

Kalaa Utsavam Indian Festival of Arts

AN ESPLANADE CO-PRODUCTION

MARABU Footprints of an Artist

Principal Sponsor



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18 - 20 NOV 2022 FRI, 8PM | SAT & SUN, 3PM & 8PM ESPLANADE THEATRE STUDIO PROGRAMME NOTES

About Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Esplanade is Singapore's national performing arts centre. It hosts a year-round line-up of about 3.500 live performances and activities presented by Esplanade, its partners and hirers. Esplanade also brings the arts virtually to audiences in Singapore and beyond, through its diverse range of digital programmes on Esplanade Offstage, an all-access backstage pass to the performing arts and guide to Singapore and Asian arts and culture, with videos, podcasts, articles, quizzes and resources.

As an arts centre for everyone, Esplanade also creates opportunities for seniors, youth, children and underserved communities to experience the arts. More than 70% of the shows that take place each year at the centre are free for all to enjoy.

The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. Esplanade supports the creation of artistic content by commissioning and producing new Singapore and Asian work for the international stage. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

Turning 20 in 2022, Esplanade marks the occasion with a year-long celebration themed 20 and Beyond: Keeping the Lights On. In addition to the presentations of its year-long festivals, programme series, and special initiatives and events, there will also be a season of new works by Singapore and Asian artists specially commissioned for the arts centre's 20th anniversary and official opening of its newest venue, Singtel Waterfront Theatre.

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is operated by The Esplanade Co Ltd (TECL), which is a not-for-profit organisation, a registered Charity and an Institution of a Public Character. The Charity Council awarded TECL the Charity Governance Award – Special Commendation for Clarity of Strategy in 2016, and the Charity Transparency Award for four consecutive years since 2016. Esplanade is Singapore's first Dementia-Friendly Arts Venue and a certified Dementia Go-To Point, as well as a Guide-dog Friendly centre.

TECL receives funding support from Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Community Programmes are supported by Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.

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Festival Message



The Indian culture spans myriad art forms and genres that branch out from its long history. Presenting this diverse and extensive culture in Singapore is no mean task. Over the past two decades, *Kalaa Utsavam – Indian Festival of Arts* has been a champion for the Indian arts and this

year from 18 – 27 Nov 2022, the festival builds on the relationships developed over the years with artists and arts groups, while also introducing new and exciting artists and art forms that audiences can look forward to.

In the unique position of being the first Indian arts festival with a multi-genre focus in Southeast Asia, *Kalaa Utsavam* has sought to be a catalyst for excellence by developing and supporting the creations of both international and Singapore artists through debut performances by up and coming artists and premieres of new work, all telling their unique stories. Keeping in line with that vision, this year's edition will also feature the return of international artists such as sitarist Anoushka Shankar, and newly co-produced works by Apsaras Arts, Bhaskar's Arts Academy and playwright A Yagnya.

Through **ARISI** : **Rice**, Apsaras Arts explores the importance of rice from a Southeast Asian perspective; Bhaskar's Arts Academy collaborates with playwright Alfian Sa'at for **Marabu – Footprints of an Artist** which pays tribute to the late doyenne Mrs Santha Bhaskar; and upcoming local playwright A Yagnya's **Between 5 Cows and the Deep Blue Sea...** which is directed by Alvin Tan will explore traditional Indian matchmaking and the struggles of a Tamil girl. Presented as part of *PopLore – A Year of Singapore Popular Music* in celebration of Esplanade's 20th Anniversary, we welcome back the ever-popular **Vasantham Live** which will chronicle the evolution of the Indian pop scene in Singapore.

Kalaa Utsavam also features many exciting and upcoming musicians, such as Punjabi outfit **Band Walle**, Tamil group **D.N.S.V** and a night of soul and R&B with singer-songwriter **Shak'thiya**.

The festival has also had the wonderful opportunity of featuring many leading musicians from overseas. Whilst this could not be achieved in the past two years due to the pandemic, this year we are thrilled to welcome world music icon and sitarist **Anoushka Shankar**, collaborating with Austrian percussionist Manu Delago and our very own Orchestra of the Music Makers; Maverick Indian carnatic vocalist **T M Krishna** and his ensemble; and popular Malaysian hip-hop collective **#PU4LYF** who are primed to bring the house down.

