

CHENNAI • Thursday, March 20, 2025



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THE HINDU

Discover the Ripon buildings
through their iconic columns **P3**

**ALL EYES ON ARUL, BY
SANDEEP AND YANCHAN P4**



Ocean's 20



Gowri S

gowri.s@thehindu.co.in

Chennai's skies and waters are in a never-ending tussle on who wears the colour blue best. But at the Chennai Port today a first-of-its-kind vessel is docked, its imposing blue-and-white hull inviting curious glances. The vessel, sized somewhere between a ship and a boat looks decidedly out of place among the bulk carriers and container ships that dot the

ever-busy port. Not far away is a gaggle of students from St

Antony's Matriculation High School, Pallikaranai, wearing crisp smiles and making their way to the vessel. This is their first time aboard a ship, let alone one with a purpose.

Grandly christened the Plastic Odyssey, this 40-metre long "floating laboratory" is a three-and-a-half year expedition that set sail from Marseilles, in the South of France, on October 1, 2022, and has since been collecting low-cost, sustainable plastic waste solutions from around the world. These include ideas, innovations and technology that contributes to plastic recycling and reduction. After recent stops at Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia, Plastic Odyssey is on its 31st

stopover in Chennai – its only stop in India.

Simon Bernard, a former merchant navy officer whose love for the ocean led him on this expedition, says, "India is an amazing stopover for us both in terms of recycling and reduction. India consumes 10 times less plastic than France, that is approximately seven kilograms per person, per



After this expedition, we want to build a boat to focus on restoring ecosystems through clean-ups. We want to focus only on places that are impossible to reach

SIMON BERNARD
CEO and co-founder, Plastic Odyssey

year. There is a lot to learn here, the use of stainless steel instead of single-use plastic for instance." The now-CEO and co-founder reiterates that the expedition is not limited to recycling on board; it is about research and incubating programmes while working with local entrepreneurs and communities like the Indian Vision Institute, a Palavakkam-based non-governmental organisation.

"We have been to 30 countries so far. There are many initiatives, solutions, entrepreneurs, and changemakers around the world but they are not connected to each other. Our job is to make them connect, document all this knowledge and share it worldwide," he adds.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 2

Cruise control Plastic Odyssey makes a stopover in Chennai, its first and only stop in India.
JOHAN SATHYADAS

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INOCEAN-012/25

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The 40-metre vessel is a work of art in itself: divided into 10 spaces complete with analysis laboratories, recycling workshops, display areas, pyrolysis zones and training rooms, it is nothing short of a research facility on water. With a 20-member crew, of which nine are professional sailors, the vessel has been home to researchers, engineers, activists and entrepreneurs for the last two-and-a-half years.

A tour, led by stopover manager Morgane Kerdoncuff, begins at its very heart: the recycling workshop. "This area is dedicated to transforming plastic waste directly into useful products. The first step is to segregate plastic by type. We have several machines that we built on the ship, to transform the vessel itself into a recycling factory," says Morgane. The next step, after sorting, is to shred hard plastic and soft plastic into flakes using shredders. Then, the extruder melts the flakes into a chewing gum-like paste, which in turn can be moulded into usable products like lumber, tiles and other building material.

"With this kind of lumber – a good alternative to wood, you can build furniture, barriers, decking, bins and tiles for pavements," says Morgane. The workshop is also home to the many prototypes that were made onboard and discovered on their journey: think colourful soap dishes, hammers, building tiles, coconut shell bowls and chairs and tables that the crew use.

The workshop leads to a smaller, darker room where there is a neatly stacked row of moulds in the shape of spectacle frames. Morgane explains, "Here in Chennai, we are trying to make spectacles out of recycled plastic. We are working with the Indian Vision



Docking change
(Clockwise from left) Children aboard the vessel; and plastic waste strewn across the Besant Nagar beach. JOHAN SATHYADAS AND AKHLIA EASWARAN

Ocean's 20

Institute, to see if it is possible to build a model where people from underprivileged communities can bring plastic waste and make spectacles out of it. It is still in the prototyping stage." ROKA Chennai, a residents welfare association working with solid waste management, and Kabbadiwala Connect are some of the other collaborators from the city.

