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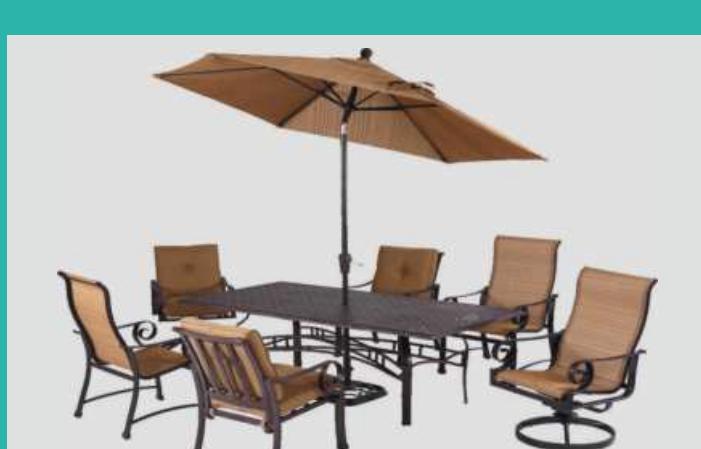
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friday Review

THE HINDU

Back to the epic

'Parishvanga Pattabhishekam' presented chosen episodes from the Ramayana p2

A stage of realism

'Meanwhile Elsewhere' takes a closer look at the dualities of life p3



THE ART ROUTE TO HERITAGE CONSERVATION

The larger purpose behind cultural festivals held in palaces and forts across the country p4

Master of her own moves

Kathak legend Kumudini Lakhia, who passed away recently, stirred the dance world with her radical approach

Chitra Swaminathan
chitra.swaminathan@thehindu.co.in

When you looked at Kumudini Lakhia's gentle, modest and cheerful persona, you could have hardly imagined she was a woman with immense inner strength and a steely resolve. After all, she fought the patriarchal setup in the Kathak world in her own quiet way, and encouraged many young girls to pursue dance on their terms. And this was about 60 years ago, when the maharajs' (male gurus) diktat couldn't be defied. After many years as a soloist, Kumudini designed a distinct vocabulary for group choreography. In fact, she pioneered ensemble works in Kathak, in a way freeing the dance form of its restrictive repertoire and regressive narratives. Her productions, with their contemporary sensibilities, drew the world's attention. Her biggest contribution to dance is transforming the conventional image of a woman performer – from an unquestioning artiste to a thinking one.

From teaching in a small space in her husband's automobile shop in Ahmedabad to starting her school Kadamb in 1965, Kumudini (Kumiben to her students and admirers) was happier being a teacher than a performer. During conversations, she devoted much of the time talking about her students and how she does not want them to merely replicate her ideas.

Aditi Mangaldas and Daksha Sheth, two of the most experimental minds in dance, were trained by Kumudini. Says Aditi, "The ethos at Kadamb was different – teaching continued beyond the class. I remember when we travelled with her, she would encourage us to go around the city, attend performances, interact with people, experience the food...the learning was wholesome. It's from her that I learnt to not be caged by tradition but to introspect and allow it to evolve. As an artiste, she believed in being free and fearless."

Exposed to the works of trailblazing dancers early on in her life, Kumudini, despite her training in traditional Kathak



Guru nonpareil (Clockwise from far left) Kumudini Lakhia at Kadamb in Ahmedabad; during a solo performance; with Ram Gopal; her students performing her popular work 'Atah Kim' and receiving the 'Pandit Achhan Maharaj Kalajyoti Award' from Pt. Birju Maharaj in New Delhi on March 10, 2008. PHOTOS COURTESY: KADAMB & THE HINDU ARCHIVES

under Pt. Sohanlal, Pt. Sundar Prasad and Pt. Shambhu Maharaj, travelled to London to join the pioneering Ram Gopal, who put Indian dance on the global culture map. He introduced her to a broader definition of dance – beyond the body. "When touring with him, I realised choreography is not just about well-conceptualised movements, it's also about well-coordinated lighting, costume, makeup and music," she had said during an interview with *The Hindu*.

These associations and travels served as a catalyst in her constant search for new material. As a soloist, Kumudini blazed through the classical idiom with enormous success, but her hunger for challenges led her to adopt a unique approach. She came up with abstract works, which stood out for their ballet-like jumps and glides and stunning formations. The pared-down costume – she sometimes did away with the *dupatta*, and instead of heavy silk, used skirts in light, breathable fabrics. For jewellery, her dancers often wore only a *maang tikka* and a pair of earrings, in a move away from convention. The music of her works was a contemporary arrangement of Indian classical rhythm and melody.

