

# fridayReview

THE HINDU

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As Prithvi Theatre gears up for another edition of its annual festival, we trace the making of this iconic performance space

## A class act

**Narendra Kusnur**

It's a familiar sight each time one enters the Prithvi Theatre courtyard. Up in front, a blackboard announces the day's event, along with the schedule for the remainder of the week. On the right, the café buzzes with young people grabbing a bite over conversations about cinema, cricket or the coastal road. An hour before any show, a winding queue builds up on the left of the entrance, as theatre buffs arrive early for a good seat. A few browse at the bookstore.

Located in a posh section of Juhu, Mumbai, Prithvi has, over the years, carved its own niche on the Indian cultural map. Since the auditorium was set up in 1978, it has been a launch pad or grooming ground for many theatre personalities. Kunal Kapoor, who runs the place, says the following has only grown over the years. "Today, the audiences are younger, and the number of shows has increased. Besides plays, we also have monthly shows for Indian and western classical music, and jazz, along with dance performances," he says.

**Illustrious history**

The venue is all set for its annual Prithvi Theatre Festival, to be held from November 3 to 18. This year, the festival incorporates a string of



**The stage is set** The venue gets ready for the festival and (below) Kunal Kapoor with son Zahan. PHOTOS: PRITHVI THEATRE

theatre performances, three music concerts and a dance recital.

The place has had an illustrious history, as it was founded on the legacy of two repertory theatre companies – Prithviraj Kapoor's Prithvi Theatres and Geoffrey and Laura Kendal's Shakespeareana. When Prithviraj Kapoor passed away in 1972, his son Shashi Kapoor bought the leased plot of land on which the repertory's storage shed stood. Determined to have a permanent theatre venue, Shashi and his wife Jennifer brought in architect Ved Segan.

The result was a unique auditorium with seating on three sides that allowed a perfect view of the stage from any spot. Even the acoustics were planned in such a manner that one could hear the faintest whisper from the last row. "The older theatres in the West were designed that way, and the effort was to ensure that the actors were not far from the audience," says Kunal, the eldest son of Jennifer and Shashi.

**Sought-after venue**

Prithvi Theatre was inaugurated on November 5, 1978, with G.P. Deshpande's Hindi play *Uddhwasta Dharmashala*, directed by Om Puri.

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**Chitra Swaminathan**  
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On October 10, when the hearse carrying iconic industrialist Ratan Tata's mortal remains drove into the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) for people to pay their final respects, not many would have realised India's much-respected corporate house's deep-rooted connect with culture, specifically NCPA.

Located at the end of Marine Drive by the Arabian Sea in the once-thriving business district Nariman Point (till Bandra Kurla Complex was developed), NCPA, a sprawling centre for performing arts in Mumbai, owes its existence to two visionaries – JRD Tata and Jamshed Bhabha (brother of nuclear physicist Homi Bhabha, who spent 60 years with the Tata Group).

They worked together on several projects, the most significant being NCPA. Both were keen to have a world-class, comprehensive centre for the arts in Mumbai. They established NCPA in 1969 as South Asia's first multi-venue and multi-genre cultural centre.

"Jamshed Bhabha met Mrs. Indira Gandhi when she was the Prime Minister, with a request to grant eight acres of land. She asked the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra Vasantrao Naik to help. When Bhabha approached him, the Chief Minister pointed towards the sea and told him this is the space available," says NCPA chairman Khushroo N Suntook, with a chuckle.

"Bhabha and JRD were fine with the offer. The Tatas spent more than eight years filling the land reclaimed from the sea," adds Suntook.

Even while the work was going on, Jamshed Bhabha didn't want to delay this dream project and set up NCPA in one of the floors of the high-rise building, Akash Ganga, which came up where eminent lawyer Bhulabhai Desai's bungalow once stood.



# A befitting adieu

## The National Centre for the Performing Arts is a reminder of Ratan Tata's connect with culture

"Despite initial challenges, the project took shape because of JRD's total support," elaborates Suntook. A colleague of Ratan Tata for many years, Suntook has served in various senior capacities in the Tata Group. His love for music led him to launch the Symphony Orchestra of India in 2006.

"The first theatre that came up at NCPA was called the Tata Theatre. Tata Consulting Engineers lent its technical expertise to come up with a revolving stage, a foyer and brilliant acoustics.

Internationally-renowned architect Phillip Johnson and acoustic consultant Cyril Harris were roped in. Before work began, Bhabha visited many concert halls in the West. Eminent international and national artistes have performed here," says Suntook.

