

friday Review

THE HINDU

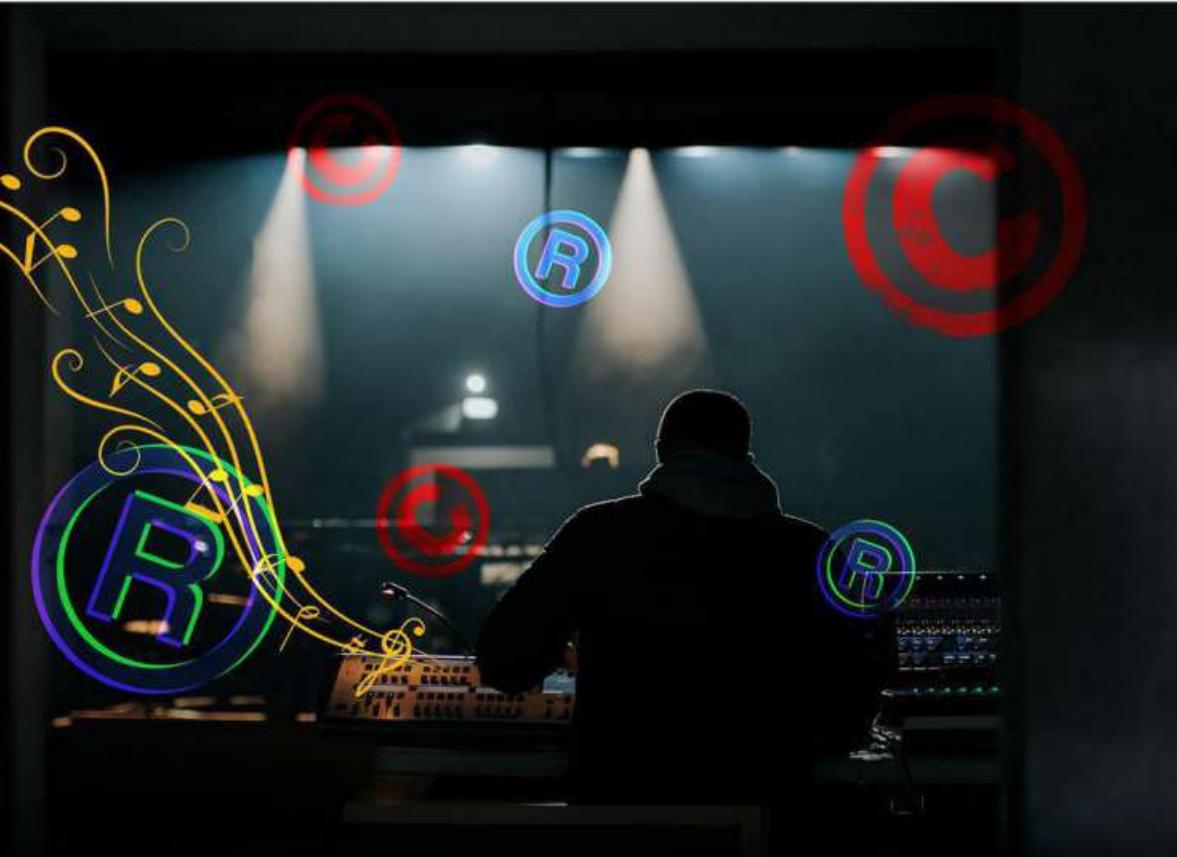
Themed on TyagarajaVeteran violinist Kanyakumari presents her 'Ekaika raga kritis' in physical format **p2****New award process**Sangeet Natak Akademi announces 'self nomination' by artistes **p3****DANCING HER WAY TO GLORY**Kruti Gandhi Sarda is the first Indian to win the Indonesia Tango Championship **p4****Anurag Tagat**

The Indian music industry has adopted several measures to strengthen its ecosystem. One of them is a vigilant approach to copyright and royalty for creators. Composers, lyricists/writers, instrumentalists and music publishers have been trying to seek a steady compensation when their work is heard or performed anywhere.

Writer, lyricist and member on the board of directors at The Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) Mayur Puri says, "The focus has always been to make artistes (or 'creators' as they prefer to use as an umbrella term) aware that there is a revenue model in place even in the age of digital streaming."

IPRS was restructured in 2017, and Mayur terms his first few months (in 2019) a "big learning curve" with respect to understanding copyright law, intellectual property law and the role of metadata and credits in the Indian music ecosystem.

Mayur says: "When I joined, we had just over 4,000 members. Today, I have stopped counting, but think we are 18,000-plus, which is



No duplication, please

The Indian Performing Right Society believes a more systemic change is required to ensure copyright is kept sacrosanct for creators

Fact check

- Music is not a free commodity.
- Copyright is a fundamental right.
- It is important to ensure due credit to the creators — in writing for print and publishing media and spoken word for radio. Not once, but every single instance of the copyrightable material being used.
- For music creators, it is important to register your work with IPRS so that your due royalties can be collected and given to you.

the fastest growth in terms of membership drives also. So, we are becoming a force to reckon with." Creators can become members of IPRS with a one-time application processing fee of ₹1,200 for author, composer and their legal heir and ₹2,200 for a publisher.

On the other side of the stakeholders, IPRS chief executive

officer Rakesh Nigam has increased the royalty distribution income from ₹9 crores to ₹170 crores in the financial year 2019-2020. He is more of an execution man, and points to Mayur as being the one with ideas.

In addition to the copyright society signing licensing deals, with important players such as YouTube, Meta and Spotify, part of the

outreach has been on a more public level — teaming up with Nagaland's Task Force for Music and Arts (TaFMA), which sent singer-songwriter Abdon Mech to a songwriter camp in Budapest, besides partnering with Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa for a specific IPRS Stage.

