

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Sabha-hopping during Margazhi
Kutcheri talk: Which artistes performed where and how? **P2, P3 and P4**

Movements inspired by verses
Natya Darshan celebrated Tamil literature through dance and music **p5**



THE RHYTHM AND REVELRY OF DANCE

Methil Devika and her ensemble of musicians heightened the appeal of Mohiniyattam **p6**



watched in rapt attention. Towards the very end, Vyjayantimala moved towards the back and in a flash, young Kodhai transformed into Goddess Andal.

The very next day, I pestered my mother to ask my Carnatic music guru Vidwan Madurai N. Krishnan to tell me how the 30 songs were set to music. He shared the fascinating tale of how he would patiently notate the songs, along with other senior students of the great Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, for five long years. When the recordings of the Tiruppavai were eventually released in the voice of M.L. Vasanthakumari, the songs were played every day from 5 a.m. in many temples in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in the 1960s and 1970s.

Andal was an impossible ideal for any young girl to emulate. After all, before she was 13, she'd written the Tiruppavai.

It was not until I was in my late teens that I came to know about the existence of the second book of poems *Naachiyar Tirumozhi*. I chanced upon it when my mother was looking for some special pasurams for one of my dances. She was reading the opening verses where Andal challenges Cupid. Here was not a pining victim of Manmada's love arrows. Her voice challenged, coaxed, cajoled, taunted, pleaded and even threatened. My mother thought it was too bold for a 19-year-old in the 1970s to dance those verses, but they stuck in my head.

When I started to explore the 143 verses of the *Naachiyar Tirumozhi*, it was like entering a dark tunnel filled with riddles and hidden streams that murmured in contrast. A more mature person was speaking. "How do my Krishna's lips taste?" She asks the conch. Such direct passion was contrasted with words of a helpless young girl playing with sand castles. The verses hurtle toward Nature, and then the anguish of a young woman – who poured her heart into a long love letter to Krishna, only to be met with silence – pierces through. As I read the final verses, 'I

This brilliant Tamil poet of 7th century CE was among the earliest in the pantheon of mystic female dreamers and the only one to have her own temple. She was a living tradition, who burst boundaries of identity and geography.

will pluck my breasts and fling it at Him who is so cold and heartless,' I wept quietly.

How could I capture these shifting moods in dance, I wondered. In the years leading to 2000, Andal was not in vogue any more on the dance circuit. But I felt Her voice in my dreams, urging me to tell her story now that my own life had found me single again. It began with a solo in 1998, then a small group

presentation 'Naachiyar' in 2000. Another followed in 2011 with my sister ('Andal-Andal'). Each expression was a step towards understanding this brilliant mind.

In my newest ensemble work, 'Naachiyar Next', I have travelled the furthest – probing her thoughts and life and trying to connect the dots that stop abruptly in the text. Centuries after Andal's time, the Vijayanagara king Krishna Devaraya provided a beautiful conclusion to the story, when Vishnu Narayana takes Andal into His being as bride and favourite consort.

Each step felt like I was being guided. Every choreographic challenge was answered after a restless night. The choice of verses, the order of the scenes – it seemed as if I was just a channel for Her story to be told in a bold and new way. The vague mist that I first saw as a nine-year-old had become a murmuring stream and a strong flowing river inside me.

I always carry a pocket version of the Tiruppavai with me. There is a volume by my bedside. I often listen to M.L. Vasanthakumari, who made the 30 songs unforgettable. The young girl who dissolved into Vishnu in Srirangam was barely 20 years old, but my Andal has grown with me. She is a woman, grey at the temples, walking with a slow but regal gait.

Crowds part, trees sway, elephants trumpet and the birds sing when she appears. My Andal is my shadow, my guide and companion.

The sacred influencer

Dancer-choreographer **Anita Ratnam** reflects on how Andal, her eternal guide and companion, has shaped modern feminine expression

“She watched and waited as you emerged into this world”. These were grandmother Saraswathi's words to me, as I was preparing for my arangetram. I was an excited nine-year-old who loved to dance and was learning choreography for the first pasuram from the Tiruppavai, Andal's iconic garland of verses adoring her favourite deity – Krishna.

My special dance debut was at my maternal uncle's wedding reception in Madras.

I was most excited about my transformation as the young and dreamy poet. I loved the side top knot (kondai) and the Tulasi garland around my neck. How was I to know that She would invade my heart, body and mind in the years to come!

My grandmother felt I danced the Andal portion the best. "I think She was watching and smiling," she said, as she stroked my hair. I urged her to tell me the Andal story all over again. I grew up listening to the Tiruppavai being rendered at home, and was especially taken in by the 29th pasuram, in which Andal vows to be reborn again and again only to serve Krishna. It was as if her entire body was humming with prayer and song. How could someone so young dream, sing and write with such amazing clarity?

Years later, during her final days, my grandmother

told me: "Your destiny is to dance and sing about Narayana, like Andal. The narrative of marriage is not meant for you!" While I memorised the entire 30 Tiruppavai pasurams, I did not begin to dissect the words until much later. I understood the self belief, complete surrender, supreme confidence and fierce joy that comes with deep love.

Andal's poems are like a riddle. On the outside, they are all sweet and about unrestrained devotion but reveal a tender, bruised and vulnerable voice. This brilliant Tamil



poet of 7th century CE was among the earliest in the pantheon of mystic female dreamers and the only one to have her own temple. She was a living tradition, who burst boundaries of identity and geography.

