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Find yourself in a Van Gogh canvas at this immersive art experience in the city **P2**

WHAT'S VIVEK-MERVIN'S VM ORIGINALS ALL ABOUT? P4

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At the beginning of every year, a wave of zealous resolutions emerge. Motivation peaks and gyms invariably witness a surge in memberships. By February, this usually begins to dip. We speak to coaches about how they motivate clients to stay on track.

A clean slate

“When people make resolutions for a new year, they are not thinking realistically,” says Raj Ganpath, co-founder, The Quad. He adds that this applies not just to fitness-related resolutions, but other things as well. “Eventually, the motivation wanes because real life catches up. You have work, you’re stressed and tired, and realise that you cannot practically do what you set out to do.”

When people are presented with a clean slate, Raj says they tend to bite more than they can chew, often under a false sense of motivation. There are two reasons to this. “First is that this is driven by guilt. From November, until the end of the year, since it is the festive season, people let go and think that they can make up with health and fitness once all this passes. Second is that your motivation levels are at a peak at the start of the year because your stress levels are low towards the end of the year,” he says, adding that these are the main reasons why people sign up for a whole year’s subscription at the gym immediately.

This is also what a lot of gym owners bank on. However, The



Quad works in quarters, and the longest membership period at simpleSTRONG, a city-based sports and fitness institution, is also quarterly.

“That’s the amount of time we need, to show change in a person’s habits and performance. The one-year memberships are more of a business strategy because the concept of resolutions plays a big role in the fitness industry,” says Ashwin Ramdas, co-founder and head coach.

At simpleSTRONG, fitness extends beyond the walls of the gym. They organise fitness retreats and vacations called Recharge at stunning locations in India and abroad – where learning, community, food, adventure, and play are at the forefront. “These retreats add a layer of fun to fitness, making it less tedious and fostering a sense of community.

Reality of resolutions

City coaches motivate clients to work towards their goals this year with breakfast stations and fitness retreats

The takeaway from these trips is to have learnt something about fitness and training philosophies,” says Ashwin, as he prepares to leave to Sri Lanka for a retreat.

Realistic goals

A resolution made in the motivational high of January is more a wish list, and less a list of achievable, practical goals.

“People set unrealistic goals, and this is also fuelled by social

media. People are putting out a lot of workout regimes and diets that are not tailored to you. Setting smaller and realistic goals, and focussing on habit and consistency rather than numbers, is the key,” Ashwin says.

For someone who is just starting out on their fitness journey, working out five days a week is unrealistic. “Training three days a week, no matter what kind – zumba, running, strength training, swimming, sports – is enough.

Beyond the gym (Clockwise from far left) A training session at The Quad; fitness retreat in Rishikesh by simpleSTRONG; and yoga on the beach by simpleSTRONG. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

They can then focus on increasing the days or the effort put on each day slowly with each quarter,” says Ashwin.

According to a large-scale experiment on New Year resolutions, a research paper published by the US-based National Library of Medicine observes that one week into the new year, 77% of participants had maintained their resolutions; the number decreased to 55% after one month, 43% after three months, 40% after six months, and 19% at the end of the year.

One thing that helps people stick to their goals is to have a coach who can guide them through the fitness journey. “Your coaches are your biggest motivators, and they keep you accountable,” says Divya Rolla, head of training and development at CultFit.

She adds, “We also have the Cult app where we have leaderboards, pop-ups, and awards you win for keeping a streak, and step counters that push you. Cult also organises events like yogathons, and dance



Training three days a week, no matter what kind — zumba, running, strength training, swimming, sports — is enough

ASHWIN RAMDAS,
simpleSTRONG

fitness parties in outdoor public arenas that ensures one never gets bored.”

“At The Quad, things are different because of the way the programming works. Training is periodised for a year. We have your year planned out into what we call a Macrocycle. We break it down into four Mesocycles for each quarter. Every cycle has a start and end and a week’s break between every quarter. This way, we have a fresh start every quarter. That’s the secret sauce. Each quarter is a 12-week-period with workouts of varied intensities. A quarter is punctuated with engaging community workouts that help break the monotony,” says Raj.

