

fridayReview

THE HINDU

An ode to Muthuswami Dikshitar
Meenakshi Chitharanjan's 'Guruguho Jayati' was based on his compositions **p2**

Mrcchakatikam comes to Chennai
Chidagni Foundation will premiere the groundbreaking Koodiyattam play **p3**



WHEN THAVIL MEETS JAZZ

Multi-percussionist Ramesh Shotham takes the instrument to the world stage **p4**

From classical ragas to contemporary rhythms, how artistes across generations have reimagined 'Vande Mataram', keeping its spirit vibrant and relevant

United by song



ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

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A part from the National Anthem, one song that echoes through our childhood and is sung in school assemblies is Vande Mataram. As children, we may not have grasped its depth, but each time it is sung or played, especially on Independence Day or Republic Day, it evokes a deep sense of pride and emotion.

On November 7, 1875, in his home near Joraghat in Chinsurah, where the river Hooghly whispers stories of time, poet and novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who was then a government official, penned these immortal lines. He first serialised it in his magazine *Bangadarshan* and later wove it into his novel *Anandamath* (1882). Vande Mataram became more than verse – it became the voice of a nation yearning for freedom.

Written in Sanskritised Bengali, its words are both gentle and defiant. Vande Mataram means 'I bow to thee, Mother'. It sings of the motherland, not with pomp, but with reverence.

*Shubhra jyotsna
pulakitayaaminim
Phulla kusumita
drumadalashobhinim
Suhaasinim
sumadhurabhaashhinim
Sukhadaam varadaam*

maataram...

It is said that Jadunath Bhattacharya, the music teacher of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, first set the song to tune in raag Malhar, evoking the monsoon's grace and the land's longing. Its first public performance happened in 1896, when Rabindranath Tagore sang it at the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta. His haunting rendition was set in raag Desh, a raag that symbolises patriotism.

At the request of Subhas Chandra Bose, noted composer Timirbaran Bhattacharya gave Vande Mataram a marching cadence, setting it in Durga, a raag that evokes strength, courage and divine feminine energy. It was a way to align the song to a rising revolution.

Vande Mataram gained prominence during the Swadeshi movement. The British, alarmed by its growing influence, imposed a ban on its public recitation. During the partition of Bengal, it became a powerful symbol of resistance and unity. It was no longer just a song – it was a call to awaken. Seminal thinkers such as Aurobindo, who translated the song into English, believed Vande Mataram carried an inherent spiritual force, capable of connecting people to a shared identity.

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Scan to Chat





Meenakshi Chitharanjan pays an ode to Dikshitar through a well-curated presentation

Novel attempt Meenakshi Chitharanjan and students performed ‘Guruguho Jayati’. PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

from Vedanta Desika’s Dasavatara stotram for context. Throughout the evening, jatis and swara passages were integrated between the compositions, sometimes as invocatory preludes and sometimes as concluding embellishments. These rhythmic interludes showcased the geometric beauty and structural precision of the Pandanallur bani, known for its economy of movement and architectural symmetry. Choreographing Dikshitar’s kritis, with their layered philosophical allusions and Sanskrit density, is no easy task. Meenakshi retained their spiritual core while remaining true to the stylistic grammar of her artistic lineage.

The Devi kriti ‘Anandamruthakarshini’ in Amritavarshini followed, introduced by Sudha with the anecdote of Dikshitar invoking rain at Ettayapuram. The choreography mirrored this act of benediction – the dancers’ flowing movements and cascading formations were apt for the phrase ‘salilam varshaya varshaya’. The performance concluded with lines from ‘Meenakshi memudam’, which is said to be the final kriti jointly rendered by Dikshitar and his disciples as he peacefully departed the mortal world.

Pandanallur Pandian’s nattuvangam lent precision, while Sakthivel Muruganandam’s mridangam added depth and texture. B. Ananthakrishnan’s violin and Mudicondan Ramesh’s veena reflected the melodic flow with warmth, and Sujith Naik’s flute brought a touch of lightness. Together, they created a soundscape that supported the dance’s emotional layers.

In celebrating Dikshitar through the lens of Adi Shankaracharya’s Shanmatham, the artistes reaffirmed the composer’s continuing resonance. His music remains a bridge between philosophy and art, intellect and devotion. ‘Guruguho Jayati’ was not merely a commemorative performance but a reaffirmation of a tradition that remains as inclusive today as it was 250 years ago.