Ripple effect
Driven by a staggering statistic that every minute, at least 20 tonnes of plastic waste is dumped into the ocean, of which 78% comes from land sources, what makes this expedition actionable is its very intent.

"Of all the plastic waste in

the ocean, only 1% comes to the surface," says Simon. And so, the idea is to stop the waste at the land source before it reaches the ocean. "We had about 400 entrepreneurs coming on board so far and sharing their practices, and launching factories in their respective countries. The aim is to have these long-running factories all over the world. We also had around 5,000 children on board who have discovered a lifestyle with less dependence on plastic. I consider that a big impact."

Senegal was their big win. There are 10 recycling factories being currently set up in this West African country. While in the Philippines, the team has facilitated factories that can

recycle 300 tonnes per year with each of them creating at least 20 jobs. "We want to replicate this in every country," says Simon.

The students now receive brief training on basic steps to reduce plastic dependence. Saranya P of ROKA says,

"Deliberate on the life cycle of a product; what does it become at the end of its life cycle?

Think about what we can do in our homes to assist this movement; carry your own bottle, bag and cutlery. Segregate your garbage at source. Join a volunteering committee. Wash your dabbba... the list goes on." The students pile out with ready answers; a field trip well done.

Next stop is Reunion Island,

in April. Though the expedition is slated to come to a halt within the next year, the efforts won't stop, assures Simon. "After this expedition, we want to build a boat to focus on restoring ecosystems through clean-ups. We want to focus only on places that are impossible to reach, and are hotbeds of biodiversity. The Henderson Island cleanup was our first step in this direction, done in collaboration with UNESCO. We are calling it The Impossible Cleanup."

Get in touch at plasticodyssey.org for information, or to introduce projects to the team.



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Across

- 1 I don't know! (3,2,7)
- 9 Demand and obtain (5)
- 10 Dozens (7)
- 11 Indicates agreement (4)
- 12 I am to blame! (Latin) (3,5)
- 14 Kind of terrier (informal) (6)
- 15 Caught sight of (6)
- 18 Holiday (8)
- 20 Small Scottish island (4)
- 22 Lamb and vegetable casserole — nirvana (anag) (7)
- 23 Bird — boy's name (5)
- 24 Gunners (12)

Down

- 2 Defame (7)
- 3 Silent (4)
- 4 Prime Minister 1945-51 (6)
- 5 Sunless (8)
- 6 Squallid dwelling (5)
- 7 Get up! (4,3,5)
- 8 The Keystone State (12)
- 13 Relating to a shore (8)

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16 Dishonourable (7)
17 Swoop (as in an attack) (6)
19 Long to have (5)
21 Licentious revel (4)

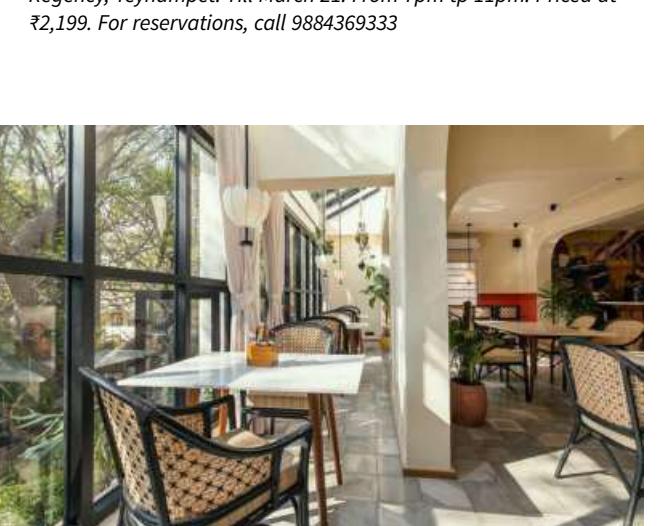
Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated March 27, 2025.

