

# fridayReview

THE HINDU

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**BHIM SINGH AND HIS RIVETING FAMILY DRAMAS**

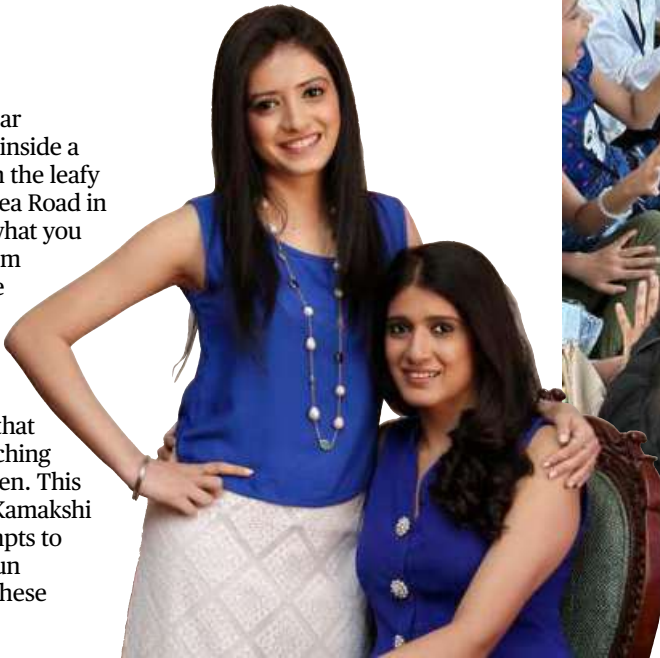
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## Music on wheels

Meet Kamakshi and Vishala Khurana, who conduct music classes for underprivileged children inside a bus

Nivedita Javaram Pawar

It's not unusual to hear classical tunes from inside a yellow bus parked in the leafy bylanes of Napean Sea Road in Mumbai. Step inside and what you see is a brightly lit classroom with colourful posters. The students are children from the nearby slums of Shimla Nagar. Conducted twice a week, ‘The Sound Space on Wheels’ is a bus that travels around the city teaching Hindustani music to children. This unique venture by sisters Kamakshi and Vishala Khurana attempts to bring some creative, and fun moments into the lives of these



**Culture trip** Children singing inside the bus; and the sisters. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

children. The sisters hold a degree in psychology and a Visharad (considered equivalent to a Bachelor's degree in music) in Hindustani music respectively. The Khurana sisters don't recollect a specific time in their childhood when they were initiated into music. It was a part of everything they did. From learning math tables to helping their mother in the kitchen – everything had a rhythm to it. While studying music from her father and other gurus, Kamakshi also dabbled in teaching music to kids, and created interesting learning modules to keep them engaged. “Expecting three- and four-year-olds to sit and learn music is not going to work. It's not the future of art education. Unless, of course, they are passionate about it. But how do you bring them to a point where they learn and also enjoy

**Kamakshi and Vishala launched ‘The Sound Space’ in 2010 combining their love and learnings from music and psychology.**

themselves? So I built a curriculum that involved not just music but also other things such as storytelling,” says Kamakshi.

A few years later, Vishala joined in and the sisters launched ‘The Sound Space’, a company that creates and runs specialised music workshops and training sessions in some of the most high-end schools in Mumbai. But it was the pandemic that gave birth to the idea of ‘The Sound Space on Wheels’. “During Covid, we had online classes for regular students from schools and homes. Some parents sent their children in cars with their nannies. That set me thinking – what are children, who cannot afford to enrol themselves in classes, doing with their time? So, we thought, why not give them 45 minutes of joy a week. A safe space to come to and go back with happy feelings,” says Kamakshi. So the sisters approached Eicher Motors for a bus they could take around Mumbai and teach music to children. After months of presentations and discussions, the auto major stepped in with a bus with remodelled interiors. The venture kickstarted with crowdfunding in 2023.