Despite the awareness and

All rights reserved
IPRS provides a vigilant approach to copyright and royalties for creators.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



There needs to be a drive to bring people on streaming platforms such as Spotify, JioSaavn and others to pay a subscription fee for the music they have access to.

RAKESH NIGAM



When I joined IPRS in 2019, we had just over 4,000 members. Today, I have stopped counting, but think we are 18,000-plus, which is the fastest growth in terms of membership drives also.

MAYUR PURI

campaigns, a more systemic change is required to ensure copyright is kept sacrosanct for creators. In 2012, the right to royalties became inalienable from the creator, and Mayur says that is when things started to shift. That means no entity can force an artiste to sign off their royalties in exchange for a flat fee, although this is still a common work practice today in the music industry. He points out that "compliance", then, becomes a major issue.

Mayur, however, adds, "In developed countries, there is no resistance now because they have become a part of the system, and they have understood and accepted the system. In India, in the last few years, most of the big stakeholders, have embraced this system. Any legitimate business house will not dare to question the right to royalty now."

The challenges certainly remain in a country as vast as India, with a largely unregulated sector for music. "We are getting royalties from people, but there is a long way ahead. We still are not getting from some broadcast [channels]. We are not getting [royalties] from radio," adds Mayur.

The next step, then, is to introduce more regulation to ensure an enforcement of copyright law and the right to royalty, according to IPRS. "The government is now telling all the stakeholders of the music industry to come together and create a single window license, which they are working on. I do not know how practical it is and how well it is going," he says, referring to the practice of music show organisers obtaining a license to play/perform music.

That's from the organisers. From music consumers, Rakesh says that there needs to be more of a drive to bring people on streaming platforms such as Spotify, JioSaavn and others to pay a subscription fee for the music they have access to. He says that from the millions of active users on these platforms, only about four per cent are paying subscribers. Mayur adds, "Social awareness is required. People in India think music is free, as if there is no money required to listen to music again and again. But the thing is, if you like an artiste and you think that by just listening to that artist, you're promoting or you're helping that artiste. It does not work like that."

He hopes all artistes get to live a "dignified, honourable" life. "So it is important for people to believe that artistes have to be paid and you cannot just listen to anything for free," says Mayur.

CULTURE BRIEFS**Artistes meet for a cause**

The T.T. Vasu Memorial concert will be held on July 5 and 6 (6.30 p.m.) at The Music Academy. The first day will feature renowned violinist L. Subramaniam with son Ambi. Well-known Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna will perform on day two.



The fundraiser has been organised by Arun Vasu Foundation. Says Arun Vasu, son of T.I. Vasu, "My father, son of T.T. Krishnamachari (the first Minister for Commerce and Industry and Finance Minister for two terms) was the president of The Music Academy for 20 years. He passionately promoted Indian classical music and dance. He gave L. Subramaniam the opportunity to perform his first solo concert in Chennai at The Music Academy. He was also responsible for T.M. Krishna's debut concert, at the age of 12, in the Spirit of Youth series." The proceeds from the concert will go towards Bala Mandir Karmaraj Trust, where T.T. Vasu served as president.

Tickets on BookMyShow

Theatre festival

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan inaugurates 'Summer Stages 2025', the annual theatre festival (non-ticketed), on July 8, at its main auditorium, Mylapore. The event, to conclude on July 12, will feature five Tamil plays.

On the occasion, the 'Iyakkunar Sigaram K. Balachander Memorial Award 2025', instituted by Kavithalaya T. Krishnan, will be presented to actor TV. Varadarajan, on July 9, which coincides with the veteran director's 96th birth anniversary.

Plays to be staged during the festival are: July 8, 6.30 p.m.: *Ennadi Penne*. July 9, 7 p.m.: *Thanneer Thanneer*. July 10, 6.30 p.m.: *Leela Vinodham*. July 11, 6.30 p.m.: *Paayum Oli*. July 12: *Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhaal*.

**Drama contest**

Theatre Marina presents the third edition of the Tenally drama short play festival, to be held on July 5, 6, 12 and 13, at Alliance Française. Tenally 3.0 is a theatre competition that showcases 10-minute plays in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Hindi and English, selected from 30 submissions. Over 120 artistes, including playwrights, actors, directors and technicians, will bring stories blending tradition and modernity to life, which will be judged by veterans.

Tickets on BookMyShow.

Classical with a twist

Experience the fusion of Indian ragas with Western music. An event titled '007 Ragas - Bond With Bhavam: Where James Bond meets Carnatic music' will be presented by KalaShiksha Music Academy on July 6 (6 p.m.), at Narada Gana Sabha. Conceptualised by vocalist Saketharaman, it will feature over 200 students from the academy. The event marks the academy's fifth anniversary and will include the presentation of 'Samuditha Bhajana Thilakam' title to Briga Balu Bhagavtar and conclude with namasankirtanam.

