

# fridayReview

THE HINDU

**On a sacred trail**Discovering Saivite heritage in Sri Lanka through the Tevaram verses **p2****Cross-cultural moves**How Ganjam in Odisha finds new expression in Malaysia **p3****BIG COMEBACK BY BRUNO MARS**

The singer tops charts with record-breaking hits and star-studded collaborations **p4**

Ghatam artiste Sumana Chandrashekhar's memoir reveals the inherent patriarchy in the world of music

## Echoes of truth



Deepa Ganesh

**G**hatam player Sumana Chandrashekhar's book, *My Journey with the Ghatam: Song of the Clay Pot*

(Speaking Tiger) is more than a memoir — It is a critical exploration of the layered histories of Indian music, performance and cultural memory. The book, while tracing the author's journey with the ghatam, pushes the boundaries of autobiographical writing. Apart from her experiences with the instrument, Sumana interrogates the broader structures — social, gendered and political — that have shaped ghatam's place within Indian classical music traditions.

Traditionally played by men, ghatam is referred to as the *upa pakavadyam* (secondary accompanying instrument) in the Carnatic music hierarchical structure. Sumana's inquiry leads to voices that have been amplified and those that have been silenced. She also questions musical practices that have become entrenched over time, while drawing attention to others that have been erased or pushed to the margins. At the heart of

this work lies the tension between memory and history. The ghatam, a clay pot percussion instrument, serves as a powerful metaphor in this exploration: an object of both sound and silence, presence and marginality, patriarchy and power.

While the book engages with similar themes that many earlier works on music have tackled, it highlights how different truths emerge depending on the vantage point. By revisiting history through diverse perspectives, especially those of women and marginalised voices, it not only offers fresh insights but also the tools to understand and navigate the present with greater sensitivity.

**Breaking stereotypes**

The opening chapters chart the author's inward journey from Carnatic vocal to the ghatam, a transition prompted by a recurring dream in the summer of 2008. She writes with exhaustive detail about her guru, the textures of apprenticeship, the stalwarts of percussion and the legends of great masters. The reflections are sincere, and at times, illuminating, harking back to ideas of discipline, body and spirit.

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 3

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**Shared history** (Clockwise from right) Koneswaram temple; Muneswaram temple; inside view of Naguleswaram temple; and Ketheeswaram temple. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & GETTY IMAGES



**Sriram V.**

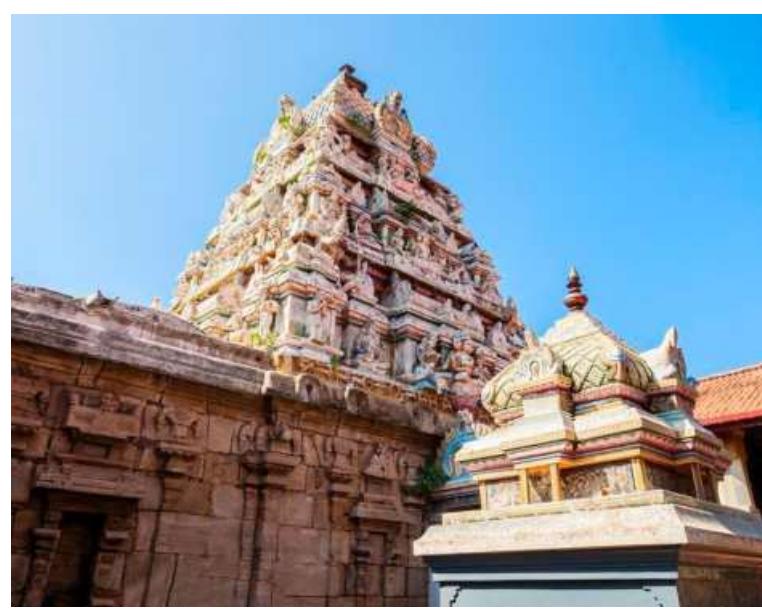
The *Ramayana*'s links with Sri Lanka are well-known across India. Not so celebrated is the connection that Tevaram (a collection of devotional hymns to Shiva) has with that country. Of the 275 Padal Petra Sthalams revered in the Tevaram, the collective name for the works of the trio – Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar – two are in Sri Lanka. A visit to these places, with those verses at hand, makes for a delightful experience of devotion and history.

