

Leveraging social media as a platform for Carnatic music

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Music has got an ethereal quality to heal the disturbed mind and provide solace. The impact of Covid-19 and the stress of confinement within one's home have been multiplied by the disturbing news flashing across media—both visual and social. In these testing times, many organisations have come forward to provide music to rasikas around the world through social media.

Arkay Convention Centre, Chennai, owned by philanthropist cum music enthusiast Arkay Ramakrishnan, has been providing free music and literary discussions throughout the year. During this lockdown, when live concerts could not be held, Arkay Ramakrishnan was quick to provide webcasts of previously recorded concerts everyday in the evening. Concerts by R. Vedavalli, T.N. Krishnan, Rama Ravi, Malladi Suribabu, T.V. Gopalakrishnan, Prof. Venkitaramanan, Sandeep Narayanan, Suryaprakash, Mandolin U. Rajesh, and many other top ranking musicians provided sublime music. Special mention should be made of thematic concerts by the late Suguna Purushothaman of exclusive ragamalikas and that of Suguna Varadachary comprising kritis on Tyagaraja by other composers.

Mudhra Bhaskar, Secretary, **Mudhra** and the brain behind the Paalam TV, conceived the programme titled *Nimmadhi*, where high quality music, dance and dramas were streamed in the evenings on their channel. The programmes featured concerts by Gayathri Venkatraghavan, Kunnakudi Balamuralikrishna, Ramakrishnan

Murthy, Sankaran Namboodiri, Sid Sriram, Abhishek Raghuram, Priya Sisters, Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan, violin duet by Mysore Brothers, flute by Shashank, jugalbandi by Jayanthi Kumaresh and Ronu Mazumdar, and a thematic concert, *Khandam Square* presented by Sriram Parasuram. Thought provoking dramas like *Tanneer Tanneer* and dance programmes were also aired which were viewed by rasikas world over. The webcasts were free and the audio and video quality were commendable. The daily webcasts started with *Insights*—a unique educational programme by Radha Bhaskar on the subtle nuances of Carnatic music.

Paalam radio is another flagship channel of Mudhra—providing 24 hours non-stop Carnatic music through the app. A series of music concerts, lecture demonstrations and sound track of dramas were relayed over this channel. The vintage concerts of stalwarts, K.V. Narayanaswamy, M.L. Vasanthakumari, N. Ramani, T.N. Krishnan, Voleti Venkateswarlu,

and U. Shrinivas, were enriching and enlightening.

Pallavi Durbar organised by Carnatica and Sri Parthasarathy Swamy Sabha is an annual event looked forward by musicians and music lovers of Chennai to enjoy lec-dems, pallavi-jam sessions, quiz and exotic pallavis in complex talas. This year, it was held online and



 <p>global digital Pallavi Darbar 2020</p> <p>CarnaticQ2020... Creativity beyond boundaries...</p> <p># Covid-19 Physical distancing and virtually connected</p> <p>5th to 14th April 2020</p> <p>Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic Pallavi renditions by popular Carnatic musicians! • First online Pallavi Jam by renowned artists! <p>We welcome pallavi renditions by performers and talents from around the world!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upload your recording on YouTube and email carnaticmusic@gmail.com or • Go live on Facebook, use #pallavidarbar and tag the Carnatica Archival Centre page <p>Time limit: 20 minutes</p> <p>Pallavi Pudhir - Puzzles and challenges will be posted on our Facebook page; we welcome everyone to try and crack them!</p> <p>Sponsored by  </p> <p>Watch this space for more details!</p>	 <p>Grand inaugural Concert:</p> <p>R. Suryaprakash</p> <p>5th April IST 10 pm</p>
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some of the musicians presented complex pallavis mostly with only the tambura; a challenging feat which the talented singers carried out with aplomb. In the inaugural concert, Suryaprakash rendered mnemonic-themed Srotovaha yati ragam-tanam-pallavi in Shanmukhapriya set to chatusra jati Ata tala. Saketharaman, in the company of Vittal Rangan (violin) and Patri Satish Kumar (mridangam), presented Tamil isai pallavi in Mullaipann (Mohanam) set to sankeerna jati Dhruva tala. Kunnakudi Balamuralikrishna presented a unique “Reverse 20-20” themed pallavi rendered as a ragamalika with Kokilapriya as the anchor raga. Vishnudev Namboodiri presented a dwiraga-dwi-nadai pallavi with the combination of Poorvikalyani and Begada. Sisters Anahita and Apoorva and Kalyanapuram Aravind also presented challenging pallavis.