Dot.. 커피 COFFEE HOUSE

KOREA COFFEE MELA

5th JULY Saturday

11 am to 11 pm

Venue

**>> Sri Motel Highway Jains <<
Ponnamalle**



Nutty Cream Latte



Matcha Cream Latte



Maple Cream Latte

prepared by korean Barista

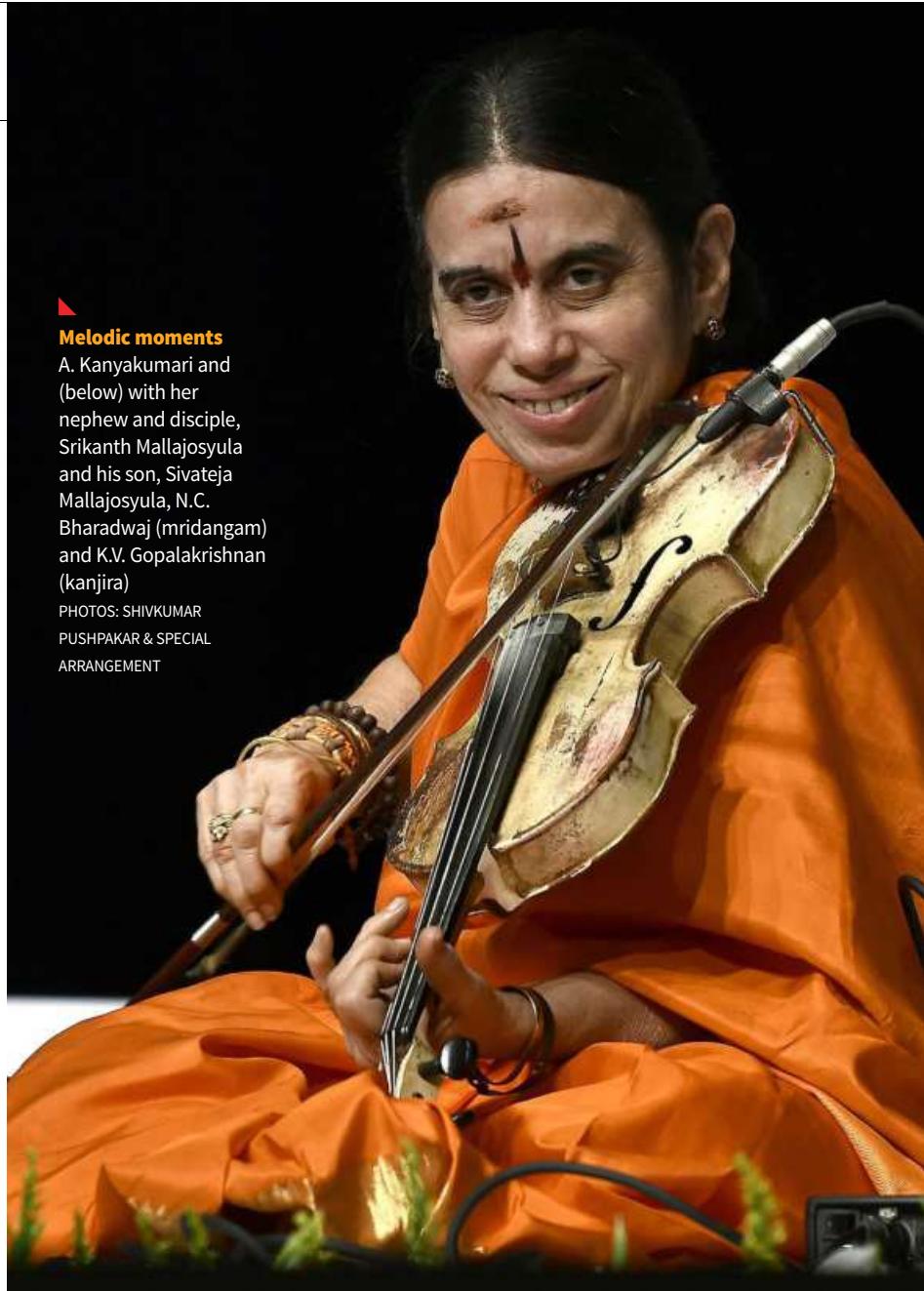
최현우 / Mr. Luke Choi

Next week event 12th & 13th JULY

VGP Heritage Golden Beach ECR

Melodic moments
A. Kanyakumari and (below) with her nephew and disciple, Srikanth Mallajosyula and his son, Sivateja Mallajosyula, N.C. Bharadwaj (mridangam) and K.V. Gopalakrishnan (kanjira)

PHOTOS: SHIVKUMAR
PUSHPAKAR & SPECIAL
ARRANGEMENT



From web to stage

A. Kanyakumari's online series, *Ekaika Raga Kritis of Tyagaraja*, will now be presented in physical format. The first concert was held recently

P. Srihari

Violin maestro Avasarala Kanyakumari has never shied away from challenges or charting new paths during her stellar musical journey, spanning six decades. Her latest initiative – launching the 'Ekaika Raga Kritis of Tyagaraja' – is a one-of-a-kind series of live concerts, under the aegis of Madhuradhwani at Arkay Convention Centre. The inaugural concert featured a violin recital, led by Kanyakumari, who was joined by her nephew and disciple, Srikanth Mallajosyula and his son, Sivateja Mallajosyula – representing three generations of the family on stage. N.C. Bharadwaj on the mridangam and K.V. Gopalakrishnan on the kanjira provided spirited rhythmic support.

The multifaceted musician and nonagenarian T.V. Gopalakrishnan, who was

the guest of honour for the evening, lauded

Kanyakumari for her initiative. She too fondly recalled her on-stage association with TVG – with the veteran accompanying her on the mridangam for her solo concerts, and she, in turn, playing for his vocal recitals.

An 'Ekaika Raga Kriti' refers to a composition that stands as the sole representative of a particular raga, and is believed that Tyagaraja's vast oeuvre contains over a hundred such gems. Kanyakumari's

inaugural episode showcased 12, with the theme set to be carried forward by different artistes in the subsequent monthly editions.

There was a precursor to this concert series. On December 13, 2019, on World Violin Day, Kanyakumari began uploading one Ekaika raga kriti every Friday on her Facebook page and YouTube channel. Encouraged by the response and sustained by the circumstances of the pandemic that followed, she continued with the series, which crossed the 100-episode mark. She is

currently premiering the Devaranamas, primarily those by Purandaradasar. She has been uploading them every week on Facebook since February 2022.

It may come as a surprise to many that Tyagaraja composed only a single kriti (ekaika raga kriti) in several well-known ragas such as Gowla, Abheri, Ranjani, Kurinji, Charukesi, Brindavanasaranga and Kiravani. The repertoire was thoughtfully curated, keeping the concert format in mind and allowing ample

scope for raga elaboration and swara exploration.

