

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Singing by the sea

Sandeep Narayan's concert stood out for its unique setting and format **p2**

Based on a common theme

Three new productions from three different dance schools **p4**



THE JOURNEY OF A SAINT-POET

A book by Kanakam Devaguptapu highlights the beauty of Kshetrayya's padams **p5**

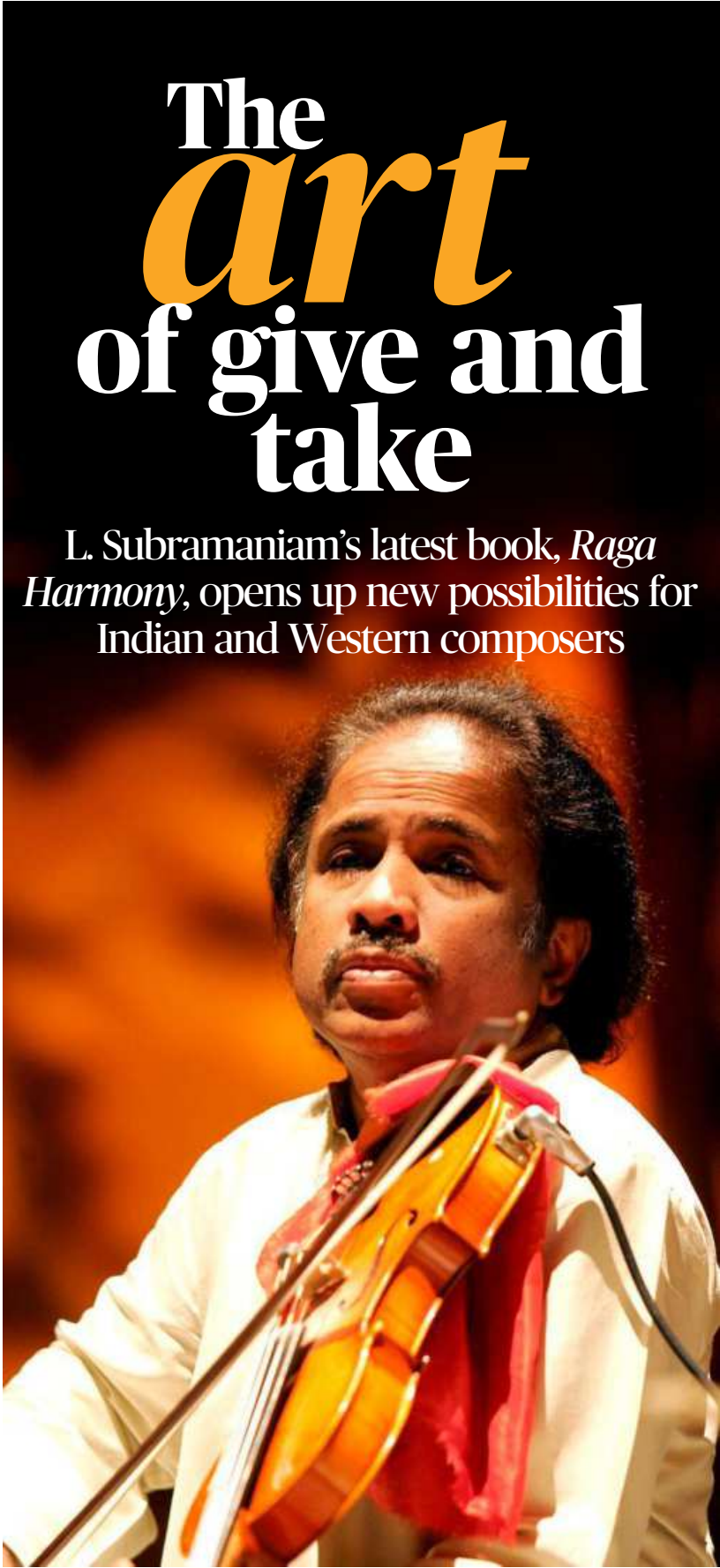


Deeпа Ganesh

Violin maestro L. Subramaniam recently published his doctoral thesis as a book, *Raga Harmony* (Westland). It explains how he integrated the Indian raga system with the harmonic structure of Western classical music. Subramaniam proposes a path-breaking 36-scale concept, which will make it possible for the Indian ragas to be played by the western orchestras. He recognises in the book that such attempts have been made by music composers of Hindi cinema, especially during the time of Shankar-Jaikishan, R.D. Burman and Laxmikant Pyarelal. However, they could accomplish this only with the help of Goan arrangers, who were trained in Western music. What Subramaniam suggests using the popularity of Indian film music as an example is that with a method and concept, it will allow for non-westerners to create western compositions, and western musicians to use other tonalities. This will serve as a methodology to create a truly global composition. His endeavour in *Raga Harmony* is to provide for a system that enables such a musical concept. Subramaniam has been thinking on these lines for several decades now, backed by the rigour of practise, reflection and performance. The book, in a way, is a culmination of these thoughts.

Raga Harmony is laced with interesting pictures of the musician directing the Leipzig and London Philharmonic Orchestras, playing with Yehudi Menuhin, conducting his composition the 'Global Symphony' and more. Excerpts from a conversation.

Question: *This is a highly specialised area of discussion. Who is the reader in your mind?*
L. Subramaniam (LS): My readers are musicians, composers, and more specifically, Indian composers, who are not familiar with the system of western harmony but would still like to compose for orchestras. Being Indian musicians they will be familiar with raga concepts. They can create soothing, powerful, new harmonic structures without having to know the western theory. Musicians who want to improvise over western harmonic progressions may do so if they understand the raga on which the harmony is built. Having said this, the system is further useful to those who are well-versed in Western music harmony and theory. Western classical harmony has seen changes and innovation all through its history. The concept of Raga Harmony, likewise, is a new system of composition, allowing for endless innovation and new possibilities. For non-musicians too, it would serve as a useful insight into harmonic composition. In music, there is horizontal motion and vertical motion. Horizontal motion



L. Subramaniam's latest book, *Raga Harmony*, opens up new possibilities for Indian and Western composers

includes melodic lines. Vertical motion includes additional notes that support the melody, thereby creating harmony. Even though a western classical orchestra might have 80 musicians, not everybody plays the same melodic lines simultaneously. Different instruments play different melodies to create harmony. Indian music is largely based on melodic or horizontal motion whereas Western music is largely based on vertical or harmonic motion. Raga Harmony bridges the gap between these two approaches.

