

friday Review

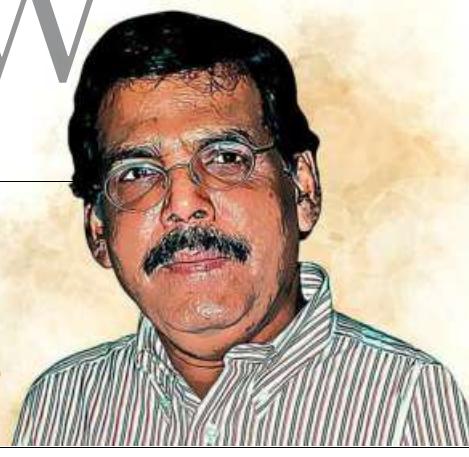
THE HINDU

Songs for the sojourn

A concert series featuring songs about famous temple towns p2

**The connecting keys**

Young Italian pianist Elia Cecino impressed with his repertoire p3


**RELIVING
THE MAGIC OF
MALAYSIA
VASUDEVAN**

At a tribute event, son Yugendran presented the singer's iconic hits p4

Gayatri Iyer

Keep your hand straight my child," coddles the teacher. Little hands contort into a 2,000-year-old mudra. Fingertips touch, neurons fire, and that little brain processes neuroplasticity at a magnitude that is still misunderstood.

Classical dance has been scientifically documented by several prestigious research organisations such as Sarah Lawrence University and the National Institutes of Health, Maryland. Not only does classical dance have documented mental health benefits, classical music has also been well-researched as both a complementary treatment for several major disorders, and a healthy practice for general well-being. Albert Einstein Medical College executed a study comparing the brain scans of subjects prescribed treadmill walking for six months versus those prescribed ballroom dancing. Dance was found to prevent cognitive decline and reduce the risk of Alzheimer's.

Indian classical dance has been lauded for its neurobiological complexity. The nuance of hand-eye coordination specifically operates through neuroplasticity – our brain's ability to change through growth and reorganisation, utilising its neural networks. There is an overwhelming amount of research in favour of the mudra, both in a yogic and dance context. If we examine the practice of mudras in dance, it is apparent that there is an underlying significance to the choice of fingers touching as well as the movement of the actual hand itself.

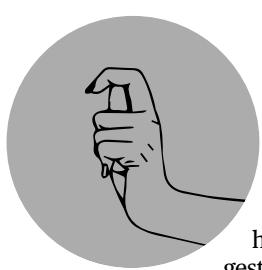
Train the brain
Laura Wimberger, a neurological meditation practitioner, has developed a modality of training the brain called neurosculpting. In her practice, the left and right hands often move in different directions and hold different gestures. She explains how these practices increase memory, protect neural

function and utilise different parts of the brain. One cannot help but correlate her practices to the gestural depiction of performing *aarthi* in classical dance. The shikara mudra remains firmly planted in the left hand, shaking like a bell, while the pataka mudra assumed by the right hand maintains a clear horizontal line while drawing a circle in the air. This simple gesture has within it over seven different mechanisms to nourish, tone and protect the brain!

Yet with so many overwhelming benefits, it feels as though practicing dancers seem to be constantly

ILLUSTRATION:
SOUMYADIP SINHA

under stress. Indian classical dance has become so competitive that young dancers often feel an overwhelming pressure to keep up with their peers and produce new repertoire on command. Social media presence is almost mandated in the current scenario, placing even more pressure on young dancers and musicians to give a glimpse of their yoga routine, studio work, practice sessions and even the occasional recreation of a film song. Are they reaping the true benefits of the art?



During the Mental Health Awareness month, we take a look at how dance and music can be powerful tools for emotional well-being

When one examines the history of Indian classical dance practices, it becomes apparent that the dance cannot be divorced from the temples and the courts. While hereditary dancers might have had healthy competition amongst themselves, one wonders if it can compare to fighting for a slot at a sabha during the December Season or for an award. When the purpose of a form was to immerse oneself in devotion, or even to entertain the audience,

innovation becomes an extension of creativity and not a race for survival. It is on the proscenium that dance has found its most cut-throat form – from televised competitions to festivals that award innovative choreography.

To take a form that was designed for self-expression and standardise it into a ruthless, athletic race is perhaps one of the reasons why so many dancers struggle to find joy in the profession. While the dance itself always remains a source of solace, the networks around it tend to deplete dancers of their mental peace.

In Australia, artistes are 20 times more likely to have mental health issues, and in the U.K. more than 46 per cent report below average mental health. Such studies haven't been done at scale in India, but it would be not be surprising if the numbers were an extension of the global trend. Artistes are often isolated, and it appears that those with better social skills tend to secure better opportunities. What kind of ecosystem do we want to build for our future? What direction should Indian classical dance and music move in?

While it is impossible to find all the answers, perhaps changing contexts will help young artistes. Several senior practitioners still maintain the habit of performing in temples for example, which is a deeply personal and grounding experience that help them define their art. Improvisational dance is another way of connecting to one's own creative mind to transcend the external noise.

