

7-2015

The enablers of the Indian Performing Arts: Government, media, the Indian High Commission, donors and event managers

Chitra VARAPRASAD

Uma RAJAN

Shankar RAJAN

Seshan RAMASWAMI

Singapore Management University, rama@smu.edu.sg

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lkcsb_research

Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#), [South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Citation

VARAPRASAD, Chitra; RAJAN, Uma; RAJAN, Shankar; and RAMASWAMI, Seshan. The enablers of the Indian Performing Arts: Government, media, the Indian High Commission, donors and event managers. (2015). *Kala Manjari: 50 Years of Indian Classical Music and Dance in Singapore*. 166-184. Research Collection Lee Kong Chian School Of Business.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lkcsb_research/5386

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Kong Chian School of Business at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Collection Lee Kong Chian School Of Business by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email libIR@smu.edu.sg.

Published in Kala Manjari: 50 Years of Indian classical music and dance in Singapore, 2015, pp. 166-184.



CHAPTER 9

THE ENABLERS OF THE INDIAN PERFORMING ARTS: GOVERNMENT, MEDIA, THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION, DONORS AND EVENT MANAGERS

DR. CHITRA VARAPRASAD, DR. UMA RAJAN, SHANKAR RAJAN
AND DR. SESHAN RAMASWAMI ¹

Arts institutions and artistes thrive in an ecological system of supporters and facilitators. They enable artistes to focus their attention and energy on practice and teaching of the art forms and on creating new productions. They enable institutions to slowly grow and attain

self-sustainability in the long run by subsidising expenses on housing, productions, and fees of visiting artistes. They also provide a platform for students to perform and to improve through competition. Students also benefit from scholarships for advanced study. In this chapter, we describe



briefly the roles played by various enablers of Indian performing art forms over the last five decades. Various parts of the Singapore government have been major enablers, helping artistes and arts institutions with grants and housing support, organising competitions (such as the National Music competitions and the Singapore Youth Festival) and funding arts related research and travel. The media (press, radio, television and increasingly online media) is an integral part of the music and dance scene. The High Commission of India has been a significant source of support, throughout the five decades, but especially in the 1970s, as the official representative of the Indian government in Singapore. There are also many individuals and corporate donors who have played a vital role in financing artistic productions. More recently, the Indian performing arts field has been enhanced by the launch of event management companies, which both bring in big productions from overseas, and provide technical and professional support to local organisers of Indian classical music and dance events.

Enablers such as the temples have been covered in a separate chapter, while some other institutional supporters such as the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore have been described elsewhere in the book.

THE GOVERNMENT

Three specific government and quasi-government departments deserve particular mention, the National Arts Council, the Ministry of Education and the People's Association.

THE NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

The focus of Singapore's early years of independence was clearly on urban, economic and educational development. The new government had greater priorities in housing, schools, job creation and economic well-being. The focus on arts and culture came much later in the form of a landmark report in 1989 led by former President, then Deputy Prime Minister, Ong Teng Cheong. This report of the

Advisory Council provided the basis and a boost for nurturing cultural identity and artistic development.

It believed in a tripartite approach with the government, corporate and civic organisations and the public working in unison. In short, it provided focus and direction.

Subsequent efforts have developed based on the fundamentals established in this report. The reports by the National Arts Council which drew upon this report are the Renaissance City Plan in three phases: Phase 1 in 2000, Phase 2 in 2005 and Phase 3 in 2015. The need to strengthen the Singaporean identity and national unity with the onset of globalisation resulted in the 2012 Arts and Culture Strategic Review.

As an outcome of the 1989 report, the National Arts Council was formed on 15 October 1991 from the amalgamation of the Singapore Cultural Foundation, Cultural Division of Ministry of Community Development, Festival of Arts Secretariat and the National Theatre Trust. It has been extremely supportive in promoting and sustaining the Indian performing arts in many ways, especially through its arts spaces and grants framework.

The National Arts Council has helped Indian performing artistes and institutions in the following ways:

- Arts housing scheme
- Arts grants – to individual projects and seed grants to institutions
- The biennial National Indian Music competition
- Recognition of veteran and young artistes through honours supplemented by cash awards
- Arts Education programme

The Arts Housing Scheme

Rising real estate costs in Singapore over the years have made it prohibitively expensive for arts institutions to survive, with a large proportion of the funds raised through fees, memberships and donations going towards rentals. Also, not having

¹ The authors acknowledge the contributions of P.S. Somasekharan and Sarita Alurkar-Sriram to this chapter. The authors also acknowledge the assistance of several other artistes and administrators interviewed for the Government section of this chapter including Santha Bhaskar, Dr S. T. Kasinathan, Kavitha Krishnan, V. Ramkumar, Nirmla Seshadri, and Gayatri Sriram.

a stable base has meant that arts groups have had to move from time to time, disrupting teaching activities and creating a constant sense of instability. The Arts Housing Scheme was implemented in 1985. Its main purpose was to give arts groups and artistes a subsidised home within which they could develop their activities and thereby contribute to an active Singapore arts scene. A review of the Arts Housing Scheme was conducted at the start of 2010 which included extensive consultations with stakeholders from the people, public and private sectors. After a 12-month review period, the Framework for Arts Spaces was developed.

Three major Indian cultural institutions, SIFAS, Nriyalaya Aesthetics Society and Apsaras Arts have benefited tremendously from this scheme.

From temporary homes in an apartment on St. Michael's Road, to locations in Branksome and Bournemouth Roads, and then to the former Rumah

Miskin Police Station, SIFAS has now been housed for the last two decades and longer at its current premises on Starlight Road.

Nriyalaya Aesthetics Society moved from the Ceylon Tamil Association under the auspices of Kamala Club to the National Theatre Club. Based on NAC's Framework for Arts Spaces, it moved to Telok Ayer Performing Arts Centre (TAPAC) first and finally to Stamford Arts Centre on Waterloo Street.

Apsaras Arts was given Arts Housing by NAC at TAPAC, based on subsidised rent. In 2011, it moved to Goodman Arts Centre under another arts housing scheme. Aravinth Kumarasamy, the creative director of Apsaras Arts says, "We could organise dedicated space for our wardrobe, spaces for classes and rehearsals, and for the first time a proper office with administrative staff. This allowed us to operate in a professional set-up. With the Arts Housing in place we were able to create more



Bhaskar's Arts Academy premises, subsidised by the Arts Housing Scheme



dance productions, host in-residence artistes and provide opportunities for Singaporean talent to perform more regularly.”

N. Subramaniam, a former committee member at SIFAS, says, “NAC’s initiative took SIFAS to a new level altogether. SIFAS could now boast of having its own home, and this resulted in an increase in student numbers, new courses were added, and the reputation of the institution received a boost. This inspired the Management Committee and other Committees to become more professional in their deliberations and an air of confidence could be seen in the way the Society was managed.”



With the Arts Housing in place we were able to create more dance productions, host- in-residence artistes and provide opportunities for Singaporean talent to perform more regularly.



Grants

Almost all major institutions, smaller independent institutions and artistes have benefited from periodic grants awarded by the NAC for staging productions, and for travelling overseas for performances and conferences.

V. Raghuraman of Alapana Arts says, “These performance grants certainly help organisations project themselves better. NAC’s support for such arts events instills a higher sense of responsibility to produce the best possible show, benefiting both artistes and organisations.”

Another recipient, Anuja Varaprasad, a Bharatanatyam dancer and a SIFAS alumna is one of them. She says, “These grants signify that the state supports the arts, and more importantly, that the state recognises the different and diverse types of art forms in Singapore’s culture.”

Sai Akileshwar, an alumnus of the Temple of Fine Arts and SIFAS, shares his sentiments about the benefits of the NAC postgraduate scholarship, “I studied Masters in Rhythmology at the University of Madras. The scholarship was invaluable in making my studies financially viable. By being in the heart of the Carnatic music world in Chennai, I have benefited tremendously, not only through performances but also by observing other performers. It also helped me realise that the best talents in Singapore are not far off from the best in Chennai, and that gives me tremendous hope and confidence.”