Q: *You have, for several decades,*



String theory L. Subramaniam; (above) with Yehudi Menuhin and conducting the Halle Orchestra. PHOTOS COURTESY: GETTY IMAGES & INDIANVIOLIN.COM

worked collaboratively, creating a bridge among Carnatic, Hindustani and Western. Did you wish to initiate a dialogue of a different kind now?
LS: My dialogue between Carnatic and Hindustani music began in the late 1970s with my jugalbandi with Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. We performed at Lincoln Centre in New York and at Berklee and made a few albums together. The dialogue with the West also started for me around the 1970s when I began to write ensemble compositions for my albums, which featured some of the jazz greats such as Herbie Hancock, George Duke, Stanley Clarke, Hubert Laws, and of course Stephane Grappelli. I wrote a composition called *Journey* for my

collaboration with Yehudi Menuhin, different compositions for Jean Pierre Rampal and many more. I used a new term – Global Fusion Concept for this kind of music. The orchestral composition began with a major composition titled *Double Concerto for Violin and Flute* in 1983 and I premiered this in Los Angeles with Hubert Laws on March 14, 1983 at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. In 1985, *Fantasy on Vedic Chants* which I wrote for maestro Zubin Mehta was premiered in New York by the New York Philharmonic with four concerts in the season. Since then, I have written a lot of orchestral compositions for major orchestras.

Lately, I have also had the opportunity to write for Indian voices using Kavita or Bindu's vocals with a major choir. This dialogue with orchestras started much earlier and is continuing to grow to a higher level. When I began composing, I was trying to create a new system inspired by my Carnatic music heritage. This fascinated many composers, critics and conductors around the world. That led me to pursue this new direction.

Q: *Unlike the western system, a large part of which is written and therefore fixed, Indian music, despite a strong theoretical basis, is innovative and improvisational. Do you think a performer can make these theoretical positions part of his conscious process?*

CONTINUED ON
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Chitra Swaminathan

Remember how on August 15, 1989, raag Desh brought together the nation? As the legendary Pt. Bhimsen Joshi sang 'Lab pe jaage geet aisa, Goonje bankar des raag' surrounded by a lush landscape, his deep voice echoed (*goonj*) in our hearts. The song 'Baje sargam har taraf se', made during the Doordarshan days to spread the message of unity in diversity, also featured other iconic musicians such as Pt. Ravi Shankar, Lalgudi Jayaraman, Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma, M. Balamuralikrishna, Ustad Alla Rakha and Zakir Hussain.

A raag for the nation

Revisit Desh with a new song launched to mark the 78th Independence Day

During an interview to *The Hindu* in 2011, Balamuralikrishna, the celebrated Carnatic musician, had recalled how much he enjoyed being part of both 'Mile sur mera tumhara' and 'Baje Sargam'. "Having been born in the pre-Independence era, I became emotional when singing the lines filled with patriotic fervour. Being a composer myself, I could imagine the joy of creating these

songs with diverse artists, art forms and instruments. I was excited to play the violin and also sing." An extremely melodic late evening raag, Desh is associated with the monsoon and often sung to convey the romance of the rain. Though called Desh, it was not created to arouse patriotic sentiments. It acquired this characteristic when it was chosen to compose the national song 'Vande Mataram', written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. It has since been used by musicians and composers to create national integration melodies.

This August 15, to celebrate India's 78th Independence Day, ITC has come up with a soul-stirring composition titled 'Desh Ek Raag'. Apart from young musicians, it features maestros and eminent gurus such as Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty, Subhra Guha and Omkar Dadarkar, along with the creators of the composition, Abir Hossain and Brajeswar Mukherjee of the Kolkata-based ITC Sangeet Research Academy

(ITC-SRA). The song celebrates the sounds of various instruments and voices. While the violin, sitar, piano, guitar, sarangi, sarod, drums, mridangam and flute blend strings, keys and percussion to present the beauty of Desh, the singers clad in green, saffron and white render a traditional bandish, 'Beet jaat barkha rut', in the raag. The Sangeet Research Academy, which was launched in 1978, trains young enthusiasts in Hindustani music. Renowned vocalist and Patiala-Kasur gharana exponent Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty is the chief mentor and guru. Says the veteran, "We all

know about CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), but the Academy is a unique example of what I would like to term as – corporate cultural responsibility. And through 'Desh Ek Raag' we wanted to show our gratitude to the country, whose cultural heritage is a strong binding force. I am delighted we were able to make many youngsters a part of this project." According to sarod artiste Abir Hossain, who teaches at SRA, "The song was created for multiple purposes, of course, the most important being the message of oneness." Belonging to the Senia-Shahjahanpur

gharana, Abir trained for several years under sarod maestro Pt. Buddhadev Das Gupta, and is currently being guided by Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty. 'Desh Ek Raag' is also an attempt to project India's cultural values, particularly the guru-sishya parampara. "Hence the song features both teachers and students. Through this initiative, we were keen to turn the spotlight on young talent. We need to prepare them to take forward the legacy. A few artistes seen in the video are just in their teens." The recording was done at SRA's in-house studio. "Singing or playing an

'Desh Ek Raag' reminds one of 'Mile sur mera tumhara' and 'Baje sargam har taraf se', which showed how the spirit of oneness can be celebrated through Indian classical music

instrument in a studio is different from performing live. 'Desh Ek Raag' exposed our young musicians to this challenge, and see how they have lived up to it!" says Abir. In India, where we have songs for every occasion, it's not surprising that a raag has become a symbol of freedom.