"I do what I do, not because I want to be called an experimentalist or an innovator. When you are constantly living with the art, it begins to mirror

your thoughts and emotions. So, my dance is what I am," she had said.

Kathak comes from the word *katha* (story) and Kumudini wanted to tell her own stories in her own way. So she came up with works that looked beyond mythology and Radha-Krishna tales. 'Okhaharan', 'Setu', 'Chakshu', 'Suvarna', 'Yugal', 'Duvidha', 'Coat', 'Samanyav', 'Vivarta' and 'Atah Kim' spoke eloquently to a modern audience trying to find a connect with a classical art form. It resonated beautifully with her young dancers too.

Says Rupanshi Kashyap, one of her senior students, "We never experienced a generational gap with Kumiben, because she was always ahead of time. We were an integral part of the creative process at Kadamb. She was delighted when we came up with our inputs to her productions."

During a chat after a performance at Chennai's Kalakshetra, Kumudini had shared how she hates slavish obedience. "My students should never hesitate to question – that is the only way to make learning and teaching exciting."

Bengaluru-based dancer couple Nirupama and Rajendra, in their Facebook post, highlighted how a teacher can leave a lasting impact on her students. "During the last week of February, we visited her. When we told her that her art, her legacy, continues here in the South through many youngsters learning and performing her compositions and her technique, she kissed our hands. Her eyes were moist. She proudly mentioned those students' names who were all doing good work in various cities and different parts of the world. It was great to see Kumiben brimming with pride and she said – 'I don't just teach dance, I create dancers'."

We never experienced a generational gap with Kumiben, because she was always ahead of time. Her students were an integral part of her creative process. And she sincerely valued their inputs

RUPANSHI KASHYAP

CULTURE BRIEFS

Music festival

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha celebrates Nadaswaram Festival and Tamil Isai Vizha 2025 from April 19 to 25 at Vani Mahal, T. Nagar.

On April 19, V. Ramaswamy, managing director, Bhagya Constructions, will inaugurate the festival at 6 p.m. The sabha's Vani Vadhyam Kala Nipuna award will be conferred on nagaswaram artiste Vaduvoor S.N.R. Krishnamoorthy and the Vani Laya Kala Nipuna award will be conferred on thavil artiste Thirupungur T.G. Babu on special thavil.

B. Hemanathan, deputy director

(Arts and Culture Department, Tamil Nadu) will felicitate the awardees.

Concert schedule:

April 19, 7 p.m.: Vaduvoor S.N.R. Krishnamoorthy and Vaduvoor R.K. Dinesh Kumar accompanied by Thirupungur T.G. Muthukumarswamy and Pollachi M. Vijayakumar on the thavil.

April 20, 6.30 p.m.: Kalyanapuram K.G.S. Dhayabaran and K.G.S. Vedhagiri with Mannargudi M.R. Vasudevan and Thirukadaiyur T.G. Babu on special thavil.

April 21, 6.30 p.m.: Adyar Brothers J. Venkatesh and J. Balasubramani with Thirunagur N.K.

Selvaganapathy and Adyar D. Senthilkumar on the thavil.

The concerts to be held under the

Tamil Isai Vizha are: **April 22, 6.30**

p.m.: Chaitra Sairam (vocal), accompanied by V. Deepika (violin) and Kishore Ramesh (mridangam).

April 23, 6.30 p.m.: R. Aswath Narayanan (vocal), with Sayee Rakshith (violin), N.C. Bharadwaj (mridangam) and Anirudh Athreya (kanjira)

April 24, 6.30 p.m.: R.P. Shravan (vocal), with M. Vijay (violin), A.V. Manikandan (mridangam) and Madipakkam A. Murali (ghatam).

April 25, 6.30 p.m.: Radha Bhaskar (vocal) with Shraddha Ravindran (violin), Kumbakonam K. Swaminathan (mridangam) and Madipakkam A. Murali (ghatam)



Dedicated to vaggeyakaras

Natyarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha, presents Vaggeyakara Bharathan, featuring violinist Lalgudivi Vijayalakshmi and dancer Urmila Sathyaranayanan. The event will take place today, 6.30 p.m. at the Sabha main hall. The 90-minute programme, sponsored by Nrithyopasana Trust, aims at enriching the Bharathanatyam repertoire with compositions by vaggeyakaras of Carnatic Music.

