

friday Review

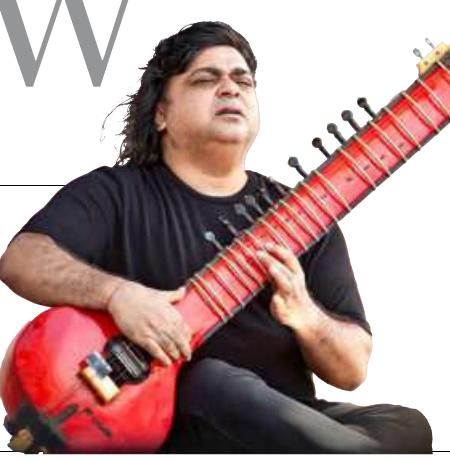
THE HINDU

Natyacharyas' life in art

V.P. and Shanta Dhananjayan look back at their creative journey p2

Hues of Holi

The festival of colours is incomplete without song and dance p3

**SITAR MAKES A SPLASH AT LOLLAPALOOZA**

Niladri Kumar creates space for classical notes at the festival of rock acts and rappers p4



The theatre of reality

As META completes two decades, looking at how it has emerged as an independent voice for playwrights

Anuj Kumar

A father beseeching the system to return his son, a mixologist hiding his Dalit identity to serve a casteist society, and a village struggling to find ways to survive the eccentric diktats of its ruler – these are some of the works to be staged at the ongoing META-2025 (Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards). And, speaking to feisty theatre practitioners at the ongoing META-2025 offers reassurance that great theatre is about challenging how we think and aspire to be or, as Stella Adler said, ‘The play is not in the words, it’s in you’.

At a time when thespians are struggling to hold on to their independent voice, 10 plays in seven languages, shortlisted out of 367 entries

across 25 States and 47 languages and dialects, underline the diverse and inclusive approach of the festival that completes two decades of commitment to quality theatre this year.

Based on the P. Rajan case, Kannan Palakkad’s *Kando ningal ente kuttive kando* (Have you seen my son) depicts a father’s struggle to find his missing son. “A student activist, Rajan, died in police custody during the Emergency but the State denied his existence as his body was never found,” explains Kannan. The Malayalam play is an eye-opener for those who feel that the Emergency impacted only the Northern parts of the country, as Kannan captures the shadow of the dark days in South India. “Rajan’s teacher-father T.V. Eachara Warrier was also an activist and a classmate of the



then Chief Minister. He kept knocking at the doors of the political leadership and the judiciary. But justice was denied to him,” Kannan adds.

Told through “real and surreal moments”, where a police officer seeks forgiveness from the father, Kannan says: “We have imbued the play with several what-if situations.” He avers the play has a

contemporary ring to it as

State apparatuses all over the world continue to save their skin at the cost of the common man.

Usually, we talk of caste in a rural context, but K.P. Lakshman brings out the social divide in an urban milieu in *Bob Marley From Kodihalli*, a dark comedy in Kannada, where a mixologist working in



Bengaluru changes his name after the reggae icon to escape derision. “The play is about how people are forced to conceal their identity in a casteist society and talks about how caste and food culture work in an urban set-up.”

Lakshman says this devised play is inspired by B.R. Ambedkar’s autobiographical work *Waiting For A Visa* and

Rohit Vemula’s letters, and draws from Ambedkarite poet N.K. Hanumantha’s verse. “Set in a contemporary setup, it is the story of three Dalit characters from a village who work in Bengaluru. Apart from Bob, who works in a bar, there is a woman who teaches English and a stand-up comedian. These are people who have risen above their immediate surroundings and social strata, but are still made conscious of their caste and food culture,” he adds.

Akshay Singh Thakur’s *Swang: Jas Ki Tas* shows life in a Bundelkhand village that is struggling to come to terms

says Thakur, adding that the form is now being revived.

Music, dance and sound art take evocative shapes in Sapan Saran’s *Be-Loved*, an exploration of queer love, and Abhi Tambe’s *Portal Waiting*, a depiction of humanity’s pursuit for freedom told through a conversation between a cyborg and the last man on earth.

Reflecting on theatre finding its voice in smaller centres, playwright Ashish Pathak, whose Agarbatti bagged four META Awards, says the economics of towns lends itself to a deeper understanding of the craft. “In big cities, the cost of hiring spaces for practice is punishing. In centres such as Jabalpur, people sometimes lend space even out of love. Most budding actors prefer playing parts that reflect their condition in their language over jumping behind a star in an OTT series,” elaborates Ashish.