Dance in a new language

Devaniya School of Kathak performed the Mahabharata in Tamil



Thematic Students of Jigyasa Giri performed on the concluding day of the ‘Mahal’ festival. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

V.V. Ramani

Mahal, a festival by Devaniya School of Kathak, was a celebration of a decade-long pursuit by Jigyasa Giri in promoting Kathak in Chennai. The three-day festival, held recently at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, featured a range of programmes – Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, a theatrical storytelling and a seminar. It concluded with a Nritya Natika titled ‘Kalam Uruttum Dhaayam’ by the students of Jigyasa Giri.

This was the first time that a Kathak production was presented in Tamil. Comprising five sequences, it portrayed the game of dice from the Mahabharata, Draupadi’s humiliation, the Kurukshetra war and Krishna’s Vishwaroop darshanam. Barring the dancer who played Draupadi, 17 others

donned the roles of the male characters from the epic. Their powerful movements and expressions captured the spirit of the characters, adding to the overall impact of the presentation.

Eclectic mix The production had more theatrical elements with Kathak footwork patterns and movements visible only in a few places. The use of twisted stoles by the main characters as a prop to depict a checkerboard was imaginative. The costumes, comprising dhoti pants, jackets and stoles, offered an eclectic mix of colours, patterns and styles. However, a more defined colour scheme to distinguish the Pandavas from the Kauravas would have created a strong visual appeal. Choreographically, the continuous movement of all characters on stage felt somewhat repetitive, making the sequences a little monotonous.

The lighting design by Victor Paulraj effectively enhanced the dramatic elements of the production, complemented by the evocative musical score by Ajay Singh and Shreya Singh. The idea to use Tamil could have been more impactful had the presentation delved deeper into the dance form.



Verses in motion

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Two-and-a-half centuries after his birth, Muthuswami Dikshitar continues to occupy a unique place in Carnatic music. His compositions, noted for their perfect alignment of raga, sahitya and spirituality, are not merely musical creations but philosophical treatises. That artistes continue to find new meaning in his works even after 250 years is a testament to his enduring relevance.

It was this spirit that the Janaki C.S. Ramachandran Trust sought to celebrate through ‘Guruguho Jayati’, a thematic dance production presented recently at The Music Academy.

Choreographed and presented by Meenakshi Chitharanjan and her disciples, the performance was based on Shanmatham, the six systems of worship – Saiva, Vaishnava, Sakta, Soura, Kaumara and Ganapatya – as codified by Adi Shankaracharya, using Dikshitar’s compositions as anchors. Carnatic vocalist Ashwath Narayanan led the music ensemble, while Dr. Sudha Seshayyan compered the presentation.

The performance opened with ‘Vallabha nayakasya’ in Begada, and Ashwath’s resonant timbre and unhurried pace created the atmosphere of a traditional temple invocation. Before

each segment, Sudha succinctly placed the compositions in their philosophical and poetic context. Her commentary combined scholarship with lucidity, allowing even non-specialists to appreciate Dikshitar’s intricate wordplay and theological symbolism.

Nuanced interpretation Before ‘Sri nathadi guruguho jayati’, Dikshitar’s first composition, Sudha explained how the phrase ‘mayamalavagauladi desa’ concealed both a raga reference and an allusion to how Subrahmanya is worshipped by the kings of Maya, Malava and Gaula. Meenakshi executed this piece with aplomb, presenting a nuanced interpretation of the panchabhootas or five elements. She focussed on how the song hails the deity as the inner self that guides an aspirant towards liberation.

In ‘Suryamurthe’ (raga Saurashtra), performed by the students of Meenakshi’s dance school Kaladiksha, the choreography unfolded into

spatial patterns. The dancers formed as the Sun-god’s seven-horse chariot. The phrase ‘Sarasa Mitra’, describing the Sun as a friend of the lotus, was interpreted through a group formation where the lotus bloomed in response to sunlight.

In the Saiva segment, Chidambareswaram, Meenakshi’s portrayal of Shiva’s acts such as wearing the tiger skin and performing the Ananda Tandava stood out. The line ‘Vasuki pramukha upasitam’ was taken up for exploration. Set in raga Dhunibhinnashadjam, the piece was sung with clarity and bhava by Ashwath. Mudicondan Ramesh’s veena in the lower octave added gravitas to the story of Vasuki and the churning of the ocean, while Pandanallur Pandian’s crisp sollukattu lent energy.

The Vaishnava piece ‘Sri lakshmi varaham’ stood out for its narrative coherence. Meenakshi portrayed Vishnu’s rescue of the Earth, drawing



The last act

Remembering theatre personality Shivaji Chaturvedi, who passed away recently



Suganthy Krishnamachari

Theatre personality Shivaji Chaturvedi, who passed away recently, was known for his signature handle-bar moustache and thunderous guffaw. He had a passion for music too, says D. Ramachandran, a member of the Madras Youth Choir, founded by M.B. Srinivasan, who was a friend of Shivaji.

