

friday Review

THE HINDU

A slice of Margazhi

Reviews of concerts that took place at sabhas across the city p2-p4

Looking back, looking ahead

Urmila Satyanarayanan on her five-decade journey in dance, and her new work p5

CLASSICAL NOTES IN A COLLEGE

At Soulfest's mike-less concert at ACJ, flautist Sruthi Sagar showcased the purity of melody p6

Chennai's iconic annual festival proves that classical traditions are vibrant, adaptable and deeply relevant today



Why the season matters

Chitra Swaminathan
chitra.swaminathan@thehindu.co.in

"His concert is dedicated to Muthuswami Dikshitar and will feature only his compositions," announced T.M. Krishna at the start of his December 25, 2025, performance, drawing a thunderous applause from the packed hall. Smiling, he added, "It's heartening to see such a response to the composer on his 250th birth anniversary. It's not just about the composer or his works, it's the sound of the period that we want to reach out to." The Music Academy was overflowing, with extra chairs brought in and a television set up in the foyer for rasikas who couldn't find a seat inside. The scene was a testament to how Carnatic music and its revered composers continue to command a huge following and relevance – even in an age dominated by social media and an array of global musical choices.

The scene was much the same at sabhas across Chennai, echoing what one has witnessed over the years. Rasikas – strangers only moments earlier – exchanged knowing smiles when a familiar raga, kriti, or even a well-loved phrase was sung. And when a lesser-known composition was rendered, they listened in contemplative silence while their minds kept the guessing game on.

Language has played a pivotal role in shaping the classical music landscape, with Tamil songs, in particular, finding renewed fervour among audiences. Sanjay Subrahmanyam's popular production 'Tamilizham Naanum' stands as a striking example of how the richness of Tamil not only preserves tradition but also deepens the emotional and cultural resonance of Carnatic music.

This also highlights how Chennai's annual Margazhi festival continues to grow, with an increasing number of youngsters

embracing the classical arts. Some concerts this Season witnessed good attendance from young music enthusiasts, underscoring the festival's widening reach. Concerns voiced by naysayers about exponential growth leading to disorganised, overcrowded venues seem to carry little weight against the evident vibrancy and enthusiasm on display.

Despite ongoing debates about the relevance of the margam – the traditional Bharatanatyam repertoire – often critiqued for its recurring theme of the heroine waiting for her man, lamenting his indifference, or his dalliances with another woman in an age shaped by progressive women, senior dancer Shobana's performance at Krishna Gana Sabha this Season reaffirmed its enduring appeal. Presenting a classic line-up, she drew a full house.

Conversations often revolve around reinventing the classical for contemporary audiences and allowing the arts to evolve with changing times. Constant efforts are also being made to deconstruct the ethos of an unfamiliar era and render it accessible.

Kalakshetra's staging of the complete Ramayana series, choreographed by Rukmini Devi, brought timeless splendour to the Season and received audience love. These seem to suggest that tradition, when performed with artistry and conviction, works.

Conversations often revolve around reinventing the classical for contemporary audiences and allowing the arts to evolve with changing times. Constant efforts are also being made to deconstruct the ethos of an unfamiliar era and render it accessible. Yet, as we step into 2026 after witnessing Margazhi 2025, the influence of the classical arts is certain to endure – reminding us that while styles may

shift and platforms multiply, their essence will inspire and anchor generations within a shared cultural memory.

When the Grammy nominations were announced in early November 2025, they once again spotlighted several Indian classical musicians – the late tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain, kanjira virtuoso Selvaganesh, acclaimed violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan, renowned sitarist Anoushka Shankar, and sarod artiste Alam Khan. It underscored the fact that Indian classical music offers musicians the freedom to draw from its depths while simultaneously enriching it with fresh contributions.

Fifty years after the iconic Shakti, founded by Zakir Hussain and legendary guitarist John McLaughlin, demonstrated how classical sounds could be seamlessly woven into Western notes, several soloists and ensembles have followed suit, staging successful collaborations across the world. In recent times, one band that has cracked this fusion code excellently is Agam, the Carnatic-progressive rock-pop band led by vocalist Harish Sivaramakrishnan. The group's performance on December 21, 2025, on the Shivala Ghat at the Mahindra Kabira Festival proved that classical music can be cool and trendy. When they rendered Purandaradasa's 'Chandrichooda shiva shankar', the crowd erupted in delight. Equally striking was the launch of their latest album, *Arrival of the Ethereal* (June 2025), featuring five raga-based tracks. The opener, Tyagaraja's timeless 'Sita kalyanam vaibhogame', was reimagined into a vibrant new soundscape – blending nagaswaram, chenda, guitar and Harish's imitable vocals.

Concert formats are becoming flexible too. Carnatic vocalist Vignesh Eshwar struck an experimental note this Season when he sang 'Ik omkar' (from

Guru Granth Sahib) in his concert at the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai.

Dancers too are striving to push boundaries. The iconic dancer-choreographer Chandrakala, whose radical movement vocabulary has inspired generations, pioneered this spirit of innovation nearly four decades ago in Madras – then a landscape dominated by rigid, codified constructs of dance.

