

friday Review

THE HINDU

Memories of a musical era*Parivadini Isai Malar* traces the history of Carnatic music p2**Abhinaya in a capsule**

Priyadarshini Govind to launch an online course for art enthusiasts p3

**LIGHTS, CAMERA, DANCE**

The film *A song for Eresha* tells the story of a Bharatanatyam dancer p4

Anurag Tagat

In the years following the COVID-19 lockdown, new records are being set in India's live music space. The demand for live concerts has increased so much that it led Coldplay to perform the biggest show of their storied career in Ahmedabad in late January this year, packing the Narendra Modi Stadium with over 2,22,000 attendees across two days.

More recently, the producer and promoter of the shows, BookMyShow Live, brought down Guns N' Roses to play for a reported 35,000 audience at Mumbai's Mahalaxmi Racecourse on May 17. Sure, Axl Rose was off-key and no longer at his best, but what has been driving audiences to catch the likes of Guns N' Roses, Maroon 5, Coldplay, Bryan Adams and soon, Enrique Iglesias is the nostalgia factor. The rush for tickets is also driven by social media and the FOMO it can quickly induce in anyone scrolling through their feeds. Never mind that you may not know more than a handful of songs out of the average 90-120 minute setlist. What further adds to the hysteria is the fact one never knows when these artistes will be in the country again.

In December last, Canadian rock favourite Bryan Adams took on his most extensive India tour yet, performing in seven cities including Shillong, Goa and Kolkata. He told me in an interview ahead of the tour

Head East

Concert tourism is booming with India emerging as a lucrative market for major international bands



kickoff, "I've been banging on to everybody to get back to India for a couple of years now. And so we finally organised it and I really, honestly didn't know what to expect because I haven't been here for a few years and, times change... but my goodness, the tickets have virtually sold out."

The tour – Bryan's sixth visit to the country – was put together by EVA Live and SG Live. A representative for EVA Live confirms that the nine-day, seven-city tour brought in over 1.5 lakh fans. The company's marketing manager Pallavi Maloo says, "The primary advantage of multi-city tours lies in shared marketing costs and increased sponsor interest. While artistes are generally inclined towards

more shows, the financial benefit of a multi-city arrangement typically ranges from 10 per cent to 15 per cent."

Larger bands such as Guns N' Roses may have only performed one show – as did the likes of Deep Purple (although they were originally slated for two) – which points to how touring with a leaner live setup can obviously help reach more cities. Case in point, Ed Sheeran returned to India within a year of his 2024 show, performing in cities such as Chennai, Shillong, Hyderabad, Pune and Bengaluru for the first time between January and February 2025.

It was just Sheeran, his guitar and his trusty Loopstation to devise catchy, groovy loops of rhythms and layers to keep the crowd engaged. While BookMyShow clearly has

processes in place to be the go-to promoter or organiser for artistes represented globally by companies such as AEG and Live Nation, the likes of EVA Live, District By Zomato and Skillbox are scaling up to keep the competition healthy.

Just one rung below are more promoters who see the strong attachment and nostalgia evoked by the likes of Enrique, Backstreet Boys and others. In fact, Backstreet Boys' member Nick Carter was in town for a solo tour for the first time early this year.

He said in a media interaction in Bengaluru, "I've been dying to get over to India for so long. We've come a couple of times with the Backstreet Boys, but I just felt like it was never enough. And so it was the perfect opportunity for me, because I have a little more control over where I go as an individual. It's a little harder with the Backstreet Boys, because it was a bigger show. Mine's a bit smaller, and I can take it to certain places that we necessarily could not go."

EVA Live breaks down how cities are gauged as viable markets for international acts. Tier 1 includes Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Kolkata. Tier 2 cities such as Hyderabad, Chennai, Goa, Shillong, and Pune definitely possess what they term "a viable market." Tier 3 cities, including Jaipur and Indore, along with other large capital cities, "have a somewhat smaller market." Below that, it doesn't get significant, but what promoters do count on while planning international shows, is that tier 3 and 4 city fans will travel to attend shows. Coldplay's shows in Ahmedabad drew visitors from over 500 cities spanning all 28 states and five union territories, according to a report made by EY-Parthenon.

Out in Kolkata, Aweek Chatterjee, who runs a local label, Free School Street Records, is an avid fan of classic rock and blues. Catching the likes of Guns N' Roses in Mumbai, Aweek is the kind of fan who invests in travelling abroad to catch his favourite bands, in case they don't come to India.

Over the years, this is the shift taking place – that Indians may not need to travel overseas to catch artistes. "I was absolutely thrilled to watch Deep Purple, Extreme, Sting, Greta Van Fleet and Mr Big live in India," says Aweek. It means that he has been zipping across Bengaluru, Shillong and Mumbai, among other cities for concerts. Considering himself a "rock n roll pilgrim," Aweek has been happy to travel outside his home city, but also notes that more needs to be done to put a city like Kolkata on the

map for international artistes.