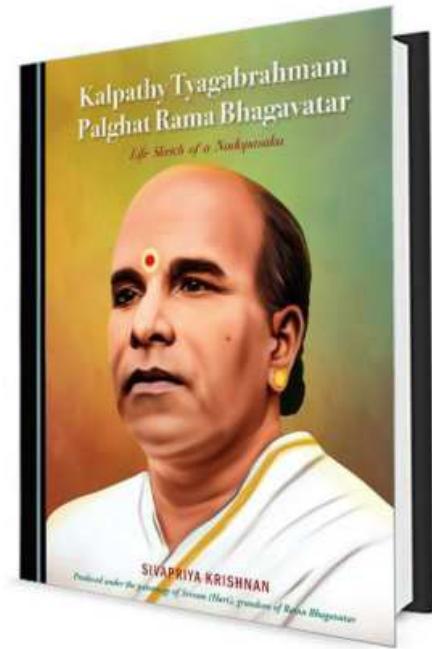


Special listening session

Madurai Mani Iyer Rasikas Association presents 'Guru Sishya Vaibhavam', a special listening session organised in memory of the musician T.V. Sankaranarayanan on April 20, 4 p.m., at P.S. High School, Mylapore. The evening presents live concert recordings of Madurai Mani Iyer and T.V. Sankaranarayanan.

Dedicated to art

The book on Palghat Rama Bhagavtar brings to light the rich musical contribution of the scholar



Akhila Krishnamurthy

Sivapriya Krishnan, a musician and advertising professional, recently turned author with the launch of her book *Kalpathy Tyagabrahmam Palghat Rama Bhagavtar - Life sketch of a Nadopasaka*.

Sivapriya says the book has brought to life the dream of Palghat Rama Bhagavtar's grandson Sriram Hari, who was keen to document the life and works of his grandfather. "Sriram's interactions with his grandmother and father piqued his interest and adoration towards the works of his grandfather. His research led to a huge collection of anecdotes, photos, paper clippings of articles published on his grandfather, speeches by other artists on his grandfather and recordings on 78 RPM from Columbia and Gramophone company," she adds.

Sriram was keen that Sivapriya author the book, which also features drawings by an artist known to Sriram. Interestingly, Sivapriya's maternal great-grandfather was born and raised in Kalpathy. "I re-established a connection with Kalpathy during the book release, when I visited it for the first time," Sivapriya says.

What fascinated Sivapriya about Rama Bhagavtar was his unfettered style of singing. "He was one of the few artists who sang 'Mahima teliya tarama' by Anai Ayya, as a full composition, with 11 or 12 sangathis in the pallavi when it was popular just as a pallavi line for singing Ragam Tanam Pallavi. His recordings for the Columbia and Gramophone Co. Ltd, show that he had honed his skills to suit the needs of a 78 RPM recording environment," she points out.

Rama Bhagavtar trained in the gurukula system for eight years under Umayalpuram Swaminatha Iyer, alongside Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, making him a direct disciple descendant of Saint Tyagaraja, Sivapriya says.

To get a copy of the book, email kamalco@gmail.com

Anitha Guha's 'Parishvanga Pattabhishekam' had episodes from Bala, Ayodhya and Aranya Kandams



Srividya

Over the years, the Ramayana has been reimagined and reinterpreted by various dancers and choreographers, reflecting the richness and complexity of the classic.

As part of Rama Navami celebrations, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan had organised the dance-drama 'Parishvanga Pattabhishekam' by students of Anitha Guha's Bharathanjali.

Conceived and choreographed by Anitha Guha and with music and lyrics by Neyveli Santhanagopalan, this unique production was named 'Parishvanga Pattabhishekam' – a term used in the Valmiki Ramayanam to describe the vatsalyam shown by Rama to Hanuman.

The dance drama, choreographed using both the margam format and dramatic elements, commenced with a dual scene – Rama expressing his sorrow to Lakhmana and Sugreeva

The epic's enduring appeal



discussing his plight with Hanuman. This scene was set to a slow padam to depict Rama's viraha thapam.

Lakshmana is astonished to see his brother's inconsolable state. Hanuman, a personification of modesty, bhakti and mischief, is sent by Sugreeva to check the identity of the two strangers. Hanuman discreetly enquires if they were devas or rishis, knowing very well that they could be neither. What followed was a varnam, where Lakshmana narrates a brief account of the

Steeped in bhakti Students of Bharathanjali performing 'Parishvanga Pattabhishekam'. PHOTOS: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Bala, Ayodhya and Aranya kandams. The scene ended with the sealing of friendship between Rama and Sugreeva.

The fight between Vaali and Sugreeva, choreographed and performed by Thiruchelvam, an alumni of Kalakshetra, had all the elements as visualised by Valmiki. It's a fight without weapons, where two vanaras assert their strength. When Rama mortally wounds Vaali, a shocked Vaali enquires about the righteousness of the act. Rama explains the dharma behind it.