Whatever the means may be, we need our dancers to stay content for the joy that they bring us is nothing short of therapy.

Deepa Venkatraman

The Indo Soul band has been captivating audience with its distinct blend of Indian classical music and global sounds. Over the past few years, the band has widened its reach with its digital presence. Last year, it launched an initiative called Soul Sabha to strengthen the connect with its fans.

This sabha is different. Around 30 listeners, each equipped with headphones, share space with Indo Soul band members – lead vocalist and violinist Karthick Iyer, lead guitarist Vikram Vivekanand, acoustic guitarist Akshay Yesodharan, bass artist Reshwin Nishith, drummer Ramkumar Kannakarajan and mridangist Venkat Subramanian – during their recording session. They are briefed about the recording process as the cameraman gets ready to shoot.

Indo Soul has so far released four albums and their popular songs include 'Nagumomu', 'Manavyala in my mind', 'Rejoicing in Raghuvamsa', and 'Clown's Junke'. Inspired by the



Want to be a part of Soul Sabha?

Indo Soul, the Chennai-based band, gears up for Season 2, where listeners can join the artistes during recording sessions

western band Snarky Puppy, who had a live audience during the making of its music video, Indo Soul founder Karthick Iyer was keen to reprise this setting to engage closely with the band's followers.

"Unlike recording in a bubble, here the listeners get to watch the making of a music video. Soul Sabha has helped us get instant feedback to our songs before the formal release. They also get to chat with us on various

music-related topics," says Karthick. Considering Soul Sabha was a unique experience, was he satisfied with the final output of the video? "Compared to our

New setting (Left) Haricharan with listeners in Season 1; and (below) the Soul Sabha 2 team led by Karthick Iyer (middle). PHOTOS COURTESY: INDO SOUL

earlier videos, there was a certain rawness, but that added a charm to the overall presentation. The best of both worlds, it's a combination of recording and live performance experience. This gives a different vibe to the songs," says Karthick.

In the first season of Soul Sabha, the band collaborated with artistes who resonated with their musical style. From popular kritis such as 'Thaye Yashoda' and 'Telisi Rama' by Haricharan and Spoorita Rao respectively, 'Pibare rama rasam' by Karthick, 'Kantha naal' by Abhinaya Shenbhagaraj (of

Aikyam) to the rare Muthuswami Dikshitar composition 'Soma Sundareshwaram' by Trichur Brothers, and a rhythmic recital of 'Niravadu sukhada' by vainika Rajhesh Vaidhya, the videos were well-received on online platforms.

Ask Karthick about the song selection process and how each song evolves in the hands of the band members, he says that he and mridangist

Q Q
Unlike recording in a bubble, in Soul Sabha listeners get to watch the making of a music video

KARTHICK IYER

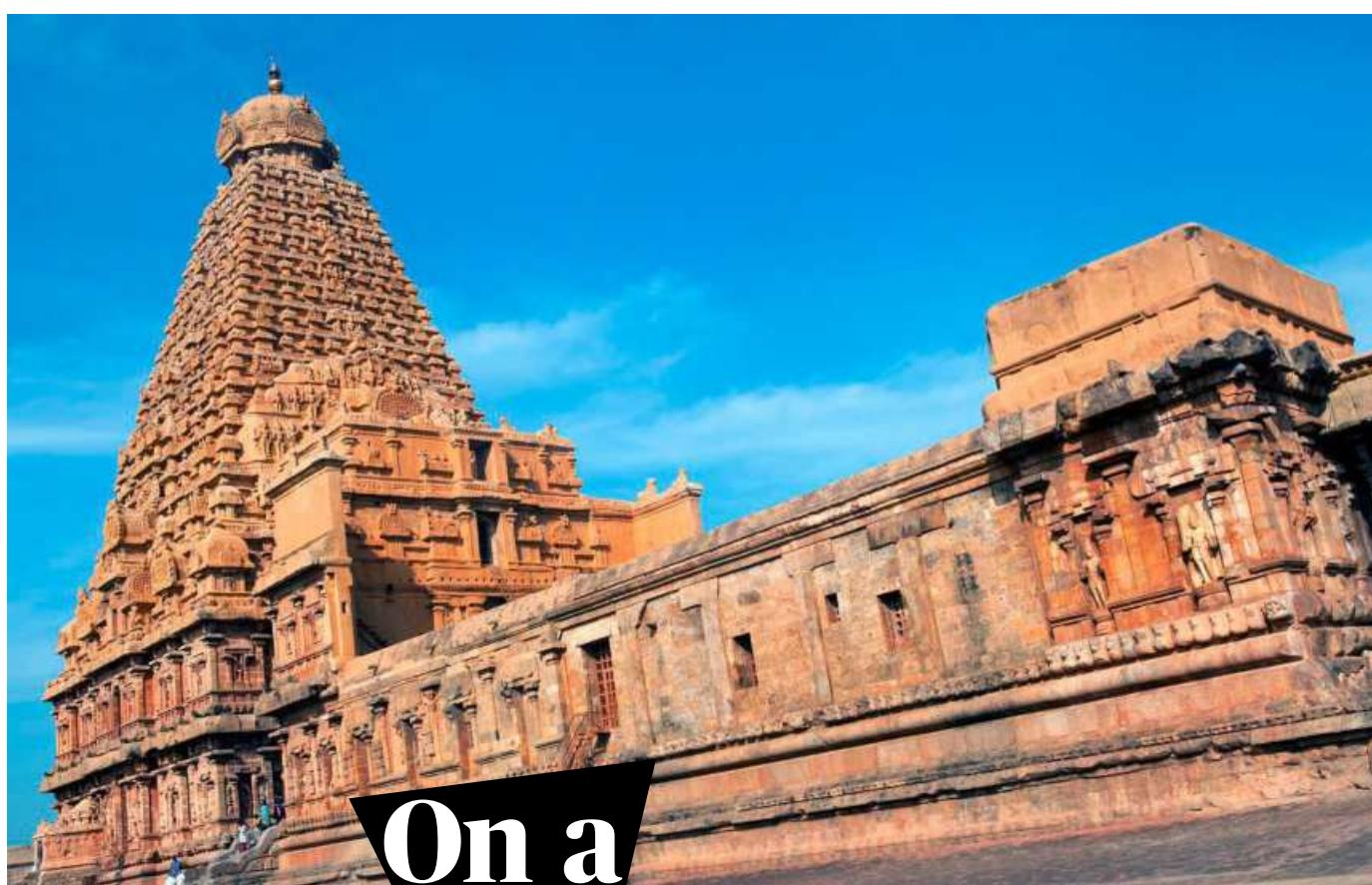
Venkat Subramanian choose from songs suggested by the collaborators. "For instance, he selected 'Soma sundareswaram' kriti because we wanted to offer our audience something different. Each song's singing and feel are different as the artistes bring in their own creativity and expertise," shares Karthick.

