham and Sempon Sei were introduced with brevity.

Working with more than 70 dancers is no easy task, Sheela not only managed it with aplomb but also remembered all the names when she introduced them during the curtain call. This commitment reflected in every segment as entries, exits, synchrony of movements, and apt expressions flowed seamlessly.

The swift change in scenes and costumes was appreciable. Video projections between each scene introduced the audience to the architecture and history of the

temples, which helped them in understanding the narration.

The music, a blend of Carnatic and Hindustani ragas, had popular compositions such as 'Sri Lakshmi Varaham' and 'Varadharajam Upasmahe' fitted appropriately into it. The chanting at regular intervals enhanced the whole experience, creating an aura of spirituality.

The final sequence was undoubtedly the highlight of 'Ekadasa Vishnum'.

It featured the Garuda Seva utsavam of Tirunangur, where all the 11 forms of Vishnu come together. Beginning with a beautiful depiction of Hamsa Vahana on which Azhwar and Nachiyar arrived, the introduction of each form of Vishnu and Garuda in a well-choreographed sequence, using a combination of twos and threes, was captivating. The finale, which had all the 11 dancing together, left the audience awe-struck.



Two-day YJF fest

Sri Krishna Gana Sabha presents the 18th edition of the Yagnaraman July Fest (YJF), started in memory of the sabha's founder-secretary, R. Yagnaraman. The two-day festival will begin on July 13 (6.30 p.m.) with Friends in Harmony concert by childhood friends and singers Saundhavi, Gowtham Bharadwaj and Haricharan.

Saundhavi and Haricharan are trained Carnatic musicians and well-known playback singers. Gowtham Bharadwaj is a playback singer and the lead vocalist of the Chennai-based band, Staccato. On July 14 (6.30 p.m.), Aayana Dance Company, based in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, presents its productions, 'Dhruma' and 'Yellige'. Their movement vocabulary is a blend of the classical and contemporary. Tickets on www.tikki.com

Chords, notes and rhythm

When Annamacharya's compositions became the binding thread for a musical ensemble



P. Srihari

Conducting a large-scale Carnatic music choir is generally an energy-sapping exercise with disproportionately meagre returns in terms of melodic aesthetics. But not when you have someone as accomplished and inspiring as Avasarala

Kanyakumari at the helm.

So, it was an enchanting evening as Team Mohana Dubai recently organised 'Guru Vandnam 2024' – a tribute to the violin exponent, who was also the chief mentor of the ensemble – at the Narada Gana Sabha Hall under the auspices of Brahma Vidya Trust. Over 80 vocalists and seven instrumentalists came together to perform 10 select compositions of

Confluence The Guru Vandnam choir performing at Narada Gana Sabha.
PHOTO: R. RAGU

Saint Annamacharya, set to music by Kanyakumari, and Ragamalika tillana named 'TriShakti', created by her.

Kanyakumari is on the verge of completing 60 years of her journey

Artistic vision

Nayanam showed how perfect eye movements and expressions can elevate a performance

Manjari Sinha

The famous Sanskrit shloka 'Yato hasto tato drishtih, Yato drishtih tato manah/ Yato manastato bhavo, yato bhavo tatah rasah' from the treatise *Abhinaya Darpana* means, 'Where the hands go, the eyes should follow, Where the eyes go, the mind should follow, Where the mind goes, the emotion or rasa is generated.'

'Nayanam', the solo Bharatanatyam recital by Apeksha Nirajan presented at the Stein auditorium of the Habitat Centre in Delhi recently, conveyed the essence of this shloka as she expressed various bhavas through her eyes.

A disciple of senior Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher Sucheta Chapekar and Alka Lajmi, Apeksha, who is also a Marathi actor, is the founder-director of Nrityanjali Performing Arts. Her expressive face, seamless movements and sculpturesque stances lent to the appeal of her performance.

Thematic margam

The core of 'Nayanam', her theme-based recital, was that the entire Bharatanatyam margam is based on 'nayan' (eyes), right from the opening Alarippu that invoked the *trinayan* Shambho (Shiva with three eyes), *jagat janani* Meenakshi (the goddess with fish-like eyes), and *kamal nayan* (one whose eyes are like the lotus) Padmanabha. This was set to Misra Chapu tala and was choreographed by Apeksha herself.