Solution No. 13633

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Persian palate

Experience the flavours of *nowruz* (meaning 'new day' in Persian) which marks the arrival of spring at Hyatt Regency in collaboration with Soul On A Plate. The restaurant presents an authentic Persian meal crafted by home chef Nisrin Karimi. The curated menu includes joje kebab, torsh kebab, plumer chicken, and shiraz mushroom, alongside traditional desserts like tarhalva and bamieh. @Spice Haat, Hyatt Regency, Teynampet. Till March 21. From 7pm to 11pm. Priced at ₹2,199. For reservations, call 9884369333



A neighbourhood's tale

Archival showcases and guided walkthroughs will spotlight Mylapore's Pelathope from March 21 to 23

Poorvaja

poorvaja.sundar@thehindu.co.in



Deep Dive
Pelathope, an iconic locality in Mylapore, means jackfruit grove. YASH JAIN

As a child, Shreya Krishnan recalls riding her tricycle and playing cricket at Pelathope in Mylapore. Her ties to the neighbourhood continue till this day as her office currently functions out of her grandfather's house, which has been there since 1935.

"Mylapore is a vibrant neighbourhood, and there are attempts being made to engage with the community through initiatives like the Mylapore Festival. It is possible here, to find different ways to engage with the neighbourhood through its heritage and culture," says the architect who heads Shreya Krishnan Design Office (SKDO).

The Pelathope Urban Living Lab - Open House, an initiative by SKDO in collaboration with PLUS (Public Landscape Urbanism Studio, Curating for Culture, U-CAN(Urban Collective Action Network) and Cultural Heritage Narratives which will take place from March 21 to 23, aims to put Pelathope in the spotlight.

Sustainable urban development and the role that neighbourhoods play in social cohesion, are areas Shreya has worked in, and is extremely passionate about.

"Through the Open House, we want to initiate a discussion on how culture and heritage should be drivers of development in Mylapore. The area has become very mobility-rich given its connectivity, but we also feel there should be a more inclusive approach that takes the heritage and culture here into consideration," she explains.

The Urban Living Lab movement, an initiative rooted in the Netherlands, is all about creating a space for experimentation in engaging with neighbourhoods and bringing in catalytic projects that can be scaled up to bring about a larger impact, she says.

Pelathope, which means jackfruit grove, is now known as Vedanta Desikar Swamy Street. The street holds within it many stories like that of Shreya's, and also from longtime residents who have made the neighbourhood their own. "All of this will be a part of the Pelathope Archives, a diverse collection of photographs, books, maps and oral histories, we have put together. As part of this exercise, we explored the area and met with some long-time residents which gave us valuable insight into this neighbourhood and Mylapore," she says.

Another significant launch will be the Mylapore Culture Map, a crowdsourced map which aims to capture the spatial and temporal cultural life of Mylapore. "While there are many organisations doing a host of interesting things here, we want to bring it all together and create a crowdsourced map where we hear from people as to what they can do when they come here," Shreya says.

Over the three days, Shreya has envisioned the Open House to be a space where people from the neighbourhood and different parts of the city can walk in, and interact with architects, urban planners, historians and the community about the past, present and future of Mylapore. While they can browse the archival showcase, there will also be a guided walkthrough to experience a restored heritage row house and its transformation, which will be central to the Open House.

The Pelathope Urban Living Lab - Open House will take place on March 21 from 5pm to 8pm, and March 22 and 23 from 9am to 6pm at 11/6, Pelathope, Vedanta Desikar Swami Street. Follow @shreyakrishnan.designoffice on Instagram for the schedule.

Rooted in flavour
(Clockwise from right) A spread of the menu at Go Native; interiors of the restaurant; jackfruit biryani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Sip, savour, sustain

Go Native's new Chennai outpost blends tradition, sustainability, and inventive flavours in a vibrant setting

Sangita Rajan

sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

There is a brand new addition to the tree-lined streets of Alwarpet – the two-storey boutique and restaurant Go Native. Open for less than two weeks now, the outlet is already buzzing with activity, and securing a table for dinner at the restaurant can feel like a game of chance.

The ground floor of the outlet is dedicated to the boutique, where a display of handwoven textiles, organically-made skincare products, accessories, home decor, and more is lined up, but it is the aroma from the kitchen upstairs that draws you in. The space is filled with plants and drenched in sunlight as it filters through large windows, casting soft patterns on tables set with copper and steel plates.