As documented in the Outside the ‘Big 4’ chapter, many independent artistes and institutions have also benefited tremendously from travel and performance grants. Notably, performance companies like Chowk and Maya Dance Theatre have received seed grants that gave them the base to hire administrative staff and the financial breathing space to attempt to build stable and sustainable companies.

National Indian Music Competition

The National Arts Council organises the biennial National Indian Music competition. A platform to identify potential musical talents, the competition also enables musicians in Singapore to develop their performing skills, raise their musical standards, and



These grants signify that the state supports the arts, and more importantly, that the state recognises the different and diverse types of art forms in Singapore’s culture.



provide opportunities for musicians to perform in a competitive environment. The entire list of winners of this biennial competition since the first edition in 1998 is documented in the appendix.

Eminent judges are invited from India to assess

the participants and adjudicate. Over the years, these have included renowned artistes such as N. Ravikiran, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, S. Sowmya, Bombay Jayashri, Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar, Neyveli Santhanagopalan, Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan, Mannargudi Easwaran, Srimushnam Raja Rao, Jayanthi Kumaresh and Sriram Parasuram. Over the years, the number of categories and genres have increased. The increasing number of students of Hindustani music has seen the recent introduction of Hindustani vocal music as the latest new genre in the 2014 edition of the competition, which attracted 182 entries across all categories.

Nishanth Thiagarajan, a Carnatic vocalist and a recent winner says of the competition, "It attracts musicians from all across Singapore and allowed me to meet people in the field beyond just those local musicians whom I know. In doing so, it establishes a sense of awareness of the music scene in Singapore at large, as it is rare that musicians gather for any other purpose. Furthermore, the judges told us what we did well and what we did not, and learning from them through the master-class session is always a delight."

Honours and Awards

The Cultural Medallion was instituted in March 1979 as an initiative of former President Ong Teng Cheong. The award recognises individuals who have attained artistic excellence in the fields of dance, theatre, music, literature, photography, art and film. The Cultural Medallion is presented by the President, Republic of Singapore and administered by the National Arts Council. The Young Artist Award was introduced in 1992 to encourage the



The Indian Music Competition establishes a sense of awareness of the music scene in Singapore at large, as it is rare that musicians gather for any other purpose.



Nishanth Thiagarajan, winner of the NAC Indian Music Competition, in a SIFAS concert accompanied by Sai Akileshwar (mridangam) and Shreya Gopi (violin), 2014



Thanks to the influence of the NAC grant, an outlook of reaching out to other Asian art forms is reflected in my new works, even as I stay rooted to traditions of the Indian classical music.



development of young artistic talents in Singapore. The award is accorded to young artistes who have shown promise of artistic excellence.

As documented in the Chronology in the Appendix, three Indian artistes have thus far been awarded the Cultural Medallion: dance pioneers Madhavi Krishnan, Neila Sathyalingam and Santha Bhaskar. Young Artist Awards have been won by veena artiste and composer Aravinth Kumarasamy, flautist and composer Ghanavenothan Retnam, dancers Nirmala Seshadri and Veshnu Thamizhvanan and tabla player Nawaz Mirajkar.

The honours also come with cash awards that can be used for new creative productions and ventures. Neila Sathyalingam used the funds to stage a mega production Sivagami with more than 75 artistes participating. Santha Bhaskar used her award for a project, “Rasa and Dhwani”, setting local poems in all the four languages of Singapore to Indian dance.

Flautist Ghanavenothan Retnam, winner of the Young Artist Award used his grant to study Thai music at the Fine Arts Department, National Theatre, Thailand and the Cultural Centre in Bangkok, the study of Indonesian music at the prestigious Fakultas Seni Pertunjukan – Institute of Seni Yogyakarta, and the study of Applied Indian Music at the Music Academy, Chennai. He says, “Thanks to the influence of the NAC grant, an outlook of reaching out to other Asian art forms is reflected in my new works, even as I stay rooted to traditions of Indian classical music.”

Arts Education Programme

The National Arts Council Arts Education Programme (NAC-AEP) was devised to help expose students to a wide variety of high quality art performances. The programme primarily consists of a database of quality arts education programmes. Thanks to the Tote Board Arts Grant, schools which purchase programmes from the NAC-AEP can receive up to a 50% subsidy on the programme cost. This helps students attend performances at a highly subsidised cost and also allows arts groups to tap into a new audience segment. The hope is that some proportion of these students would develop into a stable adult audience with a life-long interest in the arts. Many Indian institutions such as the Temple of Fine Arts, Rhythms Aesthetics Society, Apsaras Arts and Bhaskar’s Arts Academy are regular presenters in this programme.

We conclude this section with insights from some previous NAC chairpersons. Professor Tommy Koh, the first Chairman of the NAC, appointed in 1991, says he has a great affinity for the Indian performing arts, “I have always loved Indian classical music and dance. When I was a university student, I would often attend such performances. I also loved the films of Satyajit Ray and the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. You could say that, culturally, I am an honorary Indian!”

As Chairman, he reached out to all the cultural institutions and groups in Singapore, including the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society (SIFAS). He says, “I encouraged SIFAS in its important mission of promoting Indian fine arts, especially music and dance. I helped them in their fund raising activities and in securing housing for the group. I also encouraged SIFAS to cross racial boundaries and to encourage non-Indians to enjoy Indian music and dance. Culture should unite us and not divide us.”



You could say that, culturally, I am an honorary Indian! ... Culture should unite us and not divide us.

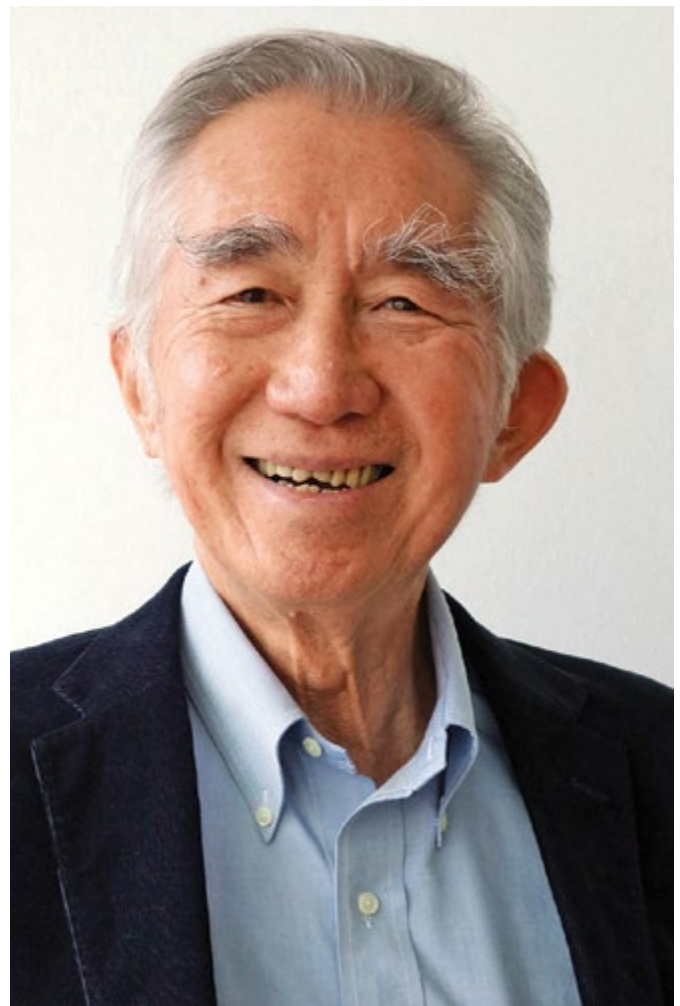




Prof Tommy Koh (third from left), alongside Cao Peng, conductor of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and Ravi Shankar after a concerto at the Singapore Conference Hall in June, 1995

Dr. Liu Thai Kher, the second Chairman of the NAC says, “Multi ethnicity is our national personality and an asset to be developed. This is one way, perhaps, to strengthen the Singaporean identity and national unity.” He remembers that his father, a painter, who was interested in all artistic traditions, enrolled his sister in Indian dance classes. Dr. Liu says he also admires how for Indians in general and for Singaporean Indians in particular, the arts are seamlessly woven into daily life, from classical musicians performing in temples, and the henna arts used at weddings, to the way in which homes are decorated artistically. He believes that this is a great model for how the arts should be integrated into every Singaporean’s life, and to not just remain an occasional intrusion into life through a visit to an arts event or gallery.

