

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Chennai Music Season 2025
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FINDING A DISTINCT SOUND

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ragas such as Mukhari or Kedaragowla. Be warned: the audacity of the resulting algorithmic gibberish can be alarming. It is advisable to approach these inquiries with restraint – your sanity and, potentially, your premium subscription depend on it. All this raises one terrifying question – when a student is assigned a manodharma exercise by their guru, will the next generation open ChatGPT instead of their own minds?

Note navigator

AI tools often demonstrate a lack of cultural literacy regarding performance conventions. They suggest using AI for “Instant sahitya or raga recall during performance”, ignoring that using a device in a concert is frowned upon by many in the classical world. AI claims it can supply a forgotten line or sangati if queried backstage or during a break, failing to grasp that a traditional Carnatic concert is a continuous flow without intermissions or mid-set huddles. Its most absurd claim involves post-performance analysis on technical flaws, detailing “shruti drift points, speed accuracy and places where the alapana lacked contrast”. AI compares this data-driven assessment to having a personal guru-analyst, missing the nuance of artistic mentorship. Usage of AI for laya also raises concerns, as claims range from constructing

korvais, muktayis and kalpanaswara patterns to tracking *angas* and detecting *eduppus* in real time. Mridangam players should be prepared for shocking artificially generated outcomes, as ChatGPT claims it can stylistically model *sollus* in the style of Palghat Mani Iyer and Palani Subramania Pillai.

Classical musicians worldwide have criticised AI, asserting that no algorithm can truly replace the depth, intuition and emotion of a human artiste. Their skepticism is reinforced by the fact that many AI tools still have limitations and include disclaimers warning of inaccuracies or fabricated content. However, as technology advances, targeted improvements in AI models that handle artistic nuance and cultural context could reduce this criticism. If AI evolves to reliably meet the intricate demands of Indian classical music, producing accurate and aesthetically pleasing output, the gap between a human creator and a machine assistant may gradually narrow.

The conversation around AI forces us to confront the definition of tradition. Tradition is not a static artefact; it is a dynamic stream of knowledge that incorporates new methodologies. Classical music, as an evolving heritage, cannot afford to sideline technological advancement. Musicians must move past the scepticism to observe, understand, and apply AI, not as a replacement for human mastery but as a modern instrument for practice, planning and cultural propagation.

Of Algorithms and Alapanas

Classical musicians must move past scepticism when it comes to AI. It cannot replace human mastery, but can be a modern instrument for practice, planning and cultural propagation

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Generative AI has disrupted everyday life, moving tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Copilot from the niche to the mainstream. This shift has reached the arts, and classical music is no exception, with Artificial Intelligence slowly integrating itself into the art form. Many who used to attend Chennai's December Season, one of the world's largest music festivals, planned their itinerary with physical aids such as reckoners that listed all the concerts of the season. Today, Generative AI has moved beyond digital listing to become a personalised logistics assistant. AI tools dynamically display artiste schedules, list events by venue, and simplify the complex task of Sabha hopping. By inputting desired artistes, free time and geographical preferences such as “Alwarpet area only”, a tool such as Gemini can automate and optimise an entire Season itinerary. Some AI tools even claim to make smart recommendations learning the user's favourite ragas, composers and artistes, and offer concert suggestions aligning with their artistic taste. There are multi-genre events taking place from November to January, but a limited number of

audiences who choose performances that resonate most with them. In this competitive environment, creative social media advertising becomes crucial. AI helps by instantly generating eye-catching posters, visuals and appealing content, allowing artistes to cut through the noise and create talking points for their performances. Attending kutcheris during the Margazhi Season is more than a solitary pursuit; it is a social phenomenon shaping daily life. Sabha premises become hubs where friends, family, and connoisseurs gather over music and the famed on-site canteens. AI tools now go beyond scheduling, factoring in traffic, parking, wheelchair access and good canteens. The canteen culture has become so central – and health concerns so strong – that concert attendees may ask AI to analyse menus for gluten-free, low-fat or high-protein options. **Decoding texts** Although phone use during performances is often criticised, AI now makes it possible to deepen appreciation of visual arts such as Bharatanatyam. It can provide instant information about the song being performed, offer translations and meanings for a complex Telugu padam to better comprehend the abhinaya, or give short act-by-act summaries of a Koodiyattam play based on a 2,000-year-old Sanskrit text,

helping audiences understand the story and the nuances of the theatre form. When questioned about its utility, ChatGPT lists over 15 ways in which it assists Carnatic musicians, feasibly in linguistic and organisational tasks like sahitya splitting, word breakdowns, prosody checks and translation. Advanced AI could also help teachers by generating notations as it hears them sing, like how Copilot summarises meeting notes. AI can construct and manage concert lists for multi-city tours or themed repertoires, ensuring raga/tala diversity, meeting linguistic and rhythmic requirements, and optimising performance duration. Its bolder claims extend to musical creativity, offering raga analysis, melodic phrase generation and guidance for alapana and niraval. When tasked with composing five alapana phrases spanning the Shadjam and Panchamam in Mayamalavagowla, AI tools churn out melodic blueprints. Not content with mere notes, they append hyper-academic justifications such as “a rakti-style approach, rich in emotional resonance” or “a forceful yet subtle glide into ‘Pa’ and back, prioritising rhythmic complexity”. Whether these mechanically-assembled sequences could be used in a performance or how pleasing an AI-constructed alapana might sound remains speculative. The real peril begins when querying AI about subtleties of phrase-based

