

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Ode to Annamacharya

Seven dancers explore the lyrical beauty of the composer's songs **p2**

A landmark moment

Chitra Visweswaran's dance school completes 50 years **p3**



TAKING FORWARD THE DHARWAD LEGACY

Pt. Vinayak Torvi on the musical significance of the region **p4**

Neha Kirpal

An ongoing exhibition in Delhi transports visitors to Chitpur, one of Kolkata's oldest neighbourhoods, known for its rich cultural past. Jatra (folk theatre), printmaking, publishing, photography and bamboo crafts, Chitpur was once a thriving colony of artists. The exhibition titled 'Chitpur Chronicles: A Journey through Sacred Imagery' provides an unparalleled glimpse into a pivotal chapter of India's visual history, where traditional religious art intersects with the modernity of print technology.

Organised by Management of Art Treasures of India (MATI), the exhibition showcases the oldest and rarest Chitpur lithographs, which were a ground-breaking innovation that transformed the production and dissemination of images during the 19th and early 20th centuries. These 100-year-old rare prints, which



Visual history Some of the exhibits at 'Chitpur Chronicles: A Journey through Sacred Imagery'. PHOTOS COURTESY: MATI



point for several renowned printing houses and studios.

Drawn by the area's bustling commercial activity and proximity to the city's growing middle class, various renowned studios harnessed this technology to create depictions of Hindu deities, epic narratives and cultural icons. Each Chitpur studio developed its signature style. The Chore Bagan Art Studio was known for its attention to detail and vibrant compositions, which made its prints highly sought after.

Located in the heart of Kolkata, the Kansaripara Art Studio was popular for its ability to infuse life into the depictions of divine figures, often embodying the deep religious sentiments of the masses. Lithographs from Chore Bagan Art Studio and Kansaripara Art Studio were also known for their exquisite detailing, especially in the intricate portrayal of jewellery, garments and expressions. Calcutta Art Studio's (Litho Press) were marked by precision and artistic finesse.

"Together, these studios created a visual legacy that not only represented religious devotion but also reflected the socio-cultural environment of Bengal," said Siddhartha Tagore.

As a result, Chitpur was transformed into a thriving artistic hub, where tradition and modern technology intersected. "Chitpur's role in this revolution was bolstered by the influx of skilled artisans and technicians who specialised in lithography. These studios not only employed local talent but also became centres for learning and innovation in printmaking. The neighbourhood's lithographs, marked by their vibrant colours and artistic intricacy, became widely recognised and collected, contributing to the spread of visual culture throughout Bengal and beyond," said Gaurav Kumar.

'Chitpur Chronicles: A Journey Through Sacred Imagery' will continue till September 30 at Naivedyam basement, Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi.

Indelible imprints

An exhibition of rare Chitpur lithographs in Delhi shows how they democratised art through modern printing technology



Chitpur lithographs is the vivid use of colour, with vibrant, saturated hues that bring depictions of deities, mythological scenes and historical narratives to life, making the prints visually striking. The affordability and efficiency of lithographic printing revolutionised the way images were shared with the public. These works, which were once accessible only to the wealthy, could now be produced in large numbers, reaching a broader audience, including the middle class," said Gaurav Kumar, curator, MATI.

Chitpur became the epicentre of the printing revolution in the 19th century. As lithographic printing gained popularity in Bengal, Chitpur soon became the focal

represent a significant moment in India's artistic evolution, primarily depict Hindu deities and mythological narratives. Unlike traditional hand-drawn or painted art, lithography allowed for the mass production of detailed and high-quality prints. This technique involved drawing images on limestone or metal plates using oil-based ink, which could then be transferred onto paper, creating multiple copies with relative ease and accuracy.

"Lithography enabled the dissemination of visual culture across different regions, creating a shared aesthetic and devotional experience. It played a key role in popularising religious imagery, ensuring that temples, households and public spaces could all house affordable, yet artistically valuable representations of divine and historical figures. This democratisation of art through lithography had a profound impact on cultural identity,

religious practice and visual expression in India," said Siddhartha Tagore, MATI's founder.

Showcased at the exhibition are Beenapani (Saraswati) as well as Jagaddhatr Mata and Kalighater Sri Sri Kali Mata (Kali). The graceful Radha is portrayed in a piece titled Radha Gostho. Additionally, works such as Ganeshwari Mata and Shiva Parivar (depicting Shiva's family) present familial and cosmic

harmony. Further, the Sri Sri Dashabhuj stands as a symbol of power and protection. Papir Shasthi (Punishment to Sinner) is a vivid portrayal of punishment in the afterlife. The exhibition also brings to life two rare scenes from India's epic traditions: the poignant narrative of Abhimanyu-Uttara from the Mahabharata and Shri Shri Ram Raja (Ram Darbar) from the Ramayana.

"One of the defining features of



"Lithography enabled the dissemination of visual culture across different regions, creating a shared aesthetic and devotional experience"

SIDDHARTHA TAGORE



Shailaja Khanna

Zohra Segal (1912-2014) wore many hats with elan, and lived life on her own terms. Born Sahibzadi Zohra Begum Mumtaz-ullah Khan into an aristocratic Muslim family in Saharanpur, Zohra broke the glass ceiling at a time when it was unknown for women to defy norms and make choices.

