

# fridayReview

THE HINDU



WARM EXPRESSIONS  
OF A COLD SEASON

Indu and Nidheesh  
explored winter hues at  
Natyarangam **P2**

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Festivals, almost by definition, ought to be egalitarian and collaborative. Music festivals, in particular, since art is a great leveller. In a cultural milieu, it actually doesn't take much effort to break class and caste barriers. *The Hindu's* upcoming 10-act musical event aspires to achieve exactly this by bringing musicians of diverse genres on a single platform.

The two-day celebration will explore Chennai's music ecosystem, which is known for its proclivity to tradition, but is evolving to embrace new settings and sounds. The festival also marks the culmination of *The Hindu's* 45-day Made of Chennai campaign to commemorate Madras Day. The campaign was about looking back (385 years) and looking ahead.

At the festival, carnatic, gaana, hip hop, rap and film songs will give listeners a peek into this city's distinctive ethos.

**Space for other genres**  
Says Badhri Narayanan Seshadri of MMM (Motta Maadi Music) fame, who will be performing at the festival, "Though Chennai is popular across the globe for Carnatic music, there is space here for other genres too. Independent musicians have tapped into it with great success."

The now nine-member group, which began performing on *motta maadi* (terrace) for fun, has moved onto the proscenium and now travels around the world. "Wherever we go, we create the atmosphere of a *thiruvizha* to showcase Tamil music," says Badhri.

With Chennai's rasikas becoming more receptive to innovative

From Carnatic to gaana —  
experience a slice of Chennai's  
diverse music at  
*The Hindu's* festival

## Sounds of the city



**High note** (Clockwise from above) Badhri; Haricharan; Arivu; and Maalavika.  
PHOTOS: SOCIAL ARRANGEMENT



together the collective led by drummer Kumaran. They are all excellent musicians. I have been recording with them and have released three songs. There are more to come. Though we are now working on covers, we plan to come up with some originals soon," says the singer.

**Songs of resistance**  
Shaped by broad cultures and cutting-edge tech, modern music festivals echo with repressed voices and rarely-heard sounds. That's how Chennai's rap star Arivu found a medium to sing his songs of resistance, highlighting the social and cultural isolation of subaltern artistes. At musical events, along with members of his Ambassa band,

Arivu connects with the audience through his message-driven gaana and folk *paatu*. Through his rebellious singles and albums, he has shown how music can be used to speak one's heart out.

Singer Maalavika Sundar is delighted about how festivals are turning into sites liberated from conventional rules. A regular at 'Poti' (she participated in Super Singer season 3 and was a finalist at Indian Idol), which incidentally is the name of a track from her soon-to-be released album *Yezhundhen Nimirndhen Nadandhen*. "Ironically, 'Poti' is about how each one of us is unique and there is no need to run the rat race," says the singer-actor.

Maalavika credits the city for her cultural orientation. "My Carnatic music grounding has helped me realise my creative strength. It has also given me and my music a distinct identity in the indie world. What's more heartening is that both the music fraternity and listeners here have become open-minded. This has made life easier for artistes like me, who love music without boundaries."

With the scope of festivals growing over the years, many have diversified, blending music with food or adventure. At *The Hindu* festival too, choicest menu from 40 food joints will be served. It's all about variety in tune and taste. And that's Chennai.

- The rocking line up**
- Haricharan and D Kumaran Collective
  - Motta Maadi Music
  - Arivu and The Ambassa Band
  - Maalavika Sundar
  - Emcee Jesz
  - JHANU- Tamil Metal band
  - Paul Jacob and Isaivani-Gaana Office Gaana
  - Gowwli- The Band



