

friday Review

THE HINDU

Highlights from concerts

Review of performances by artistes from the annual Margazhi festival p2

Kalavaahini's festival

Meenakshi Srinivasan impressed with her Krishna-based pieces p3

DIVERSITY IN A DANCE REPERTOIRE

Rama Vaidyanathan made abhang the soul of her performance p4



VASUGI BHASKAR: THE EMERGING ANTI-CASTE VOICE

Vasugi Bhaskar, editor of *Neelam* magazine and head of Neelam Publications, has emerged as an important voice in Tamil Nadu's anti-caste discourse. Under the leadership of filmmaker Pa Ranjith, *Neelam* has become a powerful platform for challenging caste oppression and fostering equality through literature and critical discourse.

As editor, Bhaskar has ensured that *Neelam* remains steadfast in its anti-caste ideology. The magazine, now in its sixth year with 52 issues published, uses essays, poetry and analyses to address caste-based inequalities, inspiring a new wave of Dalit literature and activism.

Bhaskar's impact extends beyond the written word. He plays a crucial role in Margazhiyil Makkalaisai, an initiative democratising Tamil cultural traditions by challenging caste dominance, and coordinates the annual Verchol Literary Festival, which amplifies Dalit voices.

He has also curated the Vaanam Literary Festival for three consecutive years.

Despite numerous commitments, Bhaskar has also explored filmmaking, producing a documentary on Melpathi, which has won international acclaim and continues to write, though he wishes for more time to dedicate to his craft.

Reflecting on his journey, he says, "That I've consistently contributed to *Neelam* for over six years is something I'm proud of, and I want to continue this work."

In their own words

Tamil literature thrives on diversity — a fact exemplified by the line up of Tamil authors at *The Hindu* Lit For Life. Perundevi's experimental poetry pushes boundaries, while Bogan Sankar's introspective humour offers a unique lens of reflection. Vasugi Bhaskar amplifies anti-caste narratives with a powerful voice, and A. Vennila brings history to life through the experiences of ordinary people. Together, these writers represent the dynamic shifts shaping Tamil literature.

Kavitha Muralidharan

A. VENNILA: A CHRONICLER OF HISTORY THROUGH THE LIVES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

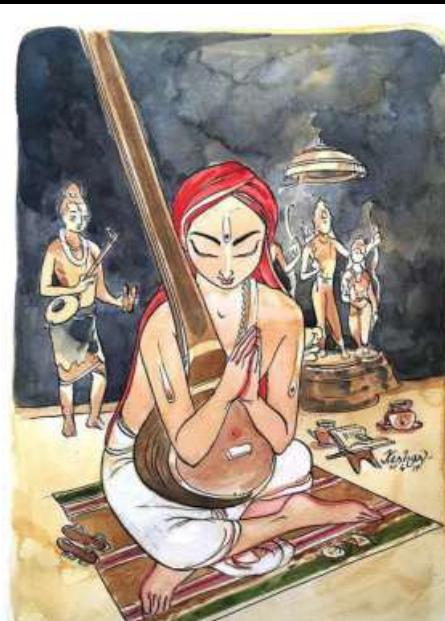
Writer, poet, and novelist A. Vennila has made significant contributions to Tamil literature with her powerful storytelling and historical narratives. Her three acclaimed novels *Gangapuram*, *Chalampuri*, and *Neerathikaram* not only delve into rich historical contexts but also offer a unique lens into the lives of ordinary people.

Gangapuram, set in the Chola period, stands out for its portrayal of societal structures and the intricate workings of a community in ancient Tamil Nadu. Through vivid characters and their experiences, Vennila mirrors the complexities of life during this significant historical era.

Chalampuri, her second novel, is set against the backdrop of the Dravidian party's transition from the Dravidar Kazhagam to electoral politics. The work portrays the lives of its grassroots workers, interwoven with the backdrop of the weaving trade.

Her latest novel *Neerathikaram* takes a monumental step in exploring the struggles of people involved in the construction of the Mullaperiyar Dam. This remarkable work sheds light on the often-overlooked contributions of the labour force, giving voice to their stories of hardship, perseverance, and resilience.

In addition to her fiction, Vennila's poetry and short stories further reflect her deep connection to both historical narratives and modern-day issues. "I would like to be remembered as a writer who brought the life and history of Tamil into fiction through the lives of ordinary people" she says.

**CULTURE BRIEFS****Singing paeans to Tyagaraja**

The Music Academy has organised special concerts for the Tyagaraja Aradhana to be held on January 19 at the TT Krishnamachari Auditorium. The day begins with a special puja (9 a.m.) followed by Kalyanapuram K.G.S. Dhayabar and Vedhagiri's nagaswaram recital (9.30 a.m.) and goshti ganam of Pancharatna kritis (10.30 a.m.). A special concert by Pantula Rama will take place at 6 p.m. She will be accompanied by M.S.N. Murthy (violin), Patri Satish Kumar (mridangam) and B.S. Purushotham (kanjira). The aradhana programme is organised under the endowment instituted by Sri.P. Obul Reddy and Smt. P Gnanamba, and co-sponsored by P. Seshadri, managing trustee, Thyagaraja Music Festival Trust.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai Kendra, will feature Prameela Gurumurthy's 'Tribute to Saint Thyagaraja'

organised as part of the 178th Tyagaraja aradhana. It will be held on January 18, 10.30 a.m., at its main auditorium, Mylapore.