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**Collaborative concert**  
Members of Madras Guild of Performing Arts and Gustav Mahler Society of Colombo.  
PHOTO COURTESY: MGPA

Rachel Rhine

The Indian premiere of F.J. Haydn’s ‘The Creation’, presented by the Madras Guild of Performing Arts (MGPA), in collaboration with the Gustav Mahler Society of Colombo (GMSC), promised an evening that would transport the audience to the realms of divine artistry. This was the first international tour of GMSC.

Inside the Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, anticipation crackled in the air. The excited whispers of the attendees, a blend of seasoned aficionados and curious newcomers, created a harmonious prelude to the night’s performance. It took them through Haydn’s masterful depiction of ‘The Creation’ inspired by the *Book of Genesis* from the *Bible* and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

At the helm of this ambitious endeavour was Atul Jacob Isaac, the conductor of the MGPA, whose vision and passion brought Haydn’s masterpiece to life. “I had the privilege of studying and learning the Viennese style of conducting and interpreting composers of this particular century,” Issac shared. “I was excited and honoured to apply that in practise with a choir I lead and with an orchestra of a very grounded musical foundation, both in management and skill.”

The performance began with *The Representation of*



# Recreating Haydn’s masterpiece

A performance of the celebrated composer’s ‘The Creation’ brought together an Indian choir and a Sri Lankan orchestra

*Chaos*, a soundscape capturing the universe’s nascent tremors. The orchestra painted a vivid tapestry where each instrument contributed to the cosmic dialogue. Strings murmured, brass roared, and woodwinds danced, each note a masterful stroke on Haydn’s expansive canvas.

The transition from C Minor to C Major on the word “light” was a moment of sheer brilliance, as the full ensemble played together for the first time. “Theatrically, I had the lights at 70 per cent at the start of this piece and when the choir sang ‘And there was light,’ the stage was

fully lit,” said Issac. Kristina Ammatill, the distinguished soprano, embodied the roles of Gabriel and Eve with grace and power. Tenor Ramon Branch Biescas, as Uriel, infused his performance with clarity and emotion, while the performance of baritone Maximilian Catalano, portraying Raphael and Adam, resonated with depth and authority. Their performances brought the characters to life, weaving a narrative rich with drama and beauty.

In a moment of cultural fusion, the encore piece, *Danno Budunge*, added a breathtaking finale. This

famous Sri Lankan song, celebrating the glory of Anuradhapura, was composed by Pt. Visvanath Lauji, an Indian musician with a deep love for Western classical music. The orchestral arrangement by Manilal Weerakoon enhanced the song’s grandeur, marking a perfect union of Sri Lankan, Indian and Western influences. It was a fitting tribute to the shared heritage and musical bonds between the nations.

Srimal Weerasinghe, conductor of the GMSC, emphasised the significance of this cultural exchange. The performance was not merely a display of musical

pro prowess, but a celebration of human connection and the power of music to transcend language and geography.

This concert raised poignant questions about the future of this art form in the city. How can Chennai nurture a deeper appreciation for Western classical music while celebrating its own heritage? What role do such collaborations play in bridging cultural divides?

Well-known pianist Anil Srinivasan highlighted the need to nurture this burgeoning interest. “Democratise the listening experience by having more community engagements – demos and workshops. Also, western classical teachers should encourage their students to participate in performances. Allow for more dialogue and discourse.”

Reflecting on the concert, Issac hoped that audiences would take away a deep appreciation for Haydn’s final masterpiece. “Whether seasoned or an amateur, this oratorio will ring in your heart,” he said.

# Music on wheels

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“The Sound Space on Wheels’ bus is no ordinary bus. Devoid of seats, the carpeted interiors are lined with guitars, ukuleles, djembes, tabla and other percussion tools and decked with colourful posters. As the clock strikes 5 p.m., children aged between 6 and 14 trickle in and take their place inside the bus. The 45-minute class is conducted by ‘didis’ (music teachers recruited by Kamakshi and Vishala) using songs and props. The session ends with listening to some calming music.

