

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Many shades of love

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Mozart's last masterpiece

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GIVING A SUFI SPIN TO KATHAK

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At 83, pianist, composer and peace messenger Herbie Hancock, who performed recently in Mumbai, is constantly seeking the new

Narendra Kusnur

One still remembers that evening at Mumbai's Rang Bhavan in 1996. In a solo piano recital, jazz legend Herbie Hancock played his popular numbers 'Watermelon Man', 'Cantaloupe Island' and 'Dolphin Dance'. The absence of a supporting band didn't stop fans from tapping their feet.

Hancock came to India again in 2007, with saxophonist Wayne Shorter, and in 2009, with singer Chaka Khan. In Mumbai, his shows were held at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre (JBT), where he played once again on his latest tour. On January 20, 2024, he was accompanied by the fabulous singer Diane Reeves, guitarist Leonard Brown and musicians from the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz, Los Angeles.

Though Herbie didn't play as much as expected at the show, he was outstanding whenever he did, using the Korg Kronos keyboard synthesizer on the faster pieces and the Steinway grand piano for an impromptu solo creation and a duet with Reeves.

As the 83-year-old musician had come to India after nearly 15 years, the crowd at the JBT show was a mix of those who had seen him earlier and first-time attendees. Either way, there was excitement in the air. Many expected him to play all the classics, but he only played 'Watermelon Man', improvised from the



version used on the 1973 album *Head Hunters*.

For many, just seeing Hancock in his trademark suit and sitting at the grand piano was a dream come true. A few tried to catch him as he left the venue, and some managed a selfie. After all, here was someone who has been a major figure in the jazz world since the 1960s, first playing with trumpeters Donald Byrd and Miles Davis.

Path-breaking track

Besides being an acclaimed pianist, Hancock, a 14-time Grammy winner and 34-time nominee, is a visionary composer and one of the leading figures of the post-bop sound. Later, he ventured into the jazz-fusion, funk and electro styles. His best-known albums include *Maiden Voyage* in 1965, *Head Hunters* in 1973 and the 1983 electro-funk record *Future Shock*, which had the path-breaking track 'Rockit'.

It's been a long journey. Interestingly, Chicago-born Hancock was introduced to Miles Davis in 1962 by 17-year-old drummer Tony Williams. Davis saw Hancock as

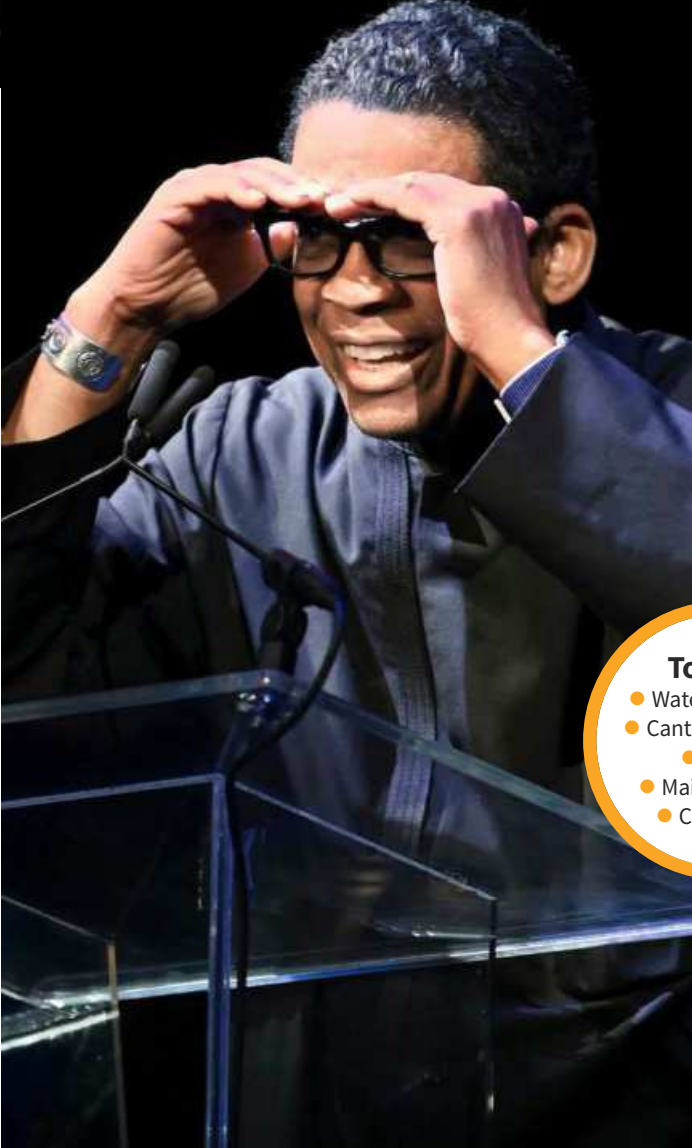
a promising talent, and included him in his new quintet. That phase gave Hancock plenty of exposure, and he began recording a lot for the Blue Note label. It was during this time that he recorded the concept album *Maiden Voyage* as bandleader.

