

fridayReview

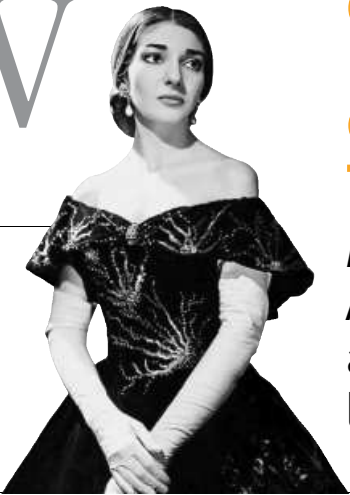
THE HINDU

Music for the new age

Jayanthi Kumaresh's Cup O' Carnatic shows reach out to the young **p2**

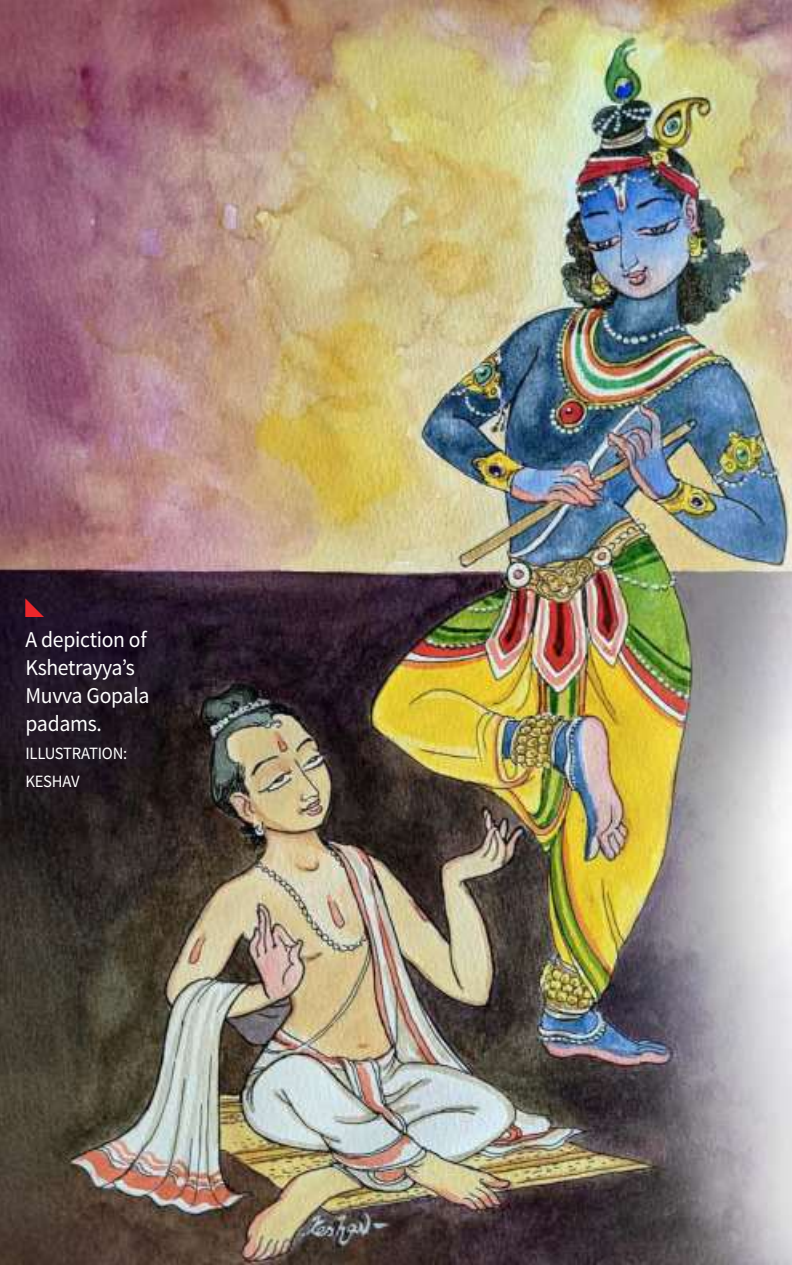
The widening canvas

How artist Paresh Maity has gone global with his works **p3**



OPERA LEGEND MARIA CALLAS GETS A CINEMATIC TRIBUTE

Maria, starring Angelina Jolie, brings alive the soprano's life and music **p4**



A depiction of Kshetrappa's Muvva Gopala padams. ILLUSTRATION: KESHAV

Soul song

Padams and javalis are a reminder of the strong link between art and human emotions

Savita Narasimhan

Padams and javalis belong to the world of love poetry – rooted in sringara. They emerged from the temple and court traditions of South India and were central to the Devadasi repertoire. The treatment of sringara in literature goes back as early as the 8th century with Andal's *Nachiyar Tirumozhi* and has been explored with nuance and depth by composers across centuries – Jayadeva in the 12th, Annamacharya in the 15th, Kshetragna in the 17th, and many others up to the 20th century.