A well-curated package

An eclectic choice of songs and neat choreography marked Vibha Veeraraghavan’s performance at Aadi Naatya Vizha



Promising Vibha Veeraraghavan.
PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

Manasa Vijaylakshme. C

The audience seemed to enjoy the dance performance, which featured a variety of songs and powerful choreography. Vibha Veeraraghavan, disciple of Archana Narayanamurthy, founder, Pandanallur School of Arts, recently presented her solo Bharatanatyam recital at the Brahma Gana Sabha festival. Vibha began with pushpanjali set in raga Nattai and Adi tala. This was followed by ‘Adikkondar anda vedikkai kanak kan ayiram vendamo,’ where the devotee exclaims, “To witness Ananda Tandavam of the cosmic dancer Nataraja, don’t I need a thousand eyes!” The composition describes how when Nataraja dances everything around him moves, for he is the source of all movement in the cosmos. It also talks about how he defeated goddess Kali in a dance competition by striking the Urdhva Tandavam posture, and

became the deity (Sabanayagar) of Thillai (Chidambaram). This piece by Muthu Thandavar is set in raga Mayamalavagowla and Adi tala. Vibha’s vibrant movements conveyed the essence of this powerful song.

A devotee’s appeal

Next came the varnam ‘Senthilmevum deva deva shivabala’ in praise of Muruga of Tiruchendur. He is the destroyer of the demon Surapadman, the saviour of the devas, and the son of Shiva. In the line ‘Sindhai irangi ennai ala va velava va,’ the devotee pleads, “What is the reason for you to neglect my devotion or refuse to understand my feelings?” This piece is set in raga Nilambari and Adi tala, and is a composition by Lalgudi G. Jayaraman.

The jathis were composed by Pandanallur Srinivas. As far as varnams go, this one was different. Vibha’s abhinaya and nritta prowess came to the fore in this piece.

Oothukadu Venkataakavi’s ‘Kuzhaloothi manamellam’ in raga Kamboji and Adi tala followed. Here, the cowherd says, “When I hear the melodious sound originating from the bamboo flute played by Krishna, all my sorrows vanish, and I am in eternal bliss.” The young dancer conveyed the emotions well.

The concluding piece was the thillana in raga Paras and Adi tala, a composition by Srinivasa Iyengar. Vibha’s sharp footwork brought out the spirit of the composition.

The orchestra for the evening consisted of Rangini Aravind on the vocals, Nagai Narayanan on the mridangam and M.S. Kannan on the violin. The choreography and nattuvangam were by Archana Narayanamurthy.



Sound waves
Sandeep Narayan with Akshay Yashodharan on the guitar; Lalit Talluri on the flute; and Chandrasekara Sharma on the ghatam.
PHOTO COURTESY: EVENT ART

Kalyan Gopalan

The twilight breeze caressed the trees. You heard the intermittent chirp of the birds. The water in the pool shimmered in the glow of candles placed on either side of the minimalist stage. As music lovers began to occupy the neatly arranged vintage chairs, they feared the dark grey sky might open up and play spoilsport. Titled ‘By the Sea’, it was an unusual intimate concert setting.

Soon the emcees introduced the talented group of musicians led by vocalist Sandeep Narayan. Without taking much time, they launched into ‘Naada tanumanisham’ in raga Chitta Ranjani. The music was seamless, and almost pitch-perfect.

Expressing his desire to

Twilight tunes

‘By the Sea’ concert showed how curators and musicians constantly explore unusual musical settings

take his informal jamming sessions to a larger audience, Sandeep said this concert was an effort in that direction. Organised along with Event Art, which had curated the concert, the evening allowed to experience music in a new ambience and format.

His second song ‘Oru murai unnai kandaen’ (from the album *Alai*) was as gentle as the breeze. Akshay Yashodharan on the guitar and Lalit Talluri on the flute took turns to play, and their imagination blended well with Sandeep’s singing. The flute, guitar and

voice came together particularly well in these lines:

Ootredutta uyir
oinduvitta pinnum
Kaatchi theliya villaye
Aatru vellam karai
thaandi vanda pinnum
Daagam thaniya villaye
Lalit’s choice of bansuri was atmospheric, and Akshay’s strumming was fluent while Chandrasekara Sharma’s ghatam accompaniment was sublime, with appropriate grooves elevating the rendition with right pace.

Sandeep next chose Jayadeva’s Ashtapadi ‘Dheera sameere yamuna theere’ composed by Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman in raga Pahadi. He effortlessly traversed between low and high registers and embellished the kriti with vibrant *brigas*. It reminded of his guru Sanjay Subrahmanyam. Sandeep’s

heart-warming presentation of ‘Aadum Chidambaramo’ again came with guitar and flute accompaniments.

Though it began to drizzle, Sandeep continued in the same spirit. He next sang ‘Chandra chooda siva shankara’, followed by ‘Naadha vindhu’ and ‘Gopala gokula vallabha’. The guitar-voice harmony stood out in these pieces.

There was a surprise towards the end. The audience got a chance to walk up to the beach with Sandeep, who sang a medley of kritis by the sea. He started with a Kannada song ‘Akka kelava nan ondhru’ followed by a couple of songs on Rama such as ‘Ramaiya Rama’ and ‘Ramanaj bhajithal’. As he made the audience sing along, one was reminded of *unchavrittis* in *Mylapore mada vedhis* during Margazhi.

Young brigade to the fore

The annual Spirit of Youth festival offers an important platform, where competitive spirit is the ruling theme

P. Srihari

For aspiring young musicians, every concert opportunity is an acid test. When competitive spirit is the ruling theme of an event that is held under the auspices of The Music Academy, the challenge looms larger. At the end of the 34th Spirit of Youth series, dedicated to the memory of Ambujam Krishna, all the 10 main artistes and their accompanists would have emerged wiser for the experience, irrespective of whether they landed the prize or not.

In a pleasant irony, the charm of the old school music came as a whiff of fresh air in Dhanush Anantharaman’s vocal recital, which began with Tyagaraja’s ‘Tulasee dalamulache’ in Mayamalavagowla. The elaborate niraval and kalpanaswaras at the customary ‘Sarasiruha punnaaga’ were a precursor to what was in store.

Dhanush aced the Kannada alapana with finesse, largely managing to eschew inordinate repetition of the characteristic vakra phrases even while keeping the raga identity intact. Muthuswami Dikshitar’s ‘Sri Mathrubhutam’ followed with brisk swara sequences at ‘Vaasita nava javanti pushpa’.

