

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Kritis on Kanchipuram

Prithvi Harish presented a concert featuring songs on the temple town **p2**

Tracing the lives of two stalwarts

An event to mark the birth centenary of Pt C.R. Vyas and Pt. Ram Marathe **p3**



THE QUEEN OF BOSSA NOVA

Eliane Elias’ concert captured the spirit of Samba, which defines Brazilian culture **p4**

Hoary past (Clockwise from below) Entrance to the palace; some of the colourful murals that adorn its walls; and Valari. PHOTOS: L. BALACHANDER



B. Kolappan

What captivates visitors at the Ramalinga Vilasam, the palace of Sethupathys, who ruled Ramanathapuram, are the murals depicting scenes from the Ramayana, Bhagavatam, Sthalapuranams of temples, and events connected with the life of Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathy.

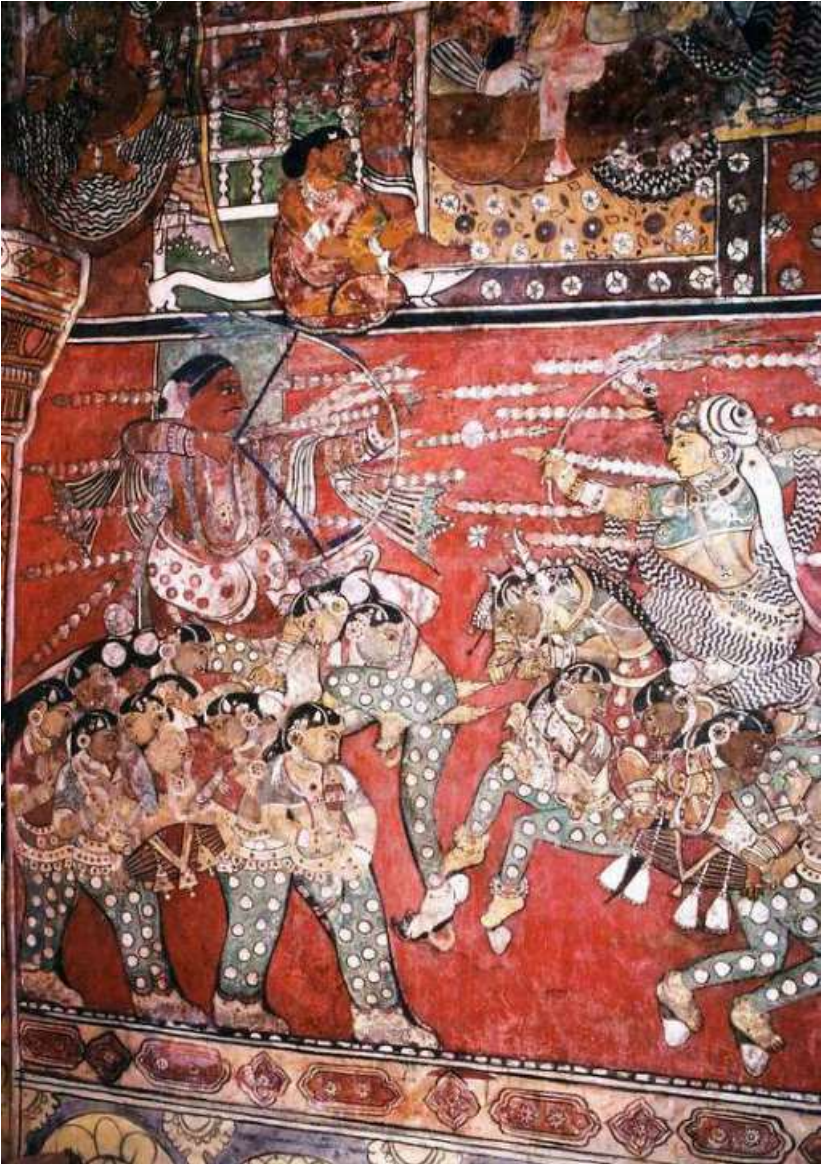
The 18th-century murals, however, have lost their sheen. The passage of time and neglect have taken a toll. Though the walls are in good condition the paintings are in rack and ruin. They might disappear if efforts are not taken to preserve them.

According to a senior archaeologist, “Since dust has gathered on the surface they need to be cleaned before preservation work starts. Also, there is no need to redraw them as it will destroy the original paintings.” The palace today functions as a museum and is maintained by the Department of Archaeology.

According to S.M. Kamal, the author of *Sethupathy Mannar Varalaru*, the paintings were done during the reign of Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathy, who assumed the throne in 1713. Ramalinga Vilasam actually resembles a temple with structures such as sanctum sanctorum, artha mandapam and maha mandapam.

Art for awareness

“The king wanted the paintings to create a social and political awakening among the people of the



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S.M. KAMAL



Sethupathys. Paintings portraying the entire Ramayana adorn the walls.

An inscribed panel shows Madura Nayak Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha Nayak performing Ratna Pattabisheka to Sethupathy. Kamal thinks that the paintings could have been drawn during the period of Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathy. The style, he feels, belongs to the painters of Andhra Pradesh since Madurai was under the rule of the Nayaks.

Valari and other weapons

The museum has on display Valari, a boomerang type of weapon, used by the Sethupathys and Marudu Brothers, the rulers of Sivaganga. It became such a nightmare for the British army, that the East India Company banned it after defeating Marudu Brothers, and offered monetary rewards to anyone who handed over the weapon. Colonel Welsh, a friend-turned-foe of the Marudu Brothers, was full of praise for the weapon. He learnt how to handle it from Chinna Marudu, the younger brother.

“It was he who first taught me to throw the spear and hurl the collyery stick, a weapon scarcely known elsewhere, but in a skilful hand, [it is] capable of being thrown to a certainty to any distance within one hundred yards,” wrote Welsh in his reminiscences.

