

friday Review

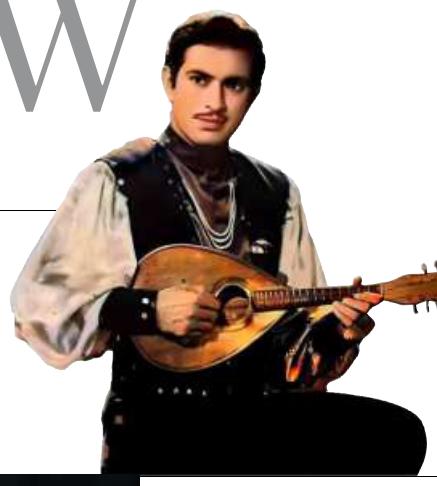
THE HINDU

Choreographic collection

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The call of Kathak

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**A VOICE THAT TUGS AT THE HEARTSTRINGS**

On Talat Mahmood's birth centenary, a biography rekindles musical memories p4

G. S. Paul

Kerala Kalamandalam (Deemed-to-be-University) recently created history by selecting a non-Chakyar for its Fellowship in Koodiyattam. G. Venu, an accomplished performer, skillful choreographer, prolific writer and venerated guru was the chosen one.

While sea changes in society have compelled the traditional performers or Chakyars to migrate to other vocations, Venu, a consummate performer of Kathakali, groomed by doyens such as Chengannur Raman Pillai and Guru Gopinath, plunged headlong into the world of Koodiyattam after watching a performance by maestro Ammannur Madhava Chakyar at Sree Vadakkunnathan Temple, Thrissur.

The theatrical potential of the centuries-old Sanskrit drama style and the scope of abhinaya it offered left a profound influence on him. So much so, at the age of 37, Venu resigned his permanent job at the School of Drama and Fine Arts, University of Calicut, shifted his residence to Irinjalakuda and joined Ammannur Kalari as the first non-Chakyar student of Ammannur Madhava Chakyar.

Since his initiation, Venu has been following his acharya like a shadow, taking care of his needs in the capacity of both a disciple and impresario. In turn, Madhava Chakyar groomed him as his protégé. The credit for starting Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Smaraka Gurukulam in 1982 also goes to Venu.

An ardent advocate of the traditional system of training, he has produced quite a number of young outstanding artistes, an achievement few institutions can boast of.

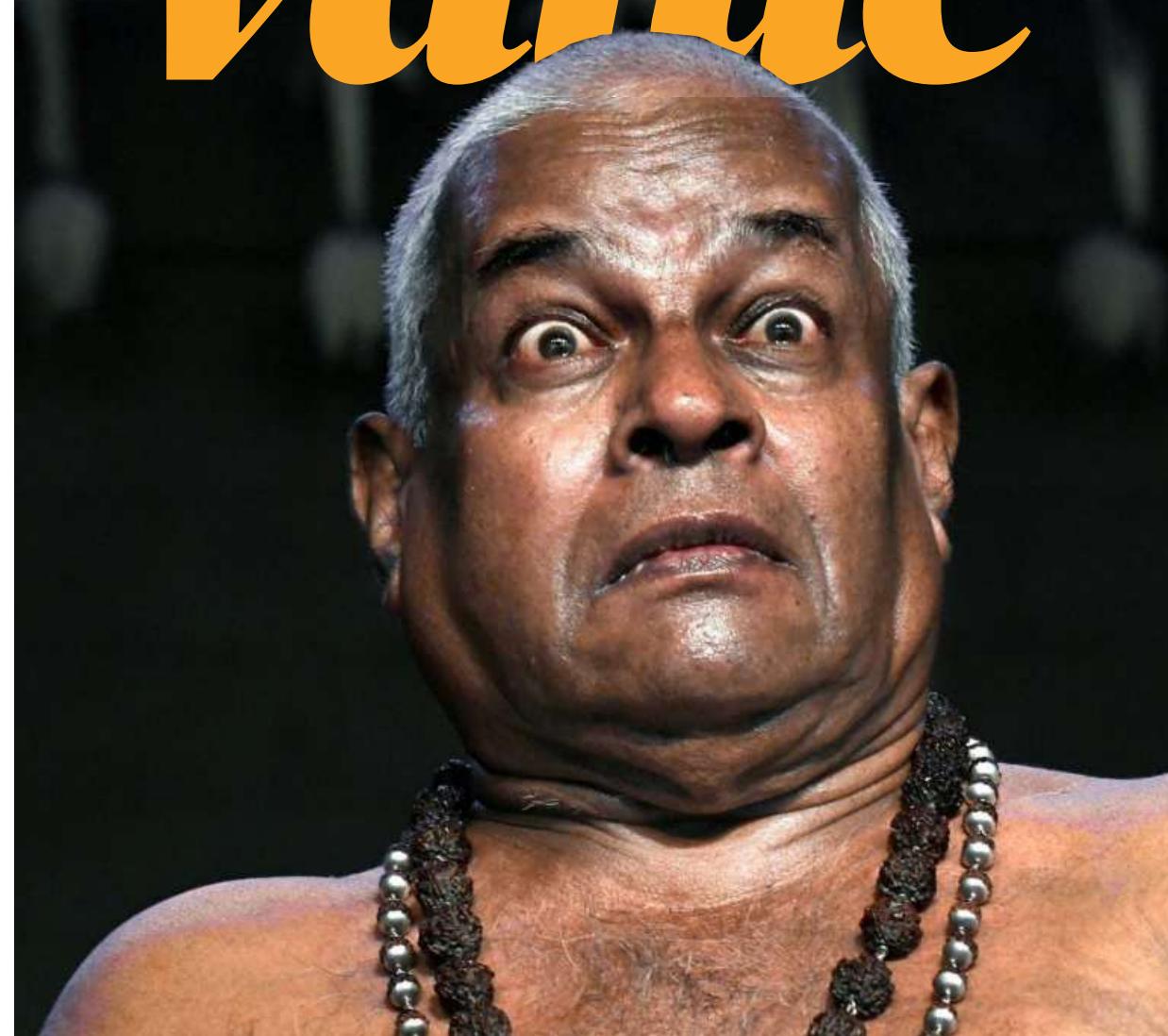
While he donned numerous veshams such as Ravana (*Thoranayudham*), Soorpanakha (*Soorpanangham*) and Bhima and Hanuman (*Kalyanasugandhikam*), Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam*, a 11-hour production, is his magnum opus in choreography. This was staged at many international festivals. His other notable choreographies include *Vikramorvaseeyam* (First half - three Acts) and *Oorubhangam*.