But who was Andal in my mind? How did she look? What did her voice sound like? Did she have a long braid? Why the top knot? What was her routine after the month of Margazhi? What did she like to do best? Vague shapes swirled around inside my head. My mother had the precious *Chitra Tiruppavai* books in which each of the 30 verses were illustrated, but the back cover held my attention. It carried the photograph of dancer Vyjayantimala, dressed in white portraying Andal. Finally, I could put a face and a body to my many questions.

It was Vyjayantimala and her choreography of all the 30 verses as a dance production that made it all come together for me. 'Sanga Tamizh

Maalai', a historic stage presentation at the Madras Music Academy, was a seminal moment.

My sister Pritha and I sat in the first row in the balcony. I leaned forward as the curtain rose, and

Divine connect From Anita Ratnam's Andal-inspired 'Naachiyar Next'. PHOTO: RISHI RAJ

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P Srihari

Some concerts resonate beyond music, shaped as much by lived journeys as by the notes that unfold on stage. For Amritha Murali, her recital was one such defining moment. She took the dais with violinist and Sangita Kalanidhi-designate R.K. Shriramkumar, her mentor of over two decades. For the disciple, the experience could scarcely have been more overwhelming or gratifying; for the guru, it marked a quiet culmination – witnessing a carefully nurtured musical vision in full flight.

That this significant concert fell on a Thursday and opened with Dikshitar's guru-vaara kriti 'Bruhaspathe' in Atana, set to Tisra Triputa, lent the evening a sense of inevitability. Amritha's spontaneous acknowledgement of the day's significance, shared after the song, heightened the moment.

Venerated as a violinist of exceptional depth, Shriramkumar is also a scholar steeped in musical and textual knowledge, a vaggeyakara and a music composer whose creativity has brought numerous works to life. Senior percussionists N. Manoj Siva (mridangam) and C.P. Vyasavittala (kanjira) completed the ensemble, embellishing the recital with their expertise.

Amritha continued with Tyagaraja's rare Sanskrit kriti 'Mamava satatam' in Jaganmohini. After rendering the song, built around vocatives and steeped in poetic beauty, she capped it with swarakalpana in two speeds.

Well-spaced phrases, flowering with the raga's characteristic gamakas and suffused with a pleading tone, marked the Anandabhairavi



alapana. There was little hint of the surprise in store as Shriramkumar completed his solo turn. When Amritha began 'Nee samana deivamu' in Rupakam – a composition on Kamalamba seldom heard before, in place of the listed kriti 'Marivere' – it evoked Syama Sastri's lyrical style and gait. The suspense deepened as she embarked on niraval at the pallavi opening, each phrase brimming with melodic allure. The ensuing swara exchanges in second speed shimmered with perfect accord, carrying the kriti to a vibrant close. Amritha revealed the composer – Shriramkumar.

The celebrated shloka 'Kasturi tilakam' from Krishnakarnamrutam, was sung as a prelude to Dikshitar's 'Chetasri balakrishnam' in Dwijawanti-Rupakam, bringing out the raga's immersive

A defining moment

quality. A brief, sweet violin reprise flowed into the kriti, and Amritha's rendition underscored its languid grace. Tyagaraja's 'Patti viduva radu' in Manjari followed, setting the stage for more elaborate explorations.

The main suite was Kamboji, and Amritha began the raga alapana on a serene note in madhya sthayi, unfurling its contours through absorbing,

Sangita Kalanidhi-desginate R.K. Shriramkumar accompanied Amritha Murali in a concert that included three Dikshitar kritis, a rare Tyagaraja composition in Sanskrit and two of his own

gamaka-laden phrases and looping movements. Dwelling in the upper register, she punctuated it with nimble forays. The violin essay added its own measure of charm. A third Dikshitar kriti emerged – the relatively rare 'Sri valmikalingam' in Khanda Ata tala.

After rendering the kriti with elan, Amritha presented a niraval on the charanam line 'Shankaram somakulambika amboja madhukaram'. The phrase carries the raga mudra and portrays Shankara as the honey-bee to the lotus, Goddess Somakulambika. Well-nuanced swara exchanges then gave way to the rhythm-rangers Manoj and Vyasavittala, who revelled in exploring the uncommon tala arithmetic. Showcasing versatility and clarity, they

Perfect harmony Amritha Murali with R.K. Shriramkumar (violin); N. Manoj Siva (mridangam) and C.P. Vyasavittala (kanjira). PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

wove engaging patterns through their dialogue, culminating in a lively korvai.

Amritha unveiled another new composition by Shriramkumar – a pallavi in Kapi, set to Misra Triputa (Chatusra nadai) in two kalai, once again on Kamalambika. After brief delineations of the ragam and tanam that evoked Kapi's karuna rasa, she took up the pallavi 'Karunatmika pinakadhara priya maam paathu sarvada – kamalambika', meaning 'May Kamalambika – the embodiment of compassion and beloved consort of the bow-bearing Shiva – protect me at all times.'

Notably, the raga mudra is derived from the final syllable of 'karunatmika' and the opening of 'pinakadhara'. The karuna rasa, intrinsic to Kapi, further resonates with the opening epithet 'karunatmika'. Equally striking in the rendition was the ragamalika segment, thoughtfully aligned to the theme and tradition. Highlighting the distinct handling of Kapi in the Tyagaraja and Dikshitar paramparas, it traversed ragas sharing the name but differing in melodic identity – moving from Kapi to Devakriya, Saraswati Manohari, Kalavati and Ritigowla.