Maravar Seemai as Ramanathapuram is known has a special place in the Tamil history. Ramalinga Vilasam stands as a testimony to the valiant Sethupathys who ruled the area. The paintings and the history behind them will disappear forever, if steps are not taken to preserve them.

FADING heritage

The exquisite and historically significant murals at Ramalinga Vilasam palace in Ramanathapuram are in desperate need of restoration

Maravar Seemai,” writes Kamal.

The murals cover every inch of the palace. “They can be easily compared to the Ajantha paintings,” says Kamal.

The palace in the middle of the fort was built during the reign of Ragunatha Kizhavan Sethupathy (1678-1710), and was constructed with the help of trader and philanthropist Seethakathi of Keezhakarai.

Noted Archaeologist R.

Nagaswamy, who prepared an archaeological guide for the composite Ramanathapuram district, with writer N.S. Ramaswami, had mentioned that Ramalinga Vilasam is the only palace having extensive wall paintings of secular nature comparable to Pahari and other schools in northern India.

The panels are labelled both in Tamil and Telugu. Muthu Vijaya Ragunatha Sethupathy is portrayed repeatedly in various poses with his

name inscribed in many places.

“The arched ceilings too portray Sethupathy in various dresses and poses. He is shown receiving the royal sceptre from goddess Raja Rajeswari in one panel. In another, he is seen listening to Rama Katha. In yet another, he is dressed like Manmatha and his wife as Rati,” according to the guide commissioned by S. Narayanan, former collector of Ramanathapuram.

“Some panels depict the battle between the Sethupathys and the Marathas of Thanjavur, waged north of Aranthangi. Even the names of the cannon are mentioned in the guide.

One of the panels show Sethupathy receiving three Europeans and welcoming a Jesuit missionary.

This mural assumes significance since the missionaries had a tough time in Ramanathapuram, and John D Britto, a Jesuit priest, was exiled from Ramanathapuram after he converted Palayakar of Seruvathi. “The return of Britto to Ramanathapuram in 1692 infuriated Kizhavan Sethupathy, who ordered his execution, overruling the objection of the Palayakar of Seruvathi,” writes Kamal.

The Ramayana on the walls

Nagaswamy has mentioned that the rear hall was held sacred by the



Luminous Musicians perform during a Candlelight Concert at the Architect’s House in Kyiv in 2022. GETTY IMAGES

In a new light

During its debut India tour, Candlelight Concerts offers a blend of classics and current favourites

Chitra Swaminathan

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On a warm humid evening after bracing Mumbai’s rush-hour traffic snarls, you finally enter the Grand Hyatt in Bandra Kurla Complex, where thousands of illuminated candles brighten your mood. The setting at the venue for the inaugural India show of the globally popular Candlelight Concert series is magical.

Culture curators have been trying hard to come up with out-of-the-box presentation ideas to let audiences experience the energy of live music in intimate and unique spaces. The larger purpose is to make music, particularly classical, less intimidating. So it was at the Candlelight Concert.

In a darkened room, in the soft glow of the candles, three accomplished musicians – saxophonist Shirish Malhotra, guitarist Nicholas Vaz and drummer Bihu Mukherjee – seem to subtly send out the message that gigs without vocals can be

enjoyable too. After all, instruments rarely get the props they deserve. Whatever the genre, they are never accorded the same status that voice is given.

When Shirish picks up the flute to play a few songs at the show titled ‘Best Movie Soundtracks’, Bihu points out his felicity with different instruments. Both are associated with music director Pritam. They wonderfully cater to the diverse audience, sitting all around them, with a blend of classics and current favourites, comforting tunes and pulsating tracks. So there are works of composers A.R. Rahman, Vishal-Shekhar, Amit Trivedi and Anirudh Ravichander.

But what struck the most in the show is the dominance of the good-old sax. Remember Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Stand Getz and our very own Kadri Gopalnath. An integral part of the soundscape of the 1970s and 1980s, the instrument with its vast tonal range has fallen out of favour in both the West and the East.

Launched in 2019 by Fever, an entertainment platform,

Candlelight Concerts have been held in more than 150 cities worldwide and in stunning locations, including the Atomium (Brussels), Eiffel Tower (Paris), S. E. A. Aquarium (Singapore), Palau de la Música Catalana (Barcelona) and Burj Al Arab Jumeirah (Dubai).

“Though conceived as a classical music series featuring works of Vivaldi, Mozart, and Chopin, we have been constantly adding to our themes and genres to reach out to more people. We have concerts dedicated to the Beatles, ABBA, Coldplay, Frank Sinatra and Aretha Franklin. We also have performances celebrating new-age sensations such as Adele, Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran and Beyonce,” says Sebastien Garcia, regional manager, Live Experience at Fever.

Deepa Bajaj, country manager, Live Your City, which brings these concerts to India, says they have exciting plans for audiences here. “Imagine listening to ghazals and classical bandish surrounded by candles. We hope to shine light on our traditional arts too,” she says.

Heritage tour (From right) Sri Varadaraja Swamy temple with the tank in the foreground; Ekambareswarar Temple and Sri Kanchi Kamakshi amman temple in Kanchipuram. (Below) Prithvi Harish. PHOTOS: THE HINDU AND M. SRINATH



H. Ramakrishnan

The name Kanchipuram evokes feelings of bhakti in the minds of devotees. Kalidasa must have been overwhelmed by the architectural beauty of the gigantic gopurams of the city, and its spiritual richness. He said, ‘Nagareshu Kanchi’ (meaning the first among cities) A Shakti peetam, Kanchipuram is considered one of the seven sacred places of India; one of the ancient cities of the South, which was the capital of the early Cholas and Pallavas. It is also known for its silk saris and weaving industry. The city is an important centre for both Saivites and Vaishnavites, as it has temples dedicated to Ekambareswarar and Varadaraja. Kanchi Kamakoti peetam is a prime spiritual centre. The Tamil Sangam work *Perumpanaattruppadai* has a reference to the city. The text *Aganaanooru* describes it as the crown jewel of Thondaimandalam. Kanchipuram is also synonymous with goddess Kamakshi. Established by Adi Shankara, the temple dates back to the 6th century. The presence of a Divyadesam within its precincts adds to the city’s distinctiveness. Of the five sacred places associated with the five elements of Nature, Kanchipuram is said to represent the Prithvi Kshetram (earth).

