

fridayReview

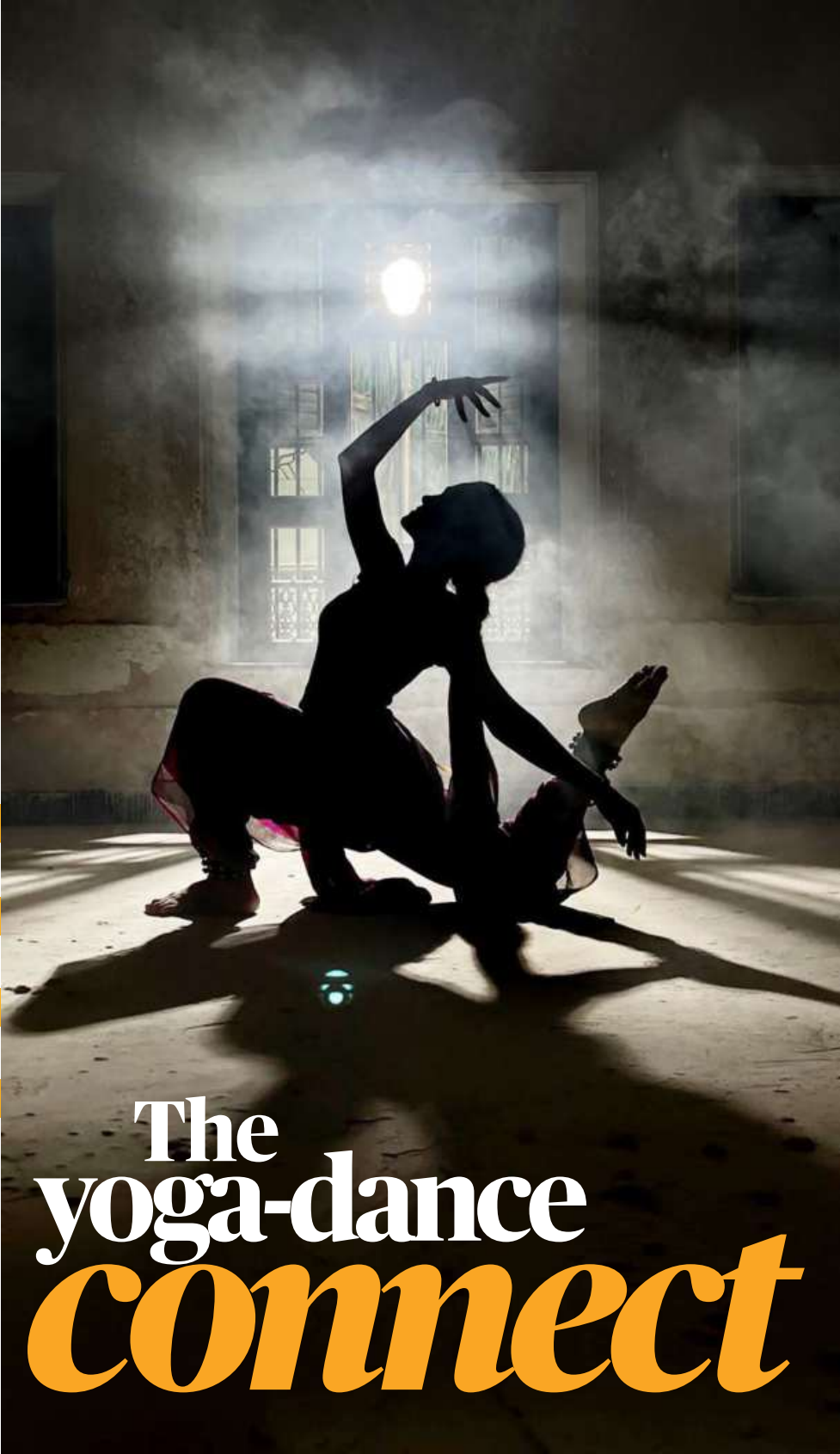
THE HINDU

Artistes speak
Dancers on their association with C.V. Chandrasekhar **p2**

Beethoven once more
Pianist Daniele Bucci played the composer's 32 Sonatas **p3**

A VISUAL TOUR OF ELEVEN ANCIENT TEMPLES

‘Ekadasa Vishnum’ is an ode to Tirunangur Divya Desams **p4**



Bharatanatyam dancer Rukmini Vijayakumar writes about the experience of finding herself and her art through mind-body interventions

In the silence of the music and the stillness of the movement, the expansive space of objectivity unfolds while I dance. In this space, everything seems leisurely. There is no urgency in the unfolding of characters and no visible end to this state of awareness. But as the muktayam plays, the awareness and objectivity diminish to a barely recognisable, miniscule presence within me, and I quickly emerge again with my name, titles and roles fully intact.