Another former CEO of the NAC, Benson Pua, currently the CEO of the Esplanade Theatres on the Bay advocates the importance of strong fundamentals. According to him, “It is insufficient to have a brushing and fleeting understanding of classics. Artistes need patience and a long period of apprenticeship and training before they can innovate. NAC tries to balance these two needs to be modern and relevant to today’s world. This was the reason why NAC was initially pushing to



Dr. Liu Thai Ker, second Chairman of the NAC



invest in facilities and administrative structure so the schools' structures are sound and they can perpetuate their practice and systematise it."

THE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION

The People's Association (PA) was established in Singapore as a statutory board on 1 July 1960 to promote racial harmony and social cohesion. Its mission is to build and bridge communities in achieving "one people, one Singapore."

PA offers a wide range of programmes to cater to Singaporeans from all walks of life, connecting people to people and people to government. Its work is done through its network of 1,800 grassroots organisations, over 100 Community Clubs, five Community Development Councils, the National Youth Council, and many more such networks.

S. Chandra Das, ex-Member of Parliament for 16 years and an outstanding businessman in the Singapore Indian community for over 40

years, started the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA), helped start the Indian Activities Groups (IAGs) in the Community Centres and persuaded People's Association to start an Indian Orchestra in 1985. He was also instrumental in helping to secure housing for SIFAS both at Rumah Miskin Police Station in Balestier Road and later, in Starlight Road.

The Indian Activity Executive Committees (IAECs) of the PA organise cultural, educational, social, recreational and sporting activities to promote mutual respect and harmonious relations between Indians and other communities. The Indian Activity Executive Committees Council or Narpani Pearavai is the co-ordinating body for the IAECs. Narpani Pearavai was formed in 1987 with the objective of co-ordinating the activities of the IAECs, currently numbering 95 across the island. The Pearavai organises many events annually at the constituency, district and national levels.

Indian cultural activities include the conducting of



S. Chandra Das, addressing the audience at SIFAS Annual Day event at Drama Centre in October 1985. Also on stage, (from left) Shashi Lal Kashyap, Dr. S.T. Kasinathan, Prof. Tommy Koh and P. Selvadurai



Kokila Rajan (left) at the SIFAS Festival reception desk, 2009

varying genres of music and dance classes and the holding of cultural shows at the different community centres during Indian festive occasions like Pongal, Indian New Year and Deepavali.

Chandra Das says, “I started the IAGs more for a social and educational cause to get the wayward youth in Singapore to have a structure in their lives and to move forward in their lives. Culture did not take a front position. But over the years, the IAGs have got into the cultural act and are making slow but steady progress.”

Kokila Rajan, who worked for almost three decades at the People’s Association, and is also a veteran committee member at SIFAS, remembers several Singaporean dancers and musicians who benefited from the arrangements at the Community Centres for teaching Indian music and dance. She remembers, “In the 1980s, the fees used to be very reasonable, something like \$36 for twelve sessions, with the fees being shared in a 70:30 ratio between the teacher and the PA. Fees have certainly gone up, over the years, but remain very affordable because there is no fixed rental cost to be borne by the teachers.”

Her duties at the PA included helping recruiting teachers for these classes in the CCs and managing the administration of the Orchestra. These heavily subsidised music and dance classes have been a great boon for both students to be initiated into these art forms, at convenient locations, and for beginning teachers to develop a base of students and to develop their teaching skills.

As documented in the Outside the ‘Big 4’, chapter, artistes such as musician M.R. Lenin, and dancers V. Balakrishnan, Usharani Maniam, Vasantha Kasinath and the Kesavan sisters all had thriving professional teaching careers at various CCs across the nation. Another beneficiary of this scheme was the late Carnatic vocal teacher, K.S. Ganapathy. Kokila has also seen the PA Indian Orchestra raise its standards over the years into its fine current avatar as the SIOC.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Students of the arts in local schools eagerly look forward to the Singapore Youth Festival (SYF), supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Launched on 18 July 1967 by then President Yusof



Ishak, today it has 40,000 students participating in the months between April and July. The Indian dance category sees the students, teachers and the choreographers working hard. The judges are drawn from a pool of eminent local dancers and choreographers, supplemented by invited overseas judges.



In the 1980s, the fees used to be very reasonable, something like \$36 for twelve sessions, with the fees being shared in a 70:30 ratio between the teacher and the PA. Fees have certainly gone up, over the years, but remain very affordable because there is no fixed rental cost to be borne by the teachers.



At the most recent edition in 2015, the judges were Ajith Bhaskaran Dass (Suvarna Arts, Malaysia), Dr. Urmimala Sarkar (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India), and from Singapore, Dr. Siri Rama, Sanjit Lal (SIFAS) and Neewin Hershall (Nrityalaya). In the past, judges have included Dr. Uma Rajan, Neila Sathyalingam, Santha Bhaskar, Nirmala Seshadri, Mohana Harendran, V. Balagurunathan (India) and Meenakshy Bhaskar (US).

Dr. Siri Rama, who has been a judge at the SYF competitions since 2007 and presented a paper “The Role of Bharatanatyam in the SYF” at the recent International Bharatanatyam conference in Singapore, says the event used to draw a much larger number of schools, even over a hundred. In the most recent edition in 2015, 29 schools participated. She says, “Most of the choreographers are trained in Bharatanatyam and it is commendable that the MOE regularly organises workshops conducted by experienced dance Gurus to raise the standards of training and choreography of these teachers.



SYF dancers from Methodist Girls School, who won a “Distinction” under the supervision of Sreedevy Viju-Pany (second row, extreme right in white salwar), 2015



Judges at the SYF at NUS UCC, flanked by MOE officials Peter Gn and Yam Boon Fong; from left, Dr. Siri Rama, Santha Bhaskar, Dr. Uma Rajan, Neila Sathyalingam and Ajith Bhaskaran Dass, 2007

Also impressive are the painstaking efforts taken to ensure that the judging of the competition is as objective, unbiased and consistent as possible.”

The immense effort results in some captivating performances in terms of dance quality costumes and choreography. Lavanya Ramesh, Indian dance instructor with secondary schools and junior colleges, says about the lasting impact of the SYF, “Students continue to dance even after the competition. Depending on the teacher-in-charge, they get to perform at different spaces and venues outside the SYF (i.e. inter-school competitions, CCs, national events etc) which encourages students to continue engaging with the art form.”

At the tertiary level too, performing arts are encouraged. For example, at the National University of Singapore, there is the Centre for the Arts (CFA) which was founded in 1993 with Professor

“

It is commendable that the MOE regularly organises workshops conducted by experienced dance Gurus to raise the standards of training and choreography of these teachers. Also impressive are the painstaking efforts taken to ensure that the judging of the competition is as objective, unbiased and consistent as possible.

”



Neila Sathyalingam, being congratulated for ten consecutive years of Distinction awards at the SYF, 1993

Edwin N. Thumboo as its founding Chairman and Director. The Centre aims to build knowledge and nurture an inquiring spirit through various art forms. It supports numerous students' art groups. One of NUS's longest existing dance companies, NUS Indian Dance Group was established in 1977. Under the guidance of its Artistic Director and Resident Choreographer, Santha Bhaskar, NUS Indian Dance mainly focuses on three different styles of Indian dance, Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Bollywood dance. The ability of the dancers varies, but its warm welcoming environment allows dancers to grow and learn. The demanding training sessions aim at maintaining high standards of performance, for dancers to not only hone their dance skills, but to also develop a deeper sense of self-confidence and cultural identity through their exploration of contemporary and classical themes.

Notably, in 2004, various groups including the Indian, Malay and Chinese dance groups as well as the Chinese Orchestra toured Pondicherry, Cochin, Kaladi, Mysore, and Chennai in India staging five multi-cultural performances. Shankar Rajan, then the Deputy General Manager of the CFA, reminisces, "It was indeed an eye-opening trip for our students.

