

fridayReview

THE HINDU

The young brigade
Dancers and musicians showcase their skills at different festivals in the city **p2**

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ON A JOURNEY TO DISCOVER DIFFERENT SOUNDS

Dhruv Ghanekar's 'Voyage 2' is an amalgam of music from across the globe **p4**



Who's the next opera star?

Talented tenors and sopranos from around the world will gather in September for Operalia, the global opera competition, which will be held in India for the first time

Narendra Kusnur

Come September, Mumbai will get to hear talented tenors and sopranos from across the globe. In a week-long affair, the final round of the popular Operalia competition will be held at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA). Founded by legendary tenor Placido Domingo in 1993, Operalia has played a special role in the world of opera, with winners getting amazing opportunities.

"It's the first time that Operalia is being held not only in India, but also in south Asia," says NCPA chairman Khushroo N. Suntook. Adds Placido, who will also preside over the jury, "I first performed in India at a concert conducted by my friend Zubin Mehta in 2009, to mark his father Mehli Mehta's centennial. I look forward to reunite with the Indian audience."

To be held from September 15 to 21, the competition invites participation from singers between the ages of 20 and 32, covering all voice types. Out of hundreds of applicants, the auditions of the leading 30 or 40 singers are shortlisted. According to Placido's son Alvaro, who is also Operalia's vice-president, "The pre-judges look at qualities such as technique and musicality. The judges in the final round consider various intricacies to choose the best singer. We do not have separate categories for men and women, as the idea is to choose the most promising voice. It's a process that has worked."

Though opera has a limited following in India, and is focused around the metros, the news of hosting Operalia has been welcomed.

Says Mumbai-bred British soprano

Patricia Rozario, "It is a prestigious competition and the NCPA has been the place for music-making. Our audiences and musicians will have a chance to hear the high levels of performance from around the world."

Drawing an audience
The opera circuit can involve full-fledged operas, or events involving operatic singing. Among staged performances, the tendency in India is to have more comic operas than serious ones, as they are easier to understand. Though the overall audience is limited, shows have drawn full houses. As opera fan Cawas Engineer says, "Many people look at these shows as a social outing. But some end up taking more interest in the genre."

Adds Asad Lalljee, curator of Royal Opera House, Mumbai, "Though people are exposed to more global cultures, opera is essentially a foreign concept, involving a foreign language. So when we choose productions, we have to make sure they are accessible to the general audience."

According to Patricia, selecting the right opera makes a huge difference. "We did an Italian opera, Domenico Cimarosa's *The Secret Marriage*, at the Royal Opera House in Mumbai. I knew the story was perfect for India because it was a comedy about various types of marriages. Our four shows were sold out. The singers sang in Italian, and the audience loved the comedy and the music."

Similarly, Khushroo feels Indian audiences have a sense of operatic understanding because of their love for song and dance through movies, a feature also found in opera. In 2022, the NCPA hosted

Austrian maestro Johann Strauss II's *Die Fiedermaus* and Hungarian composer Ferenc Erkel's *The Viceroy Bank*. It also has regular screenings of famous operas. In 2019, the Opera Gala featured the Symphony Orchestra of India (SOI) conducted by Zane Dalal with New Zealand tenor Simon O'Neill and soprano Amanda Atlas. It also gets acclaimed opera singers for the SOI seasons. In February, American mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke performed the repertoire of French composer Hector Berlioz in a show conducted by Martyn Brabbins. "I was happy to see such a wonderful and appreciative audience in India. Martyn is the ideal collaborator, and he's positive," she says.

For its part, the Royal Opera House has hosted opera shows since it was restored in



The stage is set (Clockwise from left) From Operalia-2021 at Bolshoi Theatre in Russia; soprano Sasha Cooke performing during SOI's Spring 2024 season as Martyn Brabbins wields the baton; and Patricia Rozario in 'Don Giovanni' opera. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & NARENDRA DANGIYA



2016. Early performances featured Patricia and her husband, tenor Mark Troop, and the Royal Opera Gala by Delhi-based Neemrana Foundation. Besides a tribute to famed Mumbai opera singer Celia Lobo, who passed away recently, spearheaded by her daughter Deirdre Lobo, the venue has hosted intense workshops conducted by Mark.

The budgets required to support international productions are generally high. Embassies, consulates and international cultural organisations are the best potential collaborators.

One of the focal areas in the community is to train opera singers. Institutions such as the Neemrana Foundation, Delhi School of Music and Delhi Chamber

Choir, which have produced promising talent like soprano Vaibhavi Singh and tenor Gaurav Vohra, have played a role. In 2009, Patricia and Mark started the 'Giving Voice to India' project.