As a dancer who loved movement, the stillness of the physical practice of yoga was not very pleasurable as a teenager. I was restless and thrived on the physical gains of yoga more than the mental quiet and single pointed attention that it demanded. I was ecstatic with the physical prowess that I developed in yoga class. My balances became more controlled, my legs felt like they had gained an inch with all the stretching and I could contort myself into shapes that seemed a far reach just months earlier. I skipped pranayama class, yoga nidra classes, and any class that didn't push

me enough physically. I wanted only to be challenged physically.

I didn't realise that years of dancing would bring me back to the same stillness of yoga, even if it was through movement. In a fast-paced tillana, I need the inner leisure and space that yoga was begging to offer me earlier, in order to truly 'dance'.

Dance and yoga have been intertwined in Indian culture – physically, and philosophically. Yoga and dance have the same deity – Shiva. He is often depicted seated in quiet meditation, or dancing with force, his matted locks creating gusts of

wind, jumps causing mountains to erupt and twirls egging the waters of the ocean to rise. These two movement practices seem like contradictions, but in reality, they have the same effect on the mind that is seeking.

Yoga itself contrary to popular culture is not just a physical practice. The Hatha yoga that has become the most popular representation of yoga is misunderstood by many of us. Asana practice, is just asana practice. It has tremendous physical benefits, but I am hesitant to call it yoga in its true sense.

'Yogaha chitra vritti nirodaha' (yoga is the

A fine balance Rukmini Vijayakumar has discovered yoga in dance and dance in yoga. COURTESY: RAADHA KALPA



My fingers winding, circling my body
Eyes follow lost in a hypnotic trance
The tips of which touch and open
As water droplets trickle down my elbow.
In a moment they disappear into the expanse
Of the blue sky, the billowing clouds,
And again, I am in a web of circling droplets.
Every exhalation brings closer to me
My inner being swaddled in love,
Distant, engrossed, detached, passionate
Like sliding windows that exist all at once.
In dance I am the master, the power within,
I exude precision, tranquil rage, composed laughter.
The movement stops to create a sycophant
Rendered powerless by the perceptible, the palpable.
In imagination I am queen, harnessing
A cold detachment, measured emotion.
The music ends to command me once again,
A puppet, no strings attached.

— Excerpt from the book
Finding Shiva by Rukmini Vijayakumar



Bhakti becomes a part of this Karma.

Yoga itself is a system that enumerates how one can begin to appreciate the oneness of this universe and as a result become a more amicable, loving presence in society. Yoga strives to create 'samatvam', equanimity in us. It attempts to help us live our lives with awareness, fullness, love, gratitude and an ability to experience joys and sorrows, successes and failures with 'samatvam'.