Focus on Kamakshi
For Naada Inbam’s ‘Kshetra Sankirtana Vaidhavam’ series, Prithvi Harish and his team offered a concert on the temples of Kanchipuram, with an emphasis on the dedicated to Kamakshi. He

Destination Kanchipuram

Prithvi Harish highlighted the legend behind the temple town through his wide repertoire of songs



opened his recital with ‘Kamakshi’, the evergreen Bhairavi swarajathi by Syama Sastri. The masterpiece leaves a profound impact on the minds of the listeners each time it is rendered. Prithvi, who was one of the youngest disciples of the revered guru P.S. Narayanaswamy, now trains under Abhishek Raghuram. After the Swarajathi, Prithvi rendered the only composition by Tyagaraja on Kamakshi, ‘Vinayakuni velanu’ in Madhyamavati. Niraval and swaraprastharas were at the usual ‘Anaatha rakshaki’. After a detailed alapana in Vasantha, he rendered the Tamil composition by Tiruvurur Ramasami Pillai ‘Sri kamakshi

katakshi’ with a charming chittaswara and swara sahitya. Another kriti on Kamakshi that he offered was Dikshitar’s ‘Kanchadalyadaakshi’ in Kamalamanoohari. Prithvi took up Shanmukhapriya (Chamaram in Dikshitar’s parlance) as the main raga of the evening. He presented the raga in all its glory, evoking the bhakti rasa. The chosen kriti was Dikshitar’s ‘Ekamresa nayakeem’, also on Kamakshi. The composition is in the second Vibhakti. The composer has liberally used several names of the deity



Prithvi chose Thirunavukkarasar’s Thevaram verse on Ekamranathar ‘Adutthaanai’ in Yadukulakamboji (tisra jathi Triputa tala).

Hailed by the Azhwars
The Varadaraja Perumal temple in Kanchipuram is a Divyadesam and the Azhwars have rendered Pasurams in its praise. The place where this temple is located in the city is called Vishnu Kanchi and the shrine is known by other names such as Hasthagiri and Aththiyuran. Prithvi chose a rare kriti ‘Kannaara kandena’ Atana set to Misra Chapu) on Varadaraja by Purandaradasa. Congenitally speech and hearing impaired, Muka, son of Ariyavati, it is said began to speak with the grace of Kamakshi. He sang 500 shlokas known as Muka Panchasati in her praise. He became the 20th Acharya to ascend the Kamakoti Peetam, as Muka Sankarendra Saraswati. Prithvi rendered a few verses from this well-known work in a Ragamalika (Adi tala). Rukmini Ramani’s ‘Kamakoti arul irundhal’ in Kapi, in praise of Adi Shankara, was also rendered by Prithvi. He concluded his concert with ‘Maitreem bhajatha’, sung by M.S. Subbulakshmi’s at her U.N. concert. Both the accompanists of the evening, M. Vijay (violin) and Kaushik Sridhar (mridangam) enriched the concert with their immense contributions. Vijay etched the versatile ragas such as Shanmukhapriya and Vasantha, bringing out their melody. Kaushik’s thani after the Shanmukapriya kriti was impressive too.

Beethoven meets Carnatic music

Ramesh Vinayakam comes up with a raga named after the composer



Experimental Ramesh Vinayakam. PHOTO: JOHAN SATHYADAS

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A lot of things can happen over a coffee break. In music composer Ramesh Vinayakam’s case, it certainly did.

At the Goethe Institute in Chennai, the composer was speaking with Sebastian Grams, double bass player, and Jeremy Woodruff, now in Graz University, over a coffee break when he launched into a Carnatic kriti. He sang phrases from ‘Thiruvarul thara varuvai’ and asked if it sounded familiar.

“It’s beautiful. The end sounds familiar, but we can’t put our finger on it,” they said.

It was a little musical puzzle that Ramesh had conjured, and the climax blew the visitors away. The kriti has the same notes as Ludwig van Beethoven’s popular ‘Für Elise’, which they discovered to great astonishment. “To me, it proved something I believe in: the oneness of music,” says Ramesh, about his musical experiment, which he recorded and posted on YouTube recently.

‘Thiruvarul thara varuvai’ is based on a raga that Ramesh calls ‘Beethovanapriya’ and is inspired by a simple idea: what if Beethoven was born in South India?

“This hypothesis lead me to ‘Thiruvarul thara varuvai’ where I used the melodic elements of the first section in A minor and stuck to it,” he recalls, “Beethoven was a great inventor and I reckon he would have been enamoured by the intricate microtonal gamakas of Indian music that beautifies his own music differently.”

‘Thiruvarul thara varuvai’ was performed by Ramesh during a lec-dem at the December music season soon

after its conception, but in 2018, Carnatic musician Abhishek Raghuram sang it accompanied by Mylai Karthikeyan (nagaswaram) and L. Ramakrishnan (violin), an attempt that met with rapturous applause.

Creating new ragas
Ramesh has, in the course of his musical career, created ten ragas, including Prathidwani, Madya Mohanam and Dwi Niroshtra, among others. He’s in the process of creating a raga that uses microtonal swarasthana called Sruti Ranjani. “To me, inventing a raga is a natural process in the evolution of Indian music. All the ragas that are in vogue now never existed at the very beginning. We also do not know how they evolved, whether as a scale or from a phrase or from an emotive lyrical thought that was expressed through a musical idea which sparked an expansion into a raga. So, a raga cannot be a discovery, as some people have assumed it to be,” says Ramesh.

