

friday Review

THE HINDU

The making of a legendRemembering M.L. Vasanthakumari on her 97th birth anniversary **p2****Scaling musical heights**Kaushiki Chakraborty and Shantanu Moitra launch *Pankh*, a new series **p3****HOW INDIE MUSICIANS ARE CHANGING THE SOUNDSCAPE**Six artistes talk about the highs and lows of their journeys **p4**

The heroine takes charge

Koodiyattam exponent Kapila Venu breaks the glass ceiling in *Mricchakatikam* by performing a sequence traditionally done only by the male lead

**Achuthan T.K.**

Koodiyattam, India's only surviving Sanskrit theatre form, still has an untapped goldmine of ancient texts to dip into. The latest play being *Mricchakatikam* (The little clay cart). Written by King Sudraka in the 5th Century, it is directed by celebrated guru G. Venu of Natanakairali, Irinjalakuda.

Mricchakatikam differs from the usual Koodiyattam repertoire as its story does not revolve around kings, gods or characters from the epics, but around commoners, love, friendship and a political coup. Perhaps, a major reason why *Mricchakatikam*, with a thief and a courtesan at its core plot, was never considered apt for Koodiyattam.

Even Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam*, a famed Sanskrit play, was not featured in Koodiyattam till Venu adapted it to the stage in 2001. He is known to combine theatre with socio-political consciousness. "When I took to Koodiyattam in 1976, women were not given much importance though they performed female roles. It has been my dream to present plays with strong female leads," says Venu.

Post the success of *Sakuntalam*, he directed *Vikramorvasiyam* and

Path-breaking Kapila Venu as Vasantasena. PHOTO: THULASI KAKKAT

Urubhangam with Urvashi and Gandhari as central characters. In these plays, Venu's daughter Kapila Venu played the lead.

In *Mricchakatikam*, the lead roles are played by Kapila, who portrays Vasantasena, and Sooraj Nambiar is Charudatta. The play has over 30 characters, most of them are crucial in taking the story forward. Nepathy Sreehari Chakyar plays Sarvilaka the thief, while Pothiyil Ranjith Chakyar dons the role of Karnapooraka, the mahout, who tames an unruly elephant. Venu says, "Only Koodiyattam has the acting tools to make the audience feel there is an elephant on the stage."

Though a complicated storyline, *Mricchakatikam*, at the surface level, is a romantic tale between a poor merchant and a wealthy courtesan. But, its underlying theme is about class, wealth, political corruption and redemption. And like many classical artforms, the focus is not on the plot but its presentation.

"Vasantasena is unlike any character I have played before. She is intelligent, generous, cultured and wealthy. I find it beautiful that she is drawn to Charudatta because of his compassion and generosity. In my portrayal of her, I want to emphasise her independence and power," says Kapila.

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Charumathi Ramachandran

She came, she sang, she conquered. July 3 marks M.L. Vasanthakumari's (MLV) 97th birth anniversary. It's a good time to look back at my guru and an extraordinary vocalist's life and art – a combination of melody, vidwat and dynamic stage presence.

MLV was not only adept at singing both shudha Carnatic ragas such as Thodi and Bhairavi but also desya ragas like Behag or Sindhubhairavi. She may have imbibed this talent from her father vidwan Koothanoor Aiyaswamy Iyer, who was trained in both Carnatic and Hindustani music. Along with her mother Lalithangi, he also specialised in Purandaradasa kritis. MLV followed suit.

MLV expanded the repertoire she inherited by adding compositions by Kanaka Dasa (disciple of Purandaradasa) and other Dasa Koota composers. It could be said that the family brought Dasarapadas to the concert stage. Mysore University acknowledged MLV's efforts in this regard by bestowing upon her an honorary doctorate.

A versatile vocalist, MLV was trained early on by none other than G.N. Balasubramaniam, who was also a close friend of her father. It was GNB who boldly ushered in a new voice-culture based on Hindustani akaaras and naga-swaram glides (jaarus), and lightning-fast swara clusters (brighas). She carried forward his innovative approach. She was one of the first Carnatic vocalists to sing abhangs. Her kucheris often felt wholesome with the inclusion of padams, javalis, Tevarams, Tiruppugazhi and complex RTPs.

Rare kritis
She was well-known for introducing rare kritis in each and every concert. Rasikas waited with bated breath to hear a new song, alapanas of rare ragas such as Sekarachandrika, Gamansrama, Revathi and Natabhairav, a pallavi in a difficult setting or a Purandaradasa ragamalika. They also enjoyed the tukkadas she presented.