We also take immense pride in featuring the works **Can I** Make You a Suit, Mate? by Singapore stand-up comedian Rishi Budhrani as he takes us down memory lane with a comedic monologue based on his father's experiences as an immigrant from India, and **The Indigo Jackal** directed by Grace Kalaiselvi which adds to the list of popular children's productions that were commissioned in the past few editions of the festival. The festival will also feature workshops, talks and a slew of free programmes for everyone's enjoyment.

We express our heartfelt thanks to *Kalaa Utsavam* 2022's Principal Sponsor, the High Commission of India, Singapore, Supporting Sponsor Fort Sanctuary, and supporter Bowen Enterprises Pte Ltd and The Silent Foundation. Having said that, no festival is possible without all of you, our audience and fans. We thank you for the unwavering support that has been extended to us over the last 20 years. As we step into a new frontier into the next decade of the festival, we invite you to join us once again on this journey of exploring and marvelling at the sheer diversity and beauty of Indian culture and arts.

See you at Kalaa Utsavam!

V M Sai Akileshwar

Programmer, The Esplanade Co Ltd On behalf of the *Kalaa Utsavam* Team

Sponsor's Message

As we celebrate 75 years of India's independence with a series of events under 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the High Commission of India is delighted to support the 21st year of Kalaa Utsavam - Indian Festival of Arts in Singapore. It is heartening to see the impressive

growth of the festival over the past two decades, with its focus on multiple genres but creating a niche for itself as a unique event featuring both global and local artists.

This edition of *Kalaa Utsavam* is special, as it brings to the audience an exciting bouquet of performances by several internationally acclaimed musicians such as Sitar Maestra Anoushka Shankar and Carnatic vocalist TM Krishna, apart from the dance musical, *ARISI: Rice*, which is a cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary performance inspired by the life-sustaining grain that links vast sections of humanity across Asia. The festival provides useful opportunities for children and adults to participate in interesting workshops and lectures, helping them develop a keener understanding of various art forms. In addition, it also provides a valuable platform for local talent, contributing towards keeping the Indian arts alive and thriving in Singapore.

The long and unique history of people-to-people connections between India and Singapore makes collaboration in the field of culture a joyous and spontaneous celebration of music, dance and the arts, and contributes to the vitality of our bilateral relationship. Festivals like *Kalaa Utsavam* keep artistic traditions alive and provide an opportunity to bring about greater harmony and understanding.

Arts and artists have been instrumental in providing a healing touch to our tired souls as we continue to navigate the challenging circumstances of the pandemic. We are glad to have been a key partner of *Kalaa Utsavam* last year, albeit under a heavy COVID-19 overhang. It gives us greater pleasure to see the event being held this time in-person, just as in the years before the pandemic. Esplanade has already enthralled audiences in Singapore this year by playing host to events like *Ashayein* by Salim Sulaiman and *Triveni* featuring Ustaad Zakir Hussain, as part of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations. We are hopeful that the vibrant audiences of Singapore will again give a resounding thumbs up to the events planned in this edition of *Kalaa Utsavam*. The High Commission of India conveys its best wishes to all the performers and hopes that this edition of *Kalaa Utsavam* surpasses the high standards it has set for itself, and adds another glittering chapter to India-Singapore cultural relations.

Artistic Director/ Choreographer

Marabu can be translated to legacy and heritage. It is only fitting that the third instalment of the *Marabu* series is on the artists who came to Singapore to make a living. Commissioned by Esplanade for *Kalaa Utsavam 2022*, the work evolved and became one that spotlighted a true legacy of Singapore – dance doyen and trail blazer for Singapore, Santha Bhaskar.

My mother is a familiar face in Singapore's art world. She was a visionary and a true artist, dedicated and committed to her craft, who was into multicultural and cross-cultural works even in the 1950s, being one of the first to do so in Bharatanatyam worldwide. Her choreography and own brand of Bharatanatyam is reflective of the hybrid culture of Singapore.

Her story is different – the circumstances surrounding her move to Singapore as a dewy-eyed teenager of 15, not completely aware where this new life was taking her. But she embraced her new situation with the same grace and fortitude as she lived her whole life. Bhaskar's Arts proudly presents this story in collaboration with well-known scriptwriter and dramaturg, Alfian Sa'at and music composer, BV Balasai. It has been a great gift and honour to mount this piece on our talented and capable dancers.