The Ammanur Gurukulam, under the leadership of Madhava Chakyar, was instrumental in the revival of Nangiarkoothu, an exclusive preserve of women. Venu, who was also part of this endeavour, choreographed *Narasimhavatharam*, *Sitaparthyagam* and *Soundaryalahari*.

Little wonder, Venu was nominated by UNESCO to the expert committee of its Asian Cultural Centre. One cannot ignore his contribution in the recognition of Koodiyattam by UNESCO as "the masterpiece of the oral and

As guru G. Venu becomes the first non-Chakyar to receive the Kalamandalam fellowship in Koodiyattam, we look at his unique Navarasa Sadhana technique and training

Face value



intangible heritage of humanity" in 2001.

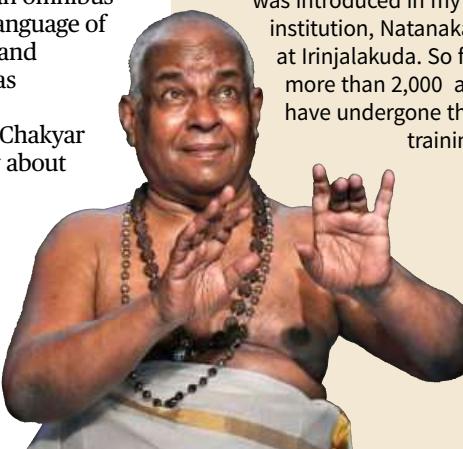
Notations of hand gestures
Endowed with exceptional inclination for research, Venu has created an ingenious system of notations of hand gestures. This began during his days as a Kathakali student. In 1977, the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi published 373 mudras with the title *Kathakaliye Kai Mudras*. In 1984, Venu's institution Natankairali published an English version – *Mudras in Kathakali*. In 1994, the Department of Cultural Publications of the Government of Kerala

published a collection of 587 mudras titled *Kathakali Mudra Nikhandu* (dictionary), which was well-received by Kathakali artistes and researchers.

As for Koodiyattam, Venu's mentor and guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar had personally taught him the mudras of the attaprakaram (acting manual) of *Ramayana Samkshepam* (RS). In the class, Venu would record each mudra in notations. The manuscript took three years – December 1982 to April 1985 – to be completed. Interestingly, the attaprakaram embraced the entire corpus of mudras employed in Koodiyattam

for plays based on the Ramayana. The historically important work was published in 2013 as a bilingual version. Perhaps, the crowning publication is MUDRA, an omnibus volume describing the language of Koodiyattam, Kathakali and Mohiniyattam, which was published in 2023.

It was from Madhava Chakyar that Venu came to know about 'Rasa vaayu', a singular technique of evoking emotions by controlling the breath. Madhava Chakyar had learnt this from Bhagavathar Kunjunni

**The maestro speaks**

"Kerala Kalamandalam's recognition is priceless. When I was working in the Sweden-based project of 'World Theatre', I realised the beauty and depth of our technique of abhinaya. 'Navarasa Sadhana' is an outcome of this realisation. I taught this system for 17 years in the InterCultural Theatre Institute, Singapore, and for 15 years at the National School of Drama, Delhi. Thereafter, this was introduced in my institution, Natankairali, at Irinjalakuda. So far, more than 2,000 artistes have undergone this training."

Thampuram of Kodungallure Palace, an acclaimed authority on the Natyashastra. Incidentally, Venu and his daughter Kapila had demonstrated this technique at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai, as part of the recent Margazhi festival.

