

# THE DAILY DRAMA

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## The Carnatic thespian

There is not a minute for your mind to wander when you are in a Sanjay Subrahmanyam concert

Parshathy J Nath

Photos: Raj Khater and Saransh Agarwal

The notes came tumbling down, and before we knew what hit us, Sanjay had begun to work his spell. His RTP in the melancholic, life-affirming Kapi just pulled us along with it to its zenith and brought us back to Earth again. The mridangist and Sanjay made our heart race with pulsating rhythmic patterns that left us on an adrenaline high. Everyone in the audience could sense something electric in the air. The full-blown musician and performer was in his element; he had us in his grip with absolute ease and force.

Sanjay's ease with the audience doesn't just stop with stage. As we meet up with him at the dining hall of Adishakti, the man tells an audience member who has come all the way from Pallavaram, "If you come to Mylapore to listen to me, I will come to Pallavaram," and gives one of his characteristic genial smiles. "Concert is a performance. I am not sitting at home and singing. The audience is coming here to hear me sing." He observes that his audience is not just a collective that is coming to hear Carnatic music but one that comes to hear "Sanjay music".

"They have come to listen to me. And, I want to surprise them. I want to play with them and draw them in." And even during our conversation, one can see how his eyes shift with absolute precision to engage with the people around him. And, he agrees to it. At the end of the day, every space holds a potential for performance, be it a concert or a conversation.

With Sanjay's music, the au-



diene interaction has always been a vital component. When one observes his body language, one senses an alert being who is aware of the ambience and the nature of the audience. It even reflects in his gestures at the mridangist when they finish a round of talam cycle, that jubilant smile he

shares with the audience the next moment, drawing us also into the percussive conversation. Its all about striking a fine balance, though. "Its about exploring an art form and sharing the beauty with the people around you. I am not trying to sell or promise you an experience," he says. Sanjay, the mu-

sical maverick, took us deeper into the rhythmic intricacies of Kedaram, the terrains of Desh and curvatures of Nat-tai ...As we move into the final week of the Remembering Veenapani Festival, this cathartic musical high absolutely befits the concluding notes of the month-long fiesta.

## Who Passed By

## Around the world, telling stories

Parshathy J Nath Photos: Andres Fagiolino and Betina Dominguez

Travel, adventure, humanity, theatre... these words come together in the creation of the world onstage for Andres Fagiolino and Betina Dominguez. The performers, representing Amares Teatro from Uruguay, won our hearts with their playful humour and touching interpretation of an apocalyptic state where two souls are literally fighting for a drop of water. Their play Rio ran to a packed house at Adishakti for The Remembering Veenapani Festival. The children were in splits, so were the adults. We gasped in marvel seeing the two deliver acrobatic feats, laughed at their per-

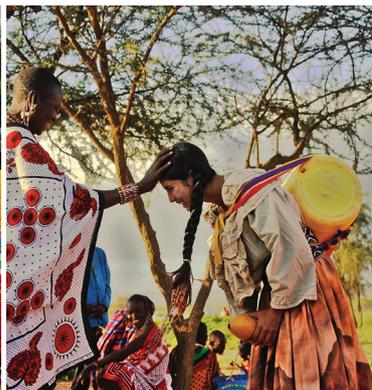
fect comic timing, exaggerated gestures and terrific rhythm in their movements and gestures.

Some of their ideas for the play stemmed from their travel experiences in Kenya. "We were living with a community there,

and initially everything was going well and nice. There was enough rainwater, and everyday it was raining and everyone was nice to each other and happy. Then suddenly the rains stopped. We weren't able to take bath everyday, we had to be careful of

how much water must be used for cooking and washing. And that divided people. After all, humanity is relative, isn't it? You can afford to be a good person when everything is fine," Betina says with a playful smile.