Since her passing, her Odissi dancer-daughter Kiran Segal has been organising an annual tribute event dedicated to the arts. "I launched the festival in 2016. Art was what defined her. So the remembrance event is dedicated to her passion for acting and dance," says Kiran. The Zohra Segal Trust,

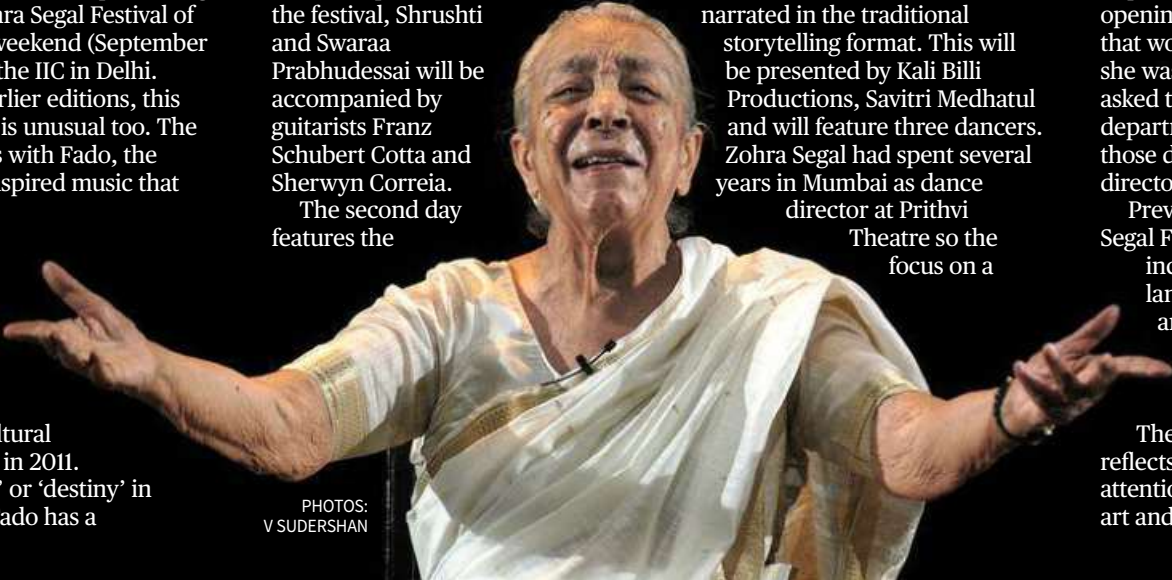
in collaboration with India International Centre, supported by the Raza Foundation is presenting its annual Zohra Segal Festival of the Arts this weekend (September 28 and 29) at the IIC in Delhi.

Like the earlier editions, this year's line up is unusual too. The festival begins with Fado, the Portuguese-inspired music that Goans have adopted. It combines music and poetry. Fado was added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists in 2011. Meaning 'fate' or 'destiny' in Portuguese, Fado has a

melancholic feel and its singers were traditionally never invited to perform. At the festival, Shrushti and Swaraa Prabhudessai will be accompanied by guitarists Franz Schubert Cotta and Sherwyn Correia.

The second day features the

journey of Lavani, the Maharashtrian folk dance, tracing its evolution from the 1800s, and narrated in the traditional storytelling format. This will be presented by Kali Billi Productions, Savitri Medhatul and will feature three dancers. Zohra Segal had spent several years in Mumbai as dance director at Prithvi Theatre so the focus on a



PHOTOS: V SUDERSHAN

A festival this weekend will celebrate Zohra Segal's lasting contributions to the fields of dance, theatre and cinema

Maharashtrian dance form is appropriate. When Zohra and her husband Kameshwar had to leave Lahore in the 1940s due to unrest, they moved to Bombay, and Zohra approached Prithvi Theatre for a job, as her sister Uzra Butt worked there. Apparently, Prithviraj Kapoor told her there was no opening in the acting department that would suit her stature. Since she was also a trained dancer, he asked to her to head the dance department. Kiran shared, "in those days they were called dance directors, not choreographers".

Previous editions of the Zohra Segal Festival of the Arts have included theatre in different languages, qawwali, dastangoi and dance. A performance by Bengali 'dhak' artistes was very well-received.

The curation of the festival reflects Zohra's ability to draw attention to unknown aspects of art and lend visibility to

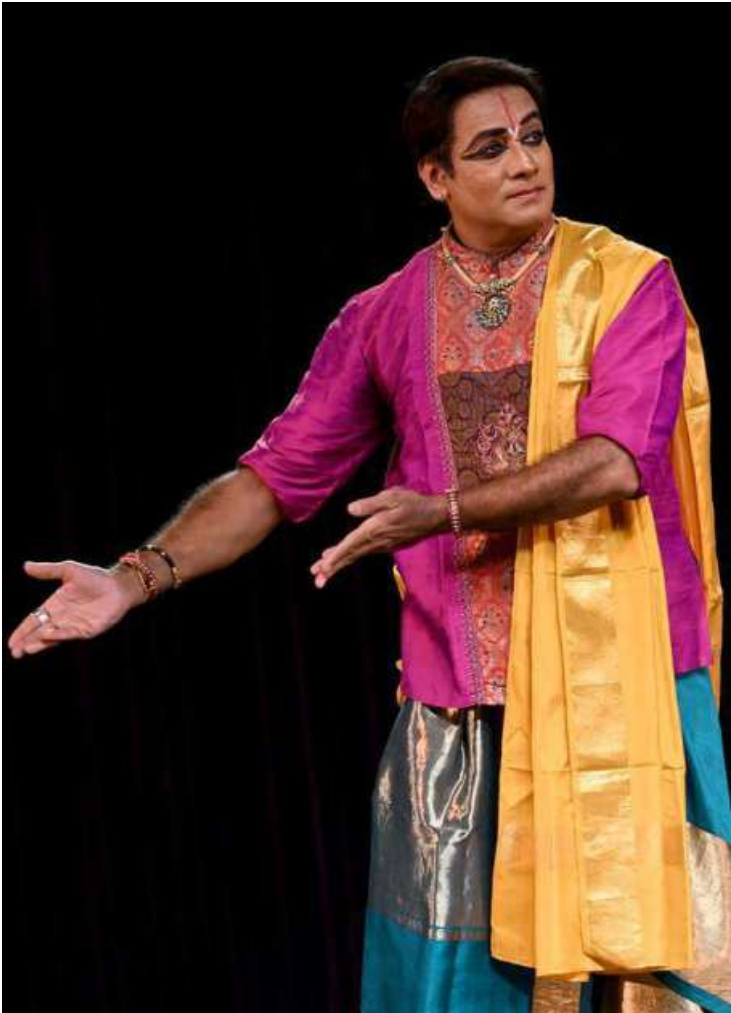
them. "She loved all the attention she got," laughs Kiran.