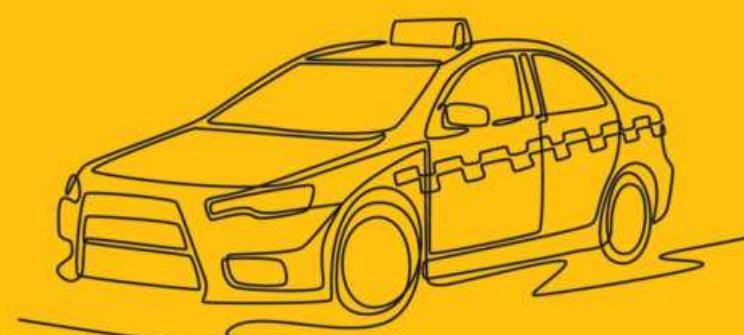
Today, that spirit of exploration continues through diverse platforms. Organisations such as Natyaratnam curate thematic productions, giving dancers the chance to bring their distinct vision to subjects beyond the repertoire. Likewise, sabha dance festivals often encourage choreographic experiments, giving artists space to reimagine classical sequences.

Coming back to music. How will it sound in 2026? Classical traditions will continue to hold sway, even as hybrid genres gain momentum with the rise of AI-driven creators. Audiences, meanwhile, will engage with music beyond the stage by discovering experiences that blur the performance-technology-imagination boundary.

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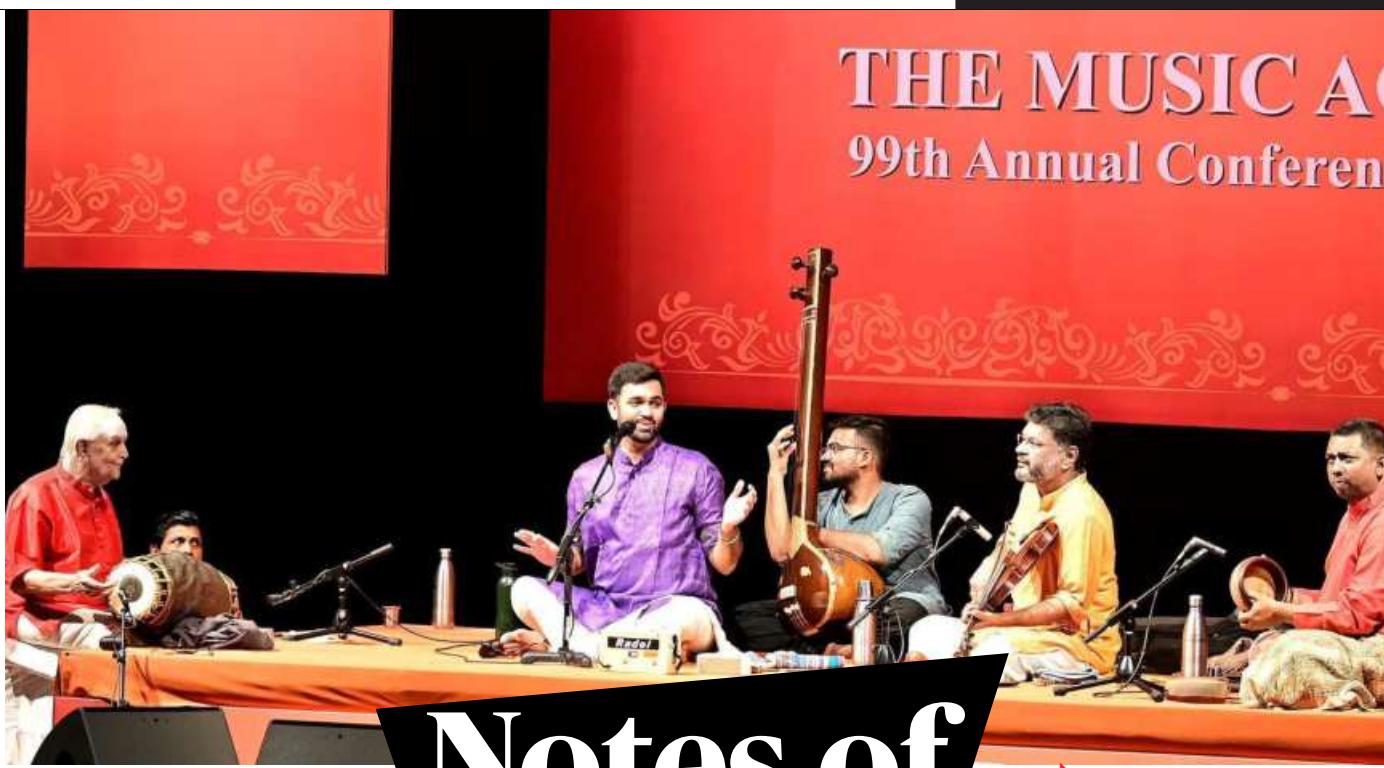
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Notes of nostalgia

Ashwath Narayanan reminded listeners of maestro K.V. Narayanaswamy's immortal 'Inta sowkhy' in Kapi

Deepa Ganesh

The contemporary concert hall is a space of mixed interests and multiple distractions. To hold an audience in thrall today, a musician needs not merely talent, but intelligence as well. Ashwath Narayanan demonstrated both in his kucheri. With a thoughtfully chosen repertoire presented in an unconventional sequence, he created moments of surprise for the listener.

Trained in the legendary K.V. Narayanaswamy bani under vidushi Padma Narayanaswamy, Ashwath evoked memories of the maestro while seamlessly integrating his own musical choices. The stage, thus, was well set.