Given that Sri Lanka was and is a Buddhist stronghold, it is not surprising that Hindu shrines came up along the periphery, practically hugging the coast. Five temples dedicated to Shiva are particularly sacred, and these Pancha Iswarams, as they are referred to, seem to form a protective chain around the island. Beginning from the north and proceeding clockwise, we have Naguleswaram in Jaffna, Koneswaram at Trincomalee in the northeast, Tondeswaram in the south, Muneswaram on the west and Ketheeswaram in Mannar in the northwest. Of these, the second and fifth are Padal Petra Sthalams.

Both temples have a shared history by way of mythical origins, Tevaram hymns, expansion by the Cholas and subsequent kings of Sri

# On the Tevaram trail

Long before modern diplomacy, devotion built bridges — the Tevaram's verses echo in two Sri Lankan shrines



Lanka, destruction by the Portuguese in the 17th Century and finally, reconstruction under the leadership of the Saiva Agama scholar Arumuga Navalar in the 19th Century. Recent history too has not been kind to the temples, affected, as they were, by the civil war. They now seem to be enjoying a resurgence, as reflected in the reconstruction and worship by large throngs of disciplined devotees.

Koneswaram is the more picturesque, located as it is, on a dramatic outcrop facing the sea. Once known as Dakshina Kailasam and famed for its now vanished thousand-pillared hall, it has links to the multiple Gokarnas of India where Shiva was worshipped by a

cow carrying water for his anointment in its ear. Sambandar in his Tevaram hymns, of which one verse is missing, has it that the sea deposits fragrant wood, gold, shells and precious stones on the shores of this Konamalai, and describes the mighty waves of the ocean and the moisture-laden air. Most significantly, he mentions a sunai or natural spring. The Papanasam spring here is of great sanctity.

Sri Lanka is called the Emerald Isle and the greenery is the first aspect that strikes you when you are there. Sambandar too seems to have noticed this for, at Koneswaram, he says, the Lord delights in the groves of malli, madhavi, vengai, punnai, serunti,

champakam and mullai. Standing at a dramatic cliff from where water falls into the sea, you feel thrilled that you are where Sambandar was. You see the same waves crashing the rock and inhale the air that has the fragrance of the sea, as he described.

That Kathirkamam in Sri Lanka received Tiruppugazh from Arunagirinathar is well known. He seems to have visited Koneswaram too. The set, beginning with *Vilaikku Meni*, is dedicated to Muruga in the six-tiered gopuram at Tirukkonomalai. There are no other details but it is possible that such a tower once stood here.

Though entirely reconstructed in recent times, Koneswaram has one link to its ancient past. The Somaskanda icon, belonging to the Chola period, was discovered embedded in the sea and rescued. It is now being worshipped. Much of the underwater discoveries were possible, thanks to the sci-fi writer Sir Arthur C. Clarke, who was an avid deep-sea diver.

Sambandar must have come by sea from the mainland to Konamalai. Another busy port was Mahathitta on the northwestern coast, at Mannar. It was where the great seafaring nations came to trade in ancient times. The ancient Shiva temple here was enlarged by the Cholas. The port in Tamil was known as *Mathottam*, and it is by that name that Sundarar sings of it. While this occurs in eight of the 10 verses, the significance in them is that the Palai River or Pali Aru flows through Mullaitivu and Mannar to reach the Palk Bay. In many of his verses, Sundarar describes the natural beauty of the place – the waves, bees flying between flowers and mango trees laden with fruit. He mentions the port anchored with ships, as it must have been in his time in the eighth Century.

Though not as dramatic as Konamalai, Ketheeswaram is charming too. In recent years, the Indian government has helped in the restoration of this temple. A noteworthy feature is the inclusion, along the periphery, of various iconographic representations of Shiva.

The Tevaram and Tiruppugazh verses reinforce the long connection between the two countries in spiritual matters. The repeated resurrection of the shrines establishes the triumph of faith in the face of great adversity.

# Rich repertoire

Rahul Vellal revisits classic compositions

**Aishwarya Raghunathan**

Rahul Vellal, who hails from Karnataka and is the winner of the Global Child Prodigy Awards 2020 among others, presented a repertoire of familiar and much-loved compositions at his recent concert at Krishna Gana Sabha. The singer was accompanied by B. Anantha Krishnan on the violin, Trivandrum V. Balaji on the mridangam and S. Krishna on the ghatam.