Kalyani Raman, a longtime friend of Shivaji, says, “Shivaji joined Missiles, a band started in 1966-67. My brothers – guitarist Chandrasekaran and drummer Purushottaman were among its founding members. In 1969, he got HMV to release an LP record of the band. During this time, he heard a young girl called Usha Iyer (today popular as Usha

Uthup) sing and was impressed. He arranged programmes for her with Missiles playing for her. In the 1970s, bands would perform at Safire theatre in the mornings. Shivaji arranged a concert for Missiles at Safire, and it was a houseful show.”

Shivaji was one of the founder-members of Stage Creations, along with Kathadi Ramamurthi, T.D. Sundararajan and Bobby Raghunathan.

He was also a founder -member of Shraddha, a theatre group established in 2010. Shraddha’s first play Dhanushkoti, written and directed by Vivek Shankar, was about a storm and the subsequent flooding of Dhanushkoti in 1964. “We wanted to recreate the flood scene on stage for which Shivaji arranged funds. Art director

Balachander drew up the plans. But Krishnaswamy, secretary of Narada Gana Sabha, refused to allow water on stage. Shivaji convinced him there would be no damage. So, we stationed a water tanker outside the venue to pump in fresh water, which flowed into collection points on the stage, cleverly concealed behind props, before being pumped out. No other play has ever attempted this.”

Vivek says Shivaji always had a contingency fund to help his theatre friends when they needed the financial help. When Shivaji was in the Gulf, he arranged for many theatre groups to stage plays there. For Crazy Mohan’s Chocolate Krishna, Shivaji performed the magic tricks, which were popular with children. In TV. Varadharajen’s IPL Kudumbam, an actor had to transform on stage from Brahma to Vishnu and then to Shiva. Each change took just 20 seconds, thanks to Shivaji’s magic.

In the 1970s, dance master K.J. Sarasa and her students were invited to perform ‘Shakuntalam’ in Ujjain for Kalidas Samaroh. “The person who was to play the palace guard didn’t turn up. We asked Shivaji to be the guard, and he readily agreed. As he had to enter the stage as a dancer, we taught him a few steps and he did quite a good job,” recalls Prema Sadasivam, Shivaji’s sister.

Off stage too, Shivaji touched the lives of many with his generosity and his wide range of interests.

Vignettes of Varali

The raga was the mainstay of Kruthi Vittal’s V. Subramaniam memorial concert

P Srihari

In a vocal concert that was as befitting the occasion as it was aesthetically pleasing, Kruthi Vittal displayed her artistry with assurance. Anchored by senior accompanists L. Ramakrishnan on the violin and Patri Satish Kumar on the mridangam, the concert was held at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Organised under the auspices of Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer Golden Jubilee Foundation, the V. Subramaniam Memorial Concert provided a perfect setting for a recollection of the doyen’s legacy. The repertoire, expectedly drawn from Semmangudi’s favourites, showed Kruthi’s grasp of the salient features of his music even while her presentation retained the requisite restraint.

Navigating such a tradition-rich path, without being carried away, is no mean task. But Kruthi was up to the challenge in offering her own style of music. Only rarely – as in the niraval for ‘Rama nee samanamevaru’ (Karaharapriya) – did glimmers of the Semmangudi bani surface. If anything, those subtle touches served as a piquant pickle, accenting a delicious meal.

Kruthi’s leisurely tempo in the opening speed of the Saveri varnam, ‘Sarasuda’ by Kothavasal Venkatarama Iyer, allowed her to highlight the beauty of the gamakas. During her measured exploration of



Mature approach Kruthi Vittal with Patri Satish Kumar (mridangam) and L. Ramakrishnan (violin). PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Karaharapriya, she let each phrase emerge as naturally as a lotus bud unfurling its petals. Ramakrishnan’s melodious response was less a counterpoint than a seamless continuation of the same blueprint. The iconic composition in Rupakam, in which Tyagaraja extols Rama as ‘peerless’, followed with its sangati-laden pallavi. Kruthi offered a well-modulated and energetic niraval and swarakalpna at ‘Paluku palukulaku tene’ in the charanam.

Patnam Subramania Iyer’s ‘Marivere dikkevarayya rama’ (Shanmukhapriya-Desadi) was rendered next with a lively niraval and swara passages at the customary phrase ‘Sannutanga sri venkatesa’. Kruthi then sang ‘Paripalinchumani’, a rare kriti (Suddhasaveri-Khanda Chapu) by Thiruvisanallur Venkataramana Iyer, featuring a well-knit chittaswara.