MLV was adventurous as a singer. For instance, at the Sangita Kalanidhi concert in 1977 at the Music Academy, she courageously took up a tricky pancha nadai (five varieties of rhythm) pallavi and executed it beautifully. Her singing drew lavish praise even from one of the sharpest critics of



The melody lingers

Remembering M.L. Vasanthakumari's extraordinary music on her 97th birth anniversary

the time – Subbudu (P.V. Subramaniam).

I began learning from MLV in 1963 at the age of 12. My mother Alamelu Viswanathan took me to her house. The singer was then getting ready for a concert. I was awestruck by akka's (as I used to call her) personality. She was wearing a beautiful silk saree, diamond ear studs and stone-embedded gold bangles. Her long well-oiled hair was neatly braided and adorned with fragrant jasmines. She heard me sing a short kriti, paused for a

moment and accepted me as her disciple. It was a 27-year-long association between the guru and the sishya.

Female trinity

MLV's music was different from that of her contemporaries – D.K. Pattammal and M.S. Subbulakshmi. Though MLV was younger than the other two legends, she rose to great heights and the three were referred to as the 'female trinity of Carnatic music'. They began their career as gramophone-record

sensations and gained unprecedented popularity in the early 20th Century. MLV was just 12 when she cut her first vinyl with 'Sarasijanabha murare' (Charukesi, Swathi Tirunal). Later, the trio forayed into singing for the cinema, with M.S. even acting in a few.

As for MLV, she sang for the top heroines of the time, including Padmuni, who was also her neighbour. Both shared a warm relationship.

MLV divided her time among kucheris, travels and studio

recordings. One often saw her practising during her commute or in the little free time she got. Despite her hectic schedule, she was always available for her sishyas, willingly sharing her knowledge and guiding them.

When I was in Queen Mary's College pursuing my B.A. in music, my HOD, Parvathi Narayanan taught us Muthuswami Dikshitar's 'Sree viswanatham', the 14-raga magnum opus (Chaturdasa ragamalika). That evening, I showed the notation to my guru. She made me sing parts of it and excitedly asked where did I get it from. She said she had been searching for this authentic version for years. 'I thank you for this gift,' she said, adding that I should continue collecting more such gems and I did so.

MLV's music was three-dimensional – she had a great voice, a creative mind and a generous heart.

The writer is a veteran Carnatic vocalist.

Iconic (From left) M.L. Vasanthakumari; her guru G.N. Balasubramaniam; and with D.K. Pattammal and M.S. Subbulakshmi PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES



Celebrating a three-decade journey

The Association of Bharatanatyam Artistes of India (ABHAI), celebrates its 36th annual day on July 5, 5.30 p.m., at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. Vijaya Thayaban, Member Secretary, Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram, will preside, and senior dancer Vasanthalakshmi Narasimhachari, will felicitate the artistes who will be honoured with titles on the occasion. Artistes to receive the Natya Kalanidhi title are N.S. Jayalakshmi and Krishnakumari Narendra; Pravasi Natya Kalanidhi title goes to Datuk Ramli Ibrahim; Nritya Perunjithi - Roja Kannan; Narthaka Pipuna - L. Narendar Kumar; Gandharva Nipuna - Nandini Anand; Naatar Kalai Vithagar - Thilagavathi Palani; and the Yuva Nritya Sadhaka title will be conferred upon Sai Shruthi Krishnaswamy and Aishwarya Rajkumar.

Founded in 1987, under the guidance of guru K.N. Pakkiyarsami Pillai, ABHAI, which began as a small collective of passionate Bharatanatyam artistes, has now evolved as a global community dedicated to the welfare and advancement of artistes.

Talking about how ABHAI has been a vital support system for artistes, president Priya Murle said, "We are looking at nurturing the future of Bharatanatyam along with recognising the contributions of the veterans in the field. Over the years, the association has launched many initiatives and programmes such as Teach for ABHAI, (taking the dance form to government schools); scholarship programmes, conducting competitions in various schools, and pension scheme for indigent artistes. One of our popular initiatives is the Abhiruddhi Shala, where the members engage with legendary gurus and senior artistes across various disciplines including Bharatanatyam, yoga, music and even temple architecture."

Certificate course in Kuchipudi

Kuchipudi Art Academy offers an online certificate course to be conducted by Srimayi Vempati, on June 28 and 29. It is open to dancers and students, across dance styles, with a minimum of five years of training in their respective dance forms. Participants will be taught Annamacharya's 'Paluku thenala talli', originally choreographed by guru Vempati Chinna Satyam. To register, call +91 9566353722 or +91 8778508195.