Poetry was another area that Zohra excelled in; her recitation was always memorable. However, what many don't know is that she spent more than two decades in London, where she made waves on British television and in films. When she came back to India in 1987 to be with her daughter Kiran in Delhi, she focussed more on Hindi films, acting till her death in 2014.

According to Kiran, "my mother considered herself a citizen of the world. She went to the Queen Mary College in Lahore, travelled to Germany to study under the dance pioneer Mary Wigman, was briefly based in Almora and associated with Uday Shankar's group. After marrying in Allahabad, she had to move to Bombay.

The Zohra Segal Festival of the Arts is non-ticketed, and supported entirely by donations from well-wishers.

Formidable line up (Clockwise from below) Sharmila Biswas; Ananda Shankar Jayant; Sathyanarayana Raju; Vaibhav Arekar; Anupama Kylash; Deepika Reddy; and Gopika Varma. PHOTOS: M. SRINATH



An emotional roller coaster

V.V. Ramani

Spending an entire evening watching the abhinaya prowess of seven senior artistes, belonging to different dance styles, was a delightful experience. Titled ‘Tamrapatra Live’, it was based entirely on Annamacharya’s compositions and curated by Ananda Shankar Jayant. The ambience of the Kalakshetra auditorium heightened the *rasamubhava*. In 2010, musician Sathiraju Venu Madhav set to tune 108 uncomposed kirtanas of Annamacharya in 108 ragas. With a desire to popularise them, Ananda Shankar, along with Anupama Kylash, launched a year-long online series, which culminated in a full-length performance. Seated on the banks of the river, Krishna, before



Seven dancers explored Annamacharya’s kirtanas through abhinaya

departing to Dwarka, reminiscences the beautiful moments spent with Radha. ‘Will I see her again,’ he asks himself. The entire scenario and the gamut of emotions came alive in a brilliant presentation by Vaibhav Arekar. One of the highlights of his visualisation was the sequence where the dancer pens his feelings on a lotus leaf and lets it float gently on the water. **With finesse** The focus then shifted to Radha in the song ‘Ati shobiteyam’ (raga Sama) performed by Gopika Varma. The myriad shades of her emotions were portrayed with grace and finesse. The final moment, depicting the seven hills was interesting.

Describing the bond between Alamelumanga and Venkateshwara in raga Behag was the kirtana ‘Ekkuvatakkuvaleevo’. Deepika Reddy captured those moments of companionship through a vibrant and joyous presentation. The piece ended in a beautiful *oonjal* sequence. Episodes of Vamana avatar and Amritmanthan were elaborated in her dancing in **Tamrapatra Live was an extension of the online series launched by Ananda Shankar Jayant, which focussed on Annamacharya kirtanas composed by Sathiraju Venu Madhav**

Kuchipudi style. A nayika’s yearning for her lord after their separation gives dancers immense scope to explore emotions, and Anupama’s exquisite mukhabhinaya captured it all. The imagery of a wilting lotus and the comparison between the heartbeat and sound of a bird’s fluttering wings made for some special moments. Clad in a colourful costume, Sathyanarayana Raju became the sakhi carrying the message from Alamelumanga to Venkateshwara. His portrayal was so graceful and engrossing that one forgot it was a man dancing. The union of the lord and his consort was shown through an exploration of the six seasons by Ananda

Shankar Jayant in the composition ‘Kaalamlarunu’ in raga Vasantha. The distinct feature of each season and the changing landscapes were conveyed by Ananda through a dynamic presentation. Ending the evening on a philosophical note, Sharmila Biswas focused on the idea of how every human is a puppet in the hands of the supreme, through an intense portrayal of the composition ‘Aatavaari guditawara’ in raga Kedaragowla. It must have been challenging to curate a dance presentation without nritta, it is here that the experience of the dancers came into play. Together they sustained audience interest with their evocative abhinaya.

Charumathi Supraja

Kathas in Kathak, presented by Natya STEM Dance Kampni at the Bangalore International Centre (BIC), was a dance between swirling and stillness, history and modernity, silence and the music of resurgence. While each aspect of this dance had its own textures, colours and vocabularies, a unified language, cultivated by the dancers in body, mind, and spirit shone through. Introducing Kathak as the form that has taken the maximum number of ‘onslaughts, invasions and bans,’ Madhu Nataraj, founder, STEM Dance Kampni, and Director, Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography (the two entities that make Natya STEM Dance Kampni), set the tone for an evening of storytelling on storytellers and their form, Kathak - that, curiously, was once a word for “storytellers.”

Leisurely pace The programme’s pace was leisurely, though we travelled through many centuries, going back and forth from the past to the future, collecting (sometimes startling) new insights on mythology, and refreshing perspectives on textbook histories. The

A tale of transition

Madhu Nataraj’s ‘Kathas in Kathak’ highlighted how the dance form has evolved to tell new stories



Tracing the roots (From left) Madhu Nataraj; and artistes of STEM Dance Kampni. PHOTOS: SURESH BABU



interactive nature of the performance afforded more access to understanding a classical dance form that has clearly evolved in rhythm with everything that was happening around it. We learnt how gracefully the form spoke when silenced; how it tweaked and tuned its motifs according to the times. Every item performed by the seasoned, much-travelled ensemble of dancers, told of Kathak’s pluralistic roots, its

resilience and tendency to daringly reinvent itself and better tell its tales. Starting with a well-synchronised piece on Kathak’s earlier avatar during the times when Vaishnavism reigned in parts of India, ‘Kathas in Kathak’ took us, in a leap, across the centuries when the ghungroos of temple dancers fell silent, only to emerge again in the bodies of court dancers wearing their ingenuity in freshly fashioned ornaments of dance. This pattern of demonstrating Kathak’s transformation with historical contexts ran parallel with a rich, visual narration of its power to transform storytellers’ voices and foster social agency.