Looking at the response to Soul Sabha - Season 1, the band is coming up with Season 2, which will feature folk artistes apart from Carnatic musicians and vocalists. "With the coming together of diverse musical styles and artistes, we wish to build a like-minded cultural community. Though Season 1 and our earlier albums were self-funded, we are now looking at promoters who can help sustain this project."

The Indo Soul Sabha team has figured out the logistics with regard to attendees. They want to increase the number. More details will be shared closer to the date. They also plan to hold their recording sessions much ahead of the Chennai Margazhi Season. "This will enable us to release the videos at a time when music takes over the city," says Karthick.



Songs for the sojourn A stone figure at the Madurai Meenakshi temple; the corridor of Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameswaram; Big Temple in Thanjavur; and P. Vikram PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



On a musical trail

H. Ramakrishnan

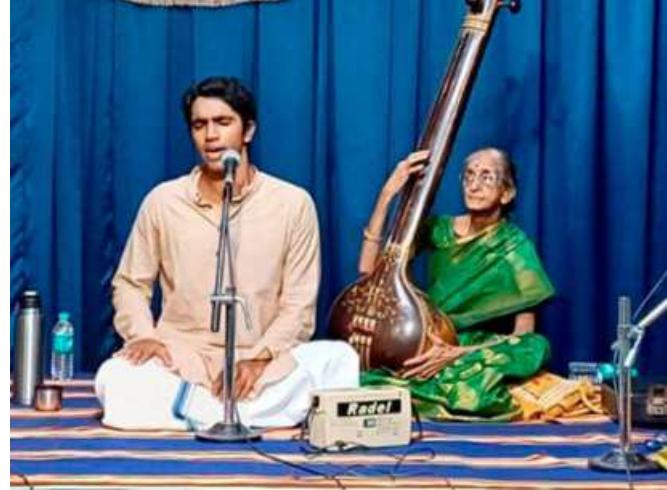
Naada Inbam's 'Kshetra Sankirthana Vaibhavam' series was an exciting musical journey through the temple towns of Tamil Nadu. The thematic concerts were by young artistes.

P. Vikram led a trip to Madurai, Rameswaram and Thanjavur through his singing of kritis attributed to these temple towns.

The tall, majestic towers of the Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple dominate the skyline of Madurai. Much of the business and life in the city revolves around the temple and its festivals, including the Thirukalyanam [celestial wedding] during the Chithirai Brahmotsavam, the Navarathri festival held during September-October and Masi Mandala Utsavam during February-March.

The temple, dedicated to Meenakshi and Sundareswarar, finds mention in Sangam literature.

A concert series took listeners on a visual tour of Tamil Nadu's popular temple towns



The huge complex spread over 14 acres, has 14 colourful gopurams, a thousand-pillared hall, a hundred-pillared hall, the Portramarai kulam (golden lotus pond), and the Kambathadi mandapam, which is famous for depicting all the 25 forms of Shiva.