Opening with 'Tattvamariya tarama' in Ritigowla by Papanasam Sivan, Rahul brought out the gentle grace of the raga. His kalpanaswaras were neat and unhurried, flowing naturally into the next composition – Dikshitar's 'Sarasija nabha sodari' in Nagagandhari – a composition that set a tranquil mood.

In an era of elaborate presentations, it's refreshing to witness a concert that stays true to the basics – simple, neat and heartfelt. A crisp

Lathangi alapana followed, its contours clearly etched and complemented by a soothing violin response. It was yet another Papanasam Sivan composition – 'Pirava varam tharum'. The anupallavi featured intricate sangatis and the kalpanaswaras began at 'Pirava varam'.

Rahul also chose to include several audience favourites such as 'Kanrin kuralai ketu' (Mukhari), 'Bhogindra sayinam' (Kunthalavarai), 'Naan oru vilayattu bommaiya' (Navaras Kaanada), and 'Jagadhodharana' in (Kapi), spanning the works of Neelakanta Sivan, Swati Tirunal, Papanasam Sivan and Purandaradasa.

The highlight of the evening unfolded in Kiravani with a manodharma that beautifully captured the raga's essence. The violin's sensitive responses heightened the atmosphere. 'Kaligiyunte' by Tyagaraja followed a poised, unembellished rendition featuring niraval and kalpanaswaras at

**Suganthy Krishnamachari**

P.C. Ramakrishna's involvement with theatre began 60 years ago, when he acted in college plays. In 1969, he directed Willis Hall's play *The Long, The Short and The Tall*, for Loyola College. "This was the first Loyola play to be staged in Museum Theatre," says Ramakrishna. The same year Ammu Mathew, president of Madras Players, offered him a chance to act in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which was about the 17th-century Massachusetts witch trials. "Girish Karnad played the hero, and I was Reverend Paris," says Ramakrishna, who has acted in more than 100 plays of Madras Players. After 2000, he turned to direction.

In 2012, *Water*, an English dramatisation of Komal Swaminathan's *Thanneer Thanneer*, directed by Ramakrishna, took the stage by storm. "I had watched the Tamil play at Mylapore Fine Arts Club in 1980, and had found it riveting. In 2011, I found an English translation of the play, by Dr. Shankar, a professor in Hawaii. After *Water*, I felt we should continue to present regional literature in English."

Ramakrishna learnt mridangam for 12 years from two disciples of Palghat Mani

Iyer, and then learnt from Mani Iyer himself for six years. "My first concert was in 1964, at the Music Academy, for T.K. Govinda Rao. But I never played after that. I took up a corporate career, and theatre occupied all my spare time." Because of his interest in music, he was glad to dramatise Sita Ravi's short stories on the Carnatic music Trinity, translated by Prabha Sridevan. "Trinity brought together music rasikas and theatre lovers. It premiered in 2018, and in 2020 it was staged in Toronto, followed by house shows in other cities." Ramakrishna also directed Sujatha Vijayaraghavan's *Kamalakshi*,

a story about a dancer.

Ramakrishna was part of Lalgudi Jayaraman's operatic ballet 'Jaya Jaya Devi'. "As Nandi, I played the mridangam and linked all the stories through my narration, which I scripted. The violin maestro took just a month to write the lyrics and compose the music for them. He would compose and record a piece every night. The next morning, I would collect the cassette and take it to Bharatanatyam artiste Rhadha for the choreography. He didn't give the pieces in the order in which they appeared. For instance, he gave a Keeravani varnam last, and gave a thillana earlier. He used

**The power of voice**

Ramakrishna's exposure in theatre led to his foray into voice overs for ads and documentaries. His first voice over was for a documentary on BHEL, followed by voice overs for HAL, DRDO and other organisations. His voice was the voice for the films made by ISRO on their launches of SLV, PSLV, GSLV, Chandrayan 1 and 2, Gaganyaan and other rockets and satellites. Voice modulation, so essential in theatre, helped him to do human interest scripts relating to children with special needs and scripts highlighting tourist destinations in different states, scripts on Indian heritage, children's talking books and so on.

**Proscenium talk**

P.C. Ramakrishna in the play *Water*. PHOTO: PV. RAMKUMAR

a discordant raga Sucharita for discordant moments in the play. We had no time for rehearsals here. We rehearsed in a temple in Cleveland. The show was presented in 23 cities across the U.S."

