

friday Review

THE HINDU

Natyarangam's annual festivalThe 2025 edition titled Acharya Bharatham pays an ode to five popular saints **p2****Designs on the walls**CFRIA's coffee table book captures the beauty of Malenadu's Chittara art **p3****ALL SET FOR A GRAND DEBUT**

Well-known conductor Andrew Litton will open Symphony Orchestra of India's Autumn Season **p4**

Neha Kirpal

The lights come on at Delhi's LTG Auditorium, revealing only a white mattress on the stage. Two women, each dressed in white salwar kameez, are seated on it. A number of children in the audience wait excitedly to watch an hour-long show of *Dastan Alice Ki* on a sultry Sunday evening. As the women take turns retelling Lewis Carroll's famous classic, *Alice in Wonderland*, in pure Urdu, there is complete silence — occasionally broken by a few laughs from the crowd.

Dastangoi is an ancient Urdu storytelling tradition that developed around the adventures of Amir Hamza, known for his valour and said to be the uncle of Prophet Muhammad. The art form ('dastan' means story and 'goi' means to tell), which originated in Persia, became popular in the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century. However, with the death of renowned Dastango Mir Baqar Ali in 1928, the form faded into oblivion.

The great Urdu critic and writer Shamsur Rahman Faruqi had worked extensively on *Tilism-e-Hoshuba* and *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza*. In the early 2000s, Mahmood Farooqui, who revived the art form in India, read his works. "His multi-volume research material helped me understand these medieval tales and the linguistic world they inhabited," recalls Mahmood. It prompted him to conceptualise the first contemporary dastangoi performance, along with his writer-director wife Arusha Rizvi, in 2005. Paying careful attention to sets, costumes and performance elements, the landmark show, which was held in New Delhi, had Mahmood presenting an excerpt from *Tilism-e-Hoshuba* with theatre artiste Himanshu Tyagi.

The show made two significant innovations. Two performers were brought in instead of one, and it

Writer, director and performer Mahmood Farooqui has expanded the repertoire of Dastangoi, the ancient art of Urdu storytelling, by including stories from Hindu epics

Inclusive chronicles



was a formal stage show. Since then, Mahmood has travelled across the globe performing for new audiences. This year, the modern revival of Dastangoi completes 25 years. It has now evolved into a Collective with dedicated practitioners (dastangos), many of whom are exceptional theatre artists.

"Being a dastango isn't as simple as memorising a script. They must research, draw from multiple sources, weave together stories, improvise during a performance, and engage the audience," says Mahmood.

So, Ainee Farooqui, a Ph.D scholar at Princeton University, has written *Dastan Shahid-e-Azam*, *Bhagat Singh* and *Dastan-e-Jallian*

based on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Veteran dastango Namita Singhai has recently written a dastan on Jawaharlal Nehru, and Poonam Girdhani's *Dastan Haroun Ki* is based on Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as well as dastans on the lives of B.R. Ambedkar and the Buddha.

Mahmood has now gone a step further and written dastans specifically for children, such as *Dastan Alice Ki* and *Dastan Little*

Prince Ki. "The idea is to introduce young audiences to Dastangoi, making the art form inclusive, engaging and sustainable across generations," he adds.

It is not easy to keep a traditional art form alive. The challenges range from lack of funds and sponsorships to logistical constraints of reaching a wider audience. As Mahmood points out, Dastangoi is not just entertainment, but a powerful medium for political and social commentary. "In today's political climate, expressing dissent or raising unorthodox ideas can be fraught with challenges," he says. While the art form may not be financially viable, the team continues to perform with passion. "Our reward lies in the

connection we form with our audiences, in their smiles and tears," adds Mahmood.

Over the years, the Dastangoi Collective has also adapted a wide range of folktales such as *Dastan-e-Chouboli* and *Dastan Raja Vikram Ki*, to literary works such as *Ghare Bhaire*, *Dastan-e-Ret Samadhi* and biographical narratives like *Dastan-e-Irfan-e-Buddh*, *Dastan-e-Gandhi*, and *Mantoiyat* to name a few. Even epics have been brought into the Dastangoi format, such as *Dastan-e-Karn* from the *Mahabharata* and *Dastan Jai Ramji Ki* based on A.K. Ramanujan's 300 *Ramayanas*.