Of the nine songs that Vikram rendered, six were on Madurai. The piece de resistance was Syama Sastri's 'Sarojadala netri' on Meenakshi. His alapana of Sankarabharanam, a sampurna raga, brought out the grandeur and melody of this sarva gamaka rakti raga. Vikram is the son and disciple of vainika-gayaka S.P. Ramh. Vikram's musical assets include a voice capable of negotiating tristhayi with ease, his inventiveness in raga elucidation, and his expressive potential.

The niraval and swaraprastara were at 'Samagana vinodini'. On the violin, Shraddha Ravindran, who is presently undergoing advanced training under violin virtuoso A. Kanyakumari, rose to the

occasion and offered effective response in the alapana, niraval and kalpanaswara segments. On the mridangam, Akshay Ram presented a thani that had aesthetically vast dimensions in rhythm. The Khanda nadai that he elaborated had a reposeful gait.

Wide range of kritis

Vikram commenced his concert with the awesome Navarasa varnam by Lalgudi Jayaraman, 'Angayarkanni'. This ragamalika varnam consists of Bilahari, Husseni, Valachi, Saranga, Sucharita, Atana, Rasikapriya, Sahana and Nadanamakriya. Syama Sastri's Anandabhairavi kriti, succeeding an eloquent alapana with swaras at the pallavi was a nice rendition. Another Lalgudi Jayaraman composition that Vikram sang was 'Thenmadurai vaazh annaiye' in Hamsarupini, with a lilting chittaswara. This raga is a janya of Harikamboji. Another song that Vikram offered on Meenakshi was 'Madhura madhura Meenakshi' by Swami Dayananda Saraswathi in raga Bageshri. He rendered a ragamalika virutham earlier. The Tiruppugazh in Thillang, 'Ni thatthuvamaaki' was on Muruga of Madurai.

One of the largest temples in India, the Brihadeeswara temple, also known as Peruvudaiyar Kovil, is in Thanjavur. The temple was built around 1010 CE by King Rajaraja Chola I. One of the main attractions of the temple is the huge Lingam and Nandi. The main temple tower is 216 ft high and the tallest of its kind in the world. The entire structure is made of stone.

On Thanjavur, Vikram offered two songs. 'Paranthama yuvathi jayathi' (Rupakam) by Dikshitar in raga Dharmavati had swaras at pallavi in a pleasant kalapramana. The Thevaram verse 'Ulagedalam thozhavarthanu' in Manirangu by Karuvur Thevar was on Rajarajeswarar.

The legend behind the Ramanathaswamy temple at Rameswaram is associated with Rama. It is believed that Rama, after defeating Ravana, wanted to worship Shiva as part of atonement. There are 22 teerthams at this temple.

On Rameswaram, Vikram offered, after an elaborate Pantuvarali alapana, Dikshitar's 'Ramanatham bhajeham' (Rupakam). Niraval and swaras were at the usual 'Kumara guruguha vidham'.

Thematic concerts call for diligent research and meticulous planning, and Vikram didn't disappoint.

It's never too late to dance

Six friends, who are mothers with full-time careers, presented their debut Odissi recital



Paramita Sarkar

You dance love, and you dance joy, and you dance dreams' - Gene Kelly

Myself and my five friends demonstrated this when we came together to perform our Manchpravesh recently at Mumbai's St. Andrew's auditorium. In Odissi dance tradition, a Manchpravesh is akin to a graduation ceremony.

Titled 'Anuttama' (means unsurpassed), this Manchpravesh was unique. It is usually performed early in life, after learning a full repertoire and seeking the guru's blessings for the first formal public appearance. But we made our debut past our prime. Apart from most of us being mothers to teenage children and young adults, we have a full-time professional career. Despite our diverse backgrounds, what Arpita Sur (preschool CEO), Mangal Walkar, Pradnya Sinha, Sangeeta Jadhav, Urvashi Makharia and myself have in common is our love for dance. We also belong to the same Odissi institute, Smitay, in Mumbai and have been trained by Jhelum Paranjape and Ankur Ballal.

A dream come true
We devised various ways to practice. We would post our daily practice routine on our WhatsApp group to encourage each other.

Mangal, a healthcare technician at a leading hospital, felt although she was a backbencher, our gurus helped shed her inhibitions. Sangeeta was overwhelmed by the beauty

of dance. Pradnya, director of a creative company, credits *dada* and *tai* (our gurus) for inspiring us to make our dream come true. Urvashi too agrees.

'Anuttama' began with Mangalacharan, the shloka 'Padavande', in praise of Ganesh. It moved to a pallavi in raag Saveri, which was high on sringara rasa.

This was followed by Brajaku, a Gitabhinaya written in Odia, depicting a playful interaction between Yashoda and baby Krishna. The performance moved again to pure dance, before we presented 'Batu Nritya', an important part of the Odissi repertoire. The piece, choreographed by the legendary Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, was recreated by Ankur Ballal in a unique way. Just as a sculptor turns stones into beautiful statues, a guru shapes the disciples into graceful dancers. Ankur Ballal, enacting the sculptor, turned us, the six dancers, lying as stone chunks into statues playing various instruments in the Konark temple.

After tandava and abhinaya pieces, we showcased two unique pallavis by guru Jhelum Paranjape.