'Krishna Kavuthuvam' followed. It was based on the Marathi song 'Mi Krishna pahila' and described how the gopis were besotted by



Drishti bhedha
Apeksha Nirajan
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Krishna's beautiful eyes. This was choreographed by Sucheta Chapekar.

Varnam, the central piece of the recital, was based on the Soundarya Lahari verse 'Shive shringaradhra', where Apeksha displayed the emotions that reflected in the eyes of Parvati, such as the Shringara bhava when she looks at Shiva, anger when she sees Ganga sitting in Shiva's matted locks, fear when she is scared of the snakes around Shiva's neck and finally praying for Karuna or compassion ('Dehi mayi janani drishtih sakaruna').

Choreographed by Apeksha, it was composed by Smita Mahajan in Ragamalika with jatis by Venkatesh. The main raga Bihag led to different ragas such as Malkaus, Kalawati and Hindol according to the changing emotions.

Erasing geographical and cultural borders, Apeksha, who earlier had incorporated Gregorian chants (sung in Roman Catholic churches in Europe) into her Bharatanatyam recital, included Polish folk music that evening in her performance. The song from Lubiena was sung on a lilting rhythmic gait, similar to Dadra taal of Hindustani music. Composed by Odmienciesie Kapela group of Polish folk musicians, the song was about the ritual of stealing the bridegroom's shoes like it happens in North Indian weddings.

This was followed by a vatsalya padam where Apeksha depicted the feelings of a young mother searching for her child, whom she had scolded for his naughty behaviour. Composed by Smita Mahajan, it was choreographed by Alka Lajmi.

The Surdas pad 'Ankhiyan hari darshan ki pyasi' composed in raag Shiv-Ranjani was about the inner eyes (antar chakshu) of the visually impaired poet, who is still able to see his *ishta dev*, the lotus-eyed Krishna. Apeksha concluded with a tillana in raag Yaman, where the dancer's eyes reflected the *mudit* (happy), *chakit* (amazed) nayan of Devi, asking the goddess to bestow her *kripa drishti* on the dancer and the audience.

as a performing violinist, and her rich vein of experience was all too evident as the 10 kirtans, tuned in mellifluous ragas and set to simple talas, were performed. Not just the melodic aspect of the songs, but the lilting interlude patterns too showed what a fine amalgam of precision, finesse and versatility she is.

Annamacharya (1408-1503), a philosopher and composer-singer hailed from Tallapaka, near Tirupati. A prominent disciple of Srimath Adivan Satakopa

Yatheendra Mahadesikan, the first Jeeyar of Sri Ahobila Math, Annamacharya conveyed intricate and rich philosophical ideas through songs written in lucid Telugu and Sanskrit, numbering a massive 32,000.

The songs presented on the day were 'Ambujaksha namo' (Nagaswaravali-Khanda Chapu), 'Evvari vaado' (Behag-Khanda Chapu), 'Papamu punyamu paraga' (Sivarajanji-Adi), 'Pondhaku athma' (Bagesri-Adi), 'Ithara dharmamulandhu' (Mohana Kalyani-Khanda Chapu), 'Analamu suryudu' (Surya-Adi), 'Nerupari innitanu' (Tilang-Eka), 'Innallu nandhu nindhu' (Shanmukhapriya-Adi), 'Machika prapanchapu' (Vasantha-Adi) and 'Vennnalu selavi' (Chakravakam-Eka), followed by the tillana.

A word about the concept of 'TriShakti' as reasoned by Kanyakumari. Kannada, Vasantini and Shivashakti, the three ragas featuring in the tillana, denote herself, her guru MLV and paramaguru GNB, who created the last-named raga. To draw from a musical parlance, either arohana or avarohana order may be adopted, according to tradition, when offering salutations to one's lineage of gurus and she chose the former.

The ensemble was led by several music teachers of repute. Ramashree Alladi's articulate presentation of the meaning before each song was a value addition. However, instruments taking turns to playing in the background during the narrative not only proved a distraction but also compromised audibility.

Team Mohana was founded in 2009 to encourage young talent in classical music. "My grandfather Kothamangalam Subbu was the author of the classic Tamil novel and film *Tillana Mohanambal* and the organisation draws its name from it as also from the beautiful raga Mohanam," said Anand V. Subramanian, a founding member.