Perfect synchrony

Synchrony prevailed as the trio presented the kritis – 'Sri gananatham' (Kanakangi), 'Dudukugala' (Gowla), 'Vinata suva vahana' (Jayantasesha) with swarakalpana, 'Nee daya rada' (Vasantha Bhairavi), 'Sripatthe' (Nagaswaravali) with raga alapana and swarakalpana, 'Ragasudharasa' (Andolika) with a brief raga essay and swarakalpana, 'Patti viduvraada' (Manjari), 'Maaravairi ramani' (Nasikabhuashani) with raga alapana and swaras, 'Sita kalyana vaibhogame' (Kurinji), 'Vara raga laya' (Chenchu Kamboji) and 'Adamodi galade' (Charukesi) with raga alapana and swarakalpana – leading into a crisp tani and, finally, 'Raminchavaravara' (Suposhini).

Explorations and accomplishments mark Kanyakumari's illustrious career – be it emerging as a leading violinist at a young age, accompanying renowned instrumentalists like N. Ramani and Sikkil Sisters (flute), U. Shrinivas (mandolin) and Kadri Gopalnath (saxophone) or successfully conducting instrumental ensemble concerts 'Vadhy Lahari' for a decade from 1987 – violin-veena (N. Vijayalakshmi / Mudicondan Ramesh) and nagaswaram (Mambalam M.K.S. Siva / Vyasarapadi G. Kothandaraman), with Srimushnam V. Raja Rao / Mannargudi A. Easwaran on the mridangam. She organised large-scale choirs, featuring Annamacharya's compositions last year – in Dubai and Chennai – with her disciples in the lead, under Team Mohana's 'Guru Vandam' programme.

Kanyakumari has always been a strong voice for instrumental music, consistently advocating for its recognition to be on a par with vocal music in the concert arena. "With proper training and hard work, a kriti can be replicated in instruments, almost like a vocal rendition, while retaining its emotive depth," she says.

Beyond her own transcendent artistry, Kanyakumari's legacy resonates through her disciples. Many of them are well-known accompanists, carrying forward her precision and passion. Kanyakumari's tutelage also extends beyond the violin, with her shaping practitioners of other instruments as well, including R. Prasanna (guitar), Mudicondan S.N. Ramesh (veena) and Vyasarapadi G. Kothandaraman (nagaswaram).

She has done all this without accepting any fee. When asked for the reason, Kanyakumari simply says, she is following in the footsteps of her mentor and guru, M.L. Vasanthakumari.

now aged 90. "I was familiar with such drills. I would walk to listen to concerts in the city with my father."

Sivanandan's father, Neyyattinkara Vasudevan Pillai, was a harmonium master, keen to train his eight children in music, who either sang or played the veena or the mridangam. "I chose the violin," Sivanandan smiles. His father was his first tutor. "At 12, I debuted for a harikatha at a local temple. I never had a formal arangetram."

In his mid-teens, Sivanandan enrolled for the Gayaka course at the Swathi Thirunal College – those days known as The Music Academy (for 23 years since its inception in 1939). The faculty was stellar: Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, C.S. Krishna Iyer, K.R. Kumaraswamy, among others. "My chief veena

teacher, K.S. Narayanaswamy, found me promising. My first love, though, was the violin."

Sivanandan later trained under Ganapathi Pillai in a gurukula system. "Tonal clarity and restraint are the traits he passed on to me. I gained a sense of proportion as an accompanist. If the vocalist's alapana spanned 10-minutes, my solo response would take around half that time," says Sivanandan, who has a performance experience of over seven decades.

To Sivanandan, practice holds the key to excellence. "Even for violin geniuses such as M.S. Gopalakrishnan or Lalguji Jayaraman," he notes. "I insist my pupils allot a decent amount of time for daily *sadhakam*; be punctual for classes and concerts." Sivanandan lives in Cherthala in the coastal Alappuzha district. "Right from the

An ode to the Semmangudi bani

Adithya Madhavan sang some of the maestro's favourite ragas at a recent kutcheri



Fitting tribute Adithya Madhavan with V.S.P. Gayatri Sivani (violin) and Kaushik Sridhar (mridangam). PHOTOS: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM & THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Aishwarya Ragunathan

The Music Academy auditorium, Chennai, was hushed, not with silence, but with expectation. The occasion carried the weight of the lineage and memory of a voice that once defined an era. Organised by K. Vivekanandan, in memory of his illustrious grandfather, Semmangudi R. Srinivasa Iyer, the endowment concert drew rasikas who came not only to listen but to reminisce. For many, Semmangudi was not just a vidwan, but an institution. A musical conscience that set uncompromising standards for bhava-laden music, raga integrity, and sahitya clarity.

Young and promising vocalist Adithya Madhavan offered a thoughtfully curated 90-minute kutcheri that celebrated the quintessential Semmangudi soundscape. He was supported by V.S.P.



Gayatri Sivani on the violin and Kaushik Sridhar on mridangam.

The repertoire, centred on Karaharapriya and its janyas, paid homage to the Semmangudi bani, which is known for its kaisiki nishadam-rich ragas, bhava-driven delivery and a rakti-oriented approach to raga alapana.

The concert opened with the varnam 'Vanajakshi' in Kalyani, rendered in a moderately brisk tempo. Adithya used it as a launchpad to settle his voice, initially marred by minor breath breaks. But, as the concert progressed, Adithya's open-throated delivery began to shine through, aided by sensitive mridangam support that avoided overstatement.

If Semmangudi's voice has lingered in our memory, it is partly due to renditions like 'Marubalka' in Sri Ranjani, a kriti he sculpted with such precision that its architecture has become canonical.