To mark its platinum jubilee, The Tata Iron and Steel Company came up with the Tata Experimental Theatre, which was designed as a Black Box – a simple performance space with black or grey walls and movable seating arrangement for a

closer interaction with the audience.

Realising the need for a space to stage operas, musicals and full-fledged orchestras, NCPA inaugurated the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre on November 24, 1999. The theatre, which can seat 1,109 people boasts of a grand 100-year-old marble staircase donated by Sir Dinshaw Petit.

Recalling the making of this theatre, Suntook says: "Two months before its completion, almost the entire structure was gutted in a fire. Jamshed Bhabha was distressed, but made sure nobody indulged in any blame game. In less than two years, the theatre was again ready for inauguration. A modest man, he wanted to call it the National

**Unstinted support** (Clockwise from left) The NCPA building; Ratan Tata with Zubin Mehta; and people waiting on the NCPA lawns to pay their final respects to the iconic industrialist. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & EMMANUEL YOGINI



Dorabji Tata Trust, JRD Tata backed the idea wholeheartedly. Though some trustees were sceptical, in his letter to the Trust in 1965, Jamshed Bhabha wrote, "...Music and related arts constituted a most important part of the country's 5,000-year-old cultural and spiritual legacy. Music accompanied an Indian from the cradle to the grave; from birth to death." Not surprisingly, the Trust made an endowment of Rs 40 lakh to build the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

"Ratan continued the legacy with his unstinted support. He would attend western classical music concerts. He enjoyed listening to the works of Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms. Ratan, Zubin and I shared a warm relationship. When Zubin was here this



September to perform with the Symphony Orchestra of India, Ratan wrote to me saying he is unable to make it to the concert because of his health condition. An astute businessman, a connoisseur of art and a kind-hearted soul, he created loyalties that were amazing. The huge crowd that came to bid him adieu proved it," says Suntook.



Ratan would attend western classical music concerts. He enjoyed listening to the works of Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms.

**KHUSHROO N SUNTOOK**  
Chairman, NCPA

Theatre. But close friends and colleagues prevailed upon him, saying it is his baby and should carry his name."

Right from the time when Jamshed Bhabha proposed the creation of a cultural complex to Sir

(Clockwise from right) Prithvi Theatre; the café; and the library. PHOTOS COURTESY: PRITHVI THEATRE



and Platform. In 2000, veteran theatre personality Akash Khurana and his son Akarsh formed Akvarious Productions staging many plays at Prithvi. After a lull during the pandemic, the place was back to normal.

Kunal says that from the beginning, the venue has been overflooded with requests for dates. He adds, "We go by our gut feeling. Theatre programming doesn't need arithmetic. A lot of it has to do with emotion. But we try and keep up with the times. Today, my children Zahan and Shaira are actively

involved with Prithvi, and they know how to use social media, which I don't," he says.

**Widening the repertoire**

To widen its repertoire over the past decade, Prithvi started other events such as Mehfil, aimed at promoting Urdu culture, and the Open Mic for café customers. Adds Kunal, "Held once a month, Udayswar, with event company Pancham Nishad, presents Hindustani classical morning raags, and is packed at 7.30 a.m. The Symphony Orchestra of India

shows are a tie-up with NCPA, and the monthly jazz brunch sessions designed by Louiz and Gino Banks have a dedicated audience."

Kunal agrees that many café customers need not necessarily attend plays. "But we make an effort. There are posters of our events all over, and one can scan the list of programmes on the tables. There are many who come for both theatre and the snacks. If we can convert two or three of 100 new customers who come for the café, and make them theatre fans, we shall be happy," he says.

# A class act

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*Uddhwasta Dharmashala* starred Naseeruddin Shah, Rohini Hattangadi and Neelam Mansingh Chowdhury. M.S. Sathya's political satire *Bakri* followed soon, and Motley, the theatre company started by Naseeruddin Shah and Benjamin Gilani, staged Samuel Beckett's English play *Waiting For Godot*. The story is that Naseeruddin was never keen on *Godot* as he thought it was too obtuse, but over the years, it became one of Prithvi's most well-received plays.