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P Srihari

Kunnakudi M. Balamurali Krishna's music is characterised by vibrant energy, a penchant for arithmetical intricacy and matching technical virtuosity. When this flair is tempered by aesthetic sensitivity, as it largely was at this recital, the effect is elevating. A seasoned accompanying ensemble of H.N. Bhaskar (violin), B. Shree Sundarkumar (mridangam) and S. Karthick (ghatam) played a key role in sustaining this balance. Balamurali Krishna opened with a neat presentation of the Khanda Ata tala varnam 'Vanajakshi' in Kalyani by Pallavi Gopala Iyer. Following an Abhogi outline, he delivered a nuanced rendition of Tyagaraja's 'Nannu brova niku', where the composer questions Rama's seeming delay in granting him refuge. The vocalist's deep-voice

High on aesthetics

Kunnakudi Balamurali Krishna's unhurried rendition underlined the value of restraint in classical music

articulation, modulations and brigas marked the kriti rendition, before judicious use of janta and datu phrases embellished the kalpanaswaras. The famous Tamil kriti in Varali, 'Kaa vaa vaa', which seeks Muruga's divine presence and protection, was Balamurali Krishna's next song. The classic, with its pallavi and anupallavi replete with vocatives, invoking the god's various names, was rendered with apt and

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

animated illustration.

The singer then presented 'Paridaanamichte', Patnam Subramania Iyer's Bilahari composition in Khanda Chapu. Occasional off-key moments in the fast passages of an otherwise well-rounded raga essay suggested that the impulse to push the tempo came at the cost of alignment. Speed was again

the alapana and the kriti 'Sri kanthimatin' provided an immersive experience. The raga was unveiled with unhurried, well-spaced phrases that revealed its contours in its splendour, and a sustained mandhra sthayi exploration was particularly compelling. It was like a celebration of 'Dikshitar 250', as Balamurali Krishna showcased the kriti's architectural strength and meditative depth with a sublime rendition where tranquility ruled. This was followed by the kalpanaswaras at the pallavi opening, which embraced measured arithmetical articulation. The tani avartanam was an expansive percussion dialogue between Shree Sundarkumar and Karthick, defined by tonal clarity, absorbing patterns and variety. A soulful rendition of Papanasam Sivan's 'Muruga muruga ena nee sol' in Hamsanandi rounded off the concert, which underlined the value of musical restraint.

Smart choice of compositions

A well-structured repertoire marked Vivek Moozhikulam's concert

Sreevalsan Thiyyadi

Vivek Moozhikulam designed his two-hour concert in such a way that a leisurely raga was followed by a sprightly one. This interspersion worked particularly well in the first half of his concert, giving his accompanists ample chance to display their skills. Saveri was the melody Vivek chose as the sub-main. Following it up with a brisk Nagagandhari, the musician embarked upon his principal suite in Kalyani. The raga can shine even at a slow pace, but the vocalist chose to focus on its vivacity. Interestingly, this also implied a lone break in the pattern, just as the kutcheri entered the second half. The 12-minute Kalyani alapana trod the classical path. It was refreshing even as the vocalist seldom went for a novel phrase. Vivek enjoys every bit of his singing, even when the upper ranges sometimes proved to be a struggle.



Sprightly Vivek Moozhikulam with Badri Narayanan (violin), Melakaveri K. Balaji (mridangam) and Nerkunam S. Sankar (kanjira). PHOTO COURTESY: MUDHRA

MUDHRA

On the violin, Badri Narayanan's solo response ended with an odd slice of Sahana (and even an unwitting flash of Kanada). Tyagaraja's 'Etavunara' managed to restore order, suitably backed by the percussionists: Melakaveri K. Balaji (mridangam) and Nerkunam S. Sankar (kanjira). A niraval (around 'Srigarudagu') peaked

too early, while the two-speed swaraprastara progressed well, but for one bit that carried a clutter of discordant notes from Vivek. The subsequent tani avartanam spanned a quarter hour, with a five-beat Khanda nadai stretch in the middle adding steam to the duo's essay in Adi tala. Vivek began his presentation with an Ata tala varnam in Ritigowla with a brief alapana. The treatment of 'Vanajaksha' (by Veenai Kuppaier)

demonstrated his impressive grip over microtones. These features earned further sweetness when the vocalist next sang 'Swaminatha paripalaya' in a peppy Nattai. This Muthuswami Dikshitar kriti taxied the kutcheri to its take-off point. And so, by the time Devagandhari came up as the third piece, the concert had earned its character and steadiness. The alapana saw its descending notes segueing into Tyagaraja's famed 'Ksheerasagara sayana'. Intelligent modulations made the concert's first niraval ('Narimani') doubly pleasing. The subsequent Saveri alapana generated phrases that appealed like an intimate conversation between the vocal and the violin. Restrained frills defined 'Muruga muruga' (Periyasami Thooran), though a couple of forays sounded tentative. 'Sarasijanabha sodari' came ahead of the piece de resistance. The post-tani ditties were an unhurried 'Taruni njan' (Dwijavanti, Swati Tirunal) and an agile 'Pathiki Haratire' (Surutti, Tyagaraja).

