

Greetings from team MOPA!

The pandemic seems to have settled down comfortably in our midst, without a care for the agony, suspense and uncertainty it is causing in our lives. Yet, we need to move forward in the best way we can, given all the concerns, restrictions and rules.

This edition of our newsletter marks the start of the 2nd year since its launch. Based on feedback from some of our readers, we have tweaked the design and layout a bit. A heartfelt thanks to all our loyal readers for their continued support and interest in our activities.

Enough is being said about the pandemic as it is. So, in this edition, we decided to focus on individuals who have chosen unique ways to express their interest and passions in the performing arts.

If you wish to contribute to our Newsletter, please email: mopafoundation@gmail.com. Articles will be published under the editor's discretion, in keeping with MOPA's guidelines.

For updates and notifications about MOPA's activities, do join our mailing list.



Savita Narasimhan
Director – MOPA



LIVING THROUGH A PANDEMIC: art and the human spirit



MUSEUM OF PERFORMING ARTS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

SAVITA NARASIMHAN

Director- MOPA

With no end in sight to the pandemic, the government has thrown open most activities and businesses to get the staggering economy back on its wobbling feet.

Except educational and cultural institutions and activities, almost everything is up and running as before. That said, schools and colleges are continuing classes online. One wonders what the plight of the performing art community will be, with no existing avenues for expression and absolutely no support systems, either private or government-aided. It shows a pathetic lack of attention given to this rather large sector – a stark irony, coming from a country that celebrates its rich cultural legacy – or at least pretends to.

Today's reality is that one needs to be comfortable with technology to survive in an urban setting. Skype, Zoom, Hangout are the new classrooms. And a good network connection, laptop, smart phone or Ipad have become the new 'basics'. So how do artistes manage if they are not familiar with gadgetry or the digital space? Sabhas have hosted artistes for nearly a century now. Has there been any attempt by any Sabha to reach out to artistes, to help in any way possible? Financial viability is a grave concern. Reliant on ticket sales and corporate sponsorships to maintain viability, most halls may find it cheaper to simply stay closed.

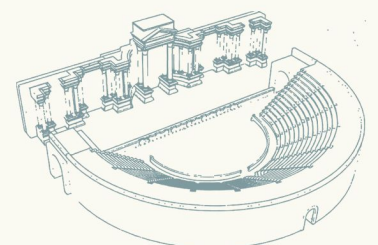
There have been several private organisations fundraising in various ways, but there is no proper system with a registered artiste base with an assurance of monetary support during such times. Maybe it is time to begin thinking along these lines. The pandemic has proved beyond doubt that life is uncertain, and the whole world may be brought to a staggering halt overnight.

Nevertheless, we are survivors by instinct. The pandemic has not robbed us of our spirit to find a creative vent and keep going. There have been several experiments by individual artistes and organisations in the digital space. From stand-alone performances to whole festivals, the online platform has seen a huge surge in activity in the last 7 months. Whether these are here to stay or are stop-gap arrangements till the situation eases up, is for time to tell. And there is the ongoing debate amongst fans and sceptics as to the quality of these programs, but that is another story!

The performing arts make for an interesting space, especially in today's world. No longer is it as simple as a performer and an audience consuming the art. For long, artistes have experimented with their art and how it is presented. There are many more ways to engage with the arts and several novel experiments are on, with people bringing in their own expertise, ideas and creativity into the performing arts. This newsletter features two such individuals who have been working in their own unique ways to make an impact on the performing arts. One uses his passion for optimal sound in experiments to enhance the tonal quality of Carnatic music performances for both the artiste as well as the audience. The other brings her background in management into a relatively and unexplored aspect in Carnatic music – namely, art management.

Kudos to the human spirit.

Savita Narasimhan is a Carnatic vocalist, teacher and painter, passionately interested in Indian folk art and craft.



Preparing Artistes for a Post COVID World

SHREYA NAGARAJAN SINGH

Arts Management consultant



I put down the phone after cancelling 6 programs with traditional folk artists, planned for the summer of 2020. A difficult decision, as they were already a vulnerable population. That is when it occurred to me that this was an opportunity to unite artists across genres and produce a music video as a statement of solidarity using the arts. That is how the 'United to Heal - Coronavai Jayippom' collaboration between Silambattam, Parai, Bharatanatyam and Gana artists was born in March. The video, presented by Chennai UCCN and produced by Aanmajothi, is a source of strength for many even today.

