

Music video on water resources

The symbolism of rivers has been used abundantly in poetry, music and storytelling. Rivers depict the entire circle of life and are revered as nature's wonders. In the Indian context, they are worshipped and humanised to tell moving stories of civilizations. However, through the generations, excessive use of these water bodies has led to their erosion and contamination. Today, we are faced with the colossal task of restoring them and sustaining them for future generations. This is the quintessential and compelling message of the recently released music video, *Rivers of India*.

Premiered on Earth Day, 22 April 2021, *Rivers of India* was conceptualised and composed by Kanniks Kannikeswaran, famous Indian-American music composer, in collaboration with The Center for Clean Water (ICCW), an initiative of IIT Madras, of which he is a distinguished alumnus (2019 awardee). The 6.5 minute-long video is a breathtaking salutation to India's rivers, with a prayer to preserve them. Not only is the video a feast for the eyes, but also pools in leading Indian classical musicians Bombay Jayashri and Kaushiki Chakraborty and their sons, who are emerging artists.

To those familiar with his work, Kanniks is a firm believer in the sovereignty of ragas to bring people and causes together. His efforts in building global choirs and musical communities have brought him a flood of accolades. As a member of one his regional choirs in the



Kanniks Kannikeswaran

US and also a miniscule part of the choral arrangement in the *Rivers of India* video, I feel privileged to share the story behind this musical video, which includes the names of 51 rivers from all over India.

In February 2020, a little before the global pandemic hit, Kanniks visited The Woodlands, TX (the choir chapter I am part of) and College Station, TX. It was while working with a group of 30 amateur singers in College Station, singing his composition *Gange* from his flagship production, *Shanti*, that the idea of creating something simple, featuring the names of rivers such as Ganga and Yamuna struck him. "I immediately found myself singing the first line of the composition, finding joy just in the names of the rivers. The manner in which they fit into a seven-beat Misra Chapu tala and the addition of the prefix *Sri* to the river Saraswati, was something that naturally fell in place," recalls Kanniks. He completed this inspiring piece of work on his way back to his home in Cincinnati.

When Kanniks resumed online lessons with us, we were indeed

delighted to be amongst the first of all his choral groups to learn the *Rivers of India* composition from him on Zoom soon after lockdowns were imposed. During one of our sessions, he expressed his vision to see this song performed by prominent singers in India, along the lines of the iconic *Mile sur mera tumhara*. Little did we know then that some of our voices would trickle into this meaningful presentation a year later alongside celebrity musicians.

Moving along with his drift of thoughts, Kanniks reached out to his 1984 batchmate E. Nandakumar (CEO – International Center for Clean Water IIT Madras), with whom he discussed the idea of a music video. This was in continuation of a conversation they had in January 2020 during the 35th reunion of IIT Madras, where Kanniks had proposed creating a large-scale stage performance on campus, with the goal of promoting awareness about water resources. Given the changed circumstances around Covid-19, Nandakumar and Professor T. Pradeep, Director of ICCW, readily agreed to support an online production with the same theme.