In 1968, Davis dismissed Hancock from the band after a misunderstanding, but he continued to appear on the legendary trumpeter's albums. His stint with Davis had drawn him to the Fender Rhodes electric piano. Around that time, the sound of jazz was changing, with the infusion of more rock and funk. The 1970 Miles Davis album *Bitches Brew* ensured that jazz fusion could attract younger audiences.

Shifting from Blue Note to Warner Records and later to Columbia, Hancock began adding different sounds like rhythm n' blues, pop and funk, much to the chagrin of purists. The album *Head Hunters* crossed over into the pop territory. There on began his quest for innovation. In 1983, 'Rockit' became an anthem for breakdancers.

Yet Hancock maintained a balance, often returning to

The jazz experimenter



Calling the tune (From left) Herbie Hancock during a concert at the Admiralspalast in Berlin in 2017; and at the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz International Guitar Competition at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

traditional sounds. In the 1990s, he recorded tributes to Miles Davis and George Gershwin, besides a duet album *I+I* with saxophonist Wayne Shorter. Hancock's 2007 album *River: The Joni Years*, a tribute to singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell, won him the Grammy for Album Of The Year.

Multi-artiste collaborations

In keeping with the new trend of multi-artiste collaborations, Hancock recorded *Possibilities* in 2005 and *The Imagine Project* in 2010. The former featured Carlos Santana, Paul Simon, Sting and John Mayer, among others. The latter had the track 'The song goes on', composed by Larry

Klein, and featuring K.S. Chithra and Chaka Khan on vocals, Anoushka Shankar on the sitar and Wayne Shorter on the saxophone.

Apart from his sheer musicianship, Hancock has been hailed for his efforts to popularise jazz globally, and spread the message of peace through music. In 2011, he was designated UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue, "in light of his profound dedication to the promotion of peace through

dialogue, culture and the arts". In that role, he has been at the helm of the International Jazz Day celebrations on April 30 every year.

Observed in 190 countries, the event's main purpose is to bring together communities, schools, artistes, historians, academics and jazz enthusiasts to learn about the genre and its roots.

Annual competition

The Herbie Hancock Institute Of Jazz, formerly known as the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, also organises an annual international competition. Through his pioneering efforts, Hancock has kept the jazz flag flying, and this was again evident on his recent visits to New Delhi and Mumbai.

Hancock aims to interact with local musicians during his tours. This time was no different. In Delhi, he played at the Piano Man, and also conducted a masterclass at the Global Music Institute. In Mumbai, he visited the Happy Home & School For The Blind, where students played Louis Armstrong's 'What a wonderful world' to greet him. His workshop at the NCPA was packed, and the rendition of 'Watermelon Man' by 10-year-old Ayaan Deshpande earned a hug from the man himself.

On a personal front, Hancock is known for practising Nichiren Buddhism. It all began in 1972, when he was trying out new things as a composer, often facing a dilemma. At a Seattle club, he heard bassist Buster Williams, and was impressed by the smoothness of his playing. Williams introduced him to chanting that became part of his routine.

Hancock says the new philosophy helped him view music from the standpoint of a human being rather than that of a musician. The world of jazz had plenty to gain from that change.

Top five

- Watermelon Man
- Cantaloupe Island
- Rockit
- Maiden Voyage
- Chameleon

Suresh Subrahmanyam

It has been five weeks since I returned home from my annual Carnatic music adrenalin rush – a non-stop, round-the-clock festival of musicians displaying their skill across the length and breadth of Chennai. I thought about the way in which we members of the audience, since time immemorial, appreciate an artiste's performance during a concert. I am particularly fascinated by the unique manner in which we use the age-old device of applauding to let the musicians know we have enjoyed what they have taken the trouble to offer us.

The applause is an integral part of audience participation during a performance that we do not even consciously think about. It just happens. At times spontaneously, at times mechanically. And, at times caught between and betwixt, not sure if the performance is deserving of an applause or not. Thus, the end result could be a spontaneous eruption or an apologetic whimper, but an applause all the same.

Be it a raga alapana by the singer or the instrumentalist, a flurry of fast-paced swaraprastaras, the thunderous end of a percussion solo, and indeed, the end of a song, all these must necessarily be followed by an applause. There is no question of sitting



The anatomy of an applause

It is an integral part of audience participation, but one should know when to applaud during a concert and when not to

stock-still when some piece of music has just concluded. We have also grown accustomed to witnessing mediocre performances receiving standing ovations. Whither discernment?