Varali was the raga chosen for the main piece. Kruthi’s elaborate essay

captured its pensive mood, and Ramakrishnan’s reply sustained it. The vocalist’s rendition of Dikshitar’s ‘Maamava meenakshi’ in Misra Chapu reflected the grandeur of the kriti, thanks to the impeccable diction, the soulful niraval at ‘Syame sankari’, the mathematical articulation in the swara exchanges, and the flowing sarvalaghu patterns culminating in the korvai. Satish Kumar’s compact tani avartanam was marked by creative rhythmic patterns executed with verve, precision and tonal purity.

A lengthy but neat alapana in Sindhubhairavi, uncommon for a bhajan, introduced Ambujam Krishna’s ‘Aaja giridhar tu aaja’. Kruthi sang the verse ‘En thaayum enakkarul thandhayum’ from Arunagirinathar’s Kandar Anubhuthi in Kamboji, Kapi and Vaasanthi as virutham, and concluded with Lalgudi Jayaraman’s thillana in Vaasanthi, set to Misra Chapu.

Protest notes

Halgi Culture Band’s ‘Thousand River Blues’ uses music to convey a powerful message



Creating a space The Halgi Culture Band and (below) Bharath Dingri. PHOTOS: TUSHAR

Charumathi Supraja

Protest and celebration, and pain and power intermingled in Halgi Culture Band’s ‘Thousand River Blues,’ performed recently at Bengaluru’s Indian Heritage Academy. The Band questioned systemic oppression without disclaiming the fullness of their voices or lives. The sharing was intense and moving, and it was a dialogue on the impact of generational segregation and exclusion targeting Dalits in Indian society.

Conversation and movement were intrinsic to the performance. The soundscape stood on an array of percussion and vocals that animated stories and community voices against caste-based violence and discrimination. Opening with ‘Freedom Day’, a significant Civil Rights Movement era song from the jazz album ‘We Insist!’ by American drummer and composer Max Roach, the band established early on that their repertoire would speak of the deep-rooted nature of oppression. They infused the jazz number with a local flavour, setting another precedent on making every composition their own.

Ph.D scholar Rohith Vemula’s last letter, before he took his life on the University of Hyderabad campus became a thread for the performance that strung together the works of activists, writers and poets such as K.B. Siddhaiah, Siddalingaiah, Kotiganaiah Ramaiah, Joopaka Subhadra, Dayanand Author and Rajappa Dalavai. Compositions such as ‘Block block’ by Shwetha Rani H.K., who recently won ‘The Shankar Nag Theatre Award’, and ‘Kattalina Gallebani’ by Bharath Dingri, founder of the Halgi Culture Band – brought home powerful messages on inclusion, while highlighting mistreatment of Dalit communities,



artisans and workers.

“The tamate or halgi has for long been associated with slave labour,” says Bharath Dingri. “It is a language of resistance, identity of a community that, for ages, was not allowed to speak up, nor allowed access to education or opportunities. The tamate stood by them, and thus became a symbol of the community’s journey in finding its voice. In north Karnataka, the halgi is also called thappadi or tappu, while in south Karnataka, it is called tamate,” Bharath shares.

Speaking of the history the instrument carries, Bharath says, “The halgi is deeply rooted in the Madhiga Dalit community of Karnataka and carries a legacy of both rhythm and resilience. Halgi Culture has reclaimed the instrument through workshops and performances, creating a space where music challenges oppression and redefines identity.”

The group also narrated stories about the making of the halgi, sometimes as rap and sometimes as haunting tunes. Bharath points out that, “In the context of Dalit culture and literature, we don’t have just stories of pain but also of celebration. We have a huge knowledge base. We need platforms to express that too.”

Kapila Venu

As I held the burning wicks of the nilavilakku (brass stage lamp) to perform my first Koothu Mudikkal/Mudiyakkitha ritual, my hands trembled, and I was overwhelmed. I felt the palpable presence of my fellow actresses, my predecessors and all actresses of the future to ever grace the stage. I prostrated in front of the lamp. It was a moment that must be etched in the history of the shifting gender dynamic in traditional theatre forms around the world.

In June, this year, we had the dress rehearsal for our Koodiyattam play *The Little Clay Cart*, an adaptation of Sudraka’s timeless classic *Mrcchakatikam* - directed by exponent, scholar and director G. Venu.

I play Vasantasena, the empowered courtesan. She is intelligent, wealthy, independent, has agency and chooses her romantic partner, an impoverished nobleman. She offers generous support and refuge to those who seek her help, defies a powerful villain and survives an attempted murder.

One of the most significant features of G. Venu’s directorial endeavours in Koodiyattam is the seriousness with which female characters are crafted, and the significant space and time that lead female actors occupy in performance, rare in the traditional Koodiyattam repertoire.