Unlike in the past, when the playwright and the theatre group didn’t collaborate at the time of creation, these days, the playwright lives with the repertory. “He takes into account the demands and desires of the actor and the visual structure that the director could create on stage. Playwrights increasingly rely on poetry to shorten the dialogues,” says Ashish, adding “The meaning of a musical is no longer limited to songs. The sound of a sewing machine or tap water can also make a play a musical.”

Noted theatre scholar Bishnupriya Dutt says theatre is indispensable, for it is a live, people-to-people, and body-to-body performance. “It has an efficacy that no other art form has. META has not shied away from presenting plays that take a socio-political position. It works in a way that allows autonomy of theatre practice,” concludes Bishnupriya.

META-2025 is on till March 19 at New Delhi’s Kamani Auditorium and Shri Ram Centre.

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Just as he ambled on stage at *The Hindu*’s art deco office building, Alexander Babu, performer and comedian extraordinaire, said he came prepared with a line that would elicit initial giggles. It was part of his formula, one guaranteed to please the audience.

“That moment when a Christian at *The Hindu* office chats with Krishna about *Sebastian & Sons* and other things,” he said. On cue, the audience let out a laugh.

The Hindu Fridays, ironically held on a Tuesday this time, saw a packed house that actively engaged with the two showmen, who enthralled the gathering with a conversation encompassing a host of topics, including their respective musical journeys, handling criticism and a conscious effort to strive for equity in unequal spaces. The two performers, also eloquent speakers, dabbled in banter, often pulling each other’s leg, while also switching to philosophy.

Alex, who began by speaking of his journey in the stand-up scene, said that he had a fairly comfortable life in the corporate world. “I decided I had done my part, worked long enough. This was to be a two-year sabbatical. It has been 10 years. I was motivated by joy,” he said.

On the other hand, T.M. Krishna



Striking a chord
Alexander Babu and T.M. Krishna during the session
PHOTO: R. RAGU



Scan this QR code to watch the full video

Learning to rock the boat

Read on to know what happened when an ace Carnatic vocalist and a popular stand-up comedian met for a conversation at a session of *The Hindu* Fridays

said that he was always into music. Purpose led him in the direction of economics. It was his way of trying to decipher the world. However, he was equally musically inclined. “I had a clearly laid out plan. I had

finished my college at Vivekananda. I was to go to the Delhi School of Economics and eventually to the London School of Economics. But right then, I had to choose, so I looked to my father.

He suggested I try my hand at singing for a while and then study if it did not work out,” he said. Krishna went on to add that the internal churning led to finding something sanguine on stage. He

loved the applause and attention that he received, but found himself seeking purpose. “I was the darling. Then, things changed because the meaning of joy changed.” His journey of understanding his privilege and politics has been a central part of Krishna’s growth.

Alex recounted the first time he watched Krishna on stage. It was a small hall in Salt Lake City with a sparse audience. Krishna intervened to say that it was in 2005. “He performed as though he was singing to a stadium,” Alex remarked, asking Krishna if his voice ever felt a strain. “I don’t think anyone in my family knows the meaning of speaking softly. When you are taught by a guru who has excellent voice culture, it automatically gets easier. One must know how to produce the voice,” he said.

Alex, who has learnt Carnatic music too, was asked to sing by Krishna. He obliged and the two jumped into a conversation about the sabha culture in the city. “I was told that kuchcheris are the best way to learn to sing so I began paying attention, but I often found them boring,” Alex said.

According to Krishna, the idea of a stage has changed over the years. He usually prefers quiet time before getting on stage. Tuning the tambura is one of the ways he prefers to shut the world out. “I experimented once by tuning the tambura on stage with

the audience. They knew that they had to remain silent too through the process. I found that they were more drawn in during the performance,” he said.

Two bits of Krishna’s observations were particularly fascinating. One, he said that he felt like his voice opened up once he got fitter. He aims to climb and summit at least one mountain a year. This requires year-long training so he tries to get in four days a week. “I try to sing for a few minutes when I summit a mountain. I was curious to see which was the longest performance under the circumstances. It was Mt. Aconcagua in Argentina and it was about 15 minutes long. I too had summited that mountain in 2019 and sang for as long. I just didn’t record it. It could have been mine,” he said.

He added that learning to be deeply vulnerable was central to his being. Alex agreed and said that he often addressed the audience as his ‘chellams’ because he called his children the same way and added that learning to circumvent different forms of criticism has been an eye-opening journey.

Alex often said that Krishna knew how to ‘rock the boat’ in several spheres. Playing on the pun, the two musicians sat down to sing ‘Nila adhu vanathu mele’, Ilaiyaraaja’s nod to fisherfolk in the iconic Mani Ratnam film *Nayakan* (1987). A fitting, spirited end to a loquacious evening.