Chinese and Malay students who had never been to India before, appreciated the richness of Indian culture, as they had opportunities to attend good concerts and visit Kalakshetra. Indian audiences really enjoyed the multi-cultural performances that our Singaporean artistes put up." The whole trip was also the subject of a television series which was aired over Vasantham TV.

Since then, CFA's Indian dance group has been involved in several productions including *The Search for Nalanda* in 2011. In the NUS Arts Festival 2014, they collaborated with the NUS Indian Instrumental Ensemble to present *Chudar – Shiva's Fire* which featured music by prominent Indian composer and flautist B.V. Balasai. Rajandra Vadivale was appointed Music Director of the NUS Indian Instrumental Ensemble (IIE) in 2004.

MEDIA

Mainstream media that have played an important vital role in sustaining and nurturing Indian arts in Singapore over the last 70 years include print media like *Tamil Murasu*, *The Straits Times* and *Tabla*, and broadcast media like *Vasantham* television and *OLI 96.8 Tamil FM* radio station. Increasingly, the

internet, with all the varied forms of communication it enables, has also been playing a big role in promoting Indian arts and artistes. In this section, we provide a survey of some important media developments and efforts, over the years, with a particular emphasis on their support for Indian performing arts.

BROADCAST MEDIA

The development of broadcast media channels into two popular Indian stations, Oli 96.8 on FM radio and Vasantham on television are described in this section.

Radio

Radio broadcast was pioneered in Singapore during the pre-war years and commenced in 1936. Anecdotal evidence points to only 3 to 4 hours of radio broadcast in the early pre-war years which increased to over 15 hours in the 1970s. Early Tamil coverage consisted primarily of news and film songs. Classical music had very little coverage except for the occasional playing of 78 rpm gramophone records. However, the film songs of the 1930s and 1940s were essentially based on Carnatic music with the voices of Thyagaraja Bagavathar, P.U.Chinnapa, T.R.Mahalingam (the singer-actor), M.S.Subbulakshmi and S.G.Kittappa dominating. There was hardly any input from local artistes until the 50s when classical singing was broadcast live from the station located at the Cathay Cinema building.

The metamorphosis from Radio Malaya through Radio Singapore, Radio Malaysia (Singapore Division), Radio and Television Singapore, Singapore Broadcasting Corporation to Mediacorp radio describes Singapore radio's travel from the year 1936 to the present day. The Tamil station was given a name Olikkalanjiyam by the then Head M.K.Narayanan, and was subsequently shortened to Oli. Since August 2001, Oli has been broadcasting 24 hours a day primarily in the Tamil language and has listenership even in Malaysia and India.

S.P. Panneerselvam, recently retired Senior Producer of Oli says, "In the early days, all announcers (as they were called rather than the current term deejays) were into classical music. I remember poet N. Palanivelu and producer K. Ramaiah as the pio-

neers in the field. There were regular radio recordings of local classical artistes in the Ulloor Kalaignar (local artistes) slot. Later on, Nagaratnam Suppiyah and R.Ramani produced programmes such as 'Rare Kritis and Rare Ragas' using the voice of (late) musical wizard Maharajapuram Santhanam to sing and demonstrate. Ramani and former radio Head A. Murugaian compiled over 200 Tamil songs that were set to music and taught to school students. Ramani gave a series of some 50 lectures on Indian classical music at the Bukit Timah campus of the University of Singapore. When top musicians came to town, all of us used to run to them and at least record their interviews."

P.S. Raman, then the Director of Broadcasting, hosted concerts of Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna, M.L. Vasanthakumari, M.S. Subbulakshmi, Maharajapuram Santhanam and K.B. Sundarambal in the radio auditorium. These concerts were subsequently aired over Radio Singapore. He even personally compered Vasanthakumari's concert. Subbulakshmi's and Maharajapuram Viswanathaiyer's birthdays were celebrated with pomp over the radio. Such was the enthusiasm for classical arts. Other radio producers like P. Krishnan, Francis Dheepan and Bamah Balakrishnan also share this view.

M. Ramalingam ran a series of radio slots called "Raga Vilakkam" (exposition of ragas) very successfully over several months. Tamil radio used to broadcast Kathakalakshebam and discourses by the famous Embar Vijayaraghavachariar and Kripananda Variyar. There was an intense listenership as radio was the only medium of entertainment in the 1950s and early 1960s.

"My personal pride is when I produced an Indian music compilation with Carnatic and Hindustani music content. It was selected and sent to China for an international contest and reached the finals," Panneerselvam recalls, with great joy.

In recent years, Shankar Rajan produced a daily programme called "Thirai Isaiyil Raagaragam" (ragas in film music) which ran for two seasons. This show succeeded in generating some interest even among the youth.

With the fierce competition for an audience across

many different media, Oli these days pays limited attention to classical music. Young veena player Maathavan laments “The current classical music slot is at an ungodly time of 5 am to 6 am. I hope there is a change in direction.”

Television

Television broadcasting was introduced in Singapore in February 1963, with the name changing from Television Singapore to Television Malaysia (Singapore) and then following the same path as radio to the present Mediacorp television. The Indian broadcast was initially together with Chinese programmes in Channel 8, but moved on



When top musicians came to town, we all used to run to them and at least record their interviews. P.S.Raman, then the Director of Broadcasting, aired one-hour concerts of Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna, M.L Vasanthakumari, M.S.Subbulakshmi, Maharajapuram Santhanam and K.B.Sundarambal in the radio auditorium – all free concerts sung before a live audience.



to be launched as Vasantham in September 1995. It was for a period known as Vasantham Central, and then became Vasantham as a stand-alone name in October 2008.

One of the most outstanding TV broadcasters was E.S.J. Chandran, who currently runs a music school in Chennai. An octogenarian, Chandran has a very creative mind with vivid memories of his years in broadcasting. Following his B.Com degree from India, he had a stint with Rediffusion, Malaysia after which he settled in Singapore in 1955, beginning

his life as a teacher in YMCA. With script writing and acting in his blood since his school days, Chandran was recommended to join radio as Broadcaster Grade 3, which paid a princely sum of \$260 per month. Chandran was sent by the then Director of Broadcasting P.S. Raman, on a Colombo Plan scholarship in 1959 to the United Kingdom to be trained by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). When television broadcast was in the offing in Singapore, Chandran was selected again for training in NHK in Japan in 1963 and came back to be placed in both radio and TV programming.

With poet K. Perumal, he produced and acted in a TV drama on the renaissance poet of India Subramanya Bharathiyar when a funny incident happened. Chandran shares, “Dressed as Bharathiyar, Perumal tied a tight turban on my head with a sharp pin. Unfortunately the pin pierced my



E.S.J. Chandran upon completing his training in Japan, 1963



Dressed as Bharathiyar, Perumal tied a tight turban on my head with a sharp pin. Unfortunately the pin pierced my head but there was no time to react as it was a live broadcast. I bled all the way and Perumal only realised it when he took the turban away after the show. But the pain was nothing – I had acted in the first Tamil TV drama and was the first compere. Those accolades were enough!



head, but there was no time to react as it was a live broadcast. I bled all the way and Perumal only realised it when he took the turban away after the show. But the pain was nothing – I had acted in the first Tamil TV drama and was the first compere. Those accolades were enough!” Chandran continued to write radio plays like Detective D’Cruz as well as science fiction like “Macedona” and “Minsara Manithan” (Electric-Man). Chandran was given the highest television accolade when he was presented the Veteran’s Award during the airing of Pradhana Vizha in 2003.

From the 1970s to the early 2000s, there were programmes like Raga Banthangal, Aaniver, Kalaimanigal, Pena Munai, Kala Sagaram and Sahitya Karthakkal whose rich content was based on classical music and dance; they were very well researched shows. Sahitya Karthakkal covered composers like the Trinity, Arunachala Kavirayar, and their life-history with local musicians singing their compositions.