Intensive programme
Says Patricia, "When we first came on a tour, we heard singers from Mumbai, Delhi, Pune and Goa. There was an eagerness to learn, and we started visiting India three times a year to conduct an intensive programme of technique, repertoire and pronunciation of European languages. It was five days of work for six hours a day, with active participation and listening. All sessions were recorded to help with regular practice. Based on the response,

we were able to put 'Giving Voice to India' on the map."

Patricia points out that there are many choirs in India and the standard of choral singing has improved. "However, opera demands greater development of vocal soloists. Local productions of opera are infrequent and at a low level. Today, quite a few young Indians study music abroad and we look forward to a time when they can come back to India to perform in a production," she says.

If anything, the forthcoming Operalia in Mumbai may help create new audiences for the genre. As Alvaro Domingo says, "One hopes it encourages young singers from India to learn opera."

Who knows, there might be an Indian winner some time.



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PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

Adithi Sriram puts her best foot forward at the Aadi Naatya Vizha

Manasa Vijaylakshme. C

A dancer enjoying her own performance adds beauty to the recital and is a joyous sight for the audience as well. Adithi Sriram, a disciple of Meenakshi Chitharanjan, performed her solo Bharatanatyam recital as part of the Aadi Naatya Vizha 2024, presented by Brahma Gana Sabha. She commenced with ‘Ananda narthana ganapathim’, a composition of Oothukadu Venkata Subbaiyer, set in raga Nattai and Adi tala. Next came the centrepiece of the evening, the Daru varnam ‘Maate malayadwaja’. This composition by Muthiah Bhagavata is dedicated to Meenakshi, the presiding deity of Madurai. Adithi elaborated on the

The joy of dancing

story of Meenakshi’s birth. It is said that king Malayadhvaja of the Pandyas was deeply troubled because he had no heir. Following the advice of the devas, he performed a yagna, and from the sacred fire emerged Meenakshi. She was raised to become a capable ruler, and when the time came, she declared her intention to conquer the eight directions and rule the world. Eventually, she reached Mount Kailash, the

abode of Shiva. Seeing His divine form, she fell in love, and Shiva promised to come to Madurai to marry Meenakshi. The composer describes the goddess as an epitome of beauty and courage. This piece is set to raga Khamas and Adi tala. Adithi’s performance was marked by precise expressions and movements. The enthusiasm she displayed added charm to the recital.

Following this came the song ‘Madhura nagarilo’, which narrates the playful antics of Krishna. The piece describes how a young gopi, who is on her way to sell milk is intercepted by Krishna. She pleads with him to let her go and promises to stop on her way back, when the sun would have set and the cows have been taken to their sheds.” This composition by Chittoor Subramaniam Pillai is set in Anandabhairavi raga and Adi tala. Adithi’s lively dancing matched the mood of the song. The concluding piece was the tillana in raga Dhanashree and Adi tala, a composition by Swati Tirunal. Adithi came across as a promising youngster, who knows how to put her training and imagination to good use.

New journey

Amrutha S. Kumar performed her first solo recital recently



V.V. Ramani

There are some performances, when the artiste takes time to warm up, and when that happens the audience gets drawn into the art. So it was at Amrutha S. Kumar’s debut solo recital. Overcoming her initial inhibitions, the dancer presented an impressive recital, organised as part of Pandurangam Kamalakshi dance endowment by Kanagasabhai Karik Fine Arts. An Adi tala tisra nadai, Gambhiranattai Mallari composed by Bhagavatulu Seetharama Sharma was the opening number. Amrutha presented the piece with grace, and there was clarity in the adavus. The K.N. Dhandayuthapani Navaragamalika varnam was about the heroine seeking the help of her sakhi to go and fetch Shiva. Amrutha’s sancharis were relevant and conveyed the emotions well, but a more imaginative exploration of ideas would have enhanced the presentation. Conducted with a flourish by

Sasirekha, the extensive first jathikorvai in varying kalapramanam and the shorter theeramanams that followed were danced in a leisurely pace. The varnam was choreographed by Leela Samson, with jathis set by Karaikudi Krishnamoorthy. The melody of raga Kapi drew the audience into Krishna’s world in the Purandaradasa kriti ‘Jagadhodharana’. The composition speaks of how Yashoda is oblivious to her son’s divine stature. Amrita’s Vatsalya bhava depiction was endearing. The Brindavana Saranga Swati Tirunal composition ‘Chaliye kunjan mo tum’ offers great scope for visualisation of the lyrics and the dancer did her best. For the line ‘Sunie koyal ke’, Shashidar’s melodic flute enhanced the impact. The performance ended with a Lalgudi Jayaraman Sindhubhairavi thillana. Sasirekha Rammohan wielded the cymbals, Chaitra Sriram was on the vocals, Nagai Narayanan on the mridangam, Kandadevi Vijayaraghavan on the violin and N. Shashidar on the flute.