Natyacharyas

V.P. and Shanta

Dhananjayan traced their dance journey at a recent lec-dem



Their creative arc

Srividya

Under the auspices of Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha, natyacharyas V.P. and Shanta Dhananjayan conducted a thought-provoking session on the need to understand the nuances of the art form to be able to breathe life into tradition.

Delving directly into the technicalities involved in the

construction of alarippu, Dhananjayan spoke about the need for a dancer to understand that the human body is broadly classified as *anga*, *upanga* and *pratyanga*. When the *anga* coordinates with the *pratyanga* and *upanga*, the dancer gets *anga shuddhi* or perfection. One should also be cognisant of the ten *mandalas* used in the construction of this seemingly simple element of dance, the basic one being *ardha mandala*.

To get this posture right, one should comprehend the karanas involved. The *Natyashastra* speaks about the 108 karanas or postures, sculpted in the Chidambaram temple, Dhananjayan said. Based on today's practice, Dhananjayan has installed 60 new karanas in DakshinaChitra, the heritage village in Muttukadu.

The veteran dancer gave a comprehensive explanation of Natyanjali, Nritta Swaravali and Nrityopaharam, and

In life and art The Dhananjayans during an earlier performance
PHOTO: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

students of Bharata Kalanjali, founded by the Dhananjayans in 1968, demonstrated these. Natyanjali is a judicious incorporation of all the main aspects of alarippu, jatiswaram and sabdam; new mnemonics and patterns were added to jatiswaram to make it nrittaswaravali; and nrityopaharam is a variation of varnam, where abhinaya was introduced for swaras, and where the story would be

introduced before the sahyam.

Bharata Kalanjali's creative director Shobana demonstrated the same.

Dhananjayan said these innovations initially met with severe criticism, but their continuing popularity is testimony of their acceptance.

Thematically, Dhananjayan and Shanta brought in new thoughts in their various productions, the first one being Mary Magdalene for Doordarshan, which won an award for best production. "For the dance drama *Karuna*, we wanted to show the seasons depicting the passing of time... new karanas for animal movements from the *Natyashastra* and Sanskrit treatise *Abhinaya Darpana* were used and the music was taken from Ravel's most famous composition *Bolero*," Shanta Dhananjayan said.

Another novelty was producing Rama Natkam in ekaharya lasya – using a single

attire, simple costume and lighting, where the dancers portray different characters without their characteristic costumes. When this production was staged in Russia, a newspaper observed that it is a choreographic marvel. "It showed how a production can be successful without the usual paraphernalia used in dance dramas," shares the revered dancer and guru.

In the final segment of the lec-dem, Dhananjayan spoke about the recreation of *Jungle Book*. The United Kingdom commissioned Shanta and Dhananjayan to produce something novel in 1984. "We were asked to involve Indian solo dancers in London for the production. So, the dance choreography was done for Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Manipuri and Odissi. Pt. Ravi Shankar's prime disciple Pt. Vijay Ragava Rao helped compose the music. There was only music, no lyrics. Though a difficult task, we pulled it off, and it did about 300 shows in and around London," he recalls.

Two diverse cultures came together when the Dhananjayans collaborated with the Russian Ballet Company to produce *Jungle Book* with a Russian choreographer. Seeing that Indian movements were mainly grounded, the Russian choreographer used movements that were up in the air, lending an entirely new dimension to the show.

Every time they create something new or revisit a traditional composition, the Dhananjayans show how to constantly be inspired by one's artistic roots and yet find joy in being imaginative and innovative.

Voice and words

Sriranjani Santhanagopalan's 'Mavericks' offered an ode to women composers



All-women ensemble Sriranjani Santhanagopalan with Deepika Venkatraman (violin) and Charu Hariharan (mridangam and Pandero Cuadrado). Jyothsna Akhilan (Below). PHOTOS: AKHILA EASWARAN

P. Srihari

Feminine power surged on International Women's Day as Sriranjani Santhanagopalan's 'Mavericks' presented an all-women Carnatic concert under the aegis of Tapasya Chamber Concerts.

Reinforcing the theme, all five songs featured were penned by women composers.

Set against the backdrop of sprawling racks housing over 50,000 books in the library hall of the Madras Literary Society building, established in 1812, this was a fund-raising programme. The show transported the audience through the aeons with compositions ranging from those by Andal and Avvaiyar to Sriranjani's.

With Deepika Venkatraman (violin), Charu Hariharan (mridangam and Pandero Cuadrado), and Jyothsna Akhilan (Bharatanatyam) as her co-'Mavericks', Sriranjani opened her recital with Avvaiyar's Vinayakar Agaval verse 'Paalum theilithenum' as a virutham in Bahudari. It is worth noting that multiple poets by this name appear in Tamil literature, and this one is believed to have lived in the medieval period.