Venu assiduously worked on this and evolved a unique method for developing abhinaya, which he introduced in the Navarasa Sadhana course a couple of years ago. Already, 106 batches, including celebrity artistes from across the globe, have completed the 15-day course. Venu has used the hitherto-partly explored 33 Vyabhichari bhavas (transitory emotions) and the tenets of the Natyashastra for designing the course.

The role of Kalamandalam in the propagation of Koodiyattam is praiseworthy. It introduced the department of Koodiyattam in 1966, opening its doors for all communities, irrespective of caste. And now, it reaffirms its commitment to the craft by awarding its highest honour to a non-Chakyar.

CULTUREBRIEFS**Lecture on Gita**

'Vision of the Cosmic Form', a lecture on the Bhagavad Gita in English by Sunandaji will be held from February 24 to 28 (6.30 p.m.) at the Music Academy. Over five sessions, she will analyse the 11th Chapter, in which Arjuna requests Krishna to show His divine manifestation in one form. Sunandaji is the daughter-disciple of Swami A. Parthasarathy. Under Swamiji's guidance, she has been

studying and researching the philosophy of Vedanta. For the past 40 years, she has addressed diverse audiences across the globe. Through her presentation of ancient wisdom in contemporary thought, she continues the legacy of Swamiji, who has been conducting Gita Jnana Yajnas, lecture series on different chapters of the Bhagavad Gita. The aim of the Yajnas is to make the wisdom of the Gita accessible to one and all.

Celebrating a visionary

Kalakshetra Foundation's 'Remembering Rukmini Devi' festival will be held from February 25 to 29 at Bharata Kalakshetra auditorium. This year's festival marks the 120th birth anniversary of Rukmini Devi, who blazed a trail in the world of dance by establishing Kalakshetra, a unique institution that focusses on wholesome training of students. She put in place a curriculum that included music, dance, theatre, costume designing, lighting and stage set.

The festival will feature performances and an exhibition (10 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.) of Rukmini Devi's saris. There will also be an exhibition of drawings, paintings, sculptures and graphic prints created by the students and faculty of Visual



Arts Department (details on Kalakshetra's FB page).

The inaugural day's performances include 'A diadem of gems' by mridangam maestro Umayalpuram Sivaraman at 5 p.m. This will be followed by Kalakshetra dance drama 'Jatayu

Moksham' at 7.15 p.m. Events to take place on other days are: February 26, 6.30 p.m.: performance by Kuchipudi Dance Academy, Chennai, followed by Shenkottai Hari Bhagavat's namasankirtanam (7.15 p.m.)

February, 27, 5 p.m.: O.S. Arun (vocal) and 7.15 p.m.: A. Kanyakumari (violin).

February 28, 6.30 p.m.: Gita Kala Samanayam, the launch of Kalakshetra's Carnatic choir. The valedictory function on February 29, will begin at 5 p.m. with felicitations to Padma awardees Padma Subrahmanyam, Sadanam Balakrishnan and Anupama Hoskare, followed by the launch of V.R. Devika's monograph on Rukmini Devi. The festival draws to a close with the dance drama 'Rukmini Kalyanam' (6.15 p.m.)

Tribute through natya

Kala Pradarshini's Natya Aradhana celebrates its silver jubilee. For the past 25 years, this institution, founded by senior dancer-teacher Parvathi Ravi Ghantasala, has been presenting Tyagaraja's Pancharatna kritis in natya form to commemorate the saint-composer's aradhana. To be held today (5.15 p.m.) at Narada Gana Sabha main hall, it will feature the disciples of Parvathi Ravi Ghantasala, Roja Kannan, S. Divyasena, Sheela Unnikrishnan and S. Shivakumar and S. Sailaja.

The chief guest will be M. Sasikumar, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu and CMD, TNPL. The guests of honour are Vijaya Thayaban, Member-Secretary, Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram, veteran dancer and guru Sudharani Ragupathy and Sri Harishankar, secretary, Narada Gana Sabha.



Creative streaks

Apoorva Jayaraman lent a refreshing touch to traditional compositions

Rupa Srikanth

That Apoorva Jayaraman has matured as a dancer is stating the obvious. This Bharatanatyam artiste, a disciple of Priyadarsini Govind, is an all-rounder – lithe with an excellent sense of timing and grace, and depth in abhinaya. One could see that in her 'Buddhamashrayami' (Nattakurinji, mishra jumpha, Muthuswami Dikshitar), performed at the Music Academy dance festival 2024. She is able to create the space for silence and movement.

Each of Apoorva's presentations was unique. The music was the bedrock on which she structured her recital. The meditative opening, the ode to Buddha (Mercury), included an Alarippu of sorts. The second was a mammoth Khamas padavarnam 'Entani ne

delupudura', in Tisra ekam by Subbarama Dikshitar, with multiple charanas and charana swaras. She added a jathi along with every new charanam, following the one-charanam convention. Her nritta, especially the early jathis, subsequently lost its sparkle. The second half fared better – the swaras were good, tattu-mettu excellent, and the last arudi innovative. Musically, the varnam missed a repetitive charanam that would anchor the second half. The nayika's intense longing was established and revisited with every line of sahitya, without it seeming like an overkill.