In the 1980s, the venue became a haunt for directors and actors. Satyadev Dubey, Feroz Abbas Khan, Akash Khurana, Nadira Zaheer Babbar, Pankaj Kapur, Paresh Rawal, Shafi Inamdar, Dinesh Thakur, Arundhati Nag, Tom Alter and Bhakti Barve were among the regulars. Says Feroz Abbas Khan, "It became a community. I was inspired by Jennifer Kapoor's approach and dedication, and meeting her was a turning point." Describing Prithvi as the beating heart of theatre in Mumbai, Motley's Ratna Pathak Shah says it has helped an audience grow. "Earlier, the audience was smaller. Now almost every show is a full house," she adds.

The first generation of theatre groups included Satyadev Dubey's Theatre Unit, the Indian People's Theatre Association, Om Katare's Yatri, Nadira Zaheer Babbar's Ekjute, Om Puri's Majma, Dinesh

## The line up

- **Nov 4 and 5:** Motley's *Ek Dastaan Ek Haqeeqat*, featuring Naseeruddin Shah and Ratna Pathak Shah.
- **Nov 9 and 10:** Mahmood Farooqui's *Dastan-e-Ahwaal-e-Kapoor* (on Raj Kapoor) and *Dastan Alice Ki* (adaptation of *Alice In Wonderland*).
- **Nov 11:** Symphony Orchestra of India.
- **Nov 13:** Akarsh Khurana's *It's a Wonderful Life*.
- **Nov 14:** Makarand Deshpande's *Piyakkad*.
- **Nov 16:** Feroz Abbas Khan's *Hind*.
- **Nov 17:** Udayswar – Pt. C.R. Vyas's compositions presented by vocalists Arati Ankalikar Tikekar and Suresh Bapat.
- **Nov 18:** Jazz performance by pianist Louiz Banks and his group.



Thakur's Ank and Gujarati theatre personality Mahendra Joshi's *Avantar*. Though the audience initially preferred comedies and lighter subjects, there was a growing demand for serious and experimental theatre once the venue was established. To mark five years of Prithvi's being, a theatre festival was started in 1983. Added attractions were the café and bookshop.

## Continuing the mission

The death of Jennifer Kapoor on September 7, 1984, came as a big shock. Recalls Kunal, who took over, "I was with her in London during the last days. The first thing I did after she passed away was look for a phone booth to call up Feroz (Abbas Khan) and tell him that the show must go on. Before that, I wasn't actively involved with the group, but we had a family tradition of sitting together for breakfast and discussing things. This is where I got an idea about Prithvi. Many people predicted doom for the venue, but we continued in our mission."

Once things got going, Kunal's sister Sanjana managed the place till 2011, after which Kunal took over again. While the Prithvi Theatre Festival would begin on Prithviraj Kapoor's birthday on November 3, another regular event is held on Jennifer's birthday February 28, when tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain performs with a changing line-up. The tradition continues till today.

By the 1990s, newer names became regular. These included Sunil Shanbhag, Makarand Deshpande, Vikram Kapadia and Ramu Ramanathan, and theatre companies like Rage Productions

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Over the past three decades, Carnatic music has been exported to the U.S., the U.K., West Asia, Far East and Australia in many forms, concerts being the primary one. There are now festivals in some parts of the world running to a few days, with senior and junior artistes from India being invited. How has this circuit evolved? What are the positive outcomes and areas of concern?

No one will complain about the fact that audiences in these countries get to listen to top artistes live, get up close and, perhaps, even learn a bit during the concert days. A large number of accompanists have travelled with the main artistes and beefed up their otherwise paltry income at home. Many musicians have expanded and even customised their repertoire to suit specific audience needs. Consumer insights have, therefore, crept into the Carnatic music scene as a conscious discipline. Many concerts have triggered post-concert dialogues, reviews and curiosity, as the digi-desis devoured the aesthetic and technical aspects of the music, through familiar social media channels. The abundance of the exchanges has also educated a large section of less knowledgeable fans. Every rare raga's arohanam and avarohanam, and comparisons and contrasts, are now available on the Internet.

There is another side to this



# When Carnatic music travels abroad

The increasing number of festivals shows the growing interest of NRIs and the huge market for the art form

remarkable story. The NRI concert circuit is a huge financial market, albeit only for a few.

Careers in Carnatic music have a different trajectory, especially among foreign audiences. Vidvans, many past their prime, may still get top slots and top dollars, while many young artistes with stronger current performance and breaking into the senior league may get chances but the dollars may be less interesting. Tickets may range from 50 US dollars to 100 US dollars for a concert by a non-prime senior, while a younger musician whose majestic Kamboji is a

better feast, would have to settle for 25 US dollars or even 10. The fairness question does crop up. That's like tennis player Carlos Alcaraz getting 20 per cent of the match fee for a game against Andy Murray now. Even here money follows the current champion.