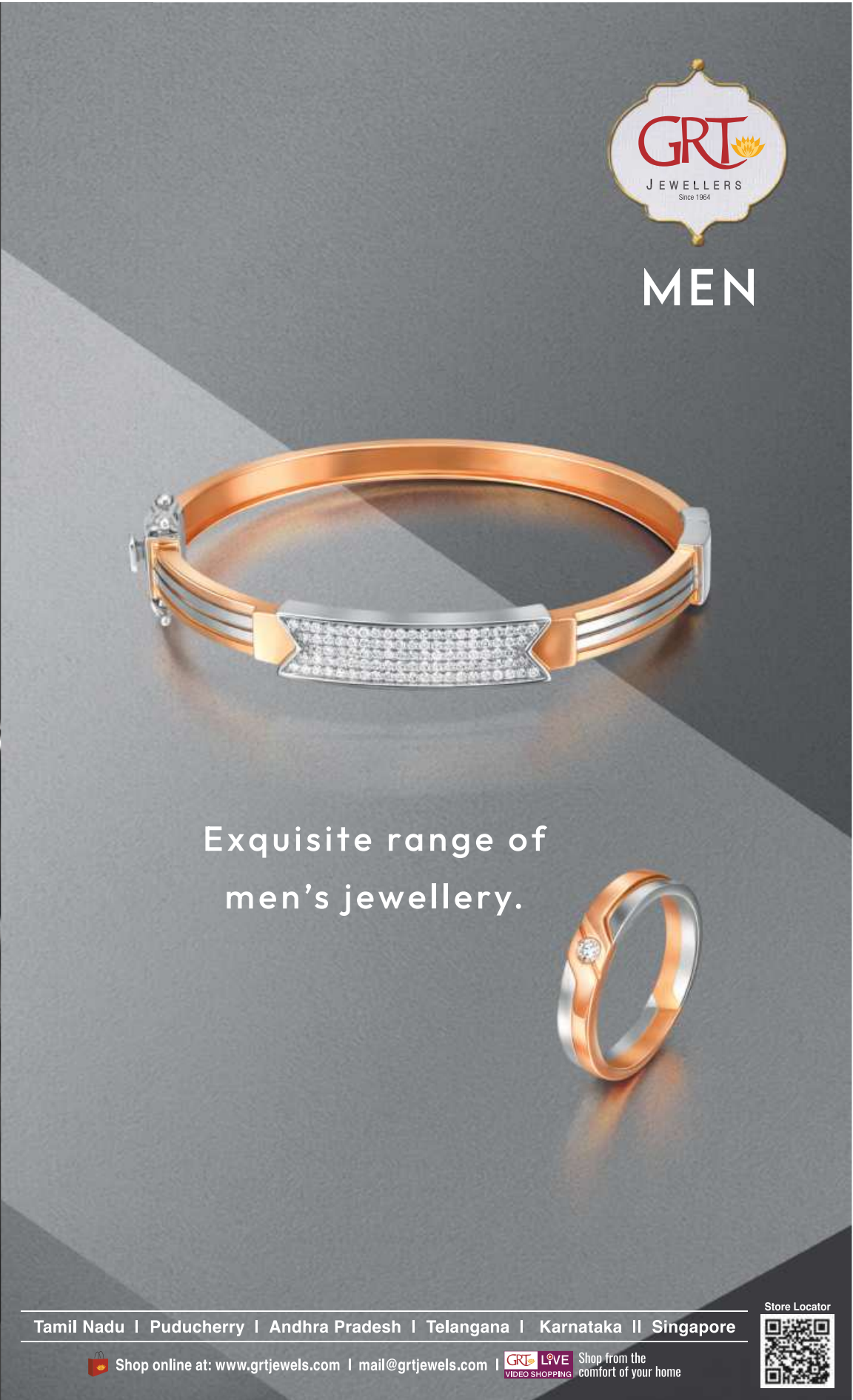
The festival will be held at Island Grounds on September 14 and 15 from 4 p.m.



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Saraswathi Vasudevan

Rithu Bharatam – the 26th edition of Natyangam’s annual dance festival – uniquely drew a parallel between the characteristic colours of different seasons and the aesthetic appeal and subtle variations of different *banis*.

As art is immeasurably deep and expansive, it must have been challenging for the artistes to explore within given boundaries – Kalidasa’s *Rithu Samharam*, Sangam literature and Ragamala paintings. But each of them rose to the occasion aided by resource persons, Dr. Sudha Seshayyan, R.K. Shriramkumar, Monali Bala, and S. Raghuraman.

The fourth day of the festival was themed on ‘Sharad Rithu’ – Rising through Fall. Ramya Suresh, senior disciple and daughter-in-law of Indira Kadambi, portrayed the allure of autumn.

Her costume – a light, flowing colourful skirt with a handmade garland around her neck – and Surya Rao’s exceptional lighting enhanced the visual appeal.

The orchestra was led by T.V. Ramprasad (vocals), who seamlessly fused languages and genres. Shubha Dhar lent vocal support. On the mridangam was Vinay Nagarajan, Pranav Dath (rhythm pads), Vivek Krishna (flute), Rakshita Ramesh (veena) and Apeksha Kamath (narration). Indira Kadambi did the nattuvangam.