G. Venu’s directorial debut started with an adaptation of Kalidasa’s *Abhijnana Sakunthalam*, which premiered in 2000. In subsequent works, notably the adaptations of Kalidasa’s *Vikramorvasheeyam* and Bhasa’s *Urubhangam*, the portrayal of the two female characters, Urvashi and Gandhari, respectively, invite special attention. The director boldly diverges from the original text when needed, to reinterpret these two women with more complexity, depth and personality than what the playwright had originally intended. Both characters share equal space and prominence with their male counterparts even though Gandhari is not the protagonist of *Urubhangam* and has very little to say in the original text, signalling a conscious rewriting of patriarchal storytelling.



Glow of change

G. Venu’s *Mrcchakatikam*, to be performed on November 16 at Kalakshetra, marks a shift in gender dynamics in Koodiyattam

Yet, the most radical shift in the gender balance arrived at the very end of the play when I, as a lead female performer, was assigned the honour of performing the Bharathavakya - final benediction

and Koothu Mudikkal (also known as Mudiyakkitha), the ritualistic conclusion of a Koodiyattam performance.

The phrase *Koothu Mudikkal* would literally translate as ‘the

tying of the Koothu’, and the word Mudiyakkitha translates as ‘the song to finish’. It carries deep spiritual and theatrical meaning. The responsibility to perform the Mudiyakkitha usually rests on the lead male actor of a performance

Mudiyakkitha symbolises gratitude to the gods, the audience, and marks the completion of the sacred duty of a performer. A woman can now stand as ritual leader and principal bearer of tradition.

Contemporary Koodiyattam sees powerful, intelligent women performers claiming the stage. As the gender composition of the audiences evolves, so do the performances. Actors of all genders are forced to reinterpret their roles with a sensitivity that speaks to a more inclusive world.

Performing the Mudiyakkitha, I felt the beginning of a new era. In the flame of that lamp, I see the future.

The writer is a Koodiyattam exponent. The Chennai premiere of *Mrcchakatikam* will be presented by Chidagni Foundation at Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium, 6 p.m.



(Top) Kapila Venu performing Mudiyakkitha ritual. Kapila as Vasantasena, Aran Kapila as Rohansena and Anjana Chakraborty as Rajanika. PHOTOS: THULASI KAKKAT

CULTURE BRIEFS



Bharatanatyam solo

Natyarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha Trust, has organised the following dance performances to take place on November 15. Details: 6 p.m.: Sathvika Ranganathan, disciple of Uma Sathyanarayanan, and 7.30 p.m.: Manasa Sriram, disciple of Mahalakshmi Ashwin. Venue: Sabha mini hall.



Dedicated to Muthiah Bhagavatar

Narada Gana Sabha Trust commemorates the 148th jayanthi of Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar today at 6.30 p.m. with Akshay Padmanabhan’s vocal concert. He will be accompanied by M. Vijayganes and B. Sivaraman. Venue: Sabha mini Hall.

Continued from

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On the eve of India’s Independence, freedom fighter Sucheta Kriplani sang Vande Mataram in the Constituent Assembly, her voice preceding Jawaharlal Nehru’s iconic ‘Tryst with Destiny’ speech. A song that had once stirred revolution now heralded a new beginning.

Hindustani vocalist Pt. Omkarnath Thakur, at the invitation of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, sang his stirring version of Vande Mataram at 6.30 a.m. on August 15, 1947. Akashvani broadcast this, musically marking the birth of a free nation.

On January 24, 1950, the Constituent Assembly formally adopted the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram as the national song.

Over the years, Vande Mataram has been reimagined by many musicians and composers, each breathing new life into its timeless spirit and introducing it to newer generations. When it played every morning on the radio, the solemn invocation became deeply embedded in the national consciousness. Among classical

United by song

music stalwarts, Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar set it to raag Kafi and sang the unabridged version at the 1923 Congress session in Kakinada. This bold act drew criticism from those who opposed its Hindu imagery, since the subsequent verses were an ode to goddess Durga.

Tamil version Carnatic vocalist M.S. Subbulakshmi offered a deeply spiritual rendition that continues to be played at events. She even sang it as a duet with Dilipkumar Roy, a singer,

musicologist, novelist and poet. D.K. Pattammal too lent her voice to the Tamil version by Subramania Bharati. His 1907 adaptation was not just a translation, it was a reinterpretation that infused the song with Tamil linguistic beauty, nationalist fervour and social reformist ideals.