“The Sound Space on Wheels’ is not just a music programme, insists Kamakshi. “The intention is not to create singing stars. It’s a class where they learn language skills, cognitive and socio-emotional skills, cultures of various countries and concentration. These are things they will never learn in school. And all they have to do is come out of their homes and step into the bus.” When the sisters spot talent, they pick them up for specialised training and to be a part of the music concerts they put together. Currently, the bus travels to Malabar Hill, Napean Sea Road and Worli.

**Funding Woes**  
While Eicher is ready to roll out the second bus, the girls are holding back because of lack of funds. In the past, business houses such as Piramal and Zerodha have funded the classes, which have recurring costs like fuel, salaries for teachers and drivers, parking charges, and repair and maintenance. “The south Bombay kids are very inspired by the project. Students from The Cathedral and John Connon School in Fort put up a music show and raised funds. One of our music students held a bake sale and donated the money to us. Some even volunteer to teach. So it’s a community project,” says Vishala.

Finding the right kind of teachers is another herculean task. “There are many music teachers but we are looking for those who are willing to work with us on raising awareness among children through music. It is high time educators get paid well so they have a reason to work well. We are firm with our teachers on how they speak with the children and on their tone and body language.”

The duo is also currently looking for sponsors for food for the children, which will give them more reasons to come to class.



# Nuanced sancharis

Ashwitha Krishnan conveyed well the emotions in the lyrics

V.V. Ramani

The beauty of the Bharatanatyam margam was evident throughout Ashwitha Krishnan’s performance. A student of Kirti Ramgopal, she began with a mallari in Gambhira Nattai, followed by a neat visualisation of the shloka ‘Gajananam’. The rendering of a Tiruppugazh ‘Padi madi nadi’ by the vocalist to the accompaniment of the flute, cymbals and mridangam aided the dancer in executing lively adavus.

The centrepiece of the day was Dhandayuthapani Pillai’s Ragamalika composition, ‘Swamiyai azhaithodi va’, where ragas and lyrics have been woven seamlessly, inspiring dancers to explore various ideas with ease. The dancer’s sancharis – sending notes on a floating lotus or a parrot to communicate her love, the coyness when she imagines being wedded to the lord, and the torturous state of love and distress, where even the moonlight scorches – were expressed aesthetically.

The theermanams were short and crisp, with the dancer executing the movements with grace and firm footwork. The depiction of the varied attributes of Shiva between each line of a jathi korvai was appealing.

In the Swati Tirunal javali ‘Ithu Sahasamulu’ in raga Saindhavi that followed, the dancer’s attention to detail was noteworthy.

The programme concluded with a thillana in raga Simhendramadhyamam, composed by Madurai Krishnan.

The musical accompaniment was an asset to the performance. Raghuram Rajagopalan sang with a lot of feeling, but the enunciation of lyrics lacked clarity at some places. Nithish Ammannaya’s melodious notes on the flute and Janardhana Rao’s rhythmic playing on the mridangam were impressive. Kirti Ramgopal conducted the recital.



Saraswathi Vasudevan

Shafeekudeen and Shabana, sishyas of Natyacharyas V.P. and and Shanta Dhananjayan, performed on day two of the Aikyam festival, held recently.

The dancers, coordinated in muted shades of green and mustard, were as pleasing as the Kalakshetra bani that they showcased.

In the 75-minute concert, the items flowed in quick succession aided by a solid team of accompanists. Kandadevi Vijayaraghavan on the violin set the tone for the evening. Singer Hariprasad’s fluidity was a huge support for the dancers. Jayshree Ramanathan’s nattuvangam and Guru Bharadwaj’s intonations on the mridangam were in sync as the artistes matched their steps efficiently, maintaining the laya component.