Ramya convincingly portrayed the bond between the earth and the fallen leaf through the wheel of time. Her gentle, fluid and even-paced movements transformed the dancing body into swaying leaves.

Concept and choreography provided a philosophical insight into autumn as the radiant moon and a symbolic tree (with subtle lighting in the background) brought alive a Ragamala painting and suitable verses. The allegory of Sharad Rithu had shades of ‘The Pilgrims’ Progress,’ which came as a stark reminder for mankind to shed the outer layers, and introspect.

Ramya concluded by paying obeisance to Devi



# Taking a leaf out of Nature

At Natyarangam’s annual festival dancers captured autumn and winter hues

with a vigorous *dhunichi naach* (of Bengal) performed during Durga puja.

However, the text and commentary could have been better aligned. Also, the inclusion of more *nritta* segments would have matched well with the many *abhinaya* delineations. But Sharad Rithu did leave behind lingering moments.

Uma Satyanarayanan’s Hemanth Rithu

When winter comes can spring be far behind? – Percy Bysshe Shelley.

‘Hemanth Rithu’ by Uma Satyanarayanan, a senior disciple of Chitra Visveswaran, showed how she has imbibed all the finer nuances of the art, which reflected from start to finish in her performance.

Versatility defines Uma’s art. She is a dancer, musician, actor, choreographer and teacher.

The usual seasonal changes have been replaced today by erratic weather patterns. Uma’s depiction of Hemanth Rithu awakened us to the long-forgotten beauty of pre-winter. Sanskrit verses from Kalidasa’s work captured the nip in the air.

Three segments describing the season were well-handled. Within a short span, Uma took us on a tour from Dakshinayan (winter solstice) to Uttarayan (summer solstice), showing a variety of festivals through

mythology, Sangam poetry, and Ragamala references.

Uma’s brilliant exposition of puppetry evoked spontaneous applause. The movements of a puppet were remarkably executed with apt rhythmic support. Her mukhabhinaya had its high and low moments – more nuanced expressions would have conveyed the essence of the lyrics. Also, the colours of her costume didn’t quite symbolise Hemanth Rithu.



Evocative (Clockwise from top) Ramya Suresh; Indu-Nidheesh; and Uma Satyanarayanan.

PHOTOS: M. SRINATH

However, one must compliment her theatrical skills, which came through in the Sangam passages as she displayed the anguish of a longing nayika for her beloved. The audience were taken-up by the bandish in Maru Bihag that she sang and emoted.

The performance stood out for the concept, choreography, music composition and soundscape. However, vocalist Janani Hamsini and Sai Santhanam (nattuvangam) need to be a little conscious about the volume when performing on the mike.

Uma concluded her performance with raag Surya, which aptly ushered in the dawn of a new life as the Sun God majestically began his journey to Uttarayan.

Indu-Nidheeh’s Sisiram Winter is a season of recovery and preparation – Paul Theroux

‘Sisiram’ – late winter, a prelude to blossoming of flowers, took on a philosophical dimension in its presentation by Indu and Nidheesh Kumar. It was a huge challenge to handle an abstract concept in the dance idiom. The enthusiastic duo presented it with figurative imagery and finesse in form.

The power of the orchestra was truly palpable. Emotive singing by S. Adithyanarayanan stirred the performers. Ragas such as Sahana, Bhairavi, and Ramkali flowed seamlessly. K.P. Rakesh aced the nattuvangam with firm control and clarity. Guru Bharadwaj’s pulsating beats on the mridangam were enjoyable and T. Shashidar’s musical intonations on the flute were haunting. Anantakrishnan’s violin and Sowmya’s veena were equally competent and melodious. In short, the music set the mood for Sisiram.

The stillness of the season, with its underlying rhythms, was wonderfully conceived using varying Yatis (arranging of different groups of syllables)

It was a unique idea to use Yatis in the narrative to represent the four stages of life – Srotovaha (infancy), Mridanga (childhood), Sama (youth), Damaru (old age) and Gopuchcha (point of infinity).

The seed played the protagonist in the episodes that followed, drawing a parallel between the tree and the human being.