As arts business consultants and managers, we are in a unique position to help prepare for the future and use this time to build skill, awareness and systems. We realized early on that artists had the time and interest to develop new skills and that is how we conceived the FOR THE FUTURE workshop series on Zoom. We have completed 10 workshops so far and connected with artists, arts administrators and practitioners from all over the world through our platform to build community and develop global solidarity. Our topics were - Goal Setting through the Futures Framework, Fundraising in the Arts, 5 Ways to Build a Successful Sponsorship Proposal, Leadership in Times of Change, Basics of Financial Planning for Artists, Audience Building in the Arts, Archiving in the Performing Arts, Pro-tips for going LIVE, and Dance Reflections - the Art of Self-Critiquing. Our upcoming workshops are about Art & Law and Learning 'Unlearning' coming up in October and November, 2020. Our [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) pages are the best spots to look out for these announcements, in case one wants to register.

Another key initiative of ours was the 'WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?' series on our social media platforms hosted by the SNS Team in Chennai, Mumbai and Chicago. We have spoken to 38 guests who are arts practitioners, donors, entrepreneurs, managers, academics, founders and technicians across the globe, from Trinidad and Tobago to Bulgaria, about the current scenario in their geographical location and how they were problem solving. We also spoke to leaders like Amrit Gill, Head of International Development - Australia Council for the Arts, Jonathan Kennedy, Head of Arts - British Council, Anuradha Behari, Founder - EOI Festival, Chicago to name a few. We are on our 3rd edition of 'What happens Next?' that metamorphosed into a fundraiser and we are delighted to share that we have so far raised about Rs 1.5 lakhs for our guests of Edition 3. All these conversations and highlights are available on our [YouTube Channel](#). *(contd...)*




(contd...)

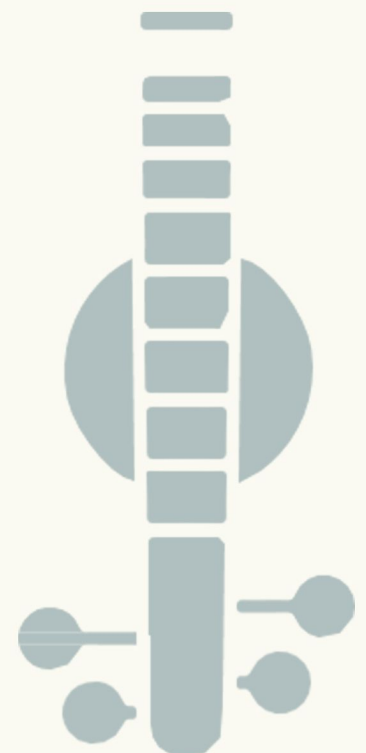
So what did we learn from this series?

1. Artists are seeking to identify new streams to generate revenue. A popular platform is Patreon in the US. Sometimes even platforms like Paytm or Gpay work well as tipping jars are helpful, if you are performing for free. Also, one should try NOT to perform for free, but that is a separate topic.
2. We are striving hard to get back to the pre-COVID 'normal', but should we get back to normal, when it was a problem to start with? How can we use this time to mould the future into a better place than the past?
3. As for fundraising and non-profits, this is the time to be engaged with your donors, continue to strengthen relationships with all stakeholders and ensure everyone is aligned with your mission.
4. It is important we recognize our privilege and help those who are struggling around us. Also, collaboration is strength, evident now more than ever. It is imperative we get through this together as a community.

We urge artists to use this time to think deeper about their audience, their art, its relevance and its position in a post COVID world.

A large, abstract watercolor splash in shades of blue and teal occupies the bottom left corner of the page.

Shreya is a Chennai-based arts management consultant who shapes artistes' careers even as they shape their art.



MAHESH VENKATESWARAN

MadRasana

I like to plan everything ahead of time. Be it in professional career or in life. As a result i devised a 25-25-25 plan - 25 years to learn, 25 years to earn and 25 years to have fun! I quit my corporate life near my 50th year and chose to spend my time and effort on things I am passionate about, to look at the unfamiliar (to me) music industry and see if I could make an impact - to Carnatic music in particular.

Through the first year I attended many concerts and Sabha-hopped during the December music season. I also met a lot of artistes to get an idea of their mindset and how the whole industry works. I was fascinated. One thing stood out - but for a few venues, the listening experience was not great. I felt I could enjoy the music more if the holistic experience of space, visuals and sound could be enhanced. Thus was born MadRasana in April 2016, a personal project to enjoy classical music the way I liked to experience it.

Our goal was a simple one - to create an intimate experience between artists, listeners and the art form. We also wanted the experience to be new in all respects - from the ambience to the presentation and the audio - not just to the listeners but also to the artists.

For the first year we presented the MadRasana Garden Concert - Carnatic concerts in a garden setting. We also took the first step of removing monitor speakers for the singers. Speakers were only for the audience. Artists had to sing naturally without any amplification. After a brief period there was an auto volume correction and the music produced was a very organic sound. Artistes loved the experience and the audience felt a difference in what they heard. These concerts were intimate with just 50 to 60 people in the audience.