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## Concluding Notes

# The journey of a festival

Nimmy Raphael, the managing trustee and resident actor, writes

Photo: Saransh Agarwal

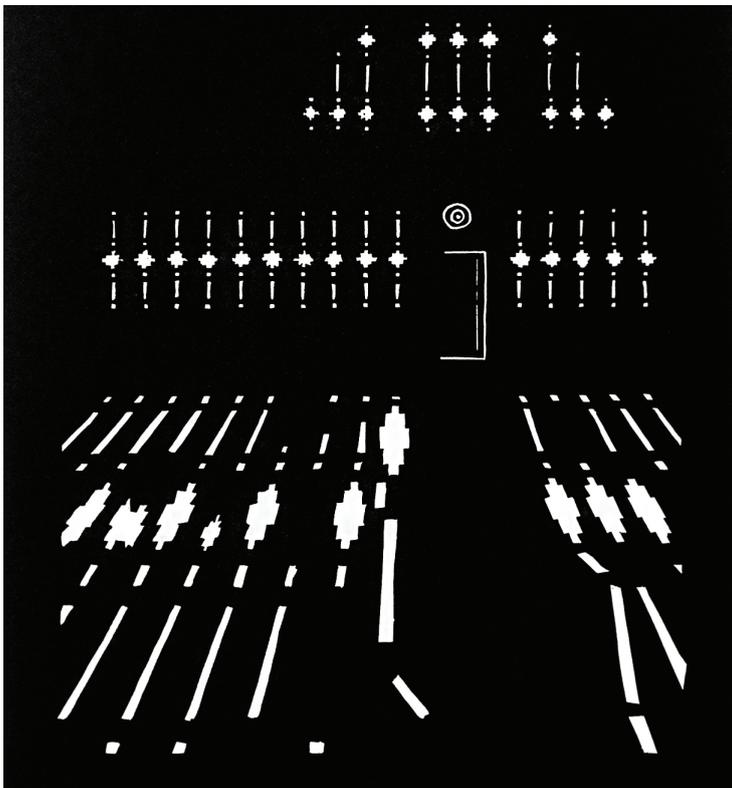
We have attempted to curate a one-month long festival this time. That's how it is different from the past editions. The festival was a spontaneous response we had when Veena-pani passed away to celebrate her work. When Vinay Kumar, the artistic director proposed it to a lot of artists, many came forward, and there was mutual understanding to celebrate her multi-disciplinary work. The natural extension was not to just have a theatre festival but also a performative arts festival. We have different kinds of creations that come for our festival.

The festival has gone through a lot of evolution; first we had it as a week-long festival and then a weekend festival for a month. However, as the festival grew, its name grew and its content grew, we managed to have a steady audience. But, what is different this time is that it is Adishakti's 40th year. We were also clear that it has to be celebrated because the world over ensemble is dying, and we have to celebrate the fact that a vision like Adishakti sustains, and that it sustains in the future. Therefore, 40 years is not a small step, and it's not just our dream, but other artists' dream to sustain this space as well.

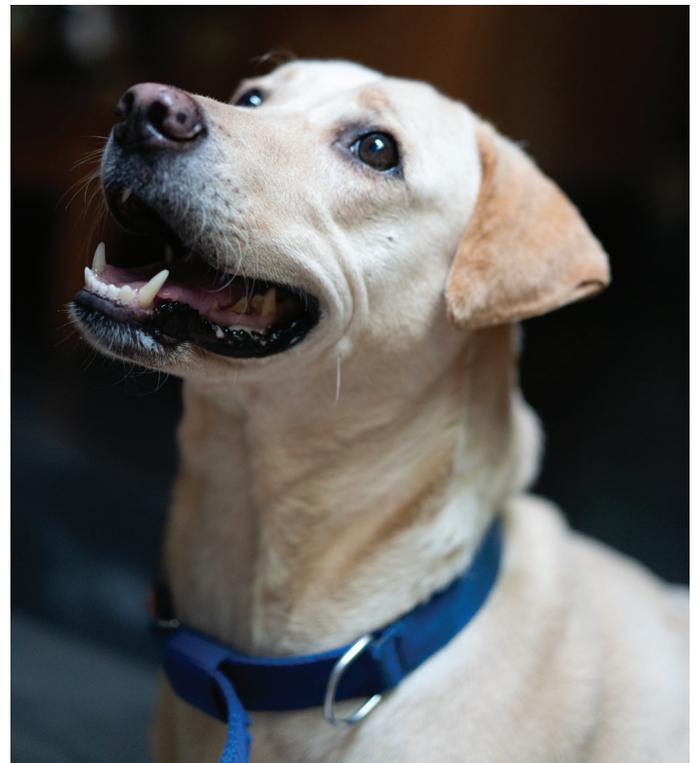
So, we thought of creating a festival where we showcase our work, which would be a natural thing to do and we had a retrospective. We also called Masters who we look up to, or who has had an association with Adishakti before. We also wanted to give the Master Class as a contribution to actors across the country who would benefit from the mastery of the masters. So, we held 14 days of



