

friday Review

THE HINDU

East meets West in a kutcheri

'Bond with bhavam' treated the audience to Indian classical and pop tunes p2

A feature film in Sanskrit*Padmagandhi* conveys the significance of the lotus in our culture p3**A SHOW DEDICATED TO INDIAN JAZZ FANS**

Trumpeter Randy Brecker and drummer Peter Erskine perform timeless classics p4



Drum dynamics

Vidhya Subramanian's latest ensemble work, 'Damaru', explores the sound and shape of the modest percussion instrument

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The term 'classical' has gained a whole new meaning in today's world. Boundaries have become porous and artistes are redefining the genre in their own distinct way. While collaborations reign high in music, Bharatanatyam exponentes have started showcasing the classical form's flexible core. Even its time-tested repertoire (*margam*) is being reinterpreted to accommodate newer perspectives. Add to this, the increased reach through social media and technological intervention. It seems like a great time to be a dancer. Ask Vidhya Subramanian and pat comes the reply: "It is lovely to be a dancer at any given time."

Explaining her response, Vidhya, who has done her Masters in Theatre Arts, says: "I have danced under the guidance of my guru S.K. Rajarathnam, when terms such as 'viral' and 'views' did not exist. Now, I dance in an AI-driven era with the liberty to ideate and implement. A creative individual will thrive in any period, through any trend. My generation of dancers has been more fortunate, though. We sit on the cusp of tradition and innovation, deriving the best of both."

Amid rehearsals, Vidhya reflects on how the dichotomies of life – progress and rootedness, silence and sound – energise her. They also fuel 'Damaru', her first major production after she shifted base from the U.S. to India. "Post pandemic, I returned to Chennai to reconnect with the culture that has defined my journey. It is then that

this production began to take shape."

'Damaru' was originally designed by Vidhya as a solo margam piece. She later elaborated on the idea and turned it into an ensemble work. The choreography emerged from a discussion she had many years ago with dance-scholar S. Jayachandran on balance and imbalance. It set her thinking. Finally, in Shiva's damaru, she found a connection to that conversation. "What struck me about the instrument was not the sound, but the shape. It helped me visualise the concept of duality – the confluence of feminine and masculine energies. Also, how opposites permeate our lives in different ways, and how we try finding a balance through them. Four compositions in the production bring alive these thoughts."

Today most classical choreographies exhibit the fluid relationship between codified and experimental movement vocabularies. Most dancers work on rare, expansive sequences. "But dance is not about constant movement. On the contrary, one should also look for moments of stillness – kaarvai – in the dance.



Exchange of ideas and experiences help build a collective vision. In 'Damaru', it was interesting to see the dancers surrender to the work through their many questions and my answers.

VIDHYA SUBRAMANIAN

Pauses often convey more," says Vidhya, who trained in abhinaya under the inimitable Kalanidhi Narayanan.