A major part of wellness includes diet and mindfulness, and Nature movement training centre Fit-O-Crazy helps with this aspect.

With an open air arena for training with a ‘five element’ approach – air (balance and awareness), water (flexibility and mobility), fire (speed, agility and cardio), earth (strength), and space (outdoor training), and a self-dependence corner where you can cook your own pre- or post-workout meals, they help with keeping it interesting on a daily basis.

“It is easier to pick a form of workout you enjoy, do that twice a week, and then do something that you don’t enjoy as much, but is necessary from a progress standpoint,” adds Divya.

She says that another method to stay on track is to have an accountability partner or a workout group. Having someone count on you to show up fosters a sense of responsibility. An added bonus is you become a part of a fitness-oriented community. In knowing that you are not alone, lies the greatest motivator.



All eyes on Pulicat

Watch fishermen compete in a catamaran race on the lagoon’s brackish waters for the annual Pulicat Day celebrations

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Alot has changed in Pulicat over the years. But there is one thing its fishermen continue to hold on to: *kattumaram*, which translates to ‘tied wood,’ is unique to the lagoon.

“Pulicat fishermen use *kattumarams* that are made of three pieces of wood,” says Xavier Benedict, founder-trustee of Art & Architecture Research Development and Education [AARDE] Foundation, a

non-profit involved in the promotion and conservation of the lagoon.

Fishermen in places like Chennai have switched to fibre catamarans and fireboats, but in Pulicat, these sturdy and dependable wooden catamarans continue to exist. Xavier says that these do not overturn even in choppy waters. “Whereas fibre catamarans are lightweight,” he points out.

Over 25 such catamarans are set to charge into the waters in a race in the upcoming Pulicat Day celebrations, organised by AARDE Foundation and Tamil

Nadu Tourism Department.

“The event was started with the intention of spreading awareness on the condition of the lagoon,” says Xavier, “Pulicat lake is shared by Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, and is hence often neglected, plagued by issues such as encroachment,” he points out. “It has three estuaries, of which two have dried up and only one is open.”

All events planned for the celebrations are hence based on understanding the ecology of the region, so that the locals, especially children, are sensitised. There will be a quiz

The lagoon calls Painted stork and grey pelicans at Pulicat lake.
B JOTHI RAMALINGAM

for school students from the nine Government Higher Secondary schools in town; drawing competitions; games such as chess; kolam competitions on the bridge that connects Pulicat to the lighthouse; a therukoothu performance, and display of traditional folk arts such as *silambam*.

Today, these catamarans are in choppy waters, since the depth of the water at Pulicat lake is reducing due to silting. North-East monsoonal rivers such as Swarnamukhi, Kalangi and Arni, flowing into the lagoon, are supposed to further drain into the sea. However, they end up depositing silt into the waterbody as the mouth has dried up. Xavier says that the lake’s mouth requires regular widening and dredging for the catamarans to ply easily.

Watch the fishermen put on a show as they dance between the devil and the deep blue sea.

On February 3, 11am onwards. The catamaran race (3pm) and therukoothu and folk arts performance (5.30pm) are open to the public. Pulicat is 45 kilometres from Chennai.

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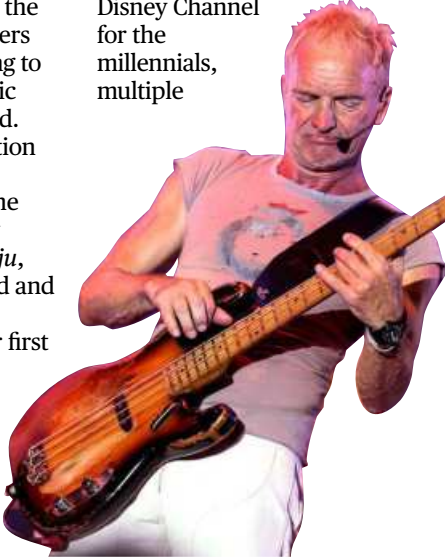
bigbasket