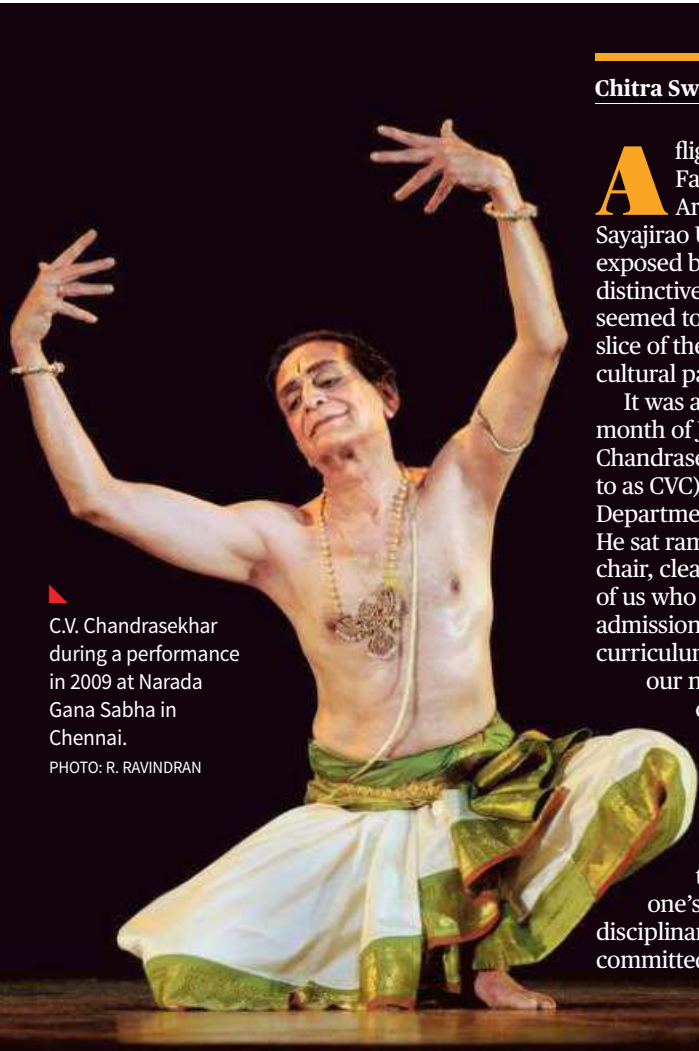
In the initial years, my practice of Bharatanatyam was all about technique and physical clarity, even the emotive parts were carefully practised and rehearsed endlessly. Now the technicality, rhythm, and aesthetics of classical dance feel like a part of me, and they no longer require constant reminding. During a performance, as I surrender to a character, I am forced to let go of 'Rukmini' as I know her. The titles, relationships, and accolades that seem to define me outside of the imaginary world, no longer hold a place as I allow the dance to take over. While executing the role of a character, I must have control, awareness, specificity, and surrender all at once. The emotions of the character overwhelm me, but I have *samatvam* while I am overwhelmed. There is precision of execution alongside absolute surrender.

I realise now that this is the same awareness, distance, and complete surrender that our lives outside of performance and dance require. *Samatvam*, even when emotions overwhelm us, allows us to make decisions in the leisurely quiet of our minds. This is what yoga strives to teach us, and this is what has been revelatory for me in performance. While I strive to imbue this *samatvam* into my life, I deeply relish its presence revealed in surrender to dance.

restrictions of the fluctuations of the mind).

People have come to believe in the various paths of yoga that are a means to the same end. But all these paths are intertwined, inseparable like creepers that cling to one another for sustenance.

One cannot have bhakti without knowledge. Bhakti is not an emotion, it is a revelation that the entire universe is made of the same fabric of creation. In that revelation, there is so much joy and celebration and love, that it becomes bhakti, a reverence for life itself. While we act in the world, constantly trying to make the right choice, for the simple reason that it is right, without expectations and without being tied emotionally to the fruit of our actions, we become Karma yogis. One, however, cannot be a Karma yogi without having love and celebration for the world around him/her.



Chitra Swaminathan

A flight of steps led to the Faculty of Performing Arts at Baroda's Maharaja Sayajirao University. The exposed brick work facade and distinctive wooden architecture seemed to hold within them a slice of the country's rich cultural past.

It was a warm morning in the month of June in 1987. C.V. Chandrasekhar (fondly referred to as CVC), the Head of the Department, was in his office. He sat ramrod straight in the chair, clearly explaining to those of us who had come for an admission test what the tough curriculum entailed. Looking at our nervous expressions, he comforted us the next minute saying there was nothing wrong in fearing challenges, but that should not come in the way of pursuing one's passion. Behind the disciplinary veneer was a committed teacher ready to help

The lasting impact

C.V. Chandrasekhar, who passed away recently, showed how you could stand apart in the art world with commitment and passion

us embrace both the rigour and excitement of the journey.

The campus echoed with the sounds of dancing feet and instruments as CVC got up and walked to the large prayer and practice hall. The moment he entered, there was hushed silence and the students quickly arranged themselves in straight rows. The girls were clad in crisp cotton Bharatanatyam training costume, the hair neatly tied into a bun or plaited, bindis on their forehead, and matching bangles and earrings. The boys, few in number, wore pristine white cotton dhotis and short kurtas. Under the hawk-eyed gaze of their guru, they began to recite the prayer. Their eloquent hands assumed different mudras and the body various poses. For CVC, training was not limited to

mastering the technique, it also extended to impeccable appearance and right attitude.