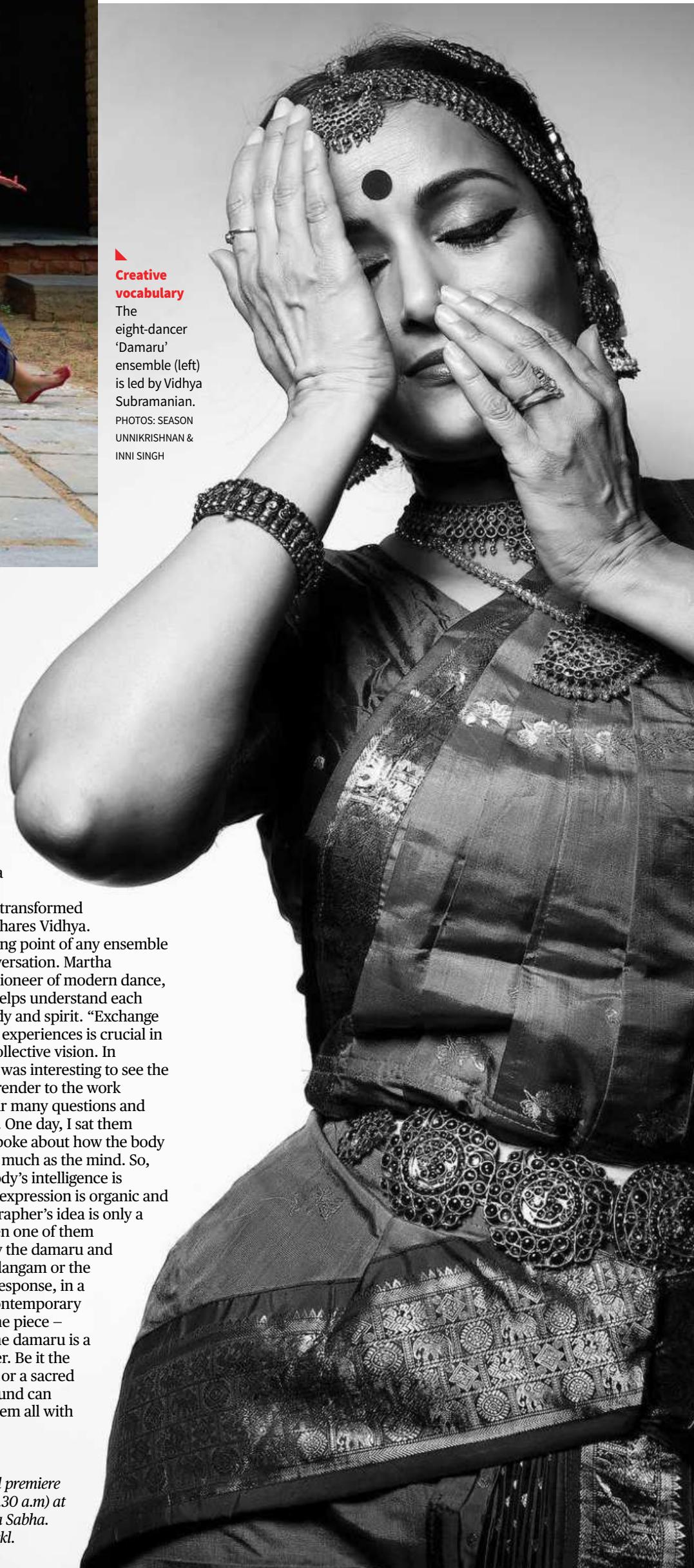
Vidhya's aim behind establishing Sparsh Arts Foundation, under whose aegis 'Damaru' is being presented, was to create a pedagogical space where diverse influences and ideas inhabit. "Right from 1991, when I started the Lasya Dance Company in California, I wanted to play the role of a catalyst – shaping the artistic philosophies of young mentees. Amidst distractions and pressures of modern life, you have to help them hold on to the art and make them realise its beauty and power."

Vidhya, who has choreographed 12 works before 'Damaru', feels the approach to choreography has "transformed tremendously", from relying on predetermined narrative and emotional content to being informed by one's study, research and observation. "You piece the work together like building blocks. But a production never feels fully constructed, it is always a work in progress. After every show, you are tempted to revisit and make some changes."

Apart from Vidhya, who leads the ensemble, 'Damaru' features Anahita Chalihha, Anisha Parameswaran, Archana Shajukumar, Manasa Vijaychander, Pranathi Ramadorai, Rutuja Kumar Marne and Subashree S, who were selected after an audition. "It's interesting to push yourself into doing something outside of what is comfortable or habitual. That's what it is like working with young artistes from other schools. With your students, you know what to expect, but with the 'Damaru' team, it felt good to be surprised at different points of time. The bond that began with a feeling of uncertainty transformed into trust," shares Vidhya.

The starting point of any ensemble work is conversation. Martha Graham, a pioneer of modern dance, believed it helps understand each dancer's body and spirit. "Exchange of ideas and experiences is crucial in building a collective vision. In 'Damaru', it was interesting to see the dancers surrender to the work through their many questions and my answers. One day, I sat them down and spoke about how the body can think as much as the mind. So, when the body's intelligence is trusted, the expression is organic and the choreographer's idea is only a subtext. Then one of them asked: 'Why the damaru and not the mridangam or the tabla?' My response, in a way, set a contemporary context to the piece – 'because, the damaru is a social leveller. Be it the street, stage or a sacred space, its sound can permeate them all with ease.'

'Damaru' will premiere on July 13 (10.30 a.m.) at Narada Gana Sabha. Tickets at Tikki.

**CULTURE BRIEFS****Platform for young dancers**

The Music Academy inaugurates its Mid-Year Dance Festival on July 17, at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. The three-day event will feature Bharatanatyam recitals by up-and-coming artistes. This year's line-up begins with performances by Sai Brindha Ramachandran (6 p.m.) and K. Aswathi (7.30 p.m.). Other artistes to perform are: July 18: 6 p.m.: Shruthipriya Vignesh and 7.30 p.m.: Thomas Vo Van Tao (Mohiniyattam). July 19, 6 p.m.: Vaishnavi Vitthal Dhore and 7.30 p.m.: Mohanapriyan Thavarajah. The festival is organised under the endowment instituted by the family of late M.N. Subramanian.