On the request of the Madras High Court, Madras Players dramatised the Lakshmi Kanthan murder trial of 1945, in which actors Thyagaraja Bhagavtar and N.S. Krishnan were the accused. "I wrote the script after reading all the court transcripts. I ran it by lawyer N.L. Rajah, who played the role of defence counsel K.M. Munshi. Our props had the perfect period look, because our set designer copied the designs of the old court furniture now displayed in the High Court museum."

How did you find someone speaking English with a British accent to play Judge Mockett? "There was a technologist called Michael Caves, who happened to be in Chennai, and he played Mockett."

Talking about choosing stories, Ramakrishna says, "They must have the three 'C's – content, characters and conflict. Without conflict, there is no drama. I also like strong women characters, which was why I dramatised Choodamani's stories."

As for casting, he feels, The actors must be age compatible with the characters. "My vision of the character must fit that person."

How is it like working with newcomers? "I like it, because they come without any baggage, and they absorb everything I teach them."

Does he act now? "Rarely. I feel I must share my knowledge of theatre with youngsters, and direction helps me do that."



## Notable scenes

Actor-director P.C. Ramakrishna looks back at his six-decade journey in theatre



Trivandrum V. Balaji, S. Krishna, Rahul Vellal and B. Anantha Krishnan PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**Assertive beats**  
The ghatam helped Sumana find her musical identity; and (below) the book cover.

PHOTOS: V. SREENIVASA MURTHY AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Echoes of truth

CONTINUED FROM  
» PAGE 1

Under Sukanya Ramgopal's tutelage, Sumana encounters not just a master of rhythm but a woman of quiet strength and rare humanity. Sukanya's choice of the ghatam came at a time when a woman percussionist was an anomaly, often met with hostility. Guided by two visionaries – Harihara Sharma and his son, Vikku Vinayakram – she weathered repeated slights from senior musicians and organisers. None of this dimmed her devotion. The presence of these three artistes and how they helped her navigate world steeped in prejudice, infuses the narrative with warmth and dignity, while inviting reflection on gender and art – reminiscent of the nattuvanar-Devasadas dynamic.

Juxtaposed with this is the story of Meenakshi of Manamadurai – a woman from a lower rung of the social hierarchy, whose labour quite literally gives form and voice to the instrument. It is her hands that bring the tonal perfection to the ghatam through days of physically demanding work, yet her contribution remains invisible to the world that reveres its sound. She sits in solitude, in quiet meditativeness, shaping the clay with instinctive precision. The media, she observes, once sought her husband's words, and now her son's; her own voice, as ever, remains unheard. Meenakshi's story becomes a counter-image to Sukanya's – one of creation without recognition, devotion without visibility – reminding us how art's hierarchies extend beyond performance into the very making of sound itself.

## Intriguing questions

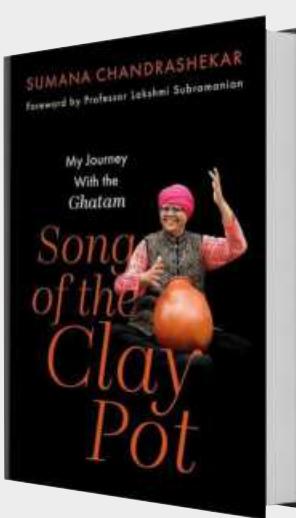
From within these layered portraits, Sumana's own persona gradually takes shape – through anecdotes of misogyny, patriarchy and the scrutiny of appearance. Her understanding of success and failure often seems refracted through the

expectations of the world around her. In the present, she appears less prepared to meet the challenges that arise, perhaps because, as products of our time, we assume the world should be fair and just, though it remains far from it. Out of this realisation emerges one of the book's most thought-provoking questions: M.S. Subbulakshmi, Sumana recalls, was a competent mridangam player before she chose to be a vocalist. Had she continued as a percussionist, would the story of women in percussion have unfolded differently? It is a question that haunts her, torn as she is between remaining with the ghatam or leaving it behind – until her guru reminds her that what truly sustains an artiste is not validation from the world, but the 'inner fire'.

The final chapters of the book are meticulously researched, with sections such as 'Musical Censorship', 'The Phoenix Rises' and 'On Pot Bellies' offering particularly engaging reading. Drawing from a variety of sources, Sumana presents her findings thoughtfully. For instance, the semi-circular concert seating of the past is back in practice today, not only addressing hierarchy on stage but also allowing the *upa pakkavadyam* artiste to establish eye contact with the main performer, correcting a subtle disadvantage. There are many such instances throughout the book.

