

A virtually exciting musiCarnival

The lockdown has exposed music lovers to several online events—live performances, conversations with artists and personalities, cook-out with artists, listening sessions and more. But what we did not expect but did experience was a ‘carnival’ online! Packed with many interesting activities, what really led to its success was that every lockdown-performance-fatigued rasika found something to do for those three days—cerebral and fun!

Sukrtam Foundation, brainchild of musician S. Sowmya, hosted the second version of the music carnival in August this year, titled *musiCarnival '20*. Sowmya was ably supported by a bunch of talented musicians consisting of K. Bharat Sundar, L. Ramakrishnan, Vidya Kalyanaraman, Ashwath Narayanan and Gayatri Kamakoti. A creative personality on and off stage, Sowmya’s innovative and fun ideas were executed skillfully by her and the team.

The power of social media was unleashed to the fullest. The lockdown was definitely a blessing in disguise for Sukrtam. The three-day carnival reached more than 1.6 lakh people from across the world—definitely more than what a physical carnival in Chennai would have seen! Plus, a wider audience base, which otherwise would have been restricted to only rasikas from namma Chennai!

The events in the carnival included a mix of online hosted events, which were streamed or premiered live on



Facebook, and games that were hosted over their website www.sukrtamcarnival.com for everyone to access and play. The sprightly group of musicians, prominent stars in the field today, surprised all of us with their techy skills as well. The Sukrtam website, for example, was designed and developed end-to-end by the talented violinist L. Ramakrishnan. When asked him how he went about this, he says, “In many ways, putting together an online event proved to be a difficult task than organising a physical event. An online festival of this scale entails participation from across the globe and hence, availability of games, media and information 24x7 was the need of the day. And to host online games for the carnival, we needed a one-stop launch pad, and with that in mind, the Sukrtam website was designed. The website was tested on multiple devices including mobile phones and tablets to ensure a seamless experience for the end user. We had around 3000 unique visitors to the

website during the carnival from all over the world.”

Vocalist K. Bharat Sundar edited all the promotional videos that were aired drumming up to the event. And Vidya Kalyanaraman managed the entire coordination between events—hosts and participants—and management of the schedules.

The carnival was inaugurated on 7 August 2020 by N.

Murali, President of The Music Academy, Madras, and art patron and organiser Cleveland V.V. Sundaram.

Some of the events which stood out and garnered excellent participation and interaction were the quiz on Carnatic music and its history by historian Sriram V; and *Dumb Charades*, based on Carnatic compositions, ragas and composers, hosted by musician Saketharaman along with his daughter Bhageshri.

The popular card game *Meld*, was given a Carnatic twist and the goal of this multiplayer game was to combine a composition, raga and tala and score points by melding them as sets. Kudos to the young engineers Abhishek, Arjun, and Sai Prasanth for developing this game from scratch for this carnival. Rasikas can still play this game which has themes around Kollywood and Western music too, on the Sukrtam website.

What emerged as a hot favourite among the virtual audience was the musicians’ *Antakshari*, hosted by the celebrated Carnatic duo Ranjani-Gayatri. Following the basic



rules of antakshari, each round was built with a lot of variety, where the participants had to ideate and come up with kritis based on ragas, anupallavi, swarasthanam, and compositions in Todi and Kalyani. The participants included top ranking musicians—Gayathri Girish, Gayathri Venkataraghavan, Nisha Rajagopalan, Amritha Murali, Vignesh Ishwar, Sriranjani Santhanagopalan, Rithvik Raja, and Bharathi Ramasubban. The event was ably and calmly moderated by singer K. Gayatri and supervised by S. Sowmya. The event, apart from scoring 100 percent on the entertainment quotient, showcased the exhaustive repertoire of the participants and almost all of them reeled out kritis in less than 30 seconds!

Some of the other interesting and innovatively thought out games were a completely virtual ‘Treasure Hunt’ through different kshetrams, which provided automated certificates once the participant crossed the finish line. A Google classroom was setup to handle more than 100 live participants playing simultaneously with a monitored helpdesk (through private comments). aMAZE, a raga maze game designed to recognise ragas with some novelty was a creation of the violinists Rajeev, Sayee Rakshith and Vittal Rangan.



Heritage enthusiast and conservationist Madhusudanan Kalaichelvan hosted a quiz on music, art and architecture. Violinist Vishvesh Chandrasekhar, drew inspiration from the popular game, *Bingo* and adapted it to include musicians and instruments. *Wheel of Fortune*, a game that tested luck and knowledge, was hosted by Deepika and Nandika.

The talented vocalist Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath hosted an interesting session of *Pictionary*. Beautiful images on Carnatic music were sketched live to the participants, inspiring them to guess the answers within seconds. Vocalist Ashwath Narayanan hosted *Scattergories*, a multiplayer game. Violinist Vittal Rangan presented the unique concept of *Make Your Own Music*, with a totally different dimension to the concept of creating music virtually.

Apart from the games, some unique

shows were also hosted on Sukrtam’s YouTube channel. A leather puppet show was put together by kids just five years of age! The puppets were animals about which lyrics were written in the tune of the sarali varisais by vocalist K. Gayatri and the beautiful leather puppets were handmade by the talented vidushi S.

Sowmya. The background music and videography were done by the young music couple Shreya Devnath and Praveen Sparsh.

Varisaiyai Paduvom, was a musical presentation by kids, based on the various varisais in Carnatic music, sung in different ragas. To make it informative and interesting for children, the songs were written on various themes like numbers, shapes, colour, gratitude towards fellow human beings, and even on the recipe of Idli! Sayee Raksith and Ravishankar had composed the music.

The skit *Jeevan*, was enacted by several musicians from their own homes! Written and directed by S. Sowmya, it was an adaptation of a real story from the 20th century. The video editing was done by K. Bharat Sundar and the cast included Vidya Kalayanaraman, K. Gayatri, Delhi Sairam, Chandrasekhara Sharma,

The puppet show





Brinda Manickavasagam, Ranjani Sidhareddy, Sankrith Sowmya, and Bhavya Hari.

The grand finale of the carnival was hosted by Sowmya, inspired by the famous television game, *Jeopardy*. The participants in this game were all the musicians and volunteers who had worked tirelessly to execute *musiCarnival'20*—it was a novel way of thanksgiving to all the contributors.

The curtains to *musiCarnival'20* were drawn on 9 August 2020 with a valedictory function, presided by eminent musicians Sudha Raganathan and Nithyasree Mahadevan, who were part of the events in the last year's edition as well.

The success of *musiCarnival'20* can undoubtedly be attributed to the ingenious efforts of Sowmya and her team. We have often seen these musicians on stage, quietly delivering what we 'thought' they knew best. But here they were in a completely different avatar, executing the entire carnival online with finesse. Lockdown or not, Sukrtam perhaps should continue to conduct this carnival every year online; it was definitely more satisfying than a physical event in terms of participation!

The website www.sukrtamcarnival.com still hosts several videos, quizzes, and games for interested rasikas to participate.

SUKANYA SANKAR