In this respect we differ greatly from the behaviour of an audience at a western classical concert. If you so much as clap your hands even gently after the first movement of one of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, you are as good as dead in the water. Censorious glances will be directed at you. That is their tradition, though I am always baffled as to why, if

the first movement of a symphony moves you to applaud, you must curb your natural instincts and wait till the third movement. Always assuming there isn't a fourth movement! If you are a novice, then the best thing is to sit back and join in the applause when the entire audience has got into the act. On one occasion in Kolkata at a chamber concert, I was guilty of such a *faux pas*, when I distinctly heard a haughty lady hissing under her breath, 'villager.' It is well-nigh impossible to 'hiss' a word without a sibilant sound in it, but she managed it. Minding your Ps and Qs at a western classical concert is a given. A quaint practice, but it is what it is. In the words of classical pianist Emanuel Ax, 'We seem to have set up some very arcane rules as to when it is actually OK to applaud.'

Thankfully, that is not the case with any Indian classical music performance. Free-spirited, we will clap as the mood takes us and let the devil take the hindmost. Let me get back to the essential point of my essay. Having closely observed audience behaviour at Carnatic music concerts for several decades now, I have arrived at some definitive ideas about how to classify different types of applause. Forgive my improvised Latin.

Applaudus Erupticus - The audience goes berserk. The end of a particular piece has so

We differ from an audience at a western classical concert. If you clap even gently after the first movement of one of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, censorious glances will be directed at you

moved them that they simply cannot stop clapping. So much so that the performer concerned almost looks a bit sheepish, as if to say, 'Is this really me they are getting so excited about?' It is, it is, you have outdone yourself. Soak it all in while you can. Who knows when it will happen again?

Applaudus Apologeticus - Oftentimes, this insatiable desire to clap after any and every piece places the audience in an awkward muddle. That particular alapana by the artiste in the raga Suddha Saveri did not quite hit a home run. Far from it. Truth to tell, the essay did not even get to first base, putting the audience in a quandary. However, decades of applauding at all natural pauses in a concert has ensured that the act is inextricably embedded in our muscle memory. So here we go. A few barely audible pitter-patter claps are heard

from distant parts of the concert hall. This time the performer really looks sheepish for the right reasons, but soldiers on.

Applaudus Boisterous - There is an impossible person, you will find him in every concert, who makes it a habit of standing up after each song and clapping loudly and conspicuously, at times accompanied by a stentorian, 'bale, sabhash!' He is up like a jack-in-the-box, and no power on earth can stop him. A few others in the audience even see him as something of a folk hero, and proceed to take selfies with him after the concert. Most of us, though, consider him an insufferable pain-in-the-neck who ought to be turned away at the gates.

Applaudus Sympatheticus - In Tamil parlance, you could describe this lot as 'the *paavam* brigade.' The artiste tried his or her best, but the effort was clearly not worth the candle. In an auditorium with a seating capacity of 600, only 32 had turned up, half of them relatives of the performers on stage. The applause, muted as it must be, is to provide encouragement, though it comes across as solace. That said, we have known artistes from this backdrop emerge later as shining stars. The boot is then firmly on the other foot as they visualise future applause rising to a crescendo. Hope springs eternal.



The spirit of love

Rama Vaidyanathan's performance was a celebration of sringara

V.V. Ramani

It was one of those days when the twin streams – music and dance – intertwined beautifully. It happened at Rama Vaidyanathan's performance at the Music Academy dance festival. 'Sringara rasamanjari' was the opening

composition of the evening, and Rama's interpretation symbolised the many hues of love. A composition by Muthuswami Dikshitar in raga Rasamanjari, it addresses goddess Kamakshi. Through apt sancharis, Rama came up with a detailed description of Kamakshi – from her form and attire to her

accessories. The popular Bhairavi ata tala varnam composed by Pacchimiriam Adiappayya followed. There was an entire sequence here where the life cycle of a lotus – how it blooms, glows in splendour and slowly wilts with the petals disintegrating before submerging in the water – was beautifully visualised to

highlight the emotional state of the nayika. Depicting Rajagopala as Krishna the cowherd, the Rama's interpretation of the compositions reiterated the significance of lending a distinctive touch