From where we stand, however, it is worth approaching our observations with certain tentativeness. Isn't that why we should revisit history from time to time? The book invites reflection not on simple binaries of right and wrong, or on a wholly rigid and unfeeling social order, but on the complexities that lie beyond our immediate understanding. There were spaces where gender and hierarchy were temporarily suspended, and moments of genuine partnership emerged. Yet, these moments coexisted with absences, gaps, and unacknowledged tensions – patterns whose causes may be obscured, reminding us not to draw easy conclusions. In this sense, the book leaves us with a quiet, probing question: how do we reckon with what is partly visible, partly intangible, and always lived?

The memoir insists on the importance of continually revisiting cultural narratives, not to destabilise tradition, but to illuminate its many layers – and to make space for more inclusive musical futures.



# The cross-cultural step

The heritage of Ganjam in Odisha finds expression in a new collaborative work



**Visual artistry** Gajendra Panda and Ramli Ibrahim's new work 'Radhe Radhe - Sweet Surrender'.  
PHOTOS: SUTRA DANCE THEATRE

By V.V. Ramani

"Take Ganjam's art and dance to the international stage," were the words of the distinguished scholar and artist Dinanath Pathy, which became the guiding force for guru Gajendra Panda and dancer-choreographer Datuk Ramli Ibrahim. Inspired by Dinanath, also their mentor, the duo delved deep into the indigenous art forms of Ganjam district (Odisha) and adapted them to suit the contemporary stage. After the success of three productions, the two artistes have come together again for 'Radhe Radhe - Sweet Surrender', a Malay-Indian dance production by the Malaysia-based Sutra Dance Theatre, which premiered recently in Kuala Lumpur.

"Our guru Debaprasad Das believed in the concept of 'Tridhara' – an organic creative flow of an indigenous thread that binds the three facets – classical, tribal and folk traditions. Both he and Dinanath believed that their inclusion within the fabric of contemporary Odissi repertoire, holistically would ensure their continuum," says Ramli. Guided by their thoughts, this production

draws references and influences from the folk form Radha Prema Leela and has been conceived to bring together music, dance and visual arts.

A rich musical score, an engaging dance vocabulary and a captivating play of lighting and scenic design, woven dexterously with a storyline, has always been the hallmark of Ramli's production and 'Radhe Radhe' lives up to it.

**Beyond the repertoire**  
The production has been devised in two parts. The first has been ideated with a focus on highlighting the personas of Radha and Krishna through a traditional Odissi repertoire of mangalacharan, sthai, abhinaya and a pallavi. The choreography for sthai introduces two main characters of the leela,

the vasakadsajjika – Chandravali adorning herself to meet Krishna and Khandita – jealous rage of Radha. In the Kalavati raga pallavi the characters who form a part of the leela are introduced judiciously into this pure dance piece.

Video projection of images on a screen as a backdrop often creates disturbances to the dance visualisation. But here, the popular Pattachitra (palm leaf) paintings of Odisha were commissioned to go with the narration and were done by artist Bibhu Patnaik. Except at a few places where the use of the visuals disturbed the large group dance formations, the paintings enriched the visual language and narration.

The traditional Radha Prema Leela from Putabagada village of Ganjam district, portraying the



divine love between Krishna and Radha, was the source of inspiration for the second half of the show. The storyline was simple – Radha gets a glimpse of Krishna, falls in love and agrees to meet him in Vrindavan. She adorns herself and waits, but Krishna is waylaid by another gopi – Chandravali. Radha gets angry and is unmoved by his apologies. He dons various disguises – of a flower seller, bird seller and a yogi. It is only when he says he will renounce the world if she doesn't accept him, Radha relents and the two are joyfully united.

**Interesting portrayals**  
The story was choreographed in an interesting manner, with clear communication and each sequence moving in quick succession. The transition of the shades of emotions of Radha – ranging from love and anger to pathos – was portrayed expressively by Geethika Sree with fine responses from Harentiran as Krishna. The dancing by Nitya Kuthiah as the flower seller and Vanitha Vasantha Nathan as the bird seller was vibrant. Jyotsna Manivasakan as Chandravali, Tao Mei Mei as Lalitha and Adhikar Raj as Balakrishna were impressive too.