There have also been some distinct dastans, such as *Dastan-e-Billi* as a tribute to art critic and historian B.N. Goswamy, based on his book *Indian Cats*. Says Mahmood, "While we've tried to preserve the traditional fabric of the Dastan, it's admittedly challenging to recreate the fantastical imagery and grandeur of *Tilism-e-Hoshuba*. That said, the traditional Dastans remain particularly special for connoisseurs of the Urdu language."

Poetry is a common

factor to all dastangois. But the writing process for each may differ. "Essentially, the topic or the subject dictates the nature of the writing. For instance, in the Mahabharata there are stories within stories; hence, the epic lends itself to poetry and many renditions and translations. On the other hand Dastangois on Bhagat Singh or Ambedkar involves a straightforward narration. It's all about making them accessible and entertaining," he explains.

Through workshops and academic engagements, their outreach has extended to schools and colleges across India.

Currently, the Collective is developing dastans on diverse themes including one on Guru Dutt and Kabir. "With each new work, the idea is to explore, innovate and deepen the form, ensuring that Dastangoi remains a living, breathing art in the contemporary world," says Mahmood.

**Legendary tales**

Mahmood Farooqui in *Dastan-e-karn* based on the Mahabharata and (above) Poonam Girdhani and Nusrat Ansari in *Dastan Alice Ki* based on *Alice in Wonderland*.

COURTESY: DASTANGOI COLLECTIVE



Dastangoi is not just entertainment, but a powerful medium for political and social commentary. But in today's political climate, expressing dissent or raising unorthodox ideas can be fraught with challenges.

MAHMOD FAROOQUI

Notes of nostalgia

T.M. Krishna shared memories of maestro Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, who was always in search of something new in music

H. Ramakrishnan

Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer strode the world of Carnatic music like a colossus and is rightly hailed today as the Sangeetha Pithamaha. He continues to inspire many young musicians. His well-known disciple, T.M. Krishna, recently performed a concert as part of the Sangitha Kalanidhi Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer Birth Anniversary Series, organised by Naada Inbam in Chennai.

Acceding to a request by his co-artist K. Arun Prakash, Krishna began the concert by sharing memories of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. He said "For many, it is the keertanas such as 'Maaru balka', 'Meru samaana', 'Challa kalla', and 'Sapasyat kausalya', viruthams, shloka such as 'Shringaram kshitinandin' and especially his second speed (*rendam kaalam*) kalpanaswaras that are deeply etched in the mind. But I wish to highlight something slightly different — what is not often spoken about is the mind behind the musician. Semmangudi's music was so full



T.M. Krishna at a recent concert in Kochi. PHOTO: THULSI KAKKAT

of life that we forget how much thought and intention has gone into crafting that music. Performance was just one part — the deeper layer was the thought, which we experienced often only in the classroom."

Talking about what a great analyser of music Semmangudi was, Krishna said, "He thought deeply about ragas, about the appropriateness of his every

rendering, and this is evident even in the few interviews available online. Time and again, he returned to one idea: Raga Sangeetham. For him, raga was the life and breath of Carnatic music."

Krishna reflected on the commonly used term, "thinking musician," and how it is often used quite frivolously. "All musicians think — it is essential

But what Semmangudi brought was something more: the ethics of musical thought. This was not about his ego or showcasing skill — it was about what served the music best. That objectivity, that selfless pursuit of musical integrity, was invaluable. Even at the very end of his life, Semmangudi was in search of something new in music."

Among many memories, one particularly stayed with Krishna. He recalled, "When Semmangudi mama was ill and admitted to hospital, my wife Sangeetha and I went to see him. When he saw us, he softly said, 'Bhayama irukku' (I am afraid). The natural assumption was that he feared passing away. So, we instinctively replied, 'Mama, kavala padatheengo. Onnum aagathu' (Don't worry. Nothing will happen). But mama said, 'Athillai. Sangeetham maranthu poyidummu bhayama irukku' (It is not that. I am afraid I will forget music). That is the kind of commitment and devotion we need — not just in music, but in whatever we do in life."