Masterclass and we had shows that came from all across the country. We have made it happen for one month. We did not think of it as an ambitious thing to do, it just felt very natural to do this. Was it challenging? We have an infrastructure that can hold a one-month festival, we have friends who helped us to make this happen, it wasn't really challenging. I think the challenging part only comes where our physical stamina is concerned and I think for now we are all good. It's also a pointer for us to know that we can hold a month-long festival in the future, and there is an open-minded audience who are responsive and sensitive and we are very proud to have them in the campus, and the performers have done exemplary work in showcasing their works. For now, fingers crossed, everything has gone smoothly.



## Paws Button



### Bumble's most viewed

Parshathy J Nath & Garima Mishra Photo: Spooky Yarbles

**Name:** Farishta, Naam Tho Suna Hoga

**Age:** Gracing always fully

**Official Occupation:**  
All Time Hogger of Adishakti

**Languages I speak:** Barkpuri, Woofayalam, Owwlugu

**Political views:** Anti-cuddler with a healthy mistrust in human kind.

**Profile:** Chicken chops lover. Mutton fry loyalist. Fish bones enthusiast. You will not forget me once you meet me, because I love your plate of chicken 65 more than you ever did.

**Relationship Status:** Don't want kids because I might have to share my bones.

**Perfect First Date:** Intimidate the species who walks on its hind legs.

**Quickest way to my heart:** Swipe Right to Earn My Bite

## Sketch Pen

### Through The Painter's Glass

Illustration by Malavika PC .

Our theatre as she sees it. A Linocut handprint made in a press close to the artist's heart. There was only one festival she couldn't attend in 2016. She wanted to be there and so made this print.

*“ Every image is a trigger for Drama, it is all about what makes you curious.”*

- Puja Sarup

# The father, daughter and the jolly clown

The Bard comes in the clown's garb to tell us a heartfelt tale

Rishabh Mittal

Photo: Saransh Agarwal

“Now, there's always something special about a play which gets recommended by people who have seen it before and can't wait for you to see it. A play which has gone through its infancy, adolescence and now you see the life it has taken. For me, 'Nothing Like Lear' was that. The play begins with a sea of people standing in a queue way before time they wanted the best seats. The chatter and movement slow down when Arvind Rane with his stylish red spectacles announces Vinay Pathak's name. There is a rousing applause.

When Pathak starts, he is not talking about anything in particular. Is this why it's called 'Nothing Like Lear'? I wondered. I can best describe it as: "chutkiyaan" because it was both snappy and witty. It gave a sense that you were starting a novel, where the writer is beginning the story with some digressions but the reader doesn't mind the amusement. Through the co-actor, our audience was loving listening to the apparent 'nothing', somehow pre-empting the Michelin star meal that is about to be served.

Why does Theatre have to be "Theaatré"? Vinay asks repeatedly with his clowning prowess. In my search of complimenting adjectives, I wanted to find a better word for energy but one has to personally witness the flowing, polished, vigorous movements that Pathak brought on stage. With just one suitcase and exaggerated makeup, he stitches visuals that tickle, sadden and engage. Time and again he disarms the audience with his fake search for a word, creating an equation carefully calculated and constructed.