One is not sure if this is the handiwork of sponsors and organisers, and whether it reflects the audience willingness to pay, or both. Social media-savvy artistes dive straight into this mix. Some marquee festivals abroad feature a range of talents, with the highest cheques landing on the laps of the more famous

names, independent of current performance.

These anomalies do exist in the western music concert world as well, but are not as apparent as in Carnatic music. Is this what one aspires for? Then, the playbook has been written - invest in a good social media team and make sure you have an ecosystem with the largest reach among fans, superfans and organisers overseas. Build a personal identity that overtakes and outlasts your music. Also be a suave bi-lingual communicator. That heady mix can ensure a perennial pot of gold in your hands, even past your prime.

**Beyond borders** Sydney Music Festival by Swara Laya in Australia and Cleveland Thygaraja Aradhana in the U.S. are among the popular Carnatic music festivals overseas PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**Diverse** From 'Tyagaraja hrt sadana' and 'Ashtanayikas'. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Song and substance

Praveen Kumar's 'Tyagaraja hrt sadana' and a piece on 'Ashtanayikas' showed how Bharatanatyam lends itself to different concepts

B. Ramadevi

It is nice to see dancers also exploring the emotions in Tyagaraja's compositions. One such attempt was Praveen Kumar's 'Tyagaraja hrt sadana'. Presented by his Bengaluru-based Chitkala School of Dance, it was an offering to Rama through the saint-poet's kritis. Conceived and choreographed by Praveen Kumar, the performance stood out for its aestheticism, imagination, abhinaya and nritya.

They began with a shloka in praise of Tyagaraja - 'Vyaso naigama charchaya' that compares him to Vyasa in the knowledge of the Vedas, to Valmiki in the choice of words, to Shukha Muni in renunciation, and to Prahlada in devotion. As the fragrance of Yadukula Kamboji wafted through the strings of

violin, they began 'Sri rama jaya rama, shringara rama' and brought out vatsalya rasa, veera rasa and shringara rasa. 'Uyyaalaloogavayyaa' was delightful, as Divya Hoskere as Kausalya showered her love on little Rama through her abhinaya and turned into the quintessential mother.

'Sogasu jooda tharama' portrayed sattvic romance. Shreema Upadhyaya as Sita coyly exhibited her admiration for Rama's good looks. Praveen Kumar as Rama was the embodiment of grace and poise.

'Jagadanandakaraka', the first Pancharatnam was the main item that was fully exploited to portray many of the incidents from the Ramayana. Rama-Ravana yudha was brought alive with powerful jathis, specially composed for this production.

When they concluded with the

thillana, an inexplicable joy spread through the packed hall.

The orchestra deserved and received a big applause. R. Raghuram impressed with his bhava-laden singing. Harsha Samaga on the mridangam, Mahesh Swamy on the flute, Mandya Nagaraj on the violin and Anoor Vinod Shyam on the tabla, kanjira and cymbals gave zestful support.

The performance was part of 'Nrityalahari, a series of events to celebrate Bharatanatyam. It was organised by Mangaluru-based dancer Radhika Shetty's Nrityaangam. The event began with 'Ashtanayikas' portrayed through 'Navarasam Thadhumbum Nattiyakalaiye', a song composed by Madurai R. Muralidharan. 'Svadhina bhartuka' keeps her husband under her control, 'Vasakasajja' gets the place ready for her lord's arrival, 'Virahotkanthita' undergoes the pangs of separation, 'Proshita bhartuka' feels miserable as her husband is travelling, 'Vipralabdha' gets angry, suspecting that her lord is being unfaithful to her, 'Khandita' turns arrogant and angry when her husband comes back to her, 'Kalahantarita' is confused as to what to do and 'Abhisarika' decides to go back to her ord, ready to compromise.

This piece was performed by dancers from Mangaluru. Choreographed by Vidyashree Radhakrishna, the song was set in ragamalika and each stanza briefly explained the state of mind of a particular nayika. The dancers effectively brought out the emotions with their apt abhinaya. The song was interspersed with jathis to add vibrancy to the performance. Vidyashree's introduction in chaste Kannada was crisp and helpful.

Lalgudi Jayaraman's thillana in Sindubhairavi with the charanam in praise of Muruga was a visual treat as Vidyashree had incorporated 'mayura narthana adavus' and kavayiyattam in her choreography.