In the world of cinema, Lata Mangeshkar sang Vande Mataram in the 1952 film *Anand Math*, with music by Hemant Kumar. Decades later, she released a contemporary version accompanied by a

Symphonic tribute

“Bringing together an orchestra of 65 musicians at short notice was a formidable task, but the effort was worthwhile as we became part of a truly historic occasion,” says violin exponent Mysore Manjunath, who conducted the orchestra. “The key challenge lay in preserving the essence of the national song while ensuring each genre — classical, light classical, and folk — found its voice in the arrangement. The ensemble featured celebrated musicians from across the country, each bringing their own distinctive artistry to the performance.

beautifully shot video. In recent years, A.R. Rahman’s rousing ‘Maa tujhe salaam’ deeply resonated with youngsters.

The latest musician to present Vande Mataram is violinist Mysore Manjunath. On November 7, 2025, to mark 150 years of the composition, he led a musical tribute at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in New Delhi. He conceived and

conducted a grand national orchestra featuring 65 distinguished vocalists and instrumentalists from across India. The presentation titled, ‘Vande Mataram: Naad Ekam, Roopam Anekam’ wove the diverse musical languages of India into a single, soaring melody.

As the final notes echoed through the stadium, it was not just music that filled the air — it was the sound of a nation remembering, rising and rejoicing.



PIC CREDIT: RITU RAJ KONWAR



Thavil meets Jazz

Chennai-born and Germany-based musician Ramesh Shotham gears up for the release of his new album and India tour

Narendra Kusnur

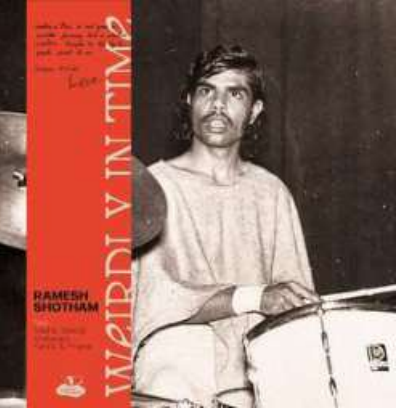
In the 1970s, Ramesh Shotham made news as a drummer of the Bengaluru rock-band Human Bondage. He later learnt the Carnatic percussion instrument thavil, before moving to Cologne, Germany. The Chennai-born musician has now recorded his new album ‘Weirdly In Time’, set to release on November 28 on Papercup Records. Two singles – ‘Morsing Madness’ (featuring the Carnatic mouth harp, and ‘In Plain Sight’ (a contemporary take on Kabir’s ‘Moko kahaan dhoonde re bande’, are already out on streaming platforms. Ramesh is also gearing up for ‘A Tribute To Human Bondage’, a series of concerts put up by the band’s former vocalist Henry Babu Joseph with flautist Rajeev Raja and his group, in Bengaluru, Goa and Mumbai in January and February 2026. Ramesh will join in on some shows along with his brother, Human Bondage guitarist Suresh Shotham,

and the band’s former vocalist Radha Thomas. For ‘Weirdly In Time’, Ramesh has looked at production with his son Keshav Purushotham and drummer Niklas Schneider, who comprise the band Keshavara. It features members of Ramesh’s group: Madras Special – violinist Zoltan Lantos, bassist Raza Askari and guitarist Sebastian Muller. Ramesh’s brother, Naresh Purushotham, chips in as a guest on the veena, and his niece Sahana Naresh and nephew Kailash

“After playing for 50 years, I still feel like a student of rhythm. Music keeps surprising me and teaching me. Every collaboration reminds me that creation is never solitary, but shared.”

RAMESH SHOTHAM

Srinivasan contribute with vocal inputs. Ramesh says the title for the album came spontaneously to him because “we find ourselves globally in ‘weird times’. But, the word ‘time’ also denotes rhythmic time. It was also the right time in my career to do something musically with my son and bring in other family members.” Keshav began by learning rhythms from his father, after which



Sounds of the East Ramesh Shotham was drawn to the thavil after hearing it at a temple; and (below) the album cover. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

he took guitar lessons from his uncle Suresh. In Cologne, he learnt classical guitar, before venturing into composing and production. Ramesh also adds that he is happy with the way old-timers still talk of Human Bondage, which performed gigs across India between 1970 and 1976. “Since the beginning of social media, there has been a lot of reminiscing by ex-colleagues and fans.”

Ramesh’s early influences include the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and other rock acts. After attending a concert of Pt Ravi Shankar and hearing records of John McLaughlin’s Mahavishnu Orchestra, he was drawn to Indian classical music and jazz and learnt thavil from K.P. Ramu in Chennai.

He recalls, “As a rock drummer, in search of an Indian percussion instrument to augment my sound, I studied the tabla and pakhawaj first, but found the sounds didn’t gel well with the drumset. On one of my trips back home to Chennai, the sound of the thavil at a temple festival was an epiphany. This instrument became part of the unique sound I was looking for as a drummer/percussionist. I’m probably the only one playing thavil in the global/ jazz fusion genre.”