Sriranjani's own creation, a vibrant varnam 'Vallabha nayaka' in Purnachandrika, was rendered next. She recalled an interesting anecdote – overhearing someone's request to her father and guru, Neyveli Santhanagopalan, to compose a varnam on Ganesha in the raga – which spurred her into action.

After a succinct alapana of Varali, Sriranjani sang 'Azhimazhai kanna' from the Tiruppavai. Jyothsna joined at this juncture to add visual delight with her dance, bringing to life Andal's compassionate plea

to Varuna, the rain god, to shower universal prosperity. It was a confluence of Sriranjani's evocative miraval and Jyothsna's graceful movements and expressions.

Bangalore Nagarathnammal's poignant javali 'Mathada baradene' was another high point. The Khamas piece conveys the plight of a nayika who is suffering separation from her Lord. Jyothsna enacted four metaphors to depict the situation – a fish thrown out of water, a derailed creeper seeking its tree, a flower desperate to bloom craving sunlight, and sruti which had fallen out of sync with laya.

In a brief detour, mridangam gave way to Pandero Cuadrado, a percussion instrument which has its roots in Portugal and Spain. Charu, in the company of Deepika, ably

demonstrated how to play the square-shaped frame drum. Also known as adufe, it is struck using a stick on one side and the hand on the other. The Meera bhajan 'Pag ghunghru baandh' wrapped up the recital on a devotional note.

The event flyer bore the tagline 'Go forth and conquer'. The ensemble certainly did that.



For the joy of dancing

Nandhini Jeeva and Rangasri Raghunathan exhibited their nritta and abhinaya prowess

Manasa Vijaylakshme C

There is always a joy in dancing as a duo, and this was evident in the Bharatanatyam recital of Nandhini Jeeva and Rangasri Raghunathan. Disciples of Mythili Sridharan, they performed for Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha.

The recital began with Pushpanjali, followed by Purandaradasar's 'Saranam siddi vinayaka' in Nattai raga and Misra Chapu tala.

The second piece, 'Maathe', a Daru varnam, was a tribute to Parvati. The dancers portrayed her beauty and talent through a nice blend of movement and abhinaya. The performance



S. R. RAGHUNATHAN

built up to the pivotal moment of Parvati's encounter with Shiva, with Nandhini portraying Parvati and Rangasri, Shiva. Upon seeing Shiva, Parvati sheds her third breast, symbolising her

transformation from warrior to consort. Nandhini and Rangasri's synchronisation was impressive. This piece was set in Khamas, Adi tala, and was a composition by Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavat.

The padam 'Nambikettavar evaraya' was performed by Nandhini, capturing the essence of devotion and surrender to Shiva. The dancer moved with fluidity, her transitions seamless, as she depicted the journey of human life. Each stage – birth, growth, struggles, and the final quest for peace and liberation – was portrayed with clarity, allowing the audience to connect with the deeper meaning of the song. This Papanasam Sivan composition was set in raga Hindolam, Adi tala.

The recital concluded with a Mohanakalyani thillana, celebrating Muruga's divine energy.

The orchestra included Samyuktha V on vocals, Govindarajan S on the mridangam, Madurai T. Kishore on the violin, and Mythili Sridharan on the nattuvangam.

Shailaja Khanna

The sarangi is North India's premier accompanying instrument for vocalists, as it most closely resembles the human voice. Its antiquity dates back centuries – in its current shape and size, the instrument is approximately 250 to 300 years old. The original gut strings were replaced by metal wires in the last 100 years. Hugely versatile, the sarangi is irreplaceable for vocal and Kathak performances.

Surprisingly, despite its importance, there are very few exclusive gharanas for sarangi players – the two that come to mind are the virtually defunct Jhajjar gharana, near Panipat, and the Jaipur-based family of Ustad Moinuddin Khan. Rajasthan's Sikar, from where Ustad Sultan Khan hails, also had a few generations of sarangi players. Ustad Mamman Khan, regarded as the greatest sarangi player of the last century, apparently learnt from Ustad Chajju Khan of Morababad. However, as an instrument,

the sarangi was always important, with enterprising musicians from every musical family playing it professionally. Prominent examples are Pt. Ram Narayan (a Padma Vibhushan awardee, he learnt the techniques of the sarangi from his father who played the dilruba), Ustad Shamin Khan, father of the iconic vocalist Ustad Amir Khan, Pt. Gopal Mishra of the Benaras gharana (uncle of Pt. Rajan-Sajan Mishra), Ustad Shakoor Khan of the Kirana gharana, Ustad Sabri Khan and Pt. Dhruv Ghosh (son of tabla maestro Pt. Nikhil Ghosh).

