

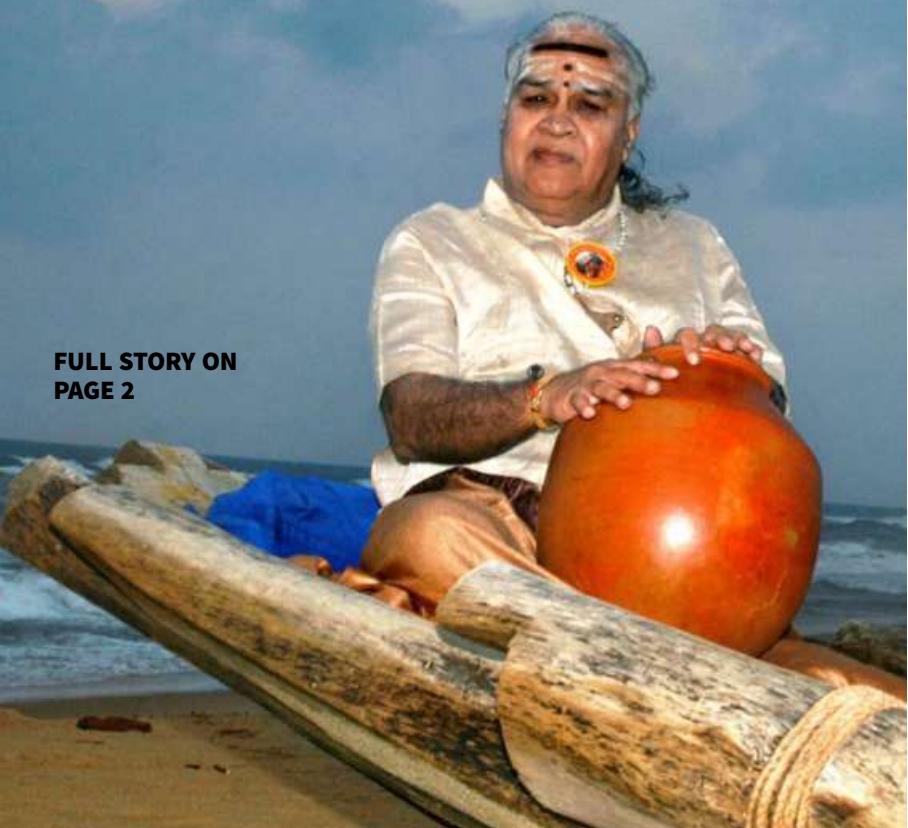
friday Review

THE HINDU

Planet drum

The Mahindra Percussion Festival, to be held on March 23 and 24 in Bengaluru, promises a rendezvous with rhythm

FULL STORY ON PAGE 2



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**Narendra Kusnur**

After the fabulous response to its inaugural edition held in Bengaluru on March 18, 2023, the Mahindra Percussion Festival (MPF) returns as a two-day event this year. The venue will be Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre for Performing Arts.

To be held on March 23 and 24, the festival features a formidable line-up including ghatam maestro Vikku Vinayakram, djembe exponent Taufiq Qureshi, mridangam players Viveick Rajagopalan and Charu Hariharan, drummer Darshan Doshi and Bengaluru band Swarathma. Going by this list, it's evident that there will be enough variety as the musicians collaborate to create fresh sounds. This has been the trend at such drum fests, whose popularity has increased over the years.

Says drummer Darshan Doshi, who is performing with the group Rhythms of India, "Besides the regular western drum kit, one can hear different types of percussion, from Hindustani and Carnatic to folk and Bollywood."

The concept of percussion festivals isn't new. Taal Vaadya concerts and Guru Purnima events dedicated to percussion teachers have been popular for a long time. The annual Barsi concert held in Mumbai, as a homage to legendary tabla artiste Ustad Alla Rakha, has featured many Indian artistes and well-known international drummers such as Billy Cobham, Vinnie Colaiuta, Pete Lockett and Simon Phillips, Congreco Giovanni Hidalgo, Sikiru Adepoju and Japanese taiko drummer

Leonard Eto.