The evening found its summit in the accompaniment of the mridangam vidwan Umayalapuram Sivaraman, who turned 90 the day before. Alert, buoyant and quietly commanding, he infused the

concert with a life that lifted it far beyond its given moment.

Ashwath's rendition of the varnam in raga Vasantha was brisk, punctuated by crisp swara passages that firmly set the concert's tempo. The Tiruppavai in raga Arabhi, 'Ongi ulagalandha' – apt for the third day of Margazhi – was presented with similar restraint, its kalpanaswaras concise, yet rich in meaning. Sivaraman, who has accompanied Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar himself, the creator of the Tiruppavai in musical form, enriched the swara exchanges with a seasoned musical instinct.

A compact yet vibrant Atana alapana, dense with briga phrases, followed. Ashwath then unfolded an exploratory niraval at 'Rajakula kalashabdhi', the second speed charged with moments of restrained drama. The rendition clearly evoked the KVN style, and Sivaraman's accompaniment – measured, poised, and responsive – spoke of a profound internalisation of the kriti.

The classic 'Sri mathrubhootam' in Kannada raga unfolded at a relaxed pace – perhaps, at moments, almost too unhurried. Yet the Mishra Chapu tala, with its innate scope for ideation, allowed Sivaraman's judicious deployment of sarvalaghu patterns to subtly frame Ashwath's rendition. The result was a serene atmosphere that gently foregrounded the compositional genius of Muthuswami Dikshitar.

Ashwath's delineation of raga Kapi was memorable, its emotional gravity occasionally drawing the music inward. On the violin, B.U. Ganesh Prasad brought a soulful richness to Kapi, his phrases steeped in warmth and introspective depth. KVN's immortal 'Inta sowkhy' hovered in the mind, as Ashwath came up with his own interpretation with imaginative niraval and swara patterns.

What followed was a tana. From a perfectly tuned mridangam, the meetu and chapu resonated through the auditorium. Sivaraman's gumki

Formidable team (from left) Mridangam vidwan Umayalapuram Sivaraman, Ashwath Narayanan, B.U. Ganesh Prasad (violin) and B.S. Purushottam (kanjira). PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

strokes and finely accented sarvalaghu passages were brilliant. B.S. Purushottam, on the kanjira, extended the mood with sensitive use of gumki, the exchanges remaining brief, yet complete. His playing always demonstrates an insightful understanding of the stylistic nuances of various percussionists.

An apt and concise Purvikalyani alapana, followed by an engaging tana, set the stage as Ashwath rendered the famous pallavi 'Kanakkidaikkumo sabesan darisanam'. The pallavi featured a challenging take-off point with an ateeta eduppu. The raga passages that followed – Anandabhairavi, Kedara and Sindhubhairavi – were handled with finesse. Ganesh Prasad's Purvikalyani possessed a lingering and evocative quality.

The act of making music and the act of listening to it are both profoundly inward journeys, requiring an undivided attention from the musician and the listener. In recent times, the impulse to applaud at every turn in concerts has begun to interrupt this fragile continuum. Perhaps, the artiste should be allowed to delve into the music in silence, and the listener to be fully present in that shared moment.

THE MUSIC ACADEMY



Mridangam vidwan Umayalapuram Sivaraman, Ashwath Narayanan, B.U. Ganesh Prasad (violin) and B.S. Purushottam (kanjira). PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

especially at the niraval at 'Bhaktiyil karai kandavan'. Swaras following the niraval were optimised for the clock.

'Sri Tyagaraja' in Sree raga (Muthuswami Dikshitar) in vilambita kala skirted slowness and was cleverly augmented with deft taps from Patri Satish Kumar on the mridangam. Bharat Sundar did not treat even the filler 'Sarasamaganam' in Kapi Narayani lightly – the swara korvais with janta prayogas livened it up.

Abheri was a masterpiece of nagaswara chakravarthi T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai. That was Bharat's reference guide for the alapana encapsulated in 13 minutes – short phrases, impactful sustains and korvais in an unhurried tempo got both the vocalist and the violinist

plenty of appreciation.

Mysore Vasudevacharya's epochal kriti 'Bhajare re manasa' demands an extended scale range across the octaves and Bharat passed the test. The niraval at 'Pavana japtham' was interesting even though slightly curtailed. Rajeev again came to the fore with brevity.

The RTP in Kalyani was a total package, steeped in ragarasa. The alapana start in nishadham was not just unusual, but seemed to mirror the pallavi which also starts with a 'ni' and swarakshara. 'Nee dayai puriya thamadama saravanabhava' set to Khanda Chapu, tisra nadai. Bharat and Rajeev rendered four kalams within one cycle, a mark of good laya control. The request to the audience to refrain from clapping was understandable.

'Kuyilar', the Kalki Krishnamurthy composition with attractive lyrics set in Mandu, got the serene treatment and pace the song demanded.

Rajeev played subtly, producing intelligent sequences and landings, and his sense of proportion allowed the concert to flow like a stream. Satish Kumar calibrated his normal style a bit, adding further subtlety to kritis such as 'Satru vilakidum' and 'Sri Thyagaraja'. Guruprasad on the ghatam lent his weight in fast-paced swara korvais and in the tani.

The concert was also a good demonstration of balancing time, mood and variety. However, Bharat needs to play his middle overs cautiously to exploit his strengths fully.