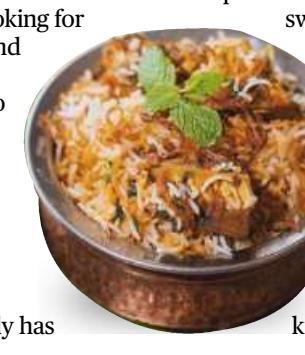
"The idea is to have a one-stop shop for everything

that allows you to connect better with the people who are making the product and consequently build a more sustainable lifestyle," says Anitha Prashanth, owner of Go Native, adding that sustainability is complicated, and it can be difficult to make sure that everything is 100% sustainable.

"But one thing we are keen on, is making this a better alternative."

The boutique currently carries products from brands like Vilvah, Juicy Chemistry, WhySoBlue, and more. "These are the brands we have in our Bengaluru outlets, so naturally, we brought them here. But we are actively looking for local brands and will start reaching out to them, especially for ceramics, jewellery, and apparel," says Anitha.

The brand, which currently has



five outlets in Bengaluru, has brought its ethos to Chennai along with a well-crafted menu rooted in tradition and local produce.

While the menu is full of surprises and might take multiple visits to explore, start with the sweet potato mochi, which is chewy, served with a flavour-packed peanut basil sauce, crunchy garlic peanut bits, and potato wafers. The spinach neer dosai, served with coconut chutney, a pineapple gassi (thick Mangalore coconut-based curry), fresh grated coconut, and jaggery, hits all the right spots; as does the classic millet Mangalore buns.

"We source all the vegetables and fresh produce from two local vendors, and the other staples like rice, millets, and pulses are currently being sourced from Bengaluru," says Anitha.

On the seasonal menu, which changes every few months, the baby jackfruit and plant meat kofta biryani is a clear winner. What catches the eye and surprises the palate is the innovative chaat section of the menu. The duet of golgappas – raw mango-filled puris served with Kerala-style buttermilk and potato and sprout-filled puris served with sweet jeera water – is served chilled, making them the perfect snack for summer. The chip and dip platter, with green peas hummus and pineapple relish, is served with four kinds of chips – Kerala

banana, sweet potato, okra, and lotus stem. The chips, however, could be crunchier and fresher.

"The menu is currently heavily Karnataka-influenced because that is what we have been doing so far, but we plan on launching new dishes that are Chennai-specific. Even in all our Bengaluru outlets, we keep changing the menu depending on the season," she says, adding that the brand is collaborating with a Chennai-based consultant chef M Lakshmanachary to create dishes that are authentic and traditional, made with local produce.

Corporate chef Kanakadri Narasimhalu, who has been with Go Native since the beginning in 2018, says that they do have some Chennai-specific dishes like



Shot on OnePlus

#FramesofIndia

S Poorvaja

poorvaja.sundar@thehindu.co.in

The chime of the clock at the Ripon Buildings is heard near the entrance, and Muhilan Murugan is ready. "This is usually my cue to start. We begin our heritage walk on the dot," he says.

Surrounded by a small group of people, Muhilan waits near the statue of Eric Conran-Smith, Commissioner of the Madras Corporation from 1928 to 1931, by the entrance. This is a great starting point for the guided tour of this iconic building, as he tells his curious audience about how the Corporation moved from Errabalu Chetty Street to the iconic Ripon Buildings as it stands now.

Earlier this year, the Greater Chennai Corporation threw its doors open to the public; to delve deeper into its history through guided tours conducted four times a week. "While we curated guided tours with the GCC's support and encouragement last year, it has truly taken off this year with structured registration and a schedule. We have completed over 100 walks, and have people who have registered till June this

year already," says Thirupurasundari Sevel, architect and founder of the city-based organisation, Nam Veedu Nam Oor Nam Kadhai.

Curating these walks has meant keeping in mind not just the history that the building and its many corners hold, but also acknowledging that the Neoclassical structure houses the second oldest functioning Corporation in the world. The first is in London.

"As an organisation, we have always been committed to highlighting living heritage structures, and there is no better example than the Ripon Buildings," Thirupurasundari says. This has meant that the hour-long heritage

This has been the most heartening aspect of organising these walks – to see different people who do not usually go on heritage walks or tours come for this one

THIRUPURASUNDARI SEVEL
Heritage walk curator

A window to the past

The Greater Chennai Corporation's guided heritage walks of the Ripon Buildings bridges the iconic landmark's history since 1913, and various facets of its present-day functioning



Annals of time (Clockwise from left) A view of the clock tower; and inside Ripon Buildings. S SHIVA RAJ

walk also includes many present-day facets of the building, including the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), a sprawling centre that handles hundreds of complaints and grievances, and works on real-time monitoring and tracking of data from across the city.