# Expanding the reach

Kartik Fine Arts takes Carnatic music to rasikas in the suburbs. The first concert featured K. Gayatri



**New venture** K. Gayatri accompanied by B. Ananthkrishnan on the violin and Praveen Sparsh on the mridangam performing at the outreach programme. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

P. Srihari

For far too long, it has been a common complaint that only those living in the cultural nucleus of South Chennai - particularly Mylapore and T. Nagar - are blessed with an abundance of opportunities to immerse themselves in live performances, because a majority of sabhas are clustered in and around these localities.

Now, Kartik Fine Arts, one of the major sabhas, plans to reach out to rasikas in the suburbs with free programmes.

"There is an immense interest among rasikas residing in distant areas of Chennai, but they often find it challenging to attend performances by eminent artistes," says S.N. Srikanth, president, Kartik Fine Arts. He adds that this will be followed by similar programmes in North Chennai and other areas. The sabha, which is in its golden jubilee year, has also earmarked sessions in the forthcoming music season for students and faculties of schools and colleges, shares Srikanth.

The inaugural 'outreach effort' of the sabha was held in collaboration with Babaji Vidhyashram, Sholinganallur, and featured a Carnatic vocal recital by K. Gayatri. Sharing the stage with her were B. Ananthkrishnan on the violin and Praveen Sparsh on the mridangam.

As it was the concluding day of

Navaratri, Gayatri opened with a sprightly ragamalika varnam 'Gananayakane thunai varuvaay' in Adi tala, composed by her guru Suguna Purushothaman. She then sang five Devi kritis on the trot.

**An ode to Devi**

'Amba vaani nannu', a Muthiah Bhagavathar kriti in Keeravani (Adi), was the first of them. After a crisp rendition of the song, Gayatri chose the charanam phrase 'Varaveena paani' for an extensive niraval and kalpanaswara presentation, a highpoint of the concert. Apart from the two-kaalam niraval, the swara passages in the second speed were deftly handled too. Ananthkrishnan's responses with the bow were delightful in both sections, seamlessly blending with Gayatri's melodic flow.

A sedate raga essay in Sriranjani was a perfect prelude to Papanasam Sivan's pleading to the goddess of Thirumayilai in the form of 'Maatha innum vaadha' in Adi tala. The bhava of her rendition, too, matched the connotation, and Gayatri did well to skip the niraval or swara exercise. She followed it up with another evocative kriti, 'Brovavamma taamasamele' by Syama Sastri (Maanji-Misra Chapu) in the ideal kaala pramanam. However, two songs in succession with similar theme and tempo could have been avoided.

Periyasami Thooran's 'Thaye Tripurasundari' (Suddha

Saveri-Khanda Chapu), a brisk song extolling the deity of Thiruvannmiyur, livened up the proceedings with Praveen playing with agility for the pacy chittaswaram. The main piece of the day was Swati Tirunal's 'Pahi Jagajananani' in Vachaspathi, set to Adi tala. After a neat presentation of the raga and the song, Gayatri dealt with kalpanaswaras with finesse at 'Mohanadaragaatri' in the anupallavi in two speeds before Praveen took over for tani.

**Teamwork**

It was a consummate team effort, with Ananthkrishnan and Praveen lending admirable support with aesthetic and sensitive display throughout. The former's delineation of both Sriranjani and Vachaspathi matched that of the vocalist, while the latter's two-kalai Adi tala tani brimmed with style and energy.

Interestingly, Gayatri signed off with two songs - Tyagaraja's 'Hecharikaga rara' in Yadukula Kamboji and Veena Seshanna's Senchurutti thillana - both having the phrase 'Sugunasaandra' (one replete with virtues), probably as a tribute to her guru.

A notable feature of the concert was that all the eight songs presented were by different composers.

Kartik Fine Arts has made a beginning in earnest. Though the turnout was modest on the day, the sabha expects it to grow once the venture takes root.