**For an encore**

Villains, a 90-minute immersive theatrical experience, returns for a second performance in Chennai. The play is presented by tale'O'meter, a creative platform founded by Santosh Kumar and Sathish Krishnamurthy. *Villains* will be staged on July 13, 6 p.m. at The Medai, Alwarpet. *Villains* is a re-imagination of storytelling that blends theatre, poetry, *paechu* (Tamil poetic performance) and active audience interaction. Tickets on BookMyShow and Allevents.in

Ten stories on stage

Perch presents an English play *Under The Mangisteen Tree* on July 12 and 13, 7.30 p.m. at Adishakti, Edayanchavadi Road, Auroville. The play is an adventurous mix of 10 stories written by Malayalam writer Vaikom Muhammad Basheer. A common thread in this vibrant mix is the character of Basheer himself, who plays narrator, participant and witness in turn.

Directed by Rajiv Krishnan, the play has music by Anushka Meenakshi and Sachin Gurjale. Donor passes are available at Adishakti office.

Music festival

The Music Academy and Radel will jointly present the eighth mid-year concerts from July 14 to 16, at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. The programme, under the endowment instituted by M/s Radel Electronics, is dedicated to the memory of Sugandha Raman. The series begins with S. Swaminathan's vocal concert on July 14 at 5.30 p.m. He will be accompanied by G. Kailasapathy on the violin, Prahalaad Vijay Varahaswami on the mridangam. This will be followed by Aditya Madhavan's vocal concert (7.15 p.m.) with Bhargav Tumkur on the violin and Avinash Anand on the mridangam. Concerts to be held on other days are: July 15, 5.30 p.m.: Vocal recital by P. Akshaya with Chetana Sekar on violin and N. Anirudh Raj on the mridangam; and 7.15 p.m.: Hariprasad Subramanian (flute) accompanied by Aparna Thyagarajan (violin), Ajeeet Sridhar (mridangam) and Murali Varadharajan (kanjira).

July 16, 5.30 p.m.: V. Deepika and V. Nandhika (vocal), supported by Rangappriya Sankaranarayanan (violin), Vishvak Kumaran (mridangam) and R. Sai Bharath (kanjira); and 7.15 p.m.: Krishna Sai and Mukunda Sai will perform a duet with Paru M.K. Ananthlakshmi on the violin, Pazhani V. Balaji on the mridangam and Shamith S. Gowda on the ghatam at 7.15 p.m.



License to sing

The show titled '007 Ragas - Bond with Bhavam' was a part of Saketharaman's 'Carnatify' series

Aishwarya Raghunathan

Thirty minutes before the show, Narada Gana Sabha was abuzz with the sounds of *jalaras*, excited chatter and last-minute rehearsals. Children in vibrant silk outfits ran across the stage, while proud parents and grandparents settled into their seats. This wasn't yet another annual day celebration, it was a thematic presentation titled '007 Ragas - Bond with



Bhavam' by Kala Shiksha, an online music school, led by Carnatic vocalist Saketharaman.

Known for presenting innovative concepts aligning with the term 'Carnatify', transforming film music and themes into swara-laden, bhakti-rich compositions, Saketharaman's vision came alive with 200 students performing with passion and poise.

Each teacher, from *Kala Shiksha*, picked a theme, curating one or two pieces per group, well-executed and accompanied by Sarvesh Karthik on the mridangam, C.S. Chinmayi on the violin, Sunil Kumar on the kanjira, and Jeno Martin on the keys.

The show opened with

swaras of an instrumental piece in Pantuvarali from the film *Rajaparvai*, complete with tisra gathi korvais and ending with 'Om shivoham'. Since the event took place on Ashada Ekadasi, it celebrated Vittala through bhajans,

'Rangamma Majhi', Nama Deva keertana and a soulful rendering of Haridas Giri's 'Brindhavaname'. A palpable wave of devotion swept through the auditorium, as some audience members broke into spontaneous claps and even dance. Two little children hopped on to the stage in an impromptu bliss to the delight of all.

Adding a touch of whimsy, one segment transformed English nursery rhymes into bhakti-infused adaptations – 'Jack and Jill' became 'Gajamukha bhol', a bhajan, while 'There Was a Farmer' unfolded with swaras and a Shiva namavali.

A particularly thoughtful moment came when the students commemorated the 250th birth anniversary of Muthuswami Dikshitar. Smrithi, a teacher at Kala Shiksha, composed the Tamil nottuwarams in Dikshitar's style, one in Kiravani and another in Suddha Dhanyasi.

Next came the most-awaited segment of the

Thematic Saketharaman (below) directed 200 students, who performed with passion and poise.

PHOTO: B. VELAKANNI RAJ

evening, 'Bond with Bhavam'. Representing 007 as Saptaswaras, the team chose the first Melakarta, Kanakangi, a vivadi raga to render the iconic James Bond theme in swaras. From there, they proceeded to 'Varaha Roopam' from the film *Kantara*, reworded into a Shiva stuti, and followed it up with 'Mogam ennum theeyil' from the film *Sindhu Bhairavi*, again refashioned into a devotional ode. The audience cheered and demanded an encore.