In 2016, drummer Gino Banks launched Mumbai Drum Day, inspired by a similar event organised by *Modern Drummer* magazine. "Though the focus was the western drum kit, they also had different genres. I wanted to do the same in India. Over the years, we have attempted different themes. In 2023, we had a western drummer play an Indian percussion instrument. This year, with Ustad Zakir Hussain in the line-up, we focused more on world music," he says.

"Festivals such as MPF help turn the spotlight on drummers. In a regular concert, they get noticed only during their solos," says Gino, who performed in the 2023 edition.

After Mumbai Drum Day found the right groove, the concept moved to other cities. Drummer Arun Kumar began curating the Bengaluru Drum Fest in 2019. Last year, tabla exponent Subhen Chatterjee and his drummer-son Sambit Chatterjee, curated the first Kolkata International Drum Festival.

These events feature percussionists from across the country. The audiences are a good mix of connoisseurs and lay listeners. Says Darshan, "Different people relate to drumming in different ways. The diverse line-up enhances the appeal."

Says Taufiq Qureshi, who has adapted Hindustani rhythms to the African djembe, "I've seen people taking a sudden liking to the djembe after seeing me or my son Shikhar Naad Qureshi play on stage. Many youngsters now want to learn this African instrument. After the pandemic, online classes have become regular."

At MPF, Taufiq Qureshi will lead his group Surya, which has

Planet drum



taken on many avatars since its formation in the late 1980s. The forthcoming show will feature him on the djembe, Shikhar Naad on the drums and djembe, Abhay Nayampally on the guitar, Sarang Kulkarni on the sarod and Kaushiki Joglekar on the keyboards. Rhythms of India will have Darshan on the drums, B.C. Manjunath on the mridangam, Varijashree Venugopal on vocals

and the flute, and Pravin Rao on the keyboards and tabla.

Multi-percussionist Charu Hariharan has an interesting set. Her main quartet features her on the mridangam, vocals and assorted percussion, Pranay Verma on the guitar, Shalini Mohan on the bass and Manonmani on the sarangi. Says Charu, "The show is a three-layered presentation – the quartet, Kozhikode Nanthalakootam folk musicians from Kerala and tribal musicians from the Jenukuruba honey-collecting community of Nagarhole in Karnataka.

"The folk musicians have tudumba, a big bass drum like the nagara, and tudi, an ancient drum. The Nagarhole tribal musicians use kotta datte, using three rows of bamboo, the burude, a gourd used as a shaker, and gajje, which is like a manjira. They also convert a lot of plastic items as drums. There is also something called 'disu', which is basically a dish antenna, played with sticks," says Charu.

Viveick Rajagopalan will perform with two different sets – 'Two Summ' with mridangam artiste Anantha R. Krishnan, which will blend Carnatic rhythms with electro-acoustic sounds, and Ashtanayika, a fusion

of Surdas's poetry, Kuchipudi dance and the raw narratives of rap with assorted rhythms.

Vikku Vinayakram's Ghatam Ensemble will feature his son V. Selvaganesh on the kanjira whereas in the Swarathma Percussive Experience, members of Bengaluru-based folk-fusion band Swarathma will be joined by different percussionists, including Karthik Mani, Thavil Raja and Beat Gurus.

Percussionists now are open to new sounds. For instance Charu Hariharan, who after learning the mridangam from Mannarkoil J. Balaji joined slide guitarist Debashish Bhattacharya's project 'O Shakuntala'. Her mind opened up to global sounds after participating in the Ethno Sweden World Music Camp, and later joining the world folk ensemble,

The schedule**March 23**

- Charu Hariharan Quartet
- Two Summ
- Swarathma Percussive Experience
- Vikku Vinayakram's Ghatam Ensemble with Sukanya Ramgopal making a guest appearance

March 24

- Darshan Doshi with Rhythms of India
- Viveick Rajagopalan & Ashtanayika
- Taufiq Qureshi's Surya

Formidable line-up (Clockwise from top left) Pravin Rao; Anantha R Krishnan; Jenukuruba; Viveick Rajagopalan; Gino Banks; Swarathma band; Charu Hariharan; and Selva Ganesh. Cover: Vikku Vinayakram. PHOTOS: MPF & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Varldens Band. "It's an ocean out there, but much as I like to explore international rhythm trends, I am also keen to discover drum sounds closer home."

