

friday Review

THE HINDU

Celebrating danceKalakshetra's Kala Mela festival presented the traditional repertoire **p2****Samudaya turns 50**The Kannada theatre group has been using the medium as a tool for change **p3****BRIDGING EAST AND WEST**A tribute to Situ Singh Buehler, who pioneered Western classical music in India **p4**

Deepa Venkatraman

The violin, though originally a Western instrument, has long been an integral part of the Carnatic music landscape. Over time, others such as the saxophone, mandolin, guitar and the piano followed. The latest addition is the keyboard, which is gradually finding its place in the classical sphere.

In the mid-1980s, harmonium exponents Palladam Venkataramana Rao and P.R. Venkatasubramanian were among the first to recreate Carnatic nuances on the keyboard. They learned to use the inbuilt synths and settings such as portamento (essential for Carnatic *gamakas*, allowing continuity, sliding and gliding of the swaras) and the pitch-bender (a lever enabling smooth note transitions) from keyboard artistes who played for film music.

Rhythmic fusion
Apart from performing solo keyboard concerts, Venkatasubramanian, also known as 'Keyboard Subbu', introduced the instrument in Bharatanatyam recitals. He first used the Roland Promars synthesiser for a dance performance in Salem in 1985.

He says, "Initially, the keyboard as an accompaniment in Bharatanatyam performances was met with apprehension. However,



The KEY makeover

How the keyboard, a Western instrument, is finding its place in Carnatic music

dance gurus soon recognised its versatility and made it part of their presentations."

Venkataramana's violinist-daughter Brinda Raghunath, who has done her research on her father's contributions to the harmonium, says, "After successfully implementing the gayaki style manually on the harmonium, he adapted it to the electronic keyboard." Recalls flautist Prapancham Balachandran, son-in-law of Venkataramana Rao, "He recreated the veena's tonal richness on the Yamaha synthesiser DX100 and played the swaras seamlessly by adjusting the technical settings."



An evolving journey
Vocalist and flautist Palakkad Sreeram began experimenting with ragas and talas on a Casio MT-31 synthesiser at the age of 13. He later explored the more advanced Casio CZ-101, eventually mastering its adaptation through MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), a system that digitally connects instruments to share musical data. After completing his post-graduation in music from Calicut University, he moved to Chennai to pursue a career in Carnatic music. However, he faced resistance for championing a Western instrument.

Recalling his lec-dem and concert at The Fine Arts Society, Chembur, in Bombay in 1998, arranged by his guru T.R.

Subramanian, Sreeram says, "During the interactive segment, I asked the audience to sing any raga or song and played them with gamakas on my synthesiser. Veteran artistes T.K. Govinda Rao and T.R. Balamani, who were in the audience, and quiet a few rasikas were amazed."

Sreeram, who performs three-in-one concerts – flute, synthesiser and vocal – is a known name in the world of film music too. He has also been part of several fusion ensembles.

According to Sreeram, "Carnatic maestros including U. Shrinivas, Chitravina N Ravikiran, A. Kanyakumari, T.V. Gopalakrishnan and M. Balamuralikrishna have mentored and supported young Carnatic keyboardists. This helped change perceptions about this instrument."

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(Clockwise from below)
Palakkad Sreeram;
Venkatasubramanian;
and Venkataramana Rao



Apart from training several youngsters, senior keyboardist M.S. Martin organises large Carnatic keyboard ensemble concerts.



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Scan to Chat





Arjun and Narayanan

Keyboard Brothers' Arjun Sambasivan and Narayanan were introduced to Korg by Keyboard Sathy. "We soon learnt its technicalities," say the brothers, who, at the age of seven, were initiated into Carnatic keyboard classes of Korattur Sahasranamam. "Despite initial challenges, opportunities for keyboard artistes have improved over the years. We both are grateful to have been mentored by Mandolin Shrinivas, who, impressed by our Shanmukhapriya rendition agreed to guide us. Though we wished to learn the mandolin, he advised us to continue with the keyboard," says Arjun.

Narayanan developed a tone close to the mandolin. "Sir was pleased with our first basic tone and asked us to use it in concerts," he adds. The brothers honed the gamaka-playing technique under Chitravina N. Ravikiran. Arjun recalls how once during a lec-dem, "When our guru was asked if he would perform on an electronic chitravina, he told the audience that there are artistes, including his disciples, who play Carnatic music on an electronic keyboard." Musician and educator Anil Srinivasan helped them understand the Western nuances on the keyboard.