Even as he works on newer compositions, the composer is kicked about his passion project, the Gamaka Box Notation System (GBNS), a structured Indian music learning tool that enables conceptual learning of complex ideas. GBNS is at the core of Music Temple, a music technology company that IIT Madras has incubated. Ramesh, who is also well-known in the film music fraternity, thanks to hits such as ‘Vizhigalil’ (*Azhagiya Theeye*), ‘Enna Idhu’ (*Nala Damayanthi*) and his work in *Ramanujan* among others, is also looking at taking up more film music work. “I am looking forward to doing a lot more movies and create new music. I believe that music is the manifestation of divinity that is already present in man.”

Achuthan T.K.

Margi Sajeev Narayana Chakyar as the love-smitten Ravana sits glued to his peetam (stool) for a little over three hours and slowly, using only his eyes and face, portrays the expressions on Ravana’s ten faces as they react to Sita’s beauty. As Soorpanakha, his act evokes sympathy for the demoness. Every role that is physically demanding or needs long periods of concentration is safe in the hands of this versatile actor. A day-long event on June 2 to honour Sajeev on his 60th birthday was an occasion for the Koodiyattam community to celebrate the art form and at the same time voice concerns over its future. A common refrain heard from many gurus and speakers is the failure to draw new students, especially boys, because of the lack of patronage faced by the artistes. Sajeev, who has spent 45 years as a Koodiyattam actor and guru, says very little has changed in this respect. “I still



What ails Koodiyattam?

Margi Sajeev on the need to adapt to the changing times

For the cause of art Margi Sajeev applying make-up before a performance (left). PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



remember the day I moved to Thiruvananthapuram from Moozhikkulam with my younger brother Madhu. It was shortly after my arangetram at age 14. The move came after Margi (popular institution) started Koodiyattam classes and my father was appointed the teacher. We were excited about going to a big city but at the same time like all Koodiyattam practitioners

wondered if the art form can provide a livelihood.” Sajeev recalls with a chuckle that he and his brother started learning typewriting and shorthand as a backup option, with half-hearted permission from his gurus. “Though I am happy to say today that we never had to fall back on it, the question of an uncertain future continues to bother Koodiyattam students. It is not easy to draw new learners. Some dropout midway while some others take up other professions. Sajeev, currently the head of Koodiyattam at Margi Thiruvananthapuram, was trained in the traditional gurukula by his father Kochukuttan Chakyar and his uncle Ammannur Madhava Chakyar. Koodiyattam was undergoing seismic shifts when Sajeev was growing up. The ritual art form, performed only in temples, moved to the performance arena. Once taught only at gurukulas run by the Chakyar families, training began to be imparted at institutions when Kerala Kalamandalam, now a

performing arts university, offered classes in Koodiyattam for the first time in 1965. And Koodiyattam ceased to be the exclusive domain of Chakyar and Nambiar communities.

Major changes
According to Sajeev, there have been major changes in the world of Koodiyattam – in the way it is taught and performed, in its costumes, and in new stories that are being adapted. Ammannur, a visiting professor at Margi, used to follow the gurukula system. “There was no syllabus. We took up a new story or role only when our gurus thought we had mastered what was being taught. For example, we did Nityakriya, a preliminary pure dance sequence, for three years.” The situation had changed by the time Sajeev became a teacher at Margi. “Now students have to balance academics and Koodiyattam training. At Margi, we adapted by introducing weekend classes conducted from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Later these were shortened to forenoon

sessions. Koodiyattam became secondary to formal education.” But Sajeev is realistic and says such changes are inevitable. “We must adapt to the changing times without compromising on the inherent values of the art form.” Sajeev finds young Koodiyattam artistes talented and committed. “But they lack opportunities. Most of the Koodiyattam programmes now are of two-or three-hour duration. So young artistes have knowledge of a limited repertoire. There are only a few venues where the long form of Koodiyattam is presented.” However, Sajeev is happy that Nepathya at Moozhikkulam stages complete performances in collaboration with scholars led by Prof David Shulman of Jerusalem University. “The Sangeet Natak Akademi has also been doing some great work through its Koodiyattam Kendra in Thiruvananthapuram. We need to preserve the only surviving Sanskrit theatre,” says Sajeev.

Musical encounter

Two legendary Hindustani musicians, who trained under the same guru went on to carve their own niche

Shailaja Khanna

Delhi's India International Centre recently hosted the centenary celebrations of two great vocalists – Pt. Ram Marathe and Pt. C.R. Vyas – from Maharashtra. Surprisingly, both were at the same point in their lives, disciples of the inimitable Pt. Jagannathbua Purohit, (1904-1968) called ‘Gunidas’, who learnt from several gurus, notable among them being Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan of the Agra gharana.

Pt. Ram Marathe was one of the most popular actors and Natya

Sangeet singers of his time, in addition to being a classical vocalist and tabla player. Regarded as a master of ‘jor ragas’, he performed in more than 7,000 theatre shows. Known for his indefatigable energy, Pt. Ram Marathe would sometimes present a four-hour concert after performing in two plays.

Though he passed away in 1989 at the age of 65, he was honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1988. There are 18 singers in his family, four of whom include his grandchildren Bhagyesh Marathe and Prajakta, cousin Swarangi Marathe and Pallavi Pote. Adwait Keskar his great grandson is currently learning from Pt. Ulhas Kashalkar.

Legacy continues

Pt. C.R. Vyas held a white collar job, yet was regarded as a skillful singer. Like Pt. Ram Marathe, he was in constant quest for musical knowledge, and learnt from several gurus. Unassuming, he pursued music more for his own joy. Today, two of his three sons are musicians – vocalist Suhas Vyas and santoor exponent Satish Vyas. Amongst his more celebrated disciples are Prabhakar Karekar, Sanjeev Chimmalgi and Ganapati Bhat. Pt Jitendra Abhisheki too learnt from him. In 1977, Pt. Vyas started the annual Gunidas festival as a tribute to his guru. It is still being conducted by his culture-curator son Satish.

Ode to the masters

Pt. Ram Marathe and Pt. C.R. Vyas.

PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

At the ICC event two vocalists paid musical homage to these two masters, who incidentally were good friends too. Shashwati Mandal sang the rare raag Swanandi. She learnt it from Suhas Vyas and Sanjeev Chimmalgi. After the vilambit khayal, the second bandish in Ek taal had an interesting context – apparently while travelling one day from Matunga in Mumbai, Pt. Vyas fell asleep and dreamt of this raga created by his guru. When he suddenly woke up, he found he had missed his stop and the musical dream ended abruptly. In despair, he created the composition that Shaswati sang, where the evocative lyrics speak of this journey: ‘chaturai ki thi mose, sapna mohe daras deke. Jab jaag pari paathe, gunijaan dukh paayo.’

Shashwati's *piece de resistance* was an unusual Punjabi composition ‘Dildaar mustafa’ in raag Shahana taught to her guru Pt. Madhup Mudgal by Sumati Mutatkar of the Agra gharana. Shashwati's intricate taans were awe-inspiring. She was accompanied on the harmonium by her husband Mausam, and on the tabla by Ustad Akram Khan.

Punjabi khayals

The next concert was by Bhagyesh Marathe. Bhagyesh has a powerful and bhava-rich voice. His singing shows his *taalim*. He sang an appealing raag Bihag. The vilambit composition was his own, in honour of his grandfather's most popular role as Shiva. There was no need for the antara as the sthayi encompassed the entire octave. He concluded with raag Sohni, ‘Pyaara menda, nazar nahi aavega’, another popular bandish in Punjabi taught to his grandfather by Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan. Apart from Braj, Hindi and Urdu, there are many khayals in Punjabi, which proves the region was once home to Hindustani music.

Bhagyesh was accompanied on the harmonium by Paromita Mukherjee, a fine instrumentalist. On the tabla was the amazing Vinod Lele from the Banaras gharana.

Neha Kirpal

India is known for its rich cultural diversity and enduring traditions, the most fascinating aspects of which is the musical heritage that is ancient and varied, including a wide range of musical instruments. From the sitar or violin to the mridangam or the tabla, many of these instruments have been passed down through generations and have significantly shaped the country's unique musical landscape. Over time, some ancient instruments faded away from the music scene.

But musician Joydeep Mukherjee is trying to restore such instruments, bringing them back to life for modern audiences. Joydeep had earlier resuscitated two ancient string instruments – mohan veena and sursingar – that date back to the early 20th and 18th century respectively.

After Prithviraj Chauhan lost the Battle of Tarain in 1192, many Afghani soldiers tried to take refuge in India during the Mamluk dynasty. They brought the Afghani Rabab along with them, which continues to be played as a folk instrument in many parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Over time, Indian musicians began playing Indian raags using this Middle Eastern instrument. In the 16th century, Miyan Tansen developed a special kind of bigger rabab for dhrupad music - called the dhrupad rabab or seni rabab. After his death, it was named Tanseni rabab. "Nevertheless, it continued as a royal stage instrument for the next 250 years till the sursingar was heralded in the 18th century by one of his descendants, Ustad Zaffer Khan. Gradually, the Tanseni rabab faded from the classical music scene," said Joydeep.

During the 1880s, Ustad Abdullah Khan of the Senia Shahjehanpur Gharana conceptualised the Sur-Rabab in Bengal by blending three instruments – sursingar, sarod and Tanseni rabab.

During the 19th century, the Sursingar was at its peak as a concert instrument, while the Sarod was played mostly by Rabab players.

Though popular, the Sur-Rabab was damaged in 1910 during one of Abdullah Khan's All-India music



A new twist to tradition

Joydeep Mukherjee has created modern versions of some ancient instruments

tours. The following year, he created a second one in the workshop of Harendra Nath Sil in Calcutta and passed it on to his son, Ustad Mohammad Ameer Khan. "In 1933, Ameer Khan passed it on to his disciple Pt. Radhika Mohan Maitreya before his death. After him, the instrument came under the possession of Somjit Dasgupta, managing trustee of the Pandit Radhika Mohan Maitreya Memorial Trust," added Joydeep Mukherjee.

To create modern versions of the traditional instruments, Joydeep had to first understand their physical structure and get an idea of their sound quality. His decade-long experience in the revival of extinct instruments helped. He read books, studied the instruments in various museums and then came up with the revived designs. From analysing what materials should be used, and what

He read several books, visited museums and then came up with fresh designs



Revival Joydeep Mukherjee with his version of the Tanseni-Rabab

PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

wood would be suitable to which kind of strings can give a better tonality and how the sound production should be done Joydeep explained the process.

A new lease of life

While an ebony wood bridge was used instead of ivory for both instruments, Joydeep Mukherjee replaced catgut strings with bronze and copper wires for the Tanseni Rabab. He retained its wooden fretboard and used rosewood for better sound. For the Sur-Rabab, he used a century-old seasoned mahogany woodblock to keep it lightweight with a deep tonal quality. "The peacock head was constructed for ornamentation as well as to convey a symbol of India's national bird, and insignia of Krishna and Saraswati," he said.

Joydeep also added chikaris and sympathetic strings for more resonance. He then worked with his instrument maker, who lives in rural Bengal, and prepared a blueprint.

"The next few months were spent in trial and error, testing potential instruments, cutting, making the sound box, shaping and creating sample sounds with dummy structures," he adds .

Once the design of the instruments was complete and final touches added, Joydeep required the recordings of old masters to get an idea of their original sound and tonal quality. He was invited for the Republic Day celebration this year, and later for lunch at Cabinet Minister Anurag Thakur's residence, where he met Gaurav Dwivedi, CEO, Prasar Bharati, and made a request to access a few archival recordings of these instruments.

Though a sarod player, Joydeep is also trained in many other instruments, such as the sitar, surbahar, mohan veena, sursingar and several rababs. Sangeet Natak Akademi bestowed upon him the Ustad Bismillah Khan Award for Sursingar and Sarod in 2019.

Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi not only commended Joydeep for reviving the Sursingar but also got him to play it on the 98th edition of 'Mann Ki Baat'.

Advanced course in music

Applications are invited for Advanced Diploma course in Carnatic Music, conducted by The Music Academy. The three-year course has two semesters (mid-July to November end, and mid-January to April end). Classes, commencing in July, will be held from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. at The Music Academy. Besides presenting compositions learnt during the training period, the candidates will also be performing a concert in front of an invited audience.

Applicants, who have passed +2, and should be between 18 and 30 years of age. They should be able to sing varnams, kritis with knowledge of manodharma. The application form, available on The Music Academy's website, should be submitted by June 25. Candidates must mail it with their bio-data and details of their musical training. For more information log on to www.musicacademymadras.in or call 044-2811 2231/2811 6902/2811 5162.

Day-long workshop

The Music Academy has organised a workshop on rare Tyagaraja kritis on June 8, 10 a.m. at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Senior musician A.S. Murali will conduct the session, on till 12.15 p.m. For registration and other details call 2811 2231 or 2811 5162. The event is organised under the endowment of late Pankajam Krishna, Prabha Nagarajan and Ravi Subramanian in memory of their father K. Iyer – HMV.

Vocal concert

The Music Academy will feature K.T. Udaya Kiran's vocal concert today, 6 p.m. at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. The accompanists are Pappu Gyandev (violin), and B. Sai Shankar (mridangam). The programme is organised under the endowment instituted by M/s. Sri. Pichumony Iyer & Smt. Kunthalam Trust, in memory of Kunthalam Pichumony Iyer.

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Ekādasā Vishnum

A CELEBRATION OF THE 11 TIRUNANGUR DIVYA DESAMS

Saturday, June 29, 2024, 6.00 – 9.00 pm at Narada Gana Sabha Hall, Chennai

Concept and Curation: **Dr. Asha Krishnakumar**
Musical: **Dr. Rajkumar Bharathi**
Soundscapes: **Sri Sai Shrivaranam**
Consultants: **Sri Rangan Bhattar & Sri Vedharajan (Nangur)**
Choreography: **Dr. Sheela Unnikrishnan**
Natyam: **Sridevi Nrithyalaya**
Damal Sri Ramakrishnan
Narration: **Sri Malola Kannan**
Dr. Chithra Madhavan

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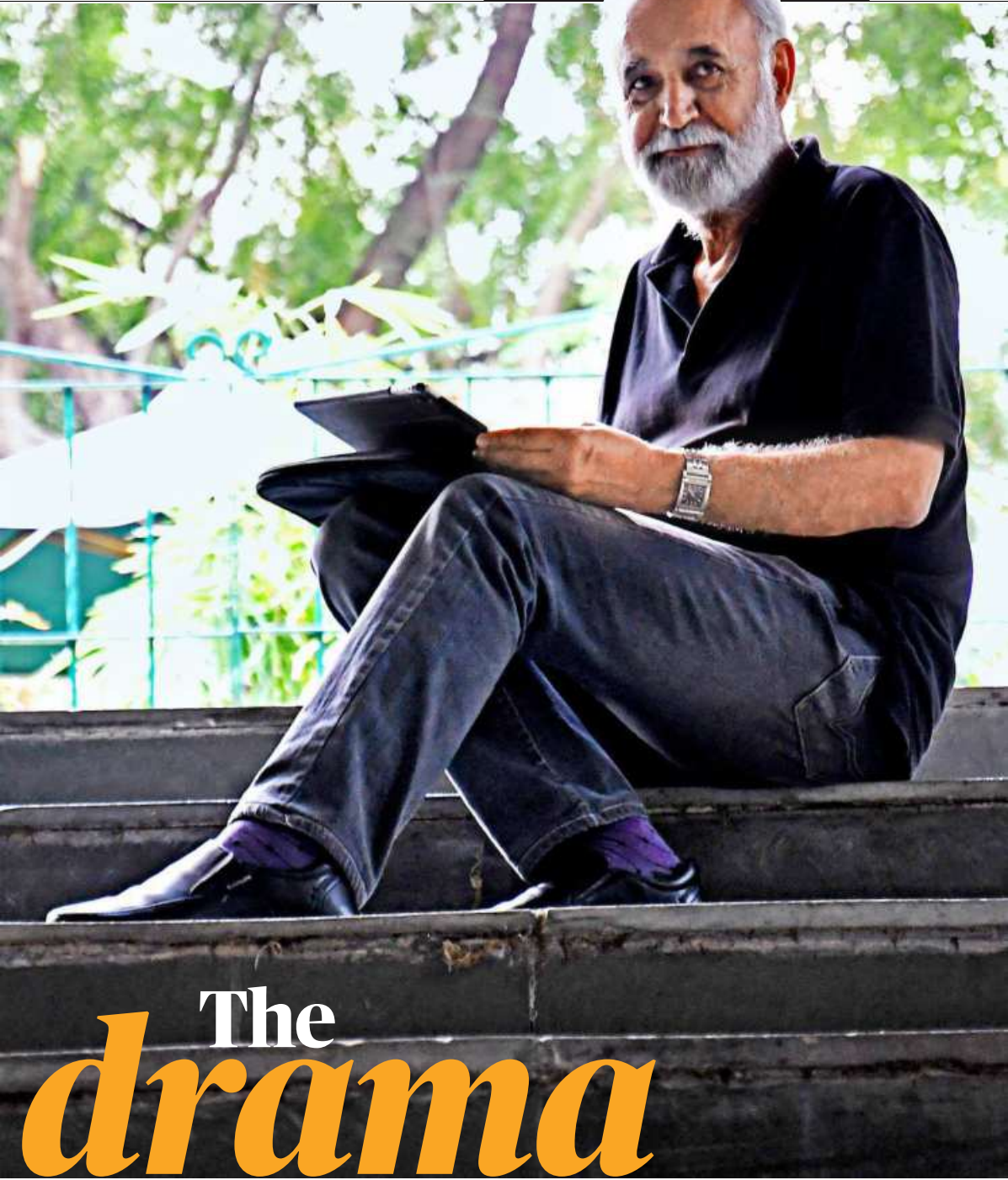
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Unhappy is the land that needs a hero.” Maharaj Krishna Raina prefers to practice what German playwright Bertolt Brecht famously said in a country that loves to indulge in hero worship. Over the years, the veteran theatre practitioner has covered his conviction with a gentle smile and used culture as a catalyst for socio-political change in the most sensitive parts of the country. Be it Punjab, Kashmir or the North East, Raina says his mantra has always been, “*hero nahin banana hai*”, making his art do the talking.