Jog as the centrepiece

Saketharaman's expansive elaboration brought out myriad shades of the raga

Kalyan Gopalan

S. Saketharaman opened his concert on an arresting note with a mallari in Gambhira Nattai – his own composition – set to Misra Jati Triputa tala. A refreshing departure from the conventional varnam or kriti opening, this established a majestic tone from the outset. He was supported by Kamalakiran Vinjamuri on the violin, Delhi Sairam on the mridangam and Anirudh Athreya on the kanjira. The concluding korvai of the Mallari was handled with synchronicity, the ensemble anticipating every nuance with precision. The vocalist next presented Muthuswami Dikshitar's 'Maragathalingam chinthaye' in Vasantha, with poise and clean intonation. This was followed by a devotion-laden viruttam of Ramalinga Vallalar, beginning with the evocative lines 'Petra thaai thanai maga marandhaalum'. Saketharaman's emphasis on 'Namah Sivayathai nan maravene' heightened the spiritual tenor before he transitioned to Papanasam Sivan's 'Andavane unai nambaninen' in Shanmukapriya, set to Tisra Eka tala. Young violinist Kamalakiran displayed his characteristic gliding legato, producing fluid, seamless phrases. While Saketharaman's voice occasionally turned sharp in the upper registers, his rendition remained expressive. Delhi Sairam's mridangam accompaniment was unhurried and sensitive, relying on well-placed mittu and cappu, often echoing shades of his guru Thiruvuvarur Bakthavathsalam, especially when he played some intricate thavil-specific grooves or nadais. Anirudh Athreya complemented him with

restraint and aesthetic clarity. The niraval at 'Tandavam aadum kunchita karana' unfolded with the smoothness of an unbroken stream. During the improvisation, Saketharaman evocatively delineated the seven sapta tandavams of Shiva – Ananda, Sandhya, Kalika, Uma, Samhara, Vijaya and Urdhva – employing khanda nadai in the swaras for Samhara Tandavam. Both percussionists showed awareness of the main artiste's intent, offering support free of unnecessary rhythmic complexity. A breezy Sama followed, with Tyagaraja's 'Santamu lekha sovkiyamu ledhu', rendered with warmth. To raise the tempo, Saketharaman chose Oothukkadu Venkatakavi's 'Neerada sama neela krishna'

in Jayantasri, painting a vivid imagery of Krishna's rain-cloud-hued complexion. The main segment of the evening – an expansive exploration of raga Jog – featured a detailed alapana, followed by tanam and a pallavi. The choice of Jog as the central piece was refreshing. Saketharaman's elaboration was imaginative, while Kamalakiran's responses were marked by finesse and anticipation. In the ragamalika section, the vocalist traversed Anandabhairavi and Madhuvanti, and the violinist briefly wove in a motif from Laigudi Jayaraman's Madhuvanti thillana, drawing spontaneous applause. The concert concluded with 'Karpagame' in Madhyamavati, preceded by a brisk 'Muruga muruga ena nee soll' in Hamsanandi, bringing the evening to a satisfying finish.



Imaginative Saketharaman with Kamalakiran Vinjamuri (violin), Delhi Sairam (mridangam) and Anirudh Athreya (kanjira). PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

CULTUREBRIEFS

A day with Dikshitar



Carnatic musician G. Ravikiran's *Guruguhaamrta* is back with its annual edition of 'A Day with Dikshitar' on December 14, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Myslapore. Dedicated to Muthuswami Dikshitar, the day-long event features vocal and instrumental concerts by both young and senior musicians, and distribution of prizes to the participants of the global competition conducted on Dikshitar kritis. It will be presided over by T.S. Krishnamurthy, former Chief Election Commissioner of India. Prizes have been instituted in the memory of Vijayalakshmi Rajasundaram and Kothamangalam Subbu by their family. The following is the list of performances to be featured on the occasion. Nottuswarams by Sumedha Vijayaganes, Magizhan P and Hirankeyi S, students of Sunaadalahari, at 9 a.m. will set the tone for the day-long event. This will be followed by Ramanth and Gopinath Iyer's veena duet (9.30 a.m.) and Tharunkuam Dhanasekaran's vocal concert (11.30 a.m.). The afternoon concerts are by Sri Sri Sisters (vocal at 2 p.m.) followed by that of Sarvesh Kirithi at 3 p.m. The artistes to perform in the evening are Aishwarya Shankar (4.30 p.m.) and Nirmala Rajasekhar (veena, 7 p.m.)