The young vocalist sped through ‘Varanarada’ in Vijayasri before plunging into the magnificence of Bhairavi, presenting an akara and gamaka-filled delineation of the raga in detail ahead of a soulful rendition of Syama Sastri’s ‘Sari evaramma’. Niraval and swaras at ‘Syamakrishna paripalini’ in



Impressive line up (Clockwise from left) Dhanush Anantharaman; Supriya Raja; and Atchayaharini.
PHOTOS: K. PICHUMANI



two speeds in an ideal kalapramanam were the highlights of the concert. The adoption of the phrase from the mudra line of the same composer’s swarajathi in the keezh kalam lent a delightful touch.

After ‘Jagathinai kaathidum Janardhana’ by Ambujam Krishna, the concert concluded with a Thiruppugazh tuned in Senchurutti and Nadanamakriya. Naga Sai displayed a good measure of sensitivity on the violin, while Pranav provided enthusiastic percussion support and his thani in Khanda Jhampa was absorbing.

Supriya’s neat essays

A sparkling swara avartanam at the pallavi opening of ‘Palimparavadelara’, a Pallavi Seshayyar composition in

Arabhi, set the tone for Supriya Raja’s concert in which she was accompanied by M. Meenakshy Dev and B.N. Kasinadh on the violin and mridangam respectively.

Supriya chose for exploration two ragas – Thodi and Kalyani – that are at the opposite ends of the swara spectrum, handling both with elan. After a tidy raga essay of Kalyani, Supriya flowed seamlessly into Patnam Subramania Iyer’s ‘Nijadasa varada’, where the anupallavi line ‘Bhujagadhupa sayana’ was taken up for an expressive niraval.

Then she breezed through Dikshitar’s ‘Ramachandram bhavayami’ before delving into Thodi, the evening’s main raga, which was built up with structural coherence. Supriya’s interpretation of Tyagaraja’s

‘Emi jesithe’ was marked by deep bhava, followed by a skilful niraval and engaging swaras at ‘Varamantramanyulaku’ in the charanam.

‘Ododi vanden Kanna’ in Dharmavathi was Supriya’s choice for the mandatory composition by Ambujam Krishna. With Kalyani and Dharmavathi having the same uttaranga – in fact, a solitary note (ga) differentiates the two – a song in some other raga would have fitted the bill better. The lively recital came to a close with Papanasam Sivan’s Behag thillana.

Violinist Meenakshy elevated the concert with sublime artistry. While her Kalyani and Thodi were insightful and resonant, she worked in perfect tandem with Supriya during the

niraval and swara exchanges. Kasinadh too played a good hand throughout, barring a minor blip in his Misra Chapu thani.

Atchayaharini’s bhava-rich singing

B. Atchayaharini’s vocal performance was noteworthy for her sound understanding of the musical values, bhava-rich rendition and deft voice modulation. After warming up with Pallavi Gopala Iyer’s varnam in Surati, she stepped on the pedal by firing away swara salvos at ‘Saraswathi’ in Puliur Duraiswami Iyer’s ‘Sarasiruhasanapriye’ in raga Nattai.

The meditative Pantuvarali and Tyagaraja’s ‘Sambho mahadeva’ and an engrossing Bhairavi followed by the Dikshitar masterpiece ‘Balagopala’, with the latter being the main number, formed the nucleus of the concert. Atchayaharini did a commendable job in both, with niraval and swara prastharam at ‘Sambho Mahadeva’ and ‘Neela neeradha sareera’. However, lingering a little more in the lower octave will make her raga alapanas more rounded.

Adithya Anil on the violin and Arvind Raman on the mridangam embellished the recital with their valuable support.

In between, ‘Kanna vaa Manivanna vaa’, a pancha ragamalika song by Ambujam Krishna – featuring Kapi, Sama, Vasantha, Neelambari and Surati – added a vibrant splash of colour. Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar’s thillana in Kalyani and Thodi were insightful and resonant, she worked in perfect tandem with Supriya during the

Mature portrayal

V.V. Ramani

Beginning with a sculpturesque pose of Ardhanarishwara, the high energy level with which the performance began was sustained till the end by Apeksha Kamath.

The Shiva-Shakti concept was explored by Apeksha in the Ardhanarishwara stuti by Adi Shankaracharya. The piece was set to music by M.S. Sukhi.

The focus on Shiva continued in the Ashtaragamalika varnam composed by Thanjavur Ponniah Pillai. The nayika pining for union with Brihadishwara was the focal point, and the sancharis were structured on it. Plucking flowers and stringing them into a garland, the nayika sets out to meet the lord. The dancer beautifully brought out the magnificent form of the lord in this sequence.

Perfect synchrony

The theermanams were noteworthy for the synchrony of footwork with the beats of the cymbals and the mridangam. But, at times, especially in fast tempo, the movements slightly lost their grace. Considering the fact that a varnam has been conceptualised as a fine blend of nritta and abhinaya, additional jathis between swara passages

are tiring to watch.

A nayika besotted with love, waiting with anticipation for her lord, is disenchanted with the dishevelled state in which her sakhi, whom she had sent as a messenger, returns, was portrayed in the padam ‘Unnai thoodanuppinen’.

This was followed by Ambujam Krishna’s bhajan, set to tune by T. V. Ramprasadh in raga Shudh Sarang, where the heroine expresses her desire to become a flute in the hands of Krishna, so that the proximity brings back memories of their conversations. Apeksha’s abhinaya for both these compositions was noteworthy for the nuances in her explorations.

A Suruti raga thillana by Oothukadu Venkataakavi, highlighting the Krishna Kaliya theme, came next. This was preceded by sawaal-jawab between the mridangist and dancer to a rhythmic pattern in Tisra and Chatusra nadai.

Indira Kadambi (Apeksha’s guru) conducted the recital. K.Hariprasad on the vocals was supported by G.S.

Nagaraj on the mridangam, R. P. Prakash on the veena and Rakesh Dhat on the flute.



Apeksha Kamath
PHOTO: K PICHUMANI



ittershots



Four-hour concert

Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha Trust has organised a four-hour concert by Purva Dhanushri Cotah and Paavani Cotah on August 18, 4.15 p.m., at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. She will be accompanied by Shraddha Ravindran on the violin, S. Kavichelvan on the mridangam and Sunil Kumar on the kanjira.