What followed was a concert that was a fitting and moving tribute from a disciple to his guru.

Such a performance cannot be a mere patchwork quilt. Careful planning, sensitivity and an infallible sense of proportion are necessary for its success. Krishna is naturally gifted with these qualities.

CONTINUED ON

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Revisiting the lives of saints

Natyarangam presents the 27th edition of its thematic festival titled Acharya Bharatham



Stepping it up
The event brings together scholars and dancers.
PHOTOS: B. VELANKANNI RAJ & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Team FR

Natyarangam's (the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha) 27th thematic festival, *Acharya Bharatham*, will present the life and teachings – Adi Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhvacharya, Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi-Vivekananda and Ramana Maharishi.

The resource persons and speakers for this edition includes Dr. Sudha Seshayyan, Dushyant Sridhar, Arjun Bharadwaj, Swami Dharmastananda and Ambika Kameshwar. The dancers who present each of the acharyas are Vidhun Kumar with Uma Govind and Sibi Sudarsan (Sankaracharya), K.P. Rakesh with Girish Madhu and Vidya Girish (Ramanujacharya), Praveen Kumar

(Madhvacharya), Uttiya Barua (Radhika Vairavelavan) and P. Sundaresan (Ramakrishna Paramahansa) and Anand Sachitanandan (Ramana Maharishi).

Says Vidhun, "Working on Acharya Bharatham has been a deeply enriching journey – learning Adi Shankara's timeless philosophy and teachings, through the lens of Bharatanatyam."

According to Praveen, "During the process of reading, listening, understanding and knowing the Dvaita philosophy, I realised that everything today the world speaks about – save soil, water, earth – concept was established way back and spoken widely by acharya Madhava."

Our acharyas have been social reformers and have revitalised religious faith and rituals and their teachings have been recorded in their works and preserved and spread by their disciples and devotees. Rakesh says: "Journeying into the profound philosophy and inspiring life of Sri Ramanujar has not only enriched my understanding but also touched me deeply on an emotional level. It has been an experience of learning, reflection and gratitude."

Anand, from Mumbai, says: "Ramana Maharishi's constant introspection of oneself and of one's true identity is powerful. I take it as an *upadesam*, not just as a dancer but as a collective society that is constantly mired in individuality and ego. Each page, each verse and each movement has been a reflection of the self, trying to see the self."

The event will be held at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall, Narada Gana Sabha, from 14 to 18 August, at 6.30 p.m. everyday.

CULTUREBRIEFS



A fitting tribute

Chennai-based Kathak Darpan Trust, founded by Neha Banerjee, presents the third edition of Smriti 2025 – a three-day event from August 15 to 17, at Rukmini Arangam Kalakshetra. It is organised in memory of Neha's guru, Pt. Birju Maharaj.

The event will confer the Padma Vibhushan Pt Birju Maharaj Smriti Award on tabla maestro Zakir Hussain (posthumous) and natyacharyas VP Dhananjayan and Shanta Dhananjayan; while Kathak artiste Shanky Singh will be awarded the Pt Birju Maharaj Yuva Puraskar Award.

The event line-up is as follows:
August 15, 5 p.m.: Kathak Darpan Group, 'Rhythm Divine' by tabla exponent Taufiq Qureshi, featuring a djembe solo and jugalbandi with Neha; followed by a Kathak recital by Shovana Narayan.

August 16, 5.30 p.m.: Kathak recital by Saswati Sen, a talk by Anita R. Ratnam (6.15 p.m.), and a recital by Guru Vempati Chinna Satyam's Kuchipudi Art Academy (6.30 p.m.)

August 17, 5.30 p.m.: Meera-Natya Katha by Sonal Mansingh, recital by Shanky Singh (6.45 p.m.) and a Mohiniyattam by Gopika Varma. Tickets on [tikkl.com](#).