In an invocation to Ganesha, Shafeekudeen and Shabana neatly dealt with the many

# Steps in sync

Shafeekudeen and Shabana performed at Aikyam’s two-day festival



## Roll of honour

Sri. V. Narayana Iyer Memorial Trust, Anna Nagar, will celebrate its 35th anniversary and the 114th year of V. Narayana Iyer on October 13 (6 p.m.) with an award function at Narada Gana Sabha, Alwarpet. The following awards will be presented on the occasion: Dushyanth Sridhar will be honoured with the Pravachana Vachaspathi title; Cleveland V. V. Sundaram will be presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award and Shree Vidhya with the Professional Excellence Award. Other awards to be given on the occasion are: G.K. Subramania Iyer award to M. Krishnamurthy; Lakshmi Ammal award to Kudanthai Malli; Sankari Narayanan award to SL Naanu; Janaki Vaidyanathan award to Yoga; and Thankam Krishnan award to M.S. Mathivanan. Justice N. Seshasayee, the Madras High Court, presides. The evening also features Dushyanth Sridhar’s discourse on Adi Shankarar’s ‘Kanakadhara Stotram’ (7 p.m.).

## Thematic production

Shivanugraha Trust, in association with Narada Gana Sabha and Sivan Fine Arts Academy, celebrates the 24th annual music and dance festival from October 13 to 15 at Narada Gana Sabha. The three-day event, themed on Rukmini Ramani’s compositions, begins with a group presentation of Pada varnams (Oct. 13, 4 p.m.) followed by Saketharaman’s vocal concert (6 p.m.). Dr. Sudha Seshayyan will inaugurate the festival and Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti will distribute the prizes to the winners of the competition held by the Trust. Programmes to take place on the next two days are: Oct. 14, 5 p.m.: Maharajapuram Ganesh Viswanathan (vocal) and 6.30 p.m.: Vidya Kalyanaraman (vocal). Oct. 15, 6 p.m.: ‘Tiruvurur Pancharatnam’, composed by Rukmini Ramani, will be performed by the students of Parvathi Ravi Ghantasala, Sukanya Ravinder, Sivakumar-Sailaja Sivakumar, Padmalakshme Suresh and Srekala Bharath.

## Festival special

● A thematic Bharatanatyam performance by Bhairavi Venkatesan, Mridula Sivakumar and Sanjena Ramesh, students of Sheela Unnikrishnan, will take place today at 6.30 p.m. Organised as part of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s Navaratri festival, they will present ‘Melattur Margam’. Venue: Bhavan’s Auditorium.

● Sathvika Ranganathan, student of Bharatanatyam dancer Uma Sathyanarayanan, is performing today at Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Mylapore, as part of the Navaratri Nrityotsavam. Time: 5.45 p.m.





The rock legend spent part of his childhood in Mumbai's Dadar Parsi Colony

# In search of Freddie's Indian roots

Chitra Swaminathan  
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It's a warm and humid October morning. But you hardly feel the heat walking on the clean, wide tree-lined roads in Mumbai's Dadar Parsi Colony. This is an oasis of quiet and green in a bustling megapolis. The houses here, not more than three storeys high, feature neo-classical and art deco architectural elements and the Faravahar (a bearded man on a winged disc) symbol at the entrance. They whisper tales of the past.

The largest Zoroastrian (Parsi) enclave in the world, the colony was established in the mid-1890s after the bubonic plague. Civil engineer Mancherji Edulji Joshi convinced the British to reserve this space, once a low-lying marshland, for Parsis. His futuristic blueprint included not just an agiary or fire temple (Rustom Faramna agiary), a school, a seminary (madrasa), and a wedding hall but also the tree species to be planted on each street. In a rapidly-changing city, the colony remains special as it quietly strives to hold on to Zoroastrian culture and tradition.



