

friday Review

THE HINDU

Remembering Mayadhar Raut
The Odissi exponent and guru codified the classical dance form p2

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THE PLATFORM 2025 - A STAGE FOR INNOVATION

January Low and Sooraj Subramaniam explore stillness in dance p4

Unmasking a classic

Andrew Lloyd Webber's much-feted 'The Phantom of the Opera', which had a 35-year run on Broadway, comes to India

Nivedita Jayaram Pawar

What makes a musical run for 35 years? The biggest reason why *The Phantom of the Opera*, the 1986 mega-musical, still resonates with audiences across the globe is its love story, believes Rainer Fried, associate director of the play. "People feel drawn to that. Every audience member wants to be the Phantom, they want to be Christine and can easily relate to what the characters are going through," he adds.

The narrative centres around the Phantom, a mysterious, masked figure who lurks beneath the Paris Opera House, and Christine Daaé, a gifted soprano. When Phantom falls madly in love with her, he devotes himself to nurturing her extraordinary talents. But there's a third angle - Raoul, Christine's childhood friend. Torn between Raoul and the Phantom, the singer's ultimate decision is a difficult one, adding a layer of compelling drama to the story.

Now, after shows in 85 cities worldwide, *The Phantom of the Opera*, finally lands in Mumbai.

The musical is based on a 1910 French novel by author and journalist Gaston Leroux, who was a follower of Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe. He placed his novel within the grand Paris Opera House whispered to be haunted by a ghost - apparently, during a performance in 1896 at the venue, a chandelier plummeted from the ceiling, killing one. This event, coupled with rumours of an underground reservoir beneath the opera house, provided fertile ground for Gaston's imagination, inspiring his tale

of a haunted opera house and its mysterious resident.

The story was brought to the screen a century ago, in 1925, but adapted into a musical for the stage much later, in 1986. The show opened in the West End before going to Broadway in 1988. It was directed by Broadway hitmaker Hal Prince, and the music was written by the inimitable Andrew Lloyd Webber. The songs include 'Masquerade', 'Angel of Music', 'All I Ask of You' and 'The Music of the Night'. The play was



Every audience member wants to be the Phantom, they want to be Christine and can easily relate to what the characters are going through

RAINER FRIED

choreographed by Gillian Lynne, who also choreographed the musical *Cats*.

The Cast

The Phantom of the Opera requires a performer to master singing, dancing and acting to bring to life the vibrant world of an opera house in the late 19th century. Searching out performers with this degree of expertise is a serious endeavour for associate choreographer Denny Berry. "Our current cast is drawn from the US, South Africa, Australia, China, South Korea and Italy. Jonathan Roxmouth plays the Phantom.

American actress Grace Roberts, who plays Christine, says the role is challenging, and because she is on stage for most of the show, she works on building her stamina. "It keeps me fighting fit to do the show six times a week," says Grace.

Visual feast

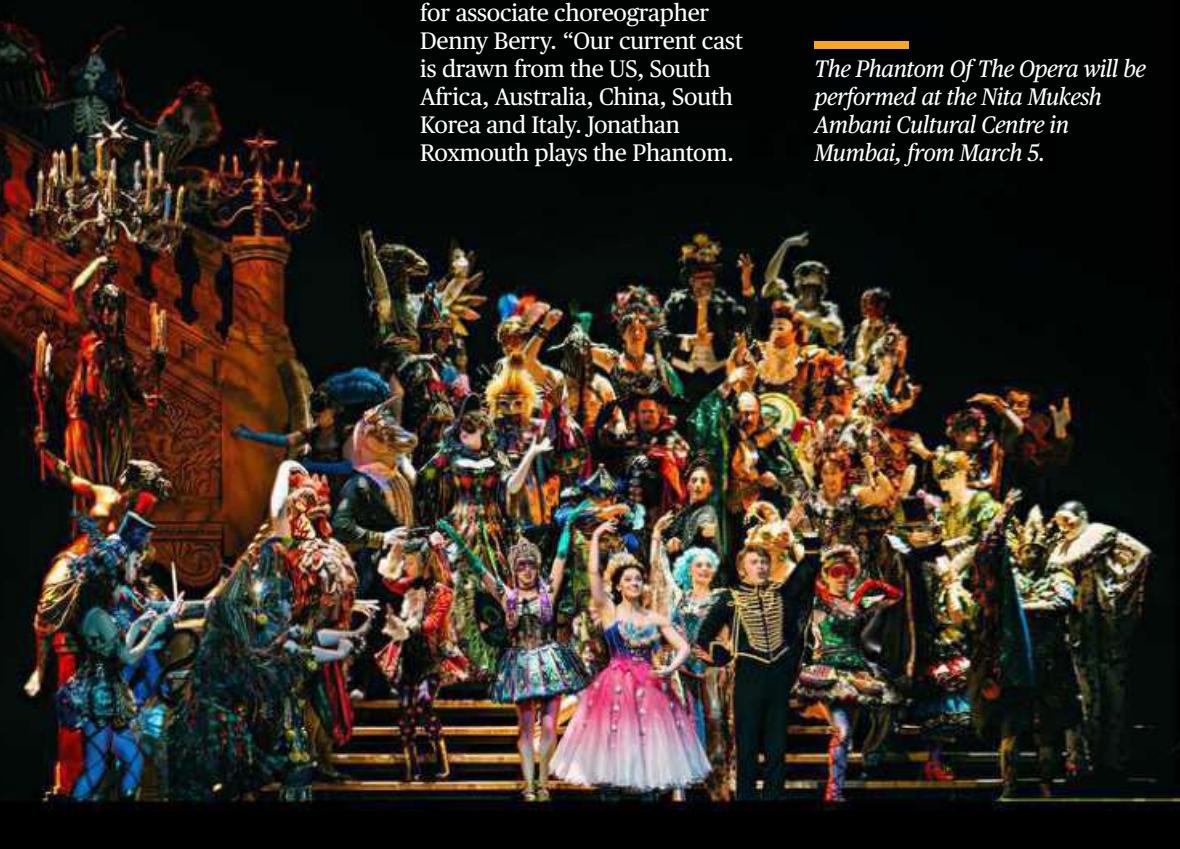
The 150-minute show employs a 130-member team, including the cast, crew and live orchestra. The iconic set design that evokes 19th-century Paris, includes extravagant costumes, and everything from trapdoors to smoky gondolas, majestic staircases and secret lakes. The centrepiece is a chandelier sparkling with 6,000 beads and weighs almost a ton.