The event concluded with 'Moksha' highlighting the liberation of the soul. Movement and stillness defined this piece. Musicians Jateen Kumar Sahu, Rohan Dahale, Aparna Deodhar and Shree Nirjan Sinha heightened the appeal.

The purpose of writing this piece is to share with other women that it is never too late to pursue your passion.

The writer is CEO, NYACONS.

Versatile vocalist

A tribute to A.P. Komala, who passed away recently

Vidya Bhavani Suresh

How do you start talking about a person who has been a part of your life for decades, whom you have admired and looked up at with awe? Let me start from where it all began.

Vidushi A.P. Komala was a staff artiste of All India Radio, Chennai. My mother, Vijayalakshmi Murthy, was then the programme executive in charge of classical music. That's how they met and became good friends. Known for her penchant for Vivadi ragas and rare kritis, my mother learnt quite a few compositions from her and also enrolled me as a student. I was 13 when I began to learn. Sadly, my classes stopped soon thereafter for various reasons. I reconnected after more than 20 years, and resumed my training.

A well-known playback singer, A.P. Komala has sung several film songs across all South Indian languages, especially in Malayalam. She sometimes felt sad that her film songs overshadowed her identity as a Carnatic musician.

My guru revelled in taking up rare ragas as the main item of her concerts, usually with a rare kriti to go with it. Once during a class, she suddenly remembered raga Kalyanayaini, a rare janya of Kalyani. She recalled learning a kriti by Dandapani Desikar in the raga, but was upset that she had forgotten the sahityam. Umpteen Internet searches and book shop and library hunts later, I was able to find it. Her joy made the effort worth it – she sang the entire kriti with just one look at the sahityam. Apart from the compositions of the Trinity, she knew the kritis of many lesser-known composers too. She is gone but her voice still lingers.



Mime and movement

A student of Indira Kadambi, Chaitra Rao journeyed to the core of every composition



V.V. Ramani

It was a performance where melody and movement complemented each other to make up an evening high on aesthetics. As the curtains went up, the dancer stood facing the backdrop, as she turned around to face the audience, her statuesque ardhanari stance made one sit up. From that moment, through the hour-long show, Chaitra Rao's ability to communicate ideas

The Ashtapadi moved at a leisurely pace and was shorn of excessive dramatisation

and feelings with her abhinaya, which seamlessly intertwined with Rohith Bhat's bhava-soaked singing, sustained audience's interest.

Chaitra began her performance for Natyaratnangam's monthly series at Narada Gana Sabha's mini hall with verses by Adi Shankaracharya describing the varied facets and attributes of Shiva and Shakti in the form of ardhanarishwara. The effortless transition from male to female through contrasting movements of vigour and grace was the highlight of the piece. Particularly noteworthy was Chaitra's graceful

'attami' (head movements). Music for these verses was by M.S. Sukhi.

In the next piece, Chaitra shifted the focus to Krishna. Her face turned into a canvas of emotions in this composition. The central piece of the evening was the popular Kalyani raga varnam, 'Sarasijakshudu', composed by Sivanandam of the Thanjavur Quartet. It talks about the state of mind of a nayika besotted by Rajagopalaswami of Mannargudi. Her nuanced abhinaya conveyed the many metaphors in the lyrics. The interpolation of theeramanams during the description of various musical instruments in the charanam lines 'Nada vیدا' lived up the choreography (by Chaitra's guru Indira Kadambi).

Then came an Ashtapadi. It portrayed the anger and pain of Radha. Set to raga Sindhubhairavi, it moved at a leisurely pace and was shorn of excessive dramatisation. Radha is deeply hurt by Krishna's infidelity. Chaitra's visualisation was riveting.

Ramya Suresh competently wielded the cymbals, but needs to gain more confidence. Harsha Samaga's subtle rhythmic flourishes on the mridangam heightened the performance's impact while flautist Nitish Amanaya's enhanced the musical experience.

Malini White

Elia Cecino, in a concert for the IMAS, burst onto the stage of the Bangalore International Centre with an explosion of showmanship, his strong left hand asserting his arrival in Liszt's Valse S407 from Gounod's opera, Faust.

It is no surprise that Liszt, partial to a good tune, transcribed many famous melodies from opera. However, he never allowed his fierce creative energy to smother the original tunes, nor did he bury them under his prodigious inventions. His technically challenging Concert Paraphrases are popular in the concert repertoire, perhaps because they often seem unattainable by a mere two-handed pianist!

Cecino's predilection for *fff* (*fortissimo*), particularly with his left hand, was given plenty of opportunity in the *stretta* and *staccato* sections of the Valse, but at no point was that gorgeous hummable tune lost in the musical verbiage, the waltz reasserting itself with fond familiarity.

The unexceptional waltz theme is given recapitulations of *glissando* flourishes and subtle variations in the upper register Liszt's penchant for the demonic thereby conjuring up Mephistopheles, who lurks in the Faustian shadows.