The Sanskrit verse from *Amaru Shatakam*, tuned by Rajkumar Bharati, about the quarrelling young couple brought together subtlety, confidence and timing. Apoorva was at once playful as narrator and earnestly egotistical as the couple, as she described a longish moment in their lives. 'Each guards their ego,' she said, as the couple sat on the bed facing away from each other, not wanting to be the first to end the quarrel. The many gestures and nuances as the couple makes overtures towards each other was a lesson in well-thought-out yet nuanced mime.

Apoorva concluded with a playfully energetic, well-timed Kalinga Nartana thillana (Gambhiranattai, Adi, Oothukadu Venkata Subbayer). The programme was conducted by Jayashree Ramnath, assisted by Sakthivel Muruganandam (mridangam). The melody by K. Venkatesan (vocal), K.P. Nandini (violin) and N. Ananthanarayanan (veena) filled every moment.

Graceful Apoorva Jayaraman. PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI



'Smrithi Patham' featured extracts from the choreographies of the Dhananjayans over the years

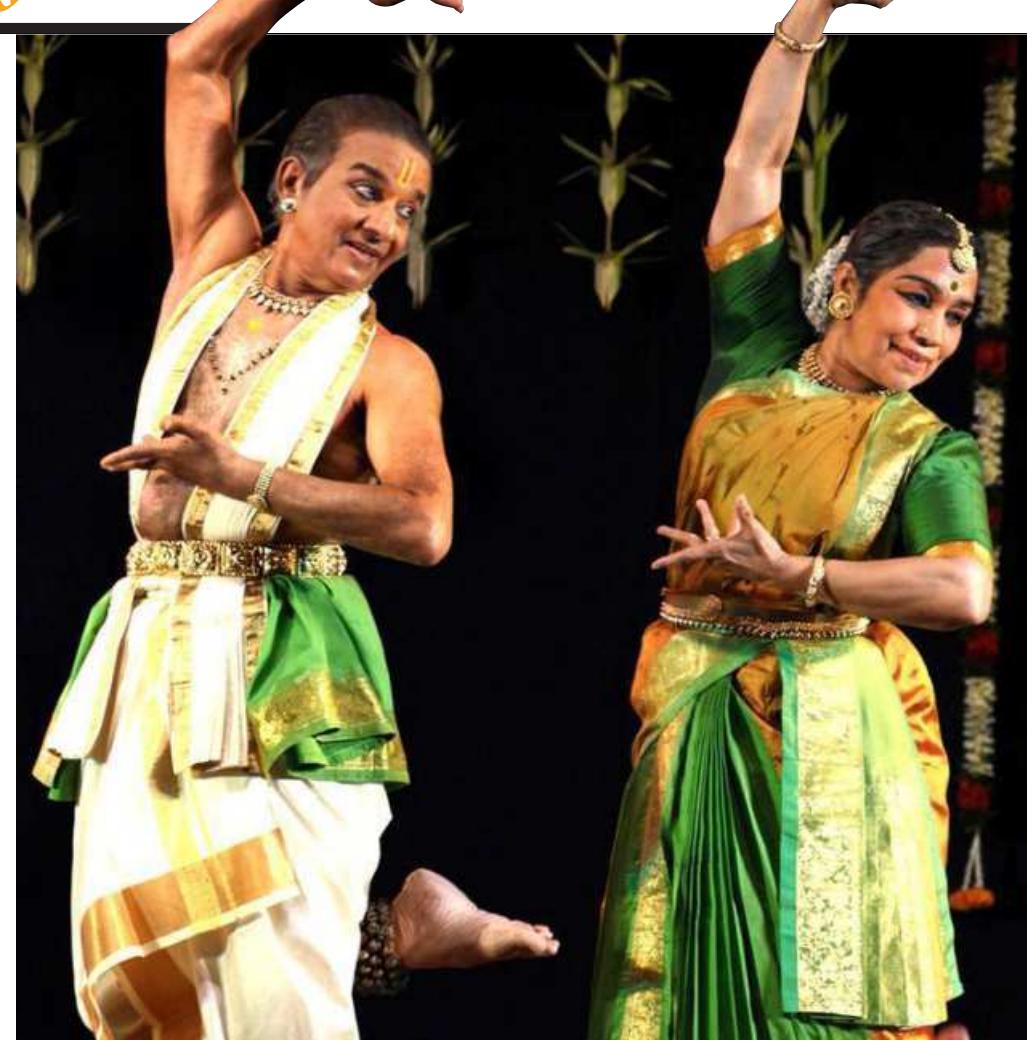
V.V. Ramani

When artistes with a career graph spanning decades decide to go on a trip down memory lane to share excerpts from their pioneering works, the outcome is interesting, as it showcases art that has evolved over a period of time. 'Smrithi Patham', a presentation by Bharatakalanjali, the dance school of the Dhananjayans, at Krishna Gana Sabha was a compilation of sequences from a few select productions choreographed by the dance couple.

The choreographic patterns provided an insight into the changes that have taken place in group choreography over the past few decades. There were no additional inputs such as sets and props, lighting design, or a soundscape. The choreography used only the basic adavus and body movements in varied permutations to communicate the feel and flavour of each song.