PHOTOS: SHIVA RAJ VEDHAN



Vigneswar VG

Vigneswar feels blessed to have trained for 20 years under the legendary T.V. Gopalakrishnan. "He would sing the sahityam and swaras, which I would reproduce," he recalls. On his guru's advice, Vigneswar upgraded to a Roland GW8 keyboard and trained in the gayaki style. To promote the instrument, his guru had him accompany him as the sole

melodic support for 25 concerts. Speaking about his first international performance in Malaysia in 2017 – where he played at his guru's vocal performance, Vigneswar says, "The audience was amazed by the instrument's broad musical range." Apart from solo concerts, he has performed for Ghatam Karthick's Heartbeat Ensemble, Sikkil Gurucharan's Janal Oram, and Subashree Thanikachalam's QFR.

K. Sathyarayanan

Sathy started performing in the year 2001 on a Yamaha PSR 640, which had only a pitch bender. A live keyboard concert aired on Doordarshan in 2003, when he was just eight along with two album releases and a series of concerts marked the rise of the child prodigy popularly known as 'Keyboard Sathy'. He had the fortune of being mentored by legends such as A. Kanyakumari, Mandolin Shrinivas, and M. Balamuralikrishna. Despite being vocalist Embar Sadagopan's grandson and violinist Embar Kannan's nephew, Sathy's journey wasn't easy. However, his



S. Harikrishnan

Harikrishnan, son of well-known ghatam artiste T.H. Subash Chandran, took to the keyboard on his father's advice. He presented his first solo concert at age 13 and also became part of his father's ensemble 'Shankara'. He also accompanied exponents Chitravina N Ravikiran and T.V. Gopalakrishnan in concerts. After his initial training under musician-composer Ramesh Vinayagam to play western notes on the keyboard, he began to play Carnatic music on the Korg Triton keyboard by himself.

Inspired by Venkataramana Rao, Harikrishnan released his first album *Prakruthi*, based on Carnatic kritis, featuring his father. Three years ago, he launched the ensemble Swarhythm to turn the spotlight on the keyboard. "The idea was to highlight the instrument's Carnatic dimension and give it an international recognition. Besides my father, I drew inspiration from my uncle Vikku Vinayakram, who put the ghatam on the global stage," says Harikrishnan, who is currently training under senior violinist and vocalist Delhi Sunderrajan.



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Srivaralaxmi Maya

"When the keyboard was little known, I had to give demonstrations to sabha organisers to showcase it during the Margazhi music season," says Srivaralaxmi. She belongs to the musical lineage of vidwan Kothavasal Venkatrama Iyer and Kumbakonam Brothers – S. Shankaran and S. Vishwanathan. She received her initial training from her grandfather and her mother, vocalist V. Nandini.

"They made me practise daily for long hours, as intricate gamakas are challenging to play on a Western instrument, especially in ragas such as Varali, Sankarabharanam, Kiravani and Arabhi. Over time, I perfected these on my Korg TR-61."



LOCATION COURTESY: ASHUTAS

A.S. Ram

In 2009, A.S. Ram, Kadri Gopalnath's disciple, composer and sound engineer, who has given Carnatic concerts on the keyboard at various venues, began to explore the enhanced features of the handheld keytar, a keyboard blended with keys and guitar features. Says Ram, one of the first musicians to perform Carnatic music on the keytar, "I felt the keytar that replaces the keyboard's pitch bender with a fretboard (guitar's part where fingers press strings to play notes) brought out the nuances of the raga bhava. With my technical background, I developed a tone, a combination of veena and mandolin – Mandolina." He has played Carnatic compositions on the keytar in his fusion band, The Pulse. Film music directors Manikanth Kadri and Joshua Sridhar have used Ram's keytar tracks in their compositions.

innate talent – along with the efforts of his parents, T. Krishnababu and Lalitha, and the backing of his gurus – helped him overcome challenges.

An Indian musician based in the U.S. saw his performance online and wanted to gift him a Korg Trinity Pro keyboard with advanced features. "Considering the high cost of the instrument, it came as a blessing," says Sathy, who as a 10-year-old explored the keyboard's capabilities, including monophony (playing one note at a time for melodic clarity) and legato (smooth transitions between notes).

Sathy upgraded this keyboard to a Korg TR and enhanced the musical scope by incorporating portamento as suggested by Palladam Venkatramana Rao. "I started using jazz guitar tone to play my concerts and developed my signature tone titled 'Shrinivas' in memory of my guru U. Shrinivas".