"The reason is Kolkata lacks the right infrastructure and sponsors, coupled with low ticket sales due to affordability and economic issues. However, it's great to see that things are improving now as at least tier B and C international artistes such as Aristocrats, Steve Vai, Karnivool have played in Kolkata in recent years and Steven Wilson is slated to play this November."

A recent surge of events in Meghalaya also points to the involvement of government authorities, with Bryan Adams and Ed Sheeran's gig getting support from Meghalaya Tourism. EVA Live hails them as "fantastic." Since Coldplay's ₹392 crore impact on Ahmedabad was highlighted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, Assam Government has made a move to crack concert economy in December, bringing in hip-hop and pop star Post Malone.

It's not so much about nostalgia as it is about artistes mounting much more expansive tours. That way, everyone's a winner. Aweek rightly sums up, "The live music industry is emerging as a new economy booster and India is poised to have exponential growth in this sector."

Showtime

Enrique Iglesias: October (dates to be announced), Mumbai

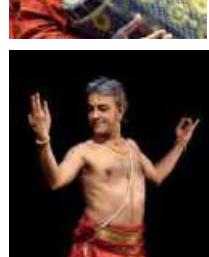
Travis Scott: October 18 and 19, Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi

Steven Wilson: November 2 - 9, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Delhi-NCR

Post Malone: December 8, Assam

**Big on gigs**

India will next host popular Spanish singer Enrique Iglesias (right); and American rapper Post Malone (above). PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

**CULTURE BRIEFS****The Choodamani title goes to...**

On the occasion of the 69th Margazhi Mela to be hosted by Sri Krishna Gana Sabha in December 2025, the Choodamani awards will be conferred upon two senior artistes – mridangist K.V. Prasad (Sangeetha Choodamani) and Bharatanatyam dancer G. Narendra (Nrithya Choodamani).

K.V. Prasad will be the 62nd recipient of the Sangeetha Choodamani title while Narendra is the 57th recipient of the title for dance.

The awards will be presented during the inaugural ceremony of the Margazhi Mela, on December 12, 5 p.m. at the sabha.

Advanced course in music

Applications are invited for the three-year Advanced Diploma course in Carnatic Music, conducted by The Music Academy. The course has two semesters (mid-July to November end, and mid-January to April end). Classes, commencing in July, will be held from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. at The Music Academy. Besides presenting compositions learnt during the three-year training period, the candidates will also be performing a concert in front of an invited audience.

Applicants, who have passed +2, and are in the age group of 18 to 30 can enrol. They should be able to sing varnams, kritis with a reasonable knowledge of manodharma. Last date to submit the application form, which is available on The Music Academy's website, is June 25. Candidates must email it with their bio-data and details of their music training. For more information log on to www.musicacademy.org.in or call 044-2811 2231/2811 6902/2811 5162.

KFA drama awards

Kartik Fine Arts will host the award function of their 34th annual Kodai Nataka Vizha on June 1, 5.30 p.m. at Narada Gana Sabha. Dhanaraj T, executive director, Indian Overseas Bank will be the chief guest, and will present the awards.

S.N. Srikanth, president, KFA, presides. SL Naanu receives the Kartik Rajagopal Award of Excellence for Best Theatre Artiste. The Nadigar Thespian Shri Sivaji Ganesan Award for all-round excellence will be presented to Kooothapiran Navabharath Theatres for the play *Leela Vinodham*, which has won seven awards.

The evening also includes the staging of SRMG Creations' new play

Irandu Kannal Pesum Mozhiyil, directed by V.S. Sridhar.

ThRee's *Kalavu Neekiya Padalam* has won six awards – Second Best Play, Best Character Actor (Lavanya Venugopal and Calcutta Ramesh), Best Storywriter (V. Sreevathson), Best Director and special prize (M.V. Bhaskar).

Satyasi Creations' *Killadi Mapillai* has been adjudged the Best Comedy Play and *Varuthapadha Vayodhikar Sangam* (Guru Raghavendra Creations Rail Priya) also wins in the same category.

While the Best Comedian Award will be presented to Mapillai Ganesh for his performance in *Killadi Mapillai*, the second Best Comedian Award will go to Ananthu for his role in *Varuthapadha Vayodhikar Sangam*. The sabha will also present awards for best reviews.



H. Ramakrishnan

As you turn the pages, you are drawn to a detailed study on T. Janakiraman's mastery in music and its reflection in his works. This is followed up with an appreciation of his scholarship by Lalguji Jayaraman as it appeared in a Tamil magazine. Enjoyable segments of T. Janakiraman's novels *Marappasu* and *Mogamal* are peppered throughout the book. The article on Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer by M. Vaidyanathan (1936) has a strong and healthy dose of humour. The encounter between Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer and Fiddle Krishna Iyer is a thought-provoking one. These and more such anecdotes and pieces make the book *Parivadini Isai Malar* (Volume 1) an interesting read. The book is a compilation of new and published articles.