When the show stopped

Though *The Phantom...* has survived cultural shifts, it could not survive the COVID pandemic. The show, which has always been a tourist draw, and relied particularly on international visitors, ended its record-setting run on Broadway in 2023.

The show might have accommodated changing audience perspectives to attract a younger audience, but it has its share of critics too. Some think it's a cleverly marketed beast-meets-beauty story. But the strongest criticism the musical has had to face is its romanticising of obsession. Phantom's obsessive love for Christine can be viewed as a problematic depiction of a relationship defined by control. Phantom also occupies a morally ambiguous space - he's a tragic figure, but his villainous actions and manipulation raise serious moral questions. And why do Webber's characters burst into a song at every turn? But if you love musical theatre and don't mind an over-the-top spectacle, then you will enjoy it.

The Phantom Of The Opera will be performed at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre in Mumbai, from March 5.



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The revivalist

Remembering Guru Mayadhar Raut, who codified Odissi for the proscenium

Chitra Swaminathan

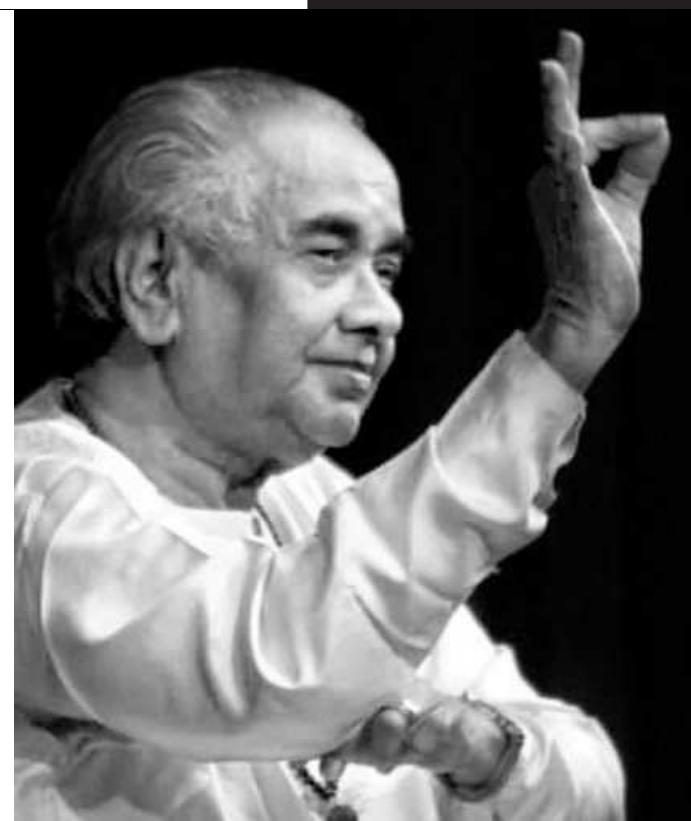
chitra.swaminathan@thehindu.co.in

When appreciating an art, we often forget to acknowledge the contribution of those who strived hard to draw the world's attention by giving it a form and structure. Odissi owes its existence to the now-fading Gotipua tradition, which is considered a precursor to the classical dance form. Most of Odissi's celebrated gurus were once Gotipua performers. And Guru Mayadhar Raut, who passed away recently at the age of 92 in Delhi, was no exception. In

fact, he was the first to present Gotipua on stage in the 1940s. He, Kelucharan Mohapatra, Debaprasad Das and Pankaj Charan Das are referred to as the architects of modern Odissi. They redefined and codified the dance for the proscenium.

Mayadhar Raut moved to Delhi in the late 1960s to teach Odissi at Nritya Niketan, a dance school, before joining Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, where he taught for 25 years.

Delhi's famous Kamani Auditorium was inaugurated in 1971 with his performance. With his expertise on ancient treatises such as *Natyashastra*,



Abhinaya Darpana and *Abhinaya Chandrika*, he drew immensely from them to enhance the appeal of the

dance form. He is credited with introducing *sanchari bhava* in Odissi and choreographing the *Gita*

Govinda ashtapadis for performances.

Ranjana Gauhar, an Odissi exponent and one of Mayadhar Raut's foremost disciples, remembers him as an affectionate person who always welcomed his sishyas with a smile. "That image of guriji with a childlike smile will remain etched in my memory."