Flexible voice Bharat Sundar. PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI



Rooted in tradition Pantula Rama accompanied by M.S.N. Murthy (violin), V.V. Ramanamurthy (mridangam) and Nerkunam S. Sankar (kanjira). PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

Keeping to the theme

Pantula Rama presented an elaborate Dikshitar composition in Gamakakriya

Renuka Suryanarayanan

Pantula Rama's concert was effervescent, yet emphasised her scholarly approach to singing.

As always, she gave her best both during the pallavi session and the elaborate Dikshitar kriti presentation in keeping with the year's theme at The Music Academy – Muthuswamy Dikshitar 250.

The vocalist's initial Kalyanavasantha raga alapana set the tone for the concert. A much appreciated 'Nada loludai' (Tyagaraja) featured slow and fast kalpanaswaras.

'Sri ramya chittalankara' (Jayamanohari raga, Tyagaraja) came next. Wishing to launch the Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi early, the vocalist set up a strongly rooted-in-tradition Kedaragowla alapana. She then enhanced the raga's intricacies with an elaborate

tanam before the pallavi, 'Neelameghdama venuganalola' set to Misra Chapu tala – the tala was set in mirror image. The singer took the pallavi into the Trikalam rendering followed by kalpanaswaras.

The piece de resistance of the evening was Muthuswamy Dikshitar's 'Meenakshi me mudham dehi' (Gamakakriya also known as Poorvikalyani) filled with the intrinsic raga bhava embellishments; it drew audience appreciation. They

kept at it when Pantula Rama established a niraval-swaram suite in this kriti at the words, 'Veena gana dasha Gamakakriye' with flourish.

In the tani avartanam that followed, V.V. Ramanamurthy on the mridangam and Nerkunam S. Sankar on the kanjira proved their prowess.

Pantula Rama concluded with a javali 'Cheli nenetu' (Paras) and a Khamas tillana composed by Patnam Subramania Iyer.

Through a thoughtful lens

Amrutha Venkatesh brought a unique analytical approach to her concert

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Amrutha Venkatesh's concert showcased her academic and technical expertise. She was supported by Bombay R. Madhavan (violin), S.J. Arjun Ganesh (mridangam) and Payyanur T. Govindaprasad (morsing).

Amrutha Venkatesh, who has trained under multiple teachers, including M.T. Selvanarayana, Charumathi Ramachandran, Rama Varma and Parassala B. Ponnammal, brings in a unique analytical nature to her concerts.

The recital opened with the Mysore Sadashiva Rao varnam 'Intha chauka' in Pantuvulari set to Adi tala. This was followed by 'Brova samayamide' in Gowri Manohari (Adi), where the artiste wove kalpanaswaras into the rendition, underscoring the framework of the raga while maintaining clarity of sahitya and pronunciation.

In Saveri, Amrutha chose the classic 'Muruga muruga'. Her aesthetic embellishments around each sangati demonstrated an experiential engagement



Expressive Amrutha Venkatesh with Bombay R. Madhavan (violin), S.J. Arjun Ganesh (mridangam) and Payyanur T. Govindaprasad (morsing). PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

with the pulse of the raga. A sketch of Niroshtha preceded 'Raja raja radhite', and the subsequent kalpanaswaras navigated its limited scalar swaras with inventive phrases.

An expansive alapana in Nattakurinji stood out for its breadth and developed contours. Nattakurinji lends itself to expressive improvisation and Amrutha thoroughly utilised this. Her alapana highlighted phrase continuity, clear anchoring on key swaras and a gradual widening of range, making the raga feel complete

without relying on speed or loudness. Swati Tirunal's 'Jagadeesha sadaa maamava' was rendered with a detailed niraval at 'Khaga vaahana sura shoaka vibhanjana'. Her niraval exemplified focused expansion on chosen melodic ranges. Substantial duration was dedicated to swarakalpanas as well.

Rhythmically complex material followed with a Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi in Sucharitra, set to a 27-beat tala also with the same name whose structure corresponded to the vowels and consonants of the word 'Sucharitra', articulated through a

framework of guru, chaturasra jathi laghu, druthashekara viramams and anudhrutam. The close alignment of raga and tala recalled themes explored in an academic session held at The Music Academy earlier. The pallavi text, drawn from a composition by M. Balamuralikrishna – 'Chintayaami santatam sri muthuswami dikshitharam parama pavitram' – was followed by ragamalika swaras set to contrasting talas.

The pallavi demanded sustained academic rigour, bringing together linguistic structure, tala mathematics and raga grammar. Its design foregrounded Sucharitra as a rhythmic and melodic idea, reflected an analytical approach to pallavi construction, and served as a considered tribute to Muthuswami Dikshitar, linking scholarship and concert practice without overt emphasis.

Throughout, the accompanists provided attentive support; Madhavan's violin echoed the vocal lines with textual sensitivity and Arjun Ganesh's mridangam and Govindaprasad's morsing contributed measured rhythmic dialogue.



A CH-CHE



P. Srihari

A musician of rare calibre, S. Sowmya possesses a sensibility attuned to the finer aspects of her art. Unwavering in her commitment to classicism, she offers listeners profound insights in her concerts.

Her repertoire often foregrounds lesser-known kritis, and the recital was firmly in that mould. Indeed, the first five songs she presented belonged entirely to this category. Sowmya was accompanied by her regular collaborators Embar S. Kannan (violin), Neyveli R. Narayanan (mridangam) and G. Chandrasekara Sharma (ghatam).