Sathy received A-grade certification from All India Radio in 2015 and the Kalaimamani award (2018). He says, "Technology is ever-evolving and I am constantly in pursuit to make Carnatic music on the keyboard more refined."

Choreographic tribute

Guru Samarpanam featured pieces by various masters

Srividya

Kala Mela, organised by Kalakshetra Foundation, began with Guru Samarpanam – a tribute to gurus – through the Bharatanatyam margam. It featured timeless compositions of the acharyas and was held at the Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium.

The evening commenced with Nandi Choll, a vibrant nritta piece, an invocation to Nandi, followed by a Dikshitar kriti in raga Vasantha set to Tisra gati Adi tala. It was choreographed by Adyar K. Lakshman.

Next in the margam sequence was a jatiswaram, performed skilfully with perfect coordination by the dancers. A composition of the Tanjore Quartet in raga Chakravakam and Rupaka tala, it was a tribute to the gurus of the Pandanallur bani.

"Swami, naan undan adimai endru ulagamellai ariyume", a well-known Nattakurinji varnam composed by Papanasam Sivan and choreographed by Krishnaveni Lakshman was the next gem presented. Through alternate sequences of nritta and abhinaya, the dancers conveyed the glory of Shiva weaving together episodes such as Manmatha dahanam, protecting Markandeya from the clutches of death and the majestic tandava that embodies creation and destruction.

Next in line was a soul-stirring Kshetrayya padam in Ananda Bhairavi raga and Misracapu tala. An abhinaya-oriented piece, choreographed by Bragha Bessell, it brought out the emotions of the proshithabhartraru nayika (whose beloved has gone away).

The mood shifted from despair to delight when a scene from the dance



Saluting mentors Synchronisation was the highpoint of the performance.

PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

drama 'Meenakshi Vijayam', choreographed by Rukmini Devi Arundale in 1977, was presented. The iconic composition 'Velli ambalithi natanam seidhar' depicted Shiva's sandhya tandavam (raga Bomboji, Chaturasra Ata tala and Adi tala, music by Bhagavatulu Sitarama Shastri). It was performed by a group of male dancers.

What followed was a beautiful depiction of sringara rasa through a Jayadeva ashtapadi in Ragamalika. Choreographed by Krishnaveni Lakshman, it showcased the uniqueness of the Radha-Krishna bond.

The evening concluded with a tillana in raga Brindavana Saranga (Adi tala). Music composition was by Madurai N. Krishnan and choreography by Adyar K. Lakshman.

The music ensemble included K.P. Rakesh on the nattuvangam, Sai Shankar and Vinayak on vocals, Karthik Balaji (mridangam), M.B. Srinivas (violin), Sashidhar (flute) and Parameswari (tambura).



Classic A scene from *Bhama Kalapam*. PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Unfolding the layers

Veena Murthy Vijay and her disciples presented the diverse facets of the Kuchipudi repertoire

Manasa Vijaylakshme C

The second evening of Kala Mela, was a vibrant showcase of Kuchipudi repertoire by Veena Murthy Vijay and her disciples from Shri Rajarajeswari Kalaniketan, Bengaluru.

The evening commenced with Purvaranga Vidhi, a preliminary rite that sanctifies the stage.

This was followed by Ramayana Shabdham, a narrative tracing the arc of Rama's life from birth to coronation. Set in Ragamalika and Adi tala, the story unfolded episodically – Rama's valour at Mithila, his exile, Sita's abduction, Hanuman's leap to Lanka, the great war and finally the Pattabishekam at Ayodhya. While the choreography carried the stamp of tradition, the ensemble ensured clarity in storytelling without letting the narrative slip into monotony.

The highlight of the evening was Sandhya Tandava, where the

dancer executed the vigorous solo with command over karanas. The choreography envisioned Shiva's celestial twilight dance in Kailasa, where he instructs Brahma to maintain the tala even as he conquers the six inner weaknesses – desire, anger, greed, delusion, arrogance and jealousy. The clarity of charis and rhythmic jatis gave this piece its luminous power, embodying both technical precision and spiritual depth.

The mood softened with Bhama Kalapam, a jewel in the Kuchipudi repertoire. Veena depicted Madhavi, sparring gently with Satyabhama in a playful yet poignant dialogue. The conversations stood out for their natural flow. As the drama unfolded, the allegory deepened. Satyabhama's pride gave way to yearning, while Madhavi's banter underlined the futility of ego. The symbolic exchange of the nose ring, representing surrender of the self, was handled with subtle abhinaya. This episode reminded the audience that *Bhama Kalapam*

is not just about conjugal quarrel, but the soul's longing to unite with the divine.