Refreshing recital

Aparna Mohan's performance was marked by neat footwork and composed expressions


Manasa Vijayakshme C.

Aparna Mohan's Bharatanatyam recital, though rooted in tradition, had a freshness to it. Hailing from Thrissur and trained under gurus, Shafiquddin and Shabana, Aparna presented a well-structured recital, which was part of the Natyaratnam

monthly series. She began with a Ganapathy stuti in raga Tilang and Adi tala, a composition by Agathiyar titled 'Prabho Ganapathi'. This opening piece was performed with clarity in footwork and composed expressions, setting a devotional tone for the evening.

The central piece of the evening was the varnam, 'Sakhiye indha velaiyl', in raga

Ananda Bhairavi and Adi tala, composed by the Thanjavur Quartet. This composition depicts a nayika's yearning for her beloved Lord Rajagopal of Mannargudi. Aparna portrayed the conversation between the nayika and hersaki with convincing expressions. Particularly notable was her subtle use of eyes, conveying love, longing and impatience. The sancharis (narrative sequences) were brought out with clarity, especially when she compares her sakhi to a peacock or when she is struck by the arrows of Mamatha. Her footwork was well-paced and confident, providing rhythmic depth without overwhelming the emotive aspect of the performance.

Next came the padam, 'Theruvil varano', composed by Muthu Thandavar in raga Khamas and Rupaka tala. This evocative piece allowed the dancer to delve deeper into the realm of abhinaya. As a maiden longing for Lord Nataraja, her expressive storytelling stood out. The moment when she imagined the Lord standing at her doorstep whispering secrets was delicately portrayed. Her hand movements were soft and precise, and the subtle changes in expression effectively captured the transitions from hope to frustration and, finally, acceptance.

Aparna concluded her recital with a vibrant thillana in raga Dhanashree and Adi tala, a composition of Swati Tirunal. This brisk piece provided a fitting end to the performance. The choreography showcased neat rhythmic patterns, while her costume and jewellery added to the visual appeal. The nattuvangam support kept the rhythm lively.



Scoring as a team

Kruthi Vittal-Bhatt's vocal concert stood out for the synergy among the senior accompanists

R. Revathi

As part of the monthly concert series, Nadurasabhi Cultural Association, Bengaluru, featured Kruthi Vittal Bhatt's vocal concert with senior accompanists Charulatha Ramanujam (violin), K.U. Jayachandra Rao (mridangam) and B. Rajashekhar (morsing). Kruthi handled the stage dynamics with poise and maturity.

The concert commenced with Lalgudi Jayaraman's navarasa Navaragamalika varnam 'Angayarkanni anandam kondale'. Kruthi did full justice to the complex composition which has vivid ragas such as Sucharita and Rasikapriya, and rakti ragas like Husseni and Sahana.

This was followed by 'Abhimannamennadu'

(Begada, Patnam Subramania Iyer). Kruthi managed to bring out the beauty of the raga in her brief alapana. The short kalpanaswara segment was neatly designed with crisp koraippus from both the vocalist and the violinist leading to an enjoyable exchange.

The centrepiece of the concert 'Meenakshi me mudam dehi' (Gamakakriya, Muthuswami Dikshitar) stood out for its grandeur. The alapana was carefully developed across registers with Kruthi moving through the mandara, madhyama and tara sthayis with ease. The voice modulations, especially in the upper octave, remained smooth.

The madhyamakala sahityam was rendered with emotional clarity. The niraval at 'Madhurapurini nilaye' had the right mix of depth and subtlety, while the kalpanaswaras

structured in methodical rhythmic patterns created a lively dialogue with the percussionists. The experienced accompanists stole the show during the tani avartanam, which lasted a good 20 minutes. In the initial round, Jayachandra set up an artistic flourish, while Rajashekhar responded with precision and flair.

Subsequent rounds moved in brisk, single avartanam exchanges, culminating in a grand finale, which was received with a hearty applause.

The Shanmukhapriya alapana was another highlight. Kruthi explored the raga's expanse and sang 'Marivere dilkevarayya rama', another Patnam Subramania Iyer composition in Adi talam. The anupallavi phrase 'dora neevu gadhaa' became a canvas for an intelligent swarakshara interpretation.