Sowmya began with a vivadi touch in the form of Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavat's 'Anandamaya manave' in Jyotiswarupini. She topped it with a lively swarakalpana, with Kannan

A penchant for the rare

S. Sowmya offered listeners profound insights through a tradition-rich repertoire

relishing the early exchanges.

If the first piece hinted at the concert's course, the second was an intriguing statement in itself. Sowmya presented a Huseni alapana that stood apart from contemporary practice. The vakra

sampurna-sampurna raga, as commonly heard today, employs chatusrti dhaivatam in the ascent and its suddha variant also in the descent. Her interpretation, she said, dispensed with the suddha dhaivatam altogether, using only the

higher note throughout. She later explained that this was the raga's original formulation, the lower note having crept into usage over time. While the alapana and the rendition of Vallalar's Tiruvarutpa 'Enna punniyam seydeno amma' naturally

THE MYLAPORE FINE ARTS

segments at the charanam line 'Taratalam pugazh' were absorbing, especially in the second speed. Sowmya then rendered Gopalakrishna Bharati's 'Vandalum varattum' in Balahamsa with a measured gait, deftly articulating its characteristic, zigzag ma-ga-ma-ri-sa phrase. The ensemble displayed compelling synergy in Tyagaraja's Pantuvarali kriti 'Vadera deivamu', delivered in a gripping kalapramanam, and in the niraval and swarakalpana at the charanam line 'Dhatru vinutudaina'.

The main raga of the evening was Bilahari. Sowmya developed it methodically, deploying compact phrases to telling effect, before easing into longer, more expressive arcs. The vocalist's exposition was well complemented by Kannan's violin essay. It had to be a Dikshitar kriti for topicality's sake – the 250th birth anniversary – and 'Kamakshi sri varalakshmi' it was. After a serene rendition, the vocalist and violinist offered engaging swara passages, particularly in the second speed, underscoring panchama nyasam. In the ensuing tani avartanam, Narayanan and Chandrasekara Sharma engaged in a spirited rhythmic dialogue in two-kalai Adi tala, culminating in a crisp korvai.

The post-tani section comprised 'Parulamma mata', a Kapi javali by Dharmapuri Subbarayar, a Kavadi-chindhu, Poochi Srinivas Iyengar's Purnachandrika thillana and the Tiruppugazh 'Thullumadha velkai kanaiyale' in Hamsanandi. The recital presented a rich compositional canvas, sourcing from 10 composers for its 11 songs, with Dikshitar featuring twice.

Getting the fundamentals right

+ Vidya Kalyanaraman's concert showcased how youthful enthusiasm can co-exist with time-tested values



Bhava-rich Vidya Kalyanaraman with B. Ananthakrishnan (violin); Papanasam Kumar (mridangam) and H. Prasanna (ghatam). PHOTO: M. SRINATH

Bala Shankar

The emergence of talents like Vidya Kalyanaraman augurs well for the performance scene of the next generation. It is a double delight that she embraces the time-tested musical values, as was evidenced in her concert.

'Gajavadana karuna sadana' in Sriranjani was sprightly in a brisk kalapramanam with a volley of sangathis. Sriranjani kritis are rarely sung without some swaras and Vidya did not alter that. The alapana of Varali was sedate and delivered with ease, but the focus seemed to be on stringing all familiar phrases. Alapanas are meant to incorporate some 'aha' moments, which Vidya will come to realise.

'Seshachala nayakam' had all the tenets of classicism that the master composition demands and Vidya's niraval at 'Aravinda padma nayanam' was engaging, especially in higher octaves.

Violinist B. Ananthakrishnan raised his game during this phase with pleasing articulation and raga bhava. A piece with a somewhat elaborate alapana and niraval could go without the mandatory swaras but the urge to sing them seems palpable these days.

Vidya affirmed her primacy for the Trinity with 'Marivere gati' (Syama Sastri, Ananda Bhairavi, Misra Chapu) and 'Naada loludai' (Tyagaraja, Kalyana Vasantham, Adi). The latter had some sprightly swara passages, largely

adhering to raga lakshana without the drum-beat effects. Such preferences underline a musician's core choices.

Mohanam was Vidya's mainstay in the concert. While she had been a bit tentative until this point, the raga sketches were calm, enjoyable and had a good progression. Roller-coaster sangathis were kept in proportion. The raga has an inherent attraction and the musician's role is just to visit the peaks and valleys without heroism, as Vidya demonstrated. Ananthakrishnan's response had similar fundamentals.

'Kapali' of Papanasam Sivan is a colossal kriti in Mohanam, faced with vivid portrayal of the Lord and several tempo combinations. Vidya's patantara is good and bereft of unpolished flights. There were a ton of swaras at the end, including a kuraippu and korvais, with ga, pa, sa, ri, ga as the overarching theme. The whole piece, engaging as it was, robbed Vidya of valuable time for some pensive pieces at the end.

'Krishna nee begane baro' (Yamuna Kalyani) was soulfully rendered as Vidya's soft voice lends itself to such pieces. Papanasam Kumar and H. Prasanna (ghatam) supported the multi-tala programme with good anticipation of the sangathis.

The two-hour concert featured only one niraval and four swaras. That underscores the tilt in the balance away from spontaneous expression to an audience-friendly diet of orchestrated swaras and more swaras, even by artistes with a classical bent. If you take away the swara segments, many concerts may shrink to a half.