The well-ideated concert befitting the occasion concluded with a Thayumanavar verse in ragamalika virutham, followed by the song 'Angai kodumalar' in Chenchurutti and Nadanamakriya and the Thiruppugazh 'Kumaragurupara' (Ragamalika-Misra Chapu).

THE MUSIC ACADEMY



Flavour of a legacy

Aishwarya Vidhya Raghunath's concert reflected the Brinda tradition with nuanced padams and javalis

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Audience engagement often determines whether a concert has merely met the mark or given joy. Achieving this requires not just musical competence but thoughtful planning, an awareness of the audience and the ability to shape one's presentation in real time. Aishwarya Vidhya Raghunath's concert demonstrated a keen understanding of these dynamics.

One of the defining features of her performance was the clarity of raga exposition. From the opening phrases, her raga outlines were unambiguous, establishing identity

early and sustaining it through well-structured development. This was particularly evident in the expansive alapanas of Kannada and Begada ('Sri mathrubhootham' and 'Nadopasana'), where ideas unfolded logically without distracting detours. Violinist Hemalatha's alapanas were musically assured and equally appealing.

In 'Nadopasana' (Tyagaraja), the niraval at 'Tantri laya swara raga vilolulu' stood out for its judicious choice of focal points and measured elaboration. The subsequent swara passages were marked by clarity and restraint, reinforcing the main ideas rather

than overwhelming them. The tani avartanam by B.C. Manjunath sustained audience interest, with Bhagyalakshmi M. Krishna's morsing adding distinctive rhythmic colour.

The choice to open the concert with the Kalyani Ata tala varnam 'Vanajaksha' proved effective in immediately establishing energy and attention.

'Upacharamu chese' was a thoughtful selection from the extensive Bhairavi list of Tyagaraja, with the niraval at 'Ekantamunanu janaki erpadi unnadani' explored mainly in the upper octave. The final melkala swaras, centred around the panchamam, resulted in a compact yet engaging exchange between the vocalist and violinist. 'Mayamma' in Ahiri exemplifies how minimalism, emotional truth and raga integrity can converge into a composition that demands depth over display – making it both a performer's challenge and a rasika's quiet reward. Aishwarya's rendition was poignant and uncluttered, aligning with Ahiri's tonal ethos.

The alapana in Aishwarya's Gamakakriya RTP stood out for its measured gait and emphasis on gamaka-laden phrases rather than scalar brightness. Set to Khanda Triputa tala in khanda nadai, the pallavi unfolded with a steady sense of proportion. The pallavi line, 'Madhuralaye mathanga tanaye' was drawn from a composition by R.K. Shriramkumar. Ragamalika swaras were rendered at one avartanam each in Lalitha, Nariritigowla, Natabharanam, Vegavahini and Sri – ragas closely associated with Muthuswami Dikshitar's compositional world.

Aishwarya's grounding under Vegavahini Vijayaraghavan, daughter of T. Brinda, was evident in her approach to padams and javalis. This was most apparent in her rendering of the Atana composition by Tiruvottiyur Thyagarajan, presented as a slower version rather than the medium-tempo interpretation also sung in the Dhanammal family, with noticeable variations in sahitya and presentation. The javali 'Naarimani neekai' in Khamas stood out for its conversational tone. She concluded with a Hanuman Bahuk by Tulsidas to mark Hanuman jayanti.

Ragamalika reimagined

Rithvik Raja lent a novel touch to the alapana with quick raga shifts



Thoughtful approach Rithvik Raja with Sruthi Sarathy (violin); K. Arun Prakash (mridangam) and Madipakkam A. Murali (ghatam). PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Rithvik Raja is known for approaching his art with sensitivity and awareness, consistently shaping his concerts with a distinct outlook. His presentation featured three Dikshitar kritis, among other compositions. He was accompanied by Sruthi Sarathy on the violin, K. Arun Prakash on the mridangam and Madipakkam A. Murali on the ghatam.

Early in the kutcheri, niraval was presented for 'Shri nathadi' (Mayamalavagowla) and 'Sarasa samadana' (Kapi Narayani). Sruthi effectively magnified Rithvik's ideas in these sections, while Arun's steady tempo and use of contrast at appropriate moments helped build the concert in a thoughtful manner. Murali mirrored Arun's approach and blended with the ensemble.

A ragamalika alapana with quick raga shifts created a sense of unpredictability about what raga would emerge next. Sruthi deserves appreciation for her responsiveness and ability to quickly perceive and follow Rithvik. This novel attempt connected well with the audience, as Rithvik clearly seemed to enjoy what he was doing. The rendition of this long kriti eschewed loudness and was presented at a sedate pace. While the alapana was engaging, it was doubtful whether the audience could decipher that it

comprised the ragas of Dikshitar's 'Chaturdasha Ragamalika', especially since the order was reversed.

Rithvik's presentation of the magnum opus 'Balagopala' stood out for its adherence to the Muthuswami Dikshitar sampradaya, with the shuddha daivatam (D1) featuring prominently. The manodharma sections comprised several relevant prayogas that highlighted this distinctive usage. From an academic perspective, presenting compositions in this manner is important to showcase Dikshitar's unique approach. Rithvik excelled in this respect by demonstrating, in multiple ways, how the shuddha daivatam combines with the nishadam, with sparing use of the chatushruti daivatam (D2) in his alapana, lending a different shade to the raga. His niraval and kalpanaswara in 'Vainika gayaka' were also centred on the D-N relationship and made for delightful listening. Some distinctive phrases in the nishadam to upper rishabham region stood out. Sruthi's Bhairavi alapana sparked with clarity.