A Sting operation in Mumbai

From Sting and Halsey to The Rose, we bring you the highlights of Lollapalooza India

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As attendees made a beeline for the BUDx stage on Day 1 of Lollapalooza India, the unmistakable beats of ‘Gallan Goodiyaan’ from the film *Dil Dhadakne Do* filled the air. “Is this the Jonas Brothers warming up? Are they going to sing some lines for their mic check,” someone wondered. Of course, their connection to the country came up moments after they took the stage. Kevin Jonas cheekily introduced Nick Jonas as *jiju*, even as the crowds chanted and called him the nation’s brother-in-law. “This is our first time performing in India together, and no, the *sangeet* performance doesn’t count,” Nick said, to raucous cheers from the audience. Over two days in



Mumbai, Lollapalooza India, in its second edition was a musical experience where the audience discovered new sounds and soaked in some nostalgia.

If watching the Jonas brothers perform ‘S.O.S.’, ‘Year 3000’ and ‘When You Look Me In The Eyes’ was a throwback to the glory days of Disney Channel for the millennials, multiple



generations came together to revel in Sting’s magic as he closed the festival on Sunday night. Couples, groups of friends and even large families teared up, held each other, and swayed to the notes of ‘A Thousand Years’, ‘Desert Rose’, and ‘Every Breath You Take’, as the 72-year-old musician serenaded them.

Across four stages, Lollapalooza India hosted nearly 35 artistes over the weekend. BookMyShow Live, the live entertainment experiential division of BookMyShow spearheaded Lollapalooza India along with global producers, Perry Farrell and C3 Presents. “I sincerely wish it would rain now, but we’ll make up for that,” said Ashwin Gopakumar, lead

vocalist of When Chai Met Toast, as the indie-folk alternative band took the stage. American singer-songwriter Lauv sang his lilted ‘Paris In The Rain’ against the backdrop of an LED screen projecting a stormy cloud with rain seemingly falling on the stage.

Making her presence felt Ranking high among the best performances of the day, American singer-songwriter Halsey apologised more than once onstage for not having come to India before through her decade-long career. Dressed in a brightly patterned skirt and crop top with her hair in wild curls, the singer dominated the stage in a way that only she could – moving from one end to the other, singing, dancing and



A strum, a beat (Clockwise from left) Scenes from Lollapalooza; Jonas Brothers; and Sting. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

sending the crowds into a frenzy. Sharing the story of how they met busking on the streets of Seoul many years ago, the four-member indie-rock South Korean band The Rose performed a set list that included ‘Sorry’, ‘Red’, ‘You’re Beautiful’, and ‘Back to Me’.

After having performed a song with Lauv the previous day, singer Armaan Malik was once again welcomed with loud cheers as he and Eric sang their song ‘Echo’ together. Surprise collaborations onstage like these made for much excitement through the festival.

On Day 1, the crowds were thrilled when rapper King joined Nick Jonas onstage to sing their song ‘Maan Meri Jaan’. There was no dearth of different genres of music to choose from on the second day of the festival too. After listening to rock band Parvaaz, many attendees made a beeline to see sitarist Anoushka Shankar, and also caught performances by English alternative rock band Keane, and British electronic music project Jungle.