Bharatanatyam dancer V. Balakrishnan, whose life story is captured in the Outside the ‘Big 4’ chapter in this book, spent most of his working life with television broadcasting and he produced many cultural programmes. A programme that he specially remembers is “An Appreciation of Bharatanatyam”

– a series produced by Singapore Broadcasting Corporation.

Like with the radio station, Balakrishnan has an issue with time slots for the classical arts on television too. “Quite often cultural programmes are aired at the wrong time. 6 pm on a Wednesday evening is never the time to get serious viewership. I wish Mediacorp could broadcast cultural programmes at prime time.”

The ex-editor of Tamil Murasu and current Head of the Indian Broadcasting Division of Mediacorp, Dr. Chitra Rajaram, accepted that current programming is primarily aimed at the younger audience, “Shows like ‘Vasantham Star’ and ‘Who is the Star’ give opportunities for training and development of music and dance among the youth.”

Another stalwart in the Indian political, business and media community, Chandra Das, described earlier in this chapter, has a suggestion, “Vasantham is doing very well in news coverage, magazine / documentary shows and dramas. But it could do better with cultural programming. Too many films are screened during festive periods. Cultural organisations should be given a weekly short slot of about 10 to 15 minutes to educate the viewers on Indian culture. This can be achieved if SIFAS or other groups took some initiative to work with Vasantham.”

That said, Vasantham continues to feature interviews, excerpts of music and dance programmes presented locally, as well as events and festival previews on their weekly “Thaalam: The Indian Beat” programme. Periodically, they also air specially commissioned programmes on Indian music and dance. There is also “Art Bites”, on the Okto channel which has featured several snippets about various Indian performing arts genres in English in well-presented bite-sized segments, often aired as fillers between programmes.

PRINT MEDIA

The Straits Times is an English-language newspaper owned by Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and it was established 170 years ago in 1845.

For more than 100 years, Indian content was very



low until after the close of the WW2. In the 1970s and 1980s when the cultural ballast in Singapore was exponentially increased, The Straits Times began devoting space to Indian culture.

One important feature was the bilingual page introduced every Friday and the most promising editor of that page was local writer, Sumathi Vaidyanathan. Articles on Indian classical music and dance and concert reviews by local musicians were carried regularly and forthcoming concerts were listed. This page was, however, stopped following a restructuring of the contents. Subsequently, references to Indian arts and culture appeared only sporadically and that situation is existent even today.

A review of the NewspaperSG resource at the NLB website, reveals a fascinating range of items related to the Indian arts in the 1950s through the 1980s.

Here are some snippets of the treasure trove at that site:

- A letter writer responding to another letter writer, sarcastically, for wanting more film music rather than classical music on Radio Malaya (1954)
- Performance notices and previews of concerts by sitar players Jaya Bose (1959), Kalyani Roy (1969) Ravi Shankar (1972), "blind violinist" M. Chandrasekharan (1977), Sikkil Sisters (1983), Kalakshetra dancers Krishnaveni Lakshmanan (1982) and (Malaysia based) Krishnakumari (1987) and many others
- Preview of a fundraising dance concert featuring Roshni Pillay, Mageswari Govindasamy and Nandana Chellappa to raise money for the Dr. V. S Rajan Memorial Scholarship, with guest of honour, Professor S. Jayakumar (1984)
- Coverage of arangetrams, with a big story on the Kesavan sisters' debut in 1984
- Snippets about election results and arrival of new teachers at SIFAS
- A story about a Malay dancer, renamed Nirmal Kumar by his Guru M. Nithianandam, dancing at the Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple (1983)
- A Bharatanatyam and Odissi recital by Stella So Wai Yee, a Hong Kong based dancer (1985),
- A Kuchipudi recital presented by Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society's Rajyasri Muralidhar (1988)
- A feature about the "the sitar man", a Chinese technician, Kenny Tan (1989)

A large number of reviews, previews and features about Indian classical music and dance by writers like Radhika Srinivasan, Pauline Walker, Shobha Sekhar (a distinguished musician herself), Rhama Sankaran, Minu Tharoor, Chitra Varaprasad and

The Straits Times, Friday, November 25, 1994

Community

East meets West in fusion-music concert

Lovers of classical Chinese, Western and Indian music can experience the amalgamation of Indian compositions played by a Chinese orchestra. Jelle Chatterjee reports.



Members of the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society choir with Radha Vijayan, the society's conductor-director-composer, who is arranging tomorrow night's fusion concert.

TIME was when Indian maestro Ravi Shankar teamed up with the Beatles to rock the world with some thunderous East-West fusion. And there have been some incredible experiments since: L. Subramaniam with Stéphane Grappelle, and Yehudi Menuhin with the Bombay Symphony Orchestra are just two of the successful experiments.

But now the tide is turning. Asian conductors and composers are discovering the first flashes of excitement from combining different Asian music styles. East is bonding with East.

The latest experiment (where Indian and Chinese styles are blended) is being conducted in Singapore by the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society's conductor-director-composer Radha Vijayan.

Chinese and Indian compositions will be presented tomorrow at Raga Sutha '94, a musical extravaganza at the Victoria Theatre in.

The society hopes, a mixed audience of music lovers.

The first time Vijayan began experimenting with Indo-Chinese fusion music (an ensemble comprising traditional Indian music played on Chinese instruments) in 1992, little did he think that it would be a launching pad for bigger things. It was, after all, a "bedding attempt at synchronization with members of the Teck Ghee community centre with the venue and chorus using by popular classical Indian vocalists. The background music was provided by Chinese instruments.

In the fusion-music concert tomorrow, however, the Chinese content will be far more discernible. Traditional Chinese compositions will be played by the members of the Hsing Hai Association Chinese Orchestra along with the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society Indian Orchestra.

Indian traditional music (Gopika Manoharan based on Ragan Mohanan) will be played on the Indian flute, veena and violin and the accompanying score, arranged by Vijayan, will be played on the Chinese instruments dixi (Chinese flute), guqin, pipa and erhu (string instruments).

Vijayan, who is the music director of Nrityalaya, says it has been a wonderful experience trying to increase the scope of interaction between Chinese and Indian styles.

"Since the composition of the Chinese traditional piece and the Indian piece are both in the pentatonic scale, it has been a happy marriage of bridging the two styles."

Are there any glitches for Chinese musicians playing the Indian compositions?

"Oh no. It was smooth sailing all the way. The Hsing Hai Orchestra had no problem at all playing this piece," says Vijayan.

Apart from the Indo-Chinese fusion content, the concert will present several kinds of amalgamation. Western compositions by Beethoven, Mozart, Offenbach and Tchaikovsky will be played by an Indian orchestra, and northern and southern Indian classical raga improvisations will be performed by well-known vocalists Teriokhan Singh and Bhagy Murthy, both teachers with Nrityalaya.

The concert will also feature Vijayan's composition, Variations, a neo-fusion experiment with Indian ragas. It will use Indian, Chinese and Western instruments - violin, guitar, pipa, tabla, bongos, aridagan and tabla.

For parties, Vijayan has lined up an interesting ensemble with the violin, veena and veena. Popular instrumentalists Manoharan, Aravinth Kumarasamy and Gnanaveenhan are expected to thrill with their expertise on the strings.

Vijayan, who was commissioned by the National Arts Council to produce the combined Indian Dance for the Dance Festival in 1992, has presented several concerts in Singapore and composed music scores for Chirag '93.

Raga Sutha '94 is on at the Victoria Theatre tomorrow at 7.30 pm. For invitations, call the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society (tel: 336-6577).

The Straits Times preview of a fusion choir and orchestra, conducted by Radha Vijayan of Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society, 1994

Shobha Tsering Bhalla (who went on to become the editor of India Se) were featured on The Straits Times too.

P.N. Balji, a senior journalist in Singapore, recognises the business challenges for an English newspaper in Singapore devoting space to a niche classical art form. "Eyeballs are moving to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and God knows what else will appear on the scene to confuse our already complex world. As the journalists focus on the stories that will capture eyeballs, the victims are those who will see their events not being covered. This is somewhat



P.N. Balji, veteran journalist

unfortunate because the Indian arts and cultural scene is riding on the wave of a liberal immigration policy, which has swelled the Indian population from 7 to 9 per cent.” He suggests that those who seek coverage should think like a journalist and pitch their event stories in ways that journalists would consider them newsworthy for the paying public.