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Down memory lane
Clockwise from right) Urmila Sathyanarayanan; with students at Vaggeyakara Bharatham.

PHOTOS: R. RAGU, S.R.
RAGHUNATHAN &
KV. SRINIVASAN

Crowning glory

Urmila Satyanarayanan, recipient of this year's Nritya Kalanidhi award, looks back at her 50-year journey in dance



V.V. Ramani

The Music Academy's Nritya Kalanidhi award comes at an important stage of my life – it has been 50 years since my arangetram and 30 years of my dance school Natya Sankalpa," says Bharatanatyam exponent Urmila

Satyanarayanan. The happiness, she says, is manifold, because her mother, who introduced her to this art form, is around to share this moment.

Looking back at her journey, Urmila says this recognition is a culmination of her parents' dreams. Her bond with the art form began at Saraswathi Gana Nilayam, the dance school run by Ranganayaki



Today, we constantly have to adapt teaching methodology to suit the needs of the present generation, which has to juggle many things.

URMILA SATHYANARAYANAN

constantly have to adapt teaching methodology to suit the needs of the present generation, which has to juggle many things. For instance, instead of attending separate classes, they now have the advantage of learning dance, music, theory and yoga in the same institution. I have been fortunate to have excellent dancers as faculty members, who are my pillars of support," shares Urmila.

Talking about the changing nature of rehearsals and performances, Urmila points out how musicians were employed full time at her vadhyar's class. "We used to practise with live music. Today, getting musicians for one rehearsal itself is a daunting task. The performance duration has also shrunk, so the repertoire needs to be edited."

A recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi award and Nritya Choodamani, Urmila has performed widely as a soloist. She also choreographed and presented many thematic productions along with collaborating with other artistes. She will be presenting her new work 'Karunya Kavya - Legends behind poetic masterpieces' on the inaugural day of The Music Academy Dance Festival on January 3.

"Dance is an inseparable part of my life. Apart from giving joy and recognition, it has also taught me discipline, commitment and humility. But this journey wouldn't have been possible without the wholehearted support of my family and rasikas," says Urmila.

Mature portrayal

Aswathi K is a promising young dancer with a presence



set the mood and Binu's tanam added to it. The moon's rays scorch the nayika's body and she cannot bear to see the blossoming flowers and the bees buzzing around them. Aswathi's abhinaya style, a mix of mukhaja and angika, and explained with metaphors, influenced her delineation. The dancer was convincing in her portrayal.

The anupallavi 'Tamadam' was taken before the dividing jathi, an unusual step, though the song continued in the same vein.

Aswathi's footwork and timing are impressive, and one could hear the distinct sound of her bells with every beat. The lack of ariamandi was, however, of concern. She should not be using space-covering movements at this stage of her career. The music was most enjoyable, and the orchestra was fully in sync with the dancer throughout.

Viyoga holds a mirror to society

Vaibhav Arekar's new production reflected on vanishing spaces and values



Message in movement
Vaibhav Arekar and dancers of the Sankhya Dance Company.

PHOTO: M. SRINATH

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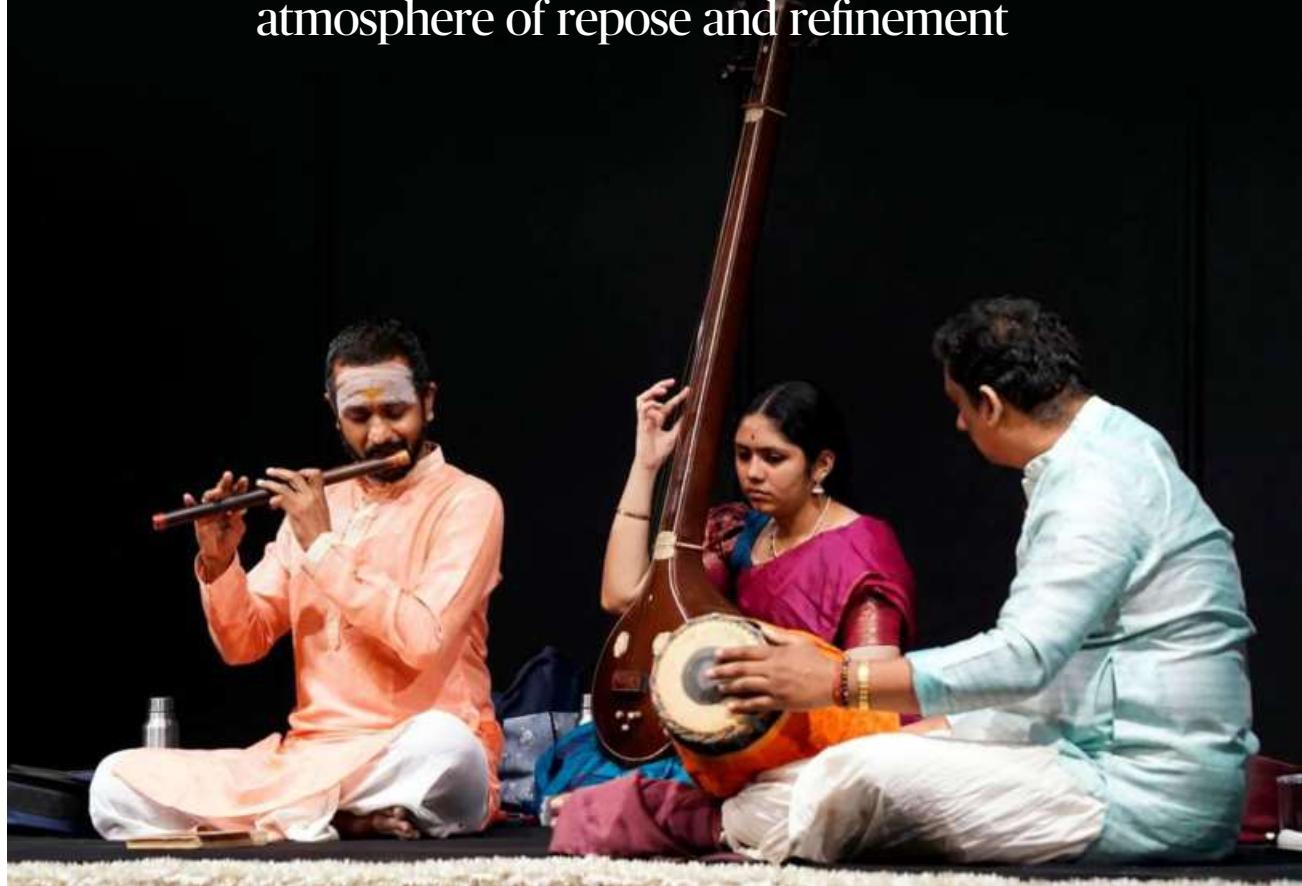
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Melody through the reed