Mature approach Kruthi Vittal-Bhatt with Charulatha Ramanujam (violin), K.U. Jayachandra Rao (mridangam) and B. Rajashekhar (morsing). PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Charulatha, in her reply, picked up subtle cues from the vocalist and embellished them in her own way. During the niraval at the line 'Sannuthanga sri venkatesha', mridangam vidwan's careful pauses contrasted with morsing's vibrant interludes. This made for an interesting listening.

'Hechcharikaga rara' in Yadukula Kamboji, an Utsava Sampradaya kriti by Tyagaraja in Khanda chapu, was presented with a good understanding of the raga's gentle nature.

Kruthi next presented 'Entanti vina vinthura' in Urmika by Pallavi Sesha Iyer, a fast-paced composition with a chittaswara in a lively gait. Post-tani, the concert maintained its pace with well-chosen ragas. The Purandaradasa composition 'Kabayekenna gopala' in Brindavana Saranga was rendered neatly, followed by the abhang 'Bolava Vithala, pahawa Vithala', by Sant Tukaram in raag Bhatiyar.

The concert concluded with the popular Misra Sivarajanji raga thillana by Lalgudi Jayaraman, where the percussionists made full use of the rhythmic spaces.

The concert stood out for the synergy among the artistes. Such camaraderie adds to the richness of a concert experience.



Wings of imagination

Kaushiki Chakraborty and Shantanu Moitra come together again for *Pankh*, a new series

Narendra Kusnur

The idea came on a boat in Benaras. While music director Shantanu Moitra and renowned Hindustani vocalist Kaushiki Chakraborty were shooting for the song 'Bhagirathi' from the 2022 series *Songs Of The River - Ganga*, they realised that looking at land from a river offered a different view. The composer says, "I thought it could make a great concept for a story. One thing led to another, and we felt we could actually create songs and tell the stories behind them."

The result is *Pankh*, an album-cum-web series. It contains six songs sung by Kaushiki over six episodes, which also have her explaining what and who inspired the songs, and how they were created. The series will be released on her YouTube channel and mark Shantanu's debut as director and Kaushiki as lyricist.

'Baithi Hoon', the first track of *Pankh* is written by her and so is the last one - 'Tarana', for which Kaushiki got help from Delhi-based lyricist Abhipsha Deb. The other songs have been written by Swanand Kirkire, Abhipsha and Tanveer Ghazi.

Pankh will be launched with a concert at Mumbai's Royal Opera House on July 11. According to Kaushiki, a 12-city tour is planned, with a few shows in the offing in the U.S. later.

Shantanu says he has been thinking of recording something elaborate with Kaushiki ever since they collaborated on the song 'Lagi lagii' in MTV Coke Studio Season 2. "That was more than 12 years ago. As a composer, I knew I could work with a voice like hers. We both had ideas on what to do next but could not proceed because of our busy schedules. But when we shot 'Bhagirathi' on a boat along with violinist Ambi Subramaniam in the middle of the night, the idea of doing an album occurred."

Shantanu says his experience of working in films with directors Shyam Benegal, Sudhir Mishra and Vidhu Vinod Chopra made him believe all art needs perspective. He adds, "I did not want to just put these songs out, I wanted to tell a story. That is where the idea of a web series came from. On a lighter note, because we did not have budgets, I became the director myself."

Kaushiki points out that *Pankh* has given her a totally new vision of art. "Coke Studio

was a different experience for me, because I come from an environment of tanpuras, sarangis, gurus, sishyas, *taleem* and *riyaaz*. But one thing I have been taught is to be a good student. If I am put in a new space, I am willing to learn. When Shantanu came up with this idea, I was ready to do something new."

The singer says that moving from an individual space, she began to understand how a group of musicians can have fun and learn from each other while



creating music. "I realised there is no right or wrong in music, but about expressing yourself and finding your true narrative. If music is a language, the language on its own is not complete. We learn the what and how of music, but not the why. It is in this 'why' of music that we discover many stories. The six songs are about different subjects, and also about things that Shantanu and I have experienced."

The track 'Baithi Hoon' is an outcome of one of Shantanu's visit to Kashmir, where he met a poet, whose wife kept staring at anyone who came home. This was because their son had gone

missing and nobody knew about his fate. Moved by their plight, Shantanu composed a tune inspired by thumri. Though I had never written a song, I decided to write this one after listening to Shantanu's experience," says Kaushiki.

The song 'Nayi bhor', penned by Abhipsha, is a tribute to four musicians who have inspired the singer – her guru and legendary tabla artiste Jnan Prakash Ghosh, tabla wizard Ustad Zakir Hussain and Shubhangkar Banerjee, also a tabla exponent, and vocalist Rashid Khan. The third episode is about the bond she shares with her father and guru Ajoy Chakrabarty. It is told as a story and leads to the song 'Mere suron mein', written by Tanveer Ghazi.