Nideesh’s delineations were powerful and struck the right chord. Indu, on her part, depicted a pregnant heroine, who is lonely and sad. Hers was a long static role. The tree, which weathers the changing seasons, counsels her to come out her isolated existence.

Lyrics in multiple languages conveyed the varying emotions of Sisiram vis a vis the nature of a mother to be.

Finally, Indu portrayed the rajasik Kali destroying the various aspects of the manifested form – desire, rage, delusion, greed, ego and jealousy. Eventually, she returns to shantam and shivam before the next creation. Sisiram was a thought-provoking production, which highlighted the concept of Shoonya.



Laced with humour: Veteran actor Kathadi Ramamurthy in Stage Creations’ play. PHOTO: R. RAGU

# A light-hearted look at life

Sikkal Sivaraman takes a peek into a middle-class household

Suganthy Krishnamachari

In Stage Creations’ play *Sikkal Sivaraman* (story, dialogues, and direction are by S.L. Naanu), Chellappa (Naanu) decides to get his son married in a Pillayar temple to the daughter of Parameswaran (Ganapathy Shankar). Unbeknownst to Chellappa, his son secretly plans to get married in the same temple, to Nandini’s (Anu Suresh) sister Hema. Chellappa disapproves of Hema, but does not know that she is the daughter of Parameswaran. Lalitha’s daughter Janu is about to get married to Suresh in the same Pillayar temple, without Chellappa’s knowledge, because he disapproves of this match too. And why is he interested in stopping this marriage? Because he is Lalitha’s cousin, and feels duty bound to protect her interests. Sounds pretty confusing, doesn’t it?

Sikkal Sivaraman (Kathadi Ramamurthy) is the man behind the muddle. Sikkal means knots, and knotty problems have a way of finding Sivaraman. Kathadi is so spry (touch wood) that you wouldn’t say he is well into his eighties. He breezes in and out of the scenes, delivering his lines with ease.

Sivaraman is not just the creator of knots, but also knows how to unravel them, so that everyone is left with the feeling of ‘All’s well that ends well.’

Closer to reality

In his plays, Naanu always has sideswipes at fads. In *Sikkal Sivaraman*, he makes fun of those ubiquitous YouTube channels, which give you tips about how to clean your kitchen, how to fold clothes, etc, making mundane chores seem like rocket science. And we can all relate to Kathadi’s constant need to check Whatsapp messages.

Naanu also shows how matchmaking has acquired the dimensions of a profession. If in the 1970s and 1980s, we had eligible grooms making impossible demands of the prospective bride, it is now the turn of the girls to make equally impossible demands, and Naanu highlights this too. Nothing is good enough for Janu, who rejects one proposal after another for frivolous reasons, until Nature takes over and makes her fall in love with Suresh. As usual, this is a light-hearted play from Naanu, known for taking a humorous look at life.

# The prodigious poet of Thanjavur

Vedanayagam Sastriar’s 250th birth anniversary is being celebrated today and tomorrow

Nahla Nainar

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This week promises to reprise the literary genius of Vedanayagam Sastriar, whose 250th birth anniversary is being observed on September 6 and 7 at Thanjavur. Known for his oeuvre of Tamil Christian evangelical songs and compositions, Sastriar’s works form the bedrock of early Protestant worship in southern India.

With H.A. Krishnapillai of Palyamkottai, and N. Samuel of Tranquebar, Sastriar forms the great triumvirate of Tamil Christian worship.

“We don’t want his legacy to be forgotten. Many in newer generations of his progeny, only know his name and nothing about his works. This probably is the last chance for us to rectify this. Vedanayagam Sastriar was a man of great learning and a social reformer too,” says Judah Vincent, a fifth generation descendant through his youngest son Elia Devasigamony Sastriar.

Vincent, a retired engineer based in Chennai, is coordinating the commemorative event, and says that more could be done to preserve and popularise the Sastriar canon.

“Out of over 130 books, only some went into print. I have digitised four of Vedanayagam’s important works – *Jebamalai*, *Gnana Pada Keerthanai*,



*Perinba Kaathal* and *Kadaisi Nyayatheerpu*. His magnum opus is *Jebamalai* (Garland of Prayer), in composition for more than 40 years, in the 1800s. *Gnanapada Kirtanaigal*, with over 400 songs, and the allegorical play *Bethlehem Kuravanji*, are some of his enduring works,” says Vincent, who has also produced a two-part online documentary on his ancestor.