Adithya revisited this classic with a sense of restraint and *raga suddham*, letting the raga's charm emerge unhurriedly. His kalpanaswaras at 'Dhari nerig' were crisp and

well-proportioned. Gayathri's violin, never merely echoing, but extending the singer's phrases with an intuitive empathy.

The sub-main segment was marked by a brief, yet emotionally luminous Varali alapana, where the raga's innate karuna rasa was brought out. The choice of Varali inevitably evoked memories of Semmangudi's enduring connection with the raga, particularly through iconic renditions like 'Ka va va'. Moving into 'Maamava meenakshi', Dikshitar's magnum opus, Adithya maintained a steady gait and his niraval at 'Shyama shankari digvijaya pradayini' was a highlight of the evening. His breath control, alignment with the tala, and depth of voice were noteworthy.

Papanasam Sivan's 'Appan avatharatha' in Karaharapriya, a less-frequently performed composition that served as a nod to Semmangudi's love for the raga, was delivered as a brisk interlude before the concert's main piece. The mel kala composition, though lighter in tone, was well-placed in the sequence, offering a measured contrast that did not break the classical intensity.

Adithya reserved his elaborate exposition for Kamboji, a raga known for its regal and rakti nature.

Gayathri's violin response was equally compelling, capturing the bhakti-rasa and dignity of Kamboji with sangatis that were subtle, yet impactful. The kriti that followed, 'Sri raghuvara aparamaya mamava', was a bold and welcome choice, a Tyagaraja piece, known for its compositional structure that juxtaposes devotion with dramatic phrasing.

The kalpanaswaras showcased his creativity, where he wove rapid-fire swaras, and concluded with a flourish that drew appreciative nods. Kaushik's tani avartanam that followed was brisk and engaging.

The concert concluded with a serene rendering of 'Saa pashyat kausalyam' in Jhnpuri, a fitting tukkada that gently let go of the lingering grandeur of the main.

String of memories

Nedumangad V. Sivanandan, who recently turned 90, is the torchbearer of the Kumbakonam style of violin playing



Sreevalsan Thiyyadi

In 1954, when Young V. Sivanandan completed a three-year course in Carnatic vocal from a prestigious institution in Thiruvananthapuram, he decided to specialise in the violin. Virudhunagar Ganapathi Pillai took Sivanandan under his wings. The mentoring gifted a new exponent to the illustrious Kumbakonam style of violin-playing, which Ganapathi had learnt from Rajamanickam Pillai.

Ganapathi, a staff-artiste in All India Radio (AIR), Thiruvananthapuram, initially started with weekly classes for Sivanandan. The boy would often walk 18 kilometres from his home in Nedumangad. "No big deal," says Sivanandan,

beginning, I was flooded with invitations for kutcheris. There was a dearth of violinists in this region," says Sivanandan, who rose steadily to accompany stalwarts, including Parassala Ponnammal, B.V. Raman-Lakshmanan, Bombay Sisters, Trichur V. Ramachandran, O.S. Thiagarajan, K. Omanakutty, Sudha Raghunathan, S. Jayashri and T.M. Krishna.

For a long time, he was in the retinue of Neyyattinkara Vasudevan and K.J. Yesudas. In the 2007 Malayalam film, *Ananda Bhairavi*. "During my travels for concerts, I would always carry a book. I didn't mind even if it was children's literature."

Even today, Sivanandan's hands move deftly along the strings of the violin. "I follow a disciplined routine. I am particular about my diet. I get most of the vegetables from the garden in our backyard. I also grow several medicinal plants."

Sivanandan's daughter V. Sindhu teaches the violin at the Chembai Music College in Palakkad. "Apart from my daughter and grandson Adarsh Dileep, I have several disciples, including Thiruvizha Sivanandan, Edappally Ajithkumar, Bindu K. Shenoy, Cherthala Sivakumar, Viju S. Anand and Manjoor Renjith. "I am sure they will carry forward the bani," says the veteran.



SNA's new award process

Sangeet Natak Akademi announces online self-nomination by artistes



Shailaja Khanna

A new initiative by Sangeet Natak Akademi for its annual award nomination process has raised eyebrows in the world of performing arts. The announcement urges artistes, who wish to receive this prestigious award in the field of arts, to go online and self-nominate themselves. The process earlier was based on recommendations of fellow artistes and awardees.

According to the new initiative, nominations by earlier awardees will also have to be done online. SNA awardee and stalwart Hindustani vocalist Pt Sajan Mishra is sceptical about the change. "Expecting senior musicians to make recommendations through a

cumbersome online process is not a practical idea. I feel it would be ideal for the members of the SNA committee to select artistes for the awards."

SNA chairperson Sandhya Purecha defended the initiative saying, "This is the first time in the over 70 years history of the Akademi awards that this decision has been taken. Earlier there was no recourse for artistes who had been inadvertently overlooked. But, when I assumed office; I felt the selection process needs to be democratic and not limited to prior awardees or institutionalised recommendations."

Another added feature is to include YouTube links of performances in the nomination form. Sandhya says, "These are performing arts, so one must be sure the nominee is still a performer. It is

now compulsory for an artiste to maintain YouTube links. There was opposition, specially from theatre artistes, but the rule stands.

"The selection process will go through the 72 members of the General Committee and Advisory Committee. The four-layered process will examine the nominations in depth, involve more time-consuming procedures – resulting, hopefully, in the emergence of 'heere' (gems)," reiterates Sandhya.

A major glitch, Sandhya expects, could be from senior artistes, who may hesitate to nominate themselves for the award.

Veena exponent and SNA awardee, Jayanthi Kumaresan, feels: "My generation of musicians are used to being called by an organisation and honoured. We feel



Pushing boundaries SNA chairperson Sandhya Purecha believes the initiative has been expanded for a greater reach.
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

whatever we have done is not enough. Nominating oneself for a job is different; this nomination will require a paradigm shift in thought. However, there is a plus too – many deserving performers, who are not popular and who may not have others nominating them may get an opportunity. I think it needs a couple of years for us to decide."