Interesting insights From the artistic morphing of Krishna’s depiction into “begum ki muskurahat” to the demonstration of Kathak’s inherent ability to hold gendered issues like cross-dressing ever so lightly, the pieces simultaneously brought delight and information to the audience, without distancing them through displays of just technical skill. In the context of “globalisation and polarisation,” to quote Madhu Nataraj, who strung the show together with her gently told, in-depth chronicles, one could appreciate the

importance of this dance form’s journey. And quite the same way, the unfair erasure of courtesans’ contributions to nurturing this form, was effectively conveyed. Rare, vintage choreographies held the audience in thrall as did modern ones addressing pressing issues like climate change. ‘Kathas in Kathak’ was presented at BIC as part of the ongoing celebrations of 60 years of Natya Institute, started in 1964 by two pioneering women, Maya Rao and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. The intention of keeping culture alive in all its wholesomeness, and for its own sake - not as “a crutch for a festival or annual day programme,” has ensured that Natya has stayed relevant for 60 years, “going way beyond the prevalent start-up culture,” says Madhu. This has been made possible through a core belief that “the role of dance institutions is to be nerve centres that create eco-systems,” she adds. **Six-decade journey** “To mark the six eventful decades, 60 collaborations are being dreamed of and acted on, of which 24 are already underway or completed”, she says. Believing that “collaboration gives you the power to harness the idea of collective

action, whether in artistry or social change,” Madhu has followed in the footsteps of her mentor and mother Maya Rao, under whom she trained closely. The early collaborations of Natya Institute with the likes of Anil Biswas and Dagar Brothers have set the stage for the ones now being developed in domains as varied as climate action and social change, she shares. “Kathak, in its DNA, is the essence of pluralism,” says Madhu, while talking about the form that has aligned with India’s innate tendency to be pluralistic, and that has constantly shaped itself according to influences of the time. She also stresses the need she has felt as a feminist, to take a stance against propagating parochialism or patriarchy through dance. This means having to constantly dialogue with arts organisers and apply sensitivity to artistic depictions of traditional stories, especially mythologies handed down over the ages. These and other aspects of Natya Institute’s practice percolated through the carefully cultivated lens of Natya STEM Dance Kampni’s ‘Kathas in Kathak’, where every story was told in rhythm with a deeply felt need for building connection.



S. Janaki

No. 10, Sri Labdi Colony in Chennai is bustling with activity as preparations are on for the celebration of Samanvay - 50 years of the Chidambaram Academy of Performing Arts (CAPA). It is the elegant home of Bharatanatyam exponent, guru and arts administrator Chitra Visweswaran, who steps into her 75th year on October 12. It also doubles up as the artistic space for CAPA.

Like the famous female trinity in Carnatic music, the names of veteran dancers Padma Subrahmanyam, Sudharani Raghupathy and Chitra Visweswaran come to mind in the field of natyam.

Chitra says, “Ever since I can remember, dance has been an intrinsic part of my existence”. She was initiated into dance at the age of three, by her mother Rukmani Padmanabhan, and then put through her paces in Western classical ballet in London. An eclectic background covering Manipuri, Kathak, Rabindra nritya and sangeet, Carnatic music and theatre, propelled Chitra on an artistic voyage of discovery at a young age in Kolkata. At the age of 10, she came under the tutelage of Tiruvaidamarudur T.A. Rajalakshmi and had her arangetram on April 12, 1962.

In 1970, after graduating in English Honours from Calcutta University, Chitra received the National Scholarship for advanced study in Bharatanatyam from the Government of India. She therefore relocated to Madras and spent four years learning from the doyen Vazhuvoor Ramaiyya Pillai. “If T.A. Rajalakshmi laid a strong foundation of grammar and technique, Vazhuvoor awakened me to unimaginable, heights of creativity. His teaching methods were very unorthodox.

Where art and life converge

As Chitra Visweswaran’s dance academy completes 50 years, the Bharatanatyam exponent on how teaching lends a new perspective to creativity

A great visionary, vadyar never viewed or taught Bharatanatyam at a mere physical level. He used analogies and awakened one to seek inspiration from Nature and life. “Think, think!” he would say. To this day I follow his approach while teaching. At CAPA, it is my endeavour to help my students develop the seeing eye, the hearing ear and the thinking mind as well.”

The scholarship period had ended and Ramaiyya Pillai was unable to travel to conduct Chitra’s concerts. On a somber note she recalls: “After much emotional trauma on both sides, he finally agreed to allow me to work independently, but circumstances prevented him from according permission for anyone else to perform nattuvangam for the pieces he had taught me. Those days there were hardly any freelance nattuvanars. So there I was, out on a limbo, with barely a month to go before my next performance. With this, a new chapter in my life began. I worked on fresh margams and extension of repertoire. And given my background, I set out on a voyage of discovery, to widen my horizons in my chosen field.”

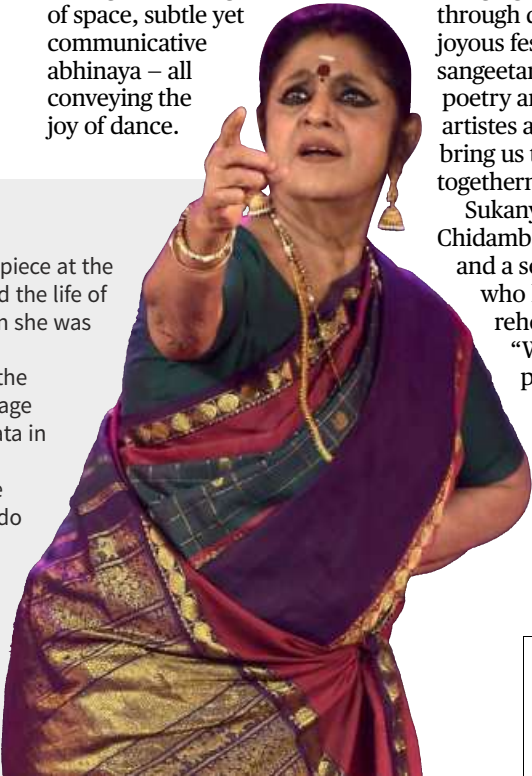
Soon, Chitra chartered her own course combining all that she had imbibed from her gurus and her knowledge of the cognate