In the second edition of its Legacy Series, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art chose to focus on the Moradabadi sarangi players – the family of Ustad Murad Ali Khan. Wisely, it did not confine the event to only performance – the event was moderated by tabla exponent Aneesh Pradhan, whose bond with Murad and knowledge about his lineage resulted in a meaningful interaction. Murad, representing the sixth generation in his family to play the instrument, recalled his grandfather talking of his grandfather's memories of music. "Every sarangi player

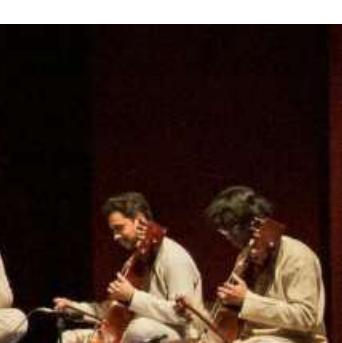
had to learn compositions from every gharana. These rare compositions remain in the family and are a vital source of musical history."

Like in other sarangi-playing families, in the Moradabadi gharana, one also finds sitar players (Fateh Ali Khan) tabla players (Amaan Ali Khan) vocalists (Mohammad Ayaan Warsi). Only relying on the sarangi for one's sustenance was not a practical option.

Despite being the best-suited to accompany vocalists, the sarangi is today not the main accompanying instrument, having been

overtaken by the harmonium. Younger vocalists who are yet to develop stage confidence sometimes avoid accompaniment by sarangi maestros as their vast repertoire and mastery of intricate taans can be intimidating.

Somehow, the sarangi is linked with khayal and thumri gayaki, and less with dhrupad. Vocalists of the Darbhanga gharana of dhrupad, including Pt. Siyaram Tiwari, used to have the sarangi accompany them. Perhaps, the lack of good sarangi players who were taught dhrupad has resulted in



Keepers of a tradition Musicians at the Legacy Series that also featured an interaction between tabla artiste Aneesh Pradhan (centre) and Murad Ali COURTESY: KNMA

sarangi not being used today in dhrupad concerts.

Also, the sarangi has traditionally not been acknowledged as a solo instrument. The tabla too was in a similar position, but in the last 75 years, great maestros established its status as a solo instrument. Pt. Ram Narayan, arguably regarded as the face of the sarangi in our times, had

declared "my mission was to obliterate the blemish that the sarangi carried due to its social origins. I hope I have succeeded in this."

Murad played some wonderful bandishes from his treasure trove of compositions. In raag Parajar, a Jaipur Atrauli bandish 'Pawan chalat' was a delight to hear on six sarangis. They also played beautiful compositions in the raags of the season – Bahar, the evergreen Khamach, a tarana in Hameer, and 'Daata mope karim keejeeye' in Sahana. The brief snatches of music gave a glimpse of the huge variety of rare compositions the family has carefully nurtured.

Interestingly, amongst the six disciples on stage, two were women – one was Manonmani from Chennai, who had learnt from Ustad Sabri Khan, Murad's father. Her mother Saroja had learnt the dilruba, as had her grandfather. The event was beautifully presented by KNMA. In the lobby, sarangis of different vintage were on display. Snippets of rare recordings of bygone sarangi maestros were played.

Strings tell a story

Murad Ali, who belongs to the sixth generation of hereditary sarangi artistes, on how his family has kept the instrument alive





PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

How music deepens the colours of Holi

Traditional songs associated with the festival enhance the celebratory spirit

Shailaja Khanna

Holi is the festival of abandon, of barriers broken, of celebration without restraint. Probably why, of all the Indian festivals, Holi is inextricably linked with song and dance.

Horis or Holis, a distinct genre, grew in popularity about 250 to 300 years ago from the earlier Dhrupad tradition, called Dhammars, which were sung in a

14-beat cycle. In fact, the dhammar taal is more known than the vocal genre.

Dhammars were traditionally sung around the time of Holi. With the growing popularity of khayal, dhammars morphed into songs sung in a lighter style, during the season. Going by the lyrics, some songs were called 'chaitis', as they were sung in the month of Chaitra, and some were called 'horis' as the lyrics pertained only to Holi.

A recent *baithak*, devoted to songs of Holi, organised by well-known musicians

Shubhendra Rao and Saskia de Haas, showcased Horis, in the folk tradition of Rajasthan, and from Benaras. Horis are associated with Uttar Pradesh with the maximum number of songs emerging from the region. The tradition of celebrating Holi through dance and martial arts also exists in Punjab, in the tradition called Holla Mohalla, celebrated in Anandpur Sahib, over a period of three days.

In Himachal Pradesh, the Kangra region is replete with beautiful songs

relating to colour play, and separation from loved ones. Anita Pandey, a music lover from Kangra, shared a popular song from the collection of scholar-musician Janmejay Guleria, 'Phagun maheene, holi je aayi, mein kis khan khelungi holi'.