Meenakshy Bhaskar

Artistic Director Bhaskar's Arts Academy

FROM THE Music Composer

Santha Bhaskar is an inspiration for every artist. She lived an example of Shantham - Peace itself.

I got introduced to her in 2011 and I felt very comfortable working with her. She treated everyone like a family. She has tremendously supported my composing.

Santha Aunty was adept in Bharatanatyam and in contemporary dance. She has incorporated Malay Music, Chinese and even Indonesian Music into Bharatanatyam. She was a multi-talented person with a multi-cultural outlook and of course very much loved by everyone. I am really proud of Santha Aunty's achievements. Her courage, discipline, dedication and hardworking nature amaze me always. I feel Santha Aunty lives on with us through her Academy.

I am very fortunate to be a part of *Marabu – Footprints* of an Artist that is celebrating the life history of Smt Santha Bhaskar.

Many thanks to Bhaskar's Arts!

My best wishes and love for all their endeavours

BV Balasai

FROM THE Scriptwriter/ Dramaturg

The first time I met Mrs B was when I was a teenager, thirty years ago. I had attended a workshop she had conducted as part of the Creative Arts Programme. She introduced us to mudras, or the hand gestures used in Bharatanatyam. It is, until today, one of the most revelatory workshops I have ever attended, because it showed me that poetry can exist not just in words but also the body.

When I was invited to dramaturg this final instalment of Marabu, I leapt at the chance to explore more about Mrs B's life and to trace her journey as an artist. It was important for me to turn to primary sources, such as oral history interviews, so that the story could be told in Mrs B's own words.

My thanks to Meenakshy and Rani as well as all the dancers, musicians and artists who have made this work possible. As a writer, I used to think of the text as enduring, the performance, ephemeral. But I have learnt that Mrs B's legacy is not only stored in words but is continually activated in the bodies of those who perform her creations. Enjoy the show tonight.

Alfian Sa'at

The Creatives



MEENAKSHY BHASKAR

The daughter of dance doyens the Bhaskars, Meenakshy Bhaskar studied dance at University of Wisconsin, USA. Upon returning to Singapore, she performed and held the lead roles in several Bhaskar's Arts Academy productions. She has performed for dignitaries

from all over the world, including Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth. In 1996, Meenakshy Bhaskar was presented the Singapore Young Artiste Award for her contributions and dedication to the Arts in Singapore.

Like her mother, Meenakshy is a gifted choreographer. Because of her diverse background in dance, her creations are uniquely rooted in Bharatanatyam but subtly influenced by her vast training. Her first fulllength work in Singapore was *Vinayaka* (2003), where her flair for choreography shone through. Her other exemplary works include *Yatra* (2005) where social issues like domestic violence were brought to centrestage; *Yatra II* (2007), an introspective work on her own journey; and *Yatra III* (2010) where she collaborated and performed with Spanish guitarist Roberto Corrias. Meenakshy also reimagined two of her mother's classics – *Manohra* (2009) and the Chinese folktale *Butterfly Lovers* (2021).

Meenakshy Bhaskar is currently Artistic Director of Bhaskar's Arts Academy (Singapore) and Principal of Bhaskar's Arts Academy (California). She continues to travel between California and Singapore teaching and choreographing original works.



BV BALASAI

Born into a family of rich musical tradition, BV Balasai is the son of B Sudarsana Rao [Flautist]. He started his initial training at the age of 8 from his father, and later on took his gurukulam under the guidance of CG Venkatesh and Dr Prapancham Sitaram. He is an "A Top" Grade artiste of the A.I.R. & Doordarshan.

As a soloist, he has performed for many prestigious sabhas and organisations all over India. He has also been featured in all the festivals of the leading media. Balasai has been performing duet concerts with Gottuvadyam and Mandolin, rare and unique instrumental combinations, without the usual accompaniment, the violin. His multi-faceted talents include playing Hindustani Classical, the Western Classical Key flute, and association with the film industry. He has travelled widely throughout the world. Three decades of performances include numerous solo, duet and fusion concerts performed in India and abroad.

He has also released few Albums to his credit. As a composer he has composed music and has done music direction for many Indian Classical Dance ballets and devotional albums.

A versatile artist with a fine professional record on the platform, displaying the maturity, fluency and the power of a veteran, Balasai has inspired confidence in the hearts of music lovers who fear for the future of classical music.