Ranjana, who began learning from Mayadhar Raut in 1977, trained under him for almost 13 years. "He was so scholarly and creative that you could not merely stop with learning – you observed and imbibed. He was extremely spontaneous and versatile. The years he spent in Kalakshetra seemed to have lent a new dimension to his approach. He was trained in Kathakali and Bharatanatyam too. He insisted on perfection, be it pure dance (he introduced Mudra Viniyoga) or expression. The depth he

brought to his abhinaya expositions by analysing the characters was unimaginable. He would often say 'abhinaya is the ocean and sanchari bhava is the wave, which ultimately settles down in it'.

For instance, while explaining to me the emotions in the Ashtapadi 'Nindati Chandana', he remembered the line 'jal bin machali' (fish out of water)

from Meera's poetry and used it as sanchari to depict Radha's desolate state. As young learners, we were often awestruck by his nuanced and refined choreography."

Natyacharya V.P. Dhananjayan, paying tribute to his Mayadhar anna, says, "I knew from the day he joined Kalakshetra that he brought a new dimension to his approach. He was trained in Kathakali and Bharatanatyam too. He insisted on perfection, be it pure dance (he introduced Mudra Viniyoga) or expression. The depth he

used to share his expertise in Odissi with us while we taught him the fundamentals of Kathakali and Bharatanatyam. He was part of the Kalakshetra productions such as the Ramayana series. The Kalakshetra training enabled him to choreograph dance-dramas such as *Tapaswini*, *Meghdoot*, *Brij Leela*, *Singhala Kumari*, *Krishna Charitam*, and *Gita Govindam*.

According to Kiran Seth, the founder of SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth); "the one aspect I will never forget about guru Mayadhar Raut was his simplicity and the honesty he brought to his craft. His sessions for SPIC MACAY were enlightening. A guru in the real sense, he was always eager to share. The Odissi we see today on stage is thanks to gurus like him. The dance world will remain indebted to him."

Right steps

Sivashree Kumar performed for Sri Parthasarathy Swamy Sabha's Bharat Nritya Utsav 2025

Manasa Vijaylakshme C

Sivashree Kumar, a disciple of R. Vijay Madhavan, began her solo recital at Sri Parthasarathy Swamy Sabha's Bharat Nritya Utsav 2025, Chennai, with 'Sadashiva Kumara', a composition by Papasanam Sivan, in raga Sudha Saveri and Adi tala.

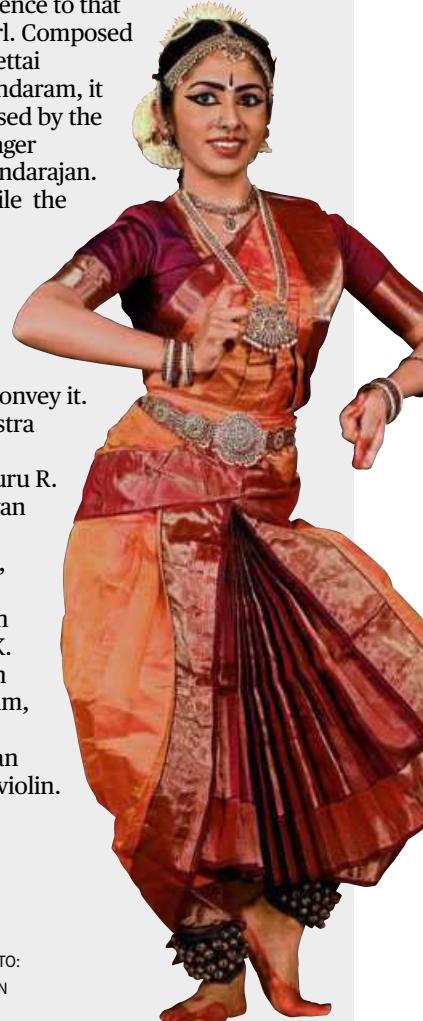
The highlight of her recital was the varnam 'Senthil Mevum'. Set to raga Nilambari and Adi tala, this composition by Laligudi G. Jayaraman saw her portraying Muruga, the lord of Tiruchendur. With her expressive eyes and flowing gestures, the dancer brought the nayika's longing to life. Her soft glances and delicate movements reflected her search for Muruga through the changing seasons. As the music built up, her steps became more intense, showing her growing impatience and deep desire to see him. The performance reached its peak when she called upon Muruga to arrive on his peacock. Sivashree embodied the beauty of a peacock in her performance.

The next piece, 'Maasil veenaiyam', a Thelavaram in Purvikalyani and Adi tala, depicted the bliss of surrendering to Shiva. The dancer maintained a restrained approach, with minimal expressions and measured movements. The composition spoke of divine refuge and serenity. The piece unfolded with a quiet steadiness, staying true to the theme.

The concluding piece, 'Chinnanjeru penpole', set in raga Sindhubhairavi and tisra nadai Adi tala, depicted the radiance of Durga, comparing her cheerful presence to that of a young girl. Composed by Ulundurpetta

Shanmugasundaram, it was popularised by the renowned singer Sirkazhi Govindarajan. However, while the composition celebrated Durga's aura, Sivashree's performance didn't quite convey it.