The repertoire continued with Shiva Tarangam, where disciples displayed agility while balancing on the brass plates. It depicted Ganga's descent and Shiva's subjugation of her pride, the dancers' synchrony in jathis enhanced the appeal.

The finale, Simhanandini (Chitrantryam), offered a spectacle and scholarship in equal measure. Set to the formidable 128-beat Simhanandana tala, the motif of a lion was drawn on stage by Veena, her footwork etching the sacred image in rhythmic precision. Traditionally performed in temples as an offering to goddess Katyayini, this number evoked echoes of the devadasi tradition while simultaneously situating itself in the modern proscenium.

What stood out was the cohesion of the troupe, uniform costuming, measured movements and an evident devotion to the idiom.

CALENDAR

Music contest

The Music Academy conducts the annual music contest at its premises on October 4 and 5. Details about the competition and application form are available on the Academy's website. For more details contact 044-2811 2231 3162. Last date is September 26.

HCL series

The Music Academy will feature the following programmes at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall: September 15, 6 p.m.: Vignesh Krishnamurthy. September 16, 6 p.m.: P. Sundaresan (Bharatanatyam).

Endowment concert

The Music Academy has organised Brinda Manickavasakan's vocal concert, featuring Thanjavur K. Ponniah Pillai's compositions, on September 13, 10 a.m., at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. The accompanists are N. Madan Mohan (violin) and R. Akshay Ram (mridangam). The programme under the endowment instituted by Shri & Smt. S. Krishnaswami and V. Vijayagopal, in memory of Sarita Vijayagopal for a research-based presentation.

Three-day festival

The Divine Life Society, Chennai branch, presents Triveni Vizha – a commemoration of the 139th jayanthi of Swami Sivananda and 35th anniversary of Sivananda Foundation at Ice House, Triplicane, and the 47th year celebrations of Sivananda Satsanga Mandir, at Madhavaram, will be held from September 13 to 15. The three-day event includes namasankirtanam, Tirumurli renditions and harikatha.

Achuthan T.K.

Koodiyattam exponent and teacher Margi Madhu's two new directorial ventures, presented at the annual Nepathy Koodiyattam festival in August, stood out as interesting innovations. They revealed how imaginative touches can enliven a centuries-old art form renowned for its strict adherence to structure and convention.

Nepathy presented an elaborate version of *Mathavilasa Prahasanam* (Dance of a Drunken Sport) – a 7th Century farce, loaded with sarcasm and wit, written by the Kancheepuram-based Pallava king Mahendra Vikrama, and *Atavyankam*, the Fourth Act of Bhasa's *Pratima Natakam*.

Mathavilasam has been performed for centuries, but only at temples as an offering, where only two couplets from the original text are used. A longer attaprakaram or actor's manual was first composed by P.K. Narayanan Nambiar in the 1990s. The current version, directed by Madhu, expands on this by including certain parts that have been left out and introducing Malayalam for the dialogues of some key characters speaking Sanskrit and Prakrit.

The plot revolves around the drunken antics of Sathyasoma, a kapali and an unorthodox Saivite mendicant who seeks god through begging, dancing and drinking. His companion Devasoma, along with the loss and recovery of their kapalam or skull-bowl, drives the

What's new at Nepathy?

The festival featured Margi Madhu's innovative take on two iconic Koodiyattam works

narrative. An inebriated Sathyasoma suspects the Buddhist monk Nagasena of stealing his bowl, but after a heated exchange, he discovers it was taken away by a dog. The recovery of the skull-bowl also involves Babhrukalpan, a Saivite of the moderate Pasupata order, and Unmathakan.

Though the play is over a thousand years old, its values – intolerance, hypocrisy, and the primacy of ritual over the spiritual – remain relevant. David Shulman, an Indologist and Sanskrit scholar, says: "The text is witty and full of vitality. The play is interesting because of the way it embodies the early

crystallisation of the tradition, and also because of its conceptual and philosophical contents and highly dramatic conclusion. Madhu has made the text come alive and showed us the deeper meanings it offers us."

These deeper meanings are what Sanskrit scholar, K.V. Vasudevan, referred to in a paper presented at the festival. He suggested that the arguments, though seemingly superficial, can be interpreted in different ways. For instance, Unmathakan in the play is not a lunatic but a



Koodiyattam and at the same time retain its humour and wit, was not easy," says Madhu.

The story, starting from Shiva's penance, Kamadeva turning to ashes from his fury, and the killing of demon Taraka was presented by Madhu in an impressive solo act, lasting over four hours.