Sugreeva's Pattabhishekam celebrated by the vanaras was presented through a Kadankuthuhalam thillana, where the highlight was the use of mukula and kapitha hastha mudras.

Hanuman's journey to Lanka marks the beginning of Sundara Kandam. His ingenuity in facing and crossing all the obstacles that come his way was depicted well. His encounter with Lankini, the powerful guard of Lanka, and her demise were brought out dramatically. The rhythm interludes by P.R.

Venkatasubramanian, faculty of Bharathanjali, added value to the scene.

The grandeur and opulence of Lanka depicted through an 'asura mallari' (a term coined by Anitha) in raga Rasikapriya successfully encapsulated the 4,000 verses of Valmiki's description of the scene.

Ravana's grand entry, marked by rhythmic nritta, showcased the skill and precision of the dancer. His authoritative words push Sita into a sea of despair and she attempts to end her life. A glimmer of hope comes in the form of Hanuman, who gives her Rama's ring. In return, she gives her chooramani. Later, Hanuman leading the march to Lanka, sings ecstatically 'In ellam jayam, in ellam sugam'.

The costumes, designed by Anitha Guha, were subtle throughout the Kishkindha Kandam and took on a brighter hue at the onset of the Sundara Kandam. Special mention has to be made of compere Revathy Sankaran.

Variety, the spice

At the Chithirai Isai Vizha 2025, Jayakrishnan Unni's concert featured many ragas and songs

G. Swaminathan

Mudhra featured some young Carnatic musicians at its week-long Chithirai Isai Vizha 2025. And, Jayakrishnan Unni's vocal recital established his commitment to classicism.

Blessed with a robust yet

flexible voice, Jayakrishnan kept the tempo alive through the concert – from 'Maal marugan', the Hindolam varnam by Thanjavur Sankara Iyer to the concluding Chandraakauns thillana by T.N. Seshagopalan. He was ably supported by senior vidwans Mannargudi A. Eswaran on the mridangam and V.L. Kumar on the violin.

The lively start was followed by Koteeswara Iyer's popular Hamsadhwani kriti 'Varanamukhava' with swara adjunct. Jayakrishnan switched over to a brief yet bright raga prelude of Purvikalyani for Gopalakrishna Bharati's 'Natamandu naathan adimalare thunai'. Following the niraval on the line 'Jadaiyinil gangaiyum pathi mathiyum', swara streams flowed towards the finale set on panchamam-centric notes. Two brisk yet catchy compositions, 'Sri kamakshi' in Vasantham by Subbaraya Sastri and 'Yarukkuththan theriyum' in Devamanohari by Gopalakrishna Bharati led the concert to the main segment.

Sankarabharanam was the main raga. Jayakrishnan was at his creative best during the raga exploration. With a

verse from Arunagirinathar's Kandar Anuboothi as a prelude, Jayakrishnan's choice was Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar's 'Manadirksaintha mamaalan'. The niraval at 'Samarasa saravanam sarguna bohan' brimmed with energy



Creative
Jayakrishnan Unni. PHOTO:
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

V.V. Ramani

It was an evening meant to celebrate the contributions of three veteran artistes – Ashimbandhu Bhattacharjee (Kathak), Deepak Majumdar (Bharatanatyam) and Aruna Mohanty (Odissi), who performed for the Articulate Festival in Bengaluru.

The introductory number by Ashimbandhu was an ode to the guru-sishya bond shared by Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. He highlighted the relationship between man and god in the piece 'Soyaham', which was set to Dhamaar taal and raga Darbari.

In 'Guldasta', a bouquet of ghazals, Ashimbandhu highlighted the poetic expression using white, black and red fabrics, an urn filled with water and rose petals and a lantern, making for an engaging viewing.

From the moment Aruna Mohanty appeared on stage striking a sculpturesque stance, framed by beams of light, her exploration was a combination of dynamic movements and nuanced expressions.

Based on a text from the *Shvetashadvatara Upanishad*, the first composition 'Shunuya Swaroopa' addressed the omnipotent presence of the supreme power that can only be felt and not seen through the formless Lord Jagannatha. She conveyed with great effect how he impacts every being.

That a villain is not an anti-hero, but a prototype of the nayaka was explored in the second piece 'Pratinayaka'. Citing examples of Narasimha-Hiranyakashipu, Rama-Ravana and Krishna-Kamsa, Aruna emphasised the philosophy 'I am - therefore you are', to highlight that every human being is a blend of good and evil. The melodious music,

lighting design and choreographic patterns blended seamlessly in the aesthetic presentation.