Sandhya seems to have factored this in, by deputing officials to connect with artistes to facilitate self-nominations. She says, "In the remote areas, artistes are not familiar with the internet, so I have deputed people to physically

The selection process will go through the 72 members of the General Committee and Advisory Committee

connect and help them. I am taking daily reports on how many artistes have been approached. The award's focus remains 'for the artistes, by the artistes', but the process has been expanded for a greater reach."

The perspective of senior dancer-choreographer Malavika Sarukkai seems to represent the dominant perspective of fellow artistes. She says, "Personally, I was surprised to see that SNA announced the self nomination initiative. In cases, in which, the artiste is not well-known, this method might help. However, for the most part, I do not see the purpose of self-nomination. The critical part is in the hands of the selection committee and the process of selection needs to be based on merit, contribution and expertise in respective disciplines."



The connecting chord

Afghan-American Muslim Qais Essar and Indian-American Sikh Sonny Singh collaborate for *Sangat*, an album inspired by Bhakti and Sufi movements

Amarjot Kaur

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The earliest-known bowed instrument, rabab, has joined forces with the trumpet, through an unusually refreshing alliance between musicians Qais Essar, an Afghan-American Muslim, and Sonny Singh, an Indian-American Sikh. Together, they are composing an album, *Sangat*, which harks back to the defining narratives of Bhakti and Sufi movements (two prominent socio-religious movements in Hinduism and Islam). Among its three compositions released so far, one is an iconic Sufi song, 'Lal meri pat', and the other two are the renditions of Sikh hymns re-imaged on the warm timbre of rabab and accented by the jazzy, raw harmonics of trumpet.

Their latest track, 'Pavan Guru', is the concluding shloka of the Sikh prayer - Japji Sahib. It was penned by the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, who conjures up the unifying cultural phenomenon of Sant Mat Bhakti that drew on both Hinduism and Islam. The third one is called 'Vich Sangat', a

16th Century Sikh devotional poem by the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ram Das.

"The album will have some instrumental tracks, centred on improvisation and conversation between the rabab and trumpet. There will be two tracks in Farsi, one of which is Qais's original composition of a poem by Amir Khusrav, while the other is a co-composition of a Farsi *shabab* by Guru Nanak," says Sonny about *Sangat*'s upcoming tracks.

Identifying sangat
He describes the album's name. "In Sikhism, we refer to worshippers inside a Gurdwara as 'sangat' (beloved community). In this project, we define 'sangat' as something broader, where our ethnic,

national and religious identities are porous," he shares. "For Sikhs and Muslims, this began with the friendship between Guru Nanak and his musical companion Bhai Mardana, who played the rabab and was a Muslim. You see this spirit of solidarity and oneness in the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhs, which includes the writings of Sufi saints like Sheikh Farid and radical bhakti poet-saints such as Ravidas, Kabir, and Namdev," he adds.

Sonny and Qais started working on *Sangat* in October 2024, shortly after they performed the six-week Revolutionary Love Tour across the US. Driven by the electric guitar, drums, dholki and trumpet, 'Pavan Guru' was featured on Sonny's previous album, *Sage Warrior*, too. Qais's rabab, on the tour, added a spiritual dimension, reinterpreting the hymn's musical texture from Nanak and Mardana's travels around South Asia and the Middle East. "We started our project by recording the hymn this February," Sonny shares.

Instruments of peace
Recorded mostly in Qais's studio in Payson, Arizona,

The album will have some instrumental tracks, centred on improvisation and conversation between the rabab and trumpet. There will also be two tracks in Farsi

SONNY SINGH

Musical bond Sonny Singh and Qais Essar PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sangat will be released this October through his indie-label and production company - Ghost Songs. With five albums and 12 EPs, Qais is the first rabab player in his family and has composed film music for the BAFTA-nominated short film *Yellow and Academy*. Award-nominated films *Three Songs for Benazir* and *The Breadwinner*. "I've pioneered many techniques on the rabab, specifically 'gayaki' (playing in a vocal way), and western concepts of harmony such as chords. The mixture of the contemporary style, rooted in tradition, gives the music ancestral power," he says.

Rabab is the national instrument of Afghanistan. Though not banned, it is under threat from Taliban's ban on music. So, how does Qais see the act of taking up the rabab? "It is an act of defiance and defence of cultural history. We protect that which we revere," he replies.

Cultural paradox
In India, conversations around the rabab gathered steam in 2022, when the Akal Takht Jathedar, requested the replacement of harmonium with traditional string

instruments like dilruba, rabab, and sarangi in kirtan at the Golden Temple. The idea was to revive the tradition of using string instruments in Sikh religious music. "Many master musicians playing at the Golden Temple were Muslims. It is a travesty that they were pushed out. That process began in the early 1900s, and the Partition (1947) sealed the deal. In the context of British colonialism, many of our communities became more rigid," says Sonny. "When Muslim rababis were expelled, much of the knowledge of the raags of the Guru Granth Sahib and the expertise on original instruments, like the rabab, were lost."

By the time you read this article, Qais and Sonny would have played their first live shows as *Sangat* in the Bay Area, California. Sonny hopes this music becomes "a space for reflection, action for justice, and liberation for all." His words bring to mind 'Free Palestine' inked on Qais's rabab in the video of 'Pavan Guru'. As for *Sangat*, it continues to pave the way for experimental music, a symphony of a cultural paradox where the rabab and trumpet, old and new, Sikh and Muslim, Afghani and Indian, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana, and Bhakti and Sufi movements – everything is connected to the sacred chord of humanism.