En Sangeetha Nainavukal by S. Sivakumar, who has also edited this volume, is a musical journey by itself. His recollections of the well-known and unsung musicians are heart-warming. His piece on M. Balamuralikrishna elaborates the legendary vocalist's distinct approach to every facet of his art. It also highlights how his persona was as unique as his music. The piece also refers to Veena Gayatri and talks about a station master with a passion for Carnatic music. This piece, in a way, is dedicated to every rasika, who goes out of the way to listen to their favourite artistes. This is also what made the station master face departmental action.

Sivakumar has paid rich tributes to Tiruvaiyaru Chellam Iyer, who is referred to as an encyclopaedia on music and musicians, and to Kannan, who started the trend of bringing out the music concert guide during the December Season.



Rewind (From below) S.G. Kittappa with his brother S.G. Kasi on the harmonium during a recording at the Columbia Studios; the book; K.B. Sundarambal in *Avvaiyar*; and Guru P.S. Narayanaswamy. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES & K.V. SRINIVASAN



From the records

Parivadini Isai Malar, a compilation of articles, takes a peek into the life and works of past masters



An especially absorbing write-up on Madurai Mani Iyer's music by S. Nilakantan, son of violin maestro Thiruvalangadu (Suswaram) Sundaresa Iyer, throws light on the bond between the two legends. Along with it comes a short but gripping excerpt from Kothamangalam Subbu's *Thillana Mohanambal*, wherein

the author brings out the grandeur of the Mallari by a group of nagaswaram artistes to the accompaniment of the great Ammappettayar's thavil.

Recollecting the past
Tiger Varadachari's reminiscences of musicians broadcast on AIR Tiruchi in the 1940s shed light on an era

that shaped Carnatic music and laid the foundation for the future generation. He speaks of Thachur Singarachariar, Veena Nilakanta Sastrigal, Mutthayalpetta Tyagarayar, Muthuswami Thevar, Ghata Devaraj, Morsing Govindarajulu, Chennai's nagaswaram artistes Parthasarathy and his son

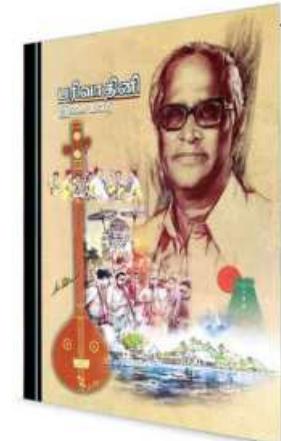
Narayanaswamy, the famous Nadhamuni Band and Clarinet Appayi.

That P.S. Narayanaswamy had translated the original Malayalam biography of Swati Tirunal into Tamil is a revelation to me. An abridged version of the foreword written by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer finds a place in this book.

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan's lively recollection of the chamber music concerts by visiting Carnatic musicians during her Delhi days is engaging.

Another fascinating piece is Mysore Vasudevachar's recollection (from the book *The Artists Whom I Have Met* written in the 1950s) of Kempe Gowda, who learnt music along with him under Patnam Subramania Iyer at Tiruvaiyaru.

Lalitharam, founder of



Parivadini, has written an absorbing piece on Dilruba artiste Angamali Jose. An essay by G.K. Seshagiri (1939) is like a thesis on the *Natyashastra*.

The famous writer R.K. Narayanan was also a music lover. The Tamil translation of one of his humorous pieces about attending a music concert in a makeshift pandal will leave readers in splits. Gopulu's illustration accompanying the piece enhances the humour.

There are articles such as the one on harikatha exponent Saraswati Bai, which reflect the societal condition of the time.

Similarly, Naradar Srinivasa Rao's article paints a gloomy picture of the world of dance in the 1940s. To Kalki's review of Kallidaikurichi Ramalinga Iyer's concert, which appeared in *Ananda Vikatan* in May 1934, a counter review by Immisai on the same concert appeared in *Manikodi*, heralding a musical war. Thi. Ja. Ra's article titled 'Rights of a rasika' presents some delightful points. The abridged

Not many would know that
P.S. Narayanaswamy translated the original Malayalam biography of Swati Tirunal into Tamil.

version of the conversation between Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, an authority on Hindustani music, and Subbarama Dikshitar, an authority on Carnatic music, is as interesting as it is illuminating.