Six excerpts from their repertoire were chosen. An offering of prayer came in the form of an invocatory number, Natarajaanjali, taken from the prelude to 'Nandanar Charitham', choreographed by them in 1982.

An anecdote about the creation of a piece called 'Nritha Swaraval'i, a rhythmic dance for musical notes, was informative. Mridangist T.V. Gopalakrishnan had composed a simple musical note to the beat of a running train during one of their



Distinct repertoire The Dhananjayans have created several works in their long natya journey PHOTO: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Revisiting the masters

The performance showcased how choreography has changed over the years and highpoints from the Dhananjayans' oeuvre

The need go beyond the text

Manasvini Ramachandran chose pieces high on abhinaya

V.V. Ramani

A thevaram written by Thirugnana Sambandar addressed to lord Shiva of Dharmapuram was chosen as the opening composition by Manasvini Ramachandran for her performance at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The lyrics highlight the blissful state of Shiva

travels. Dhananjayan embellished it with unique mnemonics suited for dance. Originally danced by Shanta and Dhananjayan, highlighting the tandava and lasya aspects, during this show, it was presented with finesse by two young dancers Anand Sachidanand and Srinivas. Perfect



and Parvati in Mount Kailasa. The depiction was interesting. The dancer conveyed well the persona of a woman with the gait of an elephant and the grace of a swan. The attributes of the elements adorning Shiva's form were depicted in quick succession with clarity.

The Kambhoji raga varnam 'Pankajakshi pa ni kiu', composed by Mahavaidyanatha Iyer, spoke nayika's

sakhi addressing Murugan, seeking a reason for his indifference to Valli. Manasvini portrayed Valli's emotional state through apt sancharis. While Manasvini handled the theermaanams with competence, she needs to move beyond descriptive, literal depictions to a more poetic form of exploration.

The emotion that dominated the abhinaya segment was a combination of bhakti and sringara bhava. The

beautiful form of Krishna, who is adorned with oddiyam and anklets that jingle when he moves, that lord who resides in Tirumala, I bow to him, says Annamacharya in his Yamunakalyani composition 'Bhavayami Gopalabalaalam'. Manasvini's abhinaya came alive in her delineation – she began with the description of the bond between Yashoda and Krishna, before moving on to depict Krishna and Venkatachalam.

The final composition, a part of Shodasa Upachaara in ritualistic practice, 'Shuddha Nrittam' (revived by Mangudi Dorairaja Iyer), is a rhythmic exposition where the dancer responds with resonating footwork patterns to only the sounds of percussion instruments – the mridangam and ghatam. The dancer's response in this composition fell short of its potential.

Venkateswaran Kuppuswamy was on the vocals, Varun Rajeshkaran on the nattuvangam and ghatam, Manohar Balachandar on the mridangam and K.P. Nandini on the violin.

Voices of youth

A concert series highlighted how five artistes showed the promise of evolving into fine musicians

just after re-tuning the tanpura amid a similar engagement by Madan Mohan on the violin and Nikshith Puttur on the mridangam. The vocalist straightaway entered the middle notes of the raga. If the melody is inherently exuberant, Dhanush's voice is suitably chirpy. Making a quick round of the upper portions of Kamboji, he let the alapana settle by resuming the opening thread at a slower pace. The frills gave way to long-drawn notes. There were a couple of slips, but Dhanush's penchant for throwing the voice worked well.

Madan's solo response was neat. So was the subsequent tanam, where Dhanush displayed his allegiance to the Semmangudi style – he is a disciple of Amirtha Murali.



'Ambhojanaba mamava' in two-kalai Adi-talam led to swaraprastara, which featured three other ragas. Along the overarching solfa sequence, the vocalist employed Malayamarutam, Bahudari and Nattai in a reverse order. Nikshith's tani avartanam wound up the package of 50 minutes. The pre-main piece was 'Tillai Chidambaram' (Purvikalayani) by Gopalakrishna Bharathi. Vignesh, too, sang Kamboji, but it

was in the first half – 'Lambodaram avalambe' by Mysore Vasudevarachar. He next opted for Kiravani, the alapana of which faced some hiccups. Initially, the voice resisted plumbing the lower octave even as the vocalist soon aired phrases that gave clues to the kriti: 'Kaligiyunte' (Tyagaraja). The upward movements faced constraints too. Violinist M. Shrikant sounded more seasoned. The vocalist's kriti rendition was tidy, though issues persisted during his

travel from one swara to the other. S. Kavichelvan (mridangam) rolled out a good tani avartanam.

If Vignesh's 110-minute concert bore an evident influence of his mentor T.M. Krishna, the next day's Kiravani package sparked with microtones that lit up her alapana as well as the Tyagaraja kriti. Yet slips robbed some of their charm. More stage experience can help. On the violin was Skanda Subramaniam, while Sannath, again, played the mridangam.

GenNext (clockwise from extreme left) K.Ranga; Ranjani Radha; Parvathi Subramaniam; Vignesh Krishnamurthy and Dhanush Anantharaman PHOTOS: KEDARAM

Papanasam Sivan's 'Nambi kettavar' in racy Hindolam worked as a good filler ahead of the pivotal Karaharapriya.