Sri Thiagaraja Sangeetha Vidwath Samajam celebrates the aradhana till January 26, at 10, Thiagarajapuram,

Mylapore. A.R. Santhana Krishnan, chairman, Rasika Ranjani Sabha Foundation, will inaugurate the utsavam today at 6 p.m.

Legendary musician T.V. Gopalakrishnan will preside and present his vocal concert. S. Varadarajan (violin), Patri Satish Kumar (mridangam) and Suresh Vaidhyanathan (ghatam) will accompany him. The aradhana will be performed tomorrow, the bahula panchami day. The line up begins with Upanishad and Veda parayanam at 8.30 a.m. followed by Uncharvitti (9.30 a.m.) and rendition of Pancharatna kritis by musicians (10.30 a.m.).

In the evening, R. Vijayalakshmi Balaji's harikatha on 'Sri Thiagaraja Charithram' (6.15 p.m.). Music concerts, each spanning 10 minutes, will be held at 6 p.m. during the aradhana.

The aradhana mahotsavam concludes on January 26 at 7 p.m. with the portrait of Tyagaraja being taken out in a procession to the accompaniment of bhajan renditions by eminent artistes and Anjaneya utsavam.

Annual dance festival

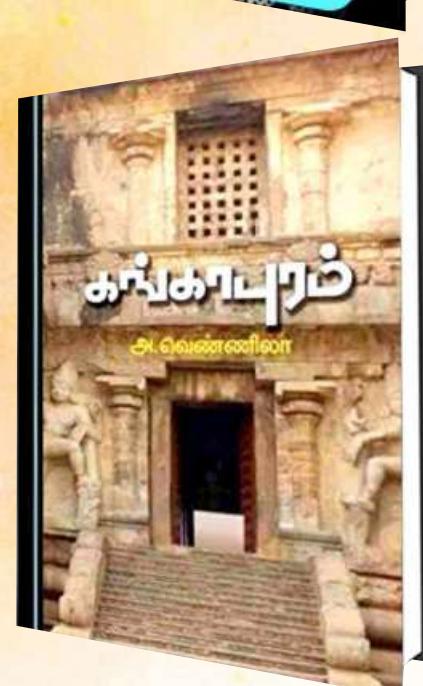
Parvathi Ravi Ghantasala's dance school, Kala Pradarshini, conducts its 27th annual dance festival from January 17 to 19, at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. Art patron Nalli Kuppuswami will preside over. Veteran dancer and actor Vyjayantimala will be the chief guest. The three-day festival begins with Sadhula Munirathnam's nagaswaram recital, today at 4.30 p.m. The evening also features Ranjitha Vivin's Bharatanatyam performance (5.30 p.m.). The line up on day one concludes with a special performance 'Kalaa Samarpama', a celebrating the legends of Bharatanatyam, at 7 p.m. It will feature Vyjayantimala, Nandini Ramani, Sudharani Ragupathy, Chitra Visweswaran and Radha.

The performances to take place on Jan 18 are: Aishwarya Ananth's Bharatanatyam (6 p.m.); 'Kalaa'

'Poshaman' (7 p.m.), featuring Sreelatha Vinod, Balagurunathan, Mutharasi Ravi, Sushama Ranganathan, Bhagyashree Satish, Uttiya Barua, Divya Sena, Sonia Ramanujam and Kausalya Srinivasan.

The three-day festival will conclude with the following performances on January 19. 6 p.m.: Medha Varakhedi and Shruthi Raammohan; 6.30 p.m.: Celebrating Tyagaraja's Pancharatna kritis through dance by Parvathi Ravi Ghantasala, Vasanth Kiran, Saikripa Prasanna, Lakshmi Ramaswamy and Lalitha Ganapathy.

Parvathi, who trained under guru Krishnakumari Narendran, has been associated with the dance form for over four decades. Besides, being a well-known solo performer, she has also choreographed group productions. She has been curating dance festivals, and conducting dance seminars. A top graded artiste of Doordarshan and an ICCR empanelled-dancer, Parvathi is the vice president of ABHAI (Association of Bharatanatyam Artistes of India).



PERUNDEVI: POETRY BEYOND LABELS

Perundevi's poetry is a canvas of constant experimentation. "I have explored various stylistic approaches in my collections. In my first book, I wrote poems without titles, subverting representational language," she explains. Each subsequent collection, she says, shifts in imagination, technique and narration. Yet, economy of words remains her hallmark.

Her style often gets categorised as anti poetry or pure poetry, but Perundevi remains unconcerned with such labels – "Let the critics handle that." What sets her apart in the Tamil literary space is her authentic engagement with modern life's predicaments, weaving in contemporary subjects with clarity.