When Leela akka (Bharatanatyam exponent Leela Samson) and I decided to come together for a performance that would let us explore the inherent charm of padams and javalis through our respective art forms – music and dance – it became a celebration of literature, movement, rasa and sruti. Over several sessions of discussions, we came up with a line-up of these short poetic pieces for the event, which was held in Bengaluru recently. This article is a result of our mutual artistic exchange and the desire to share it with the larger world. Padams and javalis are subtle verses that have suggestive, nuanced meaning, is how Leela akka succinctly puts it. “At



T. Brinda and T. Muktha represented the hoary Dhanammal tradition that exemplified what these compositions require of musicians – a malleable voice, deep breath control and the ability to sustain notes with emotional weight

the start, we look for exact meaning – word to word, then sentence by sentence and lastly verse by verse. But along the way you realise that the meaning has to emerge from the context of the situation. There is no explanation that the poet leaves behind as an instruction manual that may guide you. It simply says it as the poet felt it. Two to three hundred years later, it is largely anyone's guess as to what he might have meant. Much is left to one's own interpretation, one's *svabhaava* or nature and to a sense of aesthetic,” she explains. My own engagement with them has been shaped by a deep respect for their musical appeal. Padams feel meditative. They call for stillness and introspection. Javalis, by contrast, are quicker in emotional turns – lighter and playful. Their difference isn't one of skill, but of tone. A padam breathes slowly, through pause and weight; a javali skips along with perky charm. Language plays a central role in both padam and javali. Telugu flows with soft musicality, while Tamil brings its own emotional cadence. When I learn or perform a padam or javali, I let the emotional resonance of the language, and the melody shape each other. The sahitya offers direction, the raga gives depth. It's a quiet dialogue, not a contest. The emotions in a padam may reflect human love or spiritual yearning. I don't see them as opposites – both feel valid, at times intertwined. Rather than impose meaning, I try to let the raga and text lead me.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 3

An Initiative of
JAYANTILAL CHALLANI
GROUP

CHALLANI
JEWELLERY MART

CELEBRATES

Diamond
FESTIVAL

Till 08th June 2025

*T&C Apply

₹ 58,900/-*

PER CARAT

EF / VVS1
CERTIFIED DIAMONDS

ABSOLUTE
TRANSPARENCY

100% BUYBACK
GUARANTEE
ON EXCHANGE

SGL CERTIFIED
DIAMONDS

CHENNAI - 73737 36514 | MADURAI - 91691 62013 | PONDICHERRY - 99442 83436

www.challanijewels.com | Follow us at

A CH-CHE



Aishwarya Raghunathan

What if a raga could unravel like a bedtime story, or a ragam tanam pallavi echo with laughter? Can humour find space between a veena phrase and a ghatam beat? And what happens when a centuries-old art form decides to look a child in the eye and say, “Come, listen”?

In Cup O’ Carnatic, veena exponent Jayanthi Kumaresh dares to imagine just that. A world where Carnatic music is not only performed, but lived, spoken, questioned, and made delightfully human. Here, tradition doesn’t stand still; it walks hand-in-hand with imagination, reaching out to the next generation with a gentle, knowing smile.

In Jayanthi Kumaresh’s hands,

the veena becomes a seamless blend of music, theatre, storytelling, and visual poetry. On stage at the Narada Gana Sabha recently, she is not merely a performer, but a narrator, a teacher, and a companion to the audience. Through her conversations with a child, she

bridges the gulf between the ancient and the new, the known and the curious.

The roots of this production lie in a deeply personal moment, when Vidhya, a disciple of Jayanthi and a mother of two, found herself struggling to convey the depth and joy of Carnatic

music to her young children. In search of a medium that could bridge tradition and comprehension, she approached her guru with an idea: could the core concepts of Carnatic music be shared in a way that is both engaging and age-appropriate? This seed of a question blossomed

into a digital series on YouTube, Cup O’ Carnatic, which has been running for more than seven years. These byte-sized episodes, rich in music and conversation, found resonance with parents, educators and students alike. Inspired by this sustained digital engagement, the idea to

bring Cup O’ Carnatic to the stage took shape, not merely as a live extension, but as a transformative experience. The live stage version made its debut in Bengaluru and then travelled to Chennai.