Tamil Murasu is today the only Singapore-based Tamil newspaper. It was founded in Singapore by the well-known community leader Thamizhavel G.Sarangapani in 1935 who played a key role in developing interest and talent in performing and visual Indian arts amongst the local Tamil community by organising competitions, performances and cultural activities during Thamizhar Thirunal (Tamilians Festival). It was bought over by Singapore

Press Holdings, the main print media business in Singapore in 1995.

Tamil Murasu is the main source of news for the Tamil-speaking community with its coverage of wide-ranging matters from current affairs and foreign news, especially South Asian matters as well as sports, entertainment and the Indian film industry. This newspaper has established itself as the voice of the Tamil-speaking community in Singapore. Senior journalists like V.Palanisamy and Kanagalatha have for a long time been covering cultural affairs in Tamil Murasu with a passion that is well appreciated by readers.

Kanagalatha says with pride, “From Sarangapani’s days, Tamil Murasu has dedicated a page for the



Cultural coverage in the Tamil Murasu, 2001

arts. When the newspaper was revamped in 1999, the page was renamed Kalai Murasu (Arts Drum) which ultimately led to the creation of the Lifestyle Section of the paper. This section publishes articles that encourage and motivate young artistes as well as veterans through curtain raisers, reviews, comments, interviews and the listing of arts events. Tamil Murasu is the print medium that has been the forerunner in creating awareness about the Indian arts scene in Singapore.”

Chandra Das, who is also Chairman of Tamil Murasu, started “Tabla” to reach out to the non-Tamil and expatriate Indian community in Singapore. Launched in October 2008 (in a happy coincidence, the front page of the initial issue featured a preview of an upcoming event featuring tabla wizard Zakir Hussain), the free weekly newspaper Tabla has been a boon to Indian event organisers. Tabla features a weekly listing of event information, and periodic previews of Indian classical music and dance programmes. Special features on Indian classical music and dance institutions have

also been published, and the paper has quickly found widespread distribution among the Indian community in Singapore.

THE INTERNET

As various internet platforms continue to absorb audiences from the traditional media, Singapore Indian artistes and institutions have also become very active on the internet. Almost every Indian institution in Singapore has a well maintained and updated web site, a Facebook page, and several Youtube videos with excerpts from programmes.



Tamil Murasu is the print medium that has been the forerunner in creating awareness about the Indian arts scene in Singapore.



Email, SMS and WhatsApp messaging formats have become a dominant mode of spreading news quickly about upcoming events. For a brief period in the mid-2000s, a website kanakasabha.com voluntarily and freely listed event information for all classical music and dance programmes and also provided a directory of all classical music and dance schools. Its editor, Dr. Seshan Ramaswami, says "In the earlier days of the internet, and in the pre-Facebook era, there was very little information available online, or even offline about upcoming classical music and dance programmes. I would often just wander around the streets of Little India, looking for posters, and visit institutions just to copy information from notice boards to post information about upcoming events. Many independent teachers were very grateful for new student enrolments facilitated by the website's teacher database. The site is being renovated currently and we hope to start offering this free service again to the Indian

arts community. On average, we used to list over 500 programmes a year as we tried to cover every event, from a small free Navarathiri temple concert to the big-ticketed Esplanade events. Today, I would imagine that number must be over a 1000."

Another interesting Singaporean online initiative, and one with a global reach, is CarnaticRadio.com, a 'not for profit' organisation, started by a group of Carnatic music fans. The online radio was launched on the Vijayadasami day of 2010. The site is devoted to Carnatic music and makes available music from this great tradition to rasikas (fans) worldwide on a 24x7 basis. It is also designed to be a good entertainment medium for musicians and fans of the younger generation who can improve their "kelvi gnanam" (knowledge by listening) by tuning into the performances by various renowned artistes. Its founder, Niranjan Nanthagopan says "We also intend to provide a platform for artistes

Indian Performing Art Events in... Indian Performing Art Events in...
bha.com.sg/pastevents2004.htm Search

kanakasabha.com

Past Indian Performing Arts Events in Singapore

LAST UPDATED: January 30, 2005 10:40 p.m.

Past Events: [2002](#) [2003](#)

[Forthcoming Events](#) * [Performing Artistes](#) * [Schools](#) * [Past Events](#) * [Links](#) * [Message board](#) * [Index](#) * [Kanakasabha home](#)

Date	Time	Program	Artistes	Venue	Organizer	Ticket and Contact Information
2004						
Thu, Jan 8	8:00 p.m.	Bharata Natyam duo	Madhuran Raj Sethuraman and Shripa Raj Sethuraman	SIFAS, 2A Starlight Road	SIFAS	Free admission. Contact 6299-5925
Sun, Jan 18	8:00 p.m.	Hindustani vocal recital	Mukesh Desai	Four Seasons Hotel, Windows East, 20th Floor	Shambhala Yoga Centre	Tickets: \$20 + GST. Contact Zarina Ann Muhammad at 67388778, or email: muzarina@club21.com.sg Program Hotline: 6733-2163
Wed, Jan 21	7:00 p.m.	Paramarajasa Aradhana celebration	Various artistes, and communal singing	Yadagirtha Kalisaman Temple, 555, Serangoon Road	Kannada Sangha, Singapore	All are welcome. Ph: Bhagya Murthy at 6258-8280.
Sat, Jan 24	6:30 p.m.	"Nectar that lasts forever": Tyagaraja Aradhana celebration	Students and staff of alapana arts	Glass Hall, Singapore Art Museum	alapana arts	For more information, call 6396-3296
Sun, Jan 25	6:30 p.m.	Kalamangal "a garden of dances from Classical to folk"	Artistes of the Temple of Fine Arts	Orchid Room, 1st level, Excelsior Hotel, 5 Coleman street	Temple of Fine Arts	The performance will be followed at 8:30 p.m. by a vegetarian buffet at Annalakshmi restaurant. Ph: 4338-0903 and 4338-0497. Email: tf_a@templeoffinearts.org Pick up invitations at TFA office at the Excelsior hotel.
Fri, Jan 30	7:30 p.m.	Hindustani vocal recital	Sucheta Bhattacharya, accompanied by Chansrinath Bhattacharya (harmonium), Sarfaraz Ahmed (tabla)	SIFAS, 2A Starlight Road	SIFAS	Free admission. Contact 6299-5925
Sat, Jan 31	7:15 p.m.	Bharata Natyam arangetram	Anuradha Parasuraman and Divya Parasuraman, disciples of Usha Rani Maniam	Lubna Hall, Raffles Hotel	Usha Rani Maniam Dance School	By invitation. Contact 6481-7788.
Sat, Jan 31	7:30 p.m.	Carnatic vocal recital	Sugretha Swaminathan, disciple of Sothia Paganathan, accompanied by N N Ganesh Kumar (violin), T R Sundaresan (mridangam)	SIFAS, 2A Starlight Road	SIFAS	Tickets: \$10. Contact 6299-5925
			Srim Pagaraju at 7:00			

A screen shot of the website Kanakasabha.com, which had an extensive, updated listing of Indian fine arts events and schools, 2005



from the new generation through this radio. In addition to playing recorded music we plan to web cast live concerts. We have an average of 150 to 200 listeners at any point of time. However our App has already been downloaded 400 times from Apple and Google Play Store.”

THE HIGH COMMISSION OF INDIA, SINGAPORE (HCIS)

The HCIS has been a great source of support to many event organisers in Singapore by liaising with the Indian government’s Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). The ICCR was founded in 1950 by independent India’s first Education Minister, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. The ICCR has an empanelled list of artistes, whose travels abroad are funded by the Indian government. Local hosts for these artistes only need to fund local hospitality, venue and publicity costs. Artiste fees are paid by the Indian Government.