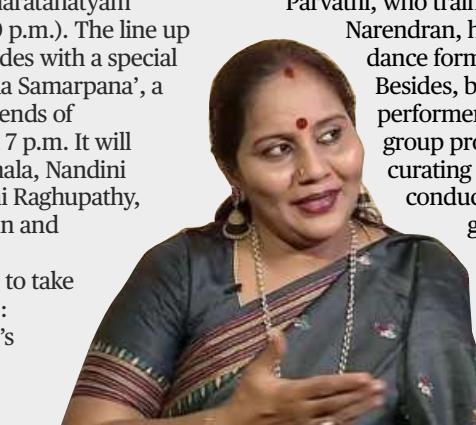
Focussing on everyday life, shaped by technology and globalisation, her poetry offers insights on fatigue and unspoken intimacy, capturing the undercurrents that define our time. "Unlike the single, linear path real life imposes, writing lets me imagine multiple outcomes for any event," she notes.

Over two decades, she has contributed 10 poetry collections, micro-fiction, essays and translations, establishing a versatile literary presence. Grapevine in the Tamil literary world suggests that Perundevi is also behind the anonymous poet Srivalli, whose lyrical poetry stands as a counterpoint to her own style. This duality adds another layer of intrigue to an already-multifaceted body of work.

Her poetry remains a dynamic presence in Tamil literature – where, as she puts it, "language reaches its boiling point".



The four writers will be speaking at *The Hindu* Lit For Life on January 18 and 19.



Bred in a bani

However, Kalyanapuram Aravind needs to go beyond his guru's playbook



Imaginative Kalyanapuram Aravind. PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

Bala Shankar

A book needs a good publisher to sell. But it also needs a good plot and arresting narration. V. Kalyanapuram Aravind's tutelage under the legendary T.N. Seshagopalan gives him a solid baseline. He backs that up with fertile imagination and flexible vocal chords to execute his ideas.

Aravind's concert packed in a lot – several contrasting kritis, raga and tala spectra, an interesting pallavi in Dwijavanthi and even trikala and ragamalika swaras. For those yearning for a live TNS flavour, Aravind's palette was largely that.

A mel sthayi trigger to the Pantuvarali alapana after the Surutti varnam established the fast-moving agenda. 'Ninne nera nammi' (Tyagaraja, Rupakam) with niraval and short swaras at 'Vedasutra purana' kept the engaging flow. Chidambaram Badrinath on the violin displayed alertness to the laya forays of the vocalist with his own punches. 'Marivere gathi' (Ananda Bhairavi, Syama Sastri, Misra Chapu) was preceded by a shloka from 'Meenakshi Pancharatnam'. It's a better ploy compared to a brief raga sketch as it underlines the spiritual state and lyrical enunciation of an artiste. Time pressure halved the expanse of a kriti.

'Kanu kontini' (Tyagaraja, Bilahari) was chosen as a breezy interlude but with no normative swaras. Instead, Aravind used the time to delineate a classical Saveri alapana with more karvais and sustains and minimum jerks. Badrinath's Saveri was quaint as he dosed it perfectly. Both had block-booked the 'ma da sa' phrase in their alapanas.

P. Srihari

Recognising opportunities amidst challenges is an art in itself, and Sriranjani Santhanagopal demonstrated her adeptness at it. Notwithstanding a delayed start by over 10 minutes, the tamburas frequently wilting under temperature fluctuations, and capricious focus lights, the young vocalist retained her poise and presented an impressive recital at Krishna Gana Sabha.

The cumulative time loss may have nudged her towards Plan B and an experimental approach. Only one raga was chosen for elaborate exploration – and it was an enchanting Ritigowla. The niravals were notably absent. However, there was no dearth of depth or sublimity in her presentation, with Kamalakiran Vinjamuri (violin), K. Sai Giridhar (mridangam) and N. Guruprasad (ghatam) rallying around with precision and panache.

The Behag varnam 'Vanajaksha' provided a bright

'Sri rajagopala' (Dikshitar, Adi) is one of the tallest kritis in this raga, as it refers to the gopuram of the Mannargudi temple. The TNS shades were very evident, especially the oozing raga lakshana.

Sometimes, rendering a big kriti with all the bells and whistles is itself a manodharma output, as Aravind showed. Niraval and swara at 'purane srividya' by both Aravind and Badrinath had good raga contours and laya feast that the school is well-known for. Tani avartanam of Prashant (mridangam) and Somnath Roy (ghatam) was in tune with the pace of the concert.

An abbreviated raga alapana of Dwijavanthi had enough charming flights from the vocalist and the violinist. The tanam was a squeeze. The pallavi in Kanda Tripita with a delayed start ('Dasarathae mampalaya dayanidhe') showcased Aravind's manodharma and laya suites (like the narrative of a book). Ragamalka swaras in Bahudari and Revathi ensured the pallavi was larger than life, despite the hustle. Aravind rounded off the concert with a Darbari Kanada tukkada. Badrinath is not just a competent violinist but handled the laya challenges and the brevity demands immaculately and with polish in sangathis.

Aravind is clearly poised for some acceleration in career. If this concert is any indication, his preference for sensitive controlled voice production (rather than loud thuds) that settle on the ears gently, is a virtue to be encouraged. Just as he is understandably keen to show the origin of his singing, he will also be expected to undertake journeys that go beyond the TNS playbook. The occasional shruthi swerves need a watch.