In the fourth episode, Kaushiki talks about her son Rishith, and how she approaches motherhood and her role as a guru, leading to the Swanand Kirkire-penned 'Chand sakha re'. The last two episodes are about Shantanu's approach to composing, summed up in a complex piece he has created.

Pankh features Rickraj Nath on the guitar, Rahul Wadhwan and Archit Shah on the keyboards, Mehtab Ali Niazi on the sitar, ID Rao on the saxophone, Ralph Menezes on the bass, Pratik Srivatsva on the sarod, Vaibhav Wavikar on the drums, Sridhar Parthasarathy on the mridangam and Khurram Ali Niazi on the tabla. Smit Ruparel is the sound engineer.

As a director, Shantanu says he kept an open script for each episode. "I was not dealing with actors. So while I had an idea of how each episode should be shot, I let the musicians be as they normally are while recording. Some things happened impromptu. I was more like a shepherd who said this is the direction we can take, and this is the route we should avoid."

Kaushiki says some of the episodes are autobiographical since it is about the life she has lived so far and the way she foresees it.

Songs of the minstrels

The annual series *Bolava Vitthal* is back with its 19th edition



Varkari pilgrims walk to Pandharpur to worship Vitthal on Ashadi Ekadashi PHOTO: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Mumbai-based Pancham Nishad presents *Bolava Vitthal*, a concert series that celebrates abhang and Varkari Bhakti tradition, in Bengaluru featuring Anand Bhate, Mugdha Vaishampayan and Prathamesh Laghate. They will be accompanied by Padhye (tabla), Sukhad Munde (pakhawaj), Aditya Oke (harmonium), Shadaj Godkhindi (flute) and Suryakant Surve (additional rhythms).

Bolava Vitthal is the brainchild of Shashi Vyas, who began curating it in 2006. The annual event is conducted in several cities around the country.

According to Anand, "Bolava Vitthal" is not just a concert; it is an emotional offering. When I sing abhangs penned by revered saints such as Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram or Namdev, I feel as though I am part of a centuries-old conversation with the divine."

Mugdha, who is delighted to be part of this musical yatra, shares that she loves the energy that audiences in Bengaluru bring to a concert by their presence and appreciation. "To be a part of a show dedicated to abhangs feels special. It allows you to understand the emotions in the lyrics and reflect on life and humanity," she says. Prathamesh, known for his deep emotional connection with Marathi poetry, adds, "singing abhangs is an immersive experience."

Bolava Vitthal is on June 27, 6.30 p.m. at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru. Tickets on BookMyShow



Dramatic portrayal
Kapila Venu and Sooraj Nambiar in *Mricchakatikam*.
PHOTO: THULASI KAKKAT

his folk versions could not," shares Venu.

"Initially, we were not sure if this was adaptable to Koodeiyattam. After several readings for a month, I wrote the play to include all the layers of its aesthetic potential. But, that ran into five-and-a-half hours. After another four months of rehearsals, it was cut down to a duration of two-and-a-half hours," states Venu.

Percussion for *Mricchakatikam* is by Kalamandalam Rajiv, Hariharan and Vineesh on the mizhavu, with Kalanilayam Unnikrishnan on the Idakka and Gurukulam Athulya on the elam. There is also the addition of kurumkuhal, a wind instrument, rarely used in Koodeiyattam.

Mricchakatikam, produced by Natanakairali and supported by the Bhoomija Trust, Bengaluru, will premiere at Ranga Shankara in Bengaluru, on July 1 and 2.

The heroine takes charge

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this ritual was restricted to the lead male actor." The biggest challenge for Venu was "to condense the 10-act play into less than three hours. It had to be done if Koodeiyattam has to stay relevant and adapt to the demands of the modern audience. My first version of *Sakunthalam* ran into 13-and-a-half hours and was staged over four days. Though it was appreciated, we could not stage many shows. Then we came up with a shorter version, which was a success and is being performed even today."

Kapila too believes that the climax will be a moment of historic significance. "Bharathavakyam, the final benediction of the play, and the mudiyakkitha ritual mark the culmination of a Koodeiyattam play and carry deep spiritual and theatrical meanings. The right to perform

the play in the climax of the play by making Vasantasena perform the ritualistic mudiyakkitha at the end of the play, traditionally performed by the male lead. He explains: "Vasantasena is no ordinary heroine. She is independent, virtuous and philanthropic. Hence, I decided to have her perform the mudiyakkitha. We need to take such bold decisions to acknowledge that today more women are taking up this art form compared to men."