Deepak Majumdar's 'Sur ke Shyam - Tulsi ke Ram,' was an ode to bhakti through the poetry of Surdas and Tulsidas.

The next piece, 'He Govinda He Gopal' spoke about giving up on materialistic life to understand the presence of the Supreme. Using the analogy of elephant as a personification of ego to be detached from the crocodile representing desire, Deepak delineated Gajendra Moksham.

Then came 'Char Pahar', which referred not just to a time cycle but to the four stages of man. Equally fascinating was Deepak's focus on the feet in the bhajan 'Ram charan sukhdayi' to depict the feeling of surrender.

It was heartening to watch a performance that moved at a leisurely pace to unravel the essence of each composition.

Three artistes, many expressions

The Articulate Festival showed how poetry finds diverse interpretations in dance



Well-articulated (From left) Ashimbandhu Bhattacharjee; Aruna Mohanty; and Deepak Majumdar. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Anurita Jadeja

That you get a reality check while watching Yadavan Chandran's 'Meanwhile Elsewhere' is true, that you question the meaning of life and death, attachment and detachment, is a given too. But, what does not happen after watching it is you walking out in relaxed acceptance or quiet submission. This play curates a mental canvas where you encounter extremes in emotions and thoughts, debate internally, assess needs, wants and wishes only to leave feeling lighter, perhaps clearer, by its sheer depiction and portrayal.

Inspired by Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, 'Meanwhile Elsewhere' "confronts surreal contradictions we live with" and as Yadavan, who conceived and directed it, clarifies, "longs to explore the invisible threads that bind us to places, experiences, memories and dreams".

With a cast comprising classical dancer and activist Mallika Sarabhai, award-winning theatre artiste Penelope Deen, Bharatanatyam dancer and drama artiste Lucrezia Maniscotti, and educator and theatre artiste Teertha Bhatt, backed by a terrific team, the production that portrays Marco Polo in all earnestness transports you into a world that oscillates between something incredibly familiar and completely non-existent. If one seeks and leads the audience to a parallel world, another searches for profound insights; one finds connections between the past and the future world and one dares to dream and derive meaning. The very fact that different characters playing Marco exist in one play explains the various layers an individual possesses and how much is unexplored in the realities and world of each individual, each story.

The narrative does not progress from a typical beginning to the middle and an end, but comforts and discomforts you in turns with



A technically sound performance, Yadavan Chandran's 'Meanwhile Elsewhere', makes the audience experience the duality of existence

realities you relate to and meanings you form or understand even when they disturb your acceptance bar.

Having done 13 shows at Natarani, Ahmedabad, since its inaugural during the Vikram Sarabhai International Arts Festival in December 2024, 'Meanwhile Elsewhere', says Mallika, has moved her deeply, especially "the empathy

and absurdity, as also the prophetic situations" it touches upon. For Yadavan, it has been about confronting the surreal contradictions we live with. "The way we chase progress while erasing memory or seek connection while building walls, it has pushed me to reflect on the strange truths of our time," he shares.

protection from the devastating floods that accompany the monsoon, and prevent diseases.

Koch Rajbongshi songs often centre around festivals and religious practices. One of the significant traditions in earlier times, now largely obsolete, is *Hudum Deo* or *Hudum Puja*. This festival, primarily celebrated by women, aims to eliminate prolonged droughts and invoke rainfall. *Hudum* is their folk god and is believed to be the god of rain.

Alongside her studies in political science at A.B.N. Seal College in Cooch Behar, Sakshi is pursuing Sangeet Ratna and already holds a Master's degree in folk dance. She draws inspiration from another folk artiste, Kalpana Patowary of Assam, whom she describes as a versatile performer.

Sakshi's first song, 'Tare na', released in 2021, is based on the *Chatka* style of *Bhawaiya gaan*. This song marked her debut in the Koch Rajbongshi music scene and helped her reach a wider audience.

Sakshi Roy, a young singer from the Koch Rajbongshi community, is on a mission to preserve its culture

Bhawaiya is a traditional folk music form rooted in Northern Bengal, encompassing Rangpur in Bangladesh, Cooch Behar in West Bengal, and the erstwhile Goalpara district of Assam. It is deeply intertwined with the lives of the working class – *mahouts* (elephant keepers), *mahishals* (buffalo herders), and *gariyals* (cart drivers) – and captures their everyday struggles and emotions. The dominant themes revolve around *biraha*, or the pain of separation, often narrated from the perspective of the women left behind. The music's signature long-drawn notes amplify the feelings of longing and sorrow, making it a deeply evocative genre.