forms of arts, imbuing them with a scholastic approach and developing an individualistic philosophy of movement. She was among the first to tour extensively abroad, and in the process equipped herself and her students in nattuvangam, acoustics and lighting design in a professional way. Her husband, R. Visweswaran, gave up a corporate career to totally involve himself in music. With his knowledge of the Carnatic and Hindustani systems as also Western classical, he started singing and composing music for

her dance. Together they created several solo pieces, thematic presentations and group productions. Her style stands out for its verve, light leaps, flowing movements punctuated by pulsating pauses, quicksilver head and eye movements, play of rhythm and cross rhythms, minimalist yet elegant jewellery and costumes, and intelligent coverage of space, subtle yet communicative abhinaya – all conveying the joy of dance.

Some milestones

- Chitra first composed a dance piece at the age of eleven, and choreographed the life of saint Tyagaraja as a varnam when she was 13.
- As a teenager, she introduced the concept of announcements on stage during her performances in Kolkata in the 1960s.
- She was among the first dance teachers to train her students to do nattuvangam.
- Having trained in lighting and lighting design under the legendary Tapas Sen in Kolkata, even as a teenager Chitra incorporated the concept of using lighting as an integral part of choreography.



Training ground Chitra Visweswaran with students; and performing at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha.
PHOTOS: R. RAVINDRAN & M. VEDHAN

Fifty years ago, two years after her marriage to the multi-talented R. Visweswaran, the idea of starting dance classes in Chennai had taken shape in August 1974, with the support of her parents. Chitra launched her dance classes in an informal way in the drawing room of her house which too has evolved over time along with her successful and fulfilling career in classical dance. Every time the furniture in the room would be cleared for the seven or eight children who attended the classes. Within a year, the space for dance was formalised aptly as the Chidambaram Academy of Performing Arts. Chitra was a popular and busy artiste presenting as many as 20 performances a month in India and abroad, but teaching was her passion and she intelligently divided her time between dancing and teaching. As the number of students grew, the

Art confluence

‘Samanvay - a confluence’ will feature Dushyanth Sridhar, Anupama Hoskere, Sikkil Gurucharan & Anil Srinivasan, and the Chidambaram Dance Company, on September 28 and 29 at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. This event is held in partnership with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Chennai Kendra, The Ministry of Culture, and Shreya Nagarajan Singh Arts Development Consultancy.

dance class got promoted from the drawing room to a more spacious and convenient dance hall on the first floor. Now, on the occasion of its golden jubilee, lectures are also being organised in the ‘Terracotta Terrace’ aesthetically designed atop the house – suitable for chamber concerts.

As the institution enters its 50th year, CAPA is curating a series called Samanvay. “I have always perceived art as a complete whole. It is this Samanvay that I have chosen to establish through this festival, bringing varied experiences through different genres. In this joyous festival of natyam, sangeetam, the spoken word, poetry and puppetry, exemplary artistes are coming together to bring us this experience of togetherness,” explains Chitra. Sukanya Ravindhar, director, Chidambaram Dance Company and a senior disciple of Chitra, who has been conducting the rehearsals, chips in saying, “We feel a deep sense of pride in continuing to share the artistry imparted by our guru. Samanvay brings together the rich influences that define our legacy.”

CULTURE BRIEFS



Navaratri concert series

Mudhra will present a series of concerts as part of its Navaratri utsavam. To be streamed on Paalamtv from October 3 to 11, the series will have both senior and young musicians rendering compositions on Devi. Each day’s concert (7 p.m.) will be preceded by Varsha Bhuvaneshwari’s harikatha on Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi (6 p.m.). Sridvidya Vadlamani’s concert on October 3 will set the tone for the nine-day festival. Artistes to perform on the other days are: Oct. 4: Padmashree Srinivasan. Oct. 5: Kalpalathika Ravishankar. Oct. 6: Vasuda Kesav. Oct. 7: Radhika Kannan. Oct. 8: Vaishnavi Ramadas. Oct. 9: Shreya Kolathaya. Oct. 10: Serugudi Sisters. Oct. 11: Hamzini Vytheeshwaran.

Melange of dance forms



MSMAB Trust and Maanasi Arts Academy present Aikyam 2024 on September 28 and 29, at Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Mylapore. The two-day event features solo and group dance

performances. The curtain goes up with the Bharatanatyam recital by Navyashree K.N., disciple of P. Praveen Kumar, Bengaluru (Sept. 28, 5.30 p.m.) followed by Spanda Dance Company’s performance (7 p.m.). Senior Mohiniyattam dancer Gopika Varma will be the guest of honour for the evening.

The performances on September 29 are by Shabana and Shafeekudeen (5 p.m.); ‘Mylai Margam’ by Sahaana Sukumar, Saibrindha Ramachandran, Kshiraja Manasvini and Sreelakshmi EB (6.20 p.m.) and thematic production ‘Ishwara’ by Rukmini Vijayakumar (7.45 p.m.)



Thematic presentation

Drishiti Art Centre, a Bharatanatyam and Bharatanrityam institution, headed by dancer Anuradha Vikranth, presents ‘Nrityarpana 2024’, to commemorate its 24-year-long journey. Featuring Bharatanatyam performances by Anuradha’s students, it will be held on October 2, 4.30 p.m., at Chowdhali Hall, Bengaluru.

The evening will include a Margam and a thematic production ‘Vijayanagara Vaibhava’, which sings the glory of the Vijayanagara Empire under the rule of Krishnadevaraya.