Scoring as a team

Vocalist Sivaganesh and the accompanists set the concert on the right path

Kalyan Gopalan

A well-crafted two-hour concert for Kedaram Trust was presented by a group of unassuming artistes, with a creative bent of mind. Madurai Sivaganesh began his concert with Muthiah Bhagavata’s ‘Shakti ganapathim’ in Nattai. With Ragul on the violin providing the right support, Sherthalai Ananthakrishnan on the mridangam and Sunil Kumar on the kanjira steered the concert like a drive on a German autobahn, setting the right rhythm. Sivaganesh trod a road less travelled in a vivadi raga Nabhomani singing Tyagaraja’s ‘Nayadavanchana’. The percussion accompanists’ kalapramanam was soothing, providing the right tonal effect to the kriti’s mood. Syama Sastri’s ‘Ninuvin mari galada’ in Ritigowla came next. Sivaganesh was able to touch the lower register with ease and clarity, and his creative space in kalpanaswaras and alapanas were wide. The camaraderie between Sunil and Ananthakrishnan was conspicuous, complementing each other well.

Music and math

In ‘Nanu palimpa’, Sivaganesh demonstrated loyalty to his lineage by seamlessly shifting the tonic note (grihadedham) briefly from raga Mohanam to Madhyamavati. The niraval chosen by the lead singer in ‘Nadaci vaccitvo’ was elaborate and exhibited the right blend of music and math. The kalpanaswaras were embedded with intricate math with kuraippu in Tisram. The tani avartanam was a detailed one, where both Ananthakrishnan and Sunil Kumar demonstrated impeccably their intricate calculations. Unlike other concerts, they launched all their korvais from *samam* to *idam* and they chose kuraippu in Khandana nadai. Overall, the thani was not only cerebral, but also enjoyable with farans and sarvalaghush.

Ananthakrishnan’s choice of mridangam (*kappi*) and his style reminded of guru Karaikudi Mani. Sivaganesh concluded the concert with a soothing Ashtapadi ‘Sanchara dadhara’.

Talented duo

Young and talented sisters Nidhi and Gauri Chandrasekhar started their concert with Thanjavur Sankara Iyer’s ‘Maal marugan shanmugan murugan’ in Hindolam. This was followed by a breezy ‘Jaya jaya ramanatha’ in Nattai by Narayana Tirtha. They packaged their one-and-half-hour concert in a manner that it didn’t have any dull moment. They were ably accompanied by Sreelakshmi Bhat on the violin. Sreelakshmi’s exposition of Mohanam was elaborative. Nidhi and Gauri complemented each other well, projecting their respective strengths. It took some time for them to settle down and their rendition of ‘Sri kantimatim’ in raga Hemavathi was more fluent and detailed. They chose to do the niraval at ‘Shuddha tamraparnita’ with good support from Sreelakshmi. Jaidev’s mridangam accompaniment was simple and measured (the bass side could have been tuned well for a better balanced sound). His brief thani started in Tisra nadai and he ended the final korvai, structuring it in a manner that it organically led to the line ‘Shuka shaanakadi’, which the singers chose to launch the kalpanaswaras.

The concert included a kriti in Devagandhari (‘Kshithija ramanam chintaye’) and ‘Jagadodharana’ in Kapi, and Arunagirinathar’s Thiruppugazh ‘Erumayil erivilaiyaadum’ in Ragamalika covering ragas such as Bageshri, Hamsanandhi, Kamboji and Kedaragowla. The concert concluded with ‘Karunai Deivame’ in Sindhubhairavi and Patnam Subramania Iyer’s thillana in Khamas. The young sisters can do well with right guidance and rigorous practice.