More efficient time management could have allowed for a longer, unhurried RTP; however, the vocalist and violinist presented a well-structured Purvikalyani RTP in Khanda Triputa.

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December 26, 4 p.m.: Jayanthi Kumaresh (veena); 6.45 p.m.: Ramakrishnan Murthy.
December 27, 4 p.m.: Amrutha

Venkatesh; 6.45 p.m.: Sanjay Subrahmanyam.
December 28, 4 p.m.: Sudha Raghunathan; 6.45 p.m.: Kunakudi M. Balamurali Krishna.
December 29, 4 p.m.: Vignesh Ishwar;

6.45 p.m.: Abhishek Raghuram.
December 30, 4 p.m.: A. Kanyakumari and L. Ramakrishnan; 6.45 p.m.: K.S. Vishnudev.
December 31, 4 p.m.: Trivandrum N.J. Nandini; 6.45 p.m.: Sikil Gurucharan.



Variety, the essence

Nisha Rajagopalan's kutcheri was a journey through ragas and composers

Aishwarya Raghunathan

Nisha Rajagopalan chose a Hanuman kriti and stuti to begin and conclude her concert, which fell on Hanuman Jayanti. The programme moved from Gopalakrishna Bharati through Ponniah Pillai, to Mysore Vasudevachar and Papanasam Sivan, and further to Banudasa and Tulsidas, with the foundational presence of Tyagaraja and

Muthuswami Dikshitar anchoring the repertoire. The opening stretch reflected Nisha's open-throated, expansive vocal style. A virutham on Hayagriva ('Gyananandamayam'), followed by 'Buddhir balam' on Anjaneya, both in Nattai, set a purposeful tone. This led to Dikshitar's 'Pavanatmaja aagaccha', where the raga's assertive contours were clearly delineated. The kalpanaswaras found sensitive reinforcement in H.N. Bhaskar's violin, while the mridangam-kanjira pairing of J.

SRI PARTHASARATHY SWAMI SABHA

Vaidhyathan and S. Sunil Kumar reflected measured coordination. Following 'Aadiya paada darisanam' in Darbar by Gopalakrishna Bharati, the programme turned to 'Ninne nammithi' by Mysore Vasudevachar in Simhendramadhyamam. The kriti was introduced with a brief alapana, after which the niraval and kalpanaswaras at 'Pannagendra sayana' unfolded with notable momentum. Contrasting the vigour of Simhendramadhyamam, the choice of Nilambari introduced a rakti-laden repose. 'Amba nilambari' by Ponniah Pillai was rendered with measured intent – fleeting breath interruptions did little to impede the musical arc. The mridangam-kanjira partnership was well-calibrated, complemented by a violin accompaniment that remained understated and elegant. The transition to the main piece

Accent on bhakti Nisha Rajagopalan with H.N. Bhaskar (violin), J. Vaidhyathan (mridangam) and S. Sunil Kumar (kanjira). PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

was shaped by Papanasam Sivan's 'Nambi kettavar' in Hindolam, rendered in a brisk tempo. The focus then shifted to Kedaragowla through Tyagaraja's 'Tulasi bilva', framed by a succinct alapana, niraval at 'karunato', and neatly-articulated kalpanaswaras. This led to a neat and measured tani avartanam, where aesthetic sollukattu choices took precedence over rhythmic complexity. A palpable shift in mood followed with Banudasa's abhang 'Vrindhavani venu' in Bhimplas, after which Tulsidas's 'Hanuman Chalisa' emerged as the emotional fulcrum of the evening. The audience responded with involvement, lending the segment a collective resonance.



Tamil music takes centrestage

The 28th Tamil Isai Vizha, hosted by Kartik Fine Arts will be inaugurated today, 5.30p.m. at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan main auditorium, Mylapore. Art patron Nalli Kuppaswami Chetti, the chief guest, will present the 'Tamil Isai Vendhar' title to violinist duo M. Lalitha and M. Nandini and 'Isai Chudar' title to vocalist Preethi Sethuraman on the occasion. Senior musician Neyveli R. Santhanagopalan will be the guest of honour.



The festival commences with Nisha Rajagopalan's vocal concert at 7 p.m. A series of concerts with focus on Tamil compositions will be featured during the festival.

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A well-rounded concert

S. Mahathi showcased bhava, technique and imagination

SRI THYAGA BRAHMA GANA SABHA

Kalyan Gopalan

Mahathi's concert was all about a confident blend of tradition and imagination, marked by expansive raga essays and neatly-chiselled swara passages. She was well-supported by Kamalakiran on the violin, Delhi Sairam on the mridangam and Sunil Kumar on the kanjira, with the percussionists settling in effortlessly right from the beginning. Mahathi opened with M. Balamuralikrishna's 'Sakara sadguna' (Sowrashtram, Adi), setting a steady pace. Tyagaraja's 'Inta kannanandamemi' (Bilahari) followed, where Sunil Kumar's crisp

response at 'Ni japamulu vela ni' stood out for its tonal balance. Mahathi chose Muthuswami Dikshitar's 'Hariharaputram shastaram' (Vasantha, Eka), elaborating the raga with poise. The korvai, structured around a 5-7-9 framework, was intellectually engaging, with clear delineation of the respective nadais. Mahathi's strength lies in balancing technique with bhava. Her alapanas, niravals and swarakalpanas revealed depth and clarity, though brief vocal strain surfaced in faster passages. Oothukkadu Venkata Kavi's 'Eppadithan en ullam' (Nilambari) brought a soothing contrast, while 'Navasiddhi petralum'