With its unique blend of animation, narration and live performance, the show dares to collapse the boundaries between the performer and the audience, between digital and live, between tradition and experiment.

Keerthi Kumar’s graphics and lighting design elevate the experience. The gentle strokes of Upasana Govindarajan’s illustrations and Aneesh Pulikode’s graphics form an impeccable backdrop and frames the narrative like a living storybook. The musical support is equally thoughtful. Giridhar Udupa on the ghatam and Pramath Kiran on the morsing and the tabla provide a responsive and understated rhythmic layer.

During a post-performance conversation, Jayanthi said, “We tested every joke on our students. If it made them laugh, we knew it had to be included.” The show is rich with gentle humour, the kind that eases the listener in, especially the young.

The production took close to a year to conceptualise and refine. “We wanted to do it right. To reach out to the next generation rasikas, we have to opt for formats they would love,” said Jayanthi, who plans to take the show across the globe.



Raga journey
Shruthi S Bhat with Kailasapathy on the violin and Bhuvan on the mridangam. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Notes of bhakti

Shruthi S Bhat conveyed the poignancy in Bhadrachala Ramadasu’s songs

P Srihari

Shruthi S. Bhat made a statement of both intent and content right at the outset of her concert, which was devoted exclusively to the compositions of Bhadrachala Ramadasu. It is rare to come across a kriti in Bhairavi as the opening number of a concert, and rarer still when it includes a niraval segment. Accompanied by G. Kailasapathy on the violin and G.N. Bhuvan on the mridangam, Shruthi presented this endowment concert under the auspices of The Music Academy at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

Shruthi’s voice was in fine fettle from the very first note, as she opened with the shloka ‘Srirama sitagaga’ from the saint-poet’s ‘Dasarathi Sathakam’ in Bhairavi. The full range of the raga’s facets emerged even in the short rendition, which was a prelude to the composition ‘Rama dayajudave’. The refinement lingered through the rendition of the song, particularly in the niraval and kalpanaswaras at ‘Rajeeva dala lochana’, creating immersive bhakti.

Rendered with zest
‘Bhadrasaila rajamandira’ in a lilting Kuntalavarali was sung zestfully, offering a lighter and contrasting shade. Chakravakam was the first raga Shruthi explored. While the delineation stayed true to the raga’s mood and structure, it occasionally veered into repetitive passages that could have been more tightly sculpted for greater coherence. Kailasapathy’s version on the violin complemented that of the vocalist.

Here, Shruthi narrated a moving anecdote from the life of the 17th-century composer, which

related to the kriti ‘Abbappa debbalaku’ in Misra Chapu. Ramadasu, a staunch devotee of Rama, had been imprisoned by the Mughal ruler Tana Shah on charges of misappropriating funds to construct the Bhadrachala Rama temple. In this composition, he pleads with the Lord: “I promise upon your feet, please do listen. I have not laundered a single penny to anybody”. After listening to his prayers, Rama and Lakshmana appeared as messengers, paid the money, and secured Ramadasu’s release from prison. The song was rendered with the poignancy the context warrants, and the swarakalpana at ‘Prema tho’ displayed synchrony from the ensemble.

‘Hari hari rama’ in Kanada carried forward the devotional fervour leading into the main suite in Kamboji and the best-known composition by Ramadasu in the raga – the evergreen ‘Emayya Rama’ in Khanda Chapu. Shruthi began by hitting the high notes shortly before ebbing into the lower octave, and then gradually shaped the melody, revealing its splendour through gamaka-laden phrases. Kailasapathy’s presentation was equally rich with melodic depth. The rendition of the kriti was replete with Kamboji’s grace before Shruthi rounded off with niraval and swara exchanges at ‘Paramatmudu ani ninnu’ in the charanam. Bhuvan’s rhythmic support was steadfast throughout, and his tani was marked by verve and tonal precision.

A shloka, ‘Sriramachandra karunakara’, in Yamunakalyani was followed by the song ‘Naraharideva’, and the concert concluded with a mangalam in Madhyamavati.