The orchestra featured Sivashree's guru R. Vijay Madhavan on the nattuvangam, Kaushik Champaikan on vocals, P.K. Sivaprasad on the mridangam, and Anantharaman Balaji on the violin.



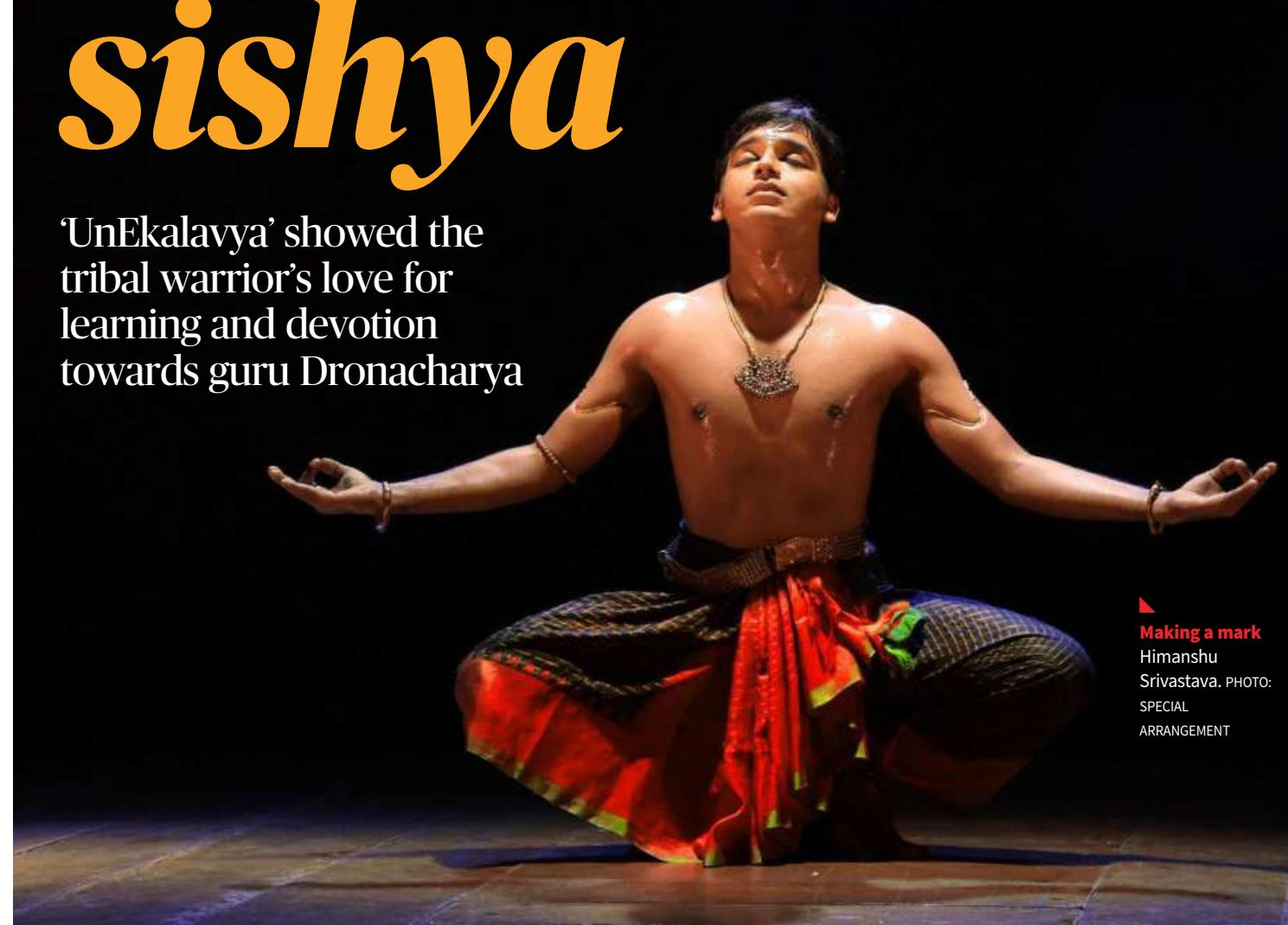
Graceful

Sivashree. PHOTO:

S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

An ideal sishya

'UnEkalavya' showed the tribal warrior's love for learning and devotion towards guru Dronacharya



Making a mark
Himanshu Srivastava. PHOTO:
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

V.V. Ramani

Jharna, a festival of dance curated by Bharata Kalanjali, is slowly gaining momentum as a platform for

young, talented dancers to share their art with the connoisseurs of Chennai. In its fourth edition this year, the line-up featured dancers who had been shortlisted based on their applications, and a few guest performances.

The idea behind 'Jharna' is that dancers are given an opportunity to conceive, choreograph and create an original work.

Himanshu Srivastava presented 'UnEkalavya – The riddle of the thumb' about

Ekalavya. Attired aesthetically like a forest dweller, Himanshu began with a sequence showing Abhidhyumna being killed in the battlefield. The narration then went into a flashback mode, into his past life as Ekalavya.