Sruthi Sagar, along with violinist Vittal Rangan and mridangist Delhi Sairam, created an atmosphere of repose and refinement



Seamless tunes The concert was a mix of measured accents and graceful glides.

PHOTO: SATISH BABU

Kalyan Gopalan

It would not be an exaggeration to say that J.B. Sruthi Sagar evokes memories of the legendary T.R. Mahalingam (Flute Mali). Immersed in his music, one often forgets that the concert is instrumental; the phrasing and emotional nuance frequently mirror the expressiveness of a vocal recital.

His recital at the architecturally elegant, mic-less M.S. Subbulakshmi Auditorium at the Asian College of Journalism was a sublime experience. Sruthi Sagar was ably accompanied by Vittal Rangan on the violin and Delhi Sairam on the mridangam. Together, the trio created an atmosphere of repose and refinement.

A child prodigy and disciple of Balasai and Dr. Sundar, Sruthi Sagar displayed effortless virtuosity over a concert spanning more than two-and-a-half hours. His calm stage presence and measured approach drew the audience into a deeply contemplative musical space.

The concert opened with the Kalyani varnam 'Vanajakshi'. The articulation was lyrical, adorned with intricate brigas in the melkalam. Sairam's judicious use of gumki, dhin and chapu complemented the flute's phrasing, while maintaining impeccable tonal balance.

This was followed by Muthuswami Dikshitar's 'Manasa guruguha' in Ananda Bhairavi, set to Tisra Eka tala. The rendition flowed with the serenity of a gentle stream, culminating in a soothing

conclusion. Muthiah Bhagavat's brisk 'Sudha mayi' in Amritavarshini came next; a brief opening phrase – lasting barely a few seconds – was sufficient to establish the raga with clarity and precision.

The Bindumalini exposition, a janya of Chakravaham, stood out for its emotive depth. Tyagaraja's 'Entha muddo', rendered with graceful glides and measured accents, was rich in bhavam. Vittal Rangan's violin responses were equally evocative, and Sairam's restrained arudi, employing only gumki and dhin, drew spontaneous applause.

Mazhavayi Chidambara Bharati's 'Ma mayura meedhil eri vaa' in Bilahari followed, showcasing the seamless unison of flute and violin – particularly striking in a mic-less setting – and highlighting stylistic shades

reminiscent of Flute Mali.

The main item was a Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi in Ritigowla, set to Tisra Jati Triputa tala, with the sahitya 'Rama nee samanamevaru.' The tanam highlighted the raga's jiva swaras – G₂, M₂, and N₂ (Kaisiki Nishada) – while rhythmic complexity unfolded through tisra and chatusra patterns, culminating in a brief kanda kuraiappu. Sairam's tani avartanam traversed kanda, tisra and misra nadaias with finesse. The final korvai was a brain teaser, while the first half of poorvangam and utharaaangam was in chatusram, the second half of each was in tisram.

Sruthi Sagar concluded the concert with the bhajan "Hey Govind, Hey Gopal," leaving the audience immersed in lingering calm and devotion.

Celebrating a landmark

Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha celebrates its 125th anniversary on January 2, 8.30 a.m., at Narada Gana Sabha. Sri Shankara Vijayendra Saraswathi, the 70th Shankaracharya of Kamakoti Peetam, will grace the occasion.

The day begins with Thirumeignanam

Brothers's nagasaram recital, this will be followed by rendition of Divyanama and Utsava Sampradaya kritis at 9.30 a.m. Dushyanth Sridhar will present 'Significance of Sri Thyagaraja Pancharatna Kritis' (10.30 a.m.). Eminent musicians will render Tyagaraja's Pancharatna kritis at 11 a.m. followed by Anugraha Bhashanam by the Kanchi seer.