The event will be presided by Krishna Byre Gowda, Minister for Revenue, Government of Karnataka; Natyacharyas Kiran Subramanyam and Sandhya Kiran, dance historian Prof. Karuna Vijayendra; and poet and author Akshay Vasu.

Multilingual drama series

S.Shivprasadh’s Nataka Kavalar, Chemmal” R.S.Manohar’s NXGs inaugurates ‘Classical Music Legends’, a multilingual play on 19 music legends. Directed by S. Shivprasadh and S. Sruuthi, the plays will be staged at the following venues: R.R. Sabha (September 30, 6.30 p.m.); The Mylapore Fine Arts Club Hall (October 1, 6.30 p.m.); at Chromepet Cultural Academy (October 2, 6.30 p.m.); and at Narada Gana Sabha (October 3, 6.30 p.m.).

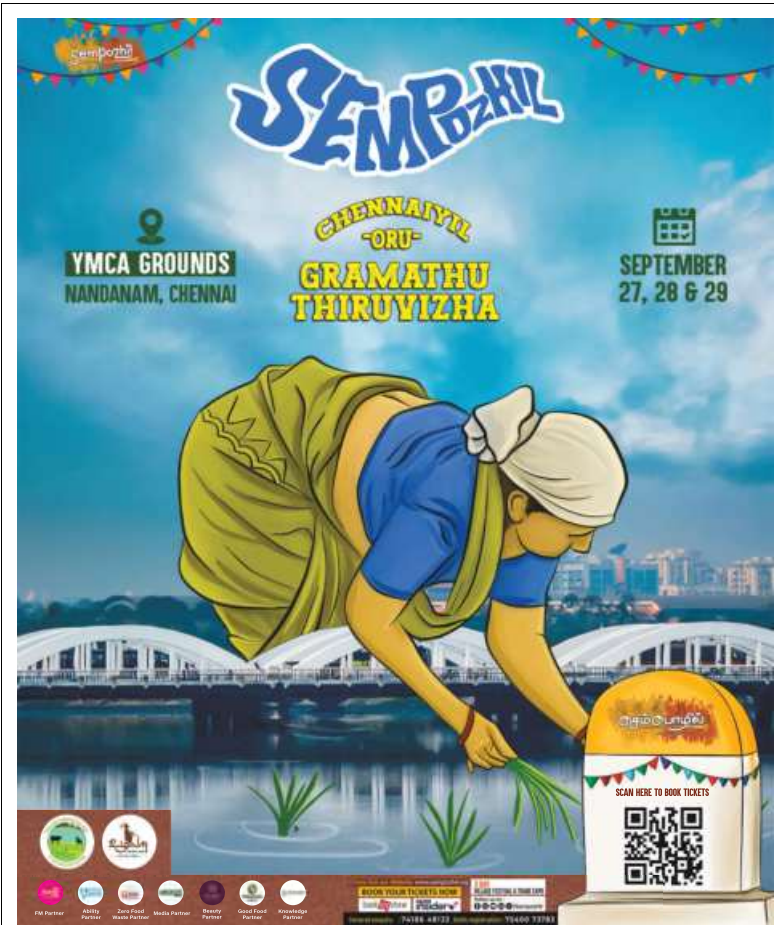
The multilingual play will trace the life and music of some of Tyagaraja, Muthuthandavar, K.B. Sundarambal and M.S.Subbulakshmi (in Tamil); Jon B.Higgins (English), Oothukadu Venkata Kavi (Sanskrit) Swathi Tirunal (Malayalam); Annamacharya (Telugu), Purandaradasar (Kannada), Kalidasa (Tulu), Alfred Rose (Konkani), Tansen (Hindi), Sudhir Phadke (Marathi), Narsinh Mehta (Gujarati), Bhanubaktha Acharya (Nepali), and Bulleh Shah (Punjabi). V. Shreekrishna and Vikram Singh have handled the scripts. While Hoimonti Shukla (Bengali) is written by Tanushree Saha; Rabindra Mohapatra in Oriya is by Sunil Kumar Rout; and Bhupen Hazarika (Assamese) by Brindaban Bordolai. The evening will also feature a thematic dance production by the students of Anitha Guha’s Bharathanjali .

Platforming young performers

Thejas School of Performing Arts commemorates the 15th edition of Thejas Bala Natyotsav on October 1 and 2, at Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Mylapore. A series of dance performances by the students of senior gurus will be featured. Bharatanatyam dancer Kavitha Ramu, IAS, will inaugurate the event on October 1 at 5.30 p.m. Senior dancer Srinidhi Chidambaram will be the chief guest.

The series will begin with the performance by the students of Purushothamam on Oct. 1 at 6.10 p.m. This will be followed by the performances of the students of senior dancer Parvathi Ravi Ghantasala (6.40 p.m.); students of Murali Srinivasan (7.10 p.m.) and disciples of Chitra and R. Muralidharan (7.40 p.m.).

Performances on October 2 will be by the students of Binesh Mahadevan (10 a.m.); Students of Gayathri Chandrasekar (10.30 a.m.); students of Sheela Unnikrishnan (11.30 a.m.). Seetha Ratnakar, former director of Programmes, Doordarshan Kendra, Chennai, will be the chief guest for the evening.



Queen of thumri
Girija Devi.
PHOTO: S.R.
RAGHUNATHAN



Purab Ang Gayaki with the dialects, literature, culture of the Ganga-Jamuni region. He, therefore, started the Purab Ang Gayaki Project. Though the effort was to enrol many gurus for the work, he finally entrusted the job to Manju Sundaram of Benaras and Dalia Rahut of Kolkata. The two continue to nurture young enthusiasts of khayal and thumri.

Rare songs
This was evident at Barkha Bahaar, where Abanti Bhattacharjee's alluring 'Piya to maanat nahi' (Kafi) and the desolate 'Tarape bin baalam'; and vocalist-sitarist duo Debapriya-Samanwaya's complex and rare tappa in raag Purvi followed by a lilting jhoola set to Megh, stood out. So was Jhumpa Sarkar's Pilu thumri 'Saiyan nahi aaye', followed by a jhoola.