Centenary celebrations

The disciples, friends and family of violin vidwan T. Kesavulu will celebrate his birth centenary on August 22, 6 p.m., at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. The evening begins with a brief presentation by M.K. Sudarshan followed by remembrance speeches by Nirmala Sundararajan and Chitra Seshadri and a vocal duet by Rama Ravi and Nanditha Ravi. The mother-daughter duo will be accompanied by R.K. Shriramkumar (violin) and K. Arun Prakash (mridangam).

New-age repertoire

Aayana Dance Company lent a modern touch to traditional pieces

V.V. Ramani

Artists constantly need to reinvent and adapt themselves to the changing sensibilities of the audience. Aayana Dance company from Bengaluru has done so, successfully. ‘Dhruva and Ellige’ two works conceptualised by the Company was presented on the concluding day of the Yagnaraman festival at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha.

Packed with energy
From the beginning, the group packed enough energy into the performance, which was a delightful mix of colour, light, music and movement. It began with a Valmiki Namana. A Vayu pushpanjali in raga Nattai followed. It had a powerful set of movements to evoke the



dynamics of wind. Seated under spotlights on either side of the stage, two artistes, through intense abhinaya drew parallel between Hanuman and Tyagaraja – the two ardent devotees of Rama. The chosen line was ‘Vegara karuna sagara’. They were soon joined by a group of dancers, and together they explored the kriti ‘Vandanamu raghunandana’. But the constant presence of a big group of dancers on stage made for a monotonous viewing. Entries and exits should be streamlined in group productions. *Hanuman Chalisa* was noteworthy for the group formations and vibrant footwork. The lines in the *Chalisa* that talk about the need to fight fear were highlighted through apt lighting and make-up. ‘Ellige’, which dealt with basic questions such as ‘Who are we?’ ‘What are we doing?’

Visual appeal
Aayana Dance Company presented two works, Dhruva and Ellige. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and ‘Where are we going?’, was divided into three choreographic pieces. The panchakanyas – Sita, Draupadi, Ahalya, Tara and Mandodari were explored through relevant stotras addressed to the five men in the Panchajathi alarippu. The dance moved beyond the narrative to focus on women empowerment. This idea was interestingly woven into the piece. The show ended with the mangalam ‘Pavamana’. Aayana Dance Company needs to be lauded for expanding the Bharatanatyam repertoire by incorporating contemporary ideas. Lighting design by Surya Rao was an intrinsic part of the choreography. It showed why curators of group productions should give equal attention to every aspect. Thanks to the lighting, watching the presentation was a delightful experience.

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Month-long ritual

Sri Sachidananda Tirtha Swami, the head of Sri Chakra Mahameru Peetam, Bilaspur, is observing his Chaturmasya vrata and performing the vyasa puja at Amara Bharati kalyana Mandapam, Thiruvanniyur. The rituals, which began on July 21, will conclude with the Visvarupa yatra on September 18. Veda parayanam, special puja of Tripurasundari, Chandramouliswarar and Mahaperiyava from part of the morning rituals, while the chanting of Lalitha Sahasranamam, followed by concerts, discourses, and namasankirtanam will take place in the evening. Sri Sachidananda Tirtha Swami, who established the Sri Chakra Mahameru Peetam in Bilaspur, was initiated by Kashi Eashwarananda Tirtha, two decades ago. It is said that Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the 68th Shankaracharya of Kanchi, bestowed the responsibility of Sri Chakra Mahameru Peetam upon Sachidananda Tirtha swami. In recognition to that, a ten-day brahmotsavam is held every year from January 16 to 26 featuring chandi homam, veda parayanam and procession.

Veterans' week

Brahma Gana Sabha conducts a seven-day 'Nalli Veterans Music Festival 2024' (non-ticketed) from August 18 to 24 at Narada Gana Sabha Mini Hall, 6.15 p.m. Artistes to be featured in this year's edition are Rama Ravi, Prema Rangarajan, M.A. Sundaresan and M.A. Krishnaswamy, Trichur Ramachandran, R.S. Jayalakshmi, K. Bhaskaran and Madurai R. Rajaram.

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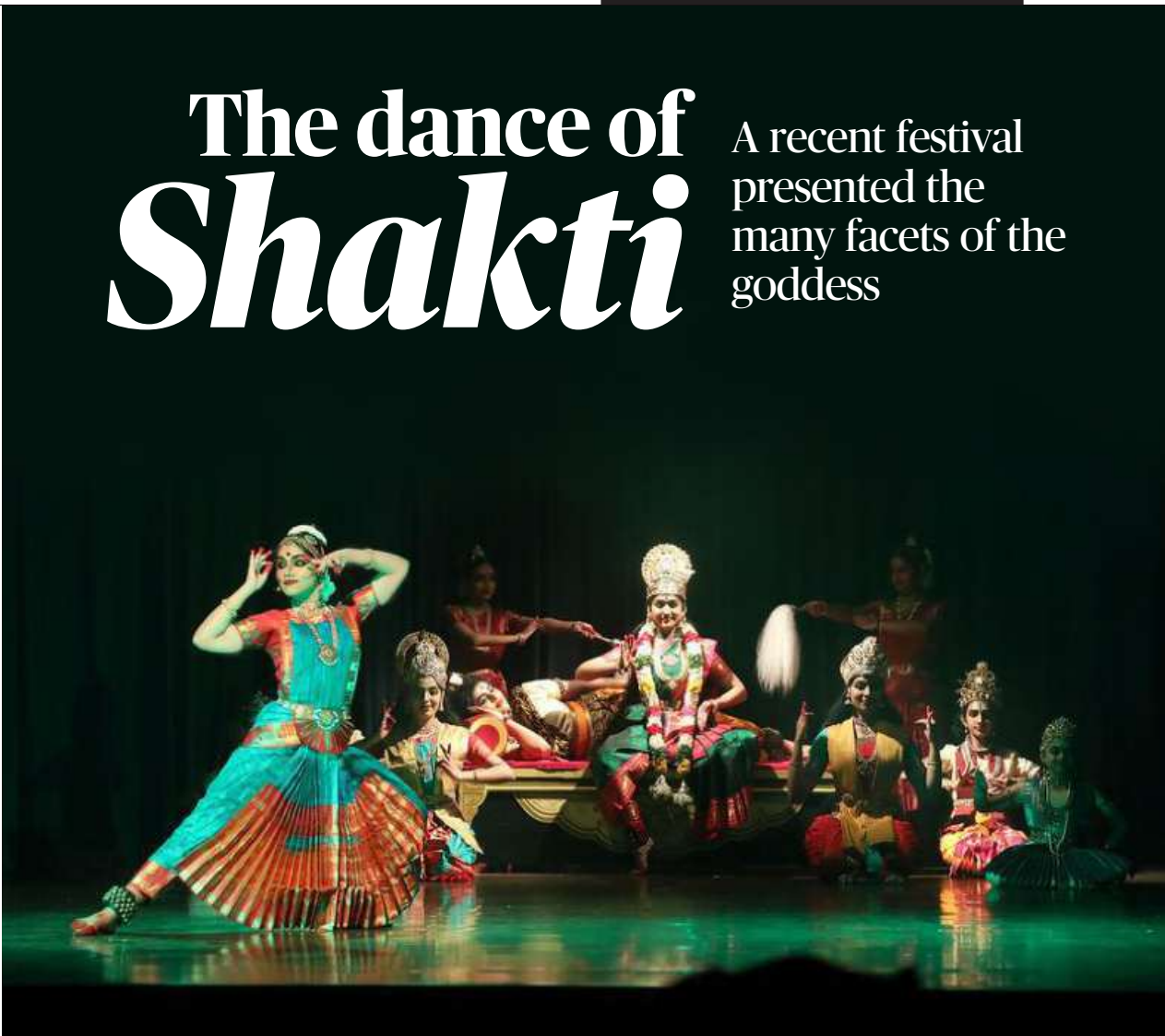
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Music and musings