# The Walls come down

Jodhpur RIFF held at the Mehrangarh Fort offered music beyond divides

Charumathi Supraja

One is made of beaten earth, the other of gourd. The overlapping origin stories of the ghatam and calabash more than peeked through in the musical conversations they made during the inaugural concert of Jodhpur RIFF. The instruments chatted like old friends, belying the fact that the musicians playing them were from different continents and had met just 10 minutes before getting on stage. Classical musician Giridhar Udupa and Congolese percussionist Elli Miller Maboungou demonstrated the essence of the fest. The roots music festival, now in its 17th year, is known for bringing home music

beyond classifications and divides. Urban-rural, classical-folk, vocal-instrumental, dance-music, local-international and other labels faded in the face of the experiences offered at the festival, with the picturesque settings (and grand entries and exits by the sun and moon) adding layers of impact. **Diverse genres** As always, this edition of the festival presented music of all kinds (exuberant, meditative, lyric-free, complex, subtle, direct) that was spoken, played, sung or even danced. While Norwegian band Gabba taught us about Yoiks, the traditional singing style of the Sami people from northern Scandinavia, the khartal ensembles from Rajasthani folk communities displayed



how playing rhythm could also be pure dance. That percussion can sing (and go solo) was proven time and again – with Natig Shirinov’s energetic performance and Sukanya Ramgopal and team’s recital of rare Carnatic ragas on the ghatam. The similarities between Azerbaijan-based Natig’s rhythmic chanting and the Indian konnakol could not be ignored. Estonian duo Puuluup had the audience rolling on the ground, laughing or joyously moving to their remarkable music interwoven with tunes from the talharpa (an instrument they’ve saved from the brink of extinction).



The bandish of C.R. Vyas (presented by Anuja Zokarkar and team) heralded the rise of a crimson moon while Chandana Bala Kalyan’s Carnatic concert left a lingering mark on an emerging day. Music from the Manganiyars and Meghwals, Louis Mhlanga’s guitar recital, Kapila Venu’s Koodiyattam, Barnali Chattopadhyay’s musical exposition of Amir Khusrau’s poetry, Sumitra Das Goswami’s embodying mystic poetry, Gray by Silver’s reflective music and Emlyn’s powerful conjuring of the Indian Ocean – the fare at this edition of Jodhpur RIFF was varied as ever. The best of the interactive sessions (puppet shows, Tamasha, dance workshops and more) was a session titled ‘Why I do what I do’ in which

five musicians from Rajasthani folk communities described how the arts intersect with their lives as women practitioners. The samples they presented of their work left one yearning to hear and know more, besides drawing many questions from a deeply-engaged audience. **Structured approach** Of the many collaborations that were presented at the festival, two stood out. In Marwar Malang, a sarangi jugalbandi curated by the festival director Divya Bhatia, Dilshad Khan’s classical sarangi produced a more refined sound and displayed classical music’s structured approach (with the instrument itself looking more spruced up) but the raw, throaty tunes from Asin Khan’s Sindhi sarangi

unleashed a magnetism that defied resistance. The balanced manner in which the two sarangis wiped out the chasm of distance that could have stood between, spoke volumes about the musicianship of the two artistes and the way the festival has opened space for such musical interactions. The other collaboration was between SAZ (that’s an acronym for Sadik, Asin and Zakir Khan – who play the dholak, Sindhi sarangi and khartal respectively), and Kathak dancer Tarini Tripathi. The beginning of this collaboration was seen at last year’s festival edition, and it has grown into a more detailed exploration of making new forms from untapped artistic material within the artistes. Titled ‘Inayat – a duet for four,’ all four collaborators stepped out of their comfort zones in this evocative choreography. Asin Khan played a part in this movement sequence (while singing and playing the sarangi), Tarini and Zakir Khan sang (at different moments in the performance) and Sadik Khan recited poetry. “In a conventional Kathak performance, the dance is at the centre and the music is fashioned around it but here, we are equal collaborators,” said Tarini, describing the process of making this work. “Our songs are based on stories more than on raags,” said Asin. The highlight of Inayat was the mature way in which folk and classical harmoniously co-existed, with neither upstaging the other.

## CULTURE BRIEFS



### Deepavali special

Get ready to celebrate the festival of lights with PaalamTV’s special five-day nagaswaram concert series. Titled ‘Pancharathinangal’, it will be held from October 30 to November 3. It begins with the nagaswaram recital by J. Venkatesh and J. Bala Subramani (Adyar Brothers) on October 30. The duo will be accompanied by Tirukadaiyur G. Babu and Adyar D. Senthil Kumar on the thavil. **The artistes performing on other days are:** **October 31:** The special Deepavali concert will be by Pazhayaseevaram G. Kalidass and Koleri G. Vinothkumar with Veliyampakkam V.M. Ganapathi and Eguvarpalayam E.V. Ganapathy on the thavil. **November 1:** Thirukadaiyur T.S.M. Umashankar and Bhuvanagiri S. Muthuraman with Sivanvayal S.M. Rajarathinam and Vedaranyam V.L. Harish (thavil). **November 2:** Desur S. Shanmugasundaram and Desur S. Sethuraman with Swamimalai C. Gurunathan and Adyar G. Silambarasan (thavil). The series concludes on November 3 with a nagaswaram duet by Thirumeignanam T.P.N. Ramanathan and Pandamangalam P.G. Yuvaraj with Kattimedu S.G.P. Balashankar and Ennayiram S. Kamaraj on the thavil. The concerts will be web streamed on [www.paalamtv.com](http://www.paalamtv.com) at 6.30 p.m. every day.