Old-world charm

At his concert for Sunaadalahari, Alleppey Venkatesan took listeners back in time

Renuka Suryanarayana

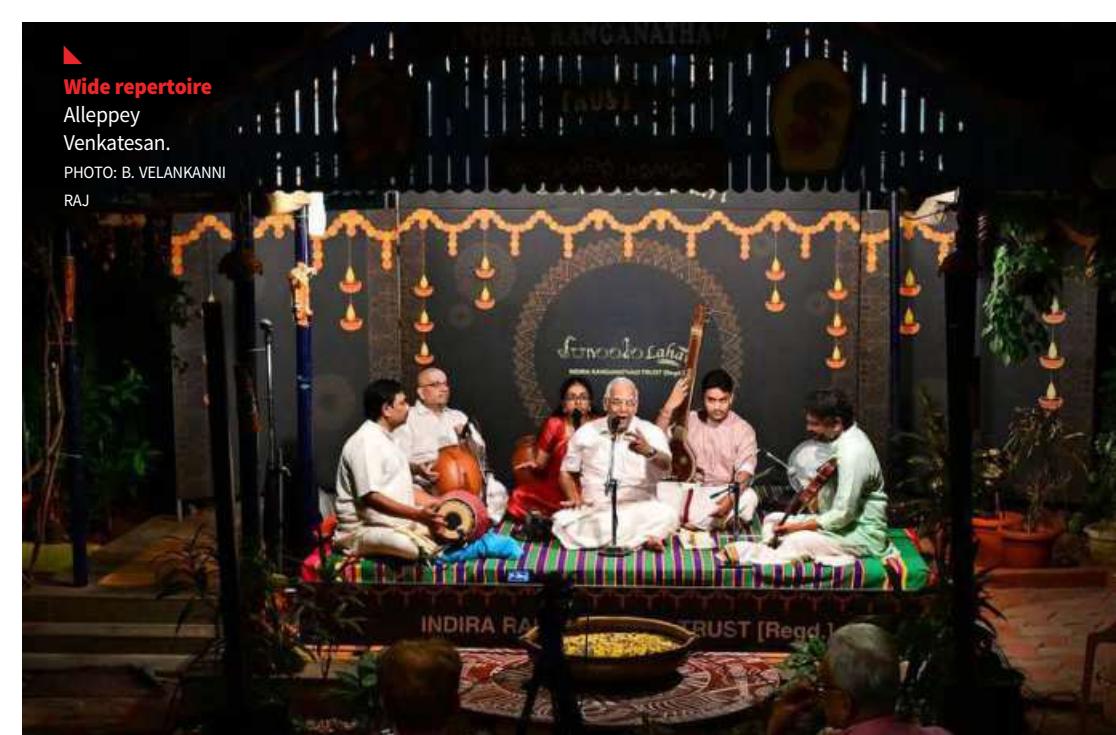
The theme of Devi kritis added lustre to veteran singer Alleppey Venkatesan's recent concert for Sunaadalahari at Indira Ranganathan Trust in Chennai.

Alleppey Venkatesan celebrates 60 years as a performing musician, and his impactful presentation reflected his guru Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar's style.

Venkatesan filled his recital with viruttams, an astonishing repertoire of compositions and manodharma segments.

Particularly impressive to today's generation were his swaraprastaras, full of intricacies learnt from the great mridangist Palghat Mani Iyer.

B.U. Ganeshprasad on the violin, Shertalai Ananthkrishnan on the mridangam and Suresh Vaidyanathan on the ghatam enhanced the performance. Venkatesan's disciple Shruti Jayaraman provided vocal



support. The initial part of the veteran vocalist's concert stood out for 'Sri kanchi nayike' (Asaveri, Annaswamy Sastri), in which he laced the kriti with swara segment at 'Navapallava komale'.

Next came 'Lalithe mam pahi' (Yadukula Kamboji, Cheyyur Chengalvaraya Sastri). This piece was emotionally binding and elegantly paced.

Following this, a virutttam on Karpagambike preceded

'Himachala tanaya' (Anandabhairavi, Syama Sastri). The line 'Uma hamsagamana tamasama brova dikkevaru' was chosen for niraval.

The vocalist then launched a Mooka Pancha Sathi virutttam

before the composition 'Kamakshi namnu brovave' (Varali, Syama Sastri), which has a beautiful swara sahityam. The niraval enchanted the audience as it highlighted the words 'Saswata rupini' in the charanam that describes the goddess.

The other compositions presented by the vocalist included 'Sarasijanabha sodari' (Nagagandhari, Dikshitar); 'Kavave Kanyakumari' (Sahana, Balamuralikrishna); and 'Shankari neeve' (Begada, Subbaraya Sastri).

Venkatesan next launched a Kalyani raga alapana in two stages, which the violinist matched in every manner possible. The kriti chosen was Tyagaraja's 'Sive pahimam' with niraval at 'Kaverojattara teera vasini katayani'.

The last part of the swaraprastara, which anchored on 'ga', came off with verve, and there was a korvai before the tani began.

Mridangist Shertalai Ananthkrishnan and ghatam Suresh were at their best in this percussion suite.

Folk twist

Hridya Haridas highlighted guru Nirmala Panicker's efforts in reviving the desi Mohiniyattam repertoire

Fine blend (Right) Hridya Haridas during her recent performance at Natanakairali. (Below) Tholpavakoothu (shadow puppet theatre). PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



G. S. Paul

Among the choreographers of Mohiniyattam, Nirmala Panicker of Natanakaisiki, Irinjalakuda, stands out for her contribution in reviving certain aspects of the desi repertoire of the dance form.