Under the auspices of Madhuradhwani, the following programmes are scheduled to take place at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. Schedule: **August 17**, 6 p.m.: Music Forum, Rukmini Arts and Music Trust, and Madhuradhwani will jointly present the Sangeetha Lakshana Lakshya series. It will feature Sureshkumar's talk on 'The role of compositions to learn raga alapana in South Indian Classical Music'. This will be followed by Seetha Narayanan's vocal concert (7 p.m.). **August 18**, 6.15 p.m.: Viswanath Parasuram with M. Narmadha (violin) and B. Ganapathyraman (mridangam) and N. Rajaraman(ghatam). **August 20**, 6 p.m.: Isaikkavi Ramanan's book Andha Naal Varuvadhillai will be launched. **August 21**, 6.15 p.m.: Dr. Sudha Seshayyan's seventh episode of Tamil Moovar to be followed by Santhosh Subramaniam's vocal rendition. Madhuradhwani has organised the event in association with Anmajothi. The line-up ends with the Sampada lecture demonstration series, organised by Sruti Magazine on **August 22** at 6 p.m. It will feature Nirmala Rajasekhar's lecture 'Tanam, Talam and Gamakam - Exploring nuances and fingering techniques on the veena' and folloed by Prof. Jayachadran's session 'Weaving Adavus: The idea and practice at 7.15 p.m.



Saraswathi Vasudevan

Three miniature dance dramas unfolded in quick succession at the Aadi Natya Samarpanam, held under the aegis of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. The well-curated works, celebrating the Tamil month of Aadi, were an outcome of the coming together of creative minds. Deepa Ganesh, artistic director, Upasana, brought together three senior teachers – Sheela Unnikrishnan, Jayanthi Subramaniam and Anita Guha – hailing from different lineages, to present a colourful garland for the goddess in her varying forms. Deepa's arduous research, under the guidance of Tamil scholar S. Raghuraman, seamlessly unravelled the intricacies of the art form, as the productions moved from the interiors



of Tamil Nadu to an urban setting. A charming group of dancers from Sheela Unnikrishnan's Sridevi Nrithyalaya presented 'Aadi Aasarippu' as an ode to Shakti. The costumes, and the props used established the rural flavour. The recorded music, which sounded a bit

A recent festival presented the many facets of the goddess



Powerful narrative (Clockwise from left) From 'The Goddess Across Time'; 'Aadi Aasarippu'; and 'Sri Bala Tripurasundari'. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the presentation. Both the Kavuthuvam and the edited version of Andal's union with her lord lent a perfect start to the evening.

Well-executed theme

Classicism marked the presentation by the students of Jayanthi Subramaniam. 'The Goddess Across Time' showcased Her glory from the Sangam period to Meenakshi Pillai Tamizh (17th century). The choreography eulogised Devi's power, bravery, and victorious trail. Warfare and weaponry were strikingly portrayed through vibrant rhythm, deftly played by mridangist M.S. Sukhi.

Nandini Anand Sharma's musical compositions and renditions for the 'Kotravai vazhipadu' recreated the heroic era of the Goddess. Jayanthi's strength clearly showed in her nattuvangam.

In stark contrast came the soothing 'Ambulipparuvam', where a mother beckons the moon to come and play with her child. 'Chaturupayas', or the four approaches of Sama, Dana, Bheda, Danda were well-depicted by the four dancers in turns.

A personal observation is that while the moon's position was steadily registered through the mukhabhinaya, the continued communication with the fixed drishti could have had intervening shifts. Though the essence of the composition came through, gentle nritta segments would have enhanced the impact.

Nandini Anand Sharma's choice of ragas was apt for the mood that was gradually built to coax the moon. The choice of Yamuna Kalyani gave a fitting start. Jayanthi Subramaniam's

abhinaya training needs to be lauded.

The performance highlighted how history and literature can be explored through the medium of dance.

The dramatic shift to 'Sri Bala Tirupurasundari' by Anita Guha, who specialises in the traditional dance drama format, offered a glimpse of the goddess' valour. Researching *Lalitha Mahatmyam* and other relevant texts, Anita came up with a compelling narrative.

Vigorous nritta passages were conceived to suit the episodes. Depiction of the hamsam carrying the goddess as a child and a variety of formations venerating Her were the high points.

P.R. Venkatasubramanian was the man behind the music ensemble. An integral part of Anita's productions, his support has been immense.

Anita's skill in presenting the story in a concise manner with a large entourage of dancers getting equal stage space needs a special mention.