The Dadar Parsi Colony is special for one more reason, especially for rock fans across the globe – Freddie Mercury, the frontman of the hugely popular 1970s British band 'Queen'. A Parsi by birth, Freddie's original name was Farrokh Bulsara, and his roots belong here. He was born in Zanzibar, East Africa, and was sent to India to study in a boarding school at Panchgani, in Maharashtra. Though the family later moved to the U.K., Freddie, his mother Jer and father Bomi remained in touch with the extended family.

"Whenever they visited Mumbai, they preferred staying with us instead of at a

five-star hotel," says Freddie's second cousin Jehangir Bulsara, sitting next to a table with a photograph of Freddie placed on it. "Look at that photograph," he says pointing to the one inside a glass cupboard. "That is very dear to me since it has Freddie's signature on it. He gave it to me and it's my prized possession. Like many around the world, I too, am a die-hard Queen fan. The combination of ballads, metal, pop, glam rock and blues became the group's signature style. The most amazing thing about Freddie was that he constantly reinvented himself," says Jehangir.

The rock icon, known for his flamboyant stage presence (remember his military-style sunflower yellow jacket and silver-sequined unitard), songwriting abilities and powerful vocal range, began his music journey at the Panchgani boarding school. "I was told that Freddie's parents sent him to St. Peter's since he was extremely mischievous. During vacations, he would come to stay with us. He discovered his love for music when he became part of the school choir and later, the school band. None of us ever thought this shy boy would one day become an international star. But the family remained simple and humble," says Jehangir.

As the four-member Queen stormed music charts with numbers like 'Bohemian Rhapsody', 'We will rock you' and 'We are the champions' and performed to packed stadiums (Queen live at Wembley Stadium had a turnout of more than 70,000), Freddie became one of the most influential and celebrated musicians.

The Parsi Colony is one of the first planned settlements of Mumbai and it reflects the collective dream of a community. Though it was exciting to go around the colony to explore Freddie's India connect, the musician actually never openly spoke about his ethnicity or discussed his Parsi heritage. He feared racial prejudice and didn't want to be looked at as an immigrant in the Western music industry. While Farrokh became Freddie at school, he took on the surname Mercury after his song 'My Fairy King'.

Freddie once said: "I always knew I was a star. And now, the rest of the world seems to agree with me."



Music and memories (From left) Freddie Mercury in his iconic attire; the house where he spent part of his childhood; and a tree-lined lane in the Dadar Parsi Colony. PHOTOS: GETTY AND CHITRA SWAMINATHAN

## A new stage

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art forays into the performing arts scene with a theatre festival

Neha Kirpal

Expanding its repertoire of multi-disciplinary artistic expression, the New Delhi-based Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) is now making its foray into the performing arts with the launch of its inaugural theatre festival. Set against the historic backdrop of Sunder Nursery in the heart of the capital, the curated festival focuses on contemporary theatre's role in addressing current societal vulnerabilities, including class, religion, location, gender and sexuality.

"The aim is to make arts accessible. The theatre festival is the next step in strengthening KNMA's multidisciplinary programming, building on initiatives such as Legacy Series, Centre Stage Festival and KNMA in the Park," said Kiran Nadar.

Bengaluru-based actor, director and filmmaker Kirtana Kumar, who is the festival's curator, wanted to put together plays that explore new material as well as encourage conversations about how people are making plays today. "The focus this time is contemporary theatre because I am interested in knowing what artists in the subcontinent are saying – what theatrical forms and languages they are exploring and what issues excite them. How do they create, where is the money, what is their inspiration, and what do they wish to express," she said.

### Exploring vulnerability

The curatorial vision for the festival centres on the theme 'The Power of Vulnerability'. Kirtana had been writing a paper on vulnerability in the context of a post-colonialism and the rehearsal room, so she thought it would be great to extend this to the theme of the festival. "To reframe vulnerability as a thing of beauty and creativity, I wanted to invite people, plays, ideas and forms that don't always get national attention," she said.