Layered with bhava
Rama Vaidyanathan.
PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

dancer portrayed the cows being herded into their shelter with finesse and a dash of humour, when she questions an unruly cow 'Are you a peacock to be prancing around, and not following the herd?' The nritya passages had the dancer, nattuvanar and the mridangist in perfect synchrony to create rhythmic movements that flowed seamlessly with the mood. In a continuum of sringara rasa, the melody of the flute casts a romantic spell on a woman slowly awakening from a night of passion with her beloved. The song 'O je mane na mana', written by Rabindranath Tagore, speaks of a woman entreating her lover to go away as the sun has risen. The final composition, a swara padam, focussed on Shiva. Is he the one on the bull in the procession, is he the one who burnt Kama, or is he the one who gave half his form to Devi, asks the devotee. Rama's nuanced abhinaya was a major takeaway of the performance. The musical team contributed immensely to the rasanubhava. Sudha Raghuraman's singing was not just in synchrony with the dance, but enhanced the experience. Sumod Sreedharan on the mridangam and Raghuraman on the flute let melody hold sway till the last sequence. S. Vasudevan wielded the cymbals impeccably.



Musical ode to Tyagaraja

T.M. Krishna's Aradhana concert on February 4 at the Music Academy

The Tyagaraja Aradhana at the Music Academy is a special event, with the group rendition of Pancharatna kritis in the morning, and a concert by a senior musician in the evening. This year's programme to be held on February 4 at TTK Auditorium, will feature MKS Natarajan and S.N. Manikandan's nagaswaram recital at 9.30 a.m. followed by the singing of Pancharatna kritis at 10.30 a.m. The evening concert (6 p.m., non-ticketed) will be by T.M. Krishna, who has had a long association with the Music Academy. The vocalist will be accompanied by R.K. Shriramkumar on the violin, K. Arun Prakash on the

mridangam and N. Guruprasad on the ghatam. Krishna is known for his unique approach, both in terms of the concert format and his singing style. His experimental spirit led him to collaborate with artistes from different genres and expand his repertoire by including the works of unsung and new composers. For rasikas, who miss listening to him during the Margazhi Season, this concert at the Music Academy is an opportunity to hear him. The Tyagaraja Aradhana programme is held under an endowment from P. Obul Reddy and P. Gnanambal, and co-sponsored by P. Seshadri, managing trustee, Thyagaraja Music Festival Trust.

Koothu-p-Pattarai's new play

Koothu-p-Pattarai, the Tamil theatre group, presents its new play *Vandichodai* (bullock-cart tracks), written by N. Muthuswamy, at its Virugambakkam premises. Inaugurated on January 31, it will be staged until February 4. Time: 7 p.m. It opens with two strangers in front of a tree rendering the dialogue: 'You got what I said, the play has begun', which sets the tone for a thought-provoking play. Fantasy assumes an important role in this production, where a goat metamorphoses into a man.



Unusual symbolism

Medha Hari tried to lend newness to traditional pieces

Rupa Srikanth

Sprightly, supple and bright are some adjectives that can describe Medha Hari's Bharatanatyam performance at the Music Academy dance festival. She is a senior disciple of Anitha Guha and Bragha Bessell, and is currently being tutored by Priyadarsini Govind. Medha's energy and agility lit up the stage and made the adavus seem airy. Her carriage – her back is ramrod straight – adds sophistication to her style. In the 75-minute time-slot, Medha presented a kriti 'Bhogeendra sayinam' (Kuntalavarali, Jhampa, Swati Tirunal), the Lalgudi Jayaraman Charukesi padavarnam 'Innum yen manam', a Sangam-literature piece 'Sudar todi' about Parvathi's family squabbles, and a Purvi-Rupaka thillana by T. Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar.

Guided by Priyadarsini, Medha's repertoire had many points of interest. Unusual symbolism for Padmanabha, including an Ananthashayana pose facing backwards, using only netra abhinaya, brief sancharis and some unusual analogies such as... 'You liked the food but broke the pot; likewise, you like me yet break me...' Medha portrayed the hurt nayika very well. She has matured and learnt to quieten down during her abhinaya, and add stillness during the varnam. She must, however, be conscious of an improper araimandi that can mar the appeal of her performance. Medha's musical accompaniment was beautiful with Jayashree Ramnath (nattuvangam) guiding the group of Sateesh Vasudevan (vocal), Shaktivel Muruganandan (mridangam), J.B.Sruthi Sagar (flute) and Ishwar Ramakrishnan (violin).

