
Aishwarya Arumbakkam

TM KRISHNA

VOCALS TM Krishna
VIOLIN Sayee Rakshith
MRIDANGAM Praveen Sparsh
GHATAM Chandrasekara Sharma

Harold Prince Theatre
Thursday, October 15 @ 7 PM

There will be no intermission.

INSIGHTS
Join us after the performance for a conversation with Krishna, moderated by Davesh Soneji, Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of South Asia Studies at Penn.

Sruti
The India Music & Dance Society, Philadelphia
www.sruti.org

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This performance is part of the Arts of India Festival, which is co-presented with Sruti, The India Music & Dance Society, Philadelphia. Lead support for the Arts of India Festival is provided by the William Penn Foundation. This performance is co-sponsored by Penn's Department of South Asian Studies.

TM Krishna (Vocals)
Thodur Madabusi Krishna is one of the preeminent vocalists in the rigorous Carnatic tradition of India's classical music. His tutelage is based in this form that originated in the southern peninsula of the sub-continent nearly 500 years ago. He has trained under the distinguished gurus, B. Seetharama Sarma, Chengalpet Ranganathan and Semmangudi Srinivasier, placing him in the highest reaches of that time-honored system. He has come to occupy a distinct place in the Carnatic universe for the stunning individuality of his renditions, distinguished by an inner luminosity and a passionate intensity that are all his own. Krishna belongs to a tradition but is not owned by it. His concert stage, whether in his hometown of Chennai or anywhere else in the world, is wholly classical, but his concert practice is uncompromisingly his own.

As a public intellectual, Krishna speaks and writes about issues affecting the human condition and about cultural matters. His trailblazing book, *A Southern Music – The Karnatik Story*, published by Harper Collins in 2013, was a first-of-its-kind philosophical, aesthetic and socio-political exploration of Karnatik music. This earned him the 2014 Tata Literature Live Award for best first book in the non-fiction category. His book *Sebastian and Sons*, published by Context in 2020, traces the history of the mrdangam-maker and the mrdangam over the past century. It received the Tata Literature Live Award for the best non-fiction book in 2020. His latest book, *We, the People of India: Decoding a Nation's Symbols*, published by Westland in 2026, explores the historical, cultural and philosophical contexts of India's national symbols—the flag, the anthem, the emblem, the motto and the Preamble—and reflects on how these symbols have shaped the nation's ideas of citizenship, belonging and democracy.

Krishna has been part of inspiring musical productions and collaborations, such as the Chennai Poromboke Paadal with environmentalist Nityanand Jayaraman, performances with the Jogappas (transgender musicians) and co-conceptualizing and performing Karnatik Kattaikuttu, an unusual aesthetic conversation between art forms and communities that belong to two ends of the social spectrum. His partnership with India's leading contemporary Tamil writer, Perumal Murugan, is unprecedented. Rarely have a poet and a musician who are contemporaries collaborated to bring about works of art on the "classical" stage. He has also been a pioneer in bringing the poetry of the social reformer and philosopher Sree Narayana Guru into the Carnatic fold.

In collaboration with Ashoka University, Krishna is now involved in The Edict Project, an attempt to reimagine Ashoka's edicts in musical form. The project aims at creating vibrant aesthetic, socio-political and academic conversations around the edicts.

In 2016, Krishna received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in recognition of "his forceful commitment as artist and advocate to art's power to heal India's deep social divisions." In 2017, he received the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration Award for his services in promoting and preserving national integration in India. That same year, he received the revered Isai Perarignar award from Tamil Isai Sangam for his contributions to Tamil music. In 2019, he received the Swathi Sangeetha Puraskaram, the highest honor for musicians, instituted by the Kerala State Government. In 2021, he received the Pasumai Award in memory of Dr. Jeevanandam, a well-respected Gandhian and social worker.

Krishna was awarded the Sangita Kalanidhi in January 2025, one of the most prestigious honors in Carnatic music, conferred annually by The Madras Music Academy. In November 2025, he was honored with the P. Govinda Pillai National Award for his formidable artistry and fearless intellectual interventions.

Sayee Rakshith (Violin)
Rakshith first trained in violin with Shri T.V. Ramani, developed further under Shri K.G. Rajesh, and advanced under the legendary Sangeetha Kalanidhi Padmashree Kumari A. Kanyakumari. He also honed his vocal skills with maestros like Shri Neyveli Ganesh, Shri A.S. Murali, and Shri Rajkumar Bharathi. In addition to his violin expertise, Rakshith is a versatile music producer, arranger and composer, proficient in harmonium and keyboard. Rakshith's musical journey began at the age of 10, and since then, he has shared the stage with revered Carnatic artists, captivating audiences both in India and internationally. Rakshith is a key member of the renowned band Staccato, collaborating on various projects and performances that showcase his diverse musical abilities. His involvement in the Dharti Ma initiative by the Earth Day Network brought him together with leading musicians across India, including Smt. Bombay Jayashree and Shri Shankar Mahadevan, to promote environmental awareness through music.