In a moment of reverent recognition, the title Samuditha Bhajana Thilakam was conferred upon Briga Balu Bhagavathar for his contribution to the tradition of namasankeerthanam.

Prior to the curtain call, the audience was treated to 'Gopika mohanam', a Dikshitar kriti in Mohanam. The younger students of Kala Shiksha then brought the evening to a close with 'Vara leelagana lola' by Tyagaraja. Their enthusiasm drew affectionate smiles from the audience.

A collector's item

The Hindu's book on Mahaperiyava is now available in Tamil

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The life and teachings of Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi or Mahaperiyava continue to inspire people across generations.

The book, *Kanchi Mahaswami - Unmayin Avataram*, published by *The Hindu*, is one such. Now launched in Tamil, this two-volume biography of Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the 68th pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, offers an insightful look into the Acharya's remarkable life, tracing his journey from his early days to his profound spiritual learnings under various gurus.

The first volume traces his early Vijaya yatras, capturing how each town transformed under his presence. The second follows his pan-India pilgrimages and his return to Kanchipuram in 1985.

One of the highlights of the book is its exploration of Mahaperiyava's meetings and interactions with prominent political and religious leaders of the time.

These richly-layered details are brought to life through rare photographs of Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi and Sri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi and artist Ma.Se's evocative illustrations. The inclusion of images in the Tamil



edition of Sri Sathyachandrasekarendra Saraswathi, the 71st pontiff, bring a sense of immediacy and continuity to the Kanchi Peetam's illustrious guru parampara. The edition also talks in detail about the rituals involved in the initiation process of the new pontiff, supported by suitable images.

Information about Sri Kamakshi Amman temple's 1,200-year-old inscriptions, and even the presence of a once-adjacent Buddhist monastery at Kanchipuram are interesting additions.

With its special 25 per cent launch offer, this Tamil edition is equally appealing to readers, who wish to relive the saint's era, and to younger generations, eager to understand their roots.

To get a copy of the book log on to <https://publications.thehindugroup.com/bookstore/>

Groundbreaking steps

Tripunithura Vanitha Kathakali Sangham, the first all-women Kathakali troupe, celebrates 50 years

Shilpa Nair Anand

In a particularly muggy afternoon in June, six women, aged between 50 and 60, embark on a trip down memory lane. The ambience in the cool, dimly-lit dining room of Deepthi Palace in Tripunithura livens up with laughter of the women, all members of Tripunithura Vanitha Kathakali Sangham. Formed in 1975, this year marks the 50th anniversary of Kerala's first all-women Kathakali troupe.

The first member and senior most of the troupe, Radhika Varma, recalls how her father KTR Varma (a Kathakali aficionado), mooted the idea that was supported by Radhika's guru – Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair. Although women were performing Kathakali then, it was not mainstream yet.

"Our families were Kathakali aficionados and we performed with their encouragement. But the credit goes to Krishnan ashan for his support that meant a lot to a young girl like me," says Radhika, who was in her early teens at the time.

The condition set was that it



Milestones Tripunithura Vanitha Kathakali sangham performing 'Dakshayagam Kathakali' at Layam Koothambalam in 2017. PHOTO: THULASI KAKKAT

be a all woman-run show, except for make-up and costume, which was handled by men. The manager of the troupe then was Sathi Varma. Her daughter, Suma Varma, continues to be an active member of the troupe.

Although the group comprised of many women from Tripunithura, it also had members from North Paravur, Irinjalakuda, Poonjar and Pattambi. Jayasree Raveendran, who travelled from Pattambi to Ernakulam for the performances says, "It was not easy. But I did it,

as I wanted to be a part of this and loved what we were doing. We were assigned roles based on our potential. Sathi ammai had a say in it."

After the troupe's first performance of *Kalyanasaugandhikam* at Tripunithura, in 1975, by Radhika, Sreemathi Antarjanam, Radhika Ajayan, Shailaja Varma, Vrinda Varma and Meera Narayanan, there was no looking back. They were invited across the country and have had more than 2,000 shows. The troupe was awarded

the Nari Shakti Puraskar in 2017.

Not all members, who joined the troupe initially, are a part of it now. The troupe started with 20-odd members, and today has more than twice that number, many of them youngsters.

In 2022, Kerala Kalamandalam accepted the first batch of women pupils, while RLV College of Music and Fine Arts, for the first time admitted women students (for Kathakali) in 2017. Kerala Kalamandalam did invite Tripunithura Vanitha Kathakali Sangham to perform in the late 1990s. Women, had been learning Kathakali for decades outside the hallowed walls of these organisations. In the 1970s, when the troupe started performing, there were a handful of women practitioners such as Chavara Parukutty Amma and Kottarakkara Ganga.