Siromani awards to artistes

Sri Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavathar Cultural Trust celebrates its 24th anniversary with a series of programmes on December 13, 5.30 p.m., at Sri Thiagaraja Sangeetha Vidwath Samajam, Myslapore. T.S. Sridhar, chairman, All India Vishnu Sahasranama Cultural Federation, will inaugurate and present the MSB award 'Lifetime Achievement' to Dr. S. Venkatesan (MBBS), 'Gana Kala Siromani' to Madurai R. Rajaram (vocalist) and Calcutta V.N. Shankar (vocalist) and 'Namasankirtana Siromani' award to J. Ramakrishnan Bhagavathar (namasankirtanam). The award function will be followed by A.V.S. Sivakumar's vocal concert, featuring compositions of Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavatar.



Madhuradhwani's Season line-up

The following concerts will be held at Arkay Convention Centre, Myslapore. Schedule: **Today**, 4.15 p.m.: Archana and Aarathi; 6.30 p.m.: T.V. Gopalakrishnan. **December 13**, 10 a.m.: Palakkad Sisters; 11.30 a.m.: Yogeswaran M; 1.30 p.m.: Archana Murali; 3 p.m.: Rathna Prabha; 4.30 p.m.: Brinda Manickavasakan; 6.30 p.m.: Dushyanth Sridhar's discourse 'Kulasekhara Azhwar Vaibhavam' with Kiran and Nivi (vocal support). **December 14**, 10 a.m.: Gokul Namagiripecttai; 11.30 a.m.: V.S. Gokul Iyer; 1.30 p.m.: Nithyashree (veena); 3 p.m.: Bharadwaj Subramaniam; 4.30 p.m.: S.V. Sahana (veena); 6.30 p.m.: Vidya

Kalyanaraman. **December 15**, 10 a.m.: Smruthi Bhaskar; 11.30 a.m.: Swathi Ravichandran; 1.30 p.m.: Mahathi Ambareeshan; 3 p.m.: Padmashree Srinivasan; 4.30 p.m.: Sai Sisters; 6.30 p.m.: Rama Varma. **December 16**, 10 a.m.: Dhanya Rudrapatnam; 11.30 a.m.: Preethi Sethuraman; 1.30 p.m.: Sri Sri Sisters; 4.25 p.m.: Sunil Gargyan; 6.30 p.m.: Charumathi Raghuraman (violin). **December 17**, 10 a.m.: Veda Praveen Sandilya Machiraju; 11.30 a.m.: Ananth Mysore; 1.30 p.m.: Lavanya Balasubramanian; 3 p.m.: Rakshita Ramesh (veena); 4.30 p.m.: Geetha Raja; 6.30 p.m.: Nagai Muralidharan (violin). **December 18**, 10 a.m.: Kamala Ramani; 11.30 a.m.: Arvind Balaji; 1.30 p.m.: Sai Govind (mandolin); 3 p.m.: Ranjani Sivakumar; 4.30 p.m.: Archana and Samanvi; 6.30 p.m.: Viji Krishnan and Sriram Krishan (violin).



Hanumath jayanti

The 24th year Hanumath jayanti and laksharchana vaibhavam will take place at Sri Varasiddhi Vinayakar, Sri Panchamukha Anjaneyar Temple, Gowriwakkam. Preliminary rituals will take place from December 17. The Hanumath Jayanti utsavam will be on December 19. The event concludes on December 21.

Discourse

As part of the Margazhi mahotsavam, an hour-long Tiruppavai discourse by Kidambi Narayanan will be held from December 16, 2025 to January 14, 2026, at Narada Gana Sabha at 7.15 a.m.

Kalavaahini Trust, which completes 10 years, empowers classical dancers through its annual festival

Chitra Swaminathan
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It was a warm April evening in 2015. Malavika Sarukkai was preparing to launch the Kalavaahini Trust to support young and talented classical dancers. Elegantly draped in a sari – as she always is – and seated under the bougainvillea tree facing the rehearsal space in her charming Thiruvanniyur home, she said, “I want to give back to the art that has given meaning and purpose to my life. I am keen on doing something for the next generation of artistes. As an insider, I know how best to support them.”

This year, the Kalavaahini Trust, which hosts the Dance for Dance Festival, completes a decade. As its curator, Malavika now has much to look back on and more to look forward to. “I knew I was taking on an extremely challenging task because getting funding for classical dance is never easy. When I began, reaching this milestone never crossed my mind,” she says, as she busies herself with the finer details for the 10th-year celebration.



The art of nurturing

Malavika's long and triumphant journey in the arts helped people believe in her vision. “The annual Dance for Dance festival, into its sixth edition now, is not just about selecting outstanding young and established performers; it is also about how dance needs to be created, viewed and perceived,” she explains.

Through its line-up of performances, Kalavaahini aims to reiterate the significance of the festival's platform. “It's not just about training and getting on stage. Dance demands deep commitment and focus. The intellectual rigour an artiste brings to a work makes all the difference,” says the senior dancer, choreographer and mentor.

Commissioning new works is a cornerstone of artistic patronage, allowing established dancers and organisations to nurture

Collaborative artistry Malavika Sarukkai; (below) Vaibhav Arekar; and Shijith and Parvathy PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Celebrating movement



The 2025 edition of The Dance For Dance Festival will be held from December 19 to 21 at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. The event is supported by BugleRock, in association with Kartik Fine Arts, and managed by Shreya Nagarajan Singh Arts Development Consultancy.