The festival will

Multi-disciplinary (Right) *Notion(s): In Between You & Me* by Savita Rani. (Top) *Vali Vadha*. PHOTOS COURTESY: KNMA



open with *Beesu Kamsale*, an acrobatic folk form associated with men of the Halu Kuruba community of the Malé Mahadeshwara hills, near Chamaraajanagar and Mandya in Karnataka. This will be followed by *The Nights* presented by the Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust, a puppet homage to the Syrian, Chinese and Indian versions of the *Arabian Nights*. Another immersive puppet experience by the group, *Enchanted Walk*, welcomes the audience into a wonderland full of insects. Further adapted from the Aranyakanda of the Ramayana, *Vali Vadha* tells the story of the two vanaras or forest-dwelling brothers, Vali and Sugreeva.

### Myriad themes

*Love and Information* by Mohit Takalkar mirrors the rapid pace of channel-hopping or social media scrolling, touching on an array of themes such as memory atrophy, privacy erosion, an alienation from the self and the decay of genuine emotion. Abhi Tambe's *Portal Waiting*, an intimate aural-theatre experience, is a performance that is both storytelling and rock show. *Wepushthesky* is a solo performance by Nisha Abdulla that weaves together song, story, myth and history to talk about friendships that are lost, found and lasting. *Notion(s): In Between You & Me* by Savita Rani is a devised solo performance that draws on one woman's name, rage and journey of mowing through religion, region, caste, gender and race.



Through fantasy, song, dance and dialogue, *Talki via Bengaluru* brings together transwomen from various walks of life, including activists, writers, mothers and community leaders. All of them are over the age of 55 and have experienced romance, survival and the human fight for dignity. Juxtaposing documentary footage, photos and soundscapes, along with the theatricality of clown, song, dance and puppetry, *Project Darling* shines a light on female sexuality in the crosshairs of censorship and culture. Woven from personal experiences, *Before Your Eyes* is a collective expression of bodies that have endured caste and sexual violence, co-devised by members of Freeda and Maraa. *Bhaagi Hui Ladkiyan* by Agaaz Repertory are retellings of daily life in Nizamuddin Basti in Delhi. *Be-Loved* is an anthological exploration of queer love through theatre, music, poetry and movement.

In curating this festival, Kirtana also had her eye on the future. "How do we create a rock solid template that will be possible to replicate with other themes and curators in the future? How do we draw the community in, and join the dots between the theme and both audience and artists? The essence of contemporaneity lies in democratic practice that includes creative ideas such as co-authorship and the value of lived experience," she added.

Alongside the performances, the festival also includes a workshop, a lecture demonstration and a symposium, fostering discussions among performance theorists, students and practitioners.

The KNMA Theatre Festival will take place at Sunder Nursery, New Delhi, from October 14 to 20.



### Devi kritis

Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha Trust presents 'Kamalalaya Devi Vaibhavam', based on Muthuswami Dikshitar's kritis extolling the goddess at the Thyagaraja temple, Tiruvarur. V.L. Sudarshan will render the kritis on the occasion. Date and time: October 11, 6.15 p.m. Venue: Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore.

### Veena festival

Narada Gana Sabha, in association with Bharata Ilango Foundaiton for Asian Culture (BIFAC) and Kalakendra.com, commemorates the 250th birth anniversary of Muthuswami Dikshitar with a special veena ensemble '108 Veena Nadanjali – Harmony of Strings for Human Harmony' on October 13, 10 a.m.-11.30 a.m., at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall.



### Music performances

Narada Gana Sabha has organised the following programmes at its venue. Today, 6.15 p.m. at Mini Hall:Prarthana Sai Narasimhan will present her vocal concert with Madurai Vijayaganesh (violin), and Mannarkoil Balaji (mridangam). October 16, 6.30 p.m., at mini hall: Baby Sreeram (vocal) with B. Anantha Krishnan (violin) and A.S. Ranganathan (mridangam).

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