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THE HINDU

Remembering Veenapani

Adishakti's annual tribute festival is back with a stellar line-up **p2**

Spotlight on young artistes

The 'Legends of Tomorrow' is a series that platforms promising talents **p3**



A FILM WHERE A DANCE FORM IS THE PROTAGONIST

'Onkara' takes you through the lives of the Mavilans and nuances of theyyam **p4**

Nature took centre stage at the 'Ragas by the River' festival held amidst the wilderness of Jim Corbett National Park

Stopping by the woods



Chitra Swaminathan

chitra.swaminathan@thehindu.co.in

Hindustani vocalist Kaushiki Chakraborty was thrilled about sighting tigers, while singer Hariharan was delighted at spotting elephants in the wild. Flautist Rakesh Chaurasia left the venue in a hurry after his morning concert to go on a safari. "I wanted to perform before I went into the forest. What if a tiger hunts me down?" he laughed, before playing a soulful raag Pahadi.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 3

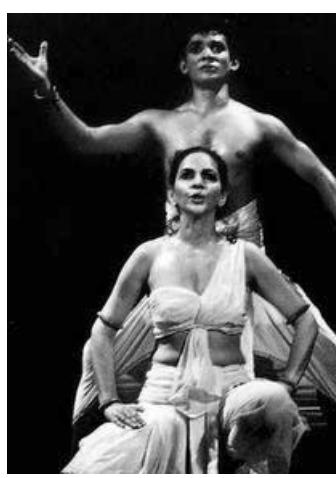
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Charumathi Supraja

There are many ways to remember a mentor. Keeping the land she nurtured, watered and green maybe one. Not giving up, for even a day, the rigour and detailing you were trained to value in work – another. Also, managing to draw back the people she taught, influenced and inspired. This and some more are what the core team of Adishakti Theatre Arts, Auroville, achieves every year through the Remembering Veenapani Festival (RVF).

In its 10th edition this year, the RVF will happen at the Adishakti campus in Auroville, between April 1 and 8. Held in memory of Veenapani Chawla, who centre-staged an exploration of the wholesome potential of theatre and created a performance training methodology that is much sought after, the RVF is known for presenting works that bridge the spaces between different forms of art.

Diverse themes

This year's RVF holds out a promise of diversity and richness. The line-up includes a play in Lepcha (a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in parts of Sikkim and West Bengal) that will have live music by Sofiyum, a Sikkimese folk fusion band; a dance-theatre production on Janabai and Lal Ded (two women who unabashedly pursued their chosen spiritual paths through poetry); a gig featuring a musician (who is also a popular actor) and his collaborator bringing alive Hindustani poetry as contemporary music to a multi-art kaleidoscopic exploration of queer love; a play that visualises a meeting between Achilles and Arjuna to one that prods our prejudices



In memory of a visionary

Adishakti presents the 10th edition of Remembering Veenapani Festival from April 1 to 8

about letting 'the other' into our domain; and a dance-theatre piece that imagines a 21st century Ashta Nayika to music in new voices.

Padmavati Rao, a senior actor in theatre and cinema, is looking forward with much excitement to performing for the first time at Adishakti in the Hindi play *Apne Ghar Jaisa*, directed by Anmol Vellani. She plays the protagonist in the play that will examine the effects of everyday bigotry. Padmavati is certain that Veenapani, who she went and met at a difficult point of time in her life, would have been proud to see her creative journey bringing her to Adishakti as a performer.

Yuki Elias, a theatre-maker for over two decades, recalls her stay in Adishakti in 2006 while working as an actor in Tim Supple's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. She experienced that

"beautiful feeling of being a theatre-maker 24/7," she says, adding how she finds "the craft of Adishakti's work fascinating." She has directed *The Far Post*, which will be part of this edition.

The play in Lepcha will be presented with English subtitles. "It will employ masks and puppetry, delve into questions on war and redemption," says Yuki, inviting the audience to witness a rare, evocative production.

The line-up

- April 1:** Vinay Kumar's 'He-Rose', an Adishakti production.
- April 2:** 'Mad and Divine' by Rama Vaidyanathan.
- April 3:** 'Apne Ghar Jaisa' by Rangashankara.
- April 4:** '8' by Deep Design.
- April 5:** 'Be-Loved' by Tamasha Theatre
- April 6:** Music by Nimit Das and Nishant Nagar.
- April 7:** 'The Far Post' by Dur Se Brothers.
- April 8:** 'Kha' music by Adithi Sagar. (All performances at 7.30 p.m.)
- Workshops:** April 2 to 4: 'Sur Naiyya - The Boat of Melody' by Ananya Gaur from and April 6 to 8: 'Tempo Tubes' by Brandon Colaco. Time: 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Vinay Kumar, artistic director, Adishakti, speaking about the festival, affirms this sense of connection that actors, theatre-makers, musicians, dancers, students of acting and audiences feel with the space as an embrace of creative energy. He fully credits this to Veenapani's ability to moor an emerging artiste to their unique artistic voice. "The team she initially gathered at Adishakti

was from small villages with no urban education," he says. "She shaped us in our multiple perspectives" and this, he adds, is what they tried to pass on when Adishakti became an institution, and also through the festival. It is no wonder, over the years, the festival is seeing a rise in the number of theatre groups and audiences wishing to participate. "This year's festival is being mapped to see how more audience-members can be accommodated in the coming years," says Vinay.