Stories about the experiences of the members are fascinating. They talk about manodharma while portraying characters and differences between the styles of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair and Kalamandalam Gopi.

Renjini Suresh, who joined the troupe in 1989, also performs independently. Daughter of Kathakali artiste, Kalamandalam Karunakaran, she runs a Kathakali school too. Renjini mentions the change in attitude towards women artistes, "I disagree that Kathakali is not for women. There is no role that cannot be essayed by women."

What the Sangham did for these women was not limited to the stage, it shaped their lives by exposing them to new places and experiences, and giving them financial independence to some extent.



From Namami Narayanan.. Photo: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Accent on bhakti

Namami Narayanan retells stories of Krishna through Mohiniyattam

Manasa Vijaylakshme C

In a performance that shimmered with a quiet elegance and spiritual resonance, *Namami Narayanan*, a Mohiniyattam dance production, choreographed by guru Shruthi Shoby, was presented at Mylapore Fine Arts Club, as part of the Abbas Cultural Dance Drama Festival. Performed by Shruthi and her disciples from Srishti School of Classical Dance, the thematic production unfolded five timeless stories, themed on Krishna.

The strength of this production lay, not in grandeur or opulence, but in its simplicity. The choreography used minimal props, allowing the audience to enjoy fluid movement vocabulary and nuanced abhinaya that characterise this dance form. The compositions in Malayalam, heightened the appeal.

The evening opened with the tale of Dhruva, the boy who, abandoned by his father (King Uttanapada) and insulted by his stepmother (Suruchi), undertakes a penance to win the grace of Narayana.

The portrayal of childlike longing, rejection and divine blessing was moving, with the dancer's restrained expressions evoking Dhruva's unwavering determination.

This was followed by the poignant story of Ajamil, a fallen Brahmin, who, despite his moral decline, attains salvation through the inadvertent utterance of the lord's name. The redemptive power of faith and surrender, highlighted during the performance, was a recurring theme throughout the evening.

The narrative deepened with the story of Pingala, a courtesan who renounces worldly pleasures to pursue a moment of spiritual awakening. This segment was particularly impactful, as the lead dancer captured Pingala's luxurious life as a courtesan and the serenity that prevailed after her transformation.

A shift in tone came with the fourth story, that of Santana Gopalan. The finale – Kalinga Narthana – where Krishna dances upon the serpent Kalinga's hood. This dance was well-executed, as the dancer's footwork and expressive control brought alive the symbolic subjugation of the ego.

Choreography, concept and nattuvangam were by Shruthi, music by Thrissur Krishnakumar, lyrics by Kalamandalam Ganeshan, background score and rhythm by Nagarajan, vocals by Sudhe Warrier, violin by Anand Lal and edakka by Thrissur Krishnakumar.



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It's not often that you get to talk to the director of a Sanskrit feature film. And when you do, you realise how difficult it is to make a film in the language, particularly for a contemporary audience.

Padmagandhi, directed by popular Kannada actor-director and theatre personality, K. Suchendra Prasad and produced by Sanskrit scholar S.R. Leela is about a flower – lotus. The story is told through the eyes and perception of a young girl studying at a gurukula and touches upon mythology, scriptures and warfare. "Though the theme may come across as philosophically intense, it is not. It is a children's film that will appeal to adults too," says Suchendra. "

Padmagandhi opened Suchendra's eyes to the flower's strong presence in our culture. "It is intriguing that the lotus grows in muddy waters, yet is considered pious. The flower finds mention in our Vedas, specifically *Sri Suktam*, literature, performing arts and temple architecture. It is our national flower and the highest

Lights, Camera, Sanskrit

The film *Padmagandhi* tells the story of lotus and its significance in Indian art and culture

civilian awards are also named after it. Then we have the Swarna Kamal award for actors. Besides, there are over 36,000 synonyms/references for the lotus in the ancient book, *Amarakosha*. Subjects such as botany consider the lotus important due to its medicinal value. These are the aspects that *Padmagandhi* weaves into its story," shares the director, who believes, "we are losing out on our ancient studies of science and scriptures, which is what we have talked about through the medium of cinema."

Knowledge that is available in our

scriptures is vast. "We have been able to incorporate just the essence of the Vedas and Puranas in the film," says Leela, who's earlier film, *Ekachakram*, also directed by Suchendra, was their first Sanskrit feature film that had a successful stint at festival circuits.

Promoting the language

Leela has invested all her life's savings to promote Sanskrit language and what better way to do this than through a film. "I approached Suchendra as he is one of those rare actors, who is also a Sanskrit scholar.



she is named so, that triggers her journey and the story of *Padmagandhi*. Initially, I wanted to make it as a documentary but Suchendra felt that the story could be built into a feature film."