It is a happy coincidence, Thirupurasundari says, that the team of four guides who lead the tours – Muhilan, Prasanna, Srishti and Aafreen Fathima – are all architects. On the guided tour, Muhilan encourages the group to experience the central staircase on their own, and to take their time as they make their way up the first floor. "There is so much to this building that fascinates all of us. I often ask people on these tours to notice the intricate

wooden jaali work on the banisters, and come back at the end of the walk and talk to me about the differences they spotted. Everything from the majestic central staircase to the views of the Ripon clock tower and the central courtyard are lovely," Muhilan says.

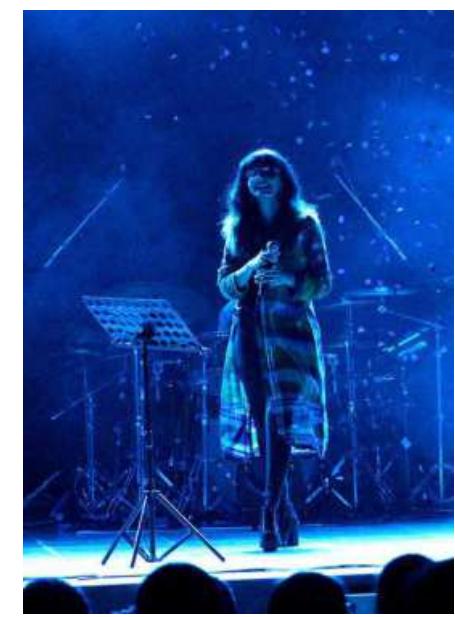
While the walks have eight stop points which encompass the history and modern-day functioning of the GCC, there is considerable awe when we walk past large wooden doors and peek inside the council hall where the periodic council meetings take place.

The group on this day includes college students, young entrepreneurs, and even a couple who has brought along their baby. "This has been the most heartening aspect of organising these walks – to see different people who do not usually go on heritage walks or tours come for this one. The crowd is significantly different, and this means more people are finally getting interested in the history of the city," Thirupurasundari says.

When Muhilan ends his walk at 9am, staffers are beginning to trickle in, and cars are pulling up on the driveway. The adherence to the 8am start time now makes sense.

While the building does hold its charm even amidst all the din from the offices, and people trooping in for appointments, there is something surreal and immersive about seeing the sunshine filter through the tall windows on each floor, empty corridors blanketed in stillness, and being able to hear nothing but the calm voice of the guide. This early morning trip to experience a slice of history should be on your agenda.

The heritage walk at the Ripon Buildings takes place from 8am to 9am on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. To register, log onto <https://gcservices.chennaicorporation.gov.in/heritagewalk>



A show for the ages
Singer Shakthisree Gopalan's concert at Instincts 2025; (inset) a motorcyclist performs stunts. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Culture in high-octane

Instincts 2025, SSN College's cultural fest, saw 30,000 students attend performances, competitions, and creative showcases

Chitradeepa Anantharam

chitradeepa.a@thehindu.co.in

Instincts 2025, the 20th edition of SSN College of Engineering and Shiv Nadar University Chennai's annual cultural fest, wrapped up a three-day run with over 30,000 students from 20 colleges across the country. Featuring over 50 events hosted by more than 20 diverse clubs, the festival scaled up this year.

Actor Kalidas Jayaram inaugurated the event, setting the tone for the three-day festival. The first day featured a series of club events. The evening's highlight was the celebrity variety show, where comedian Faiyaz Hussain had the audience in stitches. The night peaked with choreonite, a high-energy dance competition that saw performances from college teams. A standout event on day 2 was fire silambam, an engaging display of skill and tradition. Film enthusiasts gathered for reels of fire, where 12 shortlisted films explored themes ranging from social issues to historical narratives. The night closed with the pro show, headlined by singer Shakthisree Gopalan and her band.