Theatre for all

Having all facilities like guest houses, a kitchen, a state-of-the-art theatre, technological equipment and staff, they are only limited, as a self-sustaining arts space, by a flow of funds that they wish to channel towards artistes bringing their work to the festival. "This is taken care of to a great extent by the community that steps in when we open the festival's crowd-funding campaign, but since all shows are not ticketed (in keeping with Veenapani's ethos that theatre should be accessible to all), donations from the audience become crucial," says Vinay.

The festival this year will include two workshops (one on nirutti and bhakti music and another on didgeridoo crafting and playing) besides 'gupshup sessions' that will offer an opportunity to interact with artistes participating in the festival and understand their artistic processes.

CALENDAR**Honour for artistes**

Mridangam maestro Umayalpuram Sivaraman's Laya Laavanya Fine Arts Foundation will felicitate artistes at its annual event. "It is my way of giving back to the music world, which has enriched my life," said the veteran musician.

To take place on March 30 at 6 p.m., Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan, Sriram Parasuram, P.C. Ramakrishna and Priya Murle will be honoured. Art patron Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti will be the chief guest and Sridhar Vembu, CEO, Zoho Corporation, guest of honour. The evening programme also includes the presentation of the thematic production 'Srinivasa Kalyanam', choreographed by Sheela Unnikrishnan and performed by the students of her Sridevi Nrithyalaya.

Venue : Narada Gana Sabha Main Hall, Alwarpet, Chennai

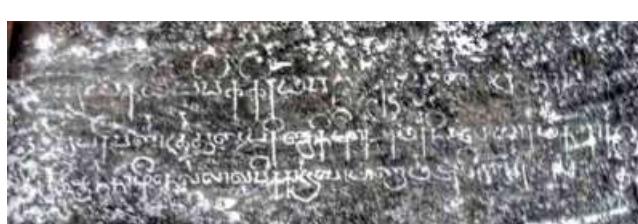
Celebrating an icon

As part of ABHAI's 'Immersive Experience with a Legend' series, the 80th birthday of Bharatanatyam exponent and guru Sudharani Raghupathy will be celebrated on March 31 at 4 p.m.

Sudharani Raghupathy, who founded Shree Bharatalaya, is known for her distinct approach to nritta and abhinaya. At this special event, to take place at Andhra Mahila Sabha, Mylapore, listen to the veteran share her experiences besides providing valuable insights into her artistry. The evening also features a special performance that will trace her dance journey. For details call 89037 17751.

Title for senior dancer

The valedictory function of Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha's Bharat Natyam Utsav will take place on March 31 at Narada Gana Sabha at 5.30 p.m. On the occasion, the Natya Kalasarthi title will be presented to senior Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher Jayanthi Subramaniam. Certificates and mementos will be given to best performers chosen from among the dancers who performed at the Utsav. The evening will begin with 'Guruvandham' (4.30 p.m.) by the students of Jayanthi Subramaniam and conclude with Anitha Guha's thematic 'Parishvanga Patabishekam' to be presented by her students. Art patron Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti will preside. Alamel Valli and Meenakshi Chittaranjan are the guests of honour.

**Journey with a purpose**

Inscription at a Alandur temple shows a woman from Chola nadu studied Jain doctrines in the Pallava region

Suganthi Krishnamachari

The Alandur Siva Subramaniaswami temple is near the Saint Thomas Mount railway station. On the step at the entrance to this temple is a Kampa Varma Pallava period inscription (875 CE). It was recorded by the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department in 2004 and talks of Mangaattu Thiruvaraandaanam.

"The word 'araandaanam' indicates a Jain temple. The same word is used to refer to Jain temples in *Manimekalai*, and a similar word is used in *Perumkathai*," explains epigraphist S. Ramachandran. The inscription mentions a Jain acharya called Veerakkuravar, and his disciple, who is said to be the daughter of a man who belonged to the village of Arkkaattu Kootruthu Paripandathurai Parisarai.

"This name is very similar to the name of a village near

Kandiyur, mentioned in Thiruppazhanam and Thirumazhappadi inscriptions.