Prayer over, the first and second year students of the graduation course moved to their respective classrooms, while the seniors stayed back to perform the padam taught by CVC. Striking the *thattukazhai* (used for nattuvangam), he indicated just through his eyes and facial expressions his displeasure or satisfaction. The students watched him in awe as he briefly stopped to talk about the need to internalise the rhythm, words and emotions.

As a guru and a performer, CVC's persona remained the same. Unassuming and forthright were traits that came to mind when you met him. His belief in his art was so strong

and deep that he brooked no compromise or reached out for favours. With a perfectly aligned body, his movements combined intense physicality and intellectual sensibility. His expressive face gave life to the lyrics of the compositions he danced to.

After his teaching stint at Baroda, CVC moved to Chennai, a city where he had trained under inimitable gurus at Kalakshetra. It was here that his mentor Rukmini Devi opened his eyes to the possibilities in the world of dance and beyond it.

Even as CVC grappled with the shifts the art form was then experiencing, his approach to dance remained reverent. And this approach often left him frustrated since he felt the emphasis on contemporariness

accorded no space for the soul.

Slowly, however, he came to terms with the idea of performing for a new age audience but, for him, dance was not a showcase, it was an intimate exercise, a sharing of emotions.

When I met him once after an experimental performance, he was a bit piqued by the artiste's bizarre approach to the form. Dance, he always reiterated, should not be looked at in isolation. One of the most significant aspects of his creative oeuvre was the close relationship between movement and music. Apart from being an influential performer and choreographer, CVC sang and composed too. His works conveyed the potential and power of dance as an expression of the human spirit – they were the outcome of his long, arduous journey of learning and discovery, and the struggle to find acceptance as a male Bharatanatyam dancer. Yet he carved a niche for himself at his own pace and on his own terms.

TRIBUTE ON PAGE 2

An inspiring presence
Malavika Sarukkai

My association with Chandru *anna* goes back several years when he returned to Chennai after being away from the city for long. I was intrigued by his experiences and journey in dance. In him I found an artiste who combined scholarship and passion, tradition and change, depth and wonderment. These were the qualities that inspired me to request him to create music compositions for dance concepts close to my heart. They included ‘Sthiti-Gati’, ‘Bird Song’ and ‘Laya’.

Our collaborative sessions were always in person, unhurried and gentle as we both deeply enjoyed the creative process. From his vast knowledge of Carnatic and Hindustani music, Chandru *anna* would effortlessly create melodic phrases, jati, lyric and rhythm that evolved into distinctive music compositions. These compositions took shape through dialogue, sensitivity and attention to detail, to best suit the concept I had in mind.