Courtroom drama

Kalavu Neekkiya Padalam, staged at the Kodai Nataka Vizha, highlighted the battle between ethics and law

Suganthi Krishnamachari

Bhavani is a lawyer who doesn’t have many cases coming her way. She is forced to settle for clients who can afford to pay very little. Ramanathan (Bhaskar), on the other hand, is a lawyer who makes money hand over fist.

ThRee’s *Kalavu Neekkiya Padalam* (script V Sreevathson; direction M.V.Bhaskar) was about how dharma triumphs over the letter of the law, in two cases where Ramanathan and Bhavani face off. In the first case, an *appalam* supplier wants to get out of a contract with a multinational company, because he finds the terms unfavourable. Ramanathan, appearing for the MNC, argues that ignorance of the law is no excuse. But Bhavani works around the law, and makes some ethical points. She asks the executive of the MNC why he gets annual increments, while the



PHOTO: M. SRINATH

poor *appalam* supplier has to stagnate on the same compensation for five years. Finally, the MNC withdraws the case, fearing negative publicity.

In the other case, Meyyappan (Isaikavi Ramanan), the trustee of a private temple, accuses the temple priest of stealing temple jewellery. The jewels were in a

cupboard, inside the sanctum. There was no break in, and the priest was the only one who had a key to the cupboard. Bhavani proves, however, that there was once a spare key, which was supposedly lost by Meyyappan’s father. What if the key hadn’t been lost? Cornered, Meyyappan withdraws his complaint against the priest. So came another victory for Bhavani. While Bhavani’s successes may leave one feeling good, because it is nice to see the underdog winning against all odds, the court scenes and Bhavani’s moral haranguing were unrealistic.

The playwright had overdramatised the court scenes. A lawyer may be religious, but quoting incidents from *Thiruvilayadal Puranam*, and invoking god in a court were overboard. However, the LED backdrops for the lawyer’s office, the court and Bhavani’s house (Shiva, Disney, Sharath and team) were striking and well done.

A whodunit

Kaanal Neero sustained interest with its many twists and turns



PHOTO: M. SRINATH

Suganthi Krishnamachari

For a suspense story to work, nothing should be obvious. It is the ambiguity that sustains interest in such stories. Dummies Drama’s *Kaanal Neero* (story and dialogues by Sridhar Ramaswamy and direction by V. Sreevathson) is one such story, where you are left wondering not who the murderer is, but whether the murder took place or not.

Shiva is a rich estate owner. His wife Kayal is an attention seeker, and torments Shiva. One day the quarrel between them takes a serious turn, and she tries to slash her wrist. Shiva wrenches the knife from her hands and pushes her down. She suffers an injury and dies. Moving the stage LED display (LED support - TN Now), to show Shiva dragging Kayal’s body out of the house and burying it, was a very clever way of portraying the scene. You see Shiva (Sridhar Ramaswamy) murdering his wife and burying her. But subsequent events leave you wondering whether Kayal is actually dead.

Shiva gets phone calls from unknown numbers and when he answers the phone, it is Kayal at the other end, asking him why he has abandoned her. Should you believe the evidence of your eyes? Or should you not? You keep asking yourself this, throughout.

Shiva goes to pieces, and finally confesses to the crime and tells the police where he buried the body. But when the police dig up the spot, there is no corpse in the pit. The way the plot was handled and the performance of the actors kept the story gripping till the end. V. Sridhar as lawyer Svigg, Sridhar Ramaswamy as Shiva and Satish as Kadir were particularly good in their roles.

The conclusion, however, was unconvincing and left one with many questions. There were some logical loopholes too in the play. However, to raise these questions in this review would act as a spoiler. Suffice it to say that the play was on the whole entertaining, and with a willing suspension of disbelief, you might be able to overlook the far-fetched conclusion.



Enduring appeal (Clockwise from left) Soprano Maria Callas greets the audience after a concert at New York's Carnegie Hall in 1974; Angelina Jolie depicting the diva in the biopic *Maria*; and the singer in her younger days.
PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rachel Rhine

With the release of Pablo Larraín's new biopic *Maria*, starring Angelina Jolie, the world is once again drawn into the life of Greek-American opera legend Maria Callas, whose artistry, ambition and isolation were inseparable from her myth. The film premiered at the 81st Venice International Film Festival on August 29, 2024, and has been streaming on Lionsgate Play in India since May 9, 2025.