From the inscription we find that the woman made a donation for food offerings at the Mangadu Jain temple," says Ramachandran. The inscription is important not only because of its antiquity, but because it tells us that a woman from Chola Nadu studied Jain doctrines in the Pallava country, became an ascetic, and donated to a Jain temple there.

Ramachandran says that the Mangadu Jain temple might have fallen into disrepair, and the stone slab with the inscription must have been used in the Siva Subramaniaswami temple. The latter temple is now being renovated. The inscription has suffered some damage because of people treading on it.

Ramachandran says that the renovation presents a good opportunity to remove the stone slab and preserve it elsewhere, to prevent further damage.

Saraswathi Nagarajan

saraswathi.nagarajan@thehindu.co.in

Dancer and academic RLV Ramakrishnan wants to perform Mohiniyattam on every stage in Kerala. "That is how I plan to protest the racist and casteist remarks made against me by Kalamandalam Sathyabhama," he says.

Veteran Mohiniyattam dancer and teacher, Sathyabhama had said that those with dusky complexion should not perform on stage. During an interview to a YouTube channel, she remarked that men, especially, those who are not good-looking, should refrain from dancing. Without specifically naming Ramakrishnan, she referred to a "dark-skinned Mohiniyattam dancer from Chalakudy". Ramakrishnan, who hails from Chalakudy, also runs a dance school there.

Following his graduation from RLV College of Fine Arts, Tripunithura, he secured first rank in post-graduation in Mohiniyattam from the Mahatma Gandhi University. His doctoral thesis was on *Aatathinte Aanvazhikal* (The path of men in dance).

Ramakrishnan speaks about the opposition and challenges he has faced in his artistic journey.

Question: Kalamandalam Sathyabhama hinted that Mohiniyattam should only be performed by women.

Answer: Mahakavi Vallathol, who founded Kalamandalam, felt that the name Kairali

It is violation of a dancer's fundamental right'

Mohiniyattam dancer RLV Ramakrishnan plans to perform across Kerala to protest against the discriminatory remarks made by a veteran artiste



Nritham would suit this dance form better than Mohiniyattam. This is mentioned in books on the Kerala Kalamandalam. She has unnecessarily raked up an issue by claiming that only 'mohinis' can perform Mohiniyattam. One must remember that Vallathol had suggested the name change to do away with the stigma associated with Mohiniyattam.

I am going to request the Department of Culture and those in the art field to help rename the dance form as Kairali Nritham.

Q: She also commented about your complexion.

A: Never should an artiste and teacher make such discriminatory remarks. In art only creativity matters. Her comment that dark-skinned



Ramakrishnan and Kalamandalam Sathyabhama.

PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

performance opportunity at a festival conducted under the aegis of Department of Tourism, she got my phone number from the application and called me. She spoke in a derogatory manner. In the world of dance, there are still people like her who are unable to accept progressive changes.

Once I was attending a seminar on Mohiniyattam at Kalamandalam, when an official asked me to leave saying that the event was meant only for women. I protested. Also during my research, I was harassed by some Kalamandalam office-bearers. Only when Mani chettan (late actor Kalabhavan Mani is his elder brother) intervened, we managed to get the actual results of my appraisal.

Q: How do you feel about the outpouring of support?

A: That is how it should be. It is not just about an individual. Many like me, dark-skinned and from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, have been scarred by her statements. I have struggled to reach where I am today. So it is only right that Kerala has stood by me in this matter.



The GenNext platform

The 'Legends of Tomorrow' series offers opportunity to talented youngsters

Manjari Sinha

Senior musicians we lost in the recent past include Malini Rajurkar of the Gwalior gharana, Prabha Atre of the Kirana gharana, Ustad Rashid Khan of the Rampur Saheswar gharana and vidwan O.S. Thyagarajan. With the passing of these stalwarts, it's time to promote the next generation of performers. The

'Legends of Tomorrow' series hosted by Pracheen Kala Kendra (PKK), Chandigarh, is working in this direction by platforming young and promising vocalists and instrumentalists.

The 23rd quarterly baithak of this series was recently held at Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi. It featured a vocal recital by Nirali Kartik and a sitar-santoor jugalbandi by Prakriti and Sanskriti Wahane, popularly known as Wahane

Sisters. Pt. Jasraj was the foremost representative of the Mewati gharana and it was heartening to see Nirali carrying forward the gharana's style. Prakriti, following the footsteps of Pt. Shivkumar Sharma and Bhajan Sapori, has taken to santoor. While Sanskriti has many sitar maestros to draw inspiration from.