For example, the forms of Polikali, Esal, Chandam and Kurathy were excluded when Mohiniyattam was revived in Kerala Kalamandalam in 1932, because of the degeneration of

the dance form due to certain abominable practices during the previous century.

However, Nirmala maintains that Kurathy has been an intrinsic character in all the dance forms of South India.

In the Mohiniyattam recital staged at Kottichetham Studio Theatre in Natanakairali recently, Nirmala's disciple Hridya Haridas staged 'Mala Kurathy'. This was presented as part of Mohiniyattam Sandhya. The kurathy is an adept palm-reader from the hills, and arrives at Valluvanadu, a region on the northern banks of Nila

River, a treasure trove of cultural traditions.

The choreography was unprecedented as the classical dance form of Mohiniyattam was dovetailed to the centuries-old folk theatre of Tholpavakoothu (shadow puppet theatre). Truly ingenuous of Nirmala.

Kurathy's entry as a Mohiniyattam dancer was noteworthy for how she introduces herself. But her histrionic talents were revealed through a picturesque portrayal of the different types of folk art forms peculiar to Valluvanadu, such as 'Poothan and Thira',

'Kaala kali', 'Thullal of velichappadu' (shamanic priest) and 'Kuhtira kali'.

Thereafter, she invites people interested in palm-reading. A childless couple shares their sorrow, and she advises them to offer Tholpavakoothu as an offering in a temple of Bhadrakali to propitiate the goddess.

But why, Tholpavakoothu that narrates the story of the Ramayana? That's because Bhadrakali is disheartened that she missed seeing the ferocious fight between Rama and Ravana, and this shadow puppetry, performed only in temples dedicated to Bhadrakali, recreates it for her.

Traditionally performed by scholars of the Vellalachetti caste, the play is presented in a *koothu madam*, a specially built performing space in the temple precincts. A white cloth spread on the front serves as the screen on which the shadows of specially designed puppets are cast.

Kottichetham, the Rama-Ravana fight and the coronation of Rama were showcased by artistes, led by Lakshmana Pulavar. The recital concluded with the re-entry of the dancer and mangalam.



CULTUREBRIEFS

Art showcase



DakshinaChitra presents the 10th edition of Utsavam, the annual festival of music and dance, on March 1 at DakshinaChitra, Chennai. The day-long event, themed Legacy, features the following. 11 a.m. - 1.30 p.m.: 'The Burden of Legacy - Power, privilege and exclusion in Classical Dance', a presentation and discussion by senior dancer Yashoda Thakore. 3 p.m.: 'Future of Tradition: Reinventing Legacy', a discussion by panellists Savita Narasimhan, Hanne M. De Bruin and A.L. Aparajithan with Preethi Bharadwaj as the moderator; 4 p.m.: Kalavantulu performance by Yashoda Thakore; 5 p.m.: Kattaikoothu Sangam presents 'Tavam', a production about what it means to be a woman on the Kattaikoothu stage. The day-long festival also showcases products and services by women entrepreneurs in 'Sandhai by Women', to be held from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Exclusion in Classical Dance', a presentation and discussion by senior dancer Yashoda Thakore. 3 p.m.: 'Future of Tradition: Reinventing Legacy', a discussion by panellists Savita Narasimhan, Hanne M. De Bruin and A.L. Aparajithan with Preethi Bharadwaj as the moderator; 4 p.m.: Kalavantulu performance by Yashoda Thakore; 5 p.m.: Kattaikoothu Sangam presents 'Tavam', a production about what it means to be a woman on the Kattaikoothu stage. The day-long festival also showcases products and services by women entrepreneurs in 'Sandhai by Women', to be held from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Celebrating a milestone

Saradhi Academy of Art and Culture marks its silver jubilee, Rajatotsav, with a year-long celebration to be inaugurated on February 28, 4.30 p.m., at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. The inaugural event, titled Gana Manjari, presents a series of performances by students, teachers of past and present, and eminent artistes from the field of music, dance and theatre.



Stories on strings

MOPA launches *The Sound Alchemists*, a docu series on instruments. The first episode focusses on the veena



Insightful
Ramana Balachandran in the debut edition of the series. (Below) Savita Narasimhan.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Aishwarya Raghunathan



What makes the veena captivating? Is it the way its long neck seems to stretch toward the heavens, or how the kudam vibrates with a subtle intensity, as though it holds centuries of unspoken melodies? It exists in a realm where sound and spirituality intertwine. Each string, when plucked, not just produces a note but an emotion.

Over the years, masters of the instrument have developed distinct styles, while modern-day players continue to explore the instrument's possibilities. This balance between heritage and innovation is the pulse of *The Sound Alchemists*, a documentary series curated by musician Savita Narasimhan and produced by the Museum of Performing Arts (MOPA). Ambitious in scope and intimate in execution, the debut episode was devoted to the veena. The series is an ode to South Indian classical instruments not as artefacts but as living, breathing entities.

Through the artistic lens of Ramana

The balance between heritage and innovation is the pulse of the series.

Balachandran, *The Sound Alchemists* takes us deep into the heart of the veena. The documentary took over a year's research, and curates an experience. We see the meticulous craftsmanship behind each instrument, from the selection of aged jackwood to the precise chiselling of the kudam. We hear the quiet intensity of Ramana as he speaks of his relationship with the instrument, how each pull of a string, each slide across a fret, is a dialogue between the artiste and the instrument.