The second half scaled great heights because of excellent music and rhythm composition by guru Gopal Chandra Panda, guru Sachitananda Das and Sangita Panda. The raw, rustic flavour of the raga and the manner in which the musical rendition was adapted to match the classical idiom enhanced the overall appeal. Sangeeta Panda and Satya Brata Katha on vocals were accompanied by Jabahar Mishra on the flute, Rabi Pradhan on the sitar, and Rama Chandra Behera on the mardal and Gajendra Panda on sabda ukkuta and manjira.

"I believe in using light as my colour palette to see the desired tones and ambience on stage," says Sivarajah Natarajan, the lighting designer. His sensitive play of lights enhanced the mood of each segment. The co-artistic direction and dance composition were by Ramli Ibrahim and guru Gajendra Panda.

## CULTURE BRIEFS



### Provoké art festival is back

Provoké Lifestyle presents its third edition of Provoké Art Festival

2025 on November 1 and 2. It will be held at The Music Academy. Ever since its inception in 2023, Provoké has celebrated India's rich artistic legacy while embracing fresh interpretations.

The festival, say the organisers, will bring together performers, art enthusiasts and cultural connoisseurs. This year, the inaugural day of the festival will feature two performances: dancer Rukmini Vijayakumar followed by Subhasree Thanikachalam with Haricharan, Sai Vignesh, Disha Prakash and others. The second day will feature a play by Rohini and Pralayan followed by Rajesh Vaidhya's performance alongwith young vocalists Rahul Vellal and Spoorthi Rao.

Eminent personalities from the field of art, music, dance and theatre will be awarded at the festival. The event is open to all and seating is on a first-come, first-served basis.

### Learn Dasar kritis

Madhuradhwani and Ranjani Memorial Trust will jointly present Dasanubava 2025, featuring a workshop and music concerts featuring Haridas compositions at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. Amrutha Venkatesh will perform on October 25, 6.15 p.m. with Bombay R. Madhavan (violin), S.J. Arjun Ganesh (mridangam) and S. Karthick (ghatam). On October 26, 6.15 p.m.: Archana and Samanvi will perform with M. Vijay on the violin, Trivandrum Balaji on the mridangam and H. Sivaramakrishnan on the ghatam. Those interested can learn the Dasar kritis, tuned by Aravinda Hebbar, on these two days at a wor10 a.m. For registration details call 9481445601.



### Revisiting the margam

Natyarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha, will present poorna margam performance by Sreedevi and Jayakrishnan on October 25, 6 p.m. Venue: Sathguru Gnanananda hall. Natyarangam presents two poorna margam recitals annually. Spanning two hours, the full-fledged performances highlight the beauty of the traditional Bharatanatyam repertoire. It also offers dancers and teachers the opportunity to revisit classic compositions.

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**Rachel Rhine**

**A**s 2025 winds to a close, one name towers above the rest on the global music charts – Bruno Mars. After years away from solo releases, Bruno returned with a string of collaborations that not only dominated streaming platforms but also swept major awards, redefining what a comeback looks like. The singer spent a record-breaking 26 weeks atop the Billboard Global 200 with two big hits: *APT* featuring BLACKPINK's ROSÉ and *Die with a smile* with Lady Gaga.

Bruno is the first artiste I ever called my favourite. I must have been 11, far too young to have opinions about melody or groove, but I remember the conviction clearly. There was something irresistible about him. Perhaps, it was his voice, that liquid blend of charm and sincerity or the way he made happiness sound like hard work. Ironically, my mother decided his 'The lazy song' would make a good alarm, a choice that still feels like a cosmic joke. There's nothing quite like being jolted awake by someone cheerfully declaring, 'Today I don't feel like doing anything'.

In retrospect, that song was part of the lesson. Bruno Mars was never lazy; he just made it look effortless. Over the years, I've watched him shapeshift from doo-wop dreamer to disco revivalist to smooth soulman, and realised that beneath all the glitz is an artist with a deep respect for the architecture of pop. He doesn't treat genre as a box but as a playground. Every time he returns, it's in a new costume, a wink, a rhythm, a mood we didn't know we missed.

Lately, he's been on another golden streak. *Die with a smile*, his lush duet with Lady Gaga, was one of 2024's biggest global hits – all sweeping strings and cinematic melancholy, the kind of ballad that reminds you how grand simplicity can be. Then came *APT*, with Rosé, a breezy slice of cross-continental pop that felt both K-pop and

# Mars in full orbit

With 'APT.' and 'Die with a Smile' ruling the 2025 charts, Bruno Mars marks his grand return to pop's frontline.