Backed by the family

Nirali's parents were

instrumental in getting her initiated into classical music. She first trained under P. G. Shinde, and later learnt from Vikas Parikh and Sanjeev Abhyankar, disciples of Pt. Jasraj. Nirali was fortunate to have been guided by the maestro as well. The Wahane Sisters were fortunate to have music in their home. They were initially trained by their musician-father Lokesh Wahane. Currently, they are being trained by Ustad Shahid

Parvez and Pt. Suresh Talwalkar. Accompanied by Sumit Mishra on the harmonium and Zaheen Khan on the tabla, Nirali opened the evening with raag Puriya-Kalyan, a

The series lays emphasis on taalim, which is one of the key factors in choosing the performers.

combination of the sombre Puriya and pleasing Kalyan. The introductory *auchaar* was followed by the traditional Bada Khayal 'Aaj so bana' set to Vilambit Ektala. There were engaging bol-alap phrases sung with skill and delicacy.

The Chhota Khayal 'Din rain kachhu na suhave', a composition of 'Manrang', was studded with fleeting taans. The main raag was followed by a Kalawati tarana, which came sweeping sargam taans. Nirali

Enlivening Prakriti and Sanskriti and Nirali Karthik
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

concluded with Braj Ki Holi 'Mriganayani tero yaar naval-rasiya'. Though Nirali said 'mriganayani' refers to the doe-eyed Krishna, in the song it actually describes the nayika, who has eyes like a deer.

The sitar-santoor jugalbandi by the Wahane Sisters opened with an expansive alap-jod-jhala in raag Charukeshi, which was anchored on the right precepts of training and understanding. Prakriti and Sanskriti complemented each other. They went on to play their father's compositions in slow and medium tempos of Jhaptaal and Teentaal. Their laya and swaras, and sawal-jawab patterns of taans lent vibrancy to the concert. Zuheb Khan on the tabla added splendour to the jugalbandi, which concluded with a melodious Bhairavi dhun.

Kudos to their guru and father Lokesh Wahane, a music teacher in Ujjain, who himself is a disciple of Ustad Shahid Parvez. He studied Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma's technique of playing the santoor to help his daughter learn the instrument. Though both the sisters were trained in sitar, Prakriti wanted to pursue the santoor. "Once Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma invited us to the hotel where he was staying for a concert in Pune and asked Prakriti to play something. He was so pleased listening to her Rageshri that he gifted her a santoor," said Lokesh Wahane.



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In a bid to provide a unique musical experience, curators of cultural festivals are constantly on the lookout for locations that will spark wanderlust in people. Palaces, forts and lush landscapes are being turned into performance arenas, allowing the audience to discover the free-spiritedness of our arts. The unconventional settings also motivate artistes to push the boundaries of their creativity.

'Ragas by the River', which was held recently in Uttarakhand, celebrated the age-old connection between music and Nature. We have heard how Tansen could set off a blaze by singing raag Deepak and could bring rain with his rendition of Miyan ki Malhar, still a popular monsoon raag.

The venue of the festival was on the banks of river Kosi and the fringes of the Jim Corbett National Park. Established in 1936, Corbett is the country's first national park and is known for its flora and fauna.

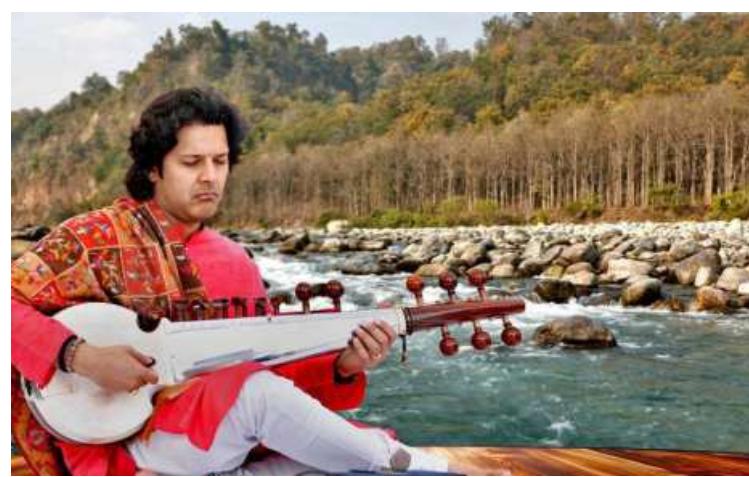
Sitting under a clear sky on chilly evenings, surrounded by tall trees, rocky hills and a river, raags Yaman, Gurjari Todi, Jhinjhoti and Shudh Kalyan seemed to gain a distinct emotional resonance.

Informal ambience

Kaushiki, who went on the safari twice with her son and husband, felt it was amazing to see curators design cultural events for a larger purpose. "I am an outdoorsy person and love going on adventure holidays. This festival has been the best working holiday I have had in recent times. I felt a surge of energy when I sang after experiencing the wilderness," she said. "The informal ambience allows for a closer interaction with the audience too."