Shreya Murthy highlighted the nritya-abhinaya blend

Margam's enduring appeal

V.V. Ramani

The margam format is ideally suited for young dancers to showcase their talent. Shreya Murthy chose to present select compositions at her performance for **Brahma Gana Sabha**. Shreya began with a Mallari in celebration of Nataraja, preceded by verses from *Tirutandakam* by Tirunavukarasar in Gambhiranattai. The myriad descriptions of familiar imageries associated with Shiva, such as the drinking of poison and the snake coiled around his neck were depicted in an interesting manner. A little more attention to detailing would have enhanced the

appeal. The varnam 'Swamiyai azhathodi vaadi', a composition of Dandayudhapani Pillai in ragamalika, has the heroine speaking to her confidante to go and fetch her lord. Shreya's ability to communicate ideas with clarity was seen in certain sequences – describing how the moon, which was once her companion with its coolness, now torments her like a ball of fire; memories of the romantic moments spent with him, the portrayal of Ardhnanariswarar and the transition of a fearful venomous snake to a tame one that adorns the neck of Shiva. The dancer's fine footwork was evident throughout, but the overall choreography needed some refinement. Constant jumps and

Fine footwork Shreya Murthy.
PHOTO COURTESY: BGS

running across the stage brought in monotony. Coming to the edge of the stage at the conclusion of each jathikorvai not only puts the dancer out of the line of lighting, but also diverts attention from the movement. In the padam 'Choodare' in raga Sahana, Shreya revelled in her delineation of a nayika on her way to meet Krishna. She is taunted and teased by jealous women commenting on her as 'that woman' who entices her nayaka. 'I go near her to feel the softness of her silks, she knocks off my hand, and walks away tossing her plaited braid with a touch of arrogance. Don't I know how she came into these riches and big house?' say the women. These sancharis, Shreya's stances and body language and the manner in which she portrayed the different characters were impressive. Orchestral support was by K.P. Rakesh on the nattuvangam, Murali Sangeeth on vocals, S. Vijayaraghavan on the mridangam and N. Sikamani on the violin.



A solo space

Anushya Hariharan chose to explore familiar compositions

Manasa Vijayalakshme C

When an artiste presents a solo Bharatanatyam, the stage becomes a canvas giving the dancer the liberty to be at his or her creative best. Anushya Hariharan's solo performance for **Bharat Kalachar** began with a Kavuthuvam in praise of Muruga, a composition by Madurai R. Muralidharan in Shanmukhapriya and Rupakam tala. This song conveys that Muruga, the handsome lord born from six lotuses, rides the peacock, wielding a divine lance. The centerpiece of the

recital was the pada varnam 'Swami naan unthan adimai' (Papanasam Sivan), in praise of Nataraja, set in Nattakurinji, Adi tala. This piece was a blend of jatis and sancharis. One of the prominent stories in this piece is of Markandeya and Yama. A wrathful Yama assumes a fearsome form and hurls his noose to capture Markandeya, who clings to the lingam. As the noose touches the lingam, Shiva emerges in all his wrath, striking Yama with his Trishul and delivering a powerful kick on his chest, defeating him. Anushya effortlessly played Shiva, Markandeya and Yama. Anushya, a

student of Tiruveezhimizhalai Kanaka Krishna Prashanth's Sankara Natyalaya, demonstrated sharp movements. Next came the well-known 'Netrandhi Naerathile', conceived as being sung by a jealous lover who feels slighted by Muruga. This padam was in raga Husseni (Rupakam). The dancer concluded with Madurai N. Krishnan's Brindavana Saranga thillana (Adi) extolling Krishna. The orchestra featured G.V. Gurubharadwaaj on the mridangam, Sowmiya Ramesh on the veena, and Gokula Krishnan on the flute. The vocals, nattuvangam and choreography were expertly executed by Kanaka.

Malini White

Swedish mezzo soprano/conductor Maria Forsstrom and pianist Bengt Forsberg, who delighted audiences in Bengaluru last year with Faure's Requiem, were again in town, primarily for a performance of Mozart's Requiem, a far more ambitious venture than their previous offering. They generously provided audiences with solo performances as well.

Given that the Swedish visitors were here for a short time prior to the main performance, great practical hurdles had to be overcome. Rehearsals required the assembling of two choirs of 47 people, and the Bangalore School of Music's Chamber Orchestra, all people with full-time occupations. So it is even more creditable that such a production was undertaken and played to a full house at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall recently.

The Mozart evening started with individual contributions: Abendempfindung K523 was a strangely lugubrious opening. Though written at the same time as Don Giovanni and Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, it had neither the dramatic melodiousness of the opera's arias nor the light charm of the latter. Instead, the melancholy piece dealt with a lover's failed relationship and thoughts of death. But Maria's feeling rendition could not have the desired effect on the audience, which was unfamiliar with German.

The mood was soon leavened with the Piano Concerto #12 in A Major. Joined by the strings of the BSM Chamber Music Orchestra, under Bengt masterful at the piano, and Maria conducting, this example of the composer's early work was enjoyable, though not as substantial as his more mature work. As always, the second movement Andante was most appealing, its wistful melody, perhaps, an epitaph to Mozart's former mentor Bach, who had just died. In the third movement Allegretto, the strings had a more active role, picking up some of the piano's phrases. The evening's main attraction, Mozart's Requiem came after the intermission.