The mystery



of how many people called their parents after the show remains unsolved. The actor made sure that we feel a tug in the gut and maybe even shed a tear in empathy for our parents who go through seemingly simple ignorance/avoidance one shows after a certain age. A theme so universal, our Uruguay friends in the audience might have made an international call. One wonders how much of this is Vinay and how much is Rajat.

I was told about 30 odd people had to be stopped outside the gate, so their FOMO lasted for about 100 minutes. Although this writer wishes it lasted for 80 minutes, but, hey, for some people its 'not to be'. I don't know Shakespeare and I don't care. I have seen Vinay Pathak and Rajat Kapoor and that counts for something, a lot of things if nothing.

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a fascist's regime, would circle around a square praying for their sons to come back. It's an evocative visual that inspired the two performers to incorporate into their work as well. "It is a ritual that came out of a need as a result of the dictatorship; their sons were kidnapped and thrown into the river... We take the river as one of the disappeared sons," says Andres.

As the two circled around, their eyes closed for what felt like either an eternity or a fraction of second, reminding us of the whirling dervishes, the mood in the hall changed from a jubilant one to reflective state. It was almost like a prayer for Nature to be restored, a shared apologetic expression by humanity for the way it has treated Nature and inflicted violence on its own kind so far. "Theatre is a ritual we can evolve to walk in the path of liberation and transformation," says Andres. And, truly, the audience that night left the theatre with their hopes for a better humanity, for a world filled with sensitivity, playfulness and abundant humour.

## Around the world ...

Parshathy J Nath Photo: Spooky Yarbles



But, there was something about the play that just wasn't about displaying skill sets. The last moment elevated the play to a depth, which made the audience completely silent. The idea of circling came from a visual they saw in Argentina, where mothers of disappeared sons, under

# Vigadan Jibes

The Blues after the storm

There is word doing the rounds that a mega virus has hit Adishakti. Audience members, organisers and performers are all showing chronic symptoms of experiencing sudden bouts of routine disorientation, popsicle melt-down, GPL exhaustion and race-against-3rd-bell spasms. What is to happen after the festival? Yours Truly, Vigadan proposes that the festival become a month long series to be aired on Netflix as a curative measure for this pandamania.



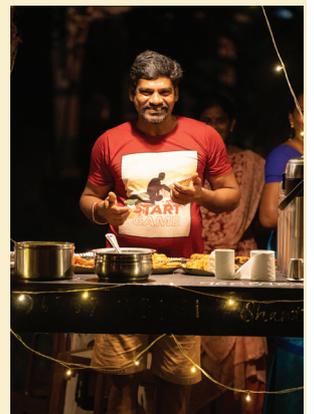
## Humans of Adishakti

### Less words, more flavour

Garima Mishra Photo: Saransh Agarwal

Suresh anna cooks with his heart, and his flavourful bajjis are a testimony for that. "Anna... you speak English?" I ask Suresh anna while he is waiting for the oil to go putu putu putu so he can fry his famous muttabajji at his bajji stall. "No English maa," he replies shaking the ladle in his hand. "Hindi...?" I ask again. "Only Tamil," he replies. "Anna, talk with gestures?" I am not going to give up easily.

He learnt cooking from watching his appa cook for wedding functions in



"A n seri okay," he laughs. We are going to talk in gestures and one word answers. Suresh anna is a full time care taker and part time chef. We are always his first customers or bohni makers. By now, anna has dropped the muttabajji in the hot oil and with the background music of putu puttutu we begin our rapid fire. "Anna family?" "One wife, two kids." "What age did you cook your first meal?" "Fourteen!" "What did you cook?" "Tamarind rice "Who tasted and what did they say?" "I only tasted, it was good," he replies.

his village. "Your favourite dish that your appa made?" "Chicken Biryani and laddoo," comes the response. Anna says the secret of making a good biryani is that the hands know how much salt to put, "so use fingers instead of using a spoon." Remembering Veenapani during this festival he said, "Veenapani I like!" He remembers that Veenapani got him a fresh chocolate cake once. "Why?" I asked. "Enakku Romba pudikkum (because I like it very much)," he smiles.