"But the biggest highlight was being able to sit back and enjoy the performances of other artistes. Imagine having Ustad

Stopping by the woods



Amjad Ali Khan in the audience at my concert," she added.

Kaushiki was also invited by the Ustad to sing 'Aaj jaane ki zid na karo' as he played the timeless ghazal on his sarod during his late evening performance. "Only in the last few years have we realised how valuable culture tourism is. Our art and heritage stand to gain immensely with this burgeoning interest. The new synergy among artistes, audiences, organisers and curators is essential to make art accessible. Look at how the audience is enjoying the music. It is not always important that they understand every note," he said.

As the delectable sounds of his sarod wafted through the cool air, the veteran musician teased out the character of each melodic phrase. Unlike the racy passages we usually hear today, his phrases began gently, shone with



The bigger purpose is to preserve the natural heritage of the region. We plan to join hands with environmental organisations to make Nature an important collaborator of the festival.

VIR SRIVASTAVA

refined improvisation and finally dove into tranquillity. All through, the Ustad demonstrated his impeccable control over the instrument. The evening began with his sons Amaan and Ayaan reiterating through their playing the challenge of innovation and the beauty of tradition.

Sujata Mishra, a young IT executive from Delhi was attending her first classical concert. "This was a perfect space for my initiation. I did not feel like being in a highbrow cultural bubble. There's a perception that classical music isn't the most welcoming, and certainly not the most diverse as far as its performers or audience members are concerned. New-age festivals are different. And who knows, maybe I'll next go to listen to classical music in an auditorium," she smiled.

Curators are attempting all types of stratagems to broaden the audience base. "We must cultivate the next generation of loyal patrons to remain culturally relevant. I am always eager to perform at such events where the audience comes with an open mind and lets the musician take them on a journey. Since there is no pressure on us to stick to the repertoire, we package the presentation in a way that it appeals to both the informed and the neophyte," said Rakesh Chaurasia (who won the Grammy this year for the album 'As we speak').

According to Vir Srivastava, the festival director, the idea was to make classical music less intimidating and more enjoyable. A trustee of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan's Sarod Ghar in Gwalior, Vir hails from a family that has its roots in the Rampur-Sahaswan gharana. It was at the suggestion of the sarod maestro that Vir launched the festival.

"During visits to Corbett with his grandsons, the Ustad would tell me during casual baithaks that music will sound divine in the pure air of this place. So we decided to stage the concerts at the foothills of the Himalayas. However, the bigger purpose was to preserve the natural heritage of the region. Going forward, we plan to join hands with environmental organisations to make Nature an important collaborator of the festival," said Vir.

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Onkara, which was screened at the Bengaluru International Film Festival, explores the connect between the Mavilan community and theyyam

Shailaja Tripathi

Onkara, a film about the Mavilan community – an obscure tribe of Kerala and their love for theyyam, a ritualistic dance form of the state, was recently screened at the 15th edition of the Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFES). The tribe of hunters, gatherers, and herbalists regard theyyam as sacred.

According to Unni KR, director of the film, their life revolves around this dance form. “Everything is connected to theyyam. And that’s what I have tried to show.”

Onkara reminds of the blockbuster Kannada film *Kantara* as far as the theme is concerned. Both deal with theyyam, but the portrayal in *Onkara* is subtle.

Onkara is reportedly the first film in Markodi, a dialect of the Tulu language, which doesn’t have a script.

The film follows the life of Karumban, a theyyam artiste and the son of Chinkam, the village head. Chinkam in Markodi means lion, and Chinkam leads the Mavilan community, akin to the king of the jungle. Karumban wants to follow in the footsteps of his father and become the next Chinkam. He leads a life of poverty. Karumban’s wife suggests he take up farming but he is consumed by his passion for theyyam. His elder daughter Manikyam falls in love with a bangle seller and elopes. The villagers turn against Karumban



The dance of identity

and question his right to become the next Chinkam. Meanwhile, Manikyam returns to the forest after being sexually assaulted. Chinkam orders the villagers to sever ties with Manikyam.

The film is peppered with theyyam performances by Karumban, essayed by Sudheer Karamana, making it a visual feast.

Colourful costume
Theyyam is derived from the word ‘davam’. The dance form was never meant to entertain but to invoke the deity and seek blessings for prosperity. That’s how theyyam became to be the dance of gods.

It is believed that during the

performance, the artiste transcends his/her body and connects with the divine.