(Karaharapriya, Misra Chapu) by Nilakanta Sivan was rendered with emotive conviction. Tyagaraja's 'Edari sancharintura' in the rare Sruti Ranjani added variety. The main kriti 'Enduku dayaradura' (Thodi), was the concert's highlight. Mahathi's measured lower-register alapana turned into a detailed exposition, seamlessly touching upon Charamati through subtle graha bhedam. Kamalakiran complemented this with brief shades of Charamati and Kalyani, even hinting at Lalgudi Jayaraman's Mohana Kalyani thillana. The niraval at 'Tyagaraja vinuta taragacharita' and the Misra Chapu *kuraippu* were well-handled. Delhi Sairam's korvai led naturally into a lively and engaging tani avartanam, enriched by fluent exchanges with Sunil Kumar. Mahathi brought an assured and aesthetically satisfying evening to a close with 'Venkatachala nilayam' (Sindhu Bhairavi), followed by a ragamalika rendering of Bharatiyar's 'Suttum vizhi chudarthaan', and a spirited Hamsanandi thillana by Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar.

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Change as a constant

Sanjay Subrahmanyman’s kutcheri was about both convention and bold departures



High note Sanjay Subrahmanyman with S. Varadarajan (violin) and Neyveli Venkatesh (mridangam). PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Bala Shankar

Sanjay Subrahmanyman’s Carnatic journey has travelled through many phases. However, the one constant aspect has been experimentation. His concert might have been familiar to his regular rasikas, but others needed to retune to his style. There were no *ghana* or important ragas except the ‘Viriboni’ varnam (Bhairavi). Even more striking was the curious trade-off between experimentative expressions and pleasant sound. That said, Sanjay continues to maintain very high sruti fidelity, voice range and long sustains. Time has not dented those abilities. The varnam was followed by a blitzkrieg of ‘Ongi ulagalanda’ (Arabhi, Andal) with crisp swaras. Shades of Sanjay’s penchant for new syllables and phrases were evident in the Ritigowla raga and much more in later pieces.

‘Paripalayamam’ (Swati Tirunal, Rupakam) was conventional by his standards. Suryakantham has one well-known kriti, ‘Muddumomu’ by Tyagaraja and even that is sung rarely. The alapana was intelligent and for the most part, Sanjay strove to underline its unique flavour. ‘Muddumomu’ rendered in a slower pace was attractive – a perfect proof of Sanjay’s experimentative mind.

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The kriti’s prominence in a concert came alive, including in a crafty niraval. Hemavati was picked for the RTP. There was some influence of M.D. Ramanathan’s vocal effects and Madurai Somu’s signatures. Unique as they were, some of the syllables were clearly unfriendly to the ear. Sanjay has always put extra life into his tanam singing with intense raga bhava

and this one was no different. ‘Tirumuruga thiruvurul tha’ in Adi two kalai at ‘sama’ eduppu was well rendered, amidst trends of complex tala structures in pallavis. S. Varadarajan toed largely his own convictions. His alapanas embraced time-tested contours. Sanjay’s ‘Ambara chidambara’ in Janaranjani (tuned by him), which has an attractive chittaswaram, ‘Ramasami doothan’ in Bahudari (Arunachala Kavi) and ‘Kani nilam vendum’ rendered in his imitable style warmed the hearts of his ardent supporters. Credit should go to Sanjay for building a band with strong musical value and repertoire. Varadarajan and Neyveli Venkatesh (mridangam) were, as usual, in perfect sync with Sanjay’s singing as the trio seem to share a special bond. Sanjay demonstrated that his major departures from conventional vocal music tenets continue to find a home amongst his flock. For the rest, listening is as much an experiment as for him in producing that music.



Mohanam set the mood

Shashank’s music blended classicism with contemporary sensibility

Kalyan Gopalan

Carnatic flute concerts that combine technical brilliance with depth of expression are relatively rare. Flautist Shashank S. achieved this with ease in his concert, supported ably by L. Ramakrishnan on the violin and Patri Satish Kumar on the mridangam. Shashank’s music blended strong Carnatic classicism with contemporary sensibility. He opened the concert with a breezy Mohanam, presenting Tyagaraja’s ‘Evarura’ in Misra Chapu. Patri Satish Kumar’s gumki strokes were measured and resonant, complementing the flute’s tonal glide. The Tisra kuraippu stood out for its clarity, and brief tabla-like phrases lent a fleeting Hindustani flavour. The exploration of the pentatonic scale was engaging, capped by a thoughtfully constructed korvai. This was followed by Tyagaraja’s ‘Atu kaaradani’ in Manoranjani, set to Adi tala. Shashank’s articulation was soulful and the niraval passages were brisk, punctuated by intricate rhythmic patterns. While Patri occasionally steered the rhythmic discourse assertively, the exchanges retained coherence. Shashank structured the concluding uttarangam using a 5-7-9 pattern, lending symmetry to the korvai. A highlight of the concert was Syama Sastri’s ‘Sankari Samkuru’ in Saveri, rendered in Adi tala (tisra gati). The composition’s meditative depth came through effectively, with Ramakrishnan’s