The series also sheds light on the less visible but equally vital contributors to the veena's legacy – the artisans. In Nelamangala, near Bengaluru,

generations of instrument makers have passed down their knowledge about jackwood's resonance, the importance of beeswax in holding the brass frets, and the balance between tradition and adaptation.

Yet, what sets *The Sound Alchemists* apart is its refusal to romanticise the past at the expense of the present. The series dares to ask: How does the veena stay relevant in the modern soundscape? How does it assert its voice in an era dominated by louder, and more amplified instruments?

Ramana Balachandran answers these questions not through words but music. The soul of the series lies in the music itself. His performance is an intricate balance between honouring tradition and embracing evolution. His gamakas are intricate and nuanced, his rhythmic experiments are bold and unrelenting. The series reminds us that music is not confined to what we hear. It lives in the silences, in the spaces between notes, and in the resonances that linger long after the last string is plucked.

Watch *The Sound Alchemists* on MOPA's YouTube channel.



Utsavam
A DakshinaChitra Festival of Music and Dance

DakshinaChitra
The Living Museum

presents
the 10th edition of Utsavam

Date: 1st March 2025 – Saturday
Venue: DakshinaChitra, Chennai

Theme: Legacy

11:00 AM – 1:30 PM
The Burden of Legacy
Power, Privilege and Exclusion in Classical Dance:
A presentation and discussion by Dr. Yashoda Thakore

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Future of Tradition: Reinventing Legacy
Panelists:
Savitha Narasimhan,
Hanne M. de Bruin &
A. L. Aparajithan
Moderator:
Preethi Bharadwaj

4:00 PM – 4:45 PM
Kalavantulu Performance
by Dr. Yashoda Thakore

5:00 PM – 6:15 PM
Tavam
A Kattaikuttu performance by five female Kattaikuttu artists on what it means to take the stage, by Kattaikuttu Sangam

10:00 AM – 6:00 PM
Sandhai by Womxn
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The beauty of pauses

January Low and Sooraj Subramaniam captured the stillness in movements at The Platform 2025



Charumathi Supraja

January Low's performance began in stillness. The absence of music was as striking as the lack of elaborate makeup or ornamentation. Movements being listed in the audio track were being matched with dance poses but the performance established from the beginning a view of the dancer's practice room. The audience was invited to witness the dancer committing sequences to memory, listening to instructions, making notes and finding the dance within.

One of two performances showcased in The Platform 2025 (presented by Alif Arts Consultancy at Medai, Bengaluru), January Low's 'Pending' displayed the many little dances that make a dance. It opened repetitions, vulnerability and the search for perfection to the gaze of the audience, accustomed to guzzling the "end product" of demanding preparatory processes. In the final playing out of the dance, with music

and other paraphernalia, the audience experienced both journey and destination in January's performance.

Sooraj Subramanian's 'Reflections of an Indian dancer,' the other performance of The Platform 2025, was rooted in similar themes but used its own stylistic vocabulary to explore the interiority of a dancer's relationship to three dance genres. The audience travelled with him as he

located Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Odissi in their histories (without sidestepping complexities), on the Indian map and in the landscape of his body (as also his personal history). Unfolding against a sparkingly written and narrated prose-poem, Sooraj's performance placed back-stories in the front. It reflected on loss; and on being "messed with" when home became a distant, unknown entity. It described the "finding of a new locus" that his dance education and practice had enabled.

While an earlier version of January's 'Pending' premiered in 2023 as 'A Listening Body,' Sooraj first performed 'Reflections of an Indian Dancer' in 2021, later touring the UK and Europe with it. 'A Listening Body' was a response to the changes in her "relationship with dance after the pandemic," but 'Pending'



offered "more nuanced content" because it was based on lessons distilled through the earlier work, January shares. Having been in search of "different entry points for the audience to encounter and experience Odissi," January says, "my practice observes how Odissi continues to thrive in my South East Malaysian body as a mother to three children. My virtual mentorship with *didi* (Bijayini Satpathy) developed an agency in my body and practice that I have never experienced before. This inspired me to create this work".

She was "curious to share the unseen labour (emotional and physical) that goes into practice, and the unwavering faith dancers carry with them when they show up, though performance opportunities are few and far between," she adds. "The biggest challenge as a mother has been to remain consistent, to be kind to myself especially during the pauses (as a mother, there are many) and to stay present," says January. Her focus, therefore, is on "the sacred stillness" that practice offers her.

'Reflections of an Indian Dancer,' directed by Balbir Singh (of Balbir Singh Dance Company, UK) sought to "make Indian dance accessible without oversimplifying its complexity", says Sooraj. "The main challenge was maintaining the tone and pace of the prose-poetry script while balancing the genealogies of the dance styles against an autobiographical backdrop." He looks for "synergy rather than conflict between idioms", he says, likening his immersive engagement with three forms to "being multilingual".

Lately, his practice has been centred on Odissi, "especially as I train with Bijayini Satpathy, and am relishing the fresh challenges and possibilities it offers", he says.

Both 'Pending' and 'Reflections of an Indian Dancer' narrated dance stories in a carefully crafted inside-out language. Mapping mind and body on stage, they felt inclusive of the audience in ways that conventional dance performances are often not. Effectively using pause and silence, they made thought visible, evocatively opening up the subtext to audience experience.