A. Sachithanathan, long-time Vice President of SIFAS remembers that among the first artistes to visit Singapore through ICCR was the Bharatanatyam danseuse Yamini Krishnamurthy who danced here in 1953, with a live orchestra. He remembers, “In the early years, the HCIS would arrange with the Oberoi Hotel to get us 2 to 4 rooms free of cost for these programmes, so it was a very fruitful partnership. Every year some 5 to 6 artistes would come to Singapore. The HCIS was very helpful as were the Indian banks. Some of the bank managers would help to host the visiting artistes, thus reducing our hospitality expenses. The banks would also help get advertisements from their clients for the programme brochure. Singaporean Cabinet ministers, prominent industrialists, and Ambassadors and High Commissioners from many different countries would be invited by the Indian High Commissioner, making these concerts very high profile events. Consequently, Indian companies like Air India were keen to get involved as supporters. At one point, we had an arrangement that Air India would purchase 12 tickets every year for these events.”

Over the years, Singapore has benefited tremendously from the HCIS’s active promotion of the Indian classical arts through the ICCR scheme. Major artistes such as Ravi Shankar, Birju

Maharaj, T. N. Krishnan, Padma Subrahmanyam, and Chitra Visveswaran have all visited Singapore under this scheme.

The period 1976-1980 is particularly noteworthy, when Ratnakar Rao served as First Secretary at the HCIS. He remembers, “We worked closely with SIFAS to get well known artistes from India, either sponsored by ICCR, or jointly with SIFAS. Sachithanathan, the live-wire Vice President of SIFAS and I worked as a team to get advertisements for colourful and informative brochures for the



Singaporean Cabinet ministers, prominent industrialists, and Ambassadors and High Commissioners from many different countries would be invited by the Indian High Commissioner, making these concerts very high profile events. Consequently, Indian companies like Air India were keen to get involved as supporters. At one point, we had an arrangement that Air India would purchase 12 tickets every year for these events.



events.” On his part, A. Sachithanathan recalls “Ratnakar was an extraordinarily supportive partner. I remember how he would just take away ticket bundles from SIFAS, and then almost miraculously soon return with cash, having sold all the tickets to the large number of Indian music patrons and friends he had cultivated through his passion for the arts during his stay in Singapore. That sort of support from the HCIS those days was just fantastic!”

In particular, Ratnakar remembers dance recitals by Kathak artiste Shovana Narayan, a Kuchipudi



(from left in foreground) G.J.R. Krishnan, Ratnakar Rao, Padmavathy Ananthagopalan and Lalgudi G. Jayaraman, late 1970s



Newspaper article about an ICCR concert by Shanthi Rao, 1977

recital by Raja and Radha Reddy, a violin recital by Lalgudi Jayaraman, and a veena recital by Shanthi Rao.

In recent years, even with the burgeoning of so many institutions conducting professionally run festivals of music and dance in Singapore, the HCIS continues to play a prominent role in arranging visits by ICCR artistes. It also continues to be a facilitator for many Singaporean Indian arts institutions in developing relationships with Indian institutions. It also invites many local artistes to perform at official High Commission events.

DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

Philanthropic organisations, community groups, corporations and individuals have also come forward to support the arts. There is also a very strong network of banks that have provided valuable financial support.

Aravinth Kumarasamy of Apsaras Arts says, "Government support meets only a small percentage of our financial needs. We have a very difficult time finding the balance of the needed funds from corporates as supporting the arts is not a high priority for the corporates in Singapore."



CORPORATE FOUNDATIONS

Two corporate foundations stand out in their consistent support for the arts in general, and for the Indian arts in particular, the Lee Foundation and the Shaw Foundation.

Lee Foundation is Singapore's largest private charitable foundation created to "aid the advancement of education, medicine and cultural activities". Founded in 1952 by the philanthropist and businessman Lee Kong Chian, it is a family-run foundation. Since its creation, Lee Foundation has donated over \$1 billion, principally for educational causes, regardless of race, language, religion, nationality and geographic location. The foundation has given generously for Indian cultural activities and organisations like SIFAS, Bhaskar's Arts Academy and Apsaras Arts have been the beneficiaries, as have several independent artistes of all genres.

Tan Sri Run Run Shaw and Runme Shaw, the famed Shaw Brothers, started the Shaw Foundation in 1957. This charitable organisation has donated millions of dollars to many charitable causes, principally towards education. Their over-riding principle is that wealth contributed by society should be returned to society in generous measures. The Shaw Foundation has supported

various institutions which have been teaching and performing the various art forms and over the years, has supported many Indian performing arts events of SIFAS and others.

The Tote Board Arts Grant was introduced in 1995 to promote arts appreciation among students in schools, junior colleges and ITEs. Its subsidies to the NAC-AEP have been described earlier in this chapter.

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

One of the most regular and dependable supporters of the Indian arts is prominent lawyer and businessman, Sat Pal Khattar. He says, "I have been associated with SIFAS since the days when the late Mr. Karthigesu was the President. Ours is a small but not insignificant community and very much a part of the fabric of modern Singapore. It is important that cultural values that we live by and which are part of our heritage are preserved and are passed on to future generations. This is essential if our community's values are not to fade away. SIFAS is an important player in that context. I am very happy to be a Patron of SIFAS. It gives me great satisfaction to see so many activities being carried out and also to note that our community's values in the performing arts are nurtured and



M. Bala Subramaniam being felicitated by Shaw Vee Meng of the Shaw Foundation at SIFAS Academy Day, World Trade Centre, 1999



(From left) Sat Pal Khattar, P.S. Somasekharan, Muri Chanrai, P. Selvadurai and Dr. S. Kasinathan at the SIFAS Festival 2009

carried to greater levels for both current needs and prosperity.”

Another prominent supporter, R. Jayachandran, who was awarded the Kala Ratna by SIFAS in 2014 for his consistent contributions to the Indian arts, says, “I have been observing the progress of the Indian music and dance scene in Singapore since 1978. Doubtless there had been cultural exchanges with India in the post-war era. These were random and infrequent, catering mainly to a small group of enthusiasts. The last three decades, however, have seen dramatic improvements in the cultural scene of Singapore. Several music and dance institutions have sprung up to teach classical music and dance of different traditions of India. The cultural calendar seems to get quickly filled up with classical and semi classical concerts through the year. The Indian cultural environment in Singapore is now vibrant. These programmes keep the cultural traditions alive while providing lively entertainment to our multi-cultural, multi-ethnic audience in Singapore.”

PROMINENT INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS

K.Kesavapany, Singapore's non-resident Ambassador to Jordan and Governor of the Singapore International Foundation shares his thoughts on the Singapore Indian Community's Cultural Profile, “As an observer

“

Ours is a small but not insignificant community and very much a part of the fabric of modern Singapore. It is important that cultural values that we live by and which are part of our heritage are preserved and are passed on to future generations.

”



R. Jayachandran, being honoured with the Kala Ratna award, by J.Y. Pillay, as P.S. Somasekharan applauds, SIFAS Academy Day, 2014

of the evolution of Singapore's cultural mosaic over the past five decades, I am extremely proud of the contribution made by the Indian community to the making of our multicultural society."

Spearheaded by pioneer organisations like the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society (SIFAS), Bhaskar's Arts Academy and Apsaras Arts, the arts and crafts of the Indian community are well entrenched. Apart from facilitating the transfer of music and dance from the ancestral land, a distinct Singaporean flavour has been imbued into the unique productions by these arts groups.

These organisations have also helped to train hundreds, if not thousands, of young aspiring musicians and dancers, some of whom have gone on to become tutors and to start their own organisations.

With the arrival of new talent from India and in the wake of the economic transformation of Singapore, new groups such as Soorya and Shruti Laya have emerged to enrich the cultural scene.

In what I would call a reverse transfer of cultural exchanges, many talented Singaporean Indian artistes are now performing regularly in Indian cities such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore. Some have ventured even further

to the US, UK, France and Malaysia. With the support given by the National Arts Council and the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), they serve as Ambassadors to promote the many facets of Singapore's multi-cultural society.



K. Kesavapany, ex-Director of Institute of South East Asian Studies (NUS), diplomat and current board member of several community and Indian organisations

The establishment of the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC), which was declared open by PM Lee Hsien Loong on 7 May 2015, serves to showcase what has been achieved so far and motivate coming generations of Singapore Indians to aspire to greater heights.”

Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, a prominent member of the Indian community in Singapore shares his thoughts as follows, “SIFAS is to be congratulated for its initiative to bring out a book on Indian classical music and dance in the fifty years of independent Singapore. The subject is significant because it is one that has had a significant influence on the performing art forms of South East Asia over hundreds of years. The fifty year period is also significant because it is the formative years of our country that has just become independent. In the midst of nation building Indian classical music and dance flourished. Organisations like SIFAS, Bhaskar’s Academy, Apsaras Arts, Temple of the Temple of Fine Arts and several more are to be given credit for this. Even today these organisations

work assiduously to keep the cultural flame burning. Many dedicated individuals devote a great deal of their time to ensure the continued existence of these organisations for more than fifty years. The community’s continuing support has also helped a great deal.”

The challenge for the future for classical music and dance is posed not by some alien art form but popular music and dance from the film world which has a great deal of appeal for the young people of today. In fact even for the older generation it provides light entertainment. Success of popular music and dance should not dissuade the proponents of classical music and dance from carrying on their good work. The media has a role to play. They can devote a significant number of slots to publish or give enough air time to classical music and dance. Western classical music has flourished in spite of a variety of popular music being available. It has shown that both classical music and new popular music can exist side by side. Indian classical arts should be able to do the same.



Gopinath Pillai, Director of Institute of South Asian Studies (NUS), diplomat and member of boards of several business and Indian organisations, presenting SIFAS Bharatanatyam Diploma to Haritha Ramesh at SIFAS Academy Day , 2011



EVENT MANAGERS

The frenetic pace of new Indian arts institutions, the large numbers of new Indian immigrants from across the subcontinent, and the rapid pace of growth in the number of Indian events staged in Singapore have all given rise to a new kind of organisation – the event management company that focuses on the Indian arts. Three of these post-millennial entrants into this burgeoning field have a wide canvas in terms of services provided and the kinds of events staged and promoted. Teamwork Productions, Jade and Arte Compass organise and support events across the entire scope of the Indian arts as well as English and Indian language theatre, Indian film music events, fusion or Indian semi-classical and pop/contemporary music events, poetry readings, stand-up comedy and others. Praapthi on the other hand, the latest entrant focuses on providing event management services to Indian classical music and dance events.

Teamwork Productions is an “entertainment company”, with roots in the performing arts, social action, and the corporate world. Their expertise includes producing television programmes,

documentary and feature films, event management, social communication, creation and development of contemporary performing and visual arts festivals across the world, and in nurturing new talent across art forms. Teamwork started in Singapore in 2001 with ‘Celebrating India– Singapore 2001’ a 7 day festival and business conference which was attended by the President and Prime Minister of Singapore. Teamwork Productions has worked closely with the Kalaa Utsavam team in Esplanade and helped produce the festival since its inception (see the 2000s chapter for a description of this regular entry on the Indian arts calendar). Other than the Utsavam, over the years, Teamwork has presented programmes by Hariprasad Chaurasia, Shubha Mudgal, Daksha Sheth , Aditi Mangaldas, Nrityagram dancers, Dr. L. Subramaniam, Vikku Vinayakram, Amjad Ali Khan and most recently, Hariharatmakam, a dance performance by renowned Kuchipudi dancers Dr. Raja and Radha Reddy and their group of young dancers. Shweta Asnani, founder of Teamwork Productions Singapore says, “I founded Teamwork Productions in partnership with its Indian headquarters, in 2001 and the last 14 years have been a wonderful



A Teamwork production staged in Victoria Theatre, Hariharatmakam by Natya Tarangini troupe of Dr. Raja Reddy and Radha Reddy, 2015

satisfying journey of bringing some of the best names in the Indian classical music and dance field. The audiences have changed and matured over the years, and that is heartening to see as Teamwork was a part of this change and growth.”

Arte Compass was established in 2003. The primary focus of Akila Iyengar, founder of Arte Compass was to take performing arts across cultures, motivated by the desire to promote local and International talent.

Arte Compass premiered with *Shraddha: An evening of melodies* in April 2003, by the legendary mandolin maestro, U. Shrinivas, singer and composer Shankar Mahadevan, percussionist Sivamani and the pianist Loy Mendonsa. Other notable classical events hosted by Arte Compass include *Mandolin Classic* by maestros, U. Shrinivas and U. Rajesh, and *Kaleidoscope of Rhythms: World Fusion Music* by Zakir Hussain, U. Shrinivas,

Fazal Qureshi, Kala Ramnath, Vijay Chauhan and other western artistes. More recently, the company managed a recital by the SIOC labelled “Mystique 7 in Sappthapadi” and “Lotus: A musical blossom”, the first ever ‘Indian and Chinese Classical Music concert by world renowned artistes U. Shrinivas, Prof. Liu Yuening, V. Selvaganesh, Vijay Ghate, Zhu Lin and Wang Yi Jen. Akila currently also serves as a Board member of the Shrinivas Institute of World Musique founded by the late maestro U. Shrinivas.

Jade Group International Pte Ltd is a full service event management firm with offices in Hong Kong and Singapore. The Singapore office was set up in 2007. Since then, Jade Group has worked behind the scenes on many quality classical dance and music events. With the advantage of having offices in Singapore and Hong Kong, Jade Group is able to promote Asia tours of well-known artistes and work on cross-border events such as the



An Arte Compass production, Mandolin U. Shrinivas playing with Prof Liu Yuening (yangqin) and V. Selvaganesh (ganjira) at the Esplanade Theatre, 2011



Singapore-Hong Kong-Bangkok concerts of Zakir Hussain with the Masters of Percussion tour. A key focus of Jade Group in Singapore has been festivals. As event manager and festival director of Samarpana-the Asian Festival of Classical Dance since its inception, Jade Group has worked closely with the producer of the festival to expand into an India chapter, the Ananya Samarpana Festival of Classical Dance which is now in its third successful annual edition. Having managed ventures that showcase Singapore-based artistes abroad, managing partner of Jade Group, Singapore, Jyoti Ramesh says, “As a company that started off 13 years ago in Hong Kong, bringing South Asian arts to the region, we are delighted that Jade Group is now in the fulfilling position of presenting talented Singapore-based artistes and local productions on the international platform.”

The large number of Indian music and dance events, festivals and arangetrams organised on a regular basis in Singapore has led in some ways to the launch of a unique company, Praapthi in January 2014. Spearheaded by a team of veteran arts volunteers V. Devarajan, Vidhya Venkat and Akila Krishnan, Praapthi provides integrated event management services with a focus on

Indian fine art events. “We offer end-to-end event management services, bringing in a concept of total outsourcing, so that our clients can focus on their performance and enjoy the event,” says Devarajan. Praapthi’s services span from sponsorship drives, print and social media publicity, to planning and managing all aspects of events. Organisers of one-time events, like parents who organise dance and music arangetrams for their children are often flustered by all the project management skills and contacts with sound, light, brochure design, stage and reception decoration that are required to make the programme a success. The arrival of Praapthi, whose banners are now already regularly seen at many local events, is a boon for such organisers, as well as for more seasoned event organisers, who can now focus on the creative aspects of the productions with the administrative, technical and logistics aspects outsourced.

In this chapter, we briefly described the roles of many of the most important enablers of the Indian performing arts in Singapore – various departments of the Government, the media, the High Commission of India, donors and event managers. There are other enablers such as venue providers and managers, ticketing agencies, independent



Zakir Hussain and Khefe Khan (Khartaal) at Masters of Percussion Tour at the Esplanade, a Jade Group presentation, 2008



Anjasa, an event managed by Praapthi and staged by Apsaras Arts, at the Victoria Theatre, 2015

lighting and sound technicians, make-up artistes, instrument suppliers and repairers, and costume makers and renters who are also enablers of the Indian arts worthy of mention.

Together, this rapidly growing and professional support system bodes well for the future of the

Indian performing arts institutions and artistes in Singapore. This continued support will free up the resources of these institutions and artistes to focus on the creative aspects of their art, a little more secure in the knowledge that there is a system that will provide much needed assistance in various aspects of the production and marketing of events.