The two-day celebration of the Purab Ang Gayaki showcased a rich and rare treasure of songs. Santa Kundu's Kafi-based thumri was soothing. She concluded with a perky Mirzapuri kajri. Bishnupriya Chakraborty's traditional thumri was followed by a sohar, congratulating Nand-Yashoda on the arrival of their baby (Krishna). Set to Shivrangani and dipchandi, it turned out to be the only ritualistic song of the fest. She concluded with a brilliant talferta swaying from kaherwa to dadra and back. Dipanjana Bose Chanda took it upwards while rendering a Desh thumri and a rare jhoola set to Rupak. Madhumita Chattopadhyay could not do justice to her melodic thoughts due to a bad throat.

Young brigade
There were many young artists who debuted in this edition of the festival.

An important aspect of the festival was the panel discussion on 'Evolution of Thumri in Bengal', moderated by vocalist Supriyo Dutta. It especially focused on Girija Devi's teaching methodology as most of the participants Dalia Rahut, Manasi Majumdar (director, Bengal Music College), Suranjana Bose (vocalist and guru), Debapriya Adhikary and Samanwaya Sarkar were trained by her. While they highlighted 'kahan' as the most important aspect of thumri, or spirituality within the seemingly plain lyrics, Punjab Ang, actually Purab Ang with Patiala nuances, had tappa of Purab Ang that differed from the original tappa of the camel riders of Punjab and Sindh. Though in favour of having more such discussions, they insisted the traditional flavour of the gayaki should not be tampered with at any cost.

Meena Banerjee

Living in the digital age has its own perks, especially for women, who have found their voice on social media, which has now become a platform for advocacy and change. But turn back the clock to the 1950s and earlier, when even influential women faced discrimination. For instance, well-known women singers of the time were labelledtawaifs or baijis (courtesans). Society hardly valued their talent and saw them merely as entertainers. Actually, these musicians were the real custodians of Hindustani music. Though they were trained in classical forms such as dhrupad and khayal, they usually performed thumri, a semi-classical style. Credit goes to these women artistes for popularising this form of Hindustani vocal music. By the 19th century, colonialism, particularly social reforms such as the anti-naught movement and decline in royal patronage, impacted thumri's popularity and its accomplished practitioners. The recent 'Barkha Bahaar' session, featuring thumri, kajri, jhula and tappa, was an effort to revive the beauty of these forms that seamlessly blend folk and classical elements. Young vocalists and an enthusiastic audience converged at the upscale Chowdhury House. The two-day event was presented by Aniruddha Chowdhury's Calcutta Performing Arts

East side story

Barkha Bahaar brought to the fore Bengal's love for the Purab Ang Gayaki -- thumri, kajri, jhoola and tappa

Foundation, in association with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Thumri and its allied forms always found favour in Bengal, thanks to the efforts of Girija Shankar Chakraborty, Prasun and Meera Banerjee, Girija Devi, Sipra Bose, and Purnima Chaudhuri. In 2011, Vinod Kapur, a businessman with a deep passion for music, launched the Purab Ang Gayaki Utsav, a series of concerts to promote thumri, dadra, chaiti and more in different Indian cities. Instead of referring to them as light forms, he came up with the term 'Purab Ang Gayaki' since these forms evolved in the Ganga-Jamuni region and are reflective of an inclusive way of life (tehzeeb). Apart from the quarterly utsavs, Vinod Kapur's famous intimate soirees, known among music-lovers as VSK Baithaks, took the initiative to rescue this gayaki from the dark corners, into which it

had been pushed and bring it back to centre stage. The baithaks were organised in Delhi, Varanasi and Kolkata. Says Vinod Kapur, "The Purab Ang Utsav and the three categories of recognition named after Girija Devi that I had instituted revealed how musicians from Bengal had a natural flair for these forms. Most of the performers and winners were from Bengal." After Girija Devi's passing, Vinod Kapur was distressed over the lack of gurus who could familiarise the learners of the rustic yet complex



The Purab Ang Utsav revealed how musicians from Bengal had a natural flair for these beautiful forms

VINOD KAPUR

The Dharwad scion

Pt. Vinayak Torvi, who turned 75 recently, on how the region prepared him for the long musical journey

Manjari Sinha

The soil of Dharwad is said to be special. It has produced stalwart musicians such as Sawai Gandharva, Pt. Bhimsen Joshi, Vidushi Gangubai Hangal, Pt. Mallikarjun Mansoor, Pt. Kumar Gandharva, and Pt. Basavraj Rajguru. Pt. Vinayak Torvi also has his roots in this region. It shows in his robust khayal singing and poignant rendition of the pieces, popularly referred to as 'light classical'.

Pt. Vinayak Torvi was born on September 4, 1948. His father Keertan Kesari Malhar Rao Torvi was a harikatha exponent. Vinayak initially trained under Gururao Deshpande in the gurukula system. He also learnt from Pt. Bhimsen Joshi. Vinayak did his Masters in Music from Karnatak University, Dharwad, where he trained under Pt. Mallikarjun Mansur, Pt. Basavraj Rajguru and Gangubai Hangal. Having imbibed precious lessons from the best in the field, Pt. Vinayak has been sharing this treasure with several of his disciples.

To celebrate their guru's 75th birthday, his sishyas, along with some music-lovers, recently organised an Amrit Mahotsav at the India International Centre in Delhi. It featured Pt. Nayan Ghosh and Pt. Vinayak Torvi's disciple Dattatreya Velankar. This event was the last in the series of concerts organised in Pune, Mumbai, Dharwad, Varanasi, San Francisco and Bengaluru. In an interview before the Delhi celebration, Pt. Vinayak Torvi spoke about how the musical mitti (mud) of Dharwad has shaped him, and given his life an identity and purpose.