Segments such as celebrating the goddess in the form of a child and a mother's angst in 'Sri Rajarajeshwari' while allowing Sri Bala to fight Bhandasura were well-established. However, the tonal shifts during the battlefield scene was a bit jarring.

The lighting was subdued as Sri Bala Tirupurasundari emerged as the real light.

Violinist Vishwesh's fluid bowing and young flautist Adwait's melodious playing in Jayanthi's and Anita's presentations deserve to be complimented.

Aadi Natya Samarpanam drove home the point that any celebration is incomplete without art, as it establishes a connect between the world and the inner self.

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ALBERT A/C dts | SANGAM A/C dts | UDHAYAM A/C dts | WOODLANDS A/C dts | PVR VR MALL A/C dts | PVR REDHILLS A/C dts
PVR ECR A/C dts | PVR GRAND MALL A/C dts | AGS CINEMAS, T NAGAR A/C dts | AGS CINEMAS, MADURAVOYAL A/C dts | AGS OMR A/C dts
AGS VILLIVAKKAM A/C dts | MAYAJAAL A/C dts | VELACHERY LUXE A/C dts | CINEPOLIS BSR MALL, OMR A/C dts | KASI TALKIES A/C dts
INOX NATIONAL | GOPIKRISHNA A/C dts | AMBATHUR MURUGAN & RAKKI CINEMAS A/C dts | EVP, CHEMBARAMBAKKAM A/C dts



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Kanakam
Devaguptapu takes
readers into the
world of Kshetrayya’s
padams



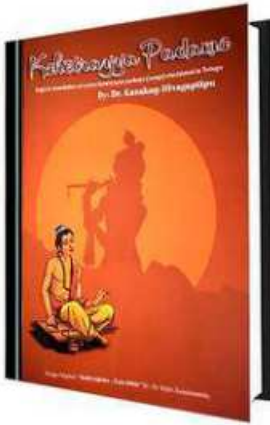
Songs of the wandering poet

Pujita Krishna

A legion of composers and poets with a gift of sublime vision and enduring devotion to a chosen deity have breathed aesthetic flavour into compositions that have remained in the popular imagination of pious Indians through the ages. A unifying principle of bhakti ignited their creative spark – indeed, this was unique to Indian poets of yore. That said, a few poets have been able to remain relevant the way Kshetrayya has. Even fewer have captured the waxing and waning shades of romantic love between a man and a woman, quite in the forthright, open manner he had. A bard struck with wanderlust; a

maverick writer of love songs; a friend and a confidante to courtesans and devadasis; a life-long devotee of Muvva Gopala – the charming, flute-playing cowherd deity of Movva – these are just some known facets of the 17th century Telugu poet-adventurer Kshetrayya. His life was ostensibly full and rich, evidenced by the 4,000-odd sringara padams he is known to have penned, forming a major bulk of his oeuvre. Steeped in madhura bhakti, traversing a whole gamut of sringara bhavas featuring a range of nayakas and nayikas, and layered with varying shades of human emotions – almost all his padams invariably culminated in the feet of Muvva’s Gopala. Musicologist, scholar and author Kanakam Devaguptapu recently

launched a book *Kshetrayya Padams*, is an admirable effort to not only translate the original ‘Kshetrajnulu’ by Prof. Veturi Anandamurthy into English, but also supplement it with information that serves to make it a valuable resource for dancers. Kanakam’s work covers 35 padams, providing detailed translation and transliteration for each, while also providing a key for difficult and archaic terms. All these padams have been notated making it easier for dancers to adapt them to



Informative (From far left) Kanakam Devaguptapu; Divya Devaguptapu; and book cover .
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

performance. In addition, the book also provides a quick rundown of nayaka, nayika and sakhi bhedas, nayika avasthas and similar concepts that a novice dancer may find useful.

More than just a manual
There is a serious dearth of dance-related material that is both comprehensive and comprehensible. Dancers are often hard-pressed to find suitable compositions with reliable translations or commentary to help them navigate through the intricacies of poetic pieces. This is particularly true of padams, which deal with a spectrum of nuanced feelings in the intractable territory of man-woman relationships. Kanakam Devaguptapu’s book fills this lacuna. Several engaging sections in this book elevate it from being a mere manual. It opens with a short biographical essay on Kshetrayya’s life shedding light on the charismatic nature of his name, for example. Theories abound on why Varadayya eventually became Kshetrayya. A few scholars suggested that his prolific travels to various temples across the country are a reason he earned this catchy epithet. Here’s a more profound and less prosaic spin. ‘One who knows this body as a vehicle for enjoying pleasures is Kshetraina’. Having once enjoyed

the company of devadasis, and having once been a worldly man, he transformed into a person solely driven by his love of Muvva Gopala. Thus, he became Kshetrayya, ‘the one who realises that this body, the kshetra, is perishable.’ The book also makes a mention of Mohanangi, the

devadasi with whom he shared a life-long bond. An aimless village bumpkin in his early years, it was Mohanangi, an ardent devotee of Muvva Gopala herself, who tutored him in music and dance. As the story goes, Kshetrayya received a life-transforming ‘Gopala mantra’ from none other than Muvva Gopala. And it is said that overnight Varadayya transformed into song-writer Kshetrayya. Be that as it may, there is a new breed of scholars who claim that Kshetrayya may be a figment of imagination after all. Kanakam Devaguptagu’s book dismisses these claims remarking that there are more facts and figures pointing to the existence of Kshetrayya. As for the padams, Veturi Anandamurthy had originally featured 33 poems in his original work in Telugu. Kanakam has included two more poems in her translation: ‘chinna dana’ and ‘nenu manchidana’. Some of the padams had already been notated in the past by legends such as Ranga Ramanuja Iyengar, Sripada Pinakapani, Subbarama Dikshitar, and Manchala Jagannatha Rao. The remaining 16 padams have been composed especially for the purpose of this book by musicians Malladi Suribabu, Neela Rangopal, and Pantula Rama among others. Yet another special feature of this book is the inclusion of a biographical musical play ‘Varadayya’ written by Sri Anandamurthy in 1959.