On December 19, 6 p.m. Vaibhav Arekar's Sankhya Dance Company will premiere its work 'Viyoga - Fragments of Light'.

On December 20, Aswathi K. (winner of the Kalavaahini scholarship) will premiere her solo Bharatanatyam work at 4.30 p.m.; followed by Koodiyattam by Sooraj Nambiar (winner of Kalavaahini Senior Fellowship), who will present his new work, 'Yayati- Desire And Life'. The evening concludes with Kavyam (7.30 p.m.), Shijith N. and Parvathy's Bharatanatyam presentation.

December 21 begins with Divya Hoskere's solo Bharatanatyam at 4.30 p.m., followed by Christopher Guruswamy's 'Ananda - Dance Of joy' (6p.m.). The evening concludes with 'Pagdandi - The Winning Footway' by Sharmila Biswas's Odissi Vision and Movement Centre. Tickets and season passes are available on Tikkl and BookMyShow.

choreographic voices while removing financial barriers to creation. In the Indian classical dance landscape, where resources remain a persistent challenge, such initiatives become catalysts for innovation and collaborative artistry. The highlight this year at the Dance for Dance festival is the commissioning of an artiste by another.

According to Malavika, “It's a significant gesture to value someone's work and enable them to channelise all their energy in creating it. I truly enjoyed being part of Vaibhav Arekar's new work. I travelled to Pune, spent three days exchanging ideas, engaging with his team of dancers and offering my creative inputs. Now, I'm eagerly awaiting its staging. Commissioning calls for mutual trust and respect, but it is essential for the growth of the art form. Imagine having a third person to view your work and make the changes and cuts that enhance the final output.”

Kalavaahini is here for the long haul, says Malavika, encouraging artistes to shed external tags and work from within. While Bharatanatyam and its practitioners feature prominently, given Malavika's own roots in the form and her Chennai base, the organisation has been extending invitations to artistes across the classical dance spectrum. In embracing this diversity of forms, Kalavaahini seeks to mirror the fractured world itself – bringing together distinct traditions into a shared language of expression. “In a divisive world, you need art that helps viewers empathise with humanity and our planet,” she says, a reminder that dance, like a river, carries not just rhythm but renewal, weaving together hearts and hopes into a continuum of belonging.

Spotlight on Tamil

Margazhi is a time when interesting seminars in music and dance are held at different venues. One such is Kartik Fine Arts' Natya Darshan.

It will be inaugurated today at 5.30 p.m. at **Narada Gana Sabha Main Hall**, with Bharatanatyam exponent Sucheta Chapekar as chief guest and guru Vasanthalakshmi Narasimhachari as the guest of honour. Convened by senior dancer NARTHAKI NATARAJ, the inaugural evening also includes presentation of titles and performance of 'K3', Radhika Shurajit's production, themed on Kandha Sashti Kavacham.

Over the next two days (December 13 and 14) at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore, Natya Darshan will explore Tamil's rich literature and music.

December 13: 9.15 a.m.: Presentation of 'Kaapiya Kaavyam', drawing from Sangam literature and *Silappadikaram*, by Karuna Sagari and Archana Narayanamurthy, supported by Janani Hamsini on the vocals and moderated by Dr. Sudha Seshayyan.

At 10.15 a.m.:



Thalaimuraivazhi Payanam, featuring Sucheta Chapekar's ensemble which will present Tamil Moovar Keerthanai, followed by Aniruddha Knight and group's performance of Tamil padams and sabdams.

11.15 a.m.: *Annavazhiyaga Bhakti Payanam* by Sasirekha Ramamohan. This segment explores the Tiruppugazh; Purnima Gururaja and team will revisit the intricate world of *Kuravanji*, and Revathi Ramachandran and group will present *Tiruporchunnam*, an exploration of Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions. Desa Mangaiyarkarasi moderates this segment.

12.15 p.m.: *Suvadai Thodarndha Payanam* features performances by Kasi Aysola (Kalingathuparani), Sagar Tumkuru (sledai and malai) and Alex Raphael (Virutham,

Venba and Tiruvisaipa), accompanied by vocalist Akshay Padmanabhan and moderated by Isaikavi Ramanan.

A special Q & A session at **1.15 p.m.** brings Sucheta and Vasanthalakshmi into conversation, steered by NARTHAKI NATARAJ.

Evening performances include Bhavana Reddy's Kuchipudi work *Beyond Boundaries* at **6 p.m.**, followed by the Kadamb group's Kathak recital at **7.30 p.m.**

December 14 opens with a morning session by Sucheta leading into *Tatthuva Vazhi Payanam* at **9.30 a.m.**, spotlighting philosophical Tamil texts such as *Tirumandiram*, *Prabandham* and *Tiruvavutpa*, performed by dancers Sathvika Shankar, Aswini Viswanath and Lucrezia Maniscotti, with verses rendered by Bhavya Hari.