## Audience Review

## Little humans at work

Garima Mishra, while struggling to 'adult', is envious of the unfiltered excitement of the young audience at Kutti Illavarasan Photo: Spoozy Yarbles



I am here to file a complaint. It's urgent. An army of Kutti Pasangas claiming that they have come to watch the play Kutti Illavarasan stormed to Adishakti today at 6.30 pm. One moment it was all quiet, all of us 'the grown-ups' were on their phones, occasionally lifting our heads to talk about work or other 'important' stuff...it was all dull just how we like it. And the very next moment the Kutti Pasanga army, like an excited and curious troop of monkeys interrupted us with their high-pitched laughter, running around and rolling in the mud. One of them even asked me if I could push them on the

swing. It was bizarre. There was too much excitement for my age. I am 26 by the way, an adult, and swings don't excite me anymore. And why do they have so many questions? "What time will the play start?" "What are you doing on your phone?" "Who is Kutti Illavarasan?" asked one from the army while we were waiting for the play to start. "I know! He is someone with a lots of questions for grown-ups," replied another kid. I kept quiet like a good audience. The play began and the Kutti Pasanga army sat as close to the actors as possible like a 'chorus of curiosity'. Their mouths were wide open for the most of the play. I don't get these

little humans, if they didn't understand something, they would question about it in the middle of the play. Some of them slowly crawled on stage when they saw actors performing shadow puppetry to see what the actors are doing behind the screen. One little gentleman got up in the middle of the play scratching his head looking for his mother.

I am filing this complaint because I am worried these Little Humans just like the Little Prince (Kutti Illavarasan) are questioning everything and spreading joy and curiosity. I am a grown-up, I don't have time, and I have 'important' things to do.

**“As a storyteller you can give back people's money, you cannot give back their time. - Jeeva Raghunath**

## Performance Review

## Elephant out of the box

Sasidhar Kochariakota Photo: Spoozy Yarbles

It's rare to find a piece of work created with minimalistic objects to portray vast landscapes. The Elephant in the Room is one of those works. As she acts in the piece that she directed, she has a control on the vast landscape which is a delight to watch. In 80 minutes, Yuki takes us through the journey of Master Tusk (Ganesha) in search of his human head in a vast forest landscape.

In this journey he comes across various characters (nine to be exact), all brought to life by Yuki. To me, the play deals with the identity crisis of my generation and Yuki found the most unique and relatable Indian mythological narrative to dabble with this idea.

Yuki's vivid sense of space comes through the performance as she recreates different spaces of the forest, supported by the detailed zones created within the set constructed with geometric precision.



## Memory lane

## Gastronomia

Arvind Rane savours all those travel moments with Veenapani filled with delicious food

Whenever we were on tour, Veenapani had a singular obsession -- food. Luckily for us. For shorter trips to Bangalore and such likes, she used to pack the vehicle with goodies -- fresh croissants from the Auroville Bakery, kheema parathas, home-made sambar saadam or fish curry with idlis and



always, delectable desserts. Once when we went for a run of shows to Bangalore and were renting apartments there, we carried our chef with us, along with all the ingredients and vessels he needed. So throughout that trip we ate gourmet food every day -- all kinds of delicious meat and veg dishes, cooked in our own kitchen. Food excursions have always been the norm, whether we were in Bombay savouring Malvani food at Sindhudurg or we were in Berlin, feasting on white sausage and white beer. Wherever we went, she always sought out the best. Luckily, her successor, our present Artistic Director Vinay Kumar loves food himself and has happily carried that legacy forward. And that has become another ongoing philosophy at Adishakti -- work hard, play hard, rehearse like hell, but eat well.

The music and lights complement her seamless character transitions. Her postures and voice, played along with intricately designed costumes, define the characters instantly for us. We are with each character from the word go every time she metamorphoses into them.

Apart from the identity crisis, the play touches upon various aspects such as environmental issues, empathy and solidarity. And, she is a ball of energy on stage surprising you at every moment in the piece with her original performative interpretation of a familiar tale of mythology.