With the face painted in bright colours and dramatic eye-make up, donning an elaborate costume, a huge bamboo headgear and unique jewellery, the male dancer performs to the beats of musical instruments such as chenda (percussion), kuzhal (double reed wind instrument), elathalam (cymbals). In an open-air setting, he then

enacts the stories of Kari Chamundi (goddess of disease), Vishnumoorthi (a representation of Vishnu), Bhagavathi, Raktha Chamundi and other gods.

The audience is immersed in bhakti rasa while watching the dancer perform with energy and vigour. The costume, performance, open-air setting in the night and lighting come together to make it an enchanting experience.

There are more than 400 styles of theyyam. “This tribe’s theyyam is different and difficult. Our lead actor, Sudheer, trained in it for six months,” says Unni.

The film’s catalogue gives a holistic description of the role theyyam practitioners play in the Mavilan community. It says:

“Theyyam artistes

in the community create wonders and are deemed to possess all-encompassing knowledge. They leave their homes and loved ones to take up residence in the jungle and perform miracles. Their abode, known as ‘Pathee’ is sought out by people who want guidance in life. Their visions of the future set a rhythm to Mavilan life.”

Apart from theyyam, the film also throws light on other folk songs and dance forms like Mangalamkali (wedding dance ritual) and Eruthkali of the Mavilan tribe. The film documents their musical instruments such as thudi and bamboo drums.

While the film was shot in forests over a period of 30 days, the research by Unni KR and Rajesh Thillenkeri, who has written the story, screenplay and dialogue, took three years. “The tribals have a difficult life but they don’t complain. They want to live like free birds. *Onkara* is an effort to capture the unique lifestyle and culture of the Mavilans,” says Unni.

Realistic portrayal
Sudheer Karamana in *Onkara* PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

CALENDAR



Guided listening session

Ganakaladha Madurai Mani Iyer Rasikas Association presents the guided listening session of the legendary musician on March 30, 4 p.m. Titled ‘Celebrating Ramanavami with Madurai Mani Iyer’ it will feature excerpts from the recordings of the maestro’s Ramanavami concerts. Venue: Vivekananda Hall, P.S. High School, Mylapore.

Vocal and violin concerts

Madhuradhwani’s concert line-up from March 29 to 31 and to be held at Arkay Convention Center. Today, 6.15 p.m.: Savita Sreerama accompanied by Bombay R. Madhavan (violin), Melakaveri Balaji (mridangam) and Madippakkam Murali (ghatam). March 30, 6.15 p.m.: Charumathi Raghuraman (violin solo) with Sai Giridhar (mridangam) and S. Krishna (ghatam). March 31, 6.15 p.m.: Pattabhirama Pandit (vocal), R. Hemalatha (violin), Bangalore V. Praveen (mridangam) and B.S. Purusotham (kanjira). A special music ensemble ‘Indra Dhanush’ by mridangist Vaidya Rajasekar will take place on April 4 at 6.15 p.m. The team will also comprise musicians Meera Sivaramakrishnan, Pazhayasevaram G. Kalidas, Thiruneermalai B. Mani, Pathangi Brothers and R. Arujun Sambasivan.



Movement therapy

Bharatambe showcased the healing power of music and dance

V.V. Ramani

It was an evening to celebrate the art and culture. Over 240 differently-abled children came together under the ‘Rasa-Ramana Sunritya Alaya’ umbrella for a dance theatre presentation titled ‘Bharatambe - Harmony in diversity’. Directed and choreographed by Ambika Kameshwar, it showcased how movement and melody are great healers.

Ambika, a pioneer in using theatre arts as a tool for holistic development of physically-challenged children, chose to channelise her passion and experience as a Bharatanatyam dancer to lend colour to the lives of those with special needs by establishing the Rasa-Ramana Sunritya Alaya in 1989.

“I realised that these children responded well to a teaching methodology that included music, dance, acting and story telling. Seeing the outcome of these exercises, I began an annual presentation, where the children



For a cause Students of Rasa-Ramana Sunritya Alaya at the annual event.

PHOTOS: M. SRINATH

hailing her. Children dressed in regional costumes performed the songs and dances of those regions.

The entries, exits and formations were executed in a seamless manner as children presented life stories of popular saints. The sequence that paid homage to goddess was aesthetically conceived. Another visually appealing sequence was the projection of lotuses on a screen in the backdrop with children holding up stalks of the flower and swaying them in rhythm.

The other moments of significance were the creation of a setting of a banyan tree and ashrama, the props used to depict the lions on the Asoka Pillar, and serene visuals of moving clouds and sunset.

The concept, music, choreography and direction were by Ambika Kameshwar. Multimedia visuals were by Vaishnavi Poorna and camera by Francis. The choreography team consisted of Vaishnavi Poorna, Anandi Chandrasekharan, Meghna Venkat, Kavita Suresh Kumar and Lakshmi Shivashankar.

displayed their talent in a theme-based programme. The immense effort that the teachers and volunteers put in to make this a reality comes through in the presentation,” says Ambika.