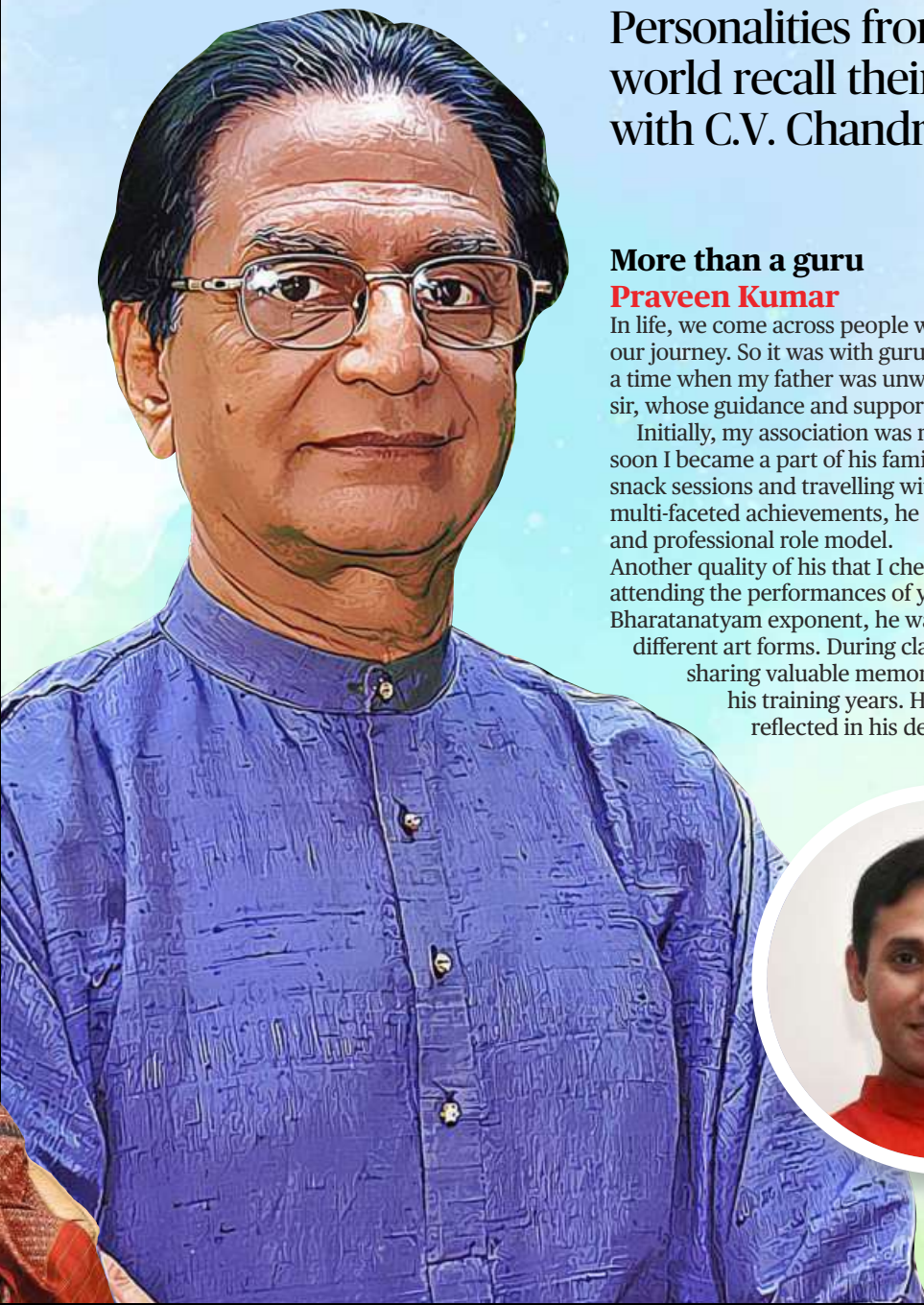
Our mutual respect inspired discussions on dance at every stage. Being an extraordinary artiste himself, his perception of art often influenced my thinking.

Once the music was composed, he gave me all the freedom to interpret it as I desired. This was something I treasured. In him I found an artiste of depth and courage, who was excited as I was to expand the boundaries of Bharatanatyam. He would often attend my performances with Jaya akka and I deeply cherished those occasions. He brought to my dance life a generosity of giving, which I can never forget.



Musings and Memories

Personalities from the art world recall their association with C.V. Chandrasekhar



More than a guru
Praveen Kumar

In life, we come across people who become a part of our journey. So it was with guru C.V. Chandrasekhar. At a time when my father was unwell, I happened to meet sir, whose guidance and support came as a blessing.

Initially, my association was restricted to dance. But soon I became a part of his family, enjoying lunch and snack sessions and travelling with him. With his multi-faceted achievements, he became my personal and professional role model.

Another quality of his that I cherished most was his attending the performances of young artistes. Though a Bharatanatyam exponent, he was appreciative of different art forms. During class, he inspired us by sharing valuable memories and anecdotes from his training years. His high aesthetic values reflected in his demeanour too.



Natyacharya nonpareil
Sujatha Vijayaraghavan

He had just recovered from an illness. We at Natyarangam requested him to take a break from his usual adavu sessions at our camp. Our more than 25-year association with the natyacharya was defined by love, reverence and learning. He participated in Natyarangam’s first thematic festival ‘Vandemataram’ in 1997, where he performed with wife Jaya a *pudu kavithai* set to music by him.

He was the convenor of the Natya Sangraham camp at Thennangur for more than two decades (from the year 2000). He could handle all the four branches of abhinaya – angika, vachika with poetry and music, aharya and satvika with equal felicity. He interacted with all the faculty members with easy informality, which made the sessions memorable and invaluable.

He challenged the young dancers with new variants of traditional adavus as he energetically led them around the temple during Garuda Utsavam at Thennangur.

His humility and approachability made us often forget that we were in the presence of a legend. His sense of humour revealed the child in him. During the late night *thinna* discussions, he shared interesting anecdotes, sang songs, cracked jokes and analysed the dance scene.