Bhawaiya is performed in two distinct styles: *Chatka* and *Dariya*. *Chatka* is lively and engaging while *Dariya* unfolds at a slower tempo, stretching the notes to heighten the emotional intensity of the lyrics.

Despite the Western genre being more popular, Sakshi is determined to delve into folk music and contribute to preserving the millennial-old legacy her ancestors had fought to preserve. The artiste hopes her folk fusion will bridge the connection between older and younger generations, reconnecting them to their roots that were severed centuries ago. She hopes her music becomes a medium for bringing change and inspiring future artistes.

dance. Sakshi spent most of her childhood in Hasimara, and began learning Rabindra Nritya and folk dance forms. She also began singing in the third grade and performed on stage.

Sakshi first gained attention for her singing on social media, which boosted her confidence to perform before audiences. Her videos captured the interest of local music composers and show organisers, leading to performances in Assam. The Kamatapur Autonomous Council occasionally invites singers like her to perform. Recently, Sakshi received an award at the Koch Rajbongshi International Culture and Tourism Festival in Nepal for her song 'Tui'.

Her latest release, 'Ge abo' incorporates the *Mechini Khela*, also known as *Bhedei Kheli*, a traditional puja dedicated to *Teesta Buri*, the goddess of the Teesta River. This ritual, performed by women, seeks to appease the river deity to ensure



The connecting thread Sakshi Roy uses folk music to bridge the gap between the older and younger generations. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Inspiring
Scenes from 'Meanwhile Elsewhere'.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

While the theatrical piece is in progress, you have words reflecting on the screen, allowing you to engage in an exercise that throws questions but follows them up with answers, so you can have a thought-provoking dialogue with your inner self, maybe.

'Why do we build only to be forgotten?'

'We build because we have dreams.'

'What remains when the chessboard is empty?'

'The memory of the game; it leaves silence behind.'

Some lines like 'Every day we

bury the past and call it progress' or 'The higher the walls, the more they conceal' spark an internal debate, switch understanding for reason and evoke the philosopher within. This unconventional theatrical performance at the outset explores the theme of building cities, but what it does better is help with discovering the self, questioning one's purpose in an evolving and fast-changing world.

In a world divided between connection and disconnection, broken by distance and built through cohesiveness, this immersive experience explores the

various facets of life and living, leaving you to wonder about your purpose and existence in the world.

A technically sound performance, 'Meanwhile Elsewhere' does not limit itself to visual appeal but caters to the wholesomeness of sound and music, presentation and view, word and technology, integrating these to create a range of visual offerings depicting moods, feelings and situations. Having essayed a fair share of hit shows in Ahmedabad, Yadavan and Mallika are working towards taking it to national and international stages.



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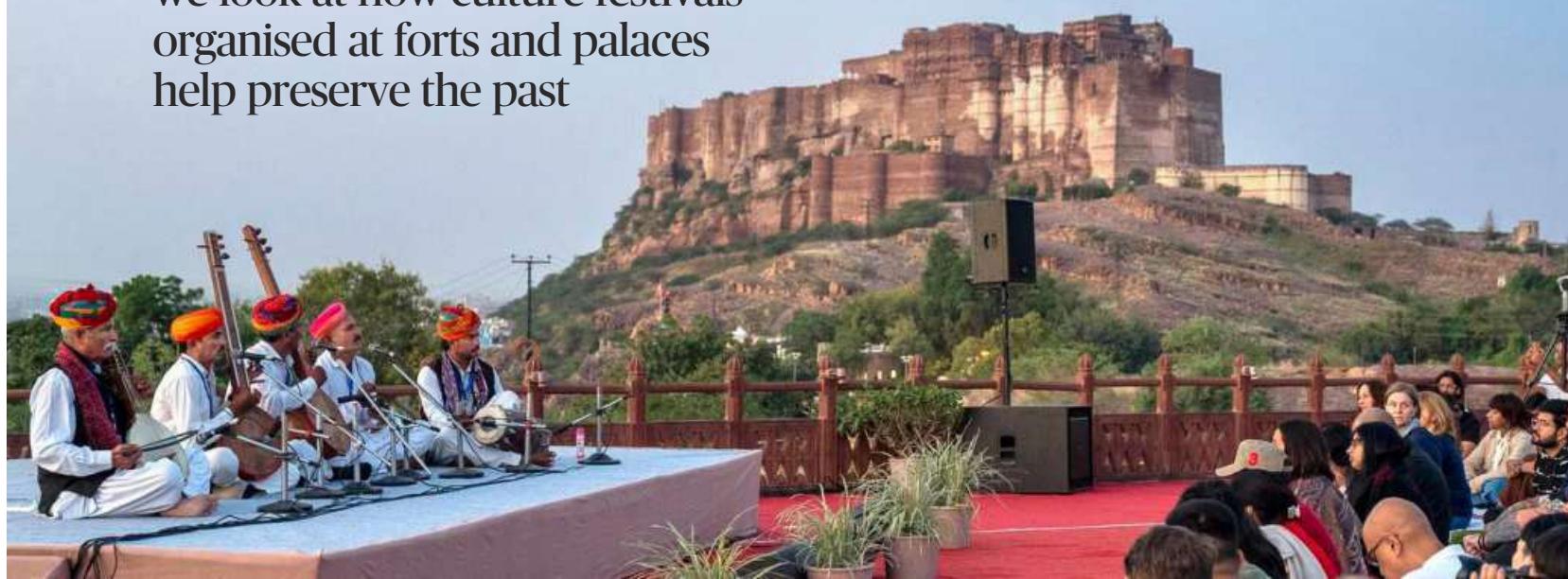
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The artiste as conservationist