The alapana started off pretty speedily. Soon it became less hurried. Ranga's voice is somewhat husky and his sketch of the raga concluded with strains that sounded uncannily close to kavadichindhu. Composer Sivan made a re-entry with 'Janakipate' in Adi. Bargava Vignesh was on the violin and Sannath Parameswaran on the mridangam.

Learning under Vignesh Ishwar, Ranjani's 'Koluvamare gada' (Thodi), after a frills-filled alapana, featured a flawless niraval and swaraprastara. Parur M.K. Ananthalakshmi (violin) and Kaushik Sridhar (mridangam) supported eminently.

If Ranjani's voice is the most mature of the five, Parvathi (the youngest) can appeal better with a sharpened voice. The 15-year-old's Kiravani package sparked with microtones that lit up her alapana as well as the Tyagaraja kriti. Yet slips robbed some of their charm. More stage experience can help. On the violin was Skanda Subramaniam, while Sannath, again, played the mridangam.

Sreevalsan Thiyyadi

When sweetness gives way to robustness during the formative years, a vocalist develops an open-throated singing style. After all, music ideally gains fineness with age. Also, when youngsters put in dedicated effort, an expansive ragam tanam pallavi is no improbable task. These are two major takeaways of a recent Youth Concert Series by Kedaram.

Featuring five vocalists, the festival provided a sample of the abilities of an emerging generation. The event held at Raga Sudha Hall also highlighted certain areas that needed improvement. The vocalists were Dhanush Anantharaman, Vignesh Krishnamurthy, K. Ranga, Ranjani Radha and Parvathi Subramaniam.

Sincere attempt
If centrepieces best demonstrate the merits of one's Carnatic artistry, all five musicians and their accompanists bore the promise of evolving into fine practitioners. This review focusses on the main suites. Dhanush came up with an RTP, while the other four chose kritis as the piece de resistance. Among them, Vignesh and Parvathi happened to go for the same raga as well as composition.

Half-way through his 125-minute concert Dhanush took up Kamboji,

CULTURE BRIEFS

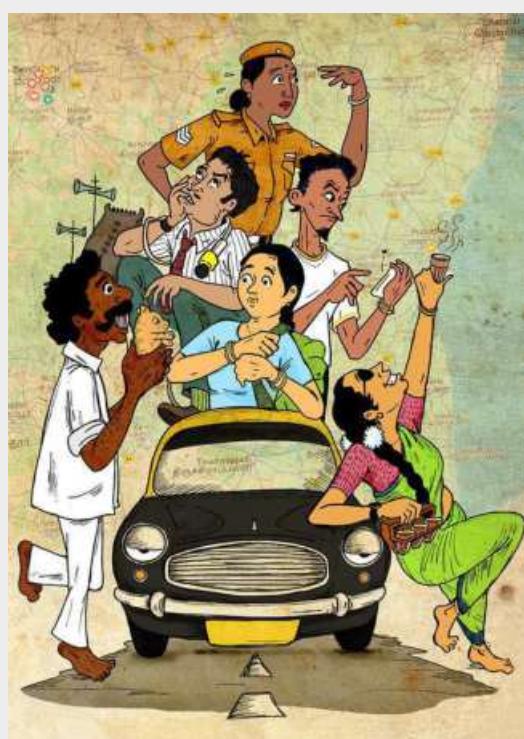


From 'Paayam Oli'

Love trilogy

February being the month of love, Dummies Drama and Threeentertains Productions present three rom-com plays as a part of 'Author's Trilogy'. The plays written and directed by V. Sreevathson of Dummies Drama and staged through the years, will be presented in a sequence this weekend at Mylapore Fine Arts Club, Oliver Road. The trilogy will revolve around relationships. While *Veenaiadi nee enaku* and *Mevum viral naan unaku* by Dummies Drama deal with what love means for the new generation, *Paayam Oli* by Threeentertains talks about the significance of companionship in one's middle age. All the three shows are non-ticketed.

Schedule:
February 24: *Veenaiadi nee enaku*; 7 p.m.
February 25: *Mevum viral naan unaku*; 5 p.m. and *Paayam Oli*; 7 p.m.



Road trip chronicles

A Tamil play *Tiruchiyyai Meeta Sundarapandiyam* (Sundarapandiyam, the man who reclaimed Tiruchi) will be staged on February 25 (7 p.m.) at Medai in Alwarpet. A comedy, the play is about how on a day when section 144 has been imposed across Tamil Nadu, four youngsters are compelled to share a taxi, which is heading to Tiruchi. What unfolds is a journey filled with misadventures.

Vocal concert

As part of the HCL Concert Series, vocalist K. Giridharan will perform on February 28 (6 p.m.) at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall, The Music Academy. He will be accompanied by Mukunthan Samraj on the violin and Ajeet Sridhar on the mridangam.

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Manjari Sinha

Kathak Kendra holds a significant position in the world of dance. This Delhi-based national academy of Kathak, a constituent unit of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, has been imparting training in Kathak and promoting the dance form.