The Requiem lives on

Swedish and Indian musicians came together to perform Mozart's choral masterpiece recently in Bengaluru

The programme notes (though the font was very small!) gave deserved credit to all the individual performers, besides being very informative.

Completing Mozart's work
It is ironic that this popular work is known as Requiem, for, Mozart died before it was completed and many composers have claimed its

creation, or parts thereof. Mozart's pupil Süßmayer was left with specific instructions for its completion. He collated his master's sheet music but falsified the date of completion, adding the inscription "di me ("by me") W.A. Mozart /1792", and rewrote the entire composition in his own hand, making it impossible to identify the Mozart sections



Soul-stirring
(Clockwise from left) Pianist Bengt Forsberg; the choir group; and mezzo soprano/conductor Maria Forsstrom.
PHOTOS: SIVA RAJ



definitively. But Beethoven was dismissive of such doubts: "If Mozart did not write the music, then the man who wrote it was a Mozart", and Beethoven's admiration of the work is probably the reason it was played at the younger composer's Memorial Mass.

Challenging ensemble
The choice of von Spengel's arrangement for strings and organ of the Requiem was dictated by the difficulty of assembling a full orchestra, underlining the drawbacks of launching an amateur production. The Introitus – a subdued opening at the best of times – made even less impact, with only string accompaniment. In the poignant sections of the work, Mozart used woodwind; and brass and timpani for the baleful Confutatis, though the choir provided the same formidable equivalent in the Dies Irae, where Mozart uses the choir's homophonic and homorhythmic texture to convey the desperation of the text. In the Tuba Mirum ["Hark the Trumpet"], one missed the trombone that buoys up the

wonderful bass voice. The electronic organ provided basso continuo, but did not compensate for the lack of brass and woodwind. Soprano Payal John, though lovely in voice, was rather soft when she started [though mics were judiciously interspersed] and lacked impact. However, the four soloists were a pleasure to hear, particularly in the Recordare, the adverse drama of the previous sections alleviated by their lovely intertwined melodies. Conducting the ensemble seemed challenging for Maria. Though the chorists [who had to convey Mozart's intricate contrapuntal strata] were more aware of the many layers that create

unified music. For, she found that the orchestra had insufficient training in that individual players be cognisant not only of their instrument, but also what every other member is doing and how they mesh together, the conductor's job being to pull everything together into musical cohesion. Both Maria and Bengt gave master classes at the BSM but did not find anyone studying to be a conductor, so perhaps classes should be initiated in music conducting, as it seems a role begging to be filled. Maria's labours were rewarded as the Requiem was a great success, and it is to be repeated at St Mark's Cathedral in March, and it may also be taken to Puducherry.

CALENDAR

Vocal concerts

- **Musiri Chamber** presents A.S. Murali's vocal concert on February 4, 4.01 p.m. at 48/2, Musiri Subramaniam Road, Mylapore. T.K.V. Ramanujacharyalu (violin), A.S. Ranganathan (mridangam) and A.S. Krishnan (morsing) will accompany him.
- **Narada Gana Sabha** has organised Abilash Giriprasad's vocal concert on February 4, 4.25 p.m., at the sabha mini hall. The accompanists are Vishvesh Chandrasekar, Kumbakonam Swaminathan and Sai Subramaniam. This will be followed by Geetha Raja's performance at 6.30 p.m.
- **Madhuradhwani** will feature the following concerts at Arkay Convention Center. February 3, 6.15 p.m.: S. Adithyanarayan. February 7, 6.15 p.m.: Vasudha Ravi.

Guided listening session

Ganakaladhara Madurai Mani Iyer Rasikas Association presents a guided listening session of the legendary musician Madurai Mani Iyer, on February 4. Titled 'The Joyful music of Madurai Mani Iyer', the event will take place at 4.15 p.m. Venue: P.S. High School, Mylapore.

Global music festival

Paalam will be conducting the global music festival exclusively for NRI artistes from this year. Inaugurated on February 2, concerts by 10 teams will be webstreamed on www.paalamtv.com at 6.30 p.m. The fest is on till February 11.

Art show

The works created by 10 Indian and 10 Korean artists during the Korea-India Artists Camp, held in Korea in 2023, are being showcased at the exhibition, 'Tagore and Nature - A River', which was inaugurated on January 30.

First presented in Korea, this exhibition will travel across various venues in India and Korea to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Indo-Korean relations and strengthen the cultural exchanges between the two countries.