There is a need for films such as *Padmagandhi*, believes Suchendra, as "we ape the West blindly in all that we do and are losing out on our culture. We had ancient universities, where people from across the world came to study. None of them exist now. Yet, our knowledge and heritage survived as ours is 'maukhikha parampara' (oral tradition)."

Suchendra plans to screen *Padmagandhi* first at the Indian Panorama International Film Festival. "This film has been in the making for over six years. Four years went into discussions and conducting studies with Sanskrit scholars and researchers. We want to make sure it reaches as many people as possible."

The gurukula sequences in *Padmagandhi* were filmed at Shubham Karoti Maitreyi Gurukula in Bengaluru. "It is a gurukula for girls and aims to promote Indian culture along with computer studies and karate," says Suchendra adding that there are several gurukulas across Karnataka. He gives complete credit to Leela. "It is her passion for Sanskrit and research on the lotus for over a decade that have been made into a film."

Music composition

The other USP of the film is its music, which is composed by Sanskrit scholar Deepak Paramashivan. All actors cast in the film are Sanskrit students, who speak the language fluently. The film, in Sanskrit and Kannada, will be para-dubbed in Hindi. It is edited by N. Nagesh Narayanappa and will be released under the banner of Suchendra's production house, Voicing Silence.



Shailaja Khanna

Defying norms

How Jyoti Hegde took to the rudra veena, once performed only by men

Jyoti Hegde sat on the stage at a recent event organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi to celebrate World Music and International Yoga Day in Delhi, what caught the eye was the beautifully crafted instrument in her hands. It looked like the Saraswati veena. But it was the rudra veena, and Jyoti Hegde is the only performing woman rudra veena artiste. She was an apt choice for the event because the rudra veena is the only string instrument that also requires the artiste to practise breath control. Underlining the need to do yoga, Jyoti said since the instrument is based on dhrupad, which lays importance on breath control, it is applicable to the rudra veena too. "It impacts the way the instrument is played and sound is produced."

The 'khandar vani' was the original style of 'beenkars' or rudra veena exponents. This was the style practised by Tansen's beenkar son-in-law, Raja Misri Chand, known as Nababat Khan in the Mughal court of Akbar. Later, Ustad Asad Ali Khan, who hailed from a family dedicated to the instrument, rose to be one of the finest rudra veena artistes. Jyoti is his foremost disciple.

During a post-performance conversation, Jyoti revealed she did not hail from a family of musicians. When she began



learning, she could not identify a dhrupad from a khayal, and used to play bandish on the veena. Though the ustad dissuaded her from pursuing the rudra veena, Jyoti was insistent. "When I heard the sound of the instrument, I found my calling. The note resonated deep within me and I knew I had to learn it."

Marriage and motherhood did not deter Jyoti from expanding her musical horizons. More so, since she was in Dharwad, home

Relentless pursuit Jyoti Hegde; (below) her guru Ustad Asad Ali Khan.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND S. THANTHONI

to many music stalwarts. She attended lec-dems by Pt. Indudhar Nirody of the Agra gharana, who helped hone her skills and made her understand why the rudra veena lent itself only to dhrupad. She was 35 then, and decided to forge ahead in her musical journey.

Jyoti approached Ustad Asad Ali Khan. He refused to teach her since he believed that the rudra veena was not meant to be played by women. She persisted for a year, travelling across the country to meet him at every concert of his. He finally agreed, but said she had to learn breath control, and enunciate the sound of 'aum' from the 'nabhi' (navel). "Only then will you be able to handle the instrument" he had said," shares Jyoti, who took six months to achieve this. Then came the next challenge – sitting in vajrasana to play the instrument. Jyoti struggled. Finally, pakhawaj maestro Pt. Dal Chand Sharma, a friend of the ustad, intervened and the ustad agreed to teach her.

Jyoti shares how she would travel by train for two days to reach Bombay to meet her guru. "It was not at all easy. But learning from him was a memorable experience. Meals were forgotten during the class and later, he would ensure a vegetarian meal was served to me. Once, he missed his flight as he was so engrossed in teaching. When I reminded him of the time, he chided me saying, 'focus on the music'."

The learning lasted six years, till the demise of Ustad Asad Ali Khan in 2011. Jyoti is indebted to him for not just teaching her to play the instrument but also to understand its heritage. Today, she is the torchbearer of the style that the ustad represented. Jyoti now teaches young enthusiasts to pass on the tradition. Though she lives in a remote village in Sirsi district of Karnataka, she still manages to teach students from across the globe. Some of them visit her for one-on-one training, which also includes working on the farm. "Connecting with Nature can significantly enhance the learning and offer endless inspiration," says Jyoti.