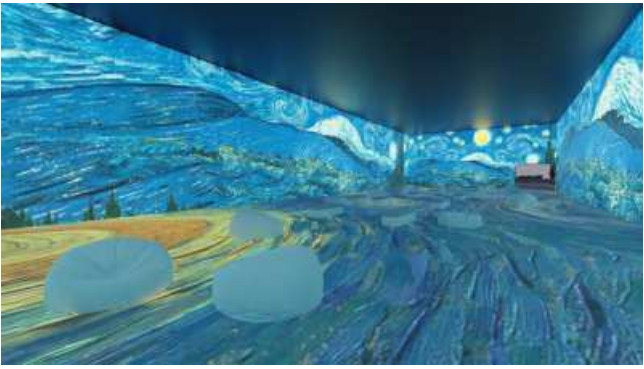
As OneRepublic took over the Walkers & Co stage on Sunday evening, frontman Ryan Tedder reminisced their journey over, and smiled down at the crowds screaming along to ‘Counting Stars’ and ‘If I Lose Myself’. People danced and sang along to the group’s biggest hits over the years.

Soon followed by Sting’s performance, these musicians and many others, perhaps best summed up what made the second edition of Lollapalooza tick – how its best performers drummed up memories and nostalgia in a way that only music can.

Into the canvas

The Real Van Gogh exhibit opens on February 2 in Chennai

As many vibrant sunflowers flit across, lending an ode to Vincent Van Gogh’s much-loved recurrent motif, one feels enveloped in a warm embrace. Familiar canvases from the most popular Starry Nights to the more melancholic The Potato Eaters flash all around, in a spatially interactive display. Chennai is next in line to host the The Real Van Gogh immersive exhibit at the city’s own Express Avenue mall. What is going to be presented in Chennai is different from what has been seen and done in other Indian cities. “The use of 20,000 lumens projectors has never been attempted before, and this is going to bring enormous clarity and



depth to the art showcased. Most importantly, the significantly brighter projectors will highlight Van Gogh’s art’s most recognisable technique – his use of bright colours and bold brush strokes,” says Sharan John, founder, The Silly Fellows who brought the show to India. A Van Gogh-themed art

cafe, meant for patrons looking for a more relaxed and social setting, is also woven into the experience.

The Real Van Gogh Immersive Experience will be on display from February 2 to 20, from 10am to 10pm at Express Avenue mall. Tickets are priced at ₹799 onwards on insider.in.

Pottery Kaari

A ceramic studio based in the city, Pottery Kaari was started in 2022 by software engineer-turned-self taught potter Rezina Farooq. The stall offers bowls, mugs, and other ceramics, moulded and painted by Rezina who also makes homeware for everyday use with each piece made by hand with no reproductions. “Though it started as a hobby, I have found true happiness in this field,” says Rezina who has been at the wheel for five years now. Rezina began her pottery journey in 2019 by taking a professional course to learn the skill. She now has a home studio on her terrace where she moulds the products which are fired separately. *Pottery Kaari products are priced between ₹500 and ₹700. The ceramics can be purchased from potterykaari.com and @potterykaari on Instagram.*



Sangiah

Sustainable fashion brand Sangiah upcycles old saris to make shirts and crop tops. Bandhani and kalamkari work on crop tops with a modern silhouette makes the brand’s work stand out. The idea for Sangiah came from the need to make sustainable fashion more affordable. Miruthula Padmanabhan, a graduate of NIFT Chennai, founded the brand in 2019. *The True Cost*, a documentary on how unsustainable the fashion industry is, was her inspiration. “The problem with sustainable brands for me was that the end product was so expensive that sustainability became an exclusive thing,” she says. Their target audience falls between ages 18 and 30. The store offers reasonable pricing when compared to most sustainable brands. *Sangiah products are priced between ₹500 and ₹2,500. The brand can be found on @sangiah_official on Instagram.*

The brick and mortar way

Meet the people behind four of Chennai’s interesting creative start-ups, and explore their products

Tarini Vyas



Offering customised cakes for birthdays, anniversaries, and weddings, the bakery has recently expanded into Healthy Moonbakes Co. Dharani, a vegan herself, wanted to offer vegan and sugar-free options with this iteration. *Moonbakes Co. can be found at moonbakes.co.in and @moonbakes.co and @healthy_moonbakes.co on Instagram. Pricing ranges between ₹300 and ₹500 for desserts and ₹1,000 to ₹1,500 for cakes.*