According to Vikku Vinayakram, such festivals can help young drummers broaden their perspective and take in new ideas. He says, "I have always told my students to approach music with an open mind. Keep adding to your repertoire and allow your style to evolve. It's important to adapt to every situation."

Adds his son Selvaganesh, who was part of 'This Moment' that won the Grammy this year, "instrumentalists, especially percussionists, have never had it so good. Over the past few years, I have learnt more by interacting with musicians from around the world. Believe in your training and make the most of the exciting opportunities coming your way."

The rhythms never stop flowing on Planet Drum.

The Mahindra Percussion Festival, in association with The Hindu, is co-sponsored by Mahindra Finance, Paul John Visitor Centre and Carlsberg Smooth Soda and promoted and produced by Hyperlink Brand Solutions. Tickets are on bookmyshow.com



Seamless strings

V.V. Subramaniam and son V.V.S. Murari presented a good choice of kritis

G. Swaminathan

As part of the centenary celebration of R. Ramachandran, founder of Hamsadhwani, a violin duet by veteran V.V. Subramaniam and his son V.V.S. Murari was held at the Youth Hostel, Indira Nagar. They were accompanied by mridangam maestro Trichy Sankaran and K.V. Gopalakrishnan on the kanjira.

The concert stood out for the scholarly presentation by the father-son duo. The Ata tala varnam in raga Kiravani composed by V.V. Subramaniam set the tone for the evening. 'Ramachandram bhavayami' by Muthuswami Dikshitar in raga Vasantham was a vibrant rendition. This was followed by Tyagaraja's 'Paramatmudu velige' in raga Vagadeeswari.

Seamless exchange

All the raga essays and swaras were jointly presented by the two. The Pantularali alapana led to Tyagaraja's 'Shiva shiva enarada'. The quick swara sallies enhanced the appeal. The



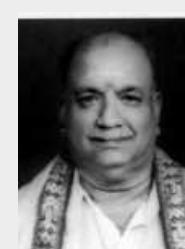
Charukesi alapana was poignant. Swati Tirunal's 'Krupaya palaya' was their choice here. The leisurely rendition conveyed beautifully the essence of the lyrics.

The delineation of Kamboji, the main raga of the concert, was a testimonial to their musical acumen. The seamless exchange of phrases created a fine portrait of the raga. They also presented the popular kriti, 'O Rangasayee' by Tyagaraja. The swara segment was at 'Bhuloka vaikuntam'.

With the presence of a stalwart like Trichy Sankaran the avartanam was thoroughly enjoyable. It was a demonstration of his experience and rhythmic precision. Each of his phrase found a prompt response on K.V. Gopalakrishnan's kanjira.

The closing pieces included 'Kanakasaila' in Punnagavarali by Syama Sastri, 'Tu dayalu,' a bhajan by Tulsidas in raag Desh and 'Karunai devimae' in Sindhubhairavi by Madurai Srinivasan.

Celebrating a legacy



The anniversary celebrations of Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer Trust and Maharajapuram Santhanam Foundation will take place on March 16 at Vani Mahal. The twin occasions will see senior artistes being honoured with titles.

Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer Trust presents the following awards, which also carries a gold medallion: 'Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer Golden Jubilee Memorial award for Pakkavadhyam Excellence' will be presented to Delhi P. Sunder Rajan; 'Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer Memorial Acharya' award will be given to Thiruppungur G. Muthukumaraswamy; and 'Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer' award for senior musicians to Kalakkad R. Seethalakshmi, Mylai S. Gajendran and Madipakkam A. Murali. The 'Youth Excellence' award will be presented to Bhavya Hari, Vaibhav Ramani and Kishore Ramesh.

'The Maharajapuram Santhanam Foundation's Memorial' award will be presented to veena vidushi Jayanthi Kumaresan, the 'Meritorious Awards of Excellence' will be given to Thirumeignanam brothers, S.R. Rajasree and Nanjal A.R. Arul.

Girija Seshadri, president, Rasika Fine Arts, and R. Seshadri, secretary, Shree Ram Samaj, will receive the 'Maharajapuram Santhanam award for Kala Sevak'.