Its annual Kathak Mahotsav, once a sought-after event that featured eminent artistes and informative seminars, was revived this year after almost a decade.

The 36th edition was held under the guidance of veteran dancer Uma Dogra, chairperson of the advisory committee, and Pranaami Bhagawati, director, Kathak Kendra, with the patronage of the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

The well-conceived festival was dedicated to famed gurus Pt. Birju Maharaj, Munna Shukla, Kundan Lal Gangani, Pt. Durga Lal, Tirath Ram Azad and Jitendra Maharaj of the Lucknow, Jaipur, and Benaras gharanas. Through talks, exhibitions and solo and group choreographies, the festival also focussed on how the dance form has evolved over the years.

Prime disciples of legendary gurus shared their experiences. Saswati Sen spoke on Pt. Birju Maharaj, Sushmita Ghosh on Munna Shukla, Prerana Shrimali on Kundan Lal Gangani, Mangala Bhatt on Pt. Durga Lal, Nalini-Kamalini on Jitendra Maharaj and Ravi Sharma on Tirath Ram Azad.

Kumkum Dhar from

Held after a hiatus, the annual Kathak Mahotsav needs to reflect contemporary changes and challenges

Lucknow presented a well-researched paper on 'Anga-Saundarya', the beauty of movements (especially in the Lucknow gharana) on the first day. Prerana Shrimali, Urmila Nagar and Geetanjali Lal discussed the compositions of the Jaipur gharana on the second day while 'Kathak mein navinikaran' (innovation in Kathak) had a PowerPoint presentation by Madhu Natraj from Bengaluru. Maulik Shah and Ishira Parikh from Ahmedabad showed video clips of their innovative works on the final day.

While photographs that took visitors through the history of the dance form were on display at Vivekananda Sabhagar (Kathak Kendra), the costumes, ghungroos and instruments of

Kathak Mahotsav's return augurs well for the dance form, but it needs to change its focus and presentation

legendary performers were showcased at the Kamani Auditorium.

The mornings were reserved for thought-provoking discussions and the evenings were meant for performances. Sangeeta Chatterjee, who opened her recital with an ode to Ganesha, felt it was a great opportunity to be part of a festival with a hoary past and to share the stage with established dancers. She presented the challenging 'Pancham Sawari' taal of 15 beats time cycle with dexterity. She chose the famous Bhairavi thumri by Wajid Ali Shah, 'Babul mora naihar chhuto ri jaye', which he composed while being exiled from Lucknow, for her abhinaya segment, and treated it in two contrasting imageries of the worldly and the spiritual.

Monisa Nayak opened her solo performance with a dhruvapad invoking Ganesha, composed by Pt. Vinay

Chandra Maudgalya in raag Bhimpalasi and followed it with the 14-beat cycle of Dhamar taal for nritta with elan. One only wished that instead of Bhairavi, she had taken another raga for Lehra, the musical refrain, because she was not the last dancer. Abhimanyu Lal opened with the invocatory dhruvapad 'Mahadeva Shankar' set to Chautaal and then shifted to the medium tempo of Teentaal with his usual assertiveness.

Maulik Shah and Ishira Parikh offered a pleasant surprise by dancing simultaneously on two different taals.

While Ishira danced to Jhaptal (10 beats) played on the tabla, Maulik danced to the Rudra taal of 11 matras played on the pakhawaj. This lent a

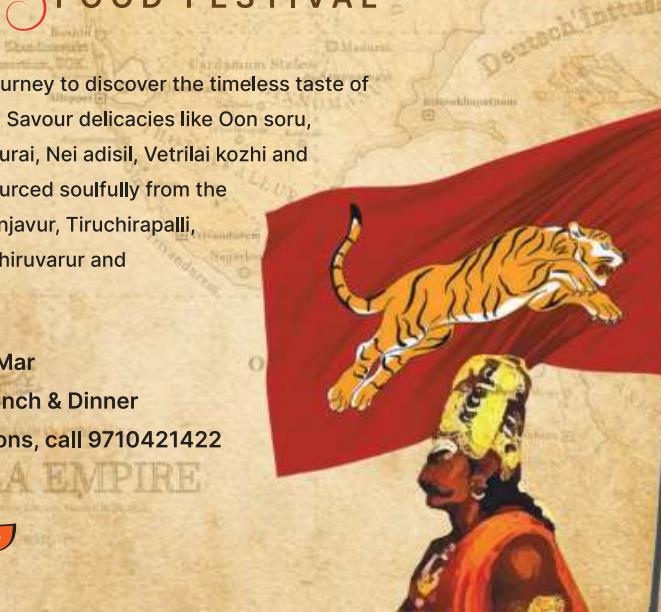


Diverse styles Students of Abhinava Dance Company and Sangeeta Chatterjee at the Kathak Mahotsav. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT


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The dil connect

On Talat Mahmood's birth centenary, a recently-released biography explains his flair for melancholic songs

Anuj Kumar

At a time when melancholy has become an undervalued emotion, let us replay the gems of Talat Mahmood (1924-1998) whose birth centenary is being celebrated across the world.