Sufiscore and Namyoho Studios present 'RaagRaanis', an album by an all-woman music ensemble. It features

Grammy-nominated vocalist Varjashree Venugopal, along with Bollywood singers Pratibha Singh Baghel, Kalpana Gandharv, Prajakta Shukre and Himani Kapoor. There are five songs in the album that blend melodies based on ragas, composed in the traditional bandish style, with contemporary sounds.

Pratibha "knew Himani and Prajakta for over a decade and collaborating with them for this album has been an absolute delight. This was also possible because of Sufiscore, which provided us with a platform that gave us the liberty to express music with our own interpretations." According to Kalpana, each song holds a different emotion and shade of the feminine spirit. "The song, 'Saayan na aaye', touched my soul the moment I heard it. It is set in one of my favourite ragas – Bhairavi – and speaks of longing, love, and everything in between."

The album opens with 'Jiya Naahi

'Laage', written by Himani, composed by Prakta and rendered by Pratibha. Prajakta shines as a singer and composer with 'Bairi Chhaliya', while 'Tere Bina Saawan' highlights the voice of Himani.

The vocals were recorded at Laya Digi Studios, Bengaluru and the project is supported by Namyoho Studios.

The singers are accompanied by Varad Kathapurkar on the flute, Arshad Khan on the esraj, I.D. Rao on the saxophone and guitarists Swapnomoy Chowdhury and Madhavan. 'RaagRaanis' has now been officially released.



The song, 'Saayan Na Aaye', touched my soul the moment I heard it. It is set in one of my favourite ragas – Bhairavi – and speaks of longing, love, and everything in between.

KALPANA GANDHARV



Band of women
(From left to right)
Varjashree Venugopal, Pratibha Singh Baghel, Prajakta Shukre, Himani Kapoor and Kalpana Gandharv. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Narendra Kusmura

In the evening of July 3, Mumbai's jazz fans waited patiently to see two renowned American musicians at Tata Theatre. Around 7.40 p.m., after compere Brian Tellis had welcomed the audience, the duo walked in to a rousing applause. Trumpeter Randy Brecker, in a black-and-red shirt and his trademark cap, and drummer Peter Erskine, in black-shirt and blazer, were a picture of elegant, avuncular grace.

Three other musicians – saxophonist Yaakov Mayman, pianist Otmaro Ruiz and bassist Richie Goods – joined them. Though the crowd knew little about them before the show, they attracted ample applause over the next 90 minutes and made the NCPA (National Centre for the Performing Arts) 'Legends' show a success.

Randy, who was part of the famed Brecker Brothers group (featuring his brother Michael Brecker, a renowned saxophonist), was visiting India for the second time. In 1966, he came with the Indiana University Jazz Ensemble as part of the U.S. State Department initiative that covered the Middle East and some regions of Asia.

"I remember the city as Bombay. It was very different from what it is today. We met many Indian musicians, and discovered the commonality between Indian music and jazz in terms of their improvisation," he said after the show.

Apart from Bombay, the tour had taken the group to Madras, Bangalore and Calcutta. Interestingly, in his debut solo album Score, released in 1968, Randy wrote a piece called 'Bangalore', inspired by the city's lush greenery. But the composition was not part of the set-list of his current India tour.

In Mumbai, the group played 'The Marble Sea' from the same album, with Randy switching to



Rhythm 'n' blues
Drummer Peter Erskine and trumpeter Randy Brecker were joined by saxophonist Yaakov Mayman, pianist Otmaro Ruiz and bassist Richie Goods at the 'Legends' concert.
PHOTOS COURTESY: NCPA & GETTY IMAGES

Sandoval and Dave Douglas, besides younger acts such as Benny Benack III and multi-genre artiste Ibrahim Maalouf – to have played in India.

Before focusing on jazz, Randy was part of the jazz-rock group, Blood Sweat & Tears, and played in their album *Child Is Father To The Man*. Later, he joined the Horace Silver Quintet, and then, Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. The Brecker Brothers with Michael, was formed in 1975 and was a huge success till they disbanded seven years later. He then married Brazilian jazz pianist, Eliane Elias, and they played together till they parted ways. The Brecker Brothers reunited in 1992 and won two Grammys for their 1994 album *Out Of The Loop*.

Besides jazz, Randy has played on albums by many rock and pop acts including Eric Clapton, Dire Straits, Bruce Springsteen, Elton John, Chaka Khan and Aretha Franklin. Like Randy, 71-year-old Peter went to the Indiana University, albeit, a few years later. Peter said he was always a fan of Randy. "He is my hero and I naturally followed him," he added.

Peter began his career with pianist Stan Kenton's Orchestra in 1972. In 1978, he joined the jazz fusion band, Weather Report, and later the group Steps Ahead with Michael Brecker and vibraphonist Mike Manieri. He too has played on numerous rock and pop albums.