Talented college bands battled it out on the final day at band hunt. As the festival drew to a close, DJ Night with DJ Sparrow delivered a pulsating send-off. Madhumitha Chandrasekaran, IT department coordinator, said: "INSTINCTS was not just a celebration of talent but a testament to art, music, and culture in bringing people together. With the theme, 'Timeless Tales', we ensured it was special for everyone."



The Hindu partnered as the official media partner for INSTINCTS 2025.

Counting steps at the club

Running is for the morning. Raves are for the night. This Saturday, the two activities come together to keep you on your toes



Sanjana Ganesh
sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in

When Karun B began Cloka three months ago, this small running community only consisted of friends from odd places. The intention was to run, but more importantly, to find time to chat and meet with other young people from similar age groups. He wanted to inject new blood into the Chennai running scene.

In 12 weeks, the community has grown multifold with over 1,500 people, usually between the ages of 18 and 35, who have registered to wake up every Saturday and run. The club caps it at around 100 people per run.

"It hasn't been possible to accommodate people for all the runs because we are now a large community and the law doesn't permit for as many people to assemble without many

permissions and approvals from the law and order authorities," Karun says. After their run on March 22 which starts at 6am (at a location which will be released only after registration), the community will head to KUP in Alwarpet for a rave at 8.30am. Karun's brother Kavin, the DJ behind Noma.ent and the coffee shop raves in the city, will play house and Afro house, alongside Karun Mathani. The access to the rave happens only if you complete the run. While registering to run is free, one needs to pay a fee for the event.

This culture of running and raving has been observed in other cities like Bengaluru and Mumbai. However, Chennai has always

Lace up At the Run and Chill event by Cloka. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

walked at its own pace.

What is interesting to witness is that many young people are not hitting the snooze button and are showing up for runs at daybreak because they wish to meet others too. During their last big event, the Run and Chill, a group of about 60 people ran in the Marina beach promenade and met at Bask for coffee and 'bean pong'. The idea, Karun says, is to ensure that the drinking games that are usually played on Saturday night, are accessible to folks on the morning of their run, to engage the sober-curious and make friends.

Karun attributes much of the buzz regarding the run club to one open secret: "Everyone just wants to make new friends and belong to circles larger than they are used to. Three months ago, I had no idea who most people were. Today, some of them are my closest friends. They bring an 'I'll support you because you're just as old as me' energy to the event and that has been heartening to see," says the 23-year-old.

In 12 weeks, the community has grown multifold with over 1,500 people, usually between the ages of 18 and 35, who have registered to wake up every Saturday and run



Melody and memories

Charming Shashi Kapoor by Satrangi, will feature timeless songs picturised on legendary actor Shashi Kapoor presented by Promod, Smriti, Ramya, and Abhishek, who will be supported by a live orchestra. @Chinmaya Heritage Centre, Chetpet. March 23, 5.45 pm. Tickets priced at ₹800, ₹500 & ₹300. For details, call 9884778073



Art, craft & zines

The upcoming edition of By Hand From the Heart will feature over 48 artists and makers showcasing

furniture, home decor, art, fashion, wardrobe essentials, jewellery, condiments, food, and leather goods. @Welcomehotel by ITC Hotels, Cathedral Road, March 22 and 23, 10am to 8pm. For details, call 9840326354



Handcrafted treasures

The Indian Artisan Bazaar showcases handcrafted jewellery, clothing, fashion accessories, home décor, and more from artisans across India. Entry and parking are free. @CERC Campus Exhibition Ground, Thiruvanmiyur. On till March 23, 10.30 am to 8.30pm. For more details, call 6364685716.

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Arul, by Canadian songwriter Yanchan Produced, and
 Chennai vocalist Sandeep Narayan, has been recently nominated for the JUNO Awards

Srinivasa Ramanujam
 srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

Sandeep Narayanan has sung Thyagaraja *kritis* on several stages, but this one was going to be different. Recording the popular 'Manavyalakincharam' for a track called 'Tradition', the Carnatic singer had to sing traditional lyrics over hip-house Afrobeats. "I had to get over my mental block of whether it was appropriate," he mulls, "To be genuinely convinced and tell myself that it's okay to go ahead was one of the most challenging things about this project."