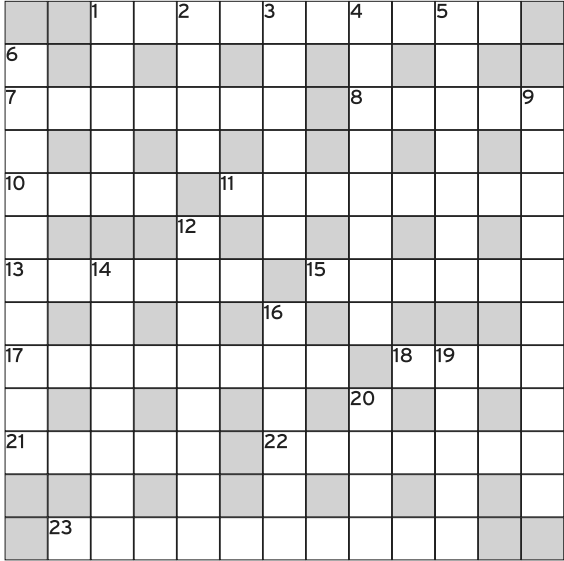
Moonbakes Co.

This bakery-cum-cake studio was founded by Dharani Ranganathan, a home baker who tried her hand at baking during the COVID-19 pandemic and expanded it into a business. “I don’t want to be another baker in town,” says Dharani, who is trying to incorporate exotic flavours that are not easily available in Chennai, into her bakes. “I love travelling, and when I offer European products, I want people to feel like they are experiencing them in those cities, like having macaroons in Paris.”

Knots Bag

Knots Bag takes sustainability and upcycling through a different route by recycling plastic bags and incorporating traditional weaving techniques. After graduating with a degree in Fashion Media Styling from London College of Fashion, VS Thanuseeya chanced upon handmade wire bags in Hong Kong which inspired her to make contemporary designs with wire bags back home. In this journey, Knots Bag has been able to revive the dying art of weaving and has also employed multiple women from villages across Tamil Nadu. “It’s turning art into wearable fashion,” she says. Made from recycled plastic, the longevity of the material is more than that of leather. “The quality of luxury bags degrades, but these bags will last two or three decades,” says Thanuseeya. Knots Bag also gives consumers options to customise bags and wallets. *Knots Bag takes orders on Instagram @knotsbag. Pricing ranges between ₹800 and ₹7,000.*

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13570



- Across**
1 College courtyard (10)
7 Give up (7)
8 Absolute (5)
10 Silent (4)
11 Resonant (8)
13 Debauched gatherings (6)
15 Reprobate (6)
17 Paid attention (8)

- 18 ___ Driver, 1976 Scorsese film (4)
21 Histrionics (5)
22 Worry intensely (7)
23 Absorbent or cushioning material (6,4)
Down
1 Feeling of unease (5)
2 Close adviser (4)



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- 3 Haphazard (6)
4 Overwrought (8)
5 Deflate (3,4)
6 Cynical (4-6)
9 Reader isn’t (anag) — unemotional (10)
12 Pertinent (8)
14 Nazi secret police (7)
16 Get back (6)
19 Prospero’s spirit (5)
20 Dorothy’s canine friend (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated February 8, 2024.
Solution No. 13569

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Crack it up

Chennai's new month-old cafe Egco, is easy, breezy and takes its eggs seriously

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At Egco in T Nagar, where the sun streams through the cafe's seemingly infinite canopies, Giri Tekki and Raksha Ravikkumar, the cafe's co-owners, are whispering to each other. "That person who just walked in – the one with the green T-shirt – is a regular here. Orders the same thing every time – mushroom scramble and coffee," says Giri.

In the one month that this 30-seater cafe has opened, Egco has managed to amass a battalion of regulars who lounge both indoor and outdoor, at this minimalist cafe that serves around 20 varieties of coffee and eggs each. It is evident why. The 10-seater indoor space is replete with natural light, while the

outdoor seating allows the food, coffee and the silence to shine. The beverage selection, offering a range of coffee and some tea options, is competitively priced.