Annual fest (Left) Sivaganesh with Ragul (violin), Ananthakrishnan (mridangam) and Sunil Kumar (Kanjira). (Top) Nidhi and Gauri Chandrasekhar with Sreelakshmy and Jaidev. PHOTOS COURTESY: KEDARAM

An RTP with an unusual combination of ragas

Ramya Kiranmayi Chaganti highlighted the uniqueness of Carnatic legend Balamuralikrishna’s compositions

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha recently organised a vocal concert by Ramya Kiranmayi Chaganti as part of the legendary M. Balamuralikrishna’s birth anniversary celebrations. Ramya, who is based in Vishakhapatnam, is the granddaughter and disciple of Ivaturi Vijayeswara Rao. She is currently learning from Pantula Rama and MSN Murthy. Coming from a rich lineage of music, Ramya naturally excels in the pronunciation of Telugu

lyrics. Her two-hour tribute concert, included many of Balamuralikrishna’s compositions. Ramya was accompanied by Mantha Sri Ramya on the violin, Akshay Ram on the mridangam and Hari Kishore on the kanjira. Starting with the varnam ‘E nadamulo’, which stands out for its explicit and heavy usage of the shatruthi daivatam, Ramya moved on to a medium-paced ‘Shri sakala ganadhipa’ in Aarabhi. Melakarta ragas Balamuralikrishna composed songs in all 72 Melakarta ragas when he was barely a teenager. Hence, there are numerous compositions that



Rich lineage Ramya hails from a family of musicians. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

can be chosen for elaboration. Ramya chose the 10th Melakarta raga Natakapriya for alapana. Subsequently, a compact niraval was rendered at ‘Sarasija nayana’ followed by a neat round of kalpanaswaras.

Impressive alapana

Ramya ensured to allocate sufficient time for manodharma throughout the concert. In her Bahudari alapana, she embellished the raga with akarams, sweeping phrases and brigas covering each sthayi progressively. Mantha Sri Ramya explored different hues of the raga during her turn, making it a wholesome presentation. A relatively lesser-heard composition by

Balamuralikrishna, ‘Kamala Dalayatha Lochana’ was presented. One of Balamuralikrishna’s popular dwiraga RTPs in Amritavarshini and Anandabhairavi is set to Tisra jathi Jhampa tala in sankeerna nadai. This is a difficult pallavi as the ragas are contrasting and almost contradictory in their musical approach as Anandabhairavi is phrase-oriented whereas Amrithavarshini is a pentatonic scale-based raga. Giving sufficient time to alapana and tanam, both the vocalist and the violinist prepped the listeners admirably to experience this unusual combination of ragas. The concert ended with Balamuralikrishna’s unique Raga Thaya Malika thillana. The percussionists, Akshay and Hari, provided good support throughout the concert.

Chithra Madhavan

Sompalem, a small village about 45 km from Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh, is home to a spectacular Vishnu temple belonging to the Vijayanagara period, dedicated to Chennakesava. Though the temple may have existed earlier, it was in the reign of the Vijayanagara rulers of the 16th century that much of the temple, as seen today, was constructed. It has several features similar to other Vijayanagara era temples such as the famous Virabhadra Swami temple in Lepakshi, and the Chintala Venkataramana Swami and Ramalingeshwara temples in Tadipatri. It appears that the Sompalem temple was constructed by chieftains of the region, although there are no inscriptions to authenticate this. It is a protected monument under the care of the Archaeological Survey of India.

At the entrance to the temple's enclosure (*prakaram*), visitors can see a tall (more than 50 ft high) and majestic monolithic *deepa-stambha* (lamp post) installed on a huge stone platform. *Deepa-stambhas* are commonly seen in many temples of South India, as lamps were lit atop them to illuminate the surroundings in pre-electricity days. The platform is covered with sculptures including a man dancing and holding a musical instrument like a veena in his left hand; a comic character; and a lady holding a fly-whisk. Creepers have been intricately carved on all four sides of the



Hidden heritage

Experience the Vijayanagara architectural style at the Chennakesava temple in Sompalem

vertical stone shaft. A mutilated gopuram stands at the entrance, to its right is a small mandapam with sculptures of the donors to the temple. Portrait sculptures of kings and chieftains are commonly seen in structures constructed in the Vijayanagara era and these men in the Sompalem temple were probably chieftains as

they wear tall conical crowns, characteristic of royalty of those times, many ornaments, and daggers tucked at the waist into the pleated lower garments. They have their palms pressed together in supplication to Chennakesava. The main temple is entered through the gopuram, leading to the inner *prakaram* with a



Majestic (Clockwise from far left)The monolithic *deepa-stambha*; sculpture of a chieftain with a conical crown; lotus hanging down from a pillar; and the ornate kalyana mandapa PHOTOS COURTESY: CHITHRA MADHAVAN



large maha mandapa in which is located a sanctum for Garuda. This shrine has been designed like a chariot (*ratha*), a peculiarity of the Vijayanagara architecture as seen in the famous Vitthala temple in Hampi, the erstwhile capital of the Vijayanagara dynasty and the Chintala Venkataramana Swami temple in Tadipatri.