The scene that introduces Kapali and Devasoma, played by Madhu and Indu G, was memorable for its drunken dance and dialogues, interspersed with some serious descriptive acting segments.

The last day of the play

Contemporary appeal (From Far left) Rama (Rahul Chakyar) flanked by Lakshmana (Nepathy Yadukrishnan) and Margi Madhu (Bharata) in *Atavyankam*; and Margi Madhu as Kapali and Indu G as Devasoma in *Mathavilasa Mathavilasa Prahasanam*. PHOTOS: T.K. ACHUTHAN

belonged to Nepathy's three young actors. The arguments and the quick ripostes between kapali (played by Nepathy Yadukrishnan) and the Buddhist monk (played by Nepathy Rahul Chakyar in Malayalam) were spirited and enjoyable. Though at times the banter did slip into slapstick, it was Unmathakan (played by Nepathy Sreehari Chakyar) who stole the show in a brief but powerful performance.

Emotional Bharata

The festival was back to the familiar territory of the *Ramayana* for the second play, presented over three days. The gist of Act 4 of Bhasa's *Pratimanatakam*, which has not been performed in at least 300 years, was Bharata's emotional encounter with Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in the forest. What stood out here was 'Paduka Pattachabisheka'.

Madhu says an old *kramadeepika* (performance manual) prescribes an actual temple priest to conduct the ritual. To ensure that the ceremony merges seamlessly into the drama, Madhu invited amateur Kathakali artist and a professional priest, Hari Nelliyoode, to be the priest in the play.

It created the right stage effect and the ritual, combined with the theatrical, made for an unforgettable scene.



The protest act

Kannada theatre group Samudaya, which turns 50, uses the medium as a tool for change

Shilpa Anandraj

Samudaya, a Kannada theatre group founded in 1975, recently celebrated its golden jubilee at Ravindra Kalakshetra in Bengaluru with a three-day festival, featuring popular theatre songs and plays.

Inspired by Brecht's philosophy that art is not just for art's sake, Samudaya was set up during the Emergency to raise voice against social ills and corruption. It is a protest form of theatre, which was popularised by Badal Sarkar. It has had among its members stalwarts such as Agrahara Krishnamurthy, Prasanna Heggodu, K.N. Nagaraj, M.C. Venkatesh and Shashidhar Bharigat. C.K. Gundanna, secretary of the cultural forum and winner of the Karnataka Rajyotsava Award, shares Samudaya's journey and its ideologies.

"Though in the 1970s this medium was seen as a means of entertainment, our aim was to use theatre as a tool for change with plays such as *Sattavara Neralu*, *Jokumaraswamy*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Jasma Oden*. When B.V. Karanth directed the play *Che*

Guevara we began to be termed as communists."

To begin with Samudaya focused on street plays. Says Gundanna, "In Bengaluru itself, we have staged 20 street plays, but the number has gone down. We have protested against issues relating to water scarcity, price rise and factory labourers through our street plays. If a play

was to be staged in Kundapur or Gulbarga, members of that unit would act and also direct it."

"Apart from artistes, Samudaya also has academicians and literary personalities as its members. Vijayamma, a journalist, also joined us," shares Gundanna, adding that the name 'Samudaya' (meaning community) was coined by Keeran Nagaraj, an academician.

Among the many iconic plays with a social message, staged by Samudaya, Gundanna speaks about *Huttava Badidare*, written by K.V. Narayana, which deals with the exploitation of people by a king. "We also staged

Brecht's *Mother*, which had music by Karanth, who had composed it differently to highlight the social message in the lyrics."

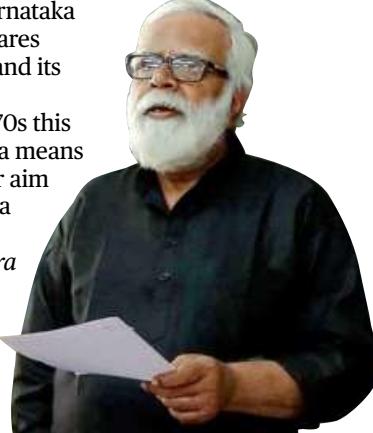
Looking back at Samudaya's five-decade journey, Gundanna feels happy about how the group faced all challenges to reach this milestone. Today, the group has branches across Karnataka including Mangaluru, Mysuru, Tumkur, KGF, Dharwad and Hospet.

"We had 35 units earlier, of which only 10 are active now. We needed someone to co-ordinate among these units. I volunteered," says Gundanna, who joined Samudaya along with his friend C.G. Krishnamurthy (known as CGK), to become an actor, but got busy with secretarial, backstage and organisational roles."