Art patron Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti will preside

over the evening programmes. C.S. Vaidyanathan, senior advocate, The Supreme Court Of India and former Additional Solicitor General Of India, will be the chief guest. The evening also features Sudha Ragunathan and Dushyanth Sridhar's 'Nava-Vidha Bakthi' at 6.30 p.m. They will be accompanied by Embar Kannan (Patri), Patri Satish Kumar (mridangam) and Sowmya Narayanan (ghatam).

Royal composers

The Sunaada Trust, in association with Chennai Fine Arts, presents 'Royals as patrons of performing arts' for two days at Bharatiya Vidyabhavan mini hall.

The festival opens today at 4 p.m. with a concert by the Sustaining Sampradaya Group, Cleveland at 5.15 p.m. This will be followed by Pavan Mani's vocal performance themed on composers of Ettayapuram Royal Patrons at 6.15 p.m. and T.V. Ramprasad's concert featuring the compositions by Mysore Kings and Muthiah Bhagavat.

A series of concerts and discussions will take place tomorrow. Schedule: 4 p.m.: L. Samuktha and L. Samhita's vocal concert themed on Vijayanagara Nayaks and Cholas. A special session by R. Kannan will be based on Ramanathapuram Rajas and Chettinadu Nagarathar as patrons' at 5 p.m. This will be followed by Iyer Sisters' presentation on Nayaks and Maratha Kings (6 p.m.); vocal concert by K. Harish Narayan will present Swati Tirunal's songs (7 p.m.) and C.V. Sudheer Warrier will render songs by Irayimman Thampi, Kutty Kunju Thankachi and Sri Kesava Pillai (8 p.m.).

Spotlight on the violin

Lalgudi Trust and Krutagnya presents Violin Vaibhavam 2026 on January 3, at Srinivasa Sastri Hall, Mylapore. The chief guest will be Bombay Jayashri Ramnath. After Radhika Podaval's invocation at 9 a.m., Sumedha Mahesh, Gayathri Sreenivasan, Deva Narayan and Vydanathan Sreenivasan (disciples of V.V.S. Murari), accompanied by Sai Nivaneethan (mridangam) and Karikal Jaikishan (ghatam) will perform.

At 10.30 a.m. there will be a violin solo by Kailasapathy G. (disciple of M.N. Moorthy and Prof. Saraswathi Moorthy), along with Adarsh Devarajan (mridangam) and S. Harihara Subramanian (ghatam). At 11.45 a.m.: violin duet by Shreyas Ravi and Lalit Kovuri (disciples of Anuradha Sridhar), accompanied by Nandan Kashyap (mridangam) and Ramya Ramesh (ghatam).

At 3.30 p.m.: Violin duet by K. Sahana and Chinmayi Ravikumar (disciples of Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi) with M. Anghiras (mridangam) and G. Ganapathy (ghatam). At 4.35 p.m.: Violin duet by Shri Sisters – Madhuvanithi and Sumedha Vijayaganesh (disciples of Madurai M. Vijayaganesh), accompanied by Tirucherai Kaushik (mridangam) and Mukunda Sai (kanjira). Prahlad Saravanapriyan (disciple of Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan) will give a violin solo at 5.40 p.m., accompanied by Anirudh Raj N (mridangam) and K. Ranganathan (ghatam). At 6.45 p.m.: Violin duet by Bharath Rajagopal and C. Ramakrishna (disciples of H.K. Venkatram), accompanied by Guruvayur Lakshman (mridangam) and Harikishore (kanjira).

ABHAI event

Association of Bharatanatyam Artistes of India (ABHAI) presents 'Meet & Greet' on January 3, 10 a.m. at Karnataka Sangha, Habibullah Road. Abhai will felicitate senior gurus with the 'Natyakala Sadhaka' award – Jaya Chandrasekhar, Ambika Buch, Jayshree Narayanan, Samyuktha Varadarajan and Revathi Muthuswamy. The chief guest will be Padma Subrahmanyam, president Nirthyodaya and managing trustee, Bharata Ilango Foundation For Asian Culture (BIFAC).

The event begins with an invocation, award ceremony, interspersed with performances by K.B. Madhusudhanan (Athma Dance Academy), Ramya Ramnarayanan's Nirthyanjali Institute of dance, Padmini Krishnamurthy (Sri Saraswathy Gana Nilayam Trust, Chennai), Shiva Kumar and Sailaja (Shivakalalayam Academy) and Lakshmi Ramaswamy's Sri Mudraalaya.

CALENDAR

Bhavan's dance festival

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore, will host Bhavan's Natya Utsav from today to January 15 at its main auditorium. The annual festival (non-ticketed) will feature 63 dance performances (solo and group), including Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, Odissi and Mohiniyattam.

Tyagaraja aradhana

Sri Thiagaraja Sangeetha Vidwath Samajam will host the 179th aradhana mahotsavam on January 6, 6 p.m. Harikesanallur Venkatraman will inaugurate and legendary musician T.V. Gopalakrishnan will preside over. The inaugural concert will be by T.V.S. Mahadevan with R. Raghu on the violin and Sai Raghavan on the mridangam. Bahula Panchami will be celebrated on January 7, from 8.30 a.m. to 12 noon. At 10.30 a.m. eminent musicians will present Pancharatna kritis. There will be concerts from January 8 to 13, 6 p.m. to 8.30 p.m., each spanning ten minutes. The aradhana concludes on January 13. The portrait of Tyagaraja will be taken out in a procession to the accompaniment of bhajan rendition.