The idea to stage *Mricchakatikam* came up when theatre director Habib Tanvir, who had directed folk versions of *Mricchakatikam*, visited Natanakairali and watched *Sakunthalam*. "He suggested we take up *Mricchakatikam* and was convinced that Koodeiyattam can achieve what

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Independent voices

Looking at how Indie musicians are changing the Indian soundscape with a diverse mix of genres. Influenced by social media, they are coming up with new ways of reaching out to listeners

Neha Kirpal

VASUNDHARA VEE

Swipe, tap and repeat is the new addiction. The highs of having access to unlimited information/entertainment feeds, yet being ignorant of the lows of living in a digital haze and FOMOS, defines a life driven by technology.

Jazz and soul singer Vasundhara Vee's new single, 'Junk the blame', addresses this. Earlier, this year,

Vasundhara made headlines for singing at popular fashion designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee's 25th anniversary celebrations. The Mumbai-based singer is known as one of the powerhouse vocalists,

who is credited with bringing time-tested genres such as RnB, Soul and Jazz to playlists of today's youth. "A singer always has a message, which is channelled through his/her personality," says Vasundhara. As a child, Vasundhara was quiet and soft-spoken. "I found my calling in soul, jazz and blues.

Music transformed me. It pushed me to communicate through words and sounds," she adds.



ABHISHEK HAZARIKA

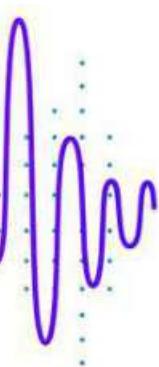
Noida-based singer, songwriter, rhythm guitarist, composer and independent musician Abhishek Hazarika is trained in Hindustani classical (vocal), acoustic and electric guitar. His debut album, *Brightendash*, comprising 10 tracks, consists of a grunge-rock sound, rooted in classic and alternative rock sensibilities. Abhishek is inspired by bands such as Soundgarden, Screaming Trees, Pearl Jam, The Smashing Pumpkins, Nirvana, The Melvins, Oasis, Green Day, The Beatles, The Who, Grand Funk Railroad, Jimi Hendrix, Cream and REM. Grunge rock, a subgenre of the 90's hard rock, originated in Seattle, the U.S. "Grunge Rock gives me the freedom to explore multiple styles of rock music. And that's how I came up with the songs in my album".



SARTEK

Sarthak Sardana, popular as Sartek, is a DJ and electronic dance-music producer. He has had releases with major global labels and even found support in legends such as David Guetta, Tiësto and Hardwell. Over time, he felt the urge to add something local to his repertoire of sound. "I wanted to blend folk and Bollywood with house-techno and Afro". So he came up with productions that fused Indian folk tunes with electronic beats.

Today, it resonates on dancefloors around the world. "It is all about creating a sound rooted in culture, but built for the future," says Sartek.



NEEL ADHIKARI, PUSHAN KRIPALANI, ARIJIT DATTA

Singer-songwriters Neel Adhikari, Pushan Kripalani and Arijit Datta recently collaborated with Tiger Baby Records (Zoya Akhtar, Reema Kagti and Ankur Tewari) for their latest album *City Sessions*.

Pushan is a filmmaker and theatre director-turned songwriter, synonymous with his collective *Slight Diversion*. The trio's debut EP, 'Borrowed Guitars', earned them critical acclaim with the track 'Man, boy and liar' topping the charts. When Pushan wrote his first song, he was inspired by a woman singing in Central Park, New York. "She sang with just an acoustic guitar in front of a small crowd. The songs were her own, yet appealed to people because of the simplicity of its rendition," he recalls.

Singer-songwriter Arijit Datta is the frontman of the Hindi-Indie band, Airport, which is known for its bluesy, evocative sound. "The sound of Airport feels like home. It holds the weight of everything I have lived through – silence, chaos and search. This genre gives me the freedom

to be myself, to communicate what I cannot articulate verbally. Making music is my way of staying connected to my original self," he shares.