'Tradition' is the first track of *Arul*, an EP that resulted due to a musical collaboration between Sandeep and popular Canadian songwriter-music producer Yanchan Produced.

The beats are modern and trendy, while the song and the lyrics are classical.



When *kritis* meet Afrobeats

Arul is a project that has prompted conversation among purists on the way Carnatic tracks are used. *Arul* is also a project that has appealed to global listeners for its unique approach to blending Western and classical ideas, resulting in a prestigious nomination: to the upcoming 54th Annual JUNO Awards in Canada.

At the awards ceremony set to be held in Toronto later this month, *Arul* will

compete, in the South Asian Music Recording of the Year Award category, against the likes of AP Dhillon, Chani Nattan, Inderpal Moga & Jazzy B, Jonita Gandhi and Karan Aujla. "I think we have a great chance because our album explores Indian classical-based music. *Arul* is also a bridge that connects the tradition of India to the modern day," he says.

Sandeep Narayanan first met Yanchan when he was a

teenager who wanted to learn to play the *mridangam* in Chennai. His teacher (Neyveli Venkatesh) introduced us more than 15 years ago. Subsequently, we kept in touch through social media. But during the COVID-19 lockdown, I saw a lot of his work and had given him some positive feedback. One thing led to another, and we decided that we



SANDEEP NARAYAN

Tune in Sandeep Narayan; (below) with Yanchan Produced. AMAR RAMESH AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

should work on something."

That something was a few hip-hop stems and beats that Yanchan had worked on, back in his studio in Canada. "He wanted me to sing whatever came to my mind, but over these beats," he recalls. Hoping to fruitfully battle lockdown-induced boredom, Sandeep launched into the project with gusto at his

Chennai home studio. "I would record a few things over the beats and send it to him. He would cut it, move it around. We were just jamming. We did not go into this thinking it would be an EP or album."

But it did. *Arul*, consisting of five short tracks that mixes classical and Western musical sensibilities, was not picked by two major music labels because "it could not be categorised into any genre". Undeterred, Sandeep and Yanchan decided to take *Arul* in their own hands, a decision that has yielded rich dividends. "A lot of youngsters growing up in the West, especially in Canada or the US, lose touch with their own culture and regret it when they grow up. They feel that listening to *Arul* made them feel a little connected with their roots."

Even as his regular Carnatic *kucheris* go on, Sandeep will, this year, work on an extension of the *Arul* universe, along with Yanchan.

Apart from that, he is also working on a 12-track album with German musicians. "I've been working with a few musicians in the Lo-Fi category, but trained in jazz, piano and drums. My friends from Chennai have played violin and *mridangam*.

Apart from original compositions and covers, we have also redone something from Andal's *Thirupaavai*. Each track has a different approach; some are upbeat and some meditative. I really want to show the range of Indian classical music."

The big screen

In the mood to watch some international films? Then, head to the Dr KCG Verghese International Film Festival, happening today. Held in association with Indo Cine Appreciation Foundation, Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in Chennai and Iran Culture House of Mumbai, this fest will feature four films. Watch Taiwanese film, *A Time to Live and A Time to Die* (10am), followed by a screening of *Dust in the Wind* (12.45pm). You can also watch Iranian movies like *In the Arms of the Tree* (3 pm) and *Sima's Unfinished Narration* (5pm). All screenings will take place today at PVR Inox - Screen 4, The Marina Mall, Old Mahabalipuram Road. For details, contact 9840151956/8939022618.



The OG roadie

Raghu Ram, popular for *Splitsvilla* and *Roadies*, has teamed up with Ajith in upcoming Tamil film *Good, Bad, Ugly*

Praveen Sudhevan
 praveen.s@thehindu.co.in

Raghu Ram is waiting for the release of his upcoming film - Adhik Ravichandran's *Good, Bad, Ugly* - starring Ajith Kumar. His previous Tamil film, *Doctor* (2021), starring Sivakarthikeyan, was acclaimed as well as successful. But it was released during the pandemic-induced lockdowns. So, Raghu could not be a part of the promotions or watch it in Chennai. This time, it is a bigger project. So, Raghu is waiting to experience the fanfare in Chennai with his wife Natalie Di Luccio, who has sung in *Kadal* and *I*.