Banyan Tree's **बरक्त अष्टम**
a musical celebration with the maestros
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Narada Gana Sabha, TTK Road, Chennai

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RTP series

Rasika Ranjani Sabha, inaugurated the specially-curated RTP concert series yesterday. On till July 31, it will feature rare ragas and pallavis to be performed by artistes, each adding their distinct interpretations of the RTP. Also to be featured are occasional ragamalika, trikalam and tanam, played on instruments such as the veena, violin and flute, and curated commentary and insights about each RTP for deeper appreciation. The session, on July 9, will feature vocal concerts by Lakshmi Priya (5 p.m.), followed by Sumithra Vasudevan (6.30 p.m.). Venue: Sabha premises. For details, call 86103 57987 or write to rasikaranjanisabha1929@gmail.com.



Consecration

The jeernodharana ashtabandhana mahakumbabishekam of Sri Varasiddhi Vallabha Mahaganapathy, Besant Nagar, will be performed on July 7 between 9 a.m. and 10.15 a.m. Sri Varasiddhi Vinayaka Seth Sangam has organised the event.

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FARNAZ

Musicians of light music bands talk about the challenges of surviving in a digital world



Thriving through adversity
(Clockwise from left) The Lakshman Sruthi band performing at an event; Sankar, of Saadha Paravaigal; U.K. Murali with K.S. Chitra. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Suganthy Krishnamachari

A light music show usually draws a full house since the musicians fill the air with familiar notes and beats, and the audience warms up to much-loved tunes.

Are the light music bands put together by established or by those who just have an ear for music? How have these bands fared over the years?

Sankar, whose band is called Saadha Paravaigal, is the son of lyricist Ulundurpet Shanmugam. When he was a student at the Government Music College, Chennai, he formed a band with his friends. The college, initially, did not encourage him as his teachers wanted him to focus on classical music. But when the band began to win prizes in intercollegiate contests, teachers lent their support. His band was christened in January 1988 and the formal launch was held at Vani Mahal. "In the 1980s, there used to be light music shows in cinema theatres in the mornings, and the hall would be packed," recalls Sankar.

Lakshman formed a band with some of his friends while studying at the Presidency College. "We would rent instruments from Johnny D' Mello, on Mount Road. The cost of a guitar was ₹ 2,000, but we were paid only ₹ 1,500 for a concert. So, he would insist on a bona-fide certificate, signed by the college principal. D'Mello also had a small space

The shrinking platform

for rehearsals, and the rent was ₹ 125 a day." Later Lakshman's band was named Lakshman Sruti. "For our 200th show, in 1989, my brother Raman ensured that the entire band had uniforms ready in just two days."

Surprisingly, until the 5000th show, Lakshman had not studied music. He learnt to play the piano only after that. "We used to have programmes throughout the month, but not anymore. To supplement the income, I plan to start a shop selling, renting and repairing music instruments."

U.K. Murali, whose band Udhaya Ragam U.K. Murali Innaisai Mazhai is 40 years old, did not have a music background when he entered the industry. He learnt the nuances of light music and launched his band. "Sabha concerts are not always profitable, but they give us publicity, which brings us wedding concerts and shows abroad, where the payment is good," says Murali.

Some of the musicians, who are a part of these bands, share how they entered the field and have coped with challenges posed by technology.

Flautist Raghu, who has

been in the light-music field since 1972, says, "I am 75 now, and still continue to play. Some instruments have taken a hit because of technology. Violin, for example, has disappeared from the stage, because its sound is replicated on the keyboard. The flute, fortunately, escaped this."

Satish has been a keyboard player for 35 years, and has performed in M.S. Viswanathan's shows for 12 years. He has progressed to having his own recording studio and believes: "Learning the keyboard helps you try your hand at composing. S.P. Balasubrahmanyam and MSV have sung in my devotional albums."

Nagaraj taught himself to play many percussion instruments, and can recite konnaikal as well. "I started as a mimicry artiste. Till the 1980s, in the middle of a music show, there would be 15 minutes of mimicry, but that is no longer the case."

While in school, tabla player Kiran, played for K. Balachander's TV Serial *Jannal*, in which SPB even played a role.

"I know how to play electronic pads, but prefer actual instruments. For some

songs such as 'Thendral vandhu yennai thodum', it is impossible to produce the perfect tabla sounds on a pad."

Trumpeter Viji's grandfather, father and uncle played the trumpet in the police band. "They took voluntary retirement to become full-time musicians," says Viji. "The trumpet can be used to express many emotions, including pathos, as in the song 'Veedu varai uravu'. Now brass-section instruments are played on the keyboard. What will happen to artistes like me?"

Selva, who plays the acoustic drums, did a three-year diploma course in mridangam at the Government Music College, Chennai. When he entered the music scene in

1994, electronic rhythm machines were rarely used. But by 1996, they began to be widely used and he decided to embrace technology. He learnt to play rhythm machines and later, electronic pads too.

Bass guitarist Santosh says, "Ilaiyaraaja is the one who has

QQ
"We used to have programmes throughout the month, but not anymore. To supplement the income, I plan to start a shop selling, renting and repairing music instruments."

LAKSHMAN
Lakshman Sruthi orchestra

used the bass guitar to the maximum. You cannot sing some songs such as 'Mandram vanda thendralukku' without a bass guitar. In the past, instead of the bass guitar, they used a six-foot-long instrument called the double bass, which is a pure acoustics instrument. Bass guitar is an electronic instrument."

Singer Anusha Kartik learnt both Carnatic and Hindustani music. She says, "Being in the light-music industry is a blessing, because you get to share the stage with renowned playback singers. I have sung with SPB and Yesudas. When I first came to Chennai from Kolkata, I knew only Hindi songs, and had to learn to read Tamil. Today, I know more than 300 Tamil songs."

Kavitha became a stage singer and then studied music at the Government Music College. "During rehearsals, I would note songs allotted to others and practise them. The happiest moment in my life was when P. Susheela complimented me for my rendering of the song 'Alaya maniyin' (film *Paalum Pazhamum*)."