Today is World Heritage Day and we look at how culture festivals organised at forts and palaces help preserve the past



Chitra Swaminathan
chitra.swaminathan@thehindu.co.in

Thankfully, I made it to this festival. I have been to Jodhpur earlier but never got to see this gorgeous white marble cenotaph," says Christine from Germany as we stand on the terrace of Jaswant Thada on a chill October morning. It is a perfect vantage point to view Jodhpur, splashed with hues of indigo.

Built in memory of Maharaja Jaswant Singh II, the grand mausoleum is where generations of Rathore rulers have been laid to rest. Its distinct architecture, a synthesis of Rajputana and Mughal styles, appears striking in the stark desert landscape. Often referred to as 'Taj Mahal' of Marwar, it is the venue of RIFF's (Rajasthan International Folk Festival) Dawn concerts and is located a few hundred yards from the imposing Mehrangarh Fort, the main stage of the festival.

The Mehrangarh Fort also plays host to the annual Sacred Spirit Festival, held in February. In fact, many of Rajasthan's magnificent monuments transform into performance arenas during specially curated music festivals.

Says Sarah Chawla, co-founder and director of Magnetic Fields Festival (held in December), "Such events bring together like-minded people to celebrate culture, and they are also places of discovery and exploration."

The festival venue, the 17th century Alsasir Mahal (a battle-hardened fort) in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu district, gives its guests a peek into the glorious past of the Shekhawati dynasty, along with music. "What we are trying to do is showcase Indian heritage in the best possible way, even as we reflect on the country's contemporary cultural landscape and present cutting-edge global artistes from underground music cultures.

During the festival, the desert converts into a sprawling township complete with accommodation for nearly 4,000 visitors," says Sarah.

RIFF was launched 17 years ago, it was not just about organising concerts, it was about curating an experience. Today, under the aegis of the Mehrangarh Museum Trust, it has become a significant platform for roots music and global collaborations. The audience footfalls have been sharply increasing each year. This not only augurs well for RIFF but also for our effort in preserving and popularising the heritage of the region," says Divya Bhatia, director and curator of the festival.

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CALENDAR

Dedicated to Rukmini Devi

Rukminidevi Natyakshetra Foundation, launched 28 years ago inspired by the ideologies of Rukmini Devi Arundale, presents Kala Sampada - 2025 at Rukmini Arangham, Kalakshetra. The compositions of Tamil composers Muthuthandavar, Marimuthu Pillai and Arunachala Kavirayar will be presented in 'Tamil Moovar' on April 18. It will feature vocal and instrumental music. On April 20, the dance drama 'Aarupadai Veedu' will be staged. Choreographed by S. Premnath, it has music by Radha Venkataraman and lyrics by Va.Ve.Su.

Music programme

Debut show

Amrit Dhwani School of Kathak presents 'Pratham' on April 20 (6.30 p.m.) at Krishna Gana Sabha. The school's presentation will feature 25 dancers who will explore both nritha and abhinaya through traditional and new songs. Tickets on bookmyshow

Tamil play

Under the auspices of Narada Gana Sabha, Mali's Stage presents its Tamil play 'Kannan Vandha Neram' on April 19, 6.45 p.m. at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall.