The numerous pillars of the maha mandapa are studded with sculptures of various forms and incarnations of Vishnu, but it is the ceiling that is of special importance here, covered as it is with magnificent murals depicting episodes from the Ramayana, painted 500 years ago. These paintings, in subtle organic colours and stylistically

typical of this era, are similar to the more famous and better-preserved ones in Lepakshi. Though these murals are unfortunately in a dismal condition, some scenes such as Rama attacking Tataka with Lakshmana behind him and Sage Vishwamitra giving instructions, are still fairly clear.

Scholars have identified the scene of King Dasaratha with Kaikeyi and have also pointed out the similarity between the long and conical crown of Dasaratha in these paintings with those worn by Vijayanagara royalty. Many of the garments seen in these murals carry Kalamkari designs. Further inside is the main sanctum housing the standing image of Chennakesava holding the *sankha* and *chakra*. The ornate kalyana mandapa has multiple intricately carved pillars and a raised platform in the centre once used for celebrating the annual marriage ritual of Chennakesava and Lakshmi. The kalyana mandapas in many temples of South India belong to the Vijayanagara era, and are examples of exquisite stone craftsmanship. Various forms of Vishnu, musicians and dancers are sculpted on the pillars of the Chennakesava temple, but the intricate carvings of floral patterns, elephants and hamsas, some as tiny as a couple of inches in height, on the base of the central platform are a sight to behold. The capitals of the pillars have full-blown lotuses hanging down and not the lotus buds usually seen on top of the Vijayanagara-style pillars. Tiny parrots have been carved hanging upside down on the lotus petals and pecking at them. Near the kalyana mandapa are a few small shrines, some empty and a few with damaged images. Though in a forlorn condition, the magnificence of the Chennakesava temple has not diminished. It continues to hold its own among the temples built by the Vijayanagara empire.



Master of the strings Ustad Vilayat Khan; and (below) with disciple Arvind Parikh. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

for his shishyas. Each morning, Pt. Arvind listens to the recordings sent by students who can't reach him in person. He makes a note of the points to be discussed during the virtual class. At the Guru Purnima event, addressing the students, he said, "Ustad Vilayat Khan's parampara (legacy) should live long and all of you have to work towards it." The two-day event, showcasing nearly 33 students performing vocal, shehnai, surbahar, guitar and sitar recitals, opened with the screening of the video recordings of Pt. Arvind's senior disciples. Soon the hall echoed with the sonorous notes of raag Yaman, compositions studded with well-knit taans, 'Apni garaj pakad linhi bainyaan...' the bandish in Bageshri, the haunting melody of the shehnai, a detailed delineation of Malkauns on the sitar, raga Bihag on the guitar, an aalap-jod-jhala in raga Miyan Malhar on the surbahar and the romantic raga Pilu on the flamboyant red Zeetar. The vocalists sang choicest bandish. Pt. Arvind Parikh sees this annual congregation as a tribute to Ustad Vilayat Khan's genius. "Sur and laya are the two pillars of music, hold on to them tight," he said. "At 90, it's heartening to see so many young artistes and their students joining the celebration. I hope you all will keep it going," he added.

Wah! Ustad

How an annual event keeps alive Ustad Vilayat Khan's musical style

Manjari Sinha

There are some musicians who have left an indelible impression on the minds of music-lovers. One such is Ustad Vilayat Khan. Every year, on Guru Purnima, his foremost disciple Pt. Arvind Parikh makes it a point to bring together admirers of the Ustad and musicians who follow his style of music.

The 2024 edition was held at Geeta Bhavan Hall at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Mumbai. The event underlined the significance of the guru-shishya bond in Indian classical music.

A guru is defined by five attributes – gyan (knowledge), vigyan (analytical approach), vachan (the ability to articulate clearly), prayog-siddhi (the ability to demonstrate what he/she wants to teach) and shishya-nishpadan-kshamata (the commitment to mentor the disciple into an artiste). Pt. Arvind Parikh seems to combine these attributes in his music and persona. A dedicated teacher, he remains

accessible to his students across the globe. Being Khan Saheb's *ganda-bandh shagird*, Pt. Arvind is one of the principal inheritors of the Vilayatkhani Baaj (style). He painstakingly carries forward the glorious legacy of the Agra gharana. Besides practical lessons, he has recorded a wealth of music material. He has also created a website with detailed information about several raags, their varieties, compositions and much more. This serves both as a musical treasure and lessons