### Bharatanatyam recital

The Music Academy has organised Varsha Rajkumar’s Bharatanatyam recital, as part of HCL Concert series, today 6 p.m. Venue: Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

### Contest in group singing

The Music Academy will conduct a contest in group singing (devotional music), under an endowment instituted by Rukmini Arts & Music Trust, on November 10, from 9 a.m. at its Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Groups with three to 10 participants, below 40 years of age, may register by sending particulars about their group and the compositions that they propose to present. They will have to bring their own accompaniments and sing compositions interspersed with shlokas or viruthams for a duration not exceeding 15 minutes. The last date for registration is November 5. For more details, contact 28112231, 28115162 or email [music@musicacademymadras.com](mailto:music@musicacademymadras.com)

### Sringeri Acharya in Chennai

The Shankaracharya of Sringeri Saradha Peetam, Vidhushekara Bharati Swami, will visit Saradha Peetam’s branches at T. Nagar, West Mambalam, Kodambakkam and Nanganallur during his Chennai visit. The acharya will be camping at Sudharma, Radhakrishnan Salai, Mylapore, and at Bharathi Vidyashram, Venkatnarayana Road, T. Nagar., for 14 days from October 28 to November 13. The acharya’s visit to Chennai, his first after taking up sanyasa, will be marked by special events including kumbabishekam at the branches of the math, discourses by the acharya at Adyar, Nanganallur, Mylapore and West Mambalam, and Sahasra Chandi homam. The yatra, which began on October 17 from Sringeri, reached the Bengaluru Sringeri Shankara Math on October 20. Their first halt enroute Tamil Nadu will be at the Sringeri Shankara Math, Kanchipuram, on October 27.

### An ode to Shakti

Charsur Arts Foundation and Kala Sadhanalaya jointly present ‘Nritya Samutsavam Shakthi Mahima’, from October 25 to 27 at 52, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer Road. The three-day event features music and dance concerts by young artistes. Today’s events will begin at 5.30 p.m. with the performances of Manasvini KR and KP Nandini Sai Giridhar followed by that of Divya Nayar and Bhavya Hari (6.30 p.m.). **Tomorrow, 5.30 p.m.:** Shreema Upadhyaya and Niranjana Dindodi and 6.30 p.m.: Shijith, Parvathy and Vivek Sadasivam. **October 27, 5.30 p.m.:** Smriti Vishwanath and Abilash Giriprasad and 6.30 p.m.: Jyotsna Jagannathan and Brindha Manickavasakan.

### Vocal duet

Samunnati and Rasikapriya will present Ragamudra, a Carnatic vocal concert by Ranjani and Gayathri on October 27, 5.30 p.m. at Sigappi Achi Convention Centre, Chettinad Health City, Kelambakam. The duo will be accompanied by Manoj Siva on the mridangam, Charumathi Raghuraman on the violin and S. Krishna on the ghatam. Tickets at BookMyShow: <https://in.bookmyshow.com/events/ranjani-gayatri-live-in-omr/ET00414541>. For details WhatsApp 88389 73850.



### Remembering a maestro

Madurai Mani Iyer Rasikas Association celebrates the 112th birthday of the maestro on October 27, at P.S. High School, Mylapore. A special audio-visual presentation ‘Aabaalagopam Anandam’ – Sri Madurai Mani Iyer’s Music: A delight that transcends age and social strata, will be presented by Shailesh Ramamurthy. The evening will begin with a special listening session featuring Madurai Mani Iyer’s music concert (4.30 p.m.)

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A CH-CHE





**Celebrating rhythm** Lydian Nadhaswaram playing the drums  
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the technical intricacies with effortless ease. He played an impromptu piece with Lydian on the keyboard in 9/8-time signature. Next was a western groove, played with the left hand using one stick while the Indian groove was played with the right hand.