During the pandemic, Raina got time to pause and look back at an enterprising career and the result is an immensely readable account. Aptly titled *Before I Forget* (Penguin Classics), the memoir traces the historical events that shaped Raina and informed his art. The theft of the holy relic from the Hazratbal shrine in his hometown of Srinagar in 1963, the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, the brutal murder of cultural activist and close friend Safdar Hashmi in 1989, the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, the fallout of Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 and the ethnic tension in the North East, the memoir reads like a layered script where it is impossible to take sides. No wonder his friend and director Sudhir Mishra is contemplating a film script out of Raina’s rich memory.

Driven by passion
Here is an actor-auteur-activist who stood his ground in turbulent circumstances, at times life-threatening. Like his plays, Raina avoids cliches in real life and finds humour and hope in the dark. Taking a line from his famous play on the Oppenheimer trial much before Christopher Nolan woke up to the relevance of the physicist, Raina says he doesn’t like to follow the ideas of others.

In Safdar’s case, he questioned the fascist forces of disruption and along with his friends, which included actor Shabana Azmi, turned the opening ceremony of the International Film Festival Of India in Delhi into a flop show. A few years later, after the demolition of Babri mosque, Raina was again at the forefront, coining the slogan: *Ab koi nara na hoga, bas desh bachana hoga* (Now there will be no



The drama of life

In *Before I forget*, actor, auteur and activist M.K. Raina recalls how he stood his ground in turbulent circumstances

sloganeering, it will only be about saving the nation) and questioned Atal Bihari Vajpayee. When Kashmiri Pandits were driven out of their homes, he held the silence of the secularists responsible for

pushing the Pandits and the political narrative into the hands of the right-wing ecosystem. “We can’t cease to be a citizen,” says Raina. He draws inspiration from the Buddha’s idol where he is

in deep meditation but his one hand is touching the ground. “I analyse it for myself as – if you remain in touch with the ground, you won’t go wrong.” Often, he says, the cure of stinging nettle is another weed that grows nearby. “You just have to look for it.” Inquiry, he says, is important in Indian tradition. “Chela guru se sawal karta hai (The disciple seeks answers from the Guru). It is there in our Purarans. It is the crux of the Bhagvad Gita. Unfortunately, this tradition is diminishing.” Raina describes himself as the “product of the socialist India” that allowed him plenty of affordable books and an opportunity to hone his craft at the National School of Drama. “Majority of us were from modest backgrounds with a rich

Fiction meets reality M.K. Raina and from his play ‘Badshah Pather’ staged in 2013 at Kalakshetra in Chennai. PHOTOS: SANDEEP SAXENA & M. KARUNAKARAN



We were part of a movement that believed in healthy theatre and wanted to carry forward the same sensibilities to cinema

repertoire of tradition and no inferiority complex.” He was perhaps the first who truly followed the purpose of the theatre school: taking the art form to the grassroots.

Reaching out to people
Battling stereotypes, Raina worked hard to revive folk theatre in Kashmir valley at the turn of the millennium. “I revived my links with the traditional artist villages that dot the area between Anantnag and Pahalgam and worked quietly. He provided them with

opportunities to contribute to theatre. “We requested local potters to make masks and implored tailors to tweak their craft to create costumes.” When the audience size reached 5000, the separatists woke up to Raina and his team’s presence in Pir Panjal. “They tried to thwart our efforts but by then villagers had realised culture’s role in venting pent-up feelings. They would tell those with the guns: *ab tum humein hasne bhi nahin doge*. (you won’t even allow us to laugh).” Raina fondly remembers his acting stint that started with Avatar Kaul’s avant-garde *27 Down* with Rakhee where he played a ticket collector. Shot on a real train, Raina remembers that the authorities gave in to the persistence of the young team. “As long as you could hide the cameras, it was not too expensive to shoot on platforms and trains. In fact, at times, passengers took me as a real TC. Shooting on railway stations and trains became expensive only after B.R. Chopra made *The Burning Train*.” Raina went on to work with stalwarts of art house cinema like Mani Kaul and Mrinal Sen. “We were part of a movement that believed in healthy theatre and wanted to carry forward the same sensibilities to cinema but the movement fizzled out when the filmmakers started to rope in stars under box office pressure,” says Raina.



Queen of Bossa Nova

Eliane Elias, the 64-year-old Brazilian jazz pianist and vocalist’s recent concert in Mumbai captured the spirit of Samba

Narendra Kusnur

Well into the second half of her 100-minute performance, Brazilian jazz pianist and vocalist Eliane Elias presented the famous song ‘Desafinado’, composed by the legendary Antonio Carlos Jobim. The audience was familiar with the tune, and the pulsating bass solo and riveting drums added to their joy. The encore, comprising Jobim’s huge hits “The girl from Ipanema” and “So

danco samba’, had them singing along.

Eliane had, of course, reserved the familiar pieces for the end. Most of her show at Mumbai’s Tata Theatre recently consisted of tunes from her own catalogue, written in Portuguese by composers popular in Brazil. There were bossa nova composer Carlos Lyra’s ‘Voce e Eu’, Dorival Caymmi’s ‘Saudade da Bahia’ and Ary Barroso’s ‘Aquarela do Brasil’. There were film tunes such as ‘To Each His Dulcinea’ from *The Man Of La Mancha*, which opened the show, and

‘A Felicidade’ from *Black Orpheus*, written by Jobim.