For a place in the sun

Sujata Parashar's new book traces the challenging journeys of women artistes

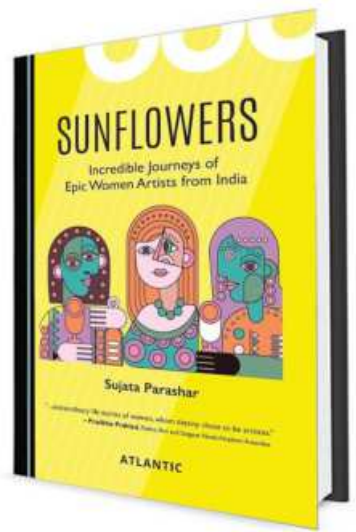


A life in art Dhruwad singer Pelva Naik and Odissi exponent Arushi Mudgal PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

troupe. With an uncanny ability to think out of the box, Choiti took to the idea of Object Theatre in her 30s. It is a performing arts form with roots in Europe. Object Theatre uses everyday objects as symbols to convey ideas and stories. "I was the only practitioner in the country and had to build it from scratch," says Choiti. In 2011, she set up Tram Arts Trust, and has produced many successful plays over the years, using objects found in daily life filling in for words. Hina Siddiqui, who is a queer, neurodivergent transmedia storyteller, processed her "emotions in a theatrical space" because she didn't know where else to do it. Her autism and ADHD were diagnosed much later, and she realised why her childhood was so difficult. Things changed when Hina's one-act play met with success, and she began to think of a career in theatre, despite her struggles with identity for a long time.

Among the other artistes, Sujata picked are Kanika DHillon, author, screenwriter and producer, who was born in Amritsar and works in Mumbai, dhruwad vocalist Pelva Naik, Madhubani artist Sweta Jha, stand-up comic, actor and academic Preeti Das, sufi singer Vusat Iqbal Khan and others.

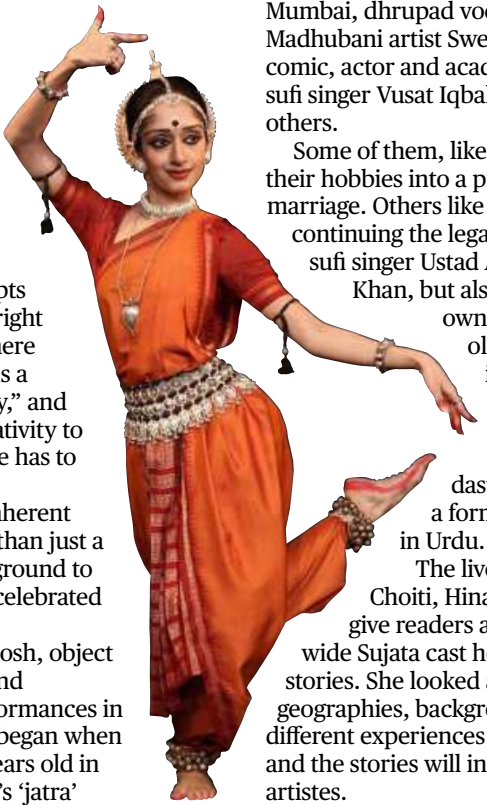
Some of them, like Sweta, turned their hobbies into a profession after marriage. Others like Vusat are continuing the legacy of her father, sufi singer Ustad Ahmed Iqbal Khan, but also bringing her own ideas into an old tradition. She is now recognised as a "pioneer of musical dastangoi", which is a form of storytelling in Urdu. The lives of Arushi, Choiti, Hina and others will give readers an inkling of how wide Sujata cast her net to tell the stories. She looked at diverse geographies, backgrounds and different experiences and challenges, and the stories will inspire aspiring artistes.



Sudipta Datta

Author of 12 books, and a self-confessed accidental writer, Sujata Parashar always wondered how women artistes chose their professions. With questions swirling in her mind, including the challenges for a woman to become an artiste in a patriarchal world, Sujata decided to write about 12 women artistes who have claimed their place in the sun, driven by their dreams in *Sunflowers: Incredible Journeys of Epic Women Artists From India*. It wasn't easy for them, and Sujata underscores how important it is to

support art at all levels. "On the one hand, Indians are proud of their culture and creativity," she writes, "however, on the other hand, the reality is that artistes have often been neglected and not given the respect they deserve." She cites the example of Odissi dancer Arushi Mudgal who blossomed primarily because of her talent and also a home where music and classical dances were cherished. But Sujata also accepts that having the right kind of atmosphere isn't enough. It is a "solitary journey," and for "art and creativity to bloom, an artiste has to possess certain extraordinary inherent qualities rather than just a privileged background to be noticed and celebrated by the world." For Choiti Ghosh, object theatre artiste and puppeteer, performances in 'jatras' or plays began when she was three years old in her grandfather's 'jatra'



Dhruv
Ghanekar's
latest album,
Voyage 2,
blends music
from around
the world



Music on the *move*

Musicians often talk about how travel experiences inspire them to create tunes. Likewise, best travel memories are sometimes associated with certain songs.