Several memorable moments are etched in our minds such as when he came up with impromptu sancharis for Bombay Jayashri’s singing of a niraval for the line ‘Kamakshi kanchadalayathakshi’.

The final guru-sishya scene in the festival ‘Baandhava Bharatham’ saw the disciple leaving the gurukulam with a lamp, while turning back tearfully to look at his guru. And there stood Chandrasekhar blessing the disciple with his hand raised in benediction. He had taught innumerable disciples all his life. There was much more to learn from him as a great human being, with unswerving principles, sublime aesthetics and incomparable grace.

The art of sharing
Indira Kadambi

In the presence of a true artiste, who embodied humility, affection, and wisdom, one experienced peace. His vast knowledge, generously shared without expecting anything in return, motivated an entire generation of artistes. His life and teachings have left an indelible mark on all those who had the privilege to learn from him, even if it was for a short period. I first met him in the early 1990s in the green room of the Mylapore Fine Arts after my performance. His subtle yet insightful criticism impacted my artistic journey. As a great musician, he instantly connected with my musician-husband, T.V. Ramprasad. The informal music sessions we conducted at our homes are now cherished memories. He never missed our performances unless he was traveling. His generosity in showering appreciation, childlike smile and curiosity, and kind hospitality will always be remembered. He had a keen eye for intricate artistic details in dance, music, textiles, costumes, and even home decor.

Though he is no longer with us physically, his legacy lives on through his teachings, acts of kindness, and moments of selfless service.



When music meets heritage in a performance, it turns informative and enjoyable

H. Ramakrishnan

Chidambaram is one of the holiest Shiva temples representing the five elements. It represents Aakaasa (ether). The name is perhaps derived from *cit*, meaning consciousness, and Ambaram, meaning sky. Spread over 50 acres, this is one of the few temples that houses shrines for both Shiva and Vishnu within its precincts. It has nine gateways, four of which have gopurams, each with seven levels. The eastern gopuram has all the 108 postures (karnas) of Bharatanatyam as described in the Natyashastra.

A unique feature of this temple is the bejewelled image of Nataraja, the Lord of the cosmic dance. The Sangam classics refer to Viduvelvidugu Perumthachan who renovated the temple. The Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagara dynasties have contributed substantially to the architecture of this temple.

There are five Sabhas (halls) - Chit Sabha, Kanaka Sabha, Nrithya Sabha, Raja Sabha and Deva Sabha. Shiva’s consort here is Parvathi, also known as Sivakamasundari or Sivakami Amman.

According to legends, Lord Adishesha, in the form of Sage Patanjali, the author of Yogasutra, and his student Sage Upamanyu moved into the Thillai forest and worshipped Shiva, who performed His Ananda Tandava – the celestial dancing posture, which is recognised the world over for its striking appeal.

Chidambaram is also referred to as Thillai (after the Thillai forests in which it is said to be located), Vyaghrapuram (in honour of Saint Vyghrapaathar), Virat hridaya padma sthalam (Lotus heart of the universe) and Ponnambalam (the golden stage). The golden-roofed stage of the sanctum sanctorum houses the Lord in three forms – the idol of Nataraja called the Sakala Tirumeni; as the crystal



Musical trip The Chidambaram temple and S. Kirthana
PHOTO: M. SRINATH

portion. The kalpanaswaras were at ‘Kedareswaram.’

After an elaborate alapana that brought out the grandeur of Purvikalyani, Kirthana rendered a Marimutha Pillai composition in Khanda Chapu, ‘Deiveega sthalam intha thillai’. The niraval and swaraprastara were at ‘Chaturvedam naalum gopurame aaghi’. She rendered a rarely heard composition of Gopalakrishna Bharati in graceful Sri ragam, ‘Maravamal eppadiyum ninai maname’ on this deity.

Kirthana’s alapana in the majestic Kamboji raga turned out to be intensely sensitive. She follows a style which has a perfect bond between form and content. Little wonder as she is the disciple of Sumitra Vasudev (of the R. Vedavalli School). Gopalakrishna Bharati’s evergreen masterpiece ‘Thiruvadi charanam enringu naan nambi vanden’ was the next. She commenced the kriti from the anupallavi, ‘Marupadiyum karuvadiyum’. If the niraval at ‘Aduththu vantha ennai thallalaakaathu’ highlighted the essence of Kamboji, the swaraprastara stood out for its simple grandeur. Kirthana rendered a Tiruppugazh ‘Iruvinaiyin’ tuned by her guru in raga Sourashtram.