Mani Krishnaswamy Academy of Music, Mangalore, streamed over 100 concerts live through Facebook. The musicians performed with only the tambura; the absence of pakkavadyams did not hamper the enjoyment of the recital. The concerts by Aditya Madhavan, Amritha Murali, Vivek Muzhikulam, Palghat Ramprasad, Kruthi Bhatt, Vignesh Easwar, N.J. Nandini, Malavika, Sunil Gargyan, Aditya Prakash, Sai

Vignesh, Hemantha and Heramba (flute), amongst others, conformed to high standards, had good viewership and received appreciable feedback from the viewers.

K.N. Shashikiran and **Carnatica Archival Centre** organised IMPL 2020 (International Music Premier League 2020) in which eminent musicians like A. Kanyakumari, Malladi Ravikumar, as well as many up-and-coming musicians posted their songs on their Facebook pages. Radha Bhaskar chaired some interesting panel discussions.

Charlotte Swati Tirunal Sabha organised Swati Tirunal Jayanti celebrations titled ‘Gems of Swati Tirunal’ for seven days in which renowned and aspiring musicians posted a song of Swati Tirunal on Facebook. There were many instances of dance programmes as well.

Popular television producer and organiser Subhasree Thanikachalam, curated a programme of vintage Tamil film songs titled ‘Quarantine from reality - Gems of Tamil film music’. Several classic hits were streamed every day for over 90 days on her YouTube channel **Ragamalika TV**. In her introduction, Subhasree provided a fund of information about the film, music director and nuances about the chosen song. The programme brought to light many songs of yore and the young singers strived to revive the emotions of the long forgotten numbers without the help of any background score.

Aishwarya and Saundarya, great granddaughters of M.S. Subbulakshmi, presented a series of concerts on Facebook with dedication, and unison in rendition, which appealed to a large number of viewers. The sisters deserve appreciation for curating an entire concert with songs in eleven languages.

In the absence of live concerts, Facebook provided platforms for many musicians to present their songs and stay connected with their fans and music aficionados. Musicians Sudha Ragunathan, Jayanthi Kumaresh, Suryaprakash, Abhishek Raghuram, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ranjani-Gayatri, Gayathri Venkatraghavan, Trichur Brothers and several top ranking artists posted their concerts on social media which attracted lakhs of views. Vocalist Amrutha Venkatesh also engaged rasikas by posting one tillana a day on her Facebook page during this period.

Vocalist Gayathri Girish uploaded a compilation of slokas from different texts that align with the cause of freeing the world from disease, as per the benevolent orders of the Kanchi Sankaracharya Vijayendra Saraswathi Swamigal. R.P. Shraavan composed a

Gayathri Girish





Madurai Sivaganesh

Adyar D. Balasubramani



prayer for world peace titled *Sukhino Bhavantu* which is posted in his YouTube channel.

Madurai Sivaganesh presented snippets of 100 ragas within a span of 55 minutes bringing out their essence very eloquently, using key phrases. He was awarded a certificate by the India Book of Records in recognition of his seamless feat. His concert for the 'Times Tyagaraja Awards' also received much appreciation.

Adyar D. Balasubramani played 121 ragas on the nagaswaram in a span of 28 minutes which also was a pointer to the deep insight and sadhana of the nagaswaram vidwan. There were many such feats by young vidwans, with varying levels of perfection.

Toronto based young musician, Abby V (Abhishek Iyer), disciple of Raji Gopalakrishnan and Ranjani-Gayatri,

posted two sets of 73 raga snippets—in rapid fire succession, bringing out the raga contours through raga alapana, tanam, or kriti snippets.

It was heartening to see some of the temple festival concerts online during this period—Panachikad Dakshina Mookambika Kalamandapam, the cultural wing attached to the famous Saraswathy temple in Kottayam district, organised online music concerts to provide a platform for musicians. The concerts of Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan, Mavelikkara Subramaniam, Vivek Muzhikulam, and Tamaracaud Govindan Namboodiri in this series maintained high standards.

The online concerts have been appreciated by a large section of music lovers as is evident from the feedback received during the webcasts. But it can never replace the experience of a live concert. This model works well for short duration concerts where raga alapana, niraval and swaras are limited. But the contribution of accompanists is essential as the concert assumes greater heights when there is a confluence of the musical ideas of all the team members.

A more serious issue deserves our attention. The absence of live concerts and festivals, cancellation of temple festivals, all have resulted in a serious financial setback for artists. The concerts on social media may bring lakhs of likes and comments and shares—but unfortunately do not translate monetarily to the same extent. Some musicians holding alternate jobs or pursuing online classes may remain unscathed by this adversity, but this has devastated the livelihood of majority of artists. The worst affected lot are the nagaswaram-tavil vidwans and panchavadyam artists as their only source of income is from temples and marriages. Under these stressful conditions, the only solace is that some organisations and musicians have come forward to raise funds and provide financial assistance to the suffering artists. ■

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