10.45 a.m.: *Inivu Thedi Payanam* features Pallu, Tuthu and Andhadhi performed by Lakshmi Ramaswamy and Parvathi Ravi Ghantasala.

11.30 a.m.: *Muthamizh Payanam - Azhagiyaar Cholai*, highlights the richness of Tamil literature. This segment features performances by the students of Velliambalam (Tirukkural), Narendra Kumar Lakshmiopathy and Ezhilan (Iyarkai and samoogaviyal Tirunangaigal), Samooganeedhi padalgal, Naatar Deva Vazhipadu, Kuravanji, and culminating in a vibrant folklore session.

The day-long session comes to a close with dance performances. At 6 p.m., Basu Sinham presents *A Mirror to Tradition* in Manipuri style followed by an Odissi recital of Arushi Mudgal (7.30 p.m.), whose lyrical precision forms a fitting finale to Natya Darshan's two-day exploration.

Head to Soulfest



The M.S. Subbulakshmi Arangam at Asian College of Journalism, known for its natural acoustics setting, will resonate with musical notes, during the annual festival – Soulfest 2025 – to be held

from December 24 to 28. This year's event, curated by writer and playwright Gowri Ramnarayan, brings together a formidable line-up of artistes (vocal and instrumental). It begins with Vignesh Ishwar's vocal concert at 2 p.m., followed by Sikkil Gurucharan at 5.30 p.m. December 25 opens with Amritha Murali and Nisha Rajagopalan at 10 a.m., and Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath at 2 p.m. N. Vijay Siva presents a special concert at 5.30 p.m. dedicated to Muthuswami Dikshitar, to mark the composer's 250th jayanti. The next day features Archana and Aarathi at 2 p.m. and Bharath Sundar at 5.30 p.m. On December 27, J.B. Sruthi Sagar (flute) at 10 a.m. followed by two special performances, as part of Musiri 125, featuring Brinda Manickavasakan at 2 p.m. and a violin concert by R.K. Shriramkumar (5.30 p.m.). The festival concludes on December 28 with T.M. Krishna's vocal concert (10 a.m.), open to all rasikas. Tickets for other concerts are available on Ticket9.

Narada Gana Sabha's cultural fest from tomorrow

Narada Gana Sabha's Isai Natya Nataka Vizha will be inaugurated on December 13, 5.30 p.m. by legendary musician T.V. Gopalakrishnan, who will present the 'Nadhabrahmam' title to mridangam vidwan Thiruvaarur Bakthavathsalam. The 'Gottuvadyam Narayana Iyengar' award will be presented to senior musician Seetha Narayanan and Tirunelveli P Subramania Iyer award to Nagaswaram vidwan S.R.G.S. Mohandass. The evening also features A. Kanyakumari's violin performance at 6.45 p.m. The following is the list of awards to be given during the festival, to take place at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall.

MLV Endowment - CMANA award will be given to Tiruvaarur S. Girish. **Subbulakshmi Sankaran Endowment award** to P. Ganesh. **Binfield Trust, Endowment:** Sreelatha Vinod.

Organiser of Fine Arts - NVS Endowment: A.S. Ramakrishnan. **Rajalakshmi Suri Endowment - Musciologist/music teacher:** violinist M. Narmadha. **P. Obul Reddy award for senior artiste (veena):** S. Nithyasree. **P. Obul Reddy award for upapakka vadyam artiste:** D.V. Venkatasubramaniam (ghatam). **Smt. Lalitha Padmanabhan award for junior artiste (veena):** R. Sowmya. **Prof. Mahalingam Padmanabhan award for junior artiste (vocal):** Shruthi S. Bhat and for **instrument:** Shantala Subramanyam. **Maharajapuram Santhanam award:** Kiranavali Vidyasankar. **K.S. Mahadevan award - Carnatic music in foreign instrument:** Badri Narayanan. **Guru Surajananda award for mridangist:** Karukurichi N. Mohanaraman. **Papanasam Sivan award:** Srividhya Vasudevan. **Nadhabrahmam P.S. Narayanaswami memorial award:** A.N. Raghu Simha. The **Subbulakshmi Sankaran award for namasankirtanam** will go to V.S. Sampathkumar.



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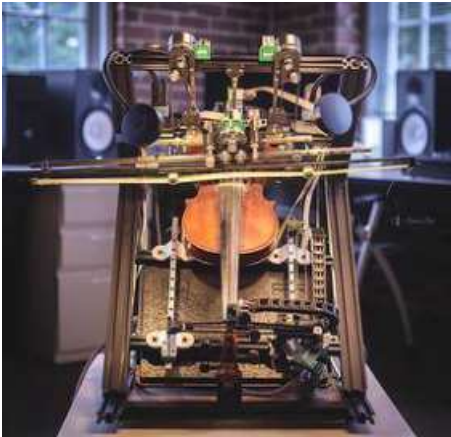
At the Inauguration of Kartik Fine Arts - Natya Darshan Seminar at 5.30 pm

Convened by Padmashree Dr NARTHAKI NATARAJ

ALL ARE WELCOME

Bow meets bot

Raghavasimhan Sankaranarayanan introduces his robotic violinist — Hathaani



Deepa Venkatraman

Meet ‘Hathaani’, a robotic violinist created by Tiruchi-born engineer-musician Raghavasimhan Sankaranarayanan. The name Hathaani reflects Raghavasimhan’s childhood passion for Carnatic violin and robotics. “‘Thaani’ is derived from the Tamil *taaniyangi*, which means automated machine or robot, and ‘Ha’ from the Sanskrit word ‘Hasta’ which means hands”, he says.