Raghu made his name as a television producer and host with popular reality shows like *Roadies*, *Splitsvilla*, and *Indian Idol*. His first film was Abbas Tyrewala's *Jhootha Hi Sahi*. Of late, he has begun embracing acting as more than just a side gig.

"I think about three years ago, I was going through a transition in my mindset," he says, over a call, "I was becoming more fascinated with fiction and other aspects of creativity." It was around this time that *Keedaa Cola*, a Telugu film directed by Tharun Bhascker, came his way, giving him the sense of direction he had been seeking. Since then, he has taken on a variety of roles across multiple industries, culminating in his upcoming Tamil venture.

The Ajith factor

Raghu's filmography spans multiple languages - Hindi, Punjabi, Telugu, and now Tamil - but it is the southern industries that have intrigued him the most. "I really enjoyed working in the South a lot more," he admits. His background gives him a unique

connection to Tamil cinema. Though he primarily lived in Mumbai and Delhi, he grew up in a Telugu household while attending a school run by a Tamil management. "I don't see myself as a random North Indian being cast in a Tamil film," he says.

One of the biggest draws of *Good, Bad, Ugly* for Raghu was the chance to work with Ajith Kumar. "All I can tell you about my character is that it's nothing like the one in *Doctor*. That's one of the reasons it appealed to me - it's very different from anything I've done," he says. "But personally, what drew me to this is that it's an Ajith Kumar film, a Mythri production, and it's directed by Adhik."

What truly struck him about Ajith was his larger-than-life persona. "I started getting a little in awe of him when I realised that he was driving his own racing car. It's like Bruce Wayne

is so rich that he could hire someone to be Batman, but he chooses to be Batman himself." Beyond his stardom, Ajith's outlook towards life resonated deeply with Raghu. "The biggest thing I picked up from him is to not let societal expectations limit or define you. He doesn't need to prove anything - he just is."

If working with Ajith was an experience in industry culture, collaborating with director Adhik Ravichandran was a crash course in adapting to a unique creative process. "There's an energy to his filmmaking. It jumps out of the screen."

Raghu is also venturing into screenwriting, drawing inspiration from the filmmakers he has worked with. "Every director is also an actor in a way. When they direct me, I pick up on their movements, their vision."



Back in time

Aditya 369, the 1991 film directed by Singeetam Srinivasa Rao, starring Nandamuri Balakrishna and Mohini, is all set for a re-release on April 11. The time travel science fiction Telugu film was produced by Sivalenka Krishna Prasad of Sridevi Movies and presented by the late, legendary singer SP Balasubrahmanyam. The film won both critical acclaim and the appreciation of the audience during its release and ever since, has been considered one of the best Indian science fiction films. On the film's re-release, producer Sivalenka Krishna Prasad says, "The iconic film has been digitally remastered in 4K resolution, with its sound upgraded to 5.1 quality. The digital team worked for six months to deliver the output. The original film continues to enjoy immense popularity among audiences. I will always remain indebted to SP Balasubrahmanyam garu, who supported me in producing this film. Nandamuri Balakrishna Rao and Singeetam Srinivasa Rao garu were thrilled when they heard about the re-release." *Aditya 369* boasts of music by maestro Ilaiyaraaja, dialogues by Jandhyala and cinematography by PC Sreeram, VSR Swamy, and Kabir Lal. The film also starred Amrishi Puri and Tinnu Anand. Meanwhile, Sivalenka Krishna Prasad's new Telugu film, *Sarangapani Jathakam*, directed by Mohanakrishna Indraganti and starring Priyadarshi Pulikonda and Roopa Koduvayur, is scheduled to release on April 18.

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Fusion special

Ready for some music? Chennai will host a fusion concert, bringing together a line-up of artistes like Andrea Jeremiah, Paal Dabba, Asal Kolaar and Pradeep Kumar. In a recent meet-and-greet event, Andrea said, "The fusion concert is a fresh concept, and it gets even more special because it's the first time the four of us - each from different performing styles - have collaborated." Put together by KYN (Know Your Neighbourhood), a neighbourhood discovery app, the concert promises to be a grand display of music and celebration. The concert will take place on March 29 at YMCA Grounds, Nandanam. Tickets available on the KYN app.