Neel Adhikari is the artiste behind the opening track of Netflix's *Little Things* and *Modern Love: Mumbai*. Neel sees his music spread over two areas – background score and song. He dislikes categorisation of music and finds it hard to imagine himself stuck to one genre. He adds that he is drawn to certain textures and sounds. "If it comes from an instrument that has wood and strings, it usually sounds good to me. My songs have a lot of acoustic guitars, ukuleles, banjos and now mandolins too," he shares. Neel also loves analogue synths and percussions from interesting sounding non-instruments. His lyrics are essentially a play at depth using simple language. Quite often, one finds deep or dark words over a chirpy tune in his songs. "I love the existence of contrasting elements in a composition and the sound of melancholy. Being a journeyman, I enjoy the process but am also goal-oriented and I break my back trying to achieve a sound I have imagined," he says.

CALENDAR

Vocal concerts

As part of the HCL concert series, The Music Academy has organised Nanditha Kannan's vocal recital on July 3, 6 p.m. at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. She will be accompanied by Prithvi Bhaskar (violin) and P.V.S. Balaji (mridangam).

Narada Gana Sabha Trust has organised Niranjana Srinivasan's vocal concert on June 30, 6.30 p.m. Paru M.K. Ananthakshmi (violin), T.R.S. Manikandan (mridangam) and A.S. Krishnan (morsing) are the accompanists. Venue: Swami Haridhos Giri Hall.

Hamsadhwani will feature the vocal concert by Srividhya Iyer and Sudha Iyer on June 28, 6.15 p.m. at Youth Hostel, Adyar. The duo will be accompanied by M.R. Gopinath (violin), Shertalai Ananthakrishnan (mridangam), and H. Prasanna (ghatam).



Lecture series

Kartik Fine Arts in association with The Kalyana Nagar Association present a three-day upayanasam (June 27 - 29, 6.30 p.m.) by Velukkudi Ranganathan at Kalyan Nagar Association.

Madhuradhwani, features the following programmes at Arkay Convention Centre, June 29: Veena Vaadhin's special programme will feature Varsha Bhuvaneswari's harikatha 'Lalithopakhyanam' (4.30 p.m.) followed by Rajani Arjun Shankar's 'Tyagaraja Virajite' (6 p.m.) and Mohan Santhanam's 'Guruguha Vihiita' (7.30 p.m.).

On a celebratory note

To mark the legendary music composer M.S. Viswanathan's 97th birthday, Bharat Kalachar, in association with TOM Mediaas, presents a special show 'Road to MSV 100' on June 28, 6.30 p.m., at YGP Auditorium, T. Nagar. The evening will have singers such as Balaji, Pavithra Balaje, Sabitha, along with Madhuvanthi, Y.Gee. Mahendra and Mouna Ragam Murali's orchestra, render popular songs composed by MSV. Singers Kovai Murali and Janaki will be honoured on the occasion.



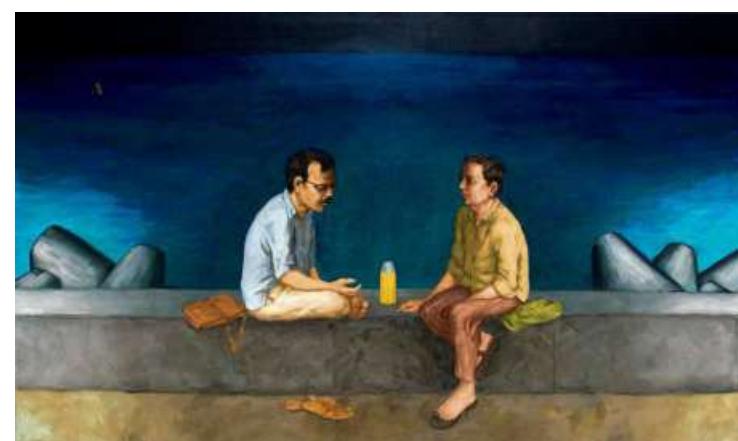
Devina Dutt

When a deeply loved and admired artist passes away, it is the city left behind and the vast pastiche of friendships made and sustained in it, that offer the best possible summation of a working life in the arts. When that artist is poet, playwright and painter Gieve Patel (1940-2023) and the city as capacious as Mumbai, the unusual can be expected.

A Show of Hands: In Memoriam, the recently concluded exhibition, curated by poet and critic Ranjit Hoskote was held at the Jehangir Nicholson Arts Foundation Gallery (JNAF) in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CMSVS), Mumbai. The exhibition, supported in part by Vadhera Art Gallery, featured works by artists Aditi Singh, Anju Dodia, Atul Dodia, Areez Katki, Biraaj Dodia, Gulmohammed Sheikh, Jitish Kallat, Mahesh Baliga, Nilima Sheikh, Ranbir Kaleka, Ratheesh T. and Sudhir Patwardhan and Sujith S.N. – many of whom were friends and colleagues of Gieve.