The show began with the depiction of Bharatmata surrounded by a group of kids



Malini White

Bangalore International Centre's tribute to Women's Day was a week of programmes celebrating women. 'Connecting the Generations', a piano recital by Marielena Fernandes, was a wonderful collection of piano miniatures from Vienna. Not only was Marielena's talent at the keyboard much appreciated, but she charmed offstage with her warm approachability and friendliness and a genuine desire to connect.

Connecting is important to this Goan, born in Mumbai. "I had a wonderful childhood. As in most homes in our community, there was always a piano, so music was an integral part of our lives. As was the church, where we sang in the choir. Our home was a hub in the neighbourhood, open to all, with people of all faiths coming over. It was the same in school: we looked forward to celebrating each others' festivals. Where else can one celebrate such diversity?"

India connect

Marielena misses India so much that she has to visit at least every other year. "I love the street noises, wonderfully colourful clothes, the amazing food ... I find all this nowhere else in the world."

Her deep commitment to sharing her music sees her conducting workshops in every city she travels to, reaching out to young aspirants. "Practice, practice, practice, is what I tell them. Don't be discouraged by setbacks like not winning a competition. They must encourage you to persevere, not surrender. But you must have a vision, with

Viennese delights

Marielena Fernandes took the audience on a musical tour of the Austrian city



Classics Marielena Fernandes performed the compositions of Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms. PHOTOS: LEKHA NAIDU AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

concrete aims, not a vague dream."

Her desire to reach out manifested itself in her introductions to the pieces, emphasising how much she wanted to share the music she is able to create. It was this genuine warmth that added an immediacy to her performance. Not only did she choose pieces of reasonable length, easily grasped by the audience, the strong melodic component of them appealed enormously. The link between her chosen composers was Vienna, now Marielena's home. Three of the

composers – Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms – wrote the pieces while living in the Austrian city, which was a vibrant musical centre.

Rachmaninoff was the odd one out, his only link to Vienna being his great admiration of the Viennese spirit of Beethoven and Brahms.

It is perhaps not so surprising that Beethoven, writing the Opus 126 Bagatelles at the end of his career, dispensed with compositional virtuosity. Many artistes in their maturity arrive at the essentials in their chosen fields, by which time

they have pared down their creativity to what is important and have the courage to dispense with the complex, to show the value of simplicity. Therefore some of the Bagatelles have affinities with his larger more complex instrumental works, and are seen to be modifications or shorn versions of some aspects of them.

Harmonic intricacies

Though they are short pieces, Marielena conveyed the essence of Beethoven's musical language: their

harmonic intricacies and melodic fretwork. Her right hand was often so light that the sound was at times almost imperceptible. The left hand was suitably strong and the combat between the right and left chords in Beethoven's 4th Bagatelle was given more prominence with her emphatic gestures.

Marielena treated the audience to Schubert's rarely performed 3 piano pieces D 946, inexplicably not better known, for they are as scintillating as his famous Impromptus that precede this Opus. Written in the year he died, they are perhaps a farewell, full of his life's agony, sensitively and poignantly realised in his glorious melodies. Rendered delicately, Marielena brought out the beauty of the singing line, but was equal to the fervid urgency of the staccato and

driven triplets as well. Schubert's tragic personal life is so inextricably interwoven into his music that listening to this fine rendering made for a moving experience.

The programme's surprise was Rachmaninoff's 3 Preludes Op23, #s 4, 5 & 6, for one does not associate the Russian composer with Vienna. Their inclusion was most welcome, for Marielena's virtuosic skill was apparent in her execution. The rich Russian sound [following Tchaikovsky's example], is a superbly crafted romantic composite of utterly sensuous melody contained in classical structure. Rachmaninoff encouraged each performer to bring to his compositions his/her own individualised experience and Marielena did justice to his injunction in the stunning G minor Prelude, whose format encourages such personal involvement. She pounded out the big splashy double octaves but suitably managed the lightly skimming passages with a requisite light mercurial touch.

Marielena ended with four pieces from Brahms' Op 119. Written in his final years, they display some of the experimentation he allowed himself. Though they are miniatures, they are profound character pieces, testing the musicianship of the performer. In the B minor Intermezzo, for example, chords are delicately slivered into a transluence, and Marielena's pedal control helped capture this fragility. The E flat major Rhapsody has a more symphonic flavour, shifting from a euphoric major key to its minor counterpart, requiring quick changes by the pianist.

The recital stood out not only for Marielena's keyboard artistry but also for her warm personality, which added a special dimension.