K

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Instrumentalists, particularly those who play the veena, usually have a hard time retaining the audience's attention. Since most rasikas strongly correlate Carnatic music to sahitya, they prefer listening to familiar kritis. This makes it difficult for instrumentalists as they have to repeat some well-known songs or ragas.

Vidushi Jayanthi Kumares is someone who accords maximum priority to audience engagement. There was never a dull moment at her recital.

Starting off pleasantly with Muthuswami Dikshitar's 'Parvati Kumaram' in Nattakurinji, she played kalpanaswaras that had flowing raga-alapana-like elements and showed an influence of tanam. She next explored Lathangi with a neat, structured alapana taking up the composition 'Pirava varama thaarum' by Papanasam Sivan. Handling high-speed swaras is a skill she has nurtured over the years.

Prefacing every piece with a short introduction either about the raga or the composition, Jayanthi made sure the audience grasped what she conveyed musically. Her alapana of Mukhari for 'Entani ne



Raga and rapport

Jayanthi Kumares has mastered the art of keeping the audience engaged

'varnintunu' mirrored the gayaki approach and reflected the mood and characteristics of the raga from the very first phrase. Her next raga for elaboration was Saveri, where her alapana stood out for some

long single-meetu phrases and judicious coverage of all three octaves. Jayanthi rendered kalpanaswaras in both speeds at 'Dhara dharavi neela'. Her melkala swaras never lost the essence of the raga,

showcasing its salient features appropriately.

Kantamani, the 61st melakarta raga, is rarely sung in concerts. It is a prati madhyama raga and stands out with shuddha daivatam (DI) and shuddha nishadham (NI) in the uttarangam. After a detailed exposition of the raga in her alapana, Jayanthi played a delightful tanam that resonated with the audience as she employed a range of left-hand techniques. Her pallavi 'Jaya jaya shankara hara hara shankara kanchi kamakoti peetha' was set in Tirsa jathi Jhampa tala. A set of neat kalpanaswaras with systematic kanakku endings resulted in Jayanthi's signature ascent to the uppermost octave in the final swara, cementing her

Melodious chord Jayanthi Kumares performing at The Music Academy with Jayachandra Rao on the mridangam and Trichy S. Krishnaswamy on the ghatam. PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

chemistry with rasikas who immediately applauded at the final meetu.

Jayanthi was accompanied by K.U. Jayachandra Rao on the mridangam and Trichy S. Krishnaswamy on the ghatam. The percussionists provided good support throughout the katcher.

Some of the other pieces included a thillana in Mishra Shivaranjani composed by Lalgudi Jayaraman and 'Kamakshi loka sakshi' in Madhyamavati by Syama Sastri.

Making the right choice

Amritha Murali showed how planning and structuring can enhance a p

H. Ramakrishnan

Soon after presenting a lec-dem on 'Raga's changing nature across compositional forms' at The Music Academy, Amritha Murali offered a soulful performance in memory of Smt and Shri V. Ananthanarayanan for Naada Inbam. Three stirring niravals at 'Padayugam madilo dalachi', 'Parula Nutimpagane' and 'Madana Ripu Sat', all in the Swarasahitya portion, marked her

exquisite treatment of the Syama Sastri kriti in Ananda Bhairavi,

'Marivere' (Misra Chapu) in a

melodic slow pace.

The elaborate alapanas of Thodi and Kalyani, saw Amritha bring out their musical structure and essence by interweaving charming patterns. The kriti she chose for Thodi was 'Sri subramanyo maam rakshatu' by Dikshitar on the deity in Tiruchendur. In this kriti, which is in the first vibhakti, there is a reference to the Navaveeras who assist Subrahmanyana during battle. Dikshitar has also mentioned Patra Vibhuti – holy ash distributed on a leaf of a panneer tree. In the



swaraprastara at the pallavi, her musicianship and technical proficiency blended well.

In Kalyani, Amritha rendered 'Sive pahimam ambike' by Tyagaraja. This kriti is in praise of Dharmasamvardhini of Tiruvayyar. Extensive niraval and swaras were at 'Kaverajottara theera vasini'

In the concert, Amritha was accompanied by her mentor and violin vidwan R.K. Shriramkumar. His ability to effortlessly weave a web of charm in any raga came to the fore in the alapanas and swaraprastaras. He is also a composer and Amritha rendered one of his compositions,

'Nidhamum Un Padam' on Madurai's Meenakshi in a tuneful Jayamanohari.

Mridangam vidwan Arun Prakash's subdued richness was an asset to the vocalist. His technical expertise and creativity came through in his tani.

Amritha commenced her concert with 'Tyagaraja palayusum' with a samashti charanam, the dhanya kriti of Dikshitar's Tyagaraja Vibhakti kritis, in the eighth (sambhodana prathama) vibhakti. The kalpanaswaras were at 'Sri guruguha pujitha'. Another Dikshitar kriti that she presented was 'Chetha sri balakrishnam'

(Rupakam) in Dwijavanthi, a raga that brought out the sahitya's bhakti and karuna rasas. Amritha's spontaneity and penchant for perfection were evident in the presentation of this piece.