BRAHMA GANA SABHA



violin responses marked by sensitivity and restraint. Patri’s mridangam accompaniment was both aesthetically pleasing and structurally sound, reinforcing the raga’s gravitas. To restore momentum, Shashank followed this with Muthaiah Bhagavata’s ‘Samaiyamidhe’ in Budhamanohari, delivered at a brisk pace. The main item of the evening was a Ragam Tanam Pallavi in Hemavati. The pallavi line ‘Samaanama sabhapathi sadasiva trilokame unakku sari’ was set to Adi tala. Notably, while the violin and mridangam were tuned to G scale, Shashank alternated between flutes tuned to C and G (the panchama of C). His tanam, played on the smaller G-scale flute, featured evocative glides and well-defined phrasing. Raga excursions into Ranjani and Sahana were handled with finesse, and the khanda nadai kuraippu built steadily towards a satisfying return to Hemavati. Patri Satish Kumar’s tani avartanam was fluent and energetic, with crisp Khanda nadai passages. The concluding korvai was structured seamlessly, leading to the pallavi. Shashank concluded the concert with a bhajan followed by Swati Tirunal’s ‘Vishveshwara darisana’ in Sindhu Bhairavi, leaving the audience with a lingering sense of repose.



Brisk tempo Kashyap Mahesh with Thiruvaarur Bakthavathsalam (mridangam), N. Guruprasad (ghatam) and V.L. Kumar (violin). PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Ranganathan N Iyer

Kashyap Mahesh, a disciple of the legendary musician T.V. Gopalakrishnan and Karaikudi M.S. Mani, has a pliable voice that traverses all three octaves with ease. Kashyap opened the concert with ‘Mathe malayadhwaja’, a daru varnam by Muthaiah Bhagavata in raga Khamas. This was followed by ‘Sri mahaganapati ravatummam’ in Gowla set to Misra Chapu tala, with brisk swaras in the charanam line ‘Prakashakaro’. A brief raga alapana in Ritigowla in all three octaves with ‘Cheravadhemira’ by Tyagaraja in Adi tala was the next piece with equally brisk swaras in ‘Merakadura’, which was apt in keeping with the tempo of the kriti. A raga alapana in Lathangi followed Ritigowla, with an emphasis on phrases covering kakalinishadam, shuddha daivatam, panchamam, madhyamam and the antara gandharam, the hallmark of this scale-based raga. Papanasam Sivan’s ‘Venkataramana’ in Rupaka tala was chosen with a niraval at the charanam segment ‘Alarmelmangai manala’,

Rich raga tapestry

Kashyap Mahesh rendered a richly embellished Abheri alapana

MUDHRA



followed by kalpanaswaras, with the final swara in a temple gopuram pattern, culminating in a beautifully-rendered muthaipu. ‘Unnadiye gati’, a composition by G.N. Balasubramanian, in raga Bahudari set to Adi tala, preceded raga Abheri. The raga alapana in Abheri was a detailed exposition using the chatusruthi daivatam. The beautiful phrases with subtle nuances of the raga were well-brought out.

‘Bhajare re manasa’ in Adi tala (rendu kalai), a composition by Mysore Vasudevachar, was rendered with emotion, followed by swaras in two speeds. The kuraipu swara with a muthaipu brought the rendition to a grand finale. V.L. Kumar’s violin sketch of the ragas in Abheri and Ritigowla stood out for the sruthi suddham and bhava-laden phrases, so characteristic of these ragas. Thiruvaarur Bakthavathsalam on the mridangam and N. Guruprasad on the ghatam lent able support, with an exciting tani avartanam. Kashyap Mahesh concluded his concert with a devotional piece in Bageshri, composed by Madurai Somasundaram, followed by a thillana (Maharajapuram Santhanam) and a ‘Tiruppugazh in Suddhasaveri.

The one-stop reference

No other book has meticulously documented Muthuswami Dikshitar’s oeuvre as the *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini*

Suganthi Krishnamachari

Rajshri Ramakrishna analysed Muthuswami Dikshitar’s compositions in publications other than Subbarama Dikshitar’s *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini* (SSP). Rajshri said that in the 33 books she had gone through, there was no Dikshitar kriti not found in SSP. She went through 21 Telugu books, of which 17 have notations. The earliest Telugu book *Sangita Sarvartha Sara Sangrahamu* came out in 1859. The Tachur brothers brought out four books. In *Sangita Swayambodhini* (1892), there are two kritis with notation, one of which is ‘Vatapi’. Rajshri said that the process of introducing sangatis wherever possible had begun quite early. There are eight Tamil books with notations, of which Thiruppamburam Natarajasundaram Pillai’s *Dikshita Kirtana Prakasika* has 50 compositions. The raga of the kriti ‘Bhaktavatsalam’ is given in *Gayaka Parijatamu* and other texts as Mandari, but as Vamsavati in SSP. Rajshri said that Vamsavati was a scalar raga, with uneven tetrachords, making it possible to introduce another note to change the raga. This could be the

reason for the mention of Mandari as the raga. ‘Chetasri’ is given as Dwijavanti in other publications, but as Jujavanti in SSP. Rajshri said ‘Akhilandeswari’ (Jujavanti) might have already been in vogue, and to differentiate, they might have given Dwijavanti for ‘Chetasri’. From *Sangita Swara Prasthara Sagaramu* (1914), you can infer that codification was taking place and attempts were being made to put some grammar in place. This work says Dikshitar kritis follow one of two formats – ati chitratama marga and chitratama marga. The former has one melodic unit in a kriya, and the latter has two. ‘Srimahaganapathim’ (Gowla) comes under ati citratama marga, and ‘Arunachalanatham’ (Saranga) under citratama marga. In the Malayalam work *Sangita Rajarangom* (1928) by A.S. Renganatha Ayyar, ‘Sri kamalambike’ (Sri raga) is noted in Ata tala. The author has just mathematically arranged the whole song. In the kriti ‘Venkateswara’ (Megharanjani), we have the words ‘Yettappa bhupati’ in SSP, but ‘Yadava’ is used in place of ‘Yettappa’ in other publications. SSP mentions the composer is Kumara Yettappa. ‘Venkateswara’, ‘Kamalaasanaadhi’