In Germany, Ramesh collaborated with the Munich krautrock band Embryo, Lebanese oud player Rabih Abou Khalil, American jazz pianist Carls Bley and American jazz saxophonist Charlie Mariano. He says, “Embryo was famous in the 1970s as one of the prominent ‘krautrock’ bands. But they evolved into one of the first bands to experiment with Arabic, Indian and African music and were in the vanguard of musicians to create the genre called world music. I learnt a lot while on the road with them about how the music scene in Europe functioned.”

Similarly, Mariano became a mentor to him. He points out, “It was an honour to perform in hundreds of concerts with various bands with him. Charlie came from the big band and bebop era and then discovered Indian music, which he fell in love with. His work with the Karnataka College of Percussion is legendary and has been well-documented.”

After many albums and shows across genres, Ramesh feels ‘Weirdly In Time’ holds a special place in his musical journey. “After playing for 50 years, I still feel like a student of rhythm. Music keeps surprising me and teaching me. Every collaboration reminds me that creation is never solitary, but shared. ‘Weirdly in Time’ is that idea made real, a collective pulse shaped by family, friendship and by time itself.”

Beyond the battlefield

A play directed by SBS Raman unravels Krishna’s wisdom for modern times



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The stage is set SBS Raman and Dharma (left) with the cast during rehearsals. PHOTO: SRINATH M.

Inspired by the universal appeal and teachings of Krishna, Chennai-based SB Creations will stage its Tamil play *Krishna* on November 23, 6.30 p.m. at Narada Gana Sabha. The play is jointly presented by Narada Gana Sabha and Brahma Gana Sabha. Directed by SBS Raman, the script is written by Vivek Bharathi, music is by G.J.R. Krishnan and dance choreography by Manasvini K.R.

“SB Creations was founded in 1959 by my father-in-law, veena vidwan S. Balachander,” says Dharma Raman. “He even directed and produced movies (*Avana Ivan*, *Bomma* and *Nadu Iravil*) under the same banner but gave up movies to become a full-time veena player. We – my husband SBS Raman (son of S. Balachander and a lawyer by profession whose passion is theatre), Baradwaj Raman (a vainika and sound engineer) and myself – revived the theatre group in 2016,” shares Dharma, who has been acting on stage since 2013. “My very first play was with the Madras Players. Ever since, I have worked with various theatre groups.”

Krishna is based on a well-researched story. “Many know his journey from birth to his killing of Kamsa as a teenager. Then there is a huge gap till he appears on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. So what

happened in between these two events will be a significant aspect of the play,” says Raman, and shares: “Dharma and our son Surya Raman collaborated on research, writing, casting and design.”

Krishna’s childhood has been extensively explored through music and dance. “Krishna is credited with every little win in the *Mahabharata*. He was not attached to the outcome, but was looking out for dharma – victory of good over evil. The play tries to understand Krishna as a complete man – teacher, friend, philosopher and guide,” says Dharma.

Krishna is SB Creations’ fifth production after the revival of the theatre group. “Our aim is to stage plays with social, political and historical themes,” says Raman, who also believes Krishna carries a great message even today. “The modern world, especially the corporates, can learn a lot from his wisdom and strategic brilliance.”

According to Dharma, the play has many creative elements that could come as a surprise to the audience. The Kurukshetra war will also be depicted on stage.

Krishna will be staged again on November 27 at Rasika Ranjani Sabha. Tickets for non-members are available on mdnd.in.

CALENDAR

BVB inaugurates Margazhi Season

Chennai gears up for the annual Margazhi music festival. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan will inaugurate its annual music festival on November 20, 6 p.m. at its Main auditorium, Mylapore. R.N. Ravi, Governor of Tamil Nadu, will be the chief guest, and Prof. V. Kamakoti, director-IIT Madras, the guest of honour. The inaugural day’s concerts will be by Seshampatti Sivalingam (nagaswaram, 4.30 p.m.) and A. Kanyakumari (violin at 7.05 p.m.). The festival will be held in three segments – vocal and instrumental concerts (November 20 to December 12, featuring 55 performances); Carnatic vocal, instrumental and Hindustani concerts (December 13 to January 1, 2026, featuring 66 concerts) and dance performances (from January 2 to 15, 2026, featuring 42 group and individual performances).

Dance workshop

Aalaap, in collaboration with dancer-writer Kumudha Chandrasekaran, presents a two-day Somatics workshop ‘Moving towards Agency’, on November 15 (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and November 16 (4 p.m. to 7 p.m.) at the Kuchipudi Art Academy. To register, visit <https://forms.gle/ou96i1TbKCRlpwt7>

Celebrating a milestone

Nritya Samsrti Trust, a Bharatanatyam school in Triplicane, commemorates its 15th year with a two-day special event to take place on November 15 and 16 at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore.