In memory of a maestro



Krutagnya Trust presents 'Lalgudi Sir - A true inspiration', a talk by senior mridangist K. Arun Prakash, on the genius of the veteran violinist Lalgudi Jayaraman. The event, organised on the occasion of his 12th remembrance day, will take place on April 22, 6 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. Girijashankar Sundaresan will lend vocal support and Shreya Devnath will play the violin.

Musiri day

Musiri Chamber presents a violin recital by R.K. Shriram Kumar with Arun Prakash on the mridangam and Purushothaman on the kanjira on April 20, 6.01 p.m., at 48/2, (old no: 28/2), Musiri Subramania Road, Mylapore.

Veena concert

The Music Academy will feature Vinayak Vaidyanathan's veena recital, as part of HCL concert series, on April 21, 6 p.m. at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Santhosh Ravindrabharathy (mridangam), and K.M. Likith (morsing) will accompany.

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History meets art
(clockwise from far left) Manganiyar artistes performing at RIFF's Dawn Concerts at Jaswant Thada in Jodhpur; a martial artiste at Dhauli-Kalinga Mahotsav in Odisha; dancer-couple Nirupama and Rajendra at Khajuraho; and Chidambara Vilas palace at Chettinad
PHOTOS: RIFF, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, A.M. FARUQUI & M. MOORTHY



Destination Tamil Nadu

The Chettinad Heritage and Cultural Festival is aiming to be a game changer down South. Launched three years ago, the four-day event combines architecture, food and the arts to draw visitors to this ancient preserve of the Chettiar. Says Jacob George, the festival director and general manager, The Bangala: "We realised we needed to do something to project the heritage of the town known for its grand mansions that seamlessly blend native design elements and art deco influences. It is a collaborative effort, with a special committee curating the programme. Much of the inputs comes from Aachi (Meenakshi Meiyappan). Going by the response, we hope to replicate this at a few other historically significant towns in the State."

Two other states that have successfully taken the cultural festival route to heritage conservation are Madhya Pradesh and Odisha.

From the 100-year-old Tansen Music Festival and the 51-year-old Khajuraho Dance Festival to the 50-year-old Ustad Allauddin Khan Samaroh at Maihar, Madhya

Pradesh's Department of Culture has been working to lend vibrancy to these events. While the Tansen Festival takes place near the legendary musician's tomb at Behat village in Gwalior district, the Khajuraho dance festival is held against the backdrop of the historic temples. Built by the Chandela dynasty, the temples are known for

their intricate sculptures and architectural splendour. The State's Tourism Department also holds the Orchha Festival – a convergence of folk and classical arts, craft and cuisine. It is held in the historic town of Orchha, dotted with stunning palaces.

Says N.P. Namdev, director, Department of Culture, Madhya Pradesh, "The tourist inflow is at its peak in these places of heritage interest during the festivals. At Khajuraho, each year, hotels get booked months ahead of the festival. Our primary aim is to showcase heritage and, over the years, we have realised how our classical and folk arts have served this purpose wonderfully."

Odisha has been celebrating its heritage through a formidable line-up of festivals. The Konark Dance Festival, launched in 1986, is held in an open-air space overlooking the 13th century Sun Temple. It also hosts near Bhubaneswar, the Raja Rani Festival of Music and the Mukteswar Odissi Dance Festival. Both are held in ancient temples by the same names. The Dhauli-Kalinga Mahotsav, a collage of classical and martial art forms, is held at the foothills of Dhauli, a symbol of Buddhist legacy in Odisha.

According to Biswajit Routray, additional director, Odisha Tourism, "Apart from helping us promote heritage tourism, these festivals have boosted the economy

of the small towns that hosts them. Since locals have begun to understand the significance of tourists, community engagement is helping us maintain these monuments. It's an ideal packaging, where one helps the other thrive."

The term 'heritage' is not limited to monuments, it can include parks too. Delhi's Sunder Nursery (known as Bagh-e-Azeem during the Mughal era) is one such. A popular venue today for music and theatre fests, it is spread over 90 acres and houses six 16th century tomb-gardens.

The art-heritage model has not been able to make inroads into Southern India. Very few cultural festivals are organised at heritage spaces. Karnataka's Hampi Festival and Tamil Nadu's Mamallapuram Festival are exceptions. While the former stages diverse art forms amidst historical ruins, the Mamallapuram Dance Festival is held near the Shore Temple, a Pallava period monument, between December and January, the only time when the region experiences pleasant weather. But this is also when the globally popular Margazhi festival is held in nearby Chennai and, therefore, there is a lack of public patronage for the Mamallapuram fest.

Despite the challenges, culture departments and heritage conservationists remain hopeful and are drawing up innovative ideas to keep the curiosity about the past alive.

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