Cecino supplied the dynamic variations and chromatic extensions to the melody in rapturous measure, exposing the sensual, dramatic emotional impact of this voluptuous piece.

If one felt a relaxing release from Liszt in the following piece, it was deceptive relief, for Brahms' variations on a theme by Schumann, op.9F, also required virtuosity, of emotion and technique. It is a difficult piece to play,



Hitting the right notes

Elia Cecino's piano keys moved between iconic and contemporary pieces

requiring true mastery of the keyboard and honest artistry, focusing on the slow and reflective bass line and harmony, rather than melody.

Brahms was only about 20 when he first met the Schumanns, and this early piece was a tribute to both, but written for Clara and based on a theme of Robert's, written when the older composer was depressed. Robert Schumann's final mental decline and hospitalisation occurred a few months after his initial meeting with, and championing of, Brahms. Brahms was allowed to visit Robert in the asylum [while Clara was not!] and was therefore their principal go-between. His first published large-scale set of Variations for solo piano, Op.9, is closely connected with the events of Schumann's

decline. While most variation sets are in major-key themes, so that there is the possibility of exploring more keys, this theme is in the minor-key, perhaps to emphasise the piece's intrinsically sad circumstances.

Layered with messages
Looking for an obvious narrative link between the variations, one finds it only in Brahms' relationship with Robert and Clara. Laden with multiple layers and hidden messages, they capture the sadness of the complex *menage a trois*, many of the variations appearing like dialogues, between male and female voices. In an attempt to immortalise Robert's former brilliant compositional faculties, Brahms was almost drawing forth conversation with the works of the once stable composer.

Clara, presciently, said of Brahms, "He will first find the true field for his genius when he begins to write for the orchestra". Seeing the symphonic affiliations in the variations, Cecino said that, while practising, he searches for ways to bring these

Liszt's composition allows subtle musicianship, whereby the pianist can shape phrases, which Cecino did with admirable shade and nuance



In 2 by 2, director Salim Arif lends a refreshing touch to Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*

Anuj Kumar

An antidote to bawdy humour and crass aesthetics prevailing on screens of different sizes that are threatening to make us tone-deaf to comedy, Gulzar's 2 by 2 provides two hours of clean entertainment that teases, tantalises, and tingles with its situational humour. Staged at the Shriram Centre For Performing Arts in Delhi, the adaptation of William Shakespeare's classic play, *The Comedy of Errors*, reaffirms faith in the power of theatre to make the audience suspend disbelief.

The Jnanpeeth awardee has a long association with the iconic story of two sets of identical twins. Way back in the 1960s, he adapted it for a feature film with Dev Anand and Johnny Walker. The casting didn't work out and eventually *Do Dooni Chaar* (1968) was made with Kishore Kumar and Asit Sen. Many summers later the ace writer-director turned it into *Angoor* (1982) with Sanjeev Kumar and Deven Verma reprising the roles. Over the years, the film has acquired cult status with cinephiles.

Reviving a classic
A few years ago, Gulzar turned it into a play that noted theatre director Salim Arif mounted with Zeeshan Ayub, Lubna Salim, and Swanand Kirkire. On popular demand, this past week, Arif returned with a new set of actors and a few fresh punches to revive the magic of Gulzar's writing.

Introducing the story in his gravelly voice-over, Gulzar takes us to the tale of two sets



Novel adaptation (Left) Director Salim Arif with Gulzar. (Below) From the play 2 by 2. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of identical twins who are separated at birth by fate, only to be reunited later by destiny. Both sets of twins share the same names, Ashok and Bahadur. A wealthy merchant had identical twin sons whom he named Ashok on a whim. As luck would have it, he and his wife came across another pair of twins and they named them Bahadur. After an accident tears the family apart, one Ashok grows up to be a married man with a wife named Sudha. His help, Bahadur, is married to Prema. Meanwhile, the other Ashok remains a bachelor, while Bahadur, also single, develops a fondness for cannabis.

One day, the bachelor twins, Ashok (Ashutosh Singh Rathore) and Bahadur (Deepak Bhatt), arrive in the city where the married Ashok and Bahadur live. Their

encounter sparks a hilarious chain of mistaken identities that leaves everyone baffled. The families, along with a jeweller, his assistant, a cycle rickshaw driver, and an inspector, all become entangled in this gentle laugh riot.

We may have moved on to the digital world but the story plays out as smoothly as ever before. The premise remains layered without getting convoluted. The execution remains lively without turning sappy. Most importantly, the central conceit of twin double roles is a challenge to execute on stage but Salim Arif takes us on a fun ride without a blip.

Expertise in stage design
An eminent art director, Salim Arif brings his expertise in stage design to create a double-story house on stage and a hotel room that takes the shape of a jewellery shop.

In between, there is a road where a cycle takes the form of an autorickshaw. Light designer Sarthak Narula ably assists him in creating a credible milieu. As the action shifts from one floor to another, the neck cranes to follow the movement and the mind works overtime to get hold of the narrative arc. The laughs are built into the narrative and seldom feel superficial. It is a classic case of a director taking the audience into confidence leaving the actors to grapple with unique situations to generate humour.