Vocalist Sai Vignesh learnt Carnatic music from T.R. Vasudevan, a disciple of Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavat. "After I participated in *Super Singer*, I began performing with various light-music bands, and then came the opportunity to sing the super hit song 'Varaha roopam', for the Kannada film *Kantara*. Classical singers must resist the tendency to

improvise when they sing for films. They must not add unnecessary gamakas."

Stating reasons for fewer programmes these days, Satish points out that, some musicians like to adopt a freestyle of music, where they don't follow every note of the background score, but produce something similar. "Freestyle is unacceptable. How can anyone tamper with what music directors have composed?" asks Selva. "These days, many opt for DJ's. This too has impacted us," says Murali.

"Costs, including rent for halls, have shot up. In addition, we also have to pay licensing fees to IPRS (Indian Performing Right Society). By way of abundant caution, some hotels insist that licenses must also be obtained from Novex Communications and PPL (Phonographic Performance Limited)," says Sankar.

While IPRS gives licenses for musical and literary works, others must be approached for a license for sound recording. With soaring expenses, the cost of tickets has increased too. But if tickets are pricey, then there are few takers. Recently, the Corporation of Chennai imposed an entertainment tax of 10 per cent of gate collection, which will add to the financial burden of bands.

"There are roughly 10,000 musicians, who will be affected if the light music industry ceases to exist," says Murali.



Meet the Tango queen

Kruthi Gandhi Sarda is the first Indian to win the Indonesia Championship

Neha Kirpal

With her signature blend of musicality, connection and cultural depth, Kruti Gandhi Sarda is leading a new wave of Indian talent on to the global Tango stage. A prominent figure in India's Tango community, Kruti's success stands as an inspiration for dancers across the country and reaffirms India's place in the evolving narrative of western dance. She recently made history by becoming the first Indian to win an award at the Indonesia Tango Championship Preliminaries 2025 – an official qualifier for the World Tango Championship in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Kruti secured third place in the Social Tango category, a uniquely

challenging division where partners are switched after each song and all performances are completely improvised. Her achievement marks a significant breakthrough for India on the international Tango stage.

Kruti's journey with Tango started in 2015, during a two-month trip to Europe where she learnt it. Once she returned to Mumbai, a city where Tango was almost non-existent back then, she started teaching what she had learnt. That is the genesis of Abrazo Tango, a Tango school founded by her. "It has been an incredible journey of exploration and

Stepping it up Kruti Gandhi Sarda and (above) with the winners.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

growth," says Kruti, who started with just six students, both of whom went on to compete at the Indonesia Tango Championship in Bali.

Kruti teaches and performs within the country and overseas, with students ranging from amateurs to Bollywood actors. "While previously, Kruti conducted regular Tango classes at IIT Mumbai, she now takes classes with Ajinkya Deshpande

on Saturdays. They also organise milongas (Tango socials) and practice sessions to build and support the local Tango community. In March this year, she taught at Tango Amistoso, one of London's leading Tango schools. In the past, she performed at the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF), IIT Bombay's Mood Indigo, the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival and Soho House, Mumbai.

In July, Abrazo Tango will host its annual Tango Dance Marathon in Mumbai – a weekend-long immersive celebration of social Tango, bringing together hundreds of dancers from across India. "It will be three-days of non-stop dancing, inspiring performances and a strong sense of community. Attendees can expect high-energy milongas, workshops and a Tango flea market that celebrate the spirit of the dance. It is a welcoming space for dancers of all levels," elaborates Kruti.

Tango, in India, is niche and Kruti had her own share of upheavals. For this reason, she is actively working to expand the Tango community in India – a challenging journey that demands continuous learning, creativity and adaptability. She believes India has potential for a vibrant and expansive Tango scene. Her goal is to share the magic of Tango with as many people as possible and build a strong, supportive dance culture. "Every new dancer, who falls in love with Tango, brings us one step closer. It is not just about the dance, but about connection, expression and creating something meaningful together."



A musical tribute

On July 5 (6 p.m.), Kamarajar Arangam will resonate with memories and music as family and friends pay a tribute to G. Devarajan – known as Devarajan Master – through an evening of songs and stories. Presided over by his wife, Leelamani Devarajan, the event will feature iconic compositions sung by leading singers from Malayalam and Tamil cinema, with interesting anecdotes shared by those who worked with him. In his four-decade career, Devarajan has worked in more than 350 films.

His training under his father, Paravar Kochugovindan Asan, was so intense and immersive that it gave him the ability to seamlessly blend Carnatic and Hindustani ragas with folk idioms, Western harmonies and choral arrangements. His compositions range from political anthems and devotional songs to film scores. He scored music for the popular devotional, 'Harivarasanam', by K.J. Yesudas. A mentor to Ilaiyaraaja, R.K. Shekhar and Johnson Master, his orchestra featured maestros such as L. Subramaniam.

Devarajan Master passed away in 2006, but his music continues to move generations. This special event, once again, provides the audience a chance to enjoy his timeless melodies.

Discourse

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha has organised a three-day discourse series, 'Yoga Vasishtam', to be presented by Ramanacharana Tirtha Swamigal (Nochur). The session, from July 4 to 6, will take place at Vani Mahal, T. Nagar.

CALENDAR

Percussion workshop

The Music Academy has organised 'Laya Dhara - The flow of Rhythm', a percussion workshop, to be conducted by ghatam artiste Suresh Vaidyanathan on July 5, 10 a.m., at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. He will be accompanied by Akshay Padmanabhan (vocal) and Prasanna Hariharan (percussion). For registration details contact 28112231/2811 5162. The programme is held under the endowment, instituted by musicologist SAK Durga in memory of her father S.A. Venkataraman.

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