The show was a worthy follow-up to last year's NCPA Legends concert, which featured the legendary trio – pianist Cyrus Chestnut, bassist Buster Williams and drummer Lenny White.

Jazz, as you like it

Trumpeter Randy Brecker and drummer Peter Erskine served a treat with a perfect playlist

flugelhorn. According to the musician, it was inspired by the Sea of Marmara near Turkey, which they visited on the same tour. The piece also featured solos by Yaakov and Otmaro.

With the exception of the

standard ballad, 'I can't get started', where Randy charmed with his melody, all tunes were originals by the members. The evening began with two compositions by Peter. While 'Cats & Kittens' was steeped in the New Orleans tradition, 'Twelve' had innovative rhythmic patterns and a medium-swing tempo. Even the uptempo encore, 'Leaving LA' from the 2024 film *Sacramento*, was composed by him. One of the highlights was the gentle flourish shown by Peter, a far cry from the more energetic drumming one hears at many concerts.

The Richie Goods composition 'Treasure mountain' had a funk flavour, as the melodic bassline was matched by solos by Randy and Otmaro.

Yaakov dedicated the piece 'Song For Horace' to the great pianist Horace Silver, using the electronic wind instrument (EWI) on it. The coordination between the musicians was exceptional, and this was jazz at its best, without gimmicks or one-upmanship.

Though 79-year-old

Randy's physical movements have slowed down, his playing has not been affected by age. He has that rich tone, his ability to improvise is spontaneous and he switches between the trumpet and flugelhorn effortlessly. It was awkward to see him strain while picking up a bottle of water from the floor. Ideally, it should have been placed on a stool. The other minus, on the side of the organiser was, not giving him a hand mic either, and the existing microphone forced him to bend uncomfortably.

Randy is part of an illustrious line-up of jazz trumpeters – Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Clark Terry, Don Ellis, Woody Shaw, Freddie Hubbard, Don Cherry, Arturo



The mridangam turns muse

Siddharth Bhayani gives the classical instrument an electronic makeover in his new track



Neha Kirpal

The North Axis Project has unveiled its latest track, 'Mridanga'. It is a percussion-driven, bass-infused composition that seamlessly blends South India's rich musical heritage with electronic sounds.

"The idea behind the track is to explore the sound of the mridangam, and reimagine it within the modern musical framework," says Siddharth Bhayani, who spearheads the band. The inspiration came during a visit to a South Indian temple, where he was left "mesmerised by the intricate mridangam rhythm patterns, played during a ritual," recalls

Siddharth. Traditionally, the mridangam is central to Carnatic music, is deeply expressive. "We treated the mridangam just as an instrument, but as a language, translating its vocabulary into new rhythmic structures that could live on a dance-floor or in a cinematic setting. We studied its phrasing, tonal range and rhythmic grammar. Then we broke it down into isolated strokes, unconventional time signatures, ghost notes – and rebuilt it using electronic production tools like granular synthesis, pitch modulation and spatial FX," elaborates Siddharth.

Siddharth's musical influences are rooted in

Acoustic explorations Siddharth Bhayani's work is a dialogue between tradition and innovation.

PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

brings together musicians, street performers and electronic elements. He is also working on a new track, inspired by the infectious energy of Nashik dhol tasha. "There is a raw power in its rhythm. I am working on weaving the dhol's sound into electronic textures, and in the process will take the energy of the streets to the dance floors," he adds.

These works follow the trajectory of past North Axis releases such as 'Dhin Na'. They also build on conceptually rich tracks such as 'Haveli', 'Minar' and 'Aangan', whose sounds were inspired by architecture. "These works explore the acoustic soul of Indian spaces, translating the resonance of courtyards, domes and facades into rhythm and atmosphere," shares Siddharth, whose background in architecture helps him "approach sound much like space".

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CALENDAR

Five-day festival

Nama Sankeertana Samrakshana Trust has organised the namasankirtana mela and celebrates the 25th year Sita Kalyana mahotsavam from July 16 to 20 at Srivari Sesha Mahal, Kallikuppam, Ambattur. Beginning with special puja, rendition of Thodayamangalam, guru keertanai and Ashtapadi will form part of the five-day festival. Sita Kalyanam will be performed on July 20 at 9 a.m. and Anjaneya utsavam at 6 p.m.



Dance recital

Bharatha Natyalaya presents the Bharatanatyam performance of Abhi Venkatesh A, disciple of Latha Ravi, today, 5.30 p.m. at Bharat Kalachar, YGP Auditorium, T. Nagar.

Vocal solo

Hamsadhwani's 'Young talent concert series' will feature E.R. Anirudh's vocal solo tomorrow at 6.15 p.m. He will be accompanied by Indalur Shyam Raghav (violin) and Palani Balaji (mridangam). Venue: Youth Hostel, Adyar.

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