"Samudaya, never banked on government funding, hence, there have been times when we have not staged a play for a year or two due to lack of funds. Yet, when a pressing issue had to be addressed, we have taken loans to stage plays and later cleared them. The aim has been to use theatre to create social, religious and political awareness. But we do not live in the illusion that our plays will revolutionise the society overnight. We look at ourselves as agents instrumental in making people think and be aware of the happenings around them," says Gundanna.

Tackling issues

A scene from Samudaya's *Pampa Bharatha* and (below) Gundanna. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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Remembering a maestro

Legendary Carnatic vocalist Rammad Krishnan's 107th Jayanthi celebration will be held on September 14, at 10 a.m. at Sadguru Gnanananda Hall, Narada Gana Sabha. Scholar Ritha Rajan, a well-known disciple of the maestro, will preside and present the Rammad Krishnan's Award of Excellence to musician Vegavahini (daughter of T. Brinda). This will be followed by Jayashree Aravind's veena recital. She will be accompanied by Praveen Sparsh on the mridangam and Chandrashekara Sharma on the ghatam.

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Aastha Mohapatra

With the rising demand for quality music education in India, if one happened to be interested in Western classical singing but didn't quite know where to start, a quick search on the internet or word of mouth would bring them to Situ Singh Buehler. While not much has been written about her life, one finds a plethora of videos, news articles, recital posts, reviews, and individual blog pages of established Indian artistes who cite her as their teacher. After working with her, many students became international performing arts professionals, and others are among well-known singing coaches in Delhi and across India today.

On meeting her, you would be immediately struck by her elegance and gentle disposition. As you got to know her, you would have realised that she was equally a loving friend, a lifelong mentor, and someone who believed in the good that the universe holds within. She had an enduring vision for independent artistes in India, to bring about tangible changes at the public policy level.

I first heard about Situ when I was merely nine years old. My choir conductor at the time happened to be her student. While I wouldn't meet her until half a decade later, I had already been influenced by her technique and a glimpse of her magnanimous presence. Losing her early this year has left a gaping hole in the hearts of those who have admired and respected her. But her contribution to music education and performing arts in India will resonate for years to come. She is solely responsible for opening avenues for multiple cultural exchanges, providing opportunities for young Indian talents to enter rooms none had before.

Born in 1946, Situ's household was extremely musical, with parents who loved Western classical music and encouraged the arts sector in

Opera in the East

Situ Singh Buehler: The soprano who pioneered Western classical music in India

Independent India as active patrons. Her father, Amarjit Singh, a Cambridge-educated scholar, was the founding member of the Delhi Music Society. Throughout her childhood, Situ's home was filled with melodies, ranging from bhajans to Beethoven. Musical visitors from across the globe would frequent their house in Delhi, and her interest was piqued by simply engaging by listening. Her journey initially began with Hindustani classical at a very young age. During the lessons, she would struggle to pay attention and was often reprimanded by her teacher then, who said she didn't have the gift. Her voice was deemed unsuitable for classical music, and she grew weary of the training.

Wide repertoire

At 23, when she took up voice lessons under Margarita Schaak Koellneretter at Max Mueller Bhavan, Delhi, she discovered her love for Western classical singing. She was talented and took to this style of music without hesitation. Her voice, as her teacher then would say, was fully developed for operatic training. Her repertoire spanned sacred music, German lieder, arias, and English songs. She began performing in recitals in India, often through the Max Mueller Bhavan. It was here she met Joachim Buehler, a German diplomat posted in India. He was a pianist, conductor of the Bombay Chamber Orchestra, and her accompanist during recitals. They

fell in love, got married, with her taking on the role of the diplomat's wife.

Situ was determined, and her journey began as she travelled across the world with her husband, she continued her education in music, performing across Europe, the U.S., Southeast Asia, and Australia. She shared stages with multiple Hindustani stalwarts, singing with Pt. Ravi Shankar, Ustad Sultan Khan, and Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia. She recalled a very young Anoushka Shankar being in awe of her operatic voice during a concert with Pt. Shankar. She performed as a soloist for multiple global orchestras. In her beautiful Panchsheel Park home, her mantelpiece was crowded with photographs. An old brochure on display mentions that she was a soloist for the Paranjyoti Chorus and the Bombay Chamber Orchestra, a pioneering moment in India's Western classical scene.