Mutual respect

Thaadi Vaadhyaa (pen name of S. Sivakumar) has brought out the competence of mimicry artiste Thiruvisainallur Vikatam Ramasami Sastrigal, who could perform a vocal concert along with vocalisation of the sounds of the mridangam, ghatam, kanjira and konnakol. Thaadi Vaadhyaa has also written about how Harikesanallur Muthaiah Bhagavtar and Palghat Mani Iyer helped two young enthusiasts learn the mridangam. The book contains tributes to Muthaiah Bhagavtar by Ku Pa Rajagopal, and to Pudukottai Manpoondia Pillai by mridangam legend Palani Subramania Pillai. Lata Mangeshkar's letter to 'Gemin' Vasan on K.B. Sundarambal's music and performance in the movie *Avvaiyar* shows how artistes praised each other's work.

SVV's article 'Porumai Illai Kaalam' – an era without patience – compares the past with the present. Two articles by Y. Mahalinga Sastry in *Manipravalam* (Sanskritised Tamil) are certainly worth a read. S.G. Kasi Iyer's tributes to his younger brother S.G. Kittappa, published in 1968, brings out several aspects of the latter's musical journey. A few titbits fit well in this collection. One such is that of musicologist Prof. Sambamurthi accompanying on the violin at the Thevaram-Thiruvachagam session by Thamizhisaivaanar Sa. Sundara Odhuvar. It was at the wedding of the daughter of Marai Malai Adigal, the founder of Tamil linguistic Purism.

The second volume of this 224-page compilation will be launched soon.

Jagyaseni chose a leisurely pace to convey the emotion of longing. However, at some point during the varnam, the dancer moved away from the routine depiction of pleading and cajoling, showing the nayika as a strong woman, who instructs the sakhi on how to behave when she meets the lord.

Interesting sancharis
The other sancharis such as a creeper clinging on to a tree, the torment of watching birds in love, and the moonlight burning her body were handled with conviction. The incorporation of Krishna's leelas for the line 'Magitalam pugazhazhum', which highlights the stature of Mannargudi Rajagopalaswami, was distractible.

The jathi segments were short and filled with appealing pirouettes and poses. However, a little more azhutham in footwork would enhance Jagyaseni's mrittika.

The song 'Irakkam varamal ponadu' by Gopalkrishna Bharathi, where a devotee pleads for the benevolence of the lord, was a poignant portrayal. Next came a Purandarasadar kriti with enough dramatic moments. The Prahlada-Hiranyakashipu and Arjuna-Duryodhana episodes made the narrative interesting.

Thematic performances offer ample scope for the dancers to explore ideas. This could have been handled with more conviction in this presentation.

The playing of the flute and the violin when introducing each composition was disturbing. The orchestra comprised of vocalist Sai Sabapathy, mridangist Dhananjayan, violinist Anantaraman Balaji and flautist Yakeshwaran. Nattuvangam was by Jagyaseni's guru Lakshmi Ramaswamy.

Composer's special

Swarathmika's concert was themed on Gopalakrishna Bharathi's compositions



S. Swarathmika with Chaganti Ramya Kiranmayi (violin) and Kundurthi Aravind (mridangam). PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

P Srihari

It came as no surprise that S. Swarathmika's concert, dedicated to the compositions of Gopalakrishna Bharathi and presented under the aegis of The Music Academy at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall, was a reflection of the steady strides she has been making in her career. What did come as a surprise, however, was her choice of pratimadhyamam ragas alone – Purvikalyani and Varali – for exploration, bypassing the more abundant sudhamadhyamam variety. Given Swarathmika's lineage – she is a granddaughter of vocalist Leelavathy Gopalakrishnan and the daughter of G. Srikanth – one might have expected her to strike a balance by drawing from her sizeable repertoire within the composer's corpus.

That said, the vocalist carved out an impressive performance, invoking the grace of the cosmic dancer, Nataraja. She was well-supported by Chaganti

unfurled loopy phrases, swirling sancharas, and long notes, particularly in the upper registers, and brought out the raga's evocative mood. Ramya Kiranmayi's bow work produced an interpretation that closely mirrored the vocalist's ideas. After the rendition of the song 'Natamadum nathan', set to Khanda Chapu, Swarathmika led the well-crafted swara exchanges in which the concluding avarthanam stood out.

'Thaa thatha thaah nee' in Karaharapriya, a seldom-heard song with a delicate pallavi, was an interesting choice. Swarathmika negotiated it with calm assurance. Swarathmika featured Varali as the main raga and her delineation progressed, gathering flair and momentum, textured with polished gamakas. Ramya Kiranmayi once again displayed a keen melodic sensibility in her response. The composition 'Adiya paadham gatiyenu' followed. There is an unmistakable felicity in her kriti rendition, and this challenging song was no exception. The niraval at the anupallavi opening 'Naadu pugazhndhidum' was a graceful exposition, and the kalpanaswaras sparkled with vitality. Mridangist Aravind, brought in a lively rhythmic presence, and his Adi talam tani carried interesting patterns and vibrant strokes.