In the film industry, Rakshith's talents have been featured in over 30 works, where he has worked with prominent music directors such as M.M. Keeravani and G.V. Prakash. Additionally, his creativity has flourished in the realm of dance, where he has composed and contributed to various productions, demonstrating his ability to seamlessly integrate classical traditions with contemporary styles.

Praveen Sparsh (Mridangam)
Sparsh is a multi-percussionist and music producer who started learning the art of mridangam at the age of five from mridangam maestro Guruvayur Sri Dorai. He is the grandson of mridangam exponent Tanjore Sri Upendran and great-grandson of tavil exponent Valangaiman Sri Shanmugasundaram Pillai.

Sparsh is one of the most sought-after mridangam exponents in the field of Carnatic music and performs regularly with stalwarts like Sri. TM Krishna, Smt. Bombay Jayshree, Smt. Sowmya and Sri. Sikkil Gurucharan, among others. He has toured the United States extensively, as well as Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium, Amsterdam, Singapore, Malaysia, Jakarta, Sydney, Melbourne, Israel and Palestine.

As a music producer, Sparsh has scored and performed music for the play *Kurukshetra - When things fall apart*, directed by noted playwright Dr. Gowri Ramnarayan, where he single-handedly played instruments like the mridangam, kanjira, guitar, cajon and darbuka along with konnakol (vocal percussion) and other ambient percussion instruments. He has also scored music for short films and ads and has worked with famed director Rajeev Menon.

Sparsh's awards and titles from revered institutions in Carnatic music include Laya Ratna, the Palani Subramania Pillai Memorial Award, the Bharat Ratna Dr. M.S. Subbulakshmi Fellowship in Music, the Yuva Kala Bharati, the Palghat Mani Iyer's Endowment Award, the Central Govt. Scholarship for Mridangam, Best Mridangam Artiste and the Carnatic Idol, among others.

Sparsh has collaborated and toured with world music bands like House of Waters, Sid Sriram live, Sean Roldan and Friends, Aditya Prakash Ensemble and Poorvaa. He has

performed in various independent music festivals, including NH7 Weekender, Frostbite Festival, Riff Festival, Covelong Surf Festival, DAM Festival and MAD festival. He curated and led a percussion ensemble with Parai artistes (traditional folk percussion) at the Urur Olcot Music Festival. At the same festival, he also presented a performance with a group of female students from Avvai Home, a school for underprivileged children, training with them for three months prior to the performance.

Sparsh, along with a team of sensitive artists, curated the No'mad Projekt, a platform for musicians where they are placed in a pristine natural environment and recorded with a single microphone, capturing the ambience and the music as one. He then curated Orisai, an offset of No'mad Projekt which brings the listener an immersive concert experience in a minimalistic concert design through ambient recording. He has also performed with his Indo-fusion band Sparsh Quartet for the last five years. He is an avid trekker and traveler and does a music travelogue called Projekt Peragro.

Chandrasekara Sharma (Ghatam)
G. Chandrasekara Sharma comes from a family steeped in music. His grandfather, TR Hari Hara Sharma, was a mridangam and morsing artist and a fixture at Flute Mali's concerts. He set up the still-functioning Jaya Ganesh Tala Vadya Vidhyalaya in Triplicane. Sharma's father, TH Gurumurthy, a violinist and a student of Sangita Kalanidhi TN Krishnan, is the younger brother of TH "Vikku" Vinayakram and TH Subash Chandran, esteemed ghatam artists.

Sharma's training was organic and unregimented. Family members recollect his repeating even complicated korvais at age three or four and sitting with Vinayakram and Subash Chandran through several full concerts without fussing. He had some basic training for farhans and mohra on the mridangam and ghatam at his grandfather's school and periodic individual lessons from Subash Chandran. At wedding concerts by the family, Sharma was allowed to play for one piece after the tani avartanam.

When Gurumurthy joined Annamalai University as a violin lecturer, Sharma studied in Chidambaram from fifth through eighth grades. There, he learned vocals from RK Kumar. His mother, Hema, a tiruppugazh exponent, was keen on him pursuing vocal performance. However, percussion instruments were present at his home since Gurumurthy had interest in layam and because his older brother, Hari Hara Sharma, learned kanjira. Sharma used to practice whatever he knew on the ghatam for at least an hour and a half each day without prompting.

Several venerable artists such as Srimushnam Raja Rao and Thiruvarur Bhaktavatsalam visited Sharma's family and stayed in his home. Sharma was asked to demonstrate some of his skills, and many of these artists let him sit with them at concerts and play. He also played for local artists. His earliest full concert was in fifth grade with Umayalpuram Sivaraman, playing a violin duet by Gurumurthy and VL Sudarshan.

Learning sessions from Subash Chandran were concentrated and chockful of information. "I did not go nearly as much as I could but, when I did, he gave me a lot to digest and practice. He would also practice the ghatam with me." Sharma learned vocal regularly for eight years from N Vijay Siva. He continues his training now under RK Shriramkumar.