Back to India

She moved back to India permanently in the 2000s and started her journey as an opera singer and vocal coach in Delhi, carrying years of experience under her belt. Through her endeavour, she



The writer was trained by Situ Singh Buehler

High note Situ Singh Buehler provided opportunities for young Indian talents.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



set the structure for the Neemrana Music Foundation, with the late Francis Wacziarg from the Neemrana Group of Hotels. This brought quality performances of opera to India, including renowned renditions of The Magic Flute, The Fakir of Benares, Romeo and Juliet, and many others, which have been loved and cherished by Delhi audiences. In 2016, she founded the Lyric Ensemble of Delhi, a group consisting of her students, specialising in Broadway, jazz, and opera. The group has organised several housefull shows under her tutelage, and the model of learning-to-perform has helped many artistes gain a foothold on the stage. One of her students, Darwin Prakash, has recently made history as the first Indian to compete in Operalia, an International Opera Festival. Kanchana Jaishankar, a contralto, is preparing to perform with the Glyndebourne Opera Festival. Ankur Dang has received a scholarship to study at the Royal Northern College of Music, United Kingdom, where she also premiered her first opera production as a dedication to Buehler. Several others such as Ashwati Parameshwar, Nilima Buch, Sparsh Bajpai, Meera Arora, and Riddhiman Dutta are carrying the baton for Western classical teaching in India.

Films such as *Taare Zameen Par* speak about how all that a dedicated learner needs is an equally dedicated teacher; one who satiates the student's hunger to learn, who sees success in their victories. As artistes, we cherish this relationship. For us, she will live on in each musical note.

SIFAS comes to Chennai

'The Universal Balance' will mark the 60th anniversary of India-Singapore diplomatic relations

In the backdrop of Singapore's 60th year of independence and the 60th anniversary of Singapore-India diplomatic relations, the Singapore Fine Arts Society (SIFAS) Productions presents 'The Universal Balance'. It will be staged at Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium (Kalakshetra Foundation) on September 13, 6 p.m.

Over the decades, SIFAS has launched several students into the world of arts in Singapore. Says Menaka Gopalan, executive director of the Society, "Performing in Chennai is both a privilege and a responsibility, as it challenges us to uphold the highest calibre of artistry while representing the unique voice of Singapore."

The Universal Balance is an artistic tribute to the eternal dualities that shape our world and will consist of two segments – *Narayanan*, curated by senior Jyothishmathi Sheejith – will

highlight compositions on the various forms of Vishnu through musical renditions. The performance features SIFAS alumni musicians – Sai Vigneshwar (vocals), Kavya Sivakumar (veena), Sreeranjani Muthu Subramanian (violin), Sabapathy Tirupathi Ramana (flute), and Sai Akileshwar (mridangam).

This will be followed by *Thillai - The Golden Abode of Shiva*, which will bring to life the rich philosophical and mystical dimensions of the deity through Bharatanatyam, conceptualised by Geethanadhan P.K. (senior Bharatanatyam tutor at SIFAS and a Kalakshetra alumnus). This narrative will be presented by SIFAS alumni dancers – Gopikka N.L., Kritika Suresh, Nagalakshmi, Tejasree Parthasarathy, and Vismaya Dinesh.

Tickets on <https://tikkl.com/aalaap>



A raga retreat

The significance of musical residencies in redefining the art of listening

Shailaja Khanna

Now in its 10th year, the annual music residency in Lonavla continues to offer a unique blend of good music, food, and stay. Held at the serene Manshanti Ashram, the tightly packed 29-hour festival featured an impressive 15 performances, beginning Friday evening and concluding by Sunday afternoon. From the moment participants step into the sylvan setting, it's the ambience and the art that take over.

The Lonavla Khandala Sangeet Sammelan is organised by Abhijit Music Forum. The artistes are chosen with care – a combination of established and young names. This edition included seasoned vocalists Nishad Bhakre (Gwalior, Agra, Jaipur gharanas), Anjali Joshi of the Mewati gharana, Radhika Joshi of the Jaipur Attrauli gharana, Geetika Umdekar Masurkar from the Gwalior gharana, and Maihar gharana sitarista Ayan Sengupta. Emerging talents included Swarali Panshikar, Manas Vishwaroop and sarodista brothers Arko and

Shaunaq Roy. The last music presentation was by 81-year-old Arun Dravid, senior-most disciple of vidushi Kishori Amonkar. His voice belies his age. He demonstrated rare forms of Bilawal.