'Adum chidambaramo', a popular number in Behag, was sung next, and 'Kanakasabhai thirunatanam' in Surutti brought the curtain down.



The power of the nayika

Jagyaseni Chatterjee's 'Flame to Fragrance' was an ode to feminine energy

V.V. Ramani

Jagyaseni Chatterjee, a senior disciple of Lakshmi Ramaswamy, recently presented a thematic Bharatanatyam recital, 'From Flame to Fragrance: A Journey of Devotion, Desire and Dharma', at Rasika Ranjani Sabha. Through a bouquet of traditional

compositions, the dancer creatively explored different rasas.

The bright red and black costume and lighting design enhanced the visual impact of the first composition, 'Thaka thaka endru aduvom', by Subhramanya Bharati, which was an ode to the feminine energy. The dancer drew parallels among the multiple roles played by women. This was visualised

through a powerful depiction of the goddess as a creator, destroyer, and an embodiment of the five elements.

Next came the varnam 'Sakhiye inda velaiyil', in Anandabhairavi. Here, the nayika's wait for her hero was given a philosophical slant,

describing it as a reflection of the expectations that each one of us have. Though this was the underlying thought conveyed during the commentary, the piece largely focussed on the traditional portrayal of a woman in love.

Thematic margams have become the order of the day.
Jagyaseni Chatterjee too followed this trend.

A masterclass in abhinaya

Bharatanatyam exponent Priyadarsini Govind will launch an online course in July



Akhila Krishnamurthy

It's a warm summer morning. Priyadarsini Govind is at her performance space and black box theatre, KGI studios in Royapettah. She is sitting alone – on the floor – dressed comfortably in a pair of tracks and a T-shirt, absorbed in her thoughts with a notepad and a pencil in hand.

For the last few weeks, this renowned Bharatanatyam artiste has been busy giving finishing touches to the four-part certificate course on abhinaya, which will be launched online in July. It is an extension of Learning Ladder, an abhinaya pedagogy she developed two years ago.

"Any art form is a work-in-progress," says Priyadarsini. Learning Ladder found its genesis during the pandemic when she conducted a series of immersive abhinaya sessions online – on the Ashtanayikas and Navarasas – for dance students from across the globe. "After every session, where I would teach abhinaya for a composition," says Priyadarsini, "I would spend hours thinking about how students need to experience the rigour of a structured learning (of abhinaya) that could allow them to ease their way into a composition. The more I thought about it, the more I was convinced why I should come up with a system that could help learners look beyond lyrics to understand abhinaya."

Learn to express
After several days of contemplation and many rounds of discussions with senior students, Learning Ladder began to take shape. It's built on the premise of teaching abhinaya to anyone in the field of performing arts – dancers, theatre practitioners and storytellers. Learning Ladder envisages learning as a process of training the mind and understanding how to communicate what one intends to in a way that is effective and evocative.

"Abhinaya is all about imagination," explains Priyadarsini. "But to explore the honesty of an emotion and to convey it meaningfully require training, practice, curiosity and questioning. The uniqueness of Learning Ladder is that it looks at

abhinaya both as a personal expression of emotions and a collective consciousness as far as the impact of the emotions are concerned. Hence, a great deal of thought has gone into designing a system of learning that does not, at any point, intend to create clones because every emotion is different."

Since its inception in 2022, Learning Ladder has unfolded as a series of modules (in the form of 24 videos) where Priyadarsini and her students develop and put into practice ideas and exercises. These are built on a learning framework that draws from the Natya Shastra and Abhinaya Darpana. The focus, however, is on imagination and the training needed to translate it into visual expression.

For the past two years, Priyadarsini has also been travelling extensively to conduct Learning Ladder workshops. "As far as abhinaya is concerned what gets across to the audience sometimes may be quite different from what the artiste has in mind. Abhinaya is not merely instinctive, a structured training can go a long way in helping to communicate the emotions better."



After every session, where I would teach abhinaya for a composition, I would spend hours thinking about how students need to experience the rigour of a structured learning

Priyadarsini feels Learning Ladder can fill the gap. "In today's world learning, in general, is not in-depth, and often lacks a broader perspective. Look at the pace of life now," says the dancer as she goes back in time to recall her abhinaya sessions with the legendary Kalanidhi Narayanan. "I went to her as a nine-year-old and my understanding of abhinaya grew with each session. Kalanidhi mami would delve deep into a character, which made the expressions intense and layered. We'd spend days to unravel a poetry. The experience was phenomenal. Learning Ladder draws from this experience and my own discovery as a performer and teacher," says Priyadarsini.

Shailaja Tripathi

During the Indo-British textile trade, between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, a few unique textile labels such as tikas, tikas or chaaps emerged. What started off as simple tags attached to fabric back then are today studied as imaginative expressions that reveal a rich visual and historical narrative.