The performances are adequate though not excellent. Prerna Gupta and Chhavi Panchal lend good support as Sudha and Tanuja. The problem is the lead actors, particularly Ashutosh. In a bid to get the timing of comedy right, they take the easy way out of copying Sanjeev Kumar and Deven Verma to the T. For those who have watched the film, it might reduce their performance to a decent mimicry. For the rest, this *Angoor* tastes sweet.

Twice as much fun



Lingering effect Elia Cecino introduced every piece by speaking to the audience before playing it on his piano. PHOTOS COURTESY: ELIACECINO.IT/EN/

orchestral influences to the keyboard, concentrating on how to recreate their instrumental reverberations and leave them lingering in the piano.

Analytical approach

Cecino also said that while rehearsing Liszt, he slows down his playing immensely, so that he can examine all the piece's elements, separately, and in relation to each other. It enables him to get to the actual emotions behind the piece, instead of focusing only on its technique. Such analysis is impossible in actual performance, where the performer is swept into a tempestuous Lisztian delirium, giving no time for reflection.

Cecino introduced his pieces, in what now seems to be accepted performance code, by speaking to the audience, giving his take on what he was about to play. His boyish charm enabled one to overlook his halting English, and once he was at the keyboard, he needed no language other than the music.

Another Liszt piece followed, though very different in mood and content. The Sonetto 104 del Petrarca, S. 161 was inspired by the Italian Renaissance poet's sonnet, addressed to his adored Laura.

The sonnet sequence captures love in its various moods, 'Pace no Trovo' [“I find no peace”] being about the ardours of unfulfilled love, the poet feeling trapped in a situation of his own making, yet enjoying his captivity. Along with unrequited love, the poet is beset with

thoughts of mortality. Liszt originally set the sonnets as songs, which he abandoned and wrote them for piano instead. But he retained a sensitivity to the text, and Liszt's musical renderings are his own response to the poetry.

Absorbed in his Romantic universe, Liszt's composition allows subtle musicianship, whereby the pianist can shape phrases, which Cecino did with admirable shade and nuance, marrying the atmosphere and sentiments of the verse with the emotional music that fluctuates between lyricism and passion. The theatricality of Liszt abounded in fortissimo with octaves, double notes, long trills and augmented chords, all of which the pianist managed with aplomb.

In a brave move, Cecino ended with a contemporary piece, Orazio Sciortino's *Nuovo Sonetto del Petrarca*, establishing its place in the programme with its mood and sentiment linking it to the preceding Liszt and Brahms.

Orazio Sciortino is a 40-year-old Milanese composer, a recognisable ideal for the 21st century, open to the new, yet with a firm foundation in tradition, so that his spirit embraces the present, unbound by the past's ideologies, making his talent recognisably personal.

Another Liszt piece followed, though very different in mood and content. The Sonetto 104 del Petrarca, S. 161 was inspired by the Italian Renaissance poet's sonnet, addressed to his adored Laura.

The encore was necessarily a winding down, with a gentle Chopin Waltz, but the lasting impression of the performance was one of a delightfully confident young man, capable of expressing emotion [unexpected in a 23-year-old] with phenomenal technique and virtuosity.

CULTUREBRIEFS



Endowment concerts

The Music Academy celebrates Swati Tirunal day today at 6 p.m., with Dr. Shankar Srinivas' vocal concert. He will be accompanied by R. Raghu on the violin and Mannarkoil J. Balaji on the mridangam. The concert is organised under the endowment instituted by M/s. Arun Fabricators.

On May 27 (6 p.m.) Chinmayi Sisters will render Narayana Tirtha compositions. They will be accompanied by Usha Rajagopal on the violin and B. Ganapathyraman on the mridangam. The programme is taking place under the endowment instituted by P. Obul Reddy and P. Gnanamba.

As part of the 'Young talented musician' series, Vignesh Krishnamurthy will present his vocal concert on May 28, 6 p.m. He will be accompanied by Mantha Sriram (violin) and B. Sivaram (mridangam). The programme is organised under the endowment instituted by K. Vivekanandan, in memory of his grandfather Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. Venue: Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

Three-day summer music festival

Puskaram Trust hosts a three-day Carnatic music summer festival (non-ticketed) from May 24 to 26 at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. It features two concerts on each day, at 4 p.m. and 6.15 p.m. Following is the list of artists to perform during the festival. May 24, 4 p.m.: Swarathmika Sureshkumar with Sai Harini, Jayendra Kumar and Sai Bharath; and 6.15 p.m.: Brindha Manickavasakan with Deepika V, Delhi Sairam and Anirudh Athreya.

May 25: Sidharth Prakash with M. Vijay, Sunaada Krishna and Rohith Prasad M.A., followed by Anahitha-Apoorva, with M. Vijay, B. Sivaraman and Sunil Kumar.

May 26: Bharath Narayan with VSP Gayatri Shivani, Aduthurai Guruprasad and Hari Kishore. The vocal concert by Aswath Narayanan with VSP Gayatri Shivani, Delhi Sairam and Anirudh Athreya at 6.15 p.m. completes the festival line-up.