Looking graceful on the Steinway Grand Piano, Elias kept the crowd engaged with her deft playing, giving information about the compositions to help listeners appreciate them better. There were some hiccups too, as her voice seemed low in the mix in the first few numbers. Leandro Pelegrino’s guitar wasn’t heard consistently, and he didn’t get a solo too. There was also an early, unplanned break when Elias was unhappy with presence of a videographer.

Once she settled down, Elias was a treat to hear, with bassist Marc Johnson and drummer Rafael Barata providing perfect company. The show was a mix of Bossa Nova and Samba tunes, though one wished she also sang some of the English songs she had recorded. Her presentation of ‘Esta Tarde Vi Llover’, which she recorded as a duet with Cuban great Chucho Valdes, and an instrumental version of ‘At First Sight’ from her June 2024 album *Time And Again*, displayed her finesse on the piano.

This was Elias’s first visit to India, which she said was the 78th country she had toured. Now 64, the Sao Paulo-born musician began learning the piano at the age of seven, and picked up quickly. She recalls, “My mom played classical piano and loved jazz pianists. She had a large jazz collection, and by the time I was 10, I was transcribing the solos of my favourite pianists.”

Initially, Elias was known for her piano skills, though she occasionally rendered wordless vocals. She had developed her own style of playing samba on piano. She says, “I toured with singer-guitarist Toquinho and lyricist Vinicius de Moraes, and we travelled around South America in the late 1970s. Samba is normally played by

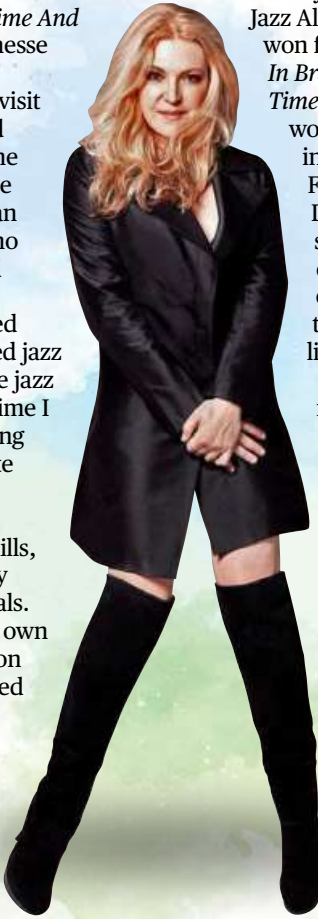
guitarists and percussionists, so I developed my own style of playing Samba on piano.”

Her transition to singing lyrics happened slowly, and culminated in 1998 with the album *Eliane Elias Sings Jobim*. She points out, “When I sang in live shows, I noticed that I reached out to the audience in a different, more meaningful way. Singing also helped me include more songs to my repertoire.”

Eliane has also played on albums by the Brecker Brothers, saxophonist Joe Henderson, guitarist Earl Klugh and Andy Summers, former member of the Police. In 2021, she released the album *Mirror Mirror*, containing duets with the great pianists Chick Corea and Chucho Valdez. She says, “I have known Chick since my earliest days of piano recording. We stayed in touch and often spoke of recording duets. As for Chucho, I always wanted to record with him since I heard him play with his father Bebo.”

Mirror Mirror earned Elias a Grammy award for Best Latin Jazz Album – which she earlier won for her 2015 album, *Made In Brazil*. On her new album *Time And Again*, Elias has worked with special guests including guitarist Bill Frisell and Brazilian singer Djavan. She says, “Each song touches a different emotional place, from exuberance and elation to reflection and light-hearted humour.”

Eliane says her main focus has been to explore the rich music Brazil has to offer. “The composers of the mid to latter half of the 20th century have contributed immensely, and the language of jazz allows for conversation in music. Jazz works with all music, and blends beautifully with Brazilian music,” she says. In her recording career spanning four decades, Elias has taken the spirit of Brazilian jazz to different lands.



CALENDAR

Listening session



Ganakaladhara Madurai Mani Iyer Rasikas Association, presents the special guided listening session ‘Madurai Mani Iyer - Over the decades’ on June 8, 4.30 p.m., at P.S. High School, Mylapore. For details call 98413 13527.

Memorial concert

Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha has organised ‘Sangeetha Yatra’, a special music programme dedicated to its co-founder S. Vasanta, on June 13, 6.15 p.m., at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. The evening will feature the vocal concert by Radha Bhaskar. She will be supported by Padmashree Srinivasan and Swarathmika Srikanth (vocal), Gayathri Vibhavari (violin) and Mudhra Bhaskar (mridangam).

Training in music

Artium Academy, the music learning platform, inaugurates its first offline centre at Alwarpet, in Chennai. It will offer courses in vocal and instrumental music, workshops and masterclasses, to be conducted by well-known musicians. For details log on to <http://www.artiumacademy.com>

Dedicated to Vaggeyakaras

Natyangaram presents a programme dedicated to vaggeyakaras today, 6.30 p.m. at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall. It will feature musicians R.K. Shriramkumar and Amritha Murali and dancer Bragha Bessell with her disciples. The programme is sponsored by Nrithyopasana Trust.

Song and string

Narada Gana Sabha will feature Y.G. Srilatha Nikshith’s veena recital on June 9, 5.30 p.m. She will be accompanied by Putur Nikshith (mridangam) and Madipakkam Murali (ghatam).

Nadasangamam, the music wing of Narada Gana Sabha, has organised Nanditha Kannan’s vocal concert with V. Mridula on the violin, Prem Krishnan on the mridangam. This will be followed by Raksha Mahalinkam’s vocal concert at 7 p.m. Adithya Anil (violin) and K.S. Vignesh (mridangam) will accompany her. Date: June 12.