**Chart topper** Bruno Mars and (below) with Lady Gaga.  
PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES



**Bruno Mars's greatest trick isn't just his versatility. It's his sincerity. Beneath the sequins and swagger is a musician who still believes that music should make you feel**

Motown at once. And, just when we thought he might settle into that elegance, he veered into the outrageous with 'Fat Juicy & Wet' alongside 'Sexy Red', proof that his humour, like his groove, is very much alive.

There's something delightful about that sequence. It's as if Bruno Mars is conducting a social experiment on how far pop can stretch and still remain itself. His music moves through eras and moods with the ease of a time-traveller who's too busy dancing to get nostalgic. And yet, even as he borrows from the past, he never sounds dated. Each song feels like a conversation between generations, genres and between the performer and the joy of performing.

For those of us who grew up

with him, Bruno Mars has become less a pop star and more a point of continuity. He's been the soundtrack to first crushes and long car rides, heartbreaks and karaoke nights. His songs have the strange ability to belong equally to our childhoods and our adulthoods. Maybe that's why he endures – because in a world that's always chasing what's next, he reminds us of what still works: melody, rhythm, charm.

Watching his evolution feels oddly personal. The child, who once claimed him as her favourite singer now listens with different ears, aware of the craft, the references, the retro callbacks. But every now and then, when *Treasure* comes on, I still catch myself smiling the same way I did back then. It's a small, quiet kind of joy – one that makes you grateful for artistes who keep growing without letting go of their sparkle.

Bruno Mars's greatest trick isn't just his versatility. It's his sincerity. Beneath the sequins and swagger is a musician who still believes that music should make you feel – whether it's a slow jam, funk groove or a tongue-in-cheek alarm clock anthem. And maybe that's why, years later, he's still my favourite.

## CALENDAR

### Dedicated to a veteran

The Music Academy will feature the following programmes at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Details: Today, 6 p.m.: 'Ghata Tarang' a special ensemble by Sukanya Ramgopal (ghatam and konnakol) with Vani Manjunath (flute), Charulatha Ramanujam (violin), Lakshmi Rajasekara Iyer (mridangam), Bhagyalakshmi M Krishna (morsing).

Tomorrow, 10 a.m.: The workshop, 'A comprehensive approach to vadya and gayaka on the violin,' will be conducted by Sriram Parusaram. The event is open to students and rasikas. For registration contact 28112231 / 28115162.

Both events are organised under the endowment instituted by the family of Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu in his memory.

### Themed on Shiva

Sridevi Nrithyalaya presents 'Siva Nava Bhakti' on October 26, 6.30 p.m., at Vani Mahal, T. Nagar. The dance drama explores the Nava Vidha Bhakti, the nine modes of devotion to attain salvation.

The team consists of Shobha Korambil (script), Embar Kannan (music composition), Sheela Unnikrishnan (choreography) and lyrics are drawn from well-known Tamil works and verses are penned down by Prof. S. Raghuraman.

### Sita Kalyanam

Sri Gopalakrishna Nama Prachara Sabha commemorates the 134th jayanthi of Pudukottai Gopalakrishna Bhagavatar with a two-day special line up on October 25 and 26 at Sri Alamelumanga Kalyana Mandapam, Radhakrishnan Street, T. Nagar.

## Rhythmic ode

Season 2 of Dikshitar-250, curated by Veena C. Seshadri, will feature solo dance performances of the composer's works



**Classic tunes** Swasti Hebbar and Niyathi Nagesh (disciples of Veena C. Seshadri) performing at Dikshitar 250 Season 1. PHOTO COURTESY: KALASAMPADA

### Shilpa Anandraj

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**M**uthuswami Dikshitar's compositions have been celebrated for generations not just by musicians but also dancers. For instance, Padma Subrahmanyam has choreographed Dikshitar's 'Meenakshi me mudam dehi' in raga Gamakari while Yamini Krishnamurthy captivated hearts with her performance of 'Balambikayah katakshithom'. Bengaluru's Kalasampa

special concerts, the Karnataka dance fraternity is paying obeisance to the composer through dance," says Veena C. Seshadri, founder of Kalasampa, who has curated the dance festival.

"We are celebrating Dikshitar 250 with a grand event every three months. We started with 'Kaladhyatham, Bani and Beyond', which was staged during Season 1 and featured duet performances by young artistes from across dance schools in Bengaluru. And Season 2 will include solo dance recitals based on Dikshitar's compositions," adds Veena, who feels this is one of the ways to take his works to the new generation. We can learn about the sthalas puranas or kshetra puranas, agama sastras and nuances of bhakti bhava through his compositions. The irony is that these pieces were not

specifically written for performances, but it's the emotions that make them ideal for the stage."