Tallapaka Meenalochani, belonging to the Annamacharya lineage, was a special invitee at the event.



Verses and voices

Maestro Ilaiyaraaja lends a distinct touch to the pasurams in his latest album

Kalyan Gopalan

Nineteen years after presenting selected verses of Manickavachakar's *Thiruvachagam* in Oratorio format, maestro Ilaiyaraaja has composed music for a few pasurams from *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*. With the support of Prof. Gnanasundaram, an acclaimed academician, Ilaiyaraaja chose some pasurams (*Tiruvelmozhி*) by Periyazhwar, Naachiyan, Kulasekara Azhwar, Thondaradipodi Azhwar and Thirumangai Azhwar for his latest album *Divya Pasurams*, which was released recently.

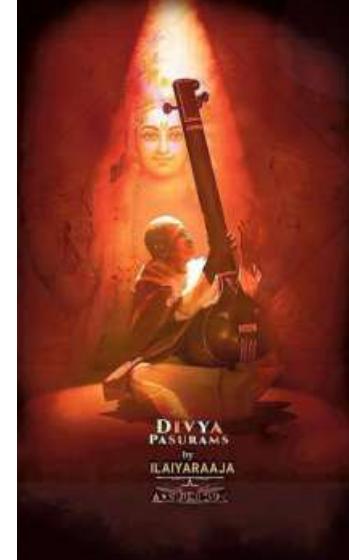
These pasurams provide a kaleidoscope of Krishna's life – from birth to Thirumangai Azhwar's plea for the Lord to reside in Thiruvazhundur and from surrendering to being liberated from the torment of the five senses.

In an era of Schumpeterian changes, Ilaiyaraaja sticks to the time-tested basics by engaging four main sections in the orchestra: the strings, woodwinds, brass (in a few places), and percussion. His music and orchestration often reflect the meaning and feel of the Azhwar pasurams, providing a divine experience.

The pasurams describe the Lord's beauty, valour, and the bhakti of the azhwars, as described in the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and Srimad Bhagavatam.

Emphasis on lyrics
The album begins with Periyazhwar's pasuram sung by Ilaiyaraaja, with the moola mantra 'Om Namo Narayana' being sung in the background by a group of singers. This pasuram, largely composed in raga Sindhubhairavi, sings paeans to Narayana and emphasises the lyrics with minimal orchestration.

The second piece is based on another Periyazhwar's pasuram 'Vanna maadankal', (sung by Narayanan Ravishankar and V.V. Prasanna) reminding us of 'Kothumbi' from *Thiruvachagam* in Oratorio. The music arrangements capture every single scene in these pasurams such as spraying scented powder and fragrant oil to celebrate the arrival of Krishna. This piece, largely based on raga Abheri, concludes with Yasodha realising that this child is the Supreme being.



The celebrated composer's music and orchestration reflect the meaning and feel of the pasurams, providing a divine experience

Naachiyaar Pasuram "Vaanidai Vaazhum Avvanavarkku" wherein Aandal strongly declares that her body is meant for Sarangan residing in Brindavan and that she will never offer it to any mortal. This short and beautiful composition is sung by Vibhavari in raga Sudha Saveri.

The album progresses through various pasurams, each capturing different aspects of Krishna's life, with Ilaiyaraaja's orchestration bringing out the essence of each raga such as Mohanam, Tilang, Sudha Dhanyasi and Mayamalavagowla.

In 'Puviyil naan' (sung by Sharreth and Vibhavari), the composition and its orchestration meander along a different rhythm, bringing the string section to the fore while the flute moves to the background. Ilaiyaraaja captures the beauty of the dance of a muster of peacocks with its string section just before the line 'Karungan thogai mayil peeli anindhu'. From here the strings hop up and down until they reach the crescendo.

The album concludes with Thirumangai Azhwar's 'Kulantharum selvam thandhidum' in raga Hamsanandhi, an intense and poignant composition, in the voice of Hariharan, where the saint expresses his desire to merge with the Lord.

Ilaiyaraaja's compositions in this album offer a timeless experience.