Shilpa Anandraj

Moritz Ostruschnjak brought *Tanzanweisungen und Moritz Ostruschnjak*. The dance was presented as part of Attakkalari India Biennale 2024 at Bangalore International Centre.

The dance, featuring Daniel Conant, is a 30-minute self-reflective solo piece with ironic references that defy any specific definition.

The India tour of this project is supported by the Bavarian State Association for Contemporary Dance (BLZT) with funds from the Bavarian State Ministry of Science and the Arts.

Moritz ventured into contemporary dance through breakdancing. He studied at Iwanson International (Munich) and completed his training with Maurice Béjart in Lausanne. He has been working as a freelance choreographer since 2013 and is known for his works titled, *Island of Only One Land*, *Text Neck*, *BOIDS*, *UNSTERN* and *AUTOPLAY*.

He talks about his tryst with different dance styles and how they have influenced his works.

Question: You started off as a graffiti artist. How did the transition from a visual to a performing art happen?

Answer: It was a gradual process. I started graffiti at 13 and it was there that I discovered hip hop and breakdancing. It was later that I moved to Munich, which happens to also have one of the largest breakdancing communities. We trained everyday and danced at metro stations. This was 25 years ago, when there was not much training for street dance or breakdance. I also had a friend who would share with me videos of ballet, break dance and contemporary dance. This is how my passion and journey



Dance, as you like it

German dancer-choreographer Moritz Ostruschnjak on his journey from street to stage

went. I studied ballet at 19 and four years of contemporary dance and soon was working and dancing professionally.

Q: Do you bring in aspects of graffiti into your dance?

A: I do not associate myself with any one particular art form or dance style. One thing I do feel closest to is contemporary dance. Because it is an open form and I believe my work, even today, is influenced by my days in hip-hop culture.

Q: Do you still dance or just focus on choreography?

A: I am more into choreography. Much of my time and energy goes into



organising and touring with my dance pieces. So I do not find the time to dance.

Q: In Indian classical dance, we have a guru who teaches. As a teacher yourself,

how much freedom is given to the dancer, how much of your ideas are imposed on them? Or do you just act as a facilitator?

A: I am not a fan of the term 'guru' or this god-like figure. If you look culturally, everything comes from somebody. There is always someone before you who has taken information, worked on it and taken it further. Inventing something out of nothing is a myth. I do not believe in the concept that I am god-like and hence can dictate my creation. I work from a space that says things are already there and you have to make yourself sensitive in order to see those things. My style is more task-based work. I research and try to come up with certain methods that work with the time that we live in. Then the dancer is given certain tasks. For me, it is important that there is a dialogue between my dancer and me. I am also interested in understanding the movement archive and history of the dancer's body and the technique that comes with them.

Q: What do you think of Indian contemporary dance? Our classical dances are all gravity-oriented whereas modern dance is all about defying gravity.

A: It is difficult to define contemporary dance. What is contemporary in Europe may not be so in India, Japan or Hong Kong. In the dancers I have encountered here, I do see a difference. In Europe contemporary training is more individualised and is based a lot on self expression. In India I see the beauty of classical dance being brought into contemporary dance, and find that amazing. We do not have much knowledge about form or rhythm. In Germany we do not have this traditional background, which is sad and this is where India is unique and I find its influence in the contemporary context extremely interesting.

UAA's tribute to Sivaji

ABBAS Cultural and Roshini Fine Arts presents 'Nadigar Thilakam Vazhangi', on March 30, 6 p.m. at Vani Mahal, T. Nagar, to celebrate three classics of the legendary Sivaji Ganesan - 40 years of *Parichaikku Neramachu*, 50 years of *Gowravam* and 60 years of *Paar Magale Paar*. Starring the legendary Sivaji Ganesan in the lead, these films were adapted from three plays, of the same name, originally staged by Y.G. Parthasarathy and Y.Gee. Mahendra's UAA.

Tomorrow's programme features an audio-visual presentation showcasing a few song sequences and select clippings from these films. Y.Gee. Mahendra will share his experiences of working with Sivaji Ganesan and many interesting anecdotes about the making of these films.

The evening also includes honouring of some of the artistes and technicians associated with these films.

United Amateur Artistes (UAA) started by Y.G. Parthasarathy and Pattu in 1952 had staged many Tamil plays, a few of which were adapted to cinema. UAA's *Petal Thaan Pillaya*, written by Pattu in 1961, was made into a Tamil film *Paar Magale Paar*.

And UAA's play *Kannan Vandhaan*, scripted by Vietnam Veedu Sundaram, was also turned into a film titled *Gowravam*. The celluloid version of a successful play of the late 1970s *Partichaikku Neramachu*, written by Mahendra and GK, was a hit as well. In both these films, Mahendra shared the screen space with the thespian.

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