Theatre and movement

Gear up for a weekend of theatre and movement in Chennai. Presented by Our Theatre Collective (Bengaluru), it includes a thought-provoking play and an immersive workshop, from August 9 to 10, 7 p.m., at Spaces, Besant Nagar. The play, *It Is You*, is a wordless physical theatre performance that explores two souls caught in a dance of curiosity and comfort, tension and surrender. It is devised and performed by Vivek Vijayakumaran and Pangambam Tyson Meitel and will be staged on both days. Between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on August 9 and 10, there will be a two-day immersive workshop – Body and Sound. Visit BookMyShow for the tickets for the show and registrations for the workshop.

Drama festival

Bharat Kalachar inaugurates the August Drama festival tomorrow, 6.30 p.m. at Sri YGP Auditorium, T. Nagar. The curtains will go up with Stage Creations' *Sikkil Sivaraman*. Plays to be staged on other days are: Aug. 10: S.R.M.G. Creations' *Karaikal Ammaiyaar*. Aug. 15: Brahma Fine Arts' *Yaaraithan Nambuvadho*. Aug. 16: Mali's Stage presents *Kannan Vanda Neram*. Aug. 17: Koothapiran Navabharath Theatres' *Leela Vinodham*. Aug. 23: Sathy Sai Creations' *Killadi Mappillai*. Aug. 24: PMG Mayurapriya's *Ennadi Penne*. Aug. 30: thRee presents *Kalavu Neekiya Padalam* and Aug. 31: Fab's Theatre's *Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhaal*.

Mali 91 Drama Festival Committee presents 'Mali 91 Navarasa Nataka Vizha'. To be inaugurated on August 10, 6 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha, the fest will feature nine of his plays at different venues beginning with *Gnanapeedam*.

Notes of nostalgia

CONTINUED FROM
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Tyagaraja's Asaveri kriti 'Lekana niemu', with which he began, set the tone for the evening. The kriti was embellished with kalpanaswaras in the pallavi. Raga Karaharapriya was a favourite of Semmangudi, and Krishna rendered an appealing alapana of the raga for the Neelakanta Sivan composition, 'Navasiddhi petralum'. Subsequently, he took up a detailed elucidation of Devagandhari. Any raga in Krishna's hands shows his never-ending quest for excellence. He chose a rarely heard Dikshitar kriti, 'Vadanyeshvaram bhajeham'

sada' and rendered it in a sedate chowka kala, distilling the raga's essence effectively. Semmangudi rendered this song at his Music Academy recital in 1966.

Then came the Ananda Bhairavi composition by Swati Tirunal, 'Pahi tarakshu puralaya mamaayi'. The swaras rendered by Krishna had a lingering effect.

The main raga of the evening was Sankarabharanam. Following an exhaustive alapana, Krishna provided a glimpse of the tanam, and the rest of it was left to violinist Akkarai Subhalakshmi to complete. As a co-artist, Subhalakshmi is always in tune with the vocalist, making a mark as a

successful accompanist. Krishna took up Semmangudi's favourite pallavi, 'Chakkagani bhajana jese variki takkuva galada Sri Rama dinadinamu' in Adi tala. It was a simple, yet melodic pallavi. Unlike the increasing tendency to indulge in speed and over-embellishment by musicians, Krishna showed restraint and adroitness both in the pallavi and kalpanaswaras, especially in the higher tempo. Thani by K. Arun Prakash on the mridangam and N. Guruprasad on the ghatam was, as it

ought to be, a continuation and part of the RTP. Both of them enriched the concert through their intelligent playing.

Krishna then continued with a virutham in Mayamalavagowla, Sahana,



Hamil Kalyani, Kapi and back in the reverse order. 'Maulau ganga shashaankau' the Sanskrit verse was written by Appaya Dikshitar in praise of Nataraja of Chidambaram. This was a staple at Semmangudi's concerts. Another of the maestro's favourite kritis that came up next was 'Sapasyat Kausalya' in Jhompuri, composed by Panchapakesa Sastry. This was followed by the Kshetrayya padam 'Meragadu rammanave naa saamini' in Sahana. But he commenced the padam from the anupallavi, 'Muratopu seyaka muvvagopala samini'.

Krishna concluded his tribute recital with 'Sakhi praaña sakhdutu jeseene', a javali by Dharmapuri Subbaraya Iyer, and Sadasiva Brahmendral's 'Pibare Ramarasam' in Yamuna Kalyani.