Rewind (From left) Malaysia Vasudevan; from films *Michael Madana Kama Rajan*; *Mudhal Mariyadhai* and *Pudhumai Penn*. (Below) Yugendran Vasudevan. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A nostalgia playlist

Yugendran recreated the retro mood with father Malaysia Vasudevan's iconic hits

Suganthy Krishnamachari

It was an evening that belonged to lovers of Malaysia Vasudevan's songs. A singer with several hits to his credit, he was a voice that was known for its versatility and gentle melody.

Malaysia Vasudevan's son Yugendran, who has been touring across the globe with Ilaiyaraaja's troupe, presented a concert in Chennai, after a hiatus of two years.

In the programme 'Voice of Malaysia Vasudevan,' organised by Abbas Cultural at the Mylapore Fine Arts Club, Yugendran began with the song 'Poove ilaya poove' from the film *Kozhi Koovuthu*. This sweet treat was followed by 'Thanga changili', a soft romantic number, from the film *Thooral Ninnu Pochu*. U.K. Murali's presentation of 'Manidan' (film *Manidan*) captured the strident notes of the original.

Favourite song

Yugendran sang 'Poonkattru thirumbumaa,' the song where a middle-aged Sivaji and a young Radha exchange musical notes. He said although 'Poonkattru' was the song most people liked in the film *Mudhal Mariyathai*, his father's favourite was 'Vetti veru Vasam',



which he presented as a tribute to his father's memory.

Yugendran said that when Ilaiyaraaja arrived on the music scene, the bass guitar came into its own. The popular composer's knowledge of western music helped him exploit the potential of this instrument to the hilt.

Versatile rendition

After singing 'Oru thendral puyalagi varume', Yugendran said that this high-pitched song left a singer drained of all energy even in a concert. In those days when technology was not so advanced, a small slip meant having to record a song all over again. Imagine if a song like 'Oru thendral' had to be repeated! But the singers of the time

were able to complete such songs in one take. That is why they are considered legends, he said.

Yugendran and Anusha Karthik, who has shared the stage with stalwarts such as SPB, Yesudas and many others, came up with 'Per vechalam veckaama' from *Michael Madana Kama Rajan*. This was a song that added to the riotous jollity of the film, presenting in a few minutes the entire premise of the story, not to mention the hilarious mix ups.

Mathangi Ajithkumar was the female voice accompanying Yugendran for the slow, sensual number 'Nilaa kaayudhu' (film *Sakalakala Vallavan*). Mathangi has sung in Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada movies, and her professionalism was evident in her singing. She reproduced every one of Janaki's sibilant sighs and seductive moans.

The enchanting Madhyamavati-based 'Aagaya gangai' and 'Ooru vittu ooru vandhu' in *Shanmukapriya* were among the other songs presented by Yugendran. The audience had many requests for him, but obviously he could not comply with all of them. Effective orchestral support was provided by Udhaya Ragam UK Murali Innisai Mazhai.

CALENDAR



ABHAI's dance workshop

ABHAI (Association of Bharatanatyam Artists of India) is back with its annual workshop Abhividdhishala, to be held from May 25 to 29 at Tamil Nadu Lal Isai Nataka Mandram, Greenways Road. Fitness and yoga practitioner Yamini Muthanna's 'Flexibility and Fitness for Dancers' and senior dancer Jayanthi Subramaniam's

workshop on Pada varnam are part of the sessions to be conducted for seniors (8 a.m.-12 p.m.).

Mahalakshmi Ashwin's workshop on how to perform elaborate kritis as invocatory pieces followed by a workshop on 'Tala exercises and the process of Jathis - composing, choreography and recitation' by Chinnamannur A. Chitra, Head of the Department, Bharatanatyam, Tamil Nadu Government Music College, Madurai, will be held for juniors (1 p.m.-4 p.m.). For more details contact 89037 17751.

Lecture series

Sruthi magazine presents a lecdem series titled 'Sampada' on May 25 at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. The programme begins with K. Gayatri's lecture 'An insight into Sarabhanandana Tala' at 10 a.m. Delhi Sararam will accompany her on the mridangam. This will be followed by senior mridangist G.V. Guru Bharadwaj's session, 'Introduction to Marga Tala' at 11.15 a.m.



Memorial concert

Madhuradhwani has organised Neyveli Santhanagopalan's vocal concert, dedicated to Thanjavur Sankara Iyer, on May 27, 6.15 p.m. The senior vocalist will be accompanied by R. Raghu on the violin, Mannargudi Easwaran on the mridangam and H. Sivaramakrishnan on the ghatam.

Solo performances

As part of HCL Concerts series, The Music Academy has organised the following performances at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall: May 29, 6 p.m.: Gopika Raj Pillai (Bharatanatyam). May 30, 6 p.m.: S. Ramkumar (veena). He will be accompanied by S. Kripal on the mridangam and Shamith S. Gowda on the ghatam.

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