Day one will feature a thematic dance presentation, ‘Mazhalaigalin Mahakavi’, at 6 p.m. It emphasises the significance of value education for future generations through the classical poems of Mahakavi Subramania Bharatiar. This production has been conceptualised and choreographed by Vaidehi Harish with music by Rajkumar Bharathi.

Day two will feature ‘Nritya Tarangini’, (at 6 p.m.) which will be performed by more than 160 students of the institution.

Tribute to gurus

Bharathanjali Trust commemorates the Centenary of Sathya Sai Baba with a special line-up on November 23, 4 p.m., at Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Mylapore. The evening begins with ‘Guru Padhavandhanam’, a special offering by Anitha Guha’s students to gurus and artistes such as Karthiayini Natesan, Prof. N.S. Jayalakshmi, V.P. Dhananjayan, Shantha Dhananjayan, Radha, Prof. A. Janardhanan, Ambika Buch, Revathi Sankaran, Sudharani Raghupathy, Savitri Jagannatha Rao, Chitra Visweswaran, Nandini Ramani, Krishnakumari Narendran, B. Meenakshi, Vasanthalakshmi Narasimhachari, Ananda Shankar Jayanth, and P.R. Venkatasubramanian.

There will also be a dance tribute ‘Sarvam Saikae Samarpanam’, featuring excerpts from Nritya Natakams, by the students of Bharathanjali.

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In what feels like a fitting culmination to a trailblazing musical journey, tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain, who passed away in December 2024, bids farewell to the global stage on a resonant note – two Grammy nominations for his final outing with Shakti, the Indo-jazz ensemble he co-founded with British guitar virtuoso John McLaughlin.

The nomination for *Mind Explosion: Shakti’s 50th Anniversary Tour - Live from 2024* for Best Global Music Album echoes half a century of musical camaraderie, improvisation and innovation that redefined the boundaries of East-West fusion.

The live album captures the electric synergy of the band’s milestone tour, featuring the Ustad’s percussive brilliance alongside McLaughlin’s fluid guitar lines, Shankar Mahadevan’s soaring vocals, Selvaganesh’s rhythmic kanjira and Ganesh Rajagopalan’s emotive violin. The tour took the band across the globe, beginning from Bengaluru’s Jayamahal Palace Hotel Grounds on January 20, 2023. They also performed in Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi, before heading to Europe and the U.S.

On a winning streak

Indian and Indian-origin musicians shine on the global stage with Grammy-2026 nominations



High note Zakir Hussain, Ganesh, John McLaughlin, Shankar Mahadevan and Selva Ganesh; and Anoushka Shankar PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Shakti’s second nomination, for *Shrini’s Dream* in the Best Global Music Performance category, is a heartfelt tribute to mandolin prodigy

U. Shrinivas – a former Shakti member whose genius left an indelible mark on Indian classical and fusion music. The track beautifully weaves memory



Ustad Zakir Hussain bids farewell to the global stage on a resonant note – two Grammy nominations for his final outing with Shakti

into melody. These nominations almost seem like Ustad Zakir Hussain’s gift to his bandmates, to the genre he helped shape and to the audiences who have followed Shakti’s journey across decades and continents.

Not just Shakti, there are more Indians and Indian-origin artistes stealing the spotlight at the Grammy nominations. Sitarist Anoushka Shankar, sarod player Alam Khan,

jazz composer Charu Suri and sound artiste Siddhant Bhatia are among those recognised for their genre-defying work. Anoushka has made it to the list for the 11th time, a testament to her enduring influence in global music. She has been nominated in two categories. Her single *Daybreak*, created with Alam and percussionist Sarathy Korwar, is in the running for Best Global Music Performance, while the trio’s collaborative album *Chapter III: We Return To Light* vies for Best Global Music Album. The project blends Indian classical textures with contemporary soundscapes, continuing the musical dialogue once shared by sitar legend Pt. Ravi Shankar (Anoushka’s father) and sarod maestro Ustad Ali Akbar Khan (Alam’s father).

Charu Suri, the New York-based jazz pianist, has earned a nomination in the Contemporary Instrumental Album category for *Shayan*, a meditative blend of Indian ragas and jazz improvisation. Siddhant Bhatia’s *Sounds of Kumbha*, inspired by the sonic and spiritual energy of the Kumbh Mela, bagged nomination in the Global Music Album category.

Together, these artistes reflect a growing global appreciation for Indian classical, devotional and fusion music, which is reshaping the art of music-making.