The exhibition is on until February 20 at The Gallery, InKo Centre, No. 18, Adyar Club Gate Road. It will be open for public viewing except on Sundays and published holidays. For details click the link https://inkocentre.org/tagore_and_nature_a_river.html

Consecration

The consecration of Arulmigu Sri Vadivudaiamman, Sri Badrakaliyamman, Sri Mariammam temple, Kuthalam taluk, Villiyanalur Kandiur, Mayiladuthurai district, will be performed on February 8, between 8.30 a.m. and 10 a.m. Rituals preceding the kumbabishekam for Sri Sivakamasundari Samedha Sri Kaliswarar will be conducted from February 5. The consecration of Vadivudaiamman temple at 9.15 a.m. on February 8 will be followed by moolasthanah mahakumbabishekam at 9.45 a.m.

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*Masjid dha de,
Mandir dha de,
Dha de jo kuch dainda,
Par kisi da dil na dha,
Rab dilan vich rehnda*
(Break down the mosque,
Break down the temple,
Break everything that
can be broken,
But don't break somebody's heart,
For in hearts does god reside.)

Bulleh Shah

Imagine these powerful lines were written 700 years ago by Bulleh Shah. Strangely, it feels more relevant today than ever before," says Sufi Kathak exponent Manjari Chaturvedi. She will present her work 'O' Bullayah' tomorrow at the Royal Opera House in Mumbai.

"I began to research the life and works of this mystic as part of my '22 Khwaja' project, which throws light on the lives of 22 Sufi poets and celebrates their enduring legacy. I began with Mahboob-e-Ilahi, followed by Chirag-e-Dilli, Waris Shah and Turub Ali Qalandar. For each, I came up with specially-curated performances interspersed with anecdotes. Bulleh Shah is the fifth in the series," says Manjari, who found this poet and thinker incredibly inspiring.

Born into a noble family of Syeds, Bulleh Shah spent his entire life rebelling against religious and social dogmas. "To me, his poetry stood out for its gender fluidity. He had no qualms about becoming the voice of women. He often dressed like them and roamed the streets singing and dancing. 'O' Bullayah' uses the richly-expressive Indian dance to convey his soul-stirring thoughts."

More than two decades ago, when Manjari decided to look at Kathak through the prism of Sufi, the philosophy of complete surrender took her on a spiritual and creative quest. "I travelled extensively across India and Central Asia, meeting Sufi practitioners and visiting shrines. I read and researched sufiyana kalams (works) and

strove to infuse them into my art," says Manjari.

Keen to experience Kathak beyond its traditional fast-paced and intricate footwork, colourful costumes and Radha-Krishna stories, Manjari created a connect between the dancing body and formless, divine love.

"I wear a lot of black costumes in my performances and, sometimes, leave my hair open, which is not allowed in traditional Kathak. The idea was to free my dance from external trappings and keep poetry at the centre of it. I want my performances to offer something more than dance and music – a slice of history, a peek at our literary heritage and to make people think."

Manjari began working on 'O' Bullayah' after she read an English translation of a book on Bulleh Shah, whose progressive views she wanted to share with the world. I was particularly struck by his pointed criticism of institutionalised religion. But the biggest challenge for me was how to showcase these in my performance."

Manjari got in touch with qawwals from Punjab, who could bring alive Bulleh Shah's verses for the contemporary audience. As for movements, she visited Sufi shrines in Punjab and Haryana to find out more about Bulleh Shah's dance. "At one such shrine in Panipat, I met a fakir, whose eyes lit up when I mentioned Bulleh Shah. He explained to me how he would gently whirl and use his hands to express emotions. I also got a friend travelling to Pakistan to visit Bulleh Shah's shrine in Kasur, which borders Lahore, to check with the fakirs there about his dance."

Though Manjari keeps improvising with each performance by bringing in her interpretation, she ensures the sensibilities of the era and the essence of the Sufi philosophy remain untouched. "With a lack of documentation, it has not been easy to create these works. 'O' Bullayah' took five to six years of groundwork. "But every moment spent has been worth it since it helped me rediscover myself and my art. Like Bulleh Shah said, 'You have read thousands of books of knowledge. Have you ever tried to read your own self?'"



Timeless (Right) The popular drum dance sequence from *Chandralekha*. (Below) From *Miss Malini* and S.S. Vasan. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES & R. KRISHNAMACHARI'S COLLECTIONS



Twin passions

This year marks the 120th birth anniversary of S.S. Vasan, a trailblazer in publishing and cinema

Suganthy Krishnamachari

In 1928, 24-year-old T.S. Srinivasan, better known as S.S. Vasan, went to the office of the Tamil magazine *Ananda Vikatan* to place an advertisement and ended up buying the magazine for 200 rupees.