How do you approach an event that features a series of concerts by talented artistes? It's not about picking the best performance, it's about the experience as a whole and the memories you take away. But, of course, some moments deserve a mention. For instance, Pt Suresh Bapat left an impact with his mature rendition and his incredibly long breath taans. The influence of the Agra gharana was perceptible but not overwhelming (amongst others, he has learnt from Pt Babanrao Haldankar).

Ayan Sengupta from ITC SRA, Kolkata, has trained in both the Vishnupur and Maihar gharanas, and is currently learning from Pt. Partha Chatterjee and Pt. Ajoy Chakraborty. These myriad influences lend a sparkle to his sitar playing. His unconventional style of barhat cannot fail to engage the audience. Manas Vishwaroop of the Agra

The hills came alive Pt. Suresh Bapat; and (below) Ayan Sengupta.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

gharana has a beautiful baritone backed by impeccable *taalim*. He imbued raag Multani with a meditative serenity. Radhika Joshi's Anandi Malhar, created by Kishori Amonkar, was all about nostalgia. Shashank Maktedar has evolved into a refined singer following the style of his popular guru, Pt Ulhas Kashalkar. Tabla exponent Pt Vijay Ghate in his solo showed how percussion is not about pace but about seamless rhythmic expansion. The pièce de résistance was Pt. Venkatesh Kumar's concert. He sang with tremendous feeling. The response from the intimate gathering inspired the maestro to reflect on the significance of such residencies. "It cannot be more satisfying – for both the artiste and the rasika," he said.

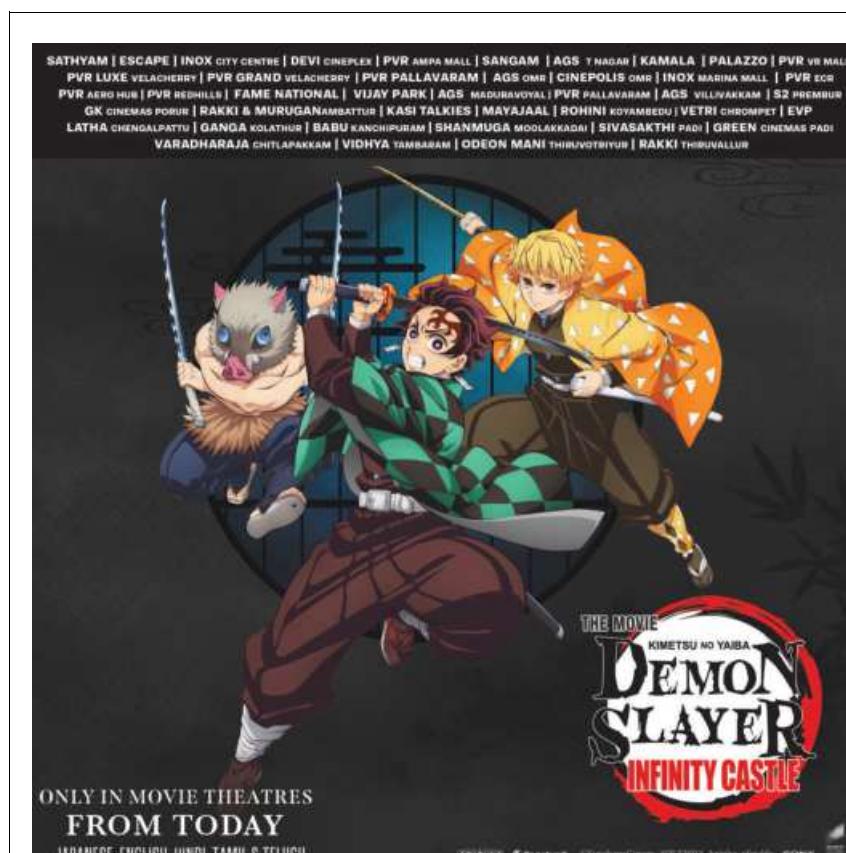
CALENDAR

Vocal and veena

Madhuradhwani has organised the following programmes at Arkay Convention Center, Mylapore. Details: Today, 6.15 p.m.: Maharajapuram Ganesh Viswanathan (vocal). September 13, 5 p.m.: Falak Chowdhary's lecture on 'Mumbai through my Lens'. September 14, 4.30 p.m.: Ramnath Bhagavath (vocal); 6.30 p.m.: Jayaraj Krishnan and Jayasri Jayaraj Krishnan (veena).

Tamil play

Under the auspices of Hamsadhwan, SRMG Creations presents the Tamil play Karaikkal Ammaiayar on September 13, 6.35 p.m. at Youth Hostel, Adyar.



GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!
Starting from Rs 150