Sastriar’s well-known hymns include ‘Amen Alleluyah, Mahathuva Thambarabara’ and ‘Esvaiye Thudhi sei nee Maname.’

Early years

The official website [www.sastriar.org](http://www.sastriar.org) gives a wealth of information about

the life and times of the poet-lyricist. Born on September 7, 1774 to Devasahayam, a resident of Tirunelveli, Vedanayagam had a clear vision of the Cross at the age of 10, an event which was to influence his entire life. Lutheran missionary evangelist Rev. Christian Frederick Schwartz, who was tutor to Prince Serfoji, took the young boy under his wing, and brought him to Thanjavur.

Vedanayagam went on to study theology at the Lutheran Seminary in Tharangambadi, (Tranquebar) and worked in the villages around Thanjavur.

However his career as an evangelist was chequered – he was excommunicated by the Society for

Pic to go with Vedanayagam Sastriar story. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.) Mission in 1829 and was often troubled by caste politics of the day.

Raja Serfoji, when apprised of his friend’s dire straits, appointed Sastriar as the court poet in 1830, and also endowed him with a monthly salary of ₹35 and a residence in Thanjavur.

It is said that before his passing in 1832, Serfoji had requested his court that his mortal remains should not be removed until Sastriar had composed

and sung a poem. Sastriar fulfilled his desire by singing an elegy.

Despite his tumultuous life, Vedanayagam Sastriar continued to make an impact on the ‘mainline’ Protestant church communities, and was eventually welcomed back into the fold by 1848. He passed away on January 24, 1864, at the age of 90, and was interred in the cemetery of St. Peter’s Church in Thanjavur.

Honour for erudition

Sastriar’s literary works may be broadly divided into two categories: lyrical compositions and pieces composed according to minor literary forms in Tamil. Most of them are based on the traditional metres of the time. A strong influence of *Thevaram* (hymns of Saivaites saints) and *Tiruppugazh* can be seen in his works.

“Sastriar” was a title in recognition of Vedanayagam’s erudition and prodigious poetic works, and is passed down to ordained family members who follow in his footsteps.

“The churches of the day wanted to honour the contribution of our ancestor to Tamil Christian music, and bestowed the title of Sastriar in recognition of his learning,” says Sastriar Sarah Martin, who is the second woman in the lineage to be consecrated with the title after Sastriar D. Gnanadeepam (1811-1870).

Based in Kotagiri, Sarah Martin and her spouse P. Martin Deva Prasath are former academics who are now ministers of the faith.

“When the missionaries introduced Christianity to our region, the worship rites and religious songs were either from a Lutheran or Anglican background that people were not able to identify with.

Vedanayagam started writing Tamil keerthanai because he wanted the local congregation to understand their faith in their native language,” she says.

Literary value

The songs can be also be appreciated for their literary finesse, says Sarah.

“His detailed description of God’s creations in the Biblical story of Noah’s Ark, is beautifully rendered in Tamil poetry. I am surprised by Vedanayagam Sastriar’s vivid imagination in describing the names of the insects, birds, animals, herbs, plants and so on, that went into the ark. He also wrote in a variety of genres, from operatic plays to folk dramas,” says Sarah.

However, due to their Carnatic tenor, Sastriar’s *keerthanais* are seen as difficult to learn and perform today.

“There’s a greater tendency towards adopting Western music in Tamil worship, but we are trying to re-introduce his *keerthanai* with a modified semi-Carnatic background,” says Sarah, who has published a book with explanatory notes on 150 compositions of the early Tamil Christian poets with her brother (minister) Clement Vedanayagam Sastriar.

The themes of caste-based discrimination, and women’s rights find a place in Vedanayagam Sastriar’s works, in keeping with the social concerns of the day.

This week’s commemorative programme will include communion service at St. Peter’s Church in Thanjavur, a performance of *Bethlehem Kuravanji*, and ‘Namo’ concert, by Clement Sastriar and group, among other activities.





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CALENDAR

Onam celebration

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai Kendra, Mylapore, has organised Bhavanonam, an Onam special, from September 9 to 13, at its venue. It begins with Thiruvathirakali Sopana Sangeetham by Chilanka Eloor Biju and team on September 9 at 6.30 p.m. Performances on other days are: Sept. 10, 6.30 p.m.: Kerala Natanam, Thiruvona Thaalam by Aparna Sharma (Madras Music Factory); Sept. 11, 6.30 p.m.: Onathileenam, Velakali by Dr. TVG's AIMA Devi Kalasamithi; Sept. 12, 7 p.m.: Kathakali by Kalakshetra Foundation. The festival concludes on September 13 with the Ottanthullal performance (Nrutha Shilpam) by Nandakumar Kalamandalam Kalyani Suresh and team at 6.30 p.m.