Four hundred such labels are on display at 'Ticket Tika Chaap, The Art of the Trademark in Indo-British Textile Trade', an ongoing (till November) exhibition at Museum of Art And Photography (MAP) in Bengaluru. Curated by Shrey Maurya, research director-MAP Academy, and Nathaniel Gaskell, author, editor and co-founder-MAP, the exhibition features labels, correspondences between Indian merchants and trademarking officers in England, stamp markings that were applied on bales of clothes and a few photographs.

MAP has a collection of 7,000 textile labels and Shrey and Nathaniel took up the subject as an annual curatorial project. "Popular art is something we wanted to look at this year. It took us close to two years to put the exhibition together. A year-and-a-half was largely spent on researching and looking at images," shares Shrey.

The labels carry diverse visuals – dancing elephants, portraits of maharajas, deities, women in traditional attire, symbols of industrialisation such as fans, telephones and buses, British imperialistic symbols, religious iconography and photographs of Indian merchants. All tickets have a well-defined margin with names of the business printed on them in English and regional languages.

The curators went through 7,000 images and categorised them into subject-based groups. "It was exhausting but it opened up a whole new world. The visuals on the labels had a meaning and seemed to hold within them several untold stories from the past. The creativity that had gone into making them led us to the history of branding and advertisement," says Shrey.

She adds that not much has been written about textile labels in the art-historical context except for a few by the likes of Jyotindra Jain, Kajri Jain and the Tasveer Ghar Project.

An intriguing process

While putting together the exhibition, the curators constantly thought about the people and processes behind the creation of these labels. "It was truly intriguing. Not just the trademarking process and printing, we wondered how they came up with the idea of images on labels and who would have drawn them. There is no record of the artists."



Rich visual narrative Colourful textile labels on display at an exhibition in Bengaluru. PHOTOS COURTESY: MAP

Tagged to a story

How Indian traders and British printers worked together to create artistic textile labels



Shrey shares that the images are representative of their times. "Tickets are reflective of society, culture, rituals, lifestyle and choices of people then. Also, the print revolution brought about

an explosion in imagery as seen on these labels."

The tickets were designed and printed in England and attached to fabrics sold directly by major British

cotton mills such as Graham Co., Manchester or a few Indian merchants, who bought clothes from them.

The exhibition also has on display the correspondence between a Gujarat-based trader and the printing establishment in Britain. The trader's letter says: "This is the design I want; please make it and send it to me". "Most merchants based in India were writing to printers in Manchester to create labels for them," says Shrey.

The registering and trademarking process was a time-consuming one and happened through letters and telegraphs. "There was a risk of rejection. The trademark office's role was to make sure that the designs were different to avoid fight among merchants claiming that someone was trying to sell goods under their name."

Shedding more light on the process, Shrey points out the fine network among people involved in the creation of tickets. She cites the example of the correspondence between a Gujarati merchant and a trademarking officer. "Since the trader had mentioned the design specifications in Gujarati, the printer sends the letter to an expert in Oriental languages for translation."

Maurya also highlights a ticket that is an exact copy of an artwork done by the American artist, Maxwell Parrish in 1909 called 'The Lantern Bearers'. "Somehow that image makes its way to England, where an artist takes the drawing and replaces the figures in them with saree-clad women for Indian customers. Despite lack of technology, it's interesting to note that these people were not working in a vacuum, there was enough interaction and exchange happening," says Shrey.

The exhibition is on at MAP, 22, Kasturba Road, Bengaluru, till November 2025.



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Trailblazer (Clockwise from below) S.D. Sundaram being honoured by former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C.N. Annadurai in 1968; from the film *Mohini*, for which he wrote the dialogue; his guru Nawab Rajamanickam Pillai during the staging of the play *Dasavatharam*; and from the film *Kappalottiya Tamizhan*. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES



encouraged him to pursue his Vidwan course, which Sundaram passed with flying colours.

In 1942, Sundaram was imprisoned in Thanjavur for nine months for his participation in the freedom movement. Once out of jail, he rejoined Nawab Rajamanickam Pillai's troupe, only to branch out on his own a little while later. In 1944, with the blessings of his guru, Sundaram and another youngster from the troupe, T.K. Thangavelu (better known in the world of theatre and cinema as T.K. Krishnaswamy), left Madurai Devi Bala Vinodha Sangeetha Sabha to

launch Sakthi Nataka Sabha. Their first production was *Kavyin Kanavu*, written by Sundaram himself.