Amritha's rendition of Tyagaraja's 'Haridasulu vedale' in Yamuna Kalyani was well-nuanced. After a virutham, 'Shanku chakra gadha paanum' in Kapi and Behag, she rendered Kamalesa Dasa's 'Kandu dhanyanadeno sri Udupi Krishna' (in Behag).

Amritha showcased her creative skills by choosing to render a few verses of Tiruvaruppa from Vallalar's 'Mahadeva Maalai' as a virutham.

NAADA INBAM

Well-curated Amritha Murali with R.K. Shriram Kumar (violin) and K. Arun Prakash (mridangam). COURTESY: NAADA INBAM



Music in a capsule

Sriranjani made the most of an abridged concert

KRISHNA GANA SABHA



start. A brief sketch of Dhenuka led to 'Teliyaleru rama'. In this kriti, Tyagaraja bemoans humanity's ignorance of the path of devotion and its entanglement in worldly pursuits.

Sriranjani's rendition transformed the composer's

anguish into a feast of melody with many facets coming together – the tempo, rich bhava through a tapestry of sangatis, Kamalakiran playing a perfect foil in the lower octave, and Sai Giridhar and Guruprasad's support. In the swarakalpana segment, the nyasam (resting) on sadharana gandham and the deft use of kakali nishadam, the two key swaras of the raga, brought out its essence. Kamalakiran's

responses were breathtaking in the lower range of the middle octave.

Another short raga alapana, this time Yamuna Kalyani, preluded 'Nandagopala mukunda' in which Dikshitar calls upon Krishna through his divine attributes. The languid pace allowed Sriranjani to capture the evocative tinge of the kriti. 'Nijamarmamulanu' by Tyagaraja and kalpanaswaras at the charanam opening 'Sruthi sastra purana' were zestfully

rendered, and a leisurely 'Parvati ninnu ne' (Kalgada-Adi tala, Tirsa nadai) by Syama Sastri restored the balance.

Then arrived Ritigowla in all its radiance. Sriranjani delved deeply into its mandhra sthayi, and developed the raga's edifice methodically. Kamalakiran matched the vocalist phrase for phrase in his delineation. Subbaraya Sastri's masterpiece 'Janani ninnuvina' in Misra Chapu

Packed with variety Sriranjani Santhanagopal with Kamalakiran Vinjamuri (violin), K. Sai Giridhar (mridangam) and N. Guruprasad (ghatam). PHOTO: B. JOITHI RAMALINGAM

unfolded in a majestic gait, highlighting the beauty of the composition, its famed chittaswara, and the corresponding sahitya. The swara sahitya in alternate speeds after the charanam was a creative addition. The swara exchanges began in the first speed at 'Tamasamu seyakane', with phrases of languorous charm evolving into vibrant bursts in the second.

The tani avartanam saw Sai Giridhar and Guruprasad engage in an absorbing interplay of rhythmic patterns. 'Kasturi tilakam', a well-known shloka from 'Krishna Karmaramutam', led to a Swati Tirunal bhajan 'Aaj aaye syaam mohan' in Sudh Sarang, Kalki's 'Poonkuyil koovum' in Kapi. A thillana by M. Balamuralikrishna in Ahirbhairav lent variety to the concluding section.

Dance of the divine

Meenakshi Srinivasan's thematic performance brought alive vignettes from Krishna's life



Rupa Srikanth

Meenakshi Srinivasan opted for a soft opening to her thematic rhythmic performance for the Dance for Dance Festival, organised by Kalavaahini, in association with Kartik Fine Arts. She began with 'Krishna – Born as a Saviour', a verse from the Srimad Bhagavatam 'Atha sarva' followed by a Swati Tirunal kriti in ragamalika (Rupaka tala). 'Kalyani khalu' brought happiness since it showed instances where Krishna saved his devotees.