The Chennai audience tends to be rigid with its coffee orders, preferring milk and sugar in it. The cafe has attempted to incorporate these requests, creating crowd-pleasers, even in drinks like espresso. Their biscoff choco bombon may likely leave Italian traditionalists hyperventilating though. Served in a shot glass, the coffee is served atop a bed of biscoff crumble and ganache. My preference shifts to the salted caramel cold coffee, another popular item on the menu, served in well-packaged cans that make it easy to grab and go. The drink is light and cold, perfect for the city's summer.

The food menu is robust too, sporting a



mostly egg-centric menu (Egco expands to eggs and coffee) with sandwiches, quick bites and smoothie bowls. Raksha says that they have incorporated local

Caffeine in the veins (Left) Egco's tzatziki open toast; (below) the cafe in T Nagar.; (inset) curry leaf benedict and a cold brew. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



ingredients like curry leaves in their eggs benedict. The yellow hollandaise, bespeckled with tiny bits of *karuvepillai* green, goes shockingly well, a welcome deflection from the chives that often accompany this American classic. This comes with a bed of well-seasoned fries and a mayonnaise-based dip.

Raksha and Giri have been part of several other

ventures together in the past and have ended up working out of cafes despite having an office space. "I am someone who is pretty critical about the ambience at cafes so I was determined to ensure our cafe was rid of design-based issues. The food also had to be top-notch," she says.

The cafe requires a couple of changes. Although the idea is to serve grab-and-go food, better cutlery will help folks tear and eat the eggs benny, an already messy dish to eat. The owners add that they too are battling the city's rising mosquito population, a problem faced by most other outdoor cafes in the city too.

Egco's regulars however, seem undeterred. There are lines that end up waiting at the location in the evenings, says Raksha. Egco's logo makes it feel like there is a cracked egg on the face of an oblong-shaped critic (much like Rataouille's Anton Ego and me) but the can is a sweet and funny keepsake.

Egco is at 8/19, 1st Cross Street, T Nagar, Near Vidhyodaya. A meal for two costs ₹500. Reach them @egco.in on Instagram.



Nuggets of drama

Over the next two weekends, Chennai will play host to 60 different plays as a part of Poochu's Productions' K.I.S.S. 2024 theatre festival. Across genres and themes, each play staged as a part of K.I.S.S., which expands to Keeping it Slightly Short, will be 15 minutes long. The festival will take place on February 2, 3 and 4, and February 9, 10 and 11, with 10 plays staged on each day. Theatre groups from Chennai and Bangalore will be participating. With Chennai Art Theatre as the festival partner, Denver Anthony Nicholas is the theatre festival's director. @Alliance Francaise de Madras, Nungambakkam, at 1pm and 6pm. Tickets at ₹350 and available on allevents.in

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Growing up in Chennai, Vivek Siva learnt Carnatic music. In another part of the city, Mervin Solomon trained in gospel music.

Little did they know then that many years later, this training would become their USP. Vivek-Mervin, as the duo is known today, is among Tamil cinema's most sought-after composers, because they bring with them two different forms of music that help them dish out interesting, catchy tunes.

"We keep learning from each other, and that helps us," says Mervin, whose collaboration with Vivek has yielded many hit numbers, in films like *Gulaebhagavali*, *Pattas* and *Sulthan*.

Vivek-Mervin's work method is slightly different from traditional music composers who team up with a film director to listen to a situation and then come up with a tune. The duo meet up

The independent route

Composer duo Vivek-Mervin, who last worked on Tamil film *Singapore Saloon*, on the scope for independent music projects

daily at their Virugambakkam studio and work on a musical idea, based on what they went through that day.

"We might walk in humming a melody, or might have heard something on the radio. We pretty much do not have an agenda," says Vivek, "We sit on the piano and put something on – it could be a potential song for a film or a bad tune that we would never play to audiences. But the process remains the same."