THE MUSIC ACADEMY



(Brindavani) and ‘Nikhilananda’ (Saveri) are kritis attributed to Dikshitar in many publications. Maybe the sahitya was by the Rajah and the music by Dikshitar. ‘Venkateswara’ is said to be in Megharanji in all publications, but it is Megharanjani in SSP. In Chinnaaswami Mudaliar’s *Oriental Music in European Notation*, ‘Gurumurthe’ is a nottuswara, but it is a keertanai in SSP. There are five works that have two extra avarthas of sahitya in the charanam of ‘Balagopala’ (Bhairavi). For ‘Sarasa dala netra’ (Atana), Chinnaaswami Mudaliar gives a metronomic speed of 144, which is the equivalent of

singing one kalai fast. He tries to define the kalapramanam in a very quantified way. He has incorporated all the gamakas such as nokku and odukkal in the staff notation. Both Indian and European systems seemed to draw inspiration from each other. Subbarama Dikshitar had the idea to reduce the number of swaras, by introducing signs and symbols on top, maybe to facilitate sight reading as in Western music. SSP shows the contours of Mohanam in the pallavi of ‘Narasimha agaccha’, where it goes to tara sthayi, comes to mandra sthayi and finishes on ‘Sa’. But this is not seen in other publications. For ‘Sri viswanatham’ (Sri raga), kampita gamaka is given for ‘ri’ in SSP. Usually, there is a kampita for ‘ri’ only in Madhyamavati, not in Sri. Orikkai is given for gandhara in SSP. This kind of gandhara is usually seen in Manirangu, not in Sri. Rajshri played two audio clippings of ‘Mamava pattabhirama’ (Manirangu), one by Brinda and Mukta and the other by M.D. Ramanathan. Both follow the notation of earlier publications and begin on ‘ri’, the way we begin Madhyamavati. But the notation in SSP is different. Sangita Kalanidhi-designate R.K. Shriramkumar observed that Mandari was not a part of the Dikshitar parampara at all. He said that T.L. Venkatarama Iyer pointed out to D.K. Pattammal that ‘Akhilandeswari’ was not a Dikshitar kriti.

Grace woven in rhythm

An ensemble of musicians elevated Methil Devika’s Mohiniyattam with each note blending with her artistry

V.V. Ramani

At times, words are inadequate to convey the experience of ‘Anandam’. That is how one felt after watching Methil Devika’s Mohiniyattam performance. From the cholkettu to the mangalam, the dancer-choreographer kept the audience spellbound, as the grace, beauty and lyricism of the dance form unfolded. From the carefully curated compositions and the musical rendition to the choreography, every aspect was seamlessly woven. Devika had an excellent team of musicians, but what enhanced the experience was the manner in which each instrument was used with a lot of thought and ideation. The sudden shift from the mridangam to the sounds of the chenda for dramatic effect, soft responses by the flute at intermittent intervals, and the majestic sound of the veena heightened the impact. A ragamalika taalamalika cholkettu interspersed with ‘Rajarajeshwari Ashtakam’

composed by Adi Shankar marked the beginning of the evening’s performance. A simple question from a young boy wanting to know why there were so many peacock feathers on the crown of the dancer in Krishnattam, was answered in ‘Song of the Feather’ on the sthalapuranam and Krishnattam of Guruvayoor temple. The devout Samudri of Kozhikode gets a darshan of Krishna, and composes Krishna Geeti in praise of Guruvayoorappan. The leitmotif of the peacock feather formed the focal point in this composition, and the manner in which the dancer depicted it at vantage moments made a strong visual impact. The depiction of the peacock was noteworthy. Methil Devika showcased with finesse the varied shades of emotions, be it in the padam by Swati Tirunal in Dhanyasi raga or the Asthapadi ‘Priye charuseele’ tuned in raga Suddha Dhanyasi. The progression from bhakti marga and sringara bhava

culminated in an intense, philosophical plane, with Devika exploring the body’s chakras, mandalas and yantras in ‘Kamalamba Navavarnam’. Meera Rammohan on vocals, Kalamandalam Krishna Gopinath on the mridangam and the maddalam, Trivandrum Sajith Bippin on the chenda and the edakka, Vinoth Kumar Koppam on the flute, Pala Vaiju N Reji on the veena and Ajeesh Menon on nattuvangam offered immense support to Devika.