Among the 108 Divya Desams the Govindaraja Perumal Temple in Chidambaram, which is in the same precincts of the Lord Nataraja Temple, is the 41st . The consort is Pundarikavalli. The Lord has been extolled by Azhwars and this temple is known as Thillai Thiruchitrakootam among the Divya Desams.

Kirthana rendered a Pasuram ‘Karumugil poal varumu’ by Thirumangai Azhwar, in praise of Govindaraja Perumal , after an imaginative alapana in raga Mukhari. This was a prelude to Dikshitar’s ‘Govindarajam upasmahe’ in Mishra Chapu. Another piece that she rendered consisted of six Pasurams by Thirumangai Azhwar, of which the first was tuned by veteran musician R. Vedavalli, and the rest by Sumitra Vasudev.

The call of Chidambaram



linga of Chandramouliswara called the Sakala Nishkala Tirumeni; and as an empty space (formless), depicting Akasa (in the Chidambara Rahasyam) the Nishkala Tirumeni.

Nataraja here has been extolled by various Saivite saints including Appar, Thirugnana Sambandhar and Sundaramoorthi Nayanar.

It is believed that Nandanar merged with the deity here. Sekkizhar’s *Periyapuranam* has immortalised this event. Manikkavachagar, another Saivite saint, who sang hymns in praise of the deity, attained salvation here.

According to a narrative in the legends, King Rajaraja I wanted to find the Thevaram hymns hitherto hidden at some unknown place. He sought the help of Nambi Andar Nambi, a devotee of Pollappillayar of Tirunaraiyur, near Chidambaram. Pollappillayar revealed to Nambi that the Thevaram hymns of Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar could be found in a room near the dance

Hall of Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram.

S. Kirthana fittingly commenced her recital with a hymn from Nambi Andar Nambi’s ‘Irattaimani malai’ on Pollappillayar for her concert dedicated to Chidambaram, as part of the Kshetra Sankirtana Vaibhavam, organised by Naada Inbam. Then followed ‘Anname’, a sublime Arabhi varnam in Tamil by Tiger Varadachariar, on the dancing lord.

The Jaganmohini kriti ‘Sivakaama sundari’ (Rupakam) by Gopalakrishna Bharati had swaras at the madhyama kala sahityam of the anupallavi, ‘Natanam aadum kanakasabha nayakam’. She chose to present swara passages at varying points of the lyrics and at the pallavi, manifesting her grip over both swara and laya.

‘Chidambara natarajam ashrayeham’ by Muthuswami Dikshitar in Kedaram was another composition she offered on this Kshetra. It has a lilting Jatiswara



The *piano man* from Verona

With a demeanour befitting a surgeon about to perform an operation, Daniele Buccio sat at the piano, and went about the keys with surgical precision. And, at the end of his marathon-recital, Daniele lifted his impassive visage from the 92-Key Bösendorfer 225 Grand and took a nonchalant bow. Well, he did take a few mini-bows more to give the audience time to express their awe than to gather his energy.

Daniele (44) recently performed all 32 piano sonatas of Beethoven, incidentally composed

between 1795 and 1822 – a first in this country, in its designated sequence – spread across four separate recitals, comprising two nearly-equal sessions totalling 140 minutes with only a slim interlude each day, except for the finale which clocked three hours and fifteen minutes.

Barring the inaugural
by-invitation
performance at Oberoi

Grand (the piano there was an in-house Boston), the other three, non-ticketed concerts took place at the intimate Sandre Hall, eponymously named after Philippe Sandre, the founder of the Calcutta School of Music, the ideator-organiser of the event. This would be Daniele's sophomore collaboration with CSM, the earlier one being a mid-February 2023

concert, where we were made privy to his finesse and tenacity, when he presented all of Chopin's 24 Preludes, lasting a tad more than two hours on a stretch and not even a wee on the fritz.

While even the likes of Rudolf Serkin, 20th Century's undisputed Beethoven-whisperer, would shudder to negotiate all of these 32 sonatas on the trot, Daniele probably took it

too without a page-turner. The way Daniele snapped the pages during the frenzied passageworks and yet returned to sweet spots lent a veritable stunt element to the performances.

Another interesting factor was his shunning the piano stool for a chair. He was most often perched at its edge.