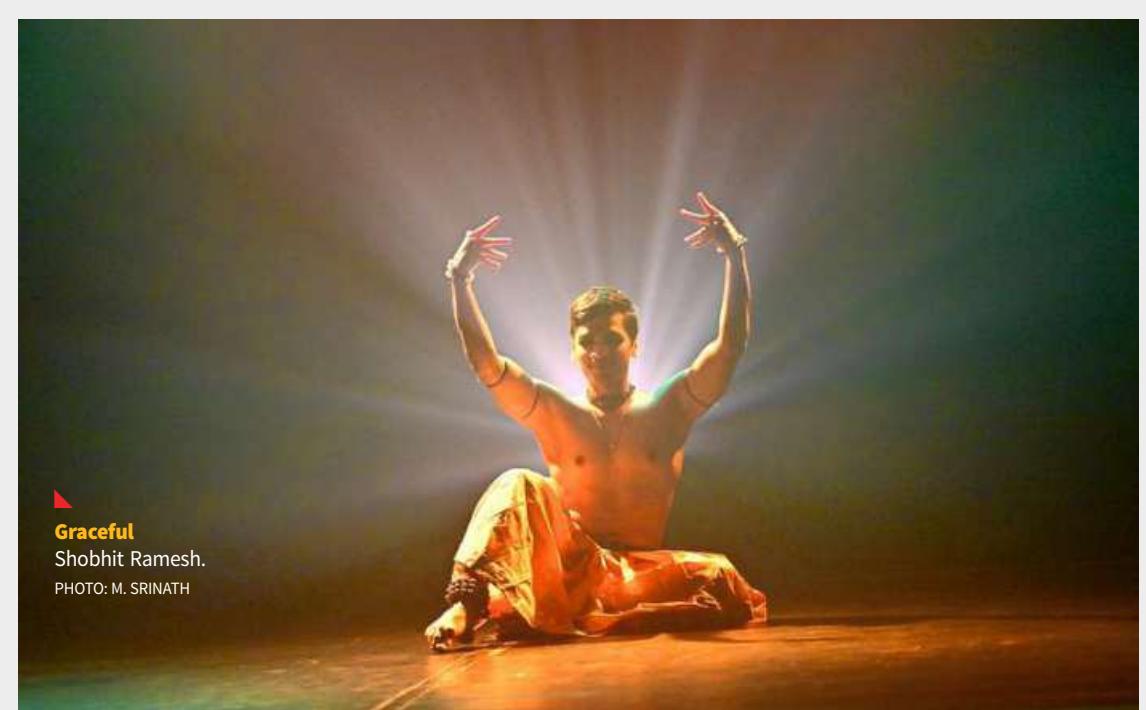
Mahesh Swamy's interjections on the flute were melodious. The musical team put in a lot of hard work in the opening ragamalika composition, and M. Balamuralikrishna's padavarnam 'Omksara' in Shanmugapriya, Adi tala, and his thaya ragamalika thillana 'Ta nom nom ta' in Kalyani raga, Adi tala.

Kaniyal Hariprasad (vocal) kept a low profile with his soft melody touching the right notes. Ishwar Ramakrishna (violin) was faithful, while Jayashree Ramanathan (nattuvangam) played a masterly role with her non-intrusive guidance.

Meenakshi seemed to enjoy the challenges. While she filled the silences with little beats in the Swati Tirunal kriti, she let the gaps be in Balamuralikrishna's pieces. The varnam, Krishna - The embodiment of Supreme Consciousness, composed by M. Balamuralikrishna, was tricky with the charanam swaras starting after one beat. Within the swaras were also gaps that Hariprasad and Meenakshi adhered to. The dancer has an affinity to lasya-kind of steps that go with her overall delicate image – kudichi mettu adavus, tha thai tha adavus, low araimandi, rounded arms and agility marked her nritta. It is a sort of concise 'within-her-body' movement vocabulary, so to speak. Even Vedakrishna Ram responded to this 'lasya' style by soft-pedalling the mridangam.

The mood of the varnam was contemplative. It reflected the abstraction of Krishna being the embodiment of that Pure Consciousness. Nature coming alive with Krishna's presence was a detailed sanchari as was Krishna's Visvaroopa vision to Arjuna on the battlefield. Meenakshi's liquid eyes captured the composer's devotion.

The Kshetrayya padam on Krishna's viraha 'Yemiseyyudu ee mohamu' tuned by Hariprasad in a surprising Charukesi, Misra Chapu, brought out the melancholy of the lyrics. Meenakshi was subtle as she built up the emotions, with Mahesh's help. The tryst with Krishna all evening was eventful.



Graceful
Shobhit Ramesh.
PHOTO: M. SRINATH

KARTIK
FINE ARTS

Visualising poetry

Shobhit Ramesh's recital was based on Narayana Guru's verses

Rupa Srikanth

The initial reaction when you see Kalavaahini Junior Scholar awardee Shobhit Ramesh is surprise. Though Shobhit is young, he has graceful, clean lines, a keen sense of timing, good finishes, and a confident stage presence. That Malavika Sarukkai chose to mentor him in choreography makes perfect sense.

Shobhit has been dancing for almost two decades and is currently training with Mavin Khoo, Parshwanath Upadhye, Shruti Gopal and P.V. Aditya. He

presented the works of Narayana Guru, the 19th-century social reformer from Kerala at the Dance for Dance Festival.

Shobhit opened with verses from 'Vinayakaashtakam' in ragamalika, Khabda Chapu tala.

The Thanjavur Quartet's Bhairavi jatiswaram in Misra Chapu, visualised by U.S. Krishna Rao, was taught to Shobhit by Mavin Khoo.

It came together beautifully in terms of dance and the music, sung by Mithun Madhusudhan, with violin by Easwar Ramakrishnan, nattuvangam by Richa Das and mridangam by Guru Bharadwaj. It was quite long and strenuous, but Shobhit

proved his mettle here, retaining his energy and clarity in nritta till the end.

The piece de resistance was 'Kali natakam', where Narayana Guru speaks of the goddess, it is an eulogy to her changing fierce and benign states. The contrasts were emphasised in Shobhit's visualisation as he brought Kali and the bhakta alive.

While there was sincerity, the clarity of thought needs refining. The enjoyable music was adapted from R.K. Shriramkumar's Yamunakalyani piece in Khanda Chapu tala. The refrain created from the poem of 'Kalichum pulachum' was especially beautiful.