Raghavasimhan was initiated into violin at age four by Kunnakudi Vaidhyanathan, and later learnt from Trichy Srinivasan and T.S. Rajagopalan. A disciple of A. Kanyakumari for the past 18 years, Raghavasimhan says, “Rajagopalan sir’s strict practice regimen deepened my love for the instrument, while Kanyakumari *amma* enhanced my expressive ornamentation and nuances of musicianship.”

It was during his Master’s Studies at Georgia Tech, US, that ‘Hathaani’ began taking shape. “I presented a simple demo of the fingerboard of



the violin. My advisor Gil Weinberg was impressed. I continued expanding my research through my PhD on ‘Applications of AI and Robotic Musicianship in South Indian Classical Music’.

The physical structure evolved over years of testing. Raghavasimhan says: “The first version was played on a single string. I soon covered all four strings and adjusted its posture to closely resemble a Carnatic violinist for better tone and stage presence.” To teach ‘Hathaani’ the nuances of gamakas, he relied on live recordings of varnams rendered by violinists Embar Kannan and Rangappriya Sankaranarayanan, vainika Anjani Srinivasan, and keyboardist Vigneswar V.G., along with precise note-level annotations. “I chose varnams as they have a uniform structure between lineages. I pre-processed the audio recordings and annotations in a way that the AI model can understand them.”

‘Hathaani’ has been tested both in the laboratory and in the presence of musicians including S. Sowmya, Ganesh Rajagopalan, Ramesh Vinayakam and Embar Kannan. “Their feedback on the gamakas’ rendition and artistic perspective was incorporated. It was also evaluated by the research peers in the scientific community worldwide,” shares Raghavasimhan.

“The goal of Hathaani is to complement human artistry, serving as an educational aid and inspiring collaborative performances that bridge technology and tradition,” adds Raghavasimhan.

Raghavasimhan recalls music composer A.R. Rahman visiting their laboratory. “He featured me and ‘Hathaani’ on the big screen during the live shows of the Wonderment tour in the U.S.”, says Raghavasimhan, who is hopeful that there could be an interactive performance next year with renowned musicians.



The soul unplugged

Khatija Rahman’s ‘The Garden of Echoes’ bloomed with diverse songs

In a world increasingly unsettled by noise and dissonance, composer-singer Khatija Rahman emerges as a voice of solace. Her recent concert ‘The Garden of Echoes’ at the Museum Theatre, offered something the audience did not know they were yearning for.

From the very first note, Khatija’s deeply-centred singing felt like a breath of comfort when abrasiveness has been normalised. Her music invited stillness.

The evening opened with the traditional ‘Maula ya salli, qaseeda burda’, where spirituality blended seamlessly with modern harmonies in a staccato-infused, contemporary choral arrangement. Without breaking the meditative spell, Khatija moved into the unplugged version of ‘Yaavum neeye’ (from the film *Tere Ishq Mein*), written by Mashook Rehman and composed by A.R. Rahman, and elevated by the

lush orchestral and choral presence on stage.

A rhythmic shift led to ‘Kannedhirae’ from R. Parthiban’s *Iravin Nizhal*. It was a moment that invited even the most restrained listeners to sway. Dressed in white, blue and purple, Khatija rendered ‘Chinnanjiru nilavae’ (*Ponniyin Selvan 2*) with emotional maturity. A poignant moment in the concert arrived with ‘Ulagam oru naal’ from *Maidaan*, delivered with optimism. Its central message of aspiration found an immediate connection with the audience. The mood shifted to reverence with the naat-e-Sharif ‘Amna

beebe ke gulshan mein’, a song Khatija said she has loved since childhood. Then, with a rhythmic sparkle, came ‘Rock a bye baby’, written by Thamarai for ‘99 Songs’.

A moment of poetic stillness and musings on love arrived with ‘Vizhigal sera, kadhaigal oora’. Khatija widened the emotional horizon with ‘Anbendra mazhaiyile’ from *Minsara Kanavu*, paying tribute to the story of Christ’s birth through music, a reminder that love and humanity transcend divides.