Layered with bhava

Young Bharatanatyam dancer Shruthipriya Vignesh impressed with her mature abhinaya

V.V. Ramani

The story of 'Shiva Deeksha', a padam composed by Ghanam Seenaiya in raga Kurinji, goes thus: the nayika, who has taken *deeksha* from her guru to serve Shiva, is busy with the rituals of daily worship. At that moment, she is distracted by Mannaru Ranga (Vishnu), who entices her. The nayika, now in a dilemma, is torn between her devotion to Shiva and her love for Vishnu.

Choreographed by Nityakalyani Vaidhyanathan, this composition was the highlight of the performance by Shruthipriya Vignesh. It was part of The Music Academy's Mid-year Dance Festival.

Shruthipriya portrayed in detail the entire process of the nayika preparing for the rituals. Her expressions aptly conveyed the heroine's state of mind.

Shruthipriya commenced her performance with a guru stuti followed by the classic Ananda Bhairavi Swarajathi, 'Sakhie indha velaiyil', by the

Thanjavur Quartet. The dancer transitioned from the nayika to a sakhi effortlessly, even as she described the grandeur of the Mannargudi temple and its presiding deity, Rajagopalaswamy. The nritta passages were executed gracefully with firm footwork.

Next, she presented 'Adahothale makkalu', a composition by Puranadaradasa that speaks about little Krishna complaining about the cowherds teasing him. Shruthipriya's portrayal captured the essence of the piece.

The dance recital concluded with a tillana in Brindavana Saranga, Adi tala, composed by Madurai N. Krishnan. Hariprasad on the vocal, Govindarajan on the mridangam, E. Devaraj on the flute, N. Anantha Narayanan on the veena, provided the musical support. Nithyakalyani Vaidhyanathan conducted the recital with finesse.



Promising

Shruthipriya Vignesh's nritta passages were graceful.

PHOTO: K. PICHIMANI

High on aesthetics

The Sarasangi RTP stood out among the compositions presented by Vishnuved

Renuka Suryanarayanan

K.S. Vishnuved exhibits stage dynamics along with a fine display of vidwat and aesthetics – by aesthetics I mean his excellent judgment of how and to what extent to present a raga or a kriti. This applies to his RTPs too. He recently performed a concert for the Patri School of Percussion at Srinivasa Sastri Hall.

He began with 'Siddhi Vinayakam' (Shanmukhapriya also known as Chamaram, Muthuswami Dikshitar). The artiste chose the line 'Prasiddha gana nayakam' for swaraprastara.

Next, the singer took up a Tyagaraja kriti 'Rama ninne namminu' in raga Husseini, where the saint-composer pleads for Rama's grace. Following



Well-structured K.S. Vishnuved with Advaith Ilavajhala (mridangam), Varadarajan (violin) and Nerkunam Sankar (kanjira). PHOTO: M. SRINATH

this, the vocalist presented a splendidly wrought 'Janani ninnuvinu' (Ritigowla, Subbaraya Sastry). This kriti has a beautiful swara-sahitya. A filler 'Sarasama dana' (Kapinayarayani, Tyagaraja) breezed in before the ragam tanam pallavi. The pallavi is an example of a palindromic in the sahitya, in the notes and in the tala. The tala was in a complex pattern: 3,4,5

followed by 5,4,3 in reverse order. Before the pallavi 'Sarasana nayana', the singer and the violinist came up with a well-etched Sarasangi alapana and tanam. After niraval and trikala in the pallavi, Vishnuved rounded it off with kalpanaswaras. Violinist Varadarajan's essays were soaked in melody. The tani that

Artistic lifelines Gademan Padmavathy works on the 'Hase Gode Chittara' and CFRIA book team with the Devara women.