"The Holi songs of the region are slower in tempo, with simpler note structures and an innate grace."

Benaras is, of course, the main repository of horis, and a source of inspiration for many Holi film songs. Who can forget the film version of Shobha Gurukar's immortal 'Rang sari gulabi'?

Sunanda Sharma, originally from Kangra, but today the face of the Benaras gharana, known for her thumris, sang a rare khayal 'Karo na mose mann maani' in raag Puriya Kalyan. The lyrics spoke of the sentiment of abandonment associated with the festival. Another iconic composition was 'Rang na daaro shamji' in raag Sohni, made popular by Pt. Kumar Gandharva. Such compositions are rare since most performers prefer to sing songs of Holi in the thumri style, with lighter embellishments, where the focus is on the emotional content rather than rigid adherence to the raag and structure of the composition.

As Sunanda shared, horis are of different types; flirty and suggestive, where the play is just by the eyes, not actual playing of Holi. Some are plaintive and pleading, some complaining... Sunanda sang a beautiful song 'Rasiya tore kaaran briji mein bhayi badnaam' (raag Des).

There are horis of despair at being parted from the loved one; the latter is sung in raags that trigger pathos. Sunanda's 'viraha' hori was in raag Sohni, 'Holi mein khelungi uns, kaho ko sham sundar so'.

Though Krishna is the usual subject of horis, some are sung for Shiva too – one popular rendition by Pt. Channul Mishra talks about Holi being played in the cremation ground by Shiva and his followers, covered in ashes: 'Khelen masanne mein holi digambar'.

The Manganiyars of Rajasthan sang two beautiful songs of Holi, showing how the same theme of sharing love through colours can be depicted differently across folk traditions. The Benaras horis are sung by women while the Rajasthani ones by men and children.

The *baithak* reiterated how art deepens the hues of Holi.

The sound of tradition

'Nadotsavam 2025', to be held from March 21 to 23, will feature two concerts every day



(Left) Adyar Brothers and (below) Mylai Karthikeyan with Koleri G. Vinod Kumar will perform at The Music Academy's festival.
PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

The Music Academy is back with the second edition of its nagaswaram festival titled 'Nadotsavam 2025'. Conceived last year, it offers a prestigious platform to nagaswaram artistes. Such festivals augur well for the instrument, which, for long, remained restricted to temple rituals and auspicious social gatherings. Such events also encourage young members of traditional nagaswaram families to pursue the art.

Mylai Karthikeyan, who will be performing at the festival, has collaborated with several Carnatic and Bharatanatyam artistes. He says, "Working with artistes from different genres offers a new experience. It helps us learn the nuances of adjusting the playing technique and the sound output, without compromising on the traditional format."

According to J. Venkatesh of Adyar Brothers, "such festivals make us feel like we are an integral part of the classical music fraternity. With most nagaswaram artistes hailing from and some still living in remote towns, these events help us stay connected with artistes and organisers."

'Nadotsavam 2025' will be held from March 21 to 23 at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. There will be two concerts every day (5.15 p.m. and 7 p.m.), each spanning 90 minutes. Some well-known nagaswaram artistes, who were not featured in the first edition, will be performing this year.

Schedule: March 21: Adyar Brothers followed by Nemmara Brothers.

March 22: Chinnamanur A. Vijay Karthikeyan and Idumbavamam V. Prakash Ilayaraja followed by Thirupampuram Brothers.

March 23: Mylai Karthikeyan with Koleri G. Vinod Kumar followed by Adyar D. Balasubramani and Koleri G. Vinod Kumar.

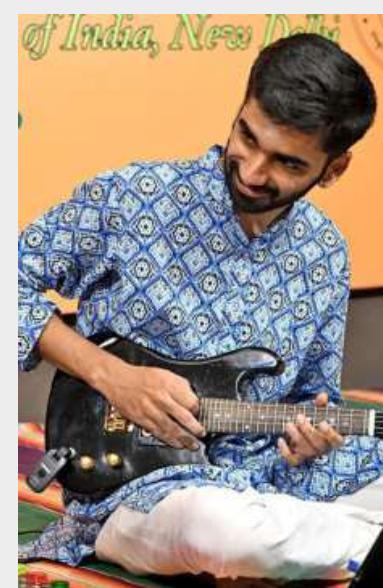


Tuneful outing

Making an impact with instrumental music

B.S. Purushotham on the kanjira, the flautist showcased his artistry with a well-curated song list. The Sahana varnam 'Karunimpa' by Tiruvotriyur Tyagaraya provided a lively start before he presented two contrasting Dikshitar kritis. His kalpanaswaras for 'Siddhi vinayakam' (Chamaran-Rupakam) flowed effortlessly, while 'Akhilandeswari' in Dwijavanti

unfolded at an unhurried pace. The flautist's Saveri alapana, replete with loopy phrases, tonal modulations, and gamakas, particularly in the middle and lower octaves, was refreshing. The Syama Sastri kriti 'Sankari samkuru' (Adi, tisra nadai) was played with flair, and Chandan Kumar's manodharma soared in the swaras at 'Syamakrishna



sodhari' in the charanam.