Dikshitar 250 features only Bharatanatyam as "that is my forte, hence we wanted to focus on this dance form. We invited applications. The dancers will each present one Dikshitar composition," shares Veena. Around eight to nine dance schools across Bengaluru will participate in season 2.

Season 1 saw participation from students of Malini Ravishankar, Suma Nagesh, Poornima Gururaj and Aranya Narain. "Season 1 featured 'Roopamu joochi' (choreographed by Rukmini Devi), 'Kanjadalayatakshi', 'Gajanayatutam', 'Hiranmayim', 'Vatapi Ganapatim bhaje', 'Ardhanareeshwaram', 'Panchi matanga', 'Sri Maha Ganapatim', Nottuswaram sahitya and 'Akhilandeshwari'. We focused on duet as we wanted to showcase the beauty of coordination. Season 2 will be featuring performances by Anushree R. Raikar (disciple of Sathyana Raja), who will present 'Rangapura vihara' in raga Brindavana Saranga, Shravani Satish (disciple of Mithun Shyam), who will present 'Swaminatha paripalaya' in raga Nattai; and Lahari premanand (disciple of Veena), who will present 'Meenakshi me mudam' in raga Gamakapriya.

A significant aspect of Kalasampa's Dikshitar 250 is a two-day tour (November 22 and 23) "where we, along with the participating dancers will visit Chidambaram, Tiruvanamalai, Thanjavur and Tiruchi – all connected to Dikshitar's life and works. We hope this trip offers insights into the musical, historical and spiritual traditions of each kshetra. The journey is designed to provide cultural depth, contextual understanding of the kritis, and a stronger appreciation of Dikshitar's legacy," says Veena. Visit [veenakalasampa.com](http://veenakalasampa.com) for details.

## Notes on the move

In 'Travellers' sarodist Soumik Datta uses music to highlight humanitarian issues

### Neha Kirpal

**A**ward-winning sarod artiste Soumik Datta is all set to tour India with a new show 'Travellers'. Having started in Mumbai on October 10, he will travel with it to Bengaluru on October 30 at Bangalore International Centre and Sabha BLR on October 31, Ahmedabad on November 2, Jaipur on November 7 and Delhi on November 13. 'Travellers', which was developed during a summer residency at G5A earlier this year, unveils a genre-blending soundscape where Indian classical roots meet ambient textures, spoken word and field recordings.

Over the last few years, Soumik's work has been exploring the space between the sheer beauty of Indian classical music and the grim reality of urgent humanitarian issues. "Now more than ever, it feels almost impossible to play music for the sake of music, without using that platform to draw attention towards our shared crises. With 'Travellers', my intention is to discover a piece that was driven by the urgency of the moment, our raw, complicit feelings of helplessness and grief. The heartbreaking images of displaced families and the suffering in Gaza created an emotional state, that became the foundation of the music," he says.

The tracks in 'Travellers' are unusual. "Some lines go from played and spoken to sung. Sometimes we shout out phrases, punctuating the music and our own playing. The pieces erupt with exclamations and theatrical moments which require a lot of concentration from us" shares Soumik. The show has him collaborating with Sayee Rakshit (violin), Debjit Patitundi (tabla), and Sumesh Narayanan (mridangam) and percussion) and together they form the quartet at the heart of 'Travellers'. "It's been refreshing to meet artistes who are both anchored to their tradition and free to explore the outermost fringes of their music. Where we align is in our collective search for new languages," says Soumik.

At its heart is the sarod's evocative tune, layered with violin, tabla and percussion to create what Soumik calls "ear cinema. I've always enjoyed films. There's a huge amount of information in the score, the Foley and of course, the dialogue. That aural space has always been magical to me but I never thought I



would explore it in such depth and detail as we have in 'Travellers.' Using field recordings and audio clips from real life drives the experience of the show towards the documentary space. "Imagine blending a live music concert with a documentary feature film about the humanitarian crisis today. Now take away the video and you'll come close to the world of 'Travellers,'" he elaborates.

During the 'Travellers' show, Soumik plans to collaborate with young musicians, record in unusual spaces and work with schools and children. Soumik also plans to launch 'Travellers' as an album.