Vasan, who was born in January 1904 – this year marks his 120th birth anniversary – made some bold decisions soon after he bought *Vikatan*. He reduced the annual subscription from two rupees to one, and increased the number of pages. He replaced *Vikatan's* Vinayaka prayer with Thayumaanavar's verse: 'I wish for nothing but for everyone to be joyful'.

Vasan, who lost his father at the age of four, was brought up by his mother Balambal. Not wanting to lean on his mother, he discontinued his studies, and began to look for ways to earn. He started an advertising agency, because it did not require much capital outlay. A rented room in

the Brahma Samaj building in George town served as his residence and office. And then, he became the owner of *Ananda Vikatan*.

When Vasan bought a printing press for the magazine, he moved to a village-style-house on Mint Street, which became *Vikatan's* new office and his new residence. During an interview with this writer many years ago, the late R.A. Padmanabhan, long associated with the magazine, said the words 'Vasan Puthagasalai' were painted in blue letters on the parapet wall of the terrace. Until the early seventies, the letters could still be seen, even after being painted over.

Vikatan, with its droll humour, won the hearts of readers. Thumilan, Kalki, Devan and Raali made up the *Vikatan* editorial team in the early years. Vasan didn't set much store by age, and R.A. Padmanabhan became an assistant editor at the age of 16! Margan (Margabandhu), Maali, Gopulu and Silpi were among the early illustrators.

Thinnai Pechu, Radio eppadi, Loka sancharam, Thukkada, Yenna

yenge yeppodu, Cheema series, Arai kurai padamum avasara pichuvum and Naam ondu ninaikka chithirakkarakar ondu ninaikkiraar were some of the popular columns.

R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* was translated and serialised in *Vikatan*, which also had articles by P. Sri on Tamil literature. The magazine ran a cover story on Tamil Thatha U. V. Swaminatha Iyer or U Ve Sa, for his 80th birthday. His autobiography was also serialised.

When Vasan bought *Vikatan*, the circulation was less than 1,000 copies a month. Within two years he was able to increase it to 10,000, and when it became a weekly in 1932 November, it was selling 40,000 copies a month. Vasan introduced short story contests to encourage writers. There were contests for readers too.

One day, Sarvodaya leader S.R. Subramaniam brought to the *Vikatan* office a hitherto unpublished photo of a bearded Bharati, with his wife Chellamma standing beside him. R.A. Padmanabhan was keen to carry the picture in the next issue of *Vikatan*. But, Vasan wanted copies to be made and shared with all the leading publications of the time.

When he could have sat back and enjoyed *Vikatan's* success, Vasan took a huge risk and entered the world of filmmaking. In 1941, he bought K. Subrahmanyam's Movieland Studio and renamed it Gemini. Along with Amirtham



Talkies, Gemini produced *Madanakamarajan*, starring vocalist V.V. Sadagopan.

In 1942, Gemini produced the musical *Nandanar*, starring Dandapani Desigar. When the film was released in Wellington, the theatre was decorated to resemble a temple, and the Nandi statue that featured in the film was placed in the foyer. People turned up with coconuts and fruits, and offered prayers to this Nandi, before watching the film. Gemini chose three songs from the film as the best, although the choices were not revealed to the audience. Every member of the audience was asked to write down their favourite songs. Those whose choices tallied with Gemini's were given prizes.

Kothamangalam Subbu's dialogues and lyrics made the film *Miss Malini* (based on R.K. Narayan's Mr. Sampath) a runaway hit. In the film, a city girl boasting about modern conveniences is given a set down by a village girl when the power goes off and no gadget can be used. The village girl's song – 'Bale jor pattanavasam' – was on everyone's lips every time there was a power outage.

Gemini had a string of successes such as *Chandralekha*, *Apoorva Sahodaragal* (famous for Bhanumathi's multilingual 'Laddu' song),

Avvaiyar and *Vanjikottai Valibhan*. The famous drum dance in *Chandralekha* spawned the trend of Chandralekha dolls, which became a must in the annual Navarathri kolu displays. *Irumbu Thirai* was remade in Hindi as *Paigam*, and Kathayee Silk Emporium, Mylapore, came up with a *Paigam* sari as part of its Deepavali collection.

Despite being busy with filmmaking, Vasan made time to go through every issue of *Vikatan* before it went to press. Once, when he found that the Deepavali message by Gopu was in Sanskritised Tamil, he wrote in the margin, "Change this. Saraswathi can understand chaste Tamil too."

Vasan dared to dream, but he knew how to make his dreams come true. It is not wrong to build castles in the air. But as Thoreau said, we must know how to lay strong foundations. And, Vasan knew how to lay those foundations.

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