The beginning
Maria Anna Cecilia Kalogeropoulos was born in New York in 1923 to Greek immigrant parents. Her childhood was marred by family discords and poverty. When her parents separated, her mother took Maria and her sister back to Athens, just before World War II. Life in wartime Greece was bleak, but within that landscape, a remarkable voice came into being.
Maria trained at Athens Conservatoire under soprano Elvira de Hidalgo, who saw not only the potential but the ferocity in her voice. She practised obsessively,

The story of a fearless voice

Maria, starring Angelina Jolie, brings alive memories of the opera diva Maria Callas

isolated from friends, fuelled by her mother's ambition and her own growing hunger for greatness. She would later say her youth was stolen from her by music.
Her professional debut came in the 1940s in Athens, but it was in post-war Italy that her legend started to crystallise. By the age of 25, Maria had conquered the major Italian stages, singing with an intensity that audiences had not seen in decades.
Maria Callas brought Bel Canto opera – long considered decorative and outdated – back into cultural prominence. In works by Bellini, Donizetti and early Verdi, she found emotional depth. Her *Norma* was

torn between motherhood and priestly duty. Her *Lucia* descended into madness with devastating realism. These were not just performances, they were revelations.
Her voice was unusual: expansive in range, volatile in colour, capable of both lyrical delicacy and volcanic force. Critics sometimes called it

uneven. But even those who questioned her technique admitted they could not look away.
By the 1950s, Maria had become a global celebrity. Her drastic weight loss transformed her physically and visually aligned her with the 'fashion elite'. Designers such as Dior and Biki dressed her, photographers pursued her and tabloids devoured every detail of her life.
But the transformation was not without cost. Many believed her voice became fragile after the physical change. Others pointed to the sheer emotional toll her performances exacted. Either way, her career began to slow by the early 1960s. Offstage, her relationship with the Greek shipping magnate, Aristotle Onassis, made headlines. When he left her for Jacqueline Kennedy, Maria was devastated. Those who knew Maria, said she

never recovered emotionally, though she rarely spoke about it in public. In her final years, Maria withdrew from limelight, living in solitude in her Paris apartment. She concealed her pain behind dark glasses, tailored suits, and carefully worded silences.
It is this fragile, human side that director Pablo Larraín explores in *Maria*, his introspective biopic starring Angelina Jolie. Set entirely in the last years of Maria's life, the film avoids the grandeur of her career, and instead, lingers on the quiet rituals of memory: letters, old videos, echoes of applause. Angelina's portrayal, informed by months of archival research, is inward and dignified. She plays



The biopic, which premiered last year at the 81st Venice International Film Festival, has been streaming on Lionsgate Play in India since May 9, 2025.

CALENDAR

Thematic concert

Madhuradhwani has organised the vocal duet by Vidya Kalayanaraman and Brindha Manickavasakan on May 25, 6.15 p.m. at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. The duo's concert is themed on Syama Sastri's compositions. They will be accompanied by Madan Mohan on the violin and Poongulam Subramaniam on the mridangam and Sai Subramaniam on the morsing.

Special event

Rasika Ranjani Sabha in association with Dr S. Shivpprasadh's Nataka Kavalair R.S. Manohar's NXGs celebrates the second edition of 'Sengol' day on May 28, 6 p.m., at the Sabha, Sivaswamy School, Mylapore. As part of the celebrations, a special play *Manunidhi Chozhan*, will be staged. The significance of 'Sengol' in our culture will be highlighted in a talk.

Honour for percussionist

Senior kanjira vidwan Bangalore N. Amrit has been conferred the 'A' Top Grade in mridangam (2025) by All India Radio, adding to his earlier distinction of 'A' Top Grade in kanjira (2016). This is said to be a rare one for a percussionist. To celebrate this honour, his students have organised a special 'Guru Vandana' felicitation programme on May 29, 6 p.m., at Sri Jayarama Seva Mandali, Jayanagar 8th Block, Bengaluru. The evening will be presided over by senior vocalist R.K. Padmanabha. Felicitations will be offered by kanjira vidwan B.S. Purushotham.

ISKCON's new centre

ISKCON Chennai inaugurates its new centre at T. Nagar on May 24. Narasimha utsavam will be performed on the occasion at Guru Balaji Kalyana Mandapam, near Natesan Park, T. Nagar. The evening will begin at 4.30 p.m. with a kirtan. This will be followed by special abhishekam and lecture (6 p.m.). There will be weekly programmes including Bhagavad Gita classes conducted on Saturdays, 7 p.m., at Alamelumagna Kalyana Mandapam, T. Nagar. For more details contact 8220017695.