The way Daniele approached the sonatas seemed to indicate his dissertation (he did his research in musicology from the University of Bologna) on the history of Gestalt psychology that emphasises that the whole of anything is greater than its parts. Though composed as self-contained pieces, all 32 sonatas do link-up to an elevated scope.

Namasankirtanam



The Music Academy presents
Savita Sreeram's
namasankirtanam on June 26 at 6
p.m. The event, organised under
the endowment of Abhang
exponent Ganesh Kumar, is in
memory of Swami Haridoss Giri.
Venue: Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

Vocal solo

The Music Academy's HCL concerts will feature S. Swaminathan's vocal performance on June 27, 6 p.m. The accompanists are Kailasapathy (violin) and Prahalaad Vijay Varahaswami (mridangam). Venue: Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

Dance recital

Natarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha, has organised Nithyakalyani Vaidyanathan's Poorna Margam performance on June 22, 6 p.m., at Swan Haridoss Giri Hall.

Roll of honour

The Mylapore Academy honours senior theatre artistes on the occasion of its 55th annual drama awards function, to be held on June 23, 5 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha, Alwarpet. Following is the list of some of the veteran theatre artistes, drama troupes and playwrights who will be felicitated on the occasion.


- Dr T.S. Duraiswami Silver Rolling trophy for Best Stage Play goes to Legally Yours' *Bakkunu Pathikkichu*.
- Kalki Fine Arts Silver Rolling Trophy for Best Story Writer - Sujatha Vijayarghavan for *Kumin Chirippu*.
- Haji Chank Abdul Khader Silver Rolling Trophy for Best Director - Karthik Gowrisankar (*Andrum Indrum*).
- E.S. Mydeen Silver Rolling Trophy for Best Actor goes to M.V. Bhaskar (*Paayum Oli*).
- Dr Lakshmi Chaturvedi Silver Rolling Trophy for Best Actress - Lavanya Venugopal (*Paayum Oli*).
- S. Viswanathan Silver Rolling trophy for Best Auditorium goes to TAG Auditorium, Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram.
- Award for Best Sabha for promotion of Fine Arts (own auditorium): Sri Krishna Gana Sabha.
- Narada Gana Sabha Silver Rolling Trophy for Best Sabha (hired Hall): Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha
- Award for Best Sabha in mofussil centre - Chrompet Cultural Academy.
- S.Ve. Shekher Silver Rolling Tophy for all-rounder goes to V.P.S. Sriraman (*Andrum Indrum*).
- P.V. Narasimha Rao Silver Rolling Trophy for contribution to stage: Sekar Rajagopal (Kartik Fine Arts).
- Rajiv Gandhi Silver Rolling Trophy for Contribution to Fine Arts: R. Vijayaraghavan (Sri parthasarathy Swami sabha).
- Honour for veteran secretary or office-bearer of city sabha: S. Ravinchandran (Brahma Gana Sabha).
- Award for music director for Tamil stage play: Dakshin for *LKG Aasai* and *Paayum Oli*.
- The Mylapore Academy drama awards recognition for stage veteran goes to senior theatre artiste Kathadi Ramamurthy.
- The Mylapore Academy Award of Excellence goes to Bhagavat Mela Natya Nataka Sangam, Melattur.

On a celebratory note


To celebrate the international Yoga and Music day, Carnatica and Vidya Sagar jointly present 'Nadayoga', a multi-genre music programme today. The event will take place at three different venues – 10.30 a.m.: Vidya Sagar, Kotturpuram; 3 p.m.: Vishranti, Palavakkam; and 6.30 p.m.: Srinivasa Sastrhi Hall, Luz, Myslapore. Artists to perform are: Rajhesh Vaidhya (veena), Chitravina Ganesha, Ghatam Karthick's Heartbeat ensemble; Padma Shankar (violin); vocalists Anahita and Apoorva; Sunil Gargyan; Aditya Madhavan; Swarathmika; Charulatha (veena); Viswas Hari (mandolin); Chinmayi (violin); V.G. Vigneswar (keys) and Sarvesh Karthick (mrIdangam).

A decade-long journey



Rhapsody Foundation, helmed by musician Anil Srinivasan, completes its 10-year journey. To mark the occasion a special programme has been organised on June 22, 7 p.m. at The Rain Tree, 120, St. Mary's Road, Alwarpet. Industry veteran R. Seshasayee, will be the guest of honour.




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