That tune may find its way into a film. Or, become an

independent song. "When we compose something without restrictions, it takes wings," adds Mervin.

'Orsadhaha', a popular independent number released in 2018, is the result of one such idea, as is the 'Gulebhagavali' title track.

Changing tunes
Their RJ Balaji-starrer *Singapore Saloon*, which released last week, had three songs and featured singers like Arivu and Ravi G. The duo's upcoming slate of work



We never set out to become film music composers. All we wanted to become was musicians... and that is the role we are playing even today

VIVEK
Music composer

Tunes from the heart Music composers Vivek and Mervin. SHERVIN EBENEZER

includes *Jinn* and *Hitler*. "What pleases us are that they are very different kinds of films, helping us try out unexplored aspects of music," says Mervin.

Jinn features 'Kutty Ma', an 'Instagram-friendly track', as the duo describes it. "The brief from the director was that it should be a dance track that people try out reels to," explains Mervin.

"For certain songs, the brief itself is that," adds Vivek. "It all boils down to decreasing attention span and how songs are consumed. We have evolved from the Eighties when songs used to be about six minutes or even more. In the Nineties, the length came down. In Anirudh's era, the second *charanam* was dispensed off with and now, we have hit the one-minute mark. We are all evolving to cater to that market, but not every song can be worked on in that pattern," he says.

Music composer Anirudh has played a vital role in their career. The three have remained friends till date, with Anirudh even crooning a track under their composition. "All his films and music has worked; that's like scoring a century in every match. It's amazing how consistent his work has been," says Vivek.

In 2024, apart from their film projects, Vivek-Mervin also has independent songs under their VM Originals banner lined up. For this, they have roped in singers like Sivaangi, Nithyashree, Adithya RK, MS Krsna and Harsha Vidyasagar.

As Vivek says, "In the current scenario, audiences don't really care if it's an independent song or a film number. If it's a good song, it will be supported."

A trip to the past

How Avinash Prakash tapped into his childhood memories for *Naangal*

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The generation that grew up in the Nineties is a unique cluster. At the cusp of globalisation and the boom of the IT era, the wheels of progress never moved as fast as they did back then, and a wave of nostalgia hits you harder if you are a fan of the pop culture from that era.

That is probably why speaking with director Avinash Prakash felt like a trip down memory lane. In *Naangal*, an autobiographical, Avinash shares the story of three brothers' traumatic yet transformative and memorable upbringing in a dysfunctional family.

During the pandemic, the ad filmmaker found solace in comic books. "Reading them took me back to the days at an estate where my brothers and I would take turns to play characters from the comics we read. As we studied in a village, I was one of the very few who got to see most of the released films which I would narrate to my schoolmates. That's when I noticed he

storyteller in me. Rewinding those days, I realised that the difficult part of my childhood was also when life was good. I penned it down as a screenplay," he says.

Adds Avinash, "I found it to be refreshing as it did not have an agenda. I finished the screenplay in 15 days and started to find the right actors for it."

Avinash was clear that he wanted the child actors to be from Ooty. "I wanted to tap into how they weren't over-exposed to media and wouldn't ape another hero. The town also still has its innocence intact," says Avinash.

Ask him if the title means 'us' or 'this is who we are', and Avinash opts for the latter, adding "unapologetically" to it. "There were times when I was made to feel that this is something that shouldn't have happened, or shouldn't be told out loud. We may not sit down as a family and discuss this but this journey is what taught us the most."

Naangal had its international premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam's Bright Future section this week



A still from *Naangal* and director Avinash Prakash. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Azerbaijan diaries
What's actor Ajith upto? He is just back from Azerbaijan, where he has finished the schedule of upcoming Tamil film *Vidaa Muyarchi*. Produced by Lyca Productions, the film is written and directed by Magizh Thirumeni. While Trisha Krishnan plays the female lead, Regina Cassandra is also playing a prominent role in the movie that has cinematography by Nirav Shah and music by Anirudh.



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