Dr. Sudha Seshayyan, former vice-chancellor, Tamil Nadu Dr. MGR Medical University, will preside and present the awards. The evening begins with Thirumeignanam Brothers's nagaswaram recital (4.45 p.m.).

A series of concerts will form part of the two-day annual music festival of Sri Maharajapuram Viswanathan Iyer Trust, to take place on March 17 and 18, at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore.



(top) Mahajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and (right) Mahajapuram Santhanam.



Innovative Agam performing at the Music Academy.
COURTESY: GLOBAL ADJUSTMENTS

R. Seshasayee

I have rarely missed an Aikya concert in the last decade. Global Adjustments, which curates these annual concerts, believes in the credo that music unites. The validation of which was in full display at the 2024 concert held recently at the Music Academy to a full house, featuring the popular Agam band from Bengaluru.

The audience, predominantly young, broke into a chorus, singing 'Rangapura Vihara' and 'Manavyalakinchara', along with Harish Sivaramakrishnan (lead singer) to the accompaniment of guitars and drums. No cathedral-like silence of a traditional kucherli. The band rocked and grooved under strobe lights and the audience shouted out with joy.

If it was sacrilege to the conservatives, particularly since 'Brindavana Saranga' boldly included anya swaras, it was, to the liberals, a grand display of unity between the classical and the

Music, Agam style

The popular band, which performed recently in Chennai for Aikya's fundraiser, never fails to impress

modern, between the young and the old.

Versatile voice

Harish Sivaramakrishnan cannot escape the trap of the runaway success of his well-known repertoire. He should be pardoned for the standard fare. The audience demanded and got 'Sree ragamo', Dhanashri tillana, 'Chandra chooda' in Darbari Kanada, and the boat song, besides 'Subrahmanyam' in

Suddha Dhanyasi.

Harish's gifted voice that can shatter the glass with power in one moment and caress the heart in the next, and his unique interpretation of the classical genre, never fail to cast a spell on the audience. He is a master communicator as well. Swaminathan Seetharaman (keyboard), Praveen Kumar (lead guitar), Jagadis Natarajan (rhythm guitar) Aditya Kashyap (bass guitar), Yadunandan

Nagarajan (drums) and Sivakumar Nagarajan (Indian percussion) were outstanding. The grand jugalbandi with the drums was a fitting finale.

Agam, which commenced its journey in 2003, has been experimenting to produce an eclectic dough of Carnatic music (Tyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar), Blues and Funk Rock, all seemingly conflicting elements, kneaded together to deliver a concert. If audience support is any indication, the experiment should be declared a success. Agam, though, would do well to expand its repertoire and incorporate more classical instruments.

The proceeds from Aikya annual concerts go towards supporting the education of girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, especially first generation learners, through the Global Adjustments Foundation's Championwoman.

The writer is Chairman, Asian Paints, Vice Chairman, Hindujia Group, and a connoisseur of music.

In tune with the times

Radha Thomas, whose new album 'As I Sing' releases today, on how she used an app to create tracks

Narendra Kusnur

During the lockdown, Bengaluru-based singer Radha Thomas wondered what to do – there were no live shows, and recording studios had shut down. That was when she discovered the app iReal Pro, which helps musicians practise with a virtual band. "I realised the benefits of this app, as I could create and program jazz standards the way I wanted," Radha says.

Soon she was in touch with guitarists from different regions. "Back in the 1970s, I was inspired by the duets of singer Ella Fitzgerald and guitarist Joe Pass. I wanted to do something on those lines, collaborating with different guitarists on some of my favourite tunes. Thanks to the app, my compositions were in place. That's how my latest album 'As I Sing' came about," she says.

The album will be released worldwide today. The guitarists comprise Canadian Reg Schwager (who has played with singer-pianist Diana Krall), Pete McCann (who has accompanied American vocal group Manhattan Transfer), and virtuosos Tom Dempsey and Paul Meyers. The musicians worked from their own studios.

Interestingly, sound engineer Yura Romaniv is based in Ukraine. Says Thomas, "He mixed and mastered under the worst circumstances. Since his country



Jazzing it up

'The Radha Thomas Ensemble' performing at blueFROG, Bengaluru, in 2015. PHOTO COURTESY: FB PAGE

is in a war situation, it was difficult to seize moments of quiet. But working in bits and pieces, from a safe place, he completed his job."