PHOTOS: SMITHA TUMULURU AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Walls as canvas

The book *Devara Chittara: the artform, the people, their culture* delves into the traditional art of Karnataka's Malenadu

R. Revathi

In the quiet villages of rain-soaked Malenadu region in Karnataka, walls become storytellers. Art in geometrical patterns bloom in natural hues. This is *Devara Chittara*, the traditional art form of Devaru community, an agrarian and matrifocal group living in the region. For generations, their women have adorned walls, doors, fabric and ceremonial objects with symbols that speak of life, lineage and Nature. In their homes, Chittara survives not as a display, but as a living language. Now, through the pages of a 200-page coffee table book, it reaches a new

audience. *Devara Chittara: the artform, the people, their culture* (published by Prism Books), is the result of two-years of fieldwork and collaborations by three women: cultural researcher Geetha Bhat, documentary photographer Smitha Tumuluru and textile designer Namrata Cavale.

The trio travelled through Malenadu, covering many villages. Geetha recalls an impromptu trip to document *Kere Bete*, a mass fishing festival, when the river Varada recedes. "It was thrilling and terrifying to shoot in knee-deep waters with heavy cameras."

Chittara is a cultural documentation in pigments and patterns. Traditionally

drawn during weddings, festivals and auspicious milestones, the motifs are geometric, delicate and symbolic. The *ele* or thread motif denotes familial ties. *Nili kochu*, a criss-cross design represents the *tatti* (bamboo-strip walls) or the light filtering through the *tatti*. *Poppali*, a checkerboard pattern evokes the joints of the house rafters and the stars, believed to be ancestors watching over the living! "Even *Patanga* or *peetti* motif illustrates a butterfly perched on intersecting beams, hinting at the connection between Nature and art," says Geetha.

It was Geetha's first encounter with Chittara at an exhibition in Bengaluru's Chitrakala Parishath 20 years ago that planted the seed. She later founded the Centre for Revival of Indigenous Art (CFRIA) in 2008. Her fieldwork took her deep into the villages of Sagara, Sirsi, Soraba and Shivamogga (Shimoga) taluks.

Smitha, whose work explores arts, culture, livelihood and gender, joined Geetha to photograph and co-write the book. Namrata began designing projects for CFRIA and came on board in 2018. As a team, we aligned on core values and aesthetics," she shares.

The most prominent expression is the *Hase Gode Chittara*, painted on the eastern or northern walls of homes. "It is considered auspicious," says Geetha. Its beauty is enhanced by enclosing it within a three-sided border, the fourth is left bare, to convey visitors are always welcome to their homes. Tiny figurines of musicians often mark the bottom of this composition. The three-sided borders are also drawn at the entry door as *Bagilu Chittara*. The drawings are architectural in their essence, documenting the structure of the home and life. *Methina Chittara*, for instance, features in two-storyed houses.

"The *madanakai* (L-shaped wall brackets) on either side of the *hase gode chittara* not only represent the beams, but metamorphically indicate extension of families," explains Smitha.



Chittara also documents ceremonial objects such as *basinga* and *tondla*, headgears for the bride and groom, painted as ornamental motifs, while the *Vastr Chittara*, drawn on a cloth is used to wrap and store these objects post-wedding. The *Tiruge mane*, a carved pedestal offering, has its own chittara representation.

The four colours used in Chittara are rooted in ecology. Red is drawn from *kemmannu* (red earth) or *raja kallu* (red stone); white from soaked and ground rice or *jedi mannu* (white clay); black from roasted rice grains and yellow

from the seasonal fruit of *Guruge* tree, a species of *Garcinia*. "Since yellow pigment comes from a specific seasonal fruit, it is used sparingly," reveals Smitha, while the brush - *pundi naaru*, is made of jute fibre. The book is a careful-curation of all these layers. Each section walks the reader through the history, motifs, rituals and evolving social landscapes of Devaru community.

The festive fairs in the villages are adapted into *therina chittara*. The painting of *theru* (chariot) depicts the *devaru* (deity), placed in the centre and people pulling the

chariot. Among the most interesting rituals of the community is *Bhoomi Hunnime Habba*, a festival that celebrates mother earth. Held on the full moon before Deepavali, this resembles a *seemantha* or baby shower for the earth. Devaru women prepare *charaga* (rice porridge with greens and vegetables), carry many delicacies in a Chittara-painted basket called *Bhoomani Butti* and offer portions not just to each other, but also to birds, rodents, snakes – everything that share the field's ecosystem. "For them, Nature is god," says Geetha.