Composer, producer and guitarist Dhruv Ghanekar recently released the second edition of his collaborative album, *Voyage 2*. Encompassing sounds and styles of artistes from across the world, the project has been many years in the making. Since 2021, the journey has taken Dhruv across the globe – from Costa Rica to Boston, Paris to Denver, Nashville to New York City, with

The idea kick-started a few years ago when Dhruv began recording melodies with Assamese playback and folk singer Kalpana Patowary and Rajasthani folk singer Ila Arun, who is also his mother-in-law. “I have always been drawn to powerful voices with a lot of character. By a happy coincidence, most of my principal artistes on this project are women, which was not premeditated but seems rather preordained. Every voice on *Voyage 2* is an authority in the culture she represents,” smiled Ghanekar.

Some of the other collaborators on the album include composer, lyricist and

playback singer Vaishali Samant, bassist Mohini Dey, ace drummer Gino Banks, percussionist Taufiq Qureshi, singer and performer Nandini Srikar and noted bass guitarist Tim Lefebvre among others. “*Voyage 2* is one big genre-less groove party. Being fearless and open to various influences allowed me to explore many of my influences.”

Diverse genres
The album combines Indian folk music with music traditions from all over the world, including Brazilian Samba, Balkan music, funk and jazz. “Every song is a marriage of two or more diametrically different cultures,” explained Dhruv. Parts of the album were conceptualised while he was touring with the first *Voyage* project – including ‘Deuri’, a mix of traditional Assamese folk, jazz funk and Brazilian influences, and ‘O Sorothia’ blending Assamese with reggae, dub, electronica and rap. ‘Suprabhatam’ is a fusion of ancient Sanskrit prayers with drum, bass and hip-hop.

Further, there were newer songs that Dhruv started working on only a few months back, such as 'Jatra', a fusion of Marathi Javni with Brazilian grooves, Norwegian folk tunes and Portuguese vocals, and 'Rasiya Chuneru', which combines Motown funk with Rajasthani folk. All of Ila's songs were composed a few years ago for a project called 'Raudy Raajas'. The reggae and drum-and-bass influenced 'Jadu' as well as the funk fusion, 'Bego', were born from those sessions. As each song started taking shape, Dhruv initiated the process of recording their various instrumental parts.

Intrigued by the concept of creating a new stage musical from scratch for the Japanese market, Dhruv's last public project was *Mumbai Star* (2023). Like the tapestry of the city that it shares the title with, its music is rich and diverse, including elements of Kathak, Bollywood and Broadway all wrapped in a musical extravaganza. The show received a phenomenal reception across Japan with over 30 shows in 25 cities . Much of it was recorded live, and took about nine months to create. "From high-energy dance anthems to heart-warming romantic ballads, classical Kathak-influenced dance pieces to a Mumbai-style rap/hip-hop, and an exhilarating celebration fusion track filled with rich Indian percussions," is how Dhruv described it.

Voyage 2 will go on tour at the end of the year. This year, Dhruv also promises to make a comeback in his singer-songwriter avatar. "It's a cool project that is diametrically opposite to *Voyage 2*," he revealed.

Festival to celebrate Shakti

To celebrate the Tamil month of Aadi and convey myriad shades of bhakti through dance, Upasana in association with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai decided, bring together students from nine dance schools to perform at the Aadi Natya Samarpanam to be held on August 2 and 4, at its Mylapore auditorium. Day one begins with 'Bharathiar's Shakti' (6 p.m.). Student of Sriom Padmini Nrithyakala Nikethan, Ananda Natyakshethra, RASA, Shivakalalayam Academy, and Chathurthakshana Academy of Fine Arts will portray the myriad shades of Shakti as perceived by Bharati. This will be followed by Rukminidevi Natyakshetra Foundation's thematic production, 'Aadi 18 - Kaveri Payanam'.

August 4 (6 p.m.): 'Aado Aasarippu', a thematic performance by Sheela Unnikrishnan's Sridevi Nrithyalaya; Jayanthi Subramaniam's 'Bhakti Across the Ages'; and Bharathanjali's 'Sree Balatripurasundari'. Art patron Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti will be the chief guest for the second day's event. Resource person S. Raghuraman.