This might have become a sombre occasion; instead it was a joyous, tender and unfussy act of remembering a friend in the midst of works of art, that had some sort of connection with Gieve. Locating the exhibition in the JNAF gallery also unambiguously alluded to a steady, solid philanthropic tradition, which had contributed to the making of a rich, varied, public-spirited and free-thinking arts ecosystem in Mumbai. The gallery's core collection is from Jehangir Nicholson (1915-2001) one of the early patrons and collectors of modern and contemporary art practices and as much a Bombay institution as Gieve.

Defying labels
As friends narrated one story after another amidst laughter and even gossip, it was clear that Gieve was an artist with wide-ranging interests. He was often seen at poetry readings at the NCPA lawns or the Sassoon Library, or silently watching a Bharatanatyam



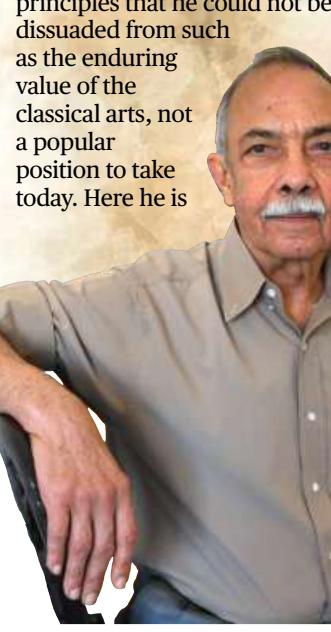
Musings and memories Sudhir Patwardhan's 'Marine Drive' is a tribute to friend Gieve Patel (below). PHOTOS: JEHANGIR ART FOUNDATION & THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Canvas of camaraderie

Friendship and creativity went hand-in-hand in artist-poet Gieve Patel's life

programme or reading out his translations of the medieval Gujarati poet Akho, whose six stanza form of *chappas* he had worked on for decades.

Attempting to draw a simplistic correlation with the man and his artistic selves or trying to slot him definitively in a particular movement in the arts is simply unworkable. He had the ability to be precise, specific but also in service to certain principles that he could not be dissuaded from such as the enduring value of the classical arts, not a popular position to take today. Here he is



speaking to his friend Sudhir Patwardhan in Art India (volume 5, 2000)

"I am a sucker for permanent values in art, and for the landmarks of the past. An artist will ignore them at his peril. Identifying with this 'eternal' stream gives one a strong conviction about what is significant and what is not. But also, I have a sense of being continually nurtured by the work and the presence of other artists on the scene. I think this scene has happened because we are talking to each other a lot – through our work, exchanging ideas, and yes of course through very lively gossip! What we are all doing is trying to zero in on some very essential notions – in our different and even conflicting ways."

As friend and senior artist Nilima Sheikh pointed out, Gieve's acuity of observation was quite remarkable. "As artists when we speak to each other we expect to be understood. But Gieve, because he was also a writer could enter an artistic work with sharpness and

empathy," she says. Pointing to the unusual laughter on the day of the opening, Sudhir Patwardhan simply says any meeting with Gieve always brought lots of laughter. Sudhir, who moved to Mumbai straight out of Medical College in Pune, to be in a city where exhibitions and meetings with fellow artists were likely to be more frequent, met Gieve, also a young doctor.

His painting as a tribute to his friend is titled 'Marine Drive' and shows two friends sitting by the sea late and having a free-wheeling chat. Sudhir says they would meet at Marine Drive for some quiet time after Gieve closed his GP clinic on Lamington Road for the day, while Sudhir came in from Thane before taking the last train back from VT station.

Atul Dodia chose to share his series of paintings on the 'Nayanars' made for the scholar David Shulman, whom he met through Gieve. But it was the painting titled 'Laughter', which used one half of a human skull and another of Gieve's laughing face that opens up many stories. Dodia points to Gieve's well-known fascination with death and the decaying of the human body. "He is probably the only painter who has painted 'Death' in so many ways," says Dodia. Among Gieve's works at the exhibition were his ink sketches of the 'Dead Politicians Series'. "You might say that as a doctor he was drawn to the idea of death, but I think it was more of a very insistent philosophical questioning and seeking that drove him," he says.

As a young student at J.J. School of Art, Dodia says, he had taken to dropping into his clinic in the evenings. A decade later, when he approached the senior artist to write a note for his first solo exhibition at Chemould, he agreed setting off another cycle of artistic friendships and possibilities in the city.