Adopting new techniques

A star studded-cast which included the likes of M.N. Nambiar (who also traced his dramatic lineage to Nawab Rajamanickam Pillai's drama troupe) as the Rajaguru and S.V. Subbaiah as the poet enhanced the play's appeal with their performances. The play was premiered in 1944, a review that appeared in 1945 shows that it was ahead of its time in terms of adopting new techniques and technology in the presentation of the play. For starters, it had just one song, unheard of in an era when songs were still an integral part of stage plays. Secondly, it made use of electric lights to good effect. Another aspect was the design of the stage itself. Two pillars were set in the

Besides authoring plays, Sundaram also penned dialogues for films starring MGR and Sivaji Ganesan

middle of the stage and were moved to either the left or the right, depending on the requirement of a particular scene. It also used slide projections to introduce the cast and crew of the play. The Rajaguru was introduced using the shadow technique.

The play was infused with strong political views of the poet, seeking to free his motherland from the clutches of the villain (from a foreign power). A play called *Kanavu*, set within this play, instilled a sense of patriotism in the poet's countrymen. It spoke of his dream of a poverty-free, equal society. Coming as it did on the throes of our country's independence, the play was a stupendous success.

Noted playwright-poet Bharatidasan, who presided over a performance at Dindigul, spoke in glowing terms about the actors' performances. The play proved a turning point in Nambiar's and Subbaiah's careers. Somasundaram of Jupiter Pictures, who was impressed by their performances hired them on contract for his production house. When Nambiar could not continue performing the play on account of his increasing movie commitments, the mantle fell on a youngster who would go on to become one of Tamil cinema's prominent lyricists, albeit briefly, Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram.

Sundaram went on to author plays such as *En Kadhai*, *Aravindar* and *Nam Thai*. He was also a dialogue writer for several successful films such as *Ondre Kulam*, *Mohini* (MGR was paired with V.N. Janaki for the first time) and *Kappalottiya Tamizhan*. In 1973, he wrote a play titled *Veera Sudhandhiram*, to mark the silver jubilee of Indian Independence. It was inaugurated at the centenary celebrations of theatre legend Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar that year, starring several film stars including R. Muthuraman, T.K. Bhagavathi, T.R. Ramachandran, and V.S. Raghavan.

Sundaram also served as a member of the Upper House of the TN Legislature between 1964 and 1968 and as the secretary of the Iyal Isai Nataka Manram from 1968 to 1976. He passed away in 1979.

Setting a new stage

Exploring the legacy of the multifaceted S.D. Sundaram, who changed the course of Tamil theatre

Karthik Bhatt

Tamil theatre's history is delightful with many stalwarts having created works that have stood the test of time and inspired generations of actors and directors. Today, when established and amateur troupes are

experimenting with new subjects on stage, it would be a good idea to recall how some yesteryear theatre personalities thought ahead of time. One such was S.D. Sundaram (1921-1979).

One of Tamil stage's prominent playwrights in the mid-20th century, Sundaram was born in Athur near Salem. He entered theatre at an early

age, joining Nawab Rajamanickam Pillai's drama troupe Madurai Devi Bala Vinodha Sangeetha Sabha around 1933.

Interest in Tamil literature

Seeing his interest and proficiency in Tamil literature's great works such as *Athichoodi*, *Kondrai Vendhan* and the *Tiruvarutpa*, Rajamanickam Pillai

envisioned it as a visual poetry, brought to life by an impressive cast and crew," shares the director.

Savitha portrays three different phases of the protagonist's journey. "Each demands a different perspective. The dance sequences serve as expressions of her internal struggles and triumphs, providing a physical and emotional framework for the story," explains Savitha.

Myriad styles

The soundtracks are composed by Abhay Nayampally, a Grammy-nominated Carnatic guitarist and a protégé of the legendary Mandolin U Srinivas. Building on Abhay's collaborative work with global artistes such as Tom Schuman of Spyro Gyra, the film's score includes influences of several genres – Carnatic classical, Western classical and Middle Eastern music. "Movies with such nuance come by rarely and so to treat it musically becomes an emotionally engaging experience. Good writing and execution make the process of musical scoring more satisfying," says Abhay.

A Song for Eresha is not just about pushing the boundaries of Bharatanatyam, but also marks a step towards reimagining traditional Indian art forms for a global audience. "The film is also my homage to the legend who has defined my love for cinema and literature – Satyajit Ray. From a young age I found his cinematic storytelling to be my inspiration," adds Srikanth, most of whose films are based on classical Indian arts.



Movements in frames

A Song for Eresha portrays the struggles and triumphs of a classical dancer

Neha Kirpal

Bharatanatyam dancer Savitha Sastry and her director-husband AK Srikanth's film, *A Song for Eresha*, is set for a theatrical and OTT release across the U.S., Canada and India. Seamlessly blending classical Indian dance with storytelling, the production, Savitha says, is a cinematic tribute to the expressive power of Indian classical arts.