CALENDAR

Namasankirtanam festival

ISKCON, Chennai, will conduct the Madura Mahotsava Kirtan festival (namasankirtanam) from January 17 to 19, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at its premises, Akkarai, ECR. The three-day festival will feature devotional chanting. For more information, log on <https://madhuramahotsava.com>

Theatre meets dance

Shastram stages Sem Mann, an immersive dance theatre production that combines theatre and cinema, on January 19, 6.30 p.m., at Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Mylapore. It is presented in Chennai by Poochi's Productions and Raging Bull Actors Studio. Featuring more than 100 artistes from India, Australia, Canada, Germany, France and Sri Lanka, this production blends Bharatanatyam with music of the 1980s cinema, to convey the enduring spirit of the Tamil people.

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Of life and love

Rama Vaidyanathan served the audience a palette of emotions at her concert



Creative Rama Vaidyanathan.
PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

V.V. Ramani

The Music Academy's dance festival began with a performance by Rama Vaidyanathan, who chose compositions that gave a feel of the Bharatanatyam margam.

Verses from Tirumoolar's *Tirumandiram* were used for Swaroopa, the first composition that focussed on the principles of Indian philosophy, especially the omnipresence of the Supreme. She opted for cyclical movements to depict the seamless flow of life, which included the flora and fauna. The music was by Sridhar Vasudevan.

THE MUSIC ACADEMY

A rare Ata tala varnam composed by Syama Sastri in Anandabhairavi was the central piece of the evening, for which the jathis were composed by mridangist Sumod Sreedharan. This varnam addressed to Varadarajaswamy of Kanchipuram followed the familiar theme of a nayika beseeching her sakhi to go and fetch her lord. Without divulging his name, she gives her sakhi clues to identify him. This was the most interesting aspect of the piece, where Rama's

depiction of the clues had a tinge of humour. But one expected an expansive treatment of the ideas from the senior dancer.

However, mention must be made about the fine choreography of the Garuda Sevai ritual.

The clincher of the evening was a Janabai abhang. Rama did complete justice to the song that speaks of the unabashed love of a woman who challenges societal norms. She says, "I will remove my veil, sing and dance in public. I am a courtesan and you are my paramour." Laced with undercurrents of eroticism, Rama's abhinaya was filled with nuances that enriched her depiction. The devotion and strength of the woman was danced with fervour. Karthik Hebbar, who composed the music for the abhang in raag Jog, sang with emotion. His voice beautifully blended with the visual language.

The evening culminated on a joyous note with 'Rasa vilasalola kirtanam', composed by Swati Tirunal in raga Kamboji. Violin support was provided by Vishwesh Swaminadhan, lights were by Murugan and the costumes were by Mohanapriyan of Apsaras Dance Company.

Nuanced portrayal

Pavitra Krishna Bhat's recital ranged from the dynamic to the feminine



Ode to tradition
Pavitra Krishna Bhat.
PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

V.V. Ramani

In aesthetic space, a soulful orchestral team and a receptive audience – Pavitra Krishna Bhat was fortunate to have all these for his performance as a part of Kalakshetra's 71st annual art festival.

Pavitra is under the tutelage of Nithyakalyani Vaidyanathan. He chose to showcase a traditional margam and classicism was the watchword of his performance.

After an anjali to Ganesha, he began with a Tirsa dhruva alarippu, with clarity of adavus.

The Nattakurinji varnam 'Swami naan undhan adimai', where the devotee seeks the blessings of Shiva, was an apt choice for a male dancer. The intense desire and angst of a devotee craving for darshan, and the descriptions of the form

of Shiva, including his dancing one, were the sancharis on which the dancer pegged his ideas.

Pavitra's abhinaya was marked by nuances. In the initial sequence of the devotee doing his puja, the way he draped the panchakacham, placed the garland and applied kumkum were done with attention to detail. The depiction of

KALAKSHETRA

varied dance poses of Nataraja and the transition between a male and female for Ardhanari, and the story narration of Markandeya were handled well. A little more intensity in internalising the emotion of the character would take Pavitra's abhinaya to the next level.

The initial chowka kalam of nritta in the

first jathi was appealing, and as it gained momentum, there was synchrony between the dancer and the mridangist, with lively jathis adding to the impact of the varnam.

Taking on a

Kshetrayya padam 'Choodare', where the focus is on a woman gossiping with her friends about the other woman who

shamelessly goes to the abode of Muvvagopal, can be a daunting task for a male dancer.

Pavitra portrayed jealousy, disdain and quicksilver glances with restraint, without turning the depiction effeminate.

Nithyakalyani Vaidyanathan wielded the cymbals with flourish. Vocals by Binu Venugopal, violin by Eshwar Ramakrishnan and mridangam by Satish Krishnamurthy proved a great asset to the performance.