The stage resonated with the warmth of Kalyani Nair’s Indian Choral Ensemble, and the

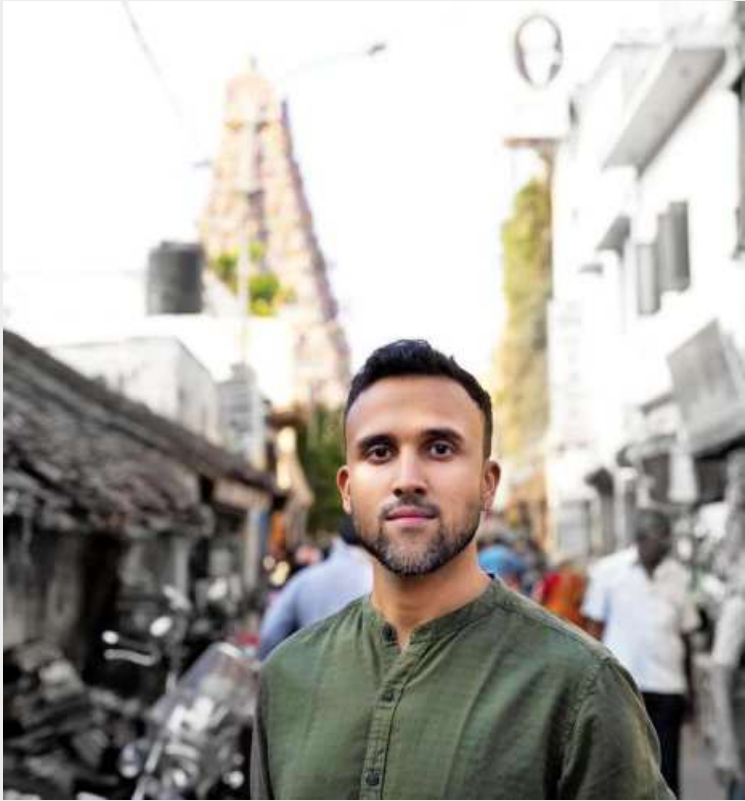
cinematic sweep of the Sunshine Orchestra String Quartet comprising Vignesh, Nandhini Anbazhagan, Ebinezer Gnanraj and Deepa. The shimmering brass textures of Pavithra, Muhammad and Nandhu, headed by Lisa Sarasini, added sparkle. Khatija’s core band comprised Chris Jason on the guitar, Bhuvanesh on the keys, Laxman Arvind on the bass, Guberan on the drums and Nikhil Ram on the flute. The acoustics and atmosphere were by Riyasdeen Riyan. Mohan Raj’s lighting complemented the music.

The evening reached a zenith with ‘Farishton’ (music by A.R. Rahman and lyrics by Munna Shaokath Ali), sung like a prayer for the world. Then came an unexpected delight: the nostalgia-laden ‘Piya tose naina laage re’ and ‘Aapki nazron ne samjha’.

The Tirukkural, delivered with spiritual depth, made for a perfect finale. The audience sat in silence long after the last note faded.

Between two worlds

LA-based Aditya Prakash on his gig theatre ‘ROOM-i-Nation’ and finding the East-West connect



S.B. Vijaya Mary

For most of his growing years in Los Angeles, Aditya Prakash was the ‘Indian kid’ who sang classical Carnatic music when his peers were discovering pop and hip-hop. When he visited Chennai every year to study under stalwarts, he was the ‘American boy’ with an accent and appearance that didn’t quite match the expected mould of a traditional musician.

“I never felt like I belonged anywhere. That sense of not fitting in became frustrating, and I think that’s where the search for identity began.” That ‘search’ is the emotional core of *ROOM-i-Nation*, the immersive gig theatre he is bringing to India this Season. It merges music, personal stories, movement and

minimal stage design to recreate the feeling of being inside his ‘room’.

Aditya, currently working on a project in Singapore, says diaspora artistes need to tell their own stories. “You feel like an outsider everywhere. But when you create a space that is out of the box, it can give someone else a voice too,” he adds.

Storytelling influences

Aditya’s narrative-driven music started early and at home. His mother (Viji Prakash), one of California’s earliest Bharatanatyam teachers in the 1970s, created full-length dance dramas. His sister Mythili Prakash, also a Bharatanatyam dancer, continued the tradition. Although storytelling had always been a part of his art, he had never explored it as a primary language until much

later, first in his 2023 album *ISOLASHUN* and then in its live, evolved form, *ROOM-i-Nation*. Working with dancers Mythili and choreographer Akram Khan showed him how powerful it is to sing through a character’s voice.

Aditya wanted *ROOM-i-Nation* to feel intimate, not performative. “If an audience walks into a theatre with stage lights and space, they automatically think ‘concert’. I wanted to disarm them and make them feel like they’ve walked into my room.”

T.M. Krishna, a mentor, once

Earlier, I used to adjust the gamakas for fusion, now I don’t. The gamaka is intrinsic to the music. The emotion it carries is inseparable

ADITYA PRAKASH

asked Aditya to define what a raga meant to him. “That made me think. Earlier, I used to adjust the gamakas for fusion, now I don’t. The gamaka is intrinsic to the music. The emotion it carries is inseparable.”

One of the biggest turning points came when Aditya joined Pt. Ravi Shankar’s ensemble as a teenager. “Until then, my American friends didn’t understand Carnatic music. But with Panditji, we performed to mostly non-Indian audiences, and there was no disconnect at all. He became the model I followed when I later formed my ensemble,” says Aditya, whose first album (2020) was titled *Diaspora Kid*.

ROOM-i-Nation will be presented on December 21 at Mahindra Kabira Festival (Varanasi) and on January 16 at Hubba at The Sabha (Bengaluru).

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