Vocal and violin solo

Narada Gana Sabha has organised the following concerts at its mini hall. Schedule: August 2, 5.30 p.m.: Nandini Dhanya Muralidharan and 7 p.m.: Tejasvi Ganesh Subramanya. August 3, 5.30 p.m.: Srinaath Perungur (violin); 7 p.m.: Shardul Krishnakumar. August 4, 5.30 p.m.: Archana Murali and 7 p.m.: Mahathi Ambareesan. August 5, 6.30 p.m.: Rohini Suresh. The line-up concludes with Anirudh Sethuraman's concert on August 6, 6.30 p.m.

New play

Stage Creations premieres its new play *Sikkal Sivaraman* today, 6.45 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha Main Hall. Story, dialogue and direction are by SL Naanu. The play, to be staged under the auspices of Kartik Fine Arts, features veteran actor Kathadi Ramamurthy.

Music competition

The global competition of Dikshitar kirtanams by Guruguhaamrta is back. Registrations are open for students of vocal music in the 8-25 age group. Visit www.dikshitar.org to register and for details.

Choral concert

The Indian Choral Ensemble in partnership with The Chennai Art Theatre presents Ula, a choral concert with 40 singers. It will be conducted by Kalyani Nair and Karthik Manickavasagam, and will be backed by a five-piece band. Apart from presenting original compositions, the concert will also feature collaborative pieces with guest musicians Vijay Narain and Pradeep Kumar. Ula will be staged on August 3 (4 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.) at Museum Theatre. For tickets, log on to thechennait9.com/event/ula

Special programme

- The 222nd Aadi month Brahmothsavam at Arulmigu Sri Periyapalayathan temple, Moolakothalam, will be celebrated from today. Special rituals, discourses and music concerts will take place as part of the 16-day festival to conclude on August 16. The deity will be seen adorned in special alankarams on each day of the utsavam.
- At Sri Devi Gangai Amman Temple, Lala Thottam, T. Nagar, the 65th year Aadi festival will be celebrated from August 9 to 11. Special rituals and programmes including Ganapathy homam, discourse and procession of paalkudam will form part of the three-day utsavam.

A family affair

A Tamil play on the everyday challenges faced by a middle class couple



Laced with humour *Meendum Thanikudithanam*. PHOTO: M. SRINATH

The play *Thanikudithanam* was a runaway success in the 1970s. Inspired by the original, JC Creations' *Meendum Thanikudithanam*, which was presented by Sri Krishna Gana Sabha recently as part of its theatre festival, dealt with the theme of a newlywed couple's desire to move away from the joint family. This play, directed by VPS Shriraman, won an award for the Best Comedy play at this year's Kodai Nadaga Vizha organised by Kartik Fine Arts.

The play begins with the usual scene in a middle class household – the elderly father Sundaresan discusses the day's menu with cook Seenu while daughter Kamu and son-in-law Ganesha are busy with their morning routine. It was a nice introductory scene for viewers to get familiarised with each character and their distinct personalities.

The focus soon shifts to the family's efforts to find a bride for young Hari. They look through matrimonial sites, narrow down prospective candidates and the decision to arrive at a choice is dealt

The girl Kamali's family consists of Madhuraveni, her domineering mother, and Krishnapriyan, the meek father. Their discussions with the groom's family prepares us for the outcome of this alliance.

The post-wedding joy is disrupted by Madhuraveni's interference, forcing the young couple to opt for *thanikudithanam*. Meanwhile, Hari lays down some conditions that create a dilemma. How it finally gets resolved brings about a twist in the story.

The simple dialogue and relatable situations sustained audience interest. However, the final and significant scene of the play could have been handled better. The actors were not convincing enough to convey the essence of the scene.

A little more attention to sets (the change of scene using a curtain to depict a second home was handled in a slipshod manner) and characterisation would enhance the play's appeal.

Theatre festival

Madras South Lions Charitable Trust, a unit of Lions Club of South Madras, will conduct the 12th year drama festival from August 3 to 10, 6.30 p.m., at Bapalab Bhavan, Valmiki Nagar, Thiruvanniyur. Following is the list of plays to be staged. August 3: Koothabiran Navabharath Theatres' *Surukka Pai*. Aug. 4: Stage Creations' *Sikkal Sivaraman*. Aug. 5: Mali Stage's *Mahaan Sri Narayana Guru*. Aug. 6: PMG Mayurapriya's *Big Boss*. Aug. 7: JC Creations' *Meendum Thanikudithanam*. Aug. 8: SRMG Creations' *Karakkall Ammayar*. Aug. 9: TOM Media's *Shakthi*. The curtains will come down with Theatre Marina's play *Anniyal* to be staged on August 10 at 6.30 p.m.