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SHAKTIDASAN - A POET'S QUEST FOR TRUTH
Documentary of the Poet's Spiritual Journey
Produced by Smt. Soundarya Sukumar Iyer

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Guided by the baton

New York-based conductor Andrew Litton makes his India debut with two shows for the Symphony Orchestra of India



Narendra Kusnur

American conductor Andrew Litton loves to joke about how many think he is British. Perhaps, because, at 23, he became the youngest recipient of the BBC/Rupert Foundation International Conductors Competition in London. "I also spent my early career with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in the U.K. My name sounds British too and people put a 'Sir' before my name," he says.

The 66-year-old, New York-based Andrew has also conducted orchestras in the US, Norway and Italy. After four decades in the field, he makes his India debut with two shows for the Symphony Orchestra of India (SOI), this year's Autumn Season at Mumbai's Jamshed

Bhabha Theatre. The August 12 programme will comprise Richard Wagner's 'Prelude and Lieberstod from *Tristan Und Isolde*' and Gustav Mahler's 'Symphony No 5', while the August 17 programme will have Maurice Ravel's famous *Bolero*, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's 'Piano Concerto No 1' with Russian-Swiss soloist Konstantin Scherbakov, and Igor Stravinsky's 'Suite from *The Firebird*, 1945 Version'.

His other two shows this season – August 22 and 26 – will feature British conductor Martyn Brabbins, whose repertoire includes Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Dmitri Shostakovich, Edward Elgar, Tchaikovsky and Sergei Prokofiev.

Though Andrew started off as a pianist, he was drawn to conducting. He recalls, "I was about 10 or 11 when I attended these presentations by Leonard

Bernstein. The first one didn't make any sense as Bernstein used a lot of technical terms. But later, I attended another of his presentations. I was fascinated by some of the things he said. Till that day, I wanted to become a fireman. Suddenly, I wanted to become a conductor."

Having done his Masters of Music in piano and conducting, and then winning the BBC award, he became an assistant conductor at the Teatro Alla Scala in Milan and later at the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington under noted cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich. He also played the piano with the Russian ballet



I always prefer to play in front of a thousand people, rather than sit in a studio where there is no audience

Music concert

• The Music Academy will feature N. Srivathsava's flute recital on August 11, 6 p.m. at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall as part of the HCL Concert series. Sanjay Gurum

Sharma (violin) and S. Srivatsa (mridangam) will accompany him.

• Nadopasana Music Trust's 58th anniversary concert series will feature Aruna Ranganathy's vocal concert today, 6 p.m. at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore.

Correction

In the article titled 'His bani lives on' published on August 1, the kritis and niraval lines

should read as 'Navasiddhi petralum', 'Amma neelayadakshi', 'Parulanna mata' and 'Paluku palukulaku' and not as mentioned.

PVR INOX AMPA SKYWALK MALL : 10:45 PM | VR MALL - ANNA NAGAR : 7:30 PM | HERITAGE RSL - ECR : 3:45 PM | LUXE PHOENIX MARKET CITY - VALACHERY : 4:35 PM | PROZONE, COIMBATORE : 10:15 PM.

cinépolis BSR MALL, COIMBATORE : 10:20 PM, and other cinemas.

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DAY 1 AUGUST 15 (FRIDAY)	5.00 pm: Inauguration Performance by Kathak Darpan Repertory, Chennai Confering of Padma Vibhushan Pt Birju Maharaj Smriti Award on Late Ustad Zakir Hussain (posthumously) & The Dhananjayans Confering of Pt Birju Maharaj Yuva Puraskar Award on Shanky Singh 6.00 pm: Rhythm Divine: A performance by Taufiq Qureshi featuring a Djembe solo & Jugalbandi with Neha Banerjee 7.00 pm: Kathak performance by Padmashri Shovana Narayan
DAY 2 AUGUST 16 (SATURDAY)	5.30 pm: Kathak performance by Saswati Sen, SNA Awardee 6.30 pm: Group performance by Padma Bhushan Guru Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam's Kuchipudi Art Academy
DAY 3 AUGUST 17 (SUNDAY)	5:30 pm: Meera Natya Katha by Padma Vibhushan Dr Sonal Mansingh 6:45 pm: Kathak performance by Shanky Singh, Pt Birju Maharaj Yuva Puraskar awardee 7:15 pm: Mohiniattam performance by Gopika Varma, SNA Awardee

Piano perspectives

From romance to revolution – Karl Lutchmayer bridges two eras of Western music

Charumathi Supraj

DYNAMIC NOTES Andrew Litton.
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

dancer Rudolf Nureyev. "Till then, I was learning to follow sound. This taught me to follow sight as I had to synchronise with the dancer's moves."