Themes and emotions
There is a lot to choose from in the array of padams: a variety of themes, emotions, nayika and nayaka bhedas, sancharis, ragas and talas find their place here. The first padam ‘Inni vidhamula’, for instance, is male-oriented, where the hero is not Muvvagopala but Kshetrayya himself. This is a male viraha composition – a rare theme in the world of sringara padams. Yet another unique padam, ‘Aligi yela’ depicts the hero’s anxiety over a sullen nayika. The book also features ‘Vadaraka popove’, a padam that Kshetrayya had left incomplete before his travels only to return to finish it since no one in his absence had been able to do so.

Special sadas held at Kanchi math

The Chaturmasya camp of the Kanchi Sankaracharya at Orirukkai near Kanchipuram is vibrant with various pujas and cultural activities. Agnihotra Sadas – a congregation of pundits, who perform Agnihotram on a daily basis (Nitya Agnihotris) – was conducted for three days. Agnihotram means worship (upasana) of the fire. Just as the universe is made of the five natural elements, the human body also is governed by Panchabhuta, although on a microcosmic level. Fire or agni is propitiated through a yagam as an act of purging the atmosphere of toxic elements. This practice has been in vogue for centuries but has declined with the number of families pursuing the ritual dwindling from 1,500 to 150. It has been the tradition of the seers of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitam to organise a Sadas (seminar) of Agnihotris during Chaturmasya Vratam in order to encourage the families and honour their dedication. They come from across the country. Apart from performing the ritual, the experts engage in debates and discussions. The event was organised under the guidance of the 70th pontiff, Sri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswati, from August 9 to 11. A highlight this year was that a group of Agnihotris from Kerala participated for the first time in the Ishti Sadas. The Sankaracharya underlined the importance of this ancient Vedic ritual, especially in the context of natural disasters that have rocked several parts of this country. “Live in unison with Nature and reap the benefits,” he stressed. (With inputs from Math camp)

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A dream come true



Amrit Ramnath gears up for the release of his new EP '100,000 Dream', that talks of hope and liberation

Narendra Kusnur

Amrit Ramnath had just signed his first film as a music director for the Malayalam movie *Varshangalkku Shesham* in March 2023, when he received the news that his mother, acclaimed singer Bombay Jayashri, had suffered an aneurysm while on her U.K. tour. The next few weeks were very challenging for Amrit and his father, Ramnath.

"I had thousands of dreams, but was faced with one single reality. This is what inspired me to work on my new EP *100,000 Dreams*. The album is symbolic of how people go through various things in life, and yet hope for the best," says the 26-year-old Chennai-based musician, best-known for his independent tracks 'Manase', 'Nee Oli' and 'Kaatre Va'.

The EP will be released by Sony Music on August 23, while the first single 'Kanavugal Kandein' was released on July 25. "I wanted to capture the feeling of liberation. I have an affinity for the classical nylon string guitar, so I began with that. Then I used the Budapest Scoring Orchestra for the strings," he says. The video has been directed by Parizad D.

The album also has two



versions of the song 'Nila', which was written by Jayashri while recovering. Amrit will perform the songs at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) in Mumbai on August 22.

Surrounded by music
Naturally, Amrit has been surrounded by music all his life. While his mother has been a major influence, his father also played a big role. He recalls, "He was a chartered accountant, but after I was born and my mother's career was flourishing, he played the role of a homemaker. He has a little business that keeps him happy. But he is an unsung artiste, because he also writes poetry in Urdu, and has released a book."

Though Amrit learnt Carnatic music, he later switched to

Western classical and played the violin and piano. His independent songs are rich in melody, and have a lot of guitarwork and string arrangements.

Amrit says he grew up on music from across India. "My mother hails from Mumbai and my father from Kolkata. I was exposed to Hindi film music, Hindustani music, Bengali songs, Marathi songs and more. These days, when I watch movies I look at how music is used. It all then comes into my music."

The film break happened when Malayalam director Vineeth Sreenivasan approached him for *Varshangalkku Shesham*. Amrit recalls, "I made most of the songs from the hospital, where my mother was admitted. She has written the lyrics of 'Nyabagam', the only Tamil song in the album which I have sung. It's a song about lost friendship but it is much more than that."

Amrit worked with singers K.S. Chithra, Sreevalsan J. Menon, Balram, Hesham Abdul Wehab and Siddharth Basrur. He has now signed his first Tamil film, which stars Siddharth. "I'll try to keep my independent music and film work running parallelly. I have a few singles lined up and they include some in Hindi," says Amrit.



All in the family
L. Subramaniam with wife Kavitha and daughter Bindu.
PHOTO COURTESY: SUBRAMANIAM FOUNDATION.ORG

The art of give and take

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

LS: Knowing the strength of Carnatic music calculation will help to create complex polyrhythmic structures in compositions and will also enable improvisation in polyrhythmic cycles. Getting familiar with these rhythmic concepts would allow musicians from anywhere in the world to play in different polyrhythmic structures such as 5 and 3/4, or 21 and 3/4; or subdividing each beat into number of pulses (notes) like 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 and multiples of that.

Learning concepts of Raga Harmony bridges the gap between the two systems. While students may use it to create new music, it also gives them a vocabulary to explain their work to non-musicians.

Q: You have talked about your experiments with Raga Harmony. How did you compose it, and your experience in guiding the musicians in your team.

LS: After finishing my Masters in Western Classical Music, I wanted to create a system that was different from existing ones both in the West and India. I began to write a lot of compositions keeping different ragas in mind and creating complex harmonies that are pleasing and smooth to hear. I have continued to develop this system since then. When I went to Moscow, one of the professors approached me and asked me to explain how I created the harmonies in *Fantasy on Vedic Chants*, which I had also played at the Tchaikovsky Hall with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. That set me thinking. So I

decided to write a book on raga harmony. Instead of just writing it as a book I thought of making it a thesis for my Ph.D. so that it will be scrutinised by others and accepted by scholars.

Q: How do you view Ilayaraja's experiments in this regard? Nothing but Wind, How to Name it, and Thiruvasagam.

LS: My friendship with Raja goes back many decades. He is one of the greatest music composers of Indian cinema. Initially, my elder brother, myself and Raja, studied from my father Prof. V. Lakshminarayana. During the Lakshminarayana Global Music Festival in 2021, Raja spoke about a piece he wrote in 1993, which was recorded with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. We are also working on a special collaborative project.

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