Chamber concert

Musiri Chamber presents C.R. Vaidyanathan's vocal concert on September 8, 4.01 p.m., at 48/2, Musiri Subramaniam Road, Mylapore. He will be accompanied by Bombay R Madhavan (violin), Shertalai Anantha Krishnan (mridangam) and S. Venkataraman (kanjira).

Discourse and play

Chromepet Cultural Academy conducts the following programmes at its Academy Hall. Details: Today, 6.30 p.m.: Brahmasri Sundarkumar's upanyasam 'Rukmini Kalyanam'. September 8, 6.30 p.m.: TV Varadharajen's Sri Thyagarajar, a musical on the saint composer. Written by VeeYesVee and music composition by Bombay Jayasri.

Music competition

The Music Academy conducts annual music competitions at its premises on September 28 and 29. For details call 044-2811 2231 or 2811 3162, on working days. Application forms can be downloaded from Music Academy's website. Last date is September 20.

Dedicated to poet Bharati

Natyarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha, celebrates Bharatiyar Day on September 8, with a thematic programme titled 'Vinayakar Naanmani Malai'. Dancers Aparna Shankar, Aswathi Suresh, Lekha Prasad and Vishnu Bhasi will perform. Time 6 p.m. The programme is organised under guru Saroja Vaidyanathan endowment.

Vadya Vrunda

The Vadya Vrunda programme, organised by The Triplicane Cultural Academy and Kasturi Srinivasan Library, will be held on September 8, 6.15 p.m. at Indira Ranganathan Trust, Alwarpet. It will feature Achyuth M. Athreya (venu), Charulatha Chandrashekhar (veena), Chinmayi C.S. (violin), Charu hariharan (mridangam), and Ramya Ramesh (ghatam).

Prakriti Foundations' next

Mourad Merzouki, the artistic director of the Lyon-based hip hop dance troupe, Compagnie Käfig, is all set to present a collaborative project in Bengaluru on September 7 (8 p.m.) at Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre for Performing Arts. In 2023, with the support of the French Institute in India, Compagnie Käfig, in partnership with the Prakriti Foundation, conducted a series of dance auditions in Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi. This search culminated in the selection of six Indian dancers. Compagnie Käfig will present one of its well-known productions 'Cartes Blanches', featuring these dancers. For free passes email prakritifoundation@gmail.com"

Music workshop

Nadasangamam, the music wing of Narada Gana Sabha Trust, will conduct a workshop for music students in their advanced level, on September 21. Senior musician Pantula Rama will teach a few rare kritis. Venue: Narada Gana Sabha mini hall. Time: 10 a.m.-12.30 p.m. For registration and other details call 2499 3201or 2499 0850.

A theatrical tribute to M.S.



To commemorate the 108th birth anniversary of the legendary M.S. Subbulakshmi, ThRee entertains, a theatre production house founded by theatre artistes Lavanya Venugopal and M.V. Bhaskar, premieres the biographical play *Kaatriniley Varum Geetham* on September 13 and 14 at Vani Mahal, T. Nagar. The play encores on September 15 and 16 at Narada Gana Sabha. Time: 6 p.m.

Directed by veteran theatre artiste Bombay Gnanam, it is based on author VSV Ramanan's book of the same name. Featuring more than 40 artistes in various capacities including music, theatre, costume design, and production, this play marks a significant milestone in ThRee entertains' journey. The play brings the singer's life and art to the stage – from her humble beginnings to becoming India's cultural ambassador – offering the audience a rich tapestry of music and drama. Tickets at bookmyshow.com and paytm.com



Guru vandanam

Gana Mukundhapriya pays homage to Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan on September 8 at Andhra Mahila Sabha, 6 p.m. It will feature a vocal concert by Prof. S. Venkateswaran, disciple of the maestro. Usha Rajagopalan (violin), Madipakkam suresh (mridangam), Madipakkam Murali (ghatam), madipakkam Gopalakrishnan (kanjira) and V. Sai Subramaniam (morsing) are the accompanists.



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