Master's touch
Ilaiyaraaja's new work 'Divya Pasurams' proves once again his impeccable composing skills.
PHOTO: R. RAGU

Breaking the illusion

Theatre Marina's *Anniyal* was a fine adaptation of Girish Karnad's Kannada play *Odakalu Bimba*

Suganthy Krishnamachari

Theatre Marina's *Anniyal*, staged in Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, is a Tamil adaptation (direction Giridharan) of Girish Karnad's play *Odakalu Bimba* (Broken Images). *Anniyal* shows how the images of ourselves, which we present for public consumption, are carefully crafted, and not a true representation of who we are. But these images are fragile and can be broken when the still small voice in us becomes active, as happens to Anjali in *Anniyal*. The play had just one actor – Latha Venkat – playing the role of Anjali, a successful author of a novel in English. The snobbery of the intellectual class, which disdains books in the vernacular, but laps up books in English is exposed.

Anjali, who has to her credit a book of Tamil short stories, says that a writer in Tamil is paid so poorly that she cannot make even sambar with the money. But, for her English story, the publishers have paid her such a hefty advance, that she has resigned her job as a lecturer. However, Anjali is not the author of the novel. She has stolen her dead invalid sister Aarti's story and passed it off as her own.

The play begins with a smug Anjali answering the questions of her readers in a television programme. She lies blithely, shedding tears over Aarti's plight and boasts of her own linguistic skills.

But when the TV programme ends, she imagines that there is an image of Aarti on the screen. Every excuse she offers as justification for her perfidy is destroyed by Aarti. Anjali is unable to shake off Aarti's image, which she knows will remain superimposed on



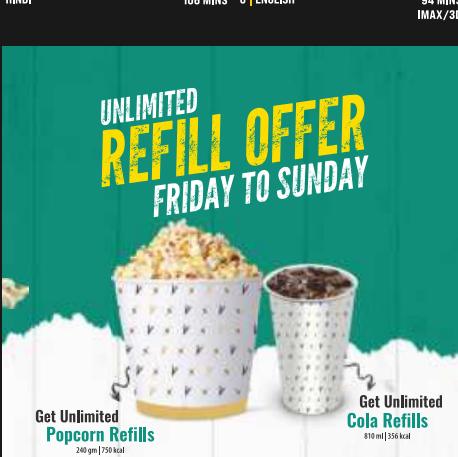
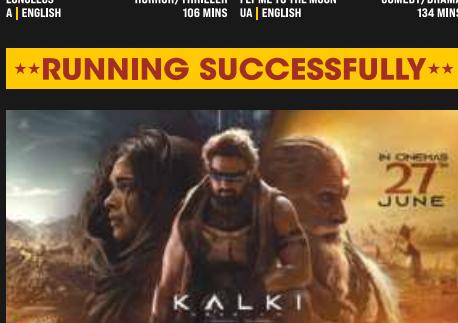
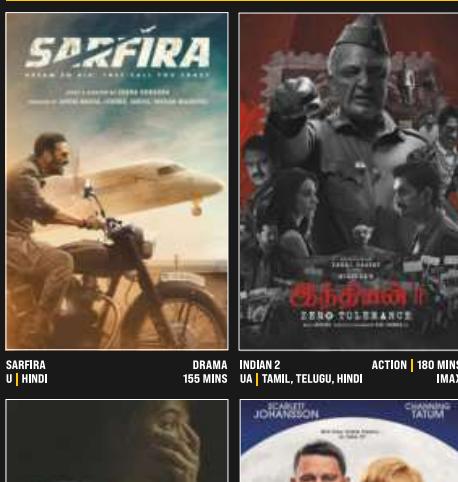
Contemplative Theatre Marina's *Anniyal* staged at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore PHOTO: M. SRINATH

her book every time she picks it up, and on every cheque she receives as royalty. With a husband who has drifted away from her and with her conscience nagging her, Anjali's self-assurance is shattered.

Latha was brilliant showing Anjali's transition from a supremely confident author to the guilt-ridden sister with a dark secret. G.P.R. Prasanna and R. Giridharan had come up with an impressive script.

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Guruvar Dorai will be honoured with the Dr. Balamuralikrishna National Award for Artistic Excellence. Suresh Gopi, Minister of State for Petroleum and other Natural Gas and Tourism, will present the award.

The event will conclude with a special mangalam to be rendered by the Balamuralikrishna's disciples, led by senior vocalist Krishnakumar.

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