Into the world of apsaras

'Deva Madhargal' brought alive the stories of Rambha, Menaka and Urvashi

Manasa Vijayalakshme C

It makes for a vibrant watch when a Bharatanatyam performance is based on the celestial dancers - Rambha, Menaka and Urvashi – and when the artistes on stage bring alive the characters. Sreka Bharath and her Thejas school of performing arts presented Deva Madhargal, a thematic group performance, at Bharat Kalachar, with music by Rukmini Ramani, daughter of the legendary composer Papanasam Sivan.

The introductory segment depicted the deva madhargal petitioning Shiva for a new land. This set a powerful tone for the performance.

The production centered around how Indra weaves his intricate web of illusion in the lives of Rambha, Menaka and Urvashi. One day, a divine wind dislodges Rambha's famed ornaments such as the Chandrakala and Tilakam, causing them to fall on Earth and lose their brilliance. Distressed, Rambha seeks Indra's protection. When he reveals the reason for the mishap, she seeks forgiveness.



BHARAT KALACHAR

The next segment portrayed Vishwamitra's penance, Menaka's allure, and their love with precise, emotive movements. The performers captured the sage's remorse and renunciation with striking expressions and fluid transitions.

In the final episode, Urvashi is abducted by the demon Keshin

while returning to heaven. Hearing the apsaras' cries, King Pururava rescues her. Their love-filled first meeting was portrayed well while their

separation and reunion with their son Aayush were executed with poignancy.

Sreka played the role of Iravadham (Indra's elephant) and appeared before the start of each segment. The production concluded with a group dance.

The costumes for Rambha, Menaka and Urvashi were in vibrant shades of purple and pink. The detailed eye makeup and well-defined eyebrows added depth to their expressions.

The other dancers in the group wore colourful costumes, adding to the overall visual appeal.

The evening's orchestra featured Padma Raghavan on nattuvangam and narration, Preethi Sethuraman on vocals, Sri Ganesh Ramamoorthy on the mridangam, K.R. Venkata Subramanian on the rhythm pad and N. Sigamani on the violin. The jatis for Rambha, Menaka and Urvashi were handled by L. Narendra Kumar.

CATCH UP

KEDARAM'S NINTH EDITION

Kedaram presents its ninth annual music festival for four days from today, at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. Vocal and instrumental concerts form part of the festival. Artistes to perform are: Today: Srikanthi Haran (2.30 p.m.); Shravan Kumar (4 p.m.) and Vasudha Ravi (6.15 p.m.). Tomorrow: Bhavna Iyer (4 p.m.) and Archana and Samanvi (6.15 p.m.). Sunday: Deepika and Nandika (4 p.m.); Special venu, veena and violin ensemble by Prapancham Balachandran (flute), N. Vijaya Lakshmi (veena), and V.V. Srinivas Rao (violin) at 6.15 p.m. The festival concludes on January 20 with an award function followed by a music concert. Senior veena artiste Kannan Balakrishnan will be conferred the 'Kedaram Nadamurthy' title on the occasion. Nalli Kupuswami Chetti will preside over.

SRI THYAGA BRAHMA GANA SABHA

@ Vani Mahal, T. Nagar.
January 17, 5 p.m.: Vishali C; 7 p.m.: Meghna Unnikrishnan.
January 18, 5 p.m.: Smritika Janarthanan; 7 p.m.: Pranaya Rajesh, Meera Sriram and Sadhana Vinodh.
January 19, 5 p.m.: Mrinalini Sivakumar; 7 p.m.: Rajadarshini Saravanan.
January 20, 5 p.m.: Sucheta Srivatsan; 7 p.m.: Shruti Umaiyal.
January 21, 5 p.m.: V. Aishwarya; 7 p.m.: Swapnapiya S.
January 22, 5 p.m.: N. Sarvaka, K.S. Krishnakeerthi, P. Nakshatra and K. Niharika.
January 23, 5 p.m.: M. Sughi Praarthana; 7 p.m.: Roshini S

BRAHMA GANA SABHA

@ TAG Dakshinamurthy Auditorium, Mylapore.
January 17, 5 p.m.: J. Varsha; 6.15 p.m.: Madhuwantha Muliya; 7.30 p.m.: Dashavardharupu Hari, by the students of Krishnadhwanie School of Natya.
January 18, 5 p.m.: Shravnitha' 6.15 p.m.: Anu Bhaskararaman; 7.30 p.m.: 'Thakita Thath Jham', presentation on layam by the students of Saikripa Prasanna.
January 19, 5 p.m.: Shriya Prana; 6.15 p.m.: Gayathri Rajaji; 7.30 p.m.: Nritya Mani Mala by S. Divyasena and students.
January 20, 5 p.m.: R D Ramya Priya; 6.15 p.m.: Arundhathi. V A; 7.30 p.m.: Shalini Diwakar.
January 21, 5 p.m.: K.J. Haritha; 6.15 p.m.: Sahana Sridhar and 7.30 p.m.: 'Aarumuganum Arunagiriyum' by the students of H N Nandhini Suresh.
January 22, 5 p.m.: Apsara; 6.15 p.m.: Aishwarya Rajkumar; 7.30 p.m.: Preetha Sampath.
January 23, 5 p.m.: Soumitri Narumanchi; 6.15 p.m.: Ravali Mylavapu; 7.30 p.m.: Vimmi B Eswar (Kuchipudi).

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