Harikatha

Hamsadhwani has organised Varsha Bhuvaneshwari's harikatha 'Bhaktha Meera' on May 24, 6.15 p.m. She will be accompanied by Mannargudi Shankaraman on the harmonium and Jayadev Haridoss on the mridangam. Venue: Youth Hostel, Adyar.

Lecture

Presented by Chennai 2000 Plus Trust and Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Ithihaasa Paathirangal's monthly lecture on 'Iruvar Kanda Ramayanam' by Va.Ve.Su., will take place on May 25, 6 p.m. at Vivekananda House.



Narendra Kusnur

Theatre director Nadir Khan describes *Mumbai Star* as a "dance musical. It is all about dance and dancers, but is set in a theatrical format as it uses narrators to tell a story. Our idea is to blend movement, music and lyrics with the theatrical element."

Mumbai Star was originally written by Devika Shahani, directed by Nadir, with music by Dhruv Ghanekar. In 2023, the team toured Japan for the Min-On Concert Association. However, when it was selected for Season 7 of Aadyam Theatre, the Aditya Birla Group's theatre initiative, it needed a fresh approach. Devika, who is the producer along with Nadir had the script reimaged, which was adapted by Akarsh Khurana and Arghya Lahiri. It also brought on board Rajit Kapur and Srishti Shrivastava as narrators.
Mumbai Star begins its India run at Mumbai's St Andrew's Auditorium (May 24 and 25), followed by performances at New Delhi's Kamani Auditorium (June 14 and 15). Choreographed by Avantika Bahl, with music by Dhruv and lyrics by Ishita Arun, it features eight songs.
Mumbai Star tells the story of Dev (played by Avenav Mukherjee), a young man from a coastal village of Maharashtra, who dreams of becoming a star. With only his raw



All about dance Rajit Kapur and Srishti Shrivastava; from the play and director Nadir Khan. PHOTOS COURTESY: AADYAM THEATRE

City chronicles

Nadir Khan's *Mumbai Star* is an ode to movement, music and people

talent and a small amount of cash, he arrives in Mumbai, hoping to win a dance competition. Though this genre has been explored before, Nadir believes, each storyteller has his own perspective and adds: "The first thing is to tell the story truthfully and interestingly, but, different modes may be used. Creating memorable moments on stage is pure joy for a director."

A major emphasis was in choosing the right dancers. Avantika worked with guest choreographers Uma Dogra (Kathak), Vivaran Dhasmana (hip-hop) and Krutika Mehta (Bollywood). Says Avantika, "The effort was to bring together various styles, interwoven within the expansive framework of

contemporary dance. As *Mumbai Star* also captures the city's spirit, we wanted the movements to represent people from all walks of life."

Avantika shares the choreography was driven by



While Sing India Sing helped me know all about the world of music, I got to learn about dance in Mumbai Star.

NADIR KHAN



Dhruv's music compositions. "It was exciting and challenging to find a way for the varied dance forms to blend and lend themselves to the storytelling, without breaking the overall rhythm of the piece."

Intense training

The dancers come with intense training in multiple forms. Avantika elaborates: "All of them are performers, teachers, and in some cases, choreographers. It was a delight to be in a room full of dancers, who bring in enthusiasm, spirit and grit, willing to push boundaries and bring their own perspectives. For the actors, we made sure they too could get familiar with the movement vocabulary."

Nadir reiterates that the effort was to bring in dancers who could adapt to other styles. "For instance, there is Arushi Nigam, who plays Koel. She is a ballerina, who also does contemporary and jazz. But, here she also has to do a lot of Kathak, which was new to her. So the training was rigorous. One can't master a dance form in a few days but one can master the choreography for a particular sequence."

This is the fourth production of Aadyam Theatre's Season 7 this year. The initiative aims to push artistic boundaries in theatre through a good mix of original and adapted stories.

Along with theatre personality Shernaz Patel, Nadir also plays the role of a programming consultant for Aadyam Theatre. He says, "We invite pitches, shortlist and select the final lot after a round of meetings. Aadyam gives producers the wherewithal to build a show and run it, so the costs are taken care of. We want these plays to be present in the theatre ecosystem for years, and that has been the case with many productions."

Nadir feels this role has helped him serve the cause of theatre by enabling other Indian directors to present some wonderful work. He says the response to this season's first three plays has been "encouraging, and hopes *Mumbai Star* will offer a completely different experience".