The tremolo in Talat's timbre in 'Jaaye toh jaya kahan' (*Taxi Driver*, 1954) echoes the feeling of a broken heart. Its greatest examples are 'Jaalte hain jiske lie' (*Sujata*, 1959) and 'Tasveer banata hoon, tasveer nahin banti' (*Baradari*, 1955).

To mark the centenary, his grand-niece Sahar Zaman has penned a heartfelt biography, which combines journalistic rigour with the flair of an expert raconteuse telling the story of her Bambai Nana, as she fondly calls him. The book clears several misconceptions and brings to light some lesser-known facts about the singer. He gave up Bimal Roy's *Madhumati* so that his friend Mukesh could tide over a lean phase and galvanised playback singers to get royalty from music companies.

Inspired by K.L. Saigal, Talat, the dashing but quiet young man from Lucknow chose to express himself through songs. Perhaps, that's why he gave up acting after working with some top female actors in a dozen films.

As ghazal singer Talat Aziz



says in the book, it's hard to define his voice. "He had a soft, rounded voice, yet he had a tremolo. When he sang a note, you could hear it on that one note. It's very difficult. You can't do it unless it comes naturally," explains Aziz.

Talat Mahmood found initial fame under the name of Tapan Kumar singing Bengali songs in Calcutta before shifting base to Bombay. His family faced the pangs of Partition as his brother Kamal Mahmood shifted to Karachi. Sahar notes that when Talat went to see off his brother, he heard voices that said, 'That's Talat Mahmood, is he going to migrate? Hold him

back. Don't let him go.' He responded to the emotion by singing, 'Jai Hind, Allah-U-Akbar' and 'Bharat mata ke do pehlwani.'

Years later, during a visit to Pakistan, Talat Mahmood discovered that Mehdi Hasan was his ardent fan. Noor Jahan wanted him to shift base to Pakistan but Talat was not for it. He, however, agreed to perform there. Apart from Mubarak Begum, he is the only singer to have sung in Pakistani films.

Discovered by Pankaj Mullick and nurtured by Anil Biswas, Talat was the favourite of composers who wanted to convey deep emotions through

their tunes. When Ghulam Mohammad was composing for Sohrab Modi's *Mirza Ghalib* (1954), Talat was the obvious choice to bring alive the bard's iconic ghazal 'Dil-e-nadaan tuyhe hua kya hai'. Sahar writes, Madan Mohan was ready to give up *Jahan Ara* if Talat was not allowed to sing the three songs that he felt only he could justice to. The film flopped but 'Phir wohi sham' remains timeless.

From Raj Kapoor and Dev

Anand to Bharat Bhushan and Sunil Dutt, Talat sang for almost all the top actors, but his voice suited Dilip Kumar the most. It highlighted the melancholy inherent in the characters that the thespian played in the first half of his career. Dilip Kumar once admitted that 'Aye mere dil kahin aur chai' (*Daag*, 1952) bared his soul. A year before, Seene main sulagte hain armaan' (*Tarana*, 1951) captured the tempest experienced by two separated lovers, and then 'Sham-e-gham ki kasam' (*Footpath*, 1953) continued to echo the despair of a man deeply in love.

It was not that Talat always voiced sadness. In *Chhaya* (1961), he rendered Salil Chowdhury's sprightly composition 'Itna tu mujhe se pyaar badha' and did complete justice to another of Salil's compositions, 'Raat ne kya kya khwab dikhayé' (*Ek gaoon ki kahani*, 1957), a gloomy number set to a fast pace. But such opportunities were few and far between.

Talat, who could sing in 16 languages, introduced violin and guitar in his non-film ghazals, which he sang to full

houses across the globe. Popular American talk show host Joe Franklin introduced Talat as the 'Frank Sinatra of India'.

Talat's deep understanding of Urdu, and poetry remain unmatched to this day. Open to experiments, Talat indulged in Hum Radeef (two ghazals sung as one) ghazals with Mukesh and C.S. Atma.

P. Susheela who sang a duet with Talat in *Manorama* (1959) recalls his pitch-perfect voice and correct pronunciation of Telugu lyrics.

Sahar, who is keeping his memory alive through Jashn-e-Talat, a multi-performance platform, says the legendary singer considered himself a child of an era when gentle and sentimental songs ruled. But changing tastes made him give up singing. And he had no regrets about it.

Discourses

Narada Gana Sabha Trust has organised a discourse 'Nirvana Shatkam' by Ramanacharana Tirtha (Nochur Swami) on February 26, 6.30 p.m. at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall. 'Sri Raghuveera Gadyam', upanyasam by Kidambi Narayanan, on from February 20, is taking place under the auspices of Asthika Samajam, at Venus Colony, Alwarpet, till February 29. Time: 6.45 p.m. to 8.15 p.m.



Musical evenings

Hamsadhwani will feature the following concerts.

As part of its Young Talent special, it will present a performance by Archana and Samanvi today at 6.15 p.m. Concerts to be held on other days are: February 24, 6.15 p.m.: Palghat Ramprasad. February 25, 6.15 p.m.: Jayant Kumarash (veena). Venue: Youth Hostel, Adyar.

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