**Inticate patterns**  
The intricate rhythm patterns of the chenda lent a desi flavour to the proceedings. It was interesting to see Siddharth pick up a nice groove with only the Hi-Hat cymbals. The next piece in a complex 11/8-time signature again had Lydian on the keyboard. Performed with finesse, it proved Siddharth's talent.

The audience responded with applause when Siddharth played the popular Tamil song 'Aasaiya kaathula thoodhu vittu' beat. An exciting moment was when he played just the kick-drum for close to a minute. Next came his own composition 'Rudra' based on a melodic minor (Charukesi raga in Carnatic format).

Lydian's solo act featured a piece that had rhythm patterns in varied time cycles. Gino Banks' solo was marked by control and fluency. Apart from playing for some karaoke tracks, Gino's repertoire included 'Spot', composed and played by Lydian with bass guitarist Aalap Raju for the album *Chromatic Grammatic*.

It was then time for 64-year-old American drummer Dave Weckl to display his way with the drums – snare, hi-hat, kick drum and toms. He presented timeless pieces of the Chic Corea band of which he was a part. He was accompanied by Lydian and Aalap Raju. Flautist Amrithavarshini too joined them.

After Ilai's solo, all the drummers came together for a brisk six-minute jam session. The drum fest's debut outing in Chennai was an exciting journey into the world of rhythm.

pianist Lydian Nadhaswaram, who played the drums at the fest along with well-known percussionists Dave Weckl, Gino Banks, Ilai, Siddharth Nagarajan and Steven Samuel Devassy.

Steven kick-started the concert with a brief mridangam solo. Taking cue from that groove, he moved to his acoustic drums, unleashing his full potential, largely using the bass drum (kick drum).

Siddharth, another young drummer and a Guinness World Record holder for most drum beats in a minute (2,109), performed next. He showcased

# Upbeat

Curated by Lydian Nadhaswaram, the Chennai Drum Fest featured six eminent percussionists

Kalyan Gopalan

Watching six ambitious drummers come together on stage at the Chennai Drum Fest, one was reminded of the 2014 film *Whiplash*. It showed how an aspiring jazz drummer is pushed to his limit by the instructor. The film explored the concepts of perfectionism, dedication, and success even while deconstructing what it is to be ambitious.

The show was curated by

# Countryside music

Experience rural India at The BiG BANG! Festival of Love



Neha Kirpal

A festival rooted in love, community and the preservation of indigenous traditions will be held on October 26 and 27 in a 500-year-old village with just 28 households. The BiG BANG! Festival of Love returns after a three-year gap, this time in Nanadisa, Assam. It celebrates the richness of India's roots while using music as a tool to connect with a wider audience.

Founded by musician and activist Daniel Langthasa and indigenous chef Avantika Roohi Haflongbar in 2016, the festival aims to serve as a platform to highlight local economies, indigenous knowledge and sustainable living. "The BiG BANG Festival was born out of a deep love for our land and people, and to reconnect with what's truly important. It's about slowing down, appreciating Nature and understanding that our traditional ways of living have immense value, while addressing the realities of the modern world," elaborates Daniel, co-founder.

The theme for the 2024 edition,

'Village is the future', comes from the realisation that the answers to many of today's challenges lie in the way our villages functioned before industrialisation and consumerism took over.

**A slice of village life**

A slew of activities has been planned to allow people to experience the practical knowledge that villagers live by every day.

Earlier editions of the BiG BANG Festival took place in different locations such as Haflong, Diphu and Hojai in Assam. The festival's revival was possible because of an application that reggae artiste Delhi Sultanate of the BFR Sound System made, featuring the festival for the Studio Monkey Shoulder initiative through Worldwide FM. 'Roots' music has the potential to make you feel what no popular music genre can, and this setting is

ideal. I hope this will give a rich context to one of the core messages of reggae music – that of cultural resilience, unity, love and reverence for the earth," says Delhi Sultanate.

Trombone and trumpet player Chie Nishikori will join forces with BFR Sound System as will Mumbai-based rapper-activist MC Mawali and reggae producer-DJ Ras ManMan. Tipriti Kharbangar will play a live acoustic set of Khasi blues and folk. Also on the line up are Ahimxa, a cult grunge band hailing from Haflong, and Daniel with his band Digital Suixide.

"The workshops, educational programmes and projects we're working on are designed to have a lasting impact on village youth, long after the festival ends.

**Back to roots** (Clockwise from left) Tipriti Kharbangar; Delhi Sultanate; and Daniel Langthasa and Avantika Roohi Haflongbar. PHOTOS COURTESY: BIG BANG

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