Many conducting assignments followed, and at 44, he received the Yale University's Sanford Medal, which is awarded to celebrated concert artistes. He even has a discography of 144 CDs, including a large number of concert recordings. "I am basically involved in the performing arts. So I'd always prefer to play in front of a thousand people, rather than sit in a studio where there is no audience," he says.

Andrew says that even before the organisers (the National Centre For The Performing Arts) contacted his manager for the

Mumbai shows, he had heard about the SOI. "When they told me they wanted to do Mahler's No 5, I immediately agreed. It's a symphony I have conducted for 30 years, yet each time it offers a fresh challenge," he adds.

According to Andrew, the five movements capture various moods like sorrow, struggle, joy and love. He points out, "Mahler wrote the famous fourth movement (Adagietto) as a love ode to his wife, Alma Schindler, whom he met when he was going through a rough phase. Unfortunately, that piece, like Elgar's 'Nimrod', is often misinterpreted and played at funerals."

Of the other pieces, he says, Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, though written in 1910, is best heard in its 1945 version, which he will play.

The conductor feels opening any concert with Ravel's *Bolero* is a "bizarre thing", but it works well because everyone in the audience knows the tune. He says, "It can actually be more challenging than the more complex pieces because every musician has to maintain the tempo and ensure that it doesn't suddenly get loud. What's worrisome is that if one makes the slightest mistake in *Bolero*, the audience will point it out."

Though Andrew admits he isn't familiar with Indian music, he remembers being inspired after attending sitar maestro Pt. Ravi Shankar's show years ago. "Besides the concerts, there are a couple of things I want to do on this visit. One is to meet someone who can explain to me how Indian music functions. Two, I'd like to taste as much Indian cuisine as possible, things we don't get back in New York," he says, with a laugh.

this was the only piece that Karl used sheet music for. The last piece, 'Gaspard de la Nuit', by French composer Maurice Ravel, strung together three smaller pieces that were marked by neo-gothic horror, surprise (not pleasant ones) and strangeness that included a body swinging in a high tower, a rope dripping blood, insects, a spinning hobgoblin and a siren whose overture of love meets failure.

Karl said: "‘Tales of the Night’ explores the human relationship with the night. There's wistfulness and memory, peace and spirituality, as well as heartache and, of course, the spookier side of imagination." While studying doctorate at Cambridge, Karl found himself "drawn" to the music of Brahms. This was the starting point of the work that later "coalesced around three different major works by Brahms, Liszt and Ravel."

He anticipates that he will be playing music of "extraordinary, young composers" from across India next year, especially the works of Utsyo Chakraborty.

Born and educated in Britain, Karl has performed across India since the age of 15 and currently resides in Goa. He highlighted the key differences between the Western classical music scene in Britain and India: "Here, it is fairly young, whereas, in Britain, it seems to be atrophying. Most teachers here have a waiting list, and there are increasing opportunities for musicians in this genre, though music education here is not as developed as it is there."

Karl also said that "for a proactive and entrepreneurial musician, India is a land of opportunities." A seasoned performing musician, who is passionate about teaching, Karl says India is a land of opportunities, and students of Western music should be encouraged to follow their passion

Another Hungarian composer Bela Bartok's 'The Night's Music' enlivened a "forests of sounds," describing "bugs, frogs, raindrops," on a rainy night. Bela's music, Karl explained, is marked by experiences of a country life that he favoured over urban living. Remarkably,



Keys of success Karl Lutchmayer has performed across India since the age of 15 and currently resides in Goa.

PHOTO: K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

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