Moods and movements Methil Devika’s Mohiniyattam. PHOTO: M. SRINATH



CALENDAR

Celebrating music and dance

● **Hamsadhwani** will feature the following performances as part of its annual NRI festival, taking place at Youth Hostel, Adyar. Details: Today, 5 p.m.: Prameela Mandyan (vocal); 6.45 p.m.: An instrumental ensemble, curated by Grammy award winning violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan. December 27, 5 p.m.: Sankrith Ramani (vocal); 6.45 p.m.: Siddharth Kaushik (vocal) . December 28, 5 p.m.: Savitha Namuduri (vocal); 6.45 p.m.: Shrisruthi Sundarrajan (Bharatanatyam). December 29, 5 p.m.: Venkat Guru Prasad (vocal); 6.45 p.m.: Ritika Iyer (Bharatanatyam). As part of the series, Hamsadhwani and The International Consortium of Performing Arts Organisations



(ICPAO) presents the Youth Cultural Ambassador awards 2025 on December 30 at 5 p.m. On January 1, 2026, 6.10 p.m., the R. Ramachandran award of Excellence will be presented to V-excel Educational Trust, followed by ‘Mahadevam Mahasenam Bhaje,’ a

thematic production by the students of Anitha Guha’s Bharathanjali. Lyrics and Music are by P.R.Venkatasubramanian. On January 2, 2026, 5 p.m., performances by differently-abled artists as part of the Margazhi Matram festival will be followed by Sudha Raja’s Choir and vocal concerts by Karaikal Jaishankar, Akshaya Parthasarathy and Namagiripettai Gokul.

● The seventh annual music and dance festival of **Shakthi Sangita Sabha** will be conducted in two phases: From December 27 to January 4, 2026, and from January 5 to 9, 2026. At Shakthi Palace Kalyana Mandapam, Valasaravakkam. The first phase will feature music performances at 4.30 p.m. (by young musicians) and 6.15 p.m. (seniors) while the second phase is dedicated to dance.



The curtains go up with Bhavya Hari’s special concert at 4.30 p.m., followed by Aishwarya Vidya Raghunathan’s performance tomorrow at 6.15 p.m. The dance festival, from January 5 will platform solo and group performances by up-and-coming artists. The event is non-ticketed.

Special concert

Naadhabrahmam has organised a series of programmes on the occasion of Vaikunta Ekadasi to be held from December 30, 6 p.m. to December 31, 6 a.m. at Sri Sudarshan Kalyana Mahal, Nanganallur. On the occasion, Cuddalore Gopi will be honoured with the ‘Naadha Bhagavatha Siromani’ title by Sri Ramananda Saraswathi of Srirachakra Rajarajeshwari Peetam, Madurai, who also inaugurates the festival. This will be followed by Namasankirtanam and ‘Bhaktha Vijayam’ by Cuddalore Gopi and Sri Ramananda Saraswathi, and a series of music concerts. Schedule: 10 p.m.: Sreeranjane Kaushik. December 31, 12.01 a.m.: Abhanga Divyanamam by Shriram Sundar and team; 2 a.m.: Kalpalathika Ravi G; and 4 a.m.: Hari Agnisarman Kappiyoor.

BGS dance festival

Brahma Gana Sabha’s annual dance festival is taking place at TAG P.S. Dakshinamurthy Auditorium, Mylapore, till January 25, 2026. The month-long festival, inaugurated yesterday, features dance performances by both senior and young artists. Time: 5 p.m. - 7.30 p.m.

Chandi homam

Sri Sai Darshan Trust has been conducting a sahasra chandi homam from December 21. It will continue till December 31 at 594, Sai Nagar, Alamathi Post, via Red Hills. The event includes chanting of Devi Mahatmiyam and Lalitha Sahasranamam parayanam. In the evening the idol and paduka of Shirdi Sai Baba will be taken out in a procession around the temple to the accompaniment of Vedic chants.

Title for senior musicians

Jai Sathguru Fine Arts, Porur, conducts the Nadha Laya Mahostav from January 1 to 4, 2026 at Sri Durga Lakshmi Saraswathi Temple, Porur. The five-day non-ticketed festival features performances and and presentation of titles – Nadha Laya Mani award to mridangam exponent Trichy Sankaran and Sangeetha Gyana Mani award to violin exponent V. V. Subrahmanyam. Guru Karaikudi Mani Endowment prize will be given to T.M. Sudharshan.

Remembering Chandralekha

SPACES Arts Foundation, Besant Nagar, presents the 19th Chandralekha Memorial Events, which will be held on its premises on December 29 and 30. December 30 is the dancer’s death anniversary and SPACES has been annually organising the event in her memory.

Chandralekha, a legendary dancer-choreographer was a founder-trustee of SPACES and her contribution has been significant to the world of dance. She staged many choreographic productions, that opened up SPACES for exploring contemporary content in classical Indian dance.

This year, SPACES will present four prominent classical dancers from Kerala, who have been exploring new possibilities within their respective forms. The line-up is as follows: December 29, 5 p.m.: Kuchipudi dancer Kavya Harish will present pieces from Kuchipudi Yakshaganam with Pasumarti Rattaiah Sarma on the nattuvangam; 6.30 p.m.: Vinitha Nedungadi’s vignettes from G. Sankara Kurup’s translation of Tagore’s *Gitanjali*. December 30, 7 a.m.: Bharatantayam dancer Rajashree Warriar’s ‘Mardhalam/Maddalam - The resilient’. At 10.30 a.m. there will be a round table — ‘Exploring contemporary within classical forms’ — led by Prof. M.V. Narayanan



(former Vice Chancellor, Shri Shankaracharya Sanskrit University, Kalady, and former acting Vice Chancellor, Kerala Kalamandalam Deemed to be University). It also includes Usha Nangiar, Rajashree Warriar, Vinitha Nedungadi and Sreelakshmy Govardhanan.

This will be followed by Koodiyattam exponent Usha Nangiar’s interpretation of ‘Ahalya’ at 6.30 p.m. The event is open to all.

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FARNAZ