This was followed by two compositions by Tyagaraja. 'Anupama gunambudhi' (Atana-Khanda Chapu) set the pace before the main piece, 'Raksha pettare' in Bhairavi. Chandan Kumar once again excelled in the raga essay by adopting a leisurely tempo, allowing the grandeur of the raga to flow organically. Ravi's reply

Melodic evening Mysore A. Chandan Kumar with V.V. Ravi (violin), Neyveli Narayanan (mridangam), and B.S. Purushotham (kanjira); and Vishwas Hari PHOTOS: B.JOTHI RAMALINGAM /

retained the melodic appeal. After a neat presentation of the Utsava Sampradaaya kirtana, which seeks to ward off evil to the Lord, Chandan Kumar took up swaraprastara at the pallavi opening, blending exuberance with aesthetics.

After Swati Tirunal's Behag javali 'Saaramaina', the recital concluded with the ever-popular Oothukadu Venkata Kavi song 'Alaipaayudhe' in Kanada. Ravi and Narayanan demonstrated the value of experience throughout with sensitive support. Narayanan's tani avartanam with Purushotham featured absorbing exchanges.

Earlier in the evening, Vishwas delivered a commendable mandolin recital, accompanied by Puttur T. Nikshith (mridangam) and Sai Bharath (kanjira). Opening with 'Ganayanakam bhajeham', a Dikshitar kriti in Purnashadjam, he capped it with a brief swara

segment. It may be noted that another school of thought assigns the raga of this composition as Rudrapriya.

Vishwas displayed an assured grasp of Nagaswaram in his alapana before taking up 'Garuda gamana' by Patnam Subramanya Iyer. The swarakalpana for the pentatonic janya of the 28th melakarta was executed with finesse. Tyagaraja's 'Kamalapta kula' in Brindavani followed, leading to Pallavi Seshayyar's 'Entani vinavintura' in the rare raga Urmila (Adi - tisra nadai), an audava-audava scale that omits 'dha' from Simhendra Madhyamam.

Vishwas sculpted Kalyani, coaxing out its essence in a meticulous exploration. It was marked by elegant phrases, some of which alternated between octaves. Tyagaraja's charming 'Vasudevayani' was the main song and Vishwas played it with the right quotient of gamakas. A lively swara passage culminated in a tani avartanam where Nikshith and Sai Bharath impressed with interesting laya forays. The concert concluded with Narayana Tirtha's 'Govardhana giridhara' in Darbari Kanada.

CALENDAR

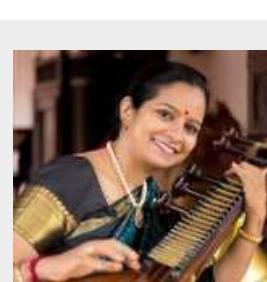
Dancers' Talkies

Aalaap presents Dancers' Talkies, a talk series featuring 10 dancers, 10 talks of 10 minutes each, on March 15 at Gobbelin Cafe, Adyar. The talks will explore a host of ideas such as insights on curation, navigating motherhood, the importance of strength training for dancers, finding a dance home in Chennai and the gravitas of carrying forward a legacy. For details visit aalaap.concepts@gmail.com

Bharatanatyam solo

Natyarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha Trust, features the following Bharatanatyam performances on March 15: Swarada Bhave, disciple of Vaibhav Arekar, at 6 p.m. followed by P.S. Nagashree, a student of Kalakshetra, at 7.30 p.m. Venue: Swami Haridoss Giri Hall.

Music concerts



Hamsadhwani will feature the following concerts at Youth Hostel, Adyar. Schedule: March 15, 6.15 p.m.: Abilash Giriprasad. March 16, 6.15 p.m.: Jayanthi Kumares (veena).

Harikatha

Madhuradhwani has organised Suchitra Balasubramanian's harikatha on Tallapaka Annamacharya on March 16, 6.15 p.m. She will be accompanied by S. Srikrishnan on the violin, N. Chandrasekar on the harmonium and A.V. Manikantan on the mridangam.

Salutations to guru

On the occasion of Gaura Purnima, ISKCON Chennai conducts a series of special programmes at its Akkarai premises, from 4 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. The evening will feature kirtan (4 p.m.), abhishekam (5.45 p.m.), a discourse on Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (6.30 p.m.) and maha arathi (7 p.m.).