Eclectic mix

For the 10-track album, Radha has chosen a mix of popular hits and rare personal favourites. Thus, there are known numbers like the evergreen 'Autumn Leaves' and George Gershwin's 'Summertime'. Other standards include Benny Golson's 'I Remember Clifford', Artie Shaw's 'Moon Ray' and Fats Waller's 'The Jitterbug Waltz'. Says Radha, "Whichever song I chose, I wanted to do it in my way, and not as rendered before. With the app, I could make that happen."

'As I Sing' comes nearly four years after her previous record 'Bangalore Blues', with pianist Aman Mahajan. "The album was released just before the lockdown

began. We had a lot of plans for live shows but everything went haywire. The album received good reviews," Radha says.

On 'Bangalore Blues', Radha wrote all the lyrics for 'Bangalore Blues', and both she and Mahajan worked on the compositions. "We had worked for 10 years before that, and he was part of 'UNK: The Radha Thomas Ensemble'. We had released the album 'I Only Have Eyes For You', and thus we shared a comfort level while working as a duo."

Music initiation

Author of the books *Men On My Mind, More Men On My Mind* and *The Cauliflower Diet*, Radha Thomas is happy with the way her music career has evolved. Her first love was jazz, but she's also studied Indian classical vocal at the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya

under Pt. Kumar Gandharva, and dhrupad from Zia Fariduddin Dagar. She began her career, even while she was in her teens, with the Bengaluru band 'The Human Bondage'. Later, she shifted to New York for 20 years, playing with saxophonist Michael Brecker, guitarist John Scofield and drummer Harvey Mason, besides appearing on two albums by Japanese guitarist Ryo Kawasaki. After her return to India, she has been active on the local jazz scene.

"I have started loving technology now. As a singer, I am constantly thinking of new songs. Earlier, I would forget many, but today I diligently record tunes the moment I think of something. I don't have any formal practice schedule but this humming and recording keeps my voice in shape," she says. She's clearly enjoying the fresh approach.

CALENDAR

Lecture

Bharatanatyam solo

- The Music Academy has organised Sai Brindha Ramachandran's Bharatanatyam performance, as part of the HCL concert series, on March 21, 6 p.m., at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.
- Narada Gana Sabha, will feature the following dance performances on March 16 at Swami Haridhos Giri Hall. Details: 6 p.m.: Navya Maitri Konda, disciple of Shweta Prachande and 7.30 p.m.: Saakshi Mohan, disciple of Girish Madhu and Bragha Bessell.



Temple renovation

Sri Neelamega Seva Trust, 5 Villiyanalur has undertaken the renovation work of the 300-year-old Sridevi, Bhooodevi Samedha Sri Neelamega Perumal temple in Villiyanalur Agraharam, Kuthalam Taluk, Mayiladuthurai district. On account of this, balalayam will be performed on March 20 between 9 a.m. and 10.30 a.m.

A mixed fare

Madhuradhwani will feature the following programmes at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. Schedule: Today, 6.15 p.m.: V. Deepika and V. Nandhika. Tomorrow, 5 p.m.: Release of Soma Valliappan's book *Kizhakkku Padippakam*. March 17, 10.30 a.m.: Abhijit Shankaran (Hindustani). March 20, 6.15 p.m.: Tamizh Moovar - 2 to be presented by Dr. Sudha Seshayyan. March 21, 5.30 p.m.: Jayalakshmi Sekhar's veena recital for Music Forum, will be followed by Aruna Ranganathan's vocal concert.

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Discover the genuine and exquisite tastes of the Godavari region at the Godavari Food Festival, hosted by Four Points by Sheraton Mahabalipuram. Chef Chandra Sekhar Raju, alongside his mother Mrs. Anasuya Devi, will present age-old traditional recipes. Embark on a gastronomic adventure with our lavish buffet available for both lunch and dinner. Seize this opportunity to savor delectable dishes and participate in a distinctive dining event. We invite you to our resort for an unforgettable culinary festival.

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