Question: How did your harikatha vidwan-father inspire your musical journey?

Answer: I was lucky to have been born into the family of a keertankar and to learn the intricacies of the art form from my father. The initiation into keertan-singing

helped me in my shastriya sangeet training. Many raag-raginis have originated from the keertan tradition, which encompasses the Ashta-Pilu (singing, instrument playing, dance, drama, bhava, laya, layakari, and tarana). It is said that in Gwalior gharana, classical music aspirants were first taught keertan, irrespective of their caste or religion.

Q: Your gurus, Gururao Deshpande, belonged to Gwalior gharana, while Pt. Bhimsen Joshi to the Kirana gharana. How did you cope with the difference as a young student?

A: The Gwalior gharana is the fountainhead of all the gharanas. It has the innate ability to absorb and incorporate the finest attributes of other gharanas including the Kirana gharana. I was fortunate to learn under two gurus without much difficulty, as Pt. Bhimsen Joshi was closely associated with Gururao Deshpande, who in turn was closely associated with Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, the crown jewel of Kirana gharana. He used to lend vocal support to Khan Saheb during his concerts. That is how the Kirana gharana gayaki had influenced Gururao's singing.

Q: Your music also shows the influence of Jaipur and Agra gharanas.

A: My guru Gururao Deshpande was an admirer of Ustad Faiyaz Khan of Agra Gharana, and a close associate of Kesarbai Kerkar, the doyenne of Jaipur gharana. So his brilliant

mind imbibed the beautiful aspects of both the gharanas. When training under him, I was fortunate to experience it all and get the essence into my singing.

Q: Pt. Mallikarjun Mansoor, Pt. Basavaraj Rajguru and vidushi Gangubai Hangal taught you at Karnatak University? How did it feel to be mentored by so many stalwarts? Did it confuse you at some point?

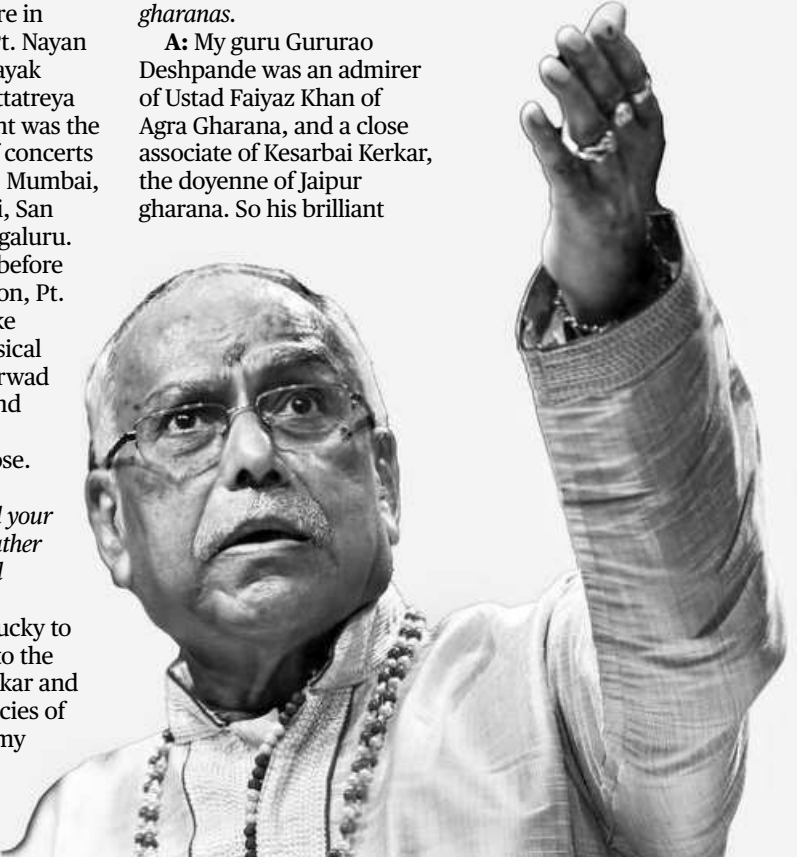
A: There was no question of getting confused. They helped me fine-tune my music.

Q: Apart from abhangs and bhajans, you also sing vachanas and devanamas in your concerts.

A: I was inspired by Pt. Bhimsen Joshi's style of singing these pieces. I learned vachanas from Mansur ji and Basavaraj ji. In a concert, you have different categories of listeners, and an artiste should fulfill their expectations.

Q: How would you define your gayaki?

A: I consider aalap as the soul of my concert; laya and layakari as the brain, and voice as the connecting link. I can adapt my voice to suit the style of different gharanas. This has helped me to reach my music to more rasikas.



CALENDAR



Dikshitar 250

As part of the year-long celebrations of Muthuswami Dikshitar's 250th birth anniversary, Veenavaadhini Sampradaya Sangit Trust has organised an evening of concerts, on September 28, at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. The evening begins at 4.30 p.m. with Veena Venkatramani's veena recital. The accompanists are Tirucherai Kaushik (mridangam) and K.R. Sivaramakrishna (kanjira). This will be followed by Neyveli Santhanagopalan's vocal concert (6 p.m.). Nagai Muralidharan (violin) and Mannargudi Easwaran (mridangam) will accompany him.

Vocal concert

Mathangi Chamber Music has organised the vocal concert by Shruthi S Bhat on September 24, 6.15 p.m., at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. She will be accompanied by Shreelakshmi S Bhat on the violin, J. Vaidyanathan on the mridangam and Madipakkam Murali on the ghatam.

Bharatanatyam recital



The Music Academy will feature Aryamba Sriram's Bharatanatyam performance today, as part of the HCL Concert series. The performance will be held at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall, 6 p.m.

Lecture

Historian Chitra Madhavan will present an illustrated lecture on 'Ancient Temples of Tamil Nadu', today, 6 p.m. The event, organised by Tattvaloka, will be held at 76, Eldams Road, Teynampet.