The events will be streamed live on iskconchennai.org/live. For more details, visit: iskconchennai.org/live



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Usha Raj (Guest Singer)

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Rocking the sitar

Narendra Kusnur

The Sunday afternoon heat was oppressive, but the many music lovers who had walked a couple of kilometres to attend the Lollapalooza India 2025 at Mumbai's Mahalaxmi Race Course, wearing caps of different shapes and colours, did not seem to mind. Most of them were in their 20s or 30s, waiting to hear American rock band Green Day, Norwegian singer Aurora and Kerala rapper Hanumankind, who stormed the global charts last year with 'Big Dawgs'. Their primary tastes were different, but they listened patiently, and clapped regularly, when sitar exponent Niladri Kumar did a 40-minute fusion set. BookMyShow's

Amidst rocks acts and rappers, Niladri Kumar's sitar strings held their own at Lollapalooza India 2025

Lollapalooza India 2025 was held on March 8 and 9. This was the festival's third edition in Mumbai, and encompassed various genres such as rock, pop and electronic dance music to desi rap and Indian

indie. Niladri's appearance came a year after sitar player Anoushka Shankar performed at the festival.

Though he did take out his traditional sitar for a few minutes, Niladri mostly played the zitar

(electric sitar), his creation. Accompanied by tabla player Satyajit Talwalkar, drummer Gino Banks and keyboardist Agnelo Fernandes, he displayed a lot of energy and spontaneity, and occasionally, his humour. After playing a 10-minute introductory piece, he said, "That was only our sound-check. The real concert begins now."

It wasn't a traditional classical concert by any means. A large chunk of it consisted of improvisation spells peppered with familiar phrases –from 'Raghupati Raghav' and 'Do Lafzon Ki' to 'Smoke On The Water' and 'Fur Elise'. The 51-year-old musician knew the pulse of the audience, and his focus was to keep them entertained with his zitar, even if seasoned ears found his efforts

Niladri's performance took place on Ustad Zakir Hussain's birthday. The sitarist has travelled

The sitarist has travelled extensively with the late tabla legend, doing numerous classical and fusion shows. "So much has already been said (about Zakir's passing), and without being repetitive, the only thing I'll say is that the thrill of pure, true improvisation has been lost," said Niladri.

Niladri was trained in the sitar by his father Pt Kartick Kumar, a disciple of the legendary Pt Ravi Shankar. While he continues to play the instrument in its traditional form, he also felt the need to develop a variant that could offer a newer style. That's how the zitar came into being. "I

not like I woke up one day and the zitar came into my hands. The process took a few years, beginning with when I started experimenting with microphones way back in 1998. However, the initial attempts did not give me what I wanted in terms of sound.”

In 2001, Niladri started

In 2001, Niladri started experimenting with magnetic pick-ups. He explained, "This is basically an electric pick-up. Two decades ago, it wasn't easy to buy sound equipment here. You either travelled abroad to buy, or asked someone to get it for you. So, it took time to get what I wanted. The first time I placed an electric pick-up was on my father's sitar. He had been advised some rest, and I took his sitar without prior permission. I remember removing the sympathetic strings and sticking the Velcro and progressing as I went along."

On a visit to Delhi, he visited the musical instrument shop Rikhi Ram. He said, "They were advertising something called the baby sitar or travelling sitar. It aroused my interest. So, I bought that sitar, and converted it by changing the configuration of

“... strings. It was more practical. I could now travel with two sitars - my own traditional sitar and the smaller one which I named the zitar.”

The new creation, however, looked similar in colour and shape to the traditional sitar. That’s when Niladri decided to give it a new colour. Painting Indian instruments was not really popular, because they probably thought it would tamper with the sound. But, I tapped into the science I studied in school and college to make sure the sound wasn’t affected. I probably would never own a Ferrari, but I thought I could colour the instrument like that – hence, red.”

instrument like that – hence, red.

Niladri said he wasn't sure whether the zitar had succeeded in attracting a new audience to classical music. "But I do know it has succeeded in making many musicians take it up, in some other form or shape or colour or name."

Niladri hoped Lollapalooza would give him the impetus to come up with a new repertoire. A surprise might just be in store.



The poster features a dramatic scene on a boat. Five men are visible; one man in the center is holding a long wooden pole or oar vertically, looking upwards. The other four men are positioned around him, some looking towards the horizon. The background is a dark, turbulent sea with greenish-blue lighting, suggesting a storm or night. The title 'KINGSTON' is written in large, stylized, jagged letters at the bottom left. Below it, the subtitle 'AND THE CURSED SEA' is visible. The overall mood is suspenseful and action-oriented.