The film follows the complex emotional journey of Eresha, a revered head of an art institute, whose love life leads to a dramatic unravelling of the institution she built and



her own inner world. Featuring Savitha in the titular role, the film includes a predominantly female cast with 100 classical dancers from across India. The film also marks the debut of Bengali actor Mayurakshi Sen along with Mekha Rajan and Arshya Lakshman in key roles.

Striking a balance

It is written by Srikanth, who has received accolades for his earlier works – *Slow Rivers* (Florence Film Awards 2023) and *Colors: White* (New York International Film Awards 2021). "The film is an exploration of what it means to be human. It captures the full spectrum of emotion: the joy of triumph, sting of regret, and the delicate balance between light and darkness, logic and emotion. I

he music of Rajasthani folk band, SAZ (an acronym for Sadiq, Asin and Zakir), inhabits spaces between the traditional and the contemporary. Their original compositions create much curiosity among community elders and musical mentors in the village. Urban listeners (who encore and keep them on stage for way longer than planned) may observe that SAZ's music, while rooted in their milieu and regional folk music vocabulary, takes off from fresh viewpoints.

Interacting after two performances and a workshop at Adishakti Theatre's Remembering Veenapani Festival, held recently, the band members spoke about how the story of their original music is entwined with the story of their band's creation. "Divya Saab (Divya Bhatia, festival director, Jodhpur RIFF) sent us to China around the end of 2019. We never thought we would become a band. They both (Sadiq and Asin) had worked together earlier. I had played with Asin earlier but the three of us had never performed as a team. We did our *riyaaz* and performed two shows every day for a week," says Zakir Khan Langa, whose dexterous khartal playing is as well received as his singing.

Asin Khan, exponent of the Sindhi Sarangi, an Aga Khan awardee and evocative singer, says, "Sadiq and I felt something clicked when we three performed as a team. We got to know each other's musical styles over that trip." Back in India, they played one concert in Mumbai and were told they might go to China again but what followed was a long and uncertain pause because of the pandemic. In 2021, when things opened up,

bit, they were at a meeting with Divya Bhatia, when he asked them if they had given thought to working together. Divya would become, not just the producer of their band, but also a close collaborator and mentor. While they welcomed the prospect of working together, they were shocked when Divya put the onus of shaping the band on them, even telling them to write new songs.

Says Zakir, "None of us has ever written our own songs." Adds Asin, "We felt we already have so many songs. Why should we write?" Sadiq Khan, the band member who draws melody with finesse from his chosen percussion – the dholak, recalls that after the initial resistance, they understood that they could not emerge as a band unless they found their signature music.

While Divya co-writes and puts the arrangements in place, the trio ideate, create the storyline, find words and compose the tune together. Divya makes them dig deeper and find a more wholesome representation of the story that is the starting point of the song in their music, because – in the words of the band, "our songs begin in a story."

Asin explains, "There is no raag, raagini or sa-re-ga-ma in folk music. A raag, if present, is usually a story. Like Surut is the story of a Maharani. Every song has a story. Every raag is a story. They used to tell us the stories and the music would be learnt by listening." Though the names of raags like Surut and Khamach come up, "they are not an exact match with classical raags," adds Sadiq. "Folk music is from ancient times and the bhaav of raags was coded into the music in those times," says Zakir. Being musicians who play by ear, the musical expression of SAZ is unfettered by theoretical approaches. Though they never learnt through structure, having performed with a host of international and local musicians, across genres in different parts of the world, they can work with the terminologies of western and Indian classical music.

SAZ members play multiple instruments and sing. If the online popularity of their original composition 'Sundar gori re' is anything to go by, the music of SAZ is hitting all the right notes.

CALENDAR

HCL concerts

The Music Academy has organised the Bharatanatyam recital by Kavya Ganesh as part of HCL concert series. The performance will take place on June 3, 6 p.m. at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

Dedicated to legends

Madhuradhwani has organised the following programmes at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. Schedule: May 31, 4.30 p.m.: Students of PMI School of Music will perform on the occasion of the 44th anniversary of Palghat Mani Iyer and 6.45 p.m.: Palghat Sisters (vocal). June 2, 6.15 p.m.: As part of Thanjavur S. Kalyanaraman's 95th birth anniversary, Nagai Muralidharan will present a lecdem and kutcheri. June 3, 6.15 p.m.: Prarthana Sai Narasimhan (vocal) for Chingleput Ranganathan's Jayanti celebration.



Tamil play

Under the auspices of Narada Gana Sabha Trust, thRee presents their latest Tamil play *Kalavu Neekiya Padalam* today, 6.45 p.m. at Sathguru GnanaNanda Hall.

Sun, sand and SAZ

Sadiq, Asin and Zakir's music is a blend of folk and contemporary sounds



Formidable trio Members of the SAZ band. PHOTO COURTESY: SAZ

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