Next we decided to go one step forward and bring the art to the living rooms with pristine audio-visual quality. We started MadRasana Unplugged on our own YouTube channel - a short, single song, one artist, and the tambura. These were recorded in full 4K resolution with great audio mix. The idea of this format was to reach a global audience too. Till date we have featured 50+ artistes on the channel (<https://www.youtube.com/c/madrasanaofficial>).



MadRasana Garden Concerts- Vishnudev Namboothiri

Taking a step forward, we started MadRasana Stage concerts. We did not pick the 'typical' stage where Carnatic concerts are held. To maintain the idea of highlighting only the art and artistes, we removed backdrops and banners, only focusing lights on the artistes. We decided to try something special during the December season.

(contd....)



MadRasana Unplugged - Charumathi Raghuraman

MadRasana Stage Concerts
- Ramakrishnan Murthy



MadRasana Festival -
Bharat Sundar at Sathyam Cinemas

(Contd...)

We were careful not to do what others were doing and wanted to ensure a brand new experience for both artists and audience. The idea fell in place with the first MadRasana Festival in 2018 at Sathyam Cinemas. We used one of their state-of-art theaters and constructed a stage, using the big screen to screen a few of the Unplugged videos and had live concerts. The novel ambience of the theater, the acoustic treatment and the comfortable chairs combined to create a very unique experience for everybody.

Thanks to media coverage and our growing reputation for superior audio-visual quality, we got introduced to several people who pushed us to technologies that had not yet been attempted for Carnatic music. In 2019 we ventured into binaural and ambisonic sounds for Carnatic music, as well as 360 video. We produced 6 albums in this series titled MadRasana Workout Sessions. The idea was to have artists seated in the middle of the hall, facing each other. We removed monitor speakers as well as amplification for the audience. We invited 50 of them to sit as close as possible around the artists. We used ambisonic soundscape, giving output from the music console to the audience, who then used their own headphones to listen to the concert sitting right next to the artists. The 360 camera output combined with the soundscape gives a very immersive experience when you watch the concert using a VR headset. The audience loved it.

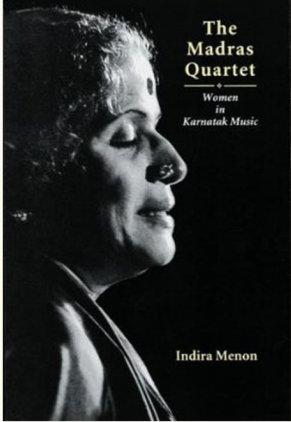
We plan to explore newer technologies that can enhance the experience. Given the current situation, we are looking into ways by which virtual concerts can be experienced as a parallel format and not as a replacement of stage concerts. We are currently working with a US company to create the platform. We are also looking at new content focused on master classes by experts and also e-courses for lovers of music and students. We are exploring audio technology to listen to live concerts using your own phone and headphones - so every seat in the auditorium will get the best possible audio.



MadRasana Workout Session - Sandeep Narayan

Our biggest asset is our followers. We have a MadRasana Closed Group on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/madrasana-closedgroup>) with about 800 members, a great mix of music lovers and musicians. We use their feedback to create new content. We have a whatsapp group (<http://bit.ly/MadRasanaNotify>) which we use to communicate about MadRasana projects. We are on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/madrasana/>) and Twitter (@madrasana). What started as a hobby has opened up a huge potential to explore new possibilities to experience this art form. We want to be a brand that stays between the artists and the audience.

Mahesh puts his obsessive passion for optimal sound to good use - to enhance the sound quality of a Carnatic music performance.



The Madras Quartet: Women in Karnatak Music by Indira Menon

Indira Menon brings her own training and deep interest in Carnatic music into this milestone of a book on the lives of four women vocalists of the 20th century – M.S. Subbulakshmi, T. Brinda, D.K. Pattammal and M.L. Vasantakumari. As it traces their careers as outstanding artistes with their own distinct styles, the book also highlights their struggle to establish themselves at par with their male counterparts and consequently, the key role they played in the emancipation of women in a conservative, conformist and patriarchal society.



MOPA would like to thank everybody who contributed to this newsletter:

**Mahesh Venkateswaran, Shreya Nagarajan Singh, Savita Narasimhan - articles
Karthik Gowrisankar - newsletter design**

Disclaimer:

The articles contained in this newsletter are views/observations of the respective authors. Every effort is made to provide accurate information in our newsletters. MOPA makes no claims or guarantees about the accuracy, completeness, or adequacy of the contents of the newsletters. All rights reserved. No part of the newsletters may be reproduced, transmitted or copied in any form or by any means without the prior written consent of MOPA.