CALENDAR

In praise of Shiva



Hamsadhwani, in association with Narada Gana Sabha and Acharyanet Foundation, will present a concert featuring Chitravina Ravikiran's 'Jyotirlinga Geeta Mala', on March 1, 6 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha. Compositions on the 12 shrines of Shiva will be sung by Sikkil Gurucharan, K.S. Vishnuadev, Pathangi Brothers and N. Ravikiran's ensemble. They will be accompanied by L. Ramakrishnan on the violin, Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman on the mridangam, and B.S. Purushothaman on the kanjira.

Tribute to a dancer

An event titled 'Woven Words' is being organised in memory of Bharatanatyam dancer-scholar Lakshmi Viswanathan on March 4 (6.15 p.m.) at Narada Gana Sabha.

Tyagaraja aradhana

Thumbari Centre for Arts organises Tyagaraja aradhana, led by senior Carnatic vocalist Nithyashree Mahadevan, on March 2 (4 p.m.) at Shankaralyam, Chetpet. V.N. Maya, Chief General Manager, Indian Bank, will be the chief guest.

Platforming young musicians

Suswara Trust inaugurates its 36th music festival on March 4, 5 p.m., at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan mini hall, Mylapore. The inaugural concerts are by Viswas Hari (Mandolin at 5 p.m.) and Mysore A Chandan Kumar (flute, at 6.30 p.m.). A series of concerts, both vocal and instrumental, by young artistes will be featured during the festival. Concerts to take place this week are: March 5, 5 p.m.: Krithika Arjun; 6.30 p.m.: Allam Durgaprasad (gottuvadyam). March 6, 5 p.m.: S. Nithyasree (veena) and 6.30 p.m.: Ranjani Sivakumar. March 7, 5 p.m.: Manda Anantha Krishna (flute) and 6.30 p.m.: Andankoil AVS Sivakumar and Sundararajan. The festival concludes on March 9.

HCL concert series

As part of the series, The Music Academy has organised Mridula Sivakumar's Bharatanatyam recital on March 6, 6 p.m., at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

Songs on Ayyappa



Chennai-based composer Raghavendran Srinivasan recently launched his third album titled 'Ennalum Ini Nannale' on Ayyappa, featuring singer Uthara Unnikrishnan. His previous albums - 'Guruve Endrum' on Raghavendran Swami, and 'Kanne Kannin Maniye', highlighting the father-daughter bond featured well-known singer and Uthara's father, P. Unnikrishnan.

The songs are available on Staves & Octaves, Raghavendran's YouTube channel.

Tuning into the trend

Young singer Sangborti Das lends a contemporary sensibility to her classical performances



Shallaja Khanna

Ten years ago, the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi tied up with ITC SRA Kolkata to host the Morning Raga series. The aim was to arrange classical music concerts in the open, in the morning. This year, to mark a decade of the series, Habitat Centre went back to the roots and featured only ITC gurus and scholars. Thus, Delhi-ites heard a new generation of excellent musicians - sarodist Abir Hossain, sitarist Ayan Sengupta, and vocalists Deborshee Bhattacharjee, Alick Sengupta and Sangborti Das.

The ambience was soothing - one could hear birdsong, green leaves fluttering overhead, and the sun slowly moving in an arc over the seated audience, many of whom were young. The stage was decorated in the spring colours of yellow and orange, and the seating, as always, was in *baithak* style.

Among the line-up of artistes, Sangborti Das' style was intriguing. Sangborti hails from a family of doctors. Though in her

'Khelo re horiyan, Mohan sang'. Next, displaying the open-minded approach that this generation of musicians holds dear, she sang a composition she learnt at a workshop conducted by Pt. Ulhas Kashalkar of the Gwalior gharana. This willingness to absorb elements from other musical styles has brought about change in Hindustani vocal gayaki.

Next, Sangborti moved to the raag of the season - Bahar. After 'Sakal ban phool rahi sarson', she sang two more songs on audience request. 'Sakal ban phool', a composition by Amir Khusrau, was part of the recent popular TV series *Heeramandi*.

Sangborti then switched to a traditional tarana in teen taal, taught at an ITC workshop by Ustad Mashkur Ali Khan of the Kirana gharana - Sangborti learnt it from her gurubhai Brajeshwar Mukherjee.

The concert concluded with 'Kaleeyan sang karat rang raleeyan'. The audience was not in a mood to let her go, despite the strong sun beating down, so Sangborti closed with a Bhairavi thumri 'Baaju band khul jaaye'. Vinay Mishra's emotion-filled playing on the harmonium for this piece was commendable.

On the tabla was the seasoned Pt. Ashok Mukherjee from Kolkata, whose on-stage rapport with the vocalist was clearly visible. Sangborti's gesture in appreciating her accompanists' musical inputs is admirable.

Twenty years, she performed like an experienced artiste. She trained at Sruti Nandan, the music school established by Pt. Ajay Chakrabarty. She currently teaches there over the weekend while continuing her training at ITC-SRA.

Sangborti is blessed with a clear, ringing voice, which steadily held the note; she was able to retain the audience's attention in her first concert in Delhi. Her diction and enunciation of the lyrics were impeccable, and her stage presence pleasing.

The singer began with the morning raag Bairagi Bhairav, in which she rendered two compositions, then sang Alhai Bilawal. The composition on Holi



Promising note
Sangborti Das; (left) singing at the 2025 edition of India Habitat Centre's morning raga series.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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