For his dedication and virtuosity, he has been awarded numerous accolades, including the Kalaimamani award from the Tamil Nadu State Government, Chennai.



ALFIAN SA'AT

Alfian Sa'at is the Resident Playwright of Wild Rice. In 2001, he won the National Arts Council Young Artist Award for Literature. He has been nominated 11 times for Best Original Script at the Life! Theatre Awards, winning for Landmarks (2005), Nadirah (2010), Kakak Kau Punya

Laki (Your Sister's Husband, 2014 and *Hotel* (with Marcia Vanderstraaten, 2016).

Alfian has also been awarded the Boh-Cameronian Award in Malaysia for Best Book and Lyrics for *The Secret Life of Nora* (2011) and for Best Original Script for *Parah* (Wounded, 2013).

His plays have been performed in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Melbourne and Berlin.

The Artistes



ARYA SREEKUMAR

Arya's Bharatanatyam journey began in 2010 with Guru Neewin Hershall. Upon completing her Bharatanatyam Diploma in 2017, her passion for dance led her to take up a Kathakali elective under the guidance

of Guru Kalamandalam Biju. A quick and assiduous learner, she was soon noticed as a talented dancer in both genres. In 2019, she gave her debut Kathakali performance at BAA's Kathakali Festival, playing the role of Draupadi in *Kalyana Sougandhikam*, alongside established artistes from Kerala Kalamandalam. Having auditioned successfully to be a BAA Junior Company dancer, Arya's first showing was at BAA's *People Get Connected 2.0* earlier this year. Arya plays Ramuni Panicker, who was Santha Bhaskar's Guru and KP Bhaskar's friend in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist*.



DAVINYA RAMATHAS

An eager and spirited dancer, Davinya started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of 10 and completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam under the tutelage of Guru Ambujah Thiru earlier this year. She

auditioned successfully to become a part of BAA's Junior Company in 2016 and recently earned her role as a Company Dancer. Davinya shone as a performer in BAA productions including *Manohra* and *Kutrala Kuravanji* and, most recently, in its Choreography Lab series, which sparked her interest to explore creativity within movements and abhinaya. A fast learner who demonstrates a keen desire for precision, Davinya is a promising up-and-coming dancer to watch. Davinya plays KP Bhaskar in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist*.



GAYATHRI KANTHAN PRAKASH

Gayathri began her formal training at the age of four under the tutelage of Mr and Mrs Bhaskar. She performed her Arangetram in 1997, and successfully staged her solo production *Natyanjanli* in 2000. An elegant and graceful dancer, Gayathri went on to present *Athmeeya Bhava* together with her sister, Shivashni, under the support of the Centre for the Arts (CFA) in NUS. Gayathri has been a part of many BAA productions both locally and abroad. Currently she is a Bharatanatyam instructor at Nrityalaya, a role she hopes will help her make a difference to the next generation of dance students. Gayathri plays Radha, one of Santha's younger sisters in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist*.



KISHANNA SASIDARAN

Kishanna started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of seven and completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam under the tutelage of Guru Ambujah Thiru in 2021. She auditioned successfully to

become a part of BAA's Junior Company in 2016. Kishanna danced in several BAA productions including *Manohra* and *Kutrala Kuravanji*. A determined learner who demonstrates a keen desire for perfection, Kishanna hopes to continue performing in as many productions as she can. Out to prove a point that Bharatanatyam is more than a dance genre, and that it is a beautiful art, Kishanna aspires to use it to inspire others. Kishanna plays Santha's mother Pankyamma in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist*.



L DIVYAASRI

Divya started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of six from Guru Padmini Subramaniam and completed her Diploma this year under the tutelage of Guru Ambujah Thiru. In recent years, Divya has displayed diligence

and determination, and has bloomed into a confident dancer. A member of BAA's Junior Company since 2019, she has performed in *Kutrala Kuravanji* and in the annual Kantha Shashti recitations. In 2018, she performed in Community Chest Singapore's Fundraiser event. In parallel, Divya also learns the flute. Her exposure to the performing arts has inspired her to further hone her skills and explore various facets of the art. Divyaa plays one of Santha's younger sisters in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist*.



NISHALINI LAKCHIMANATHAS

Nishalini started dancing at age nine and completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam under Guru Neewin Hershall in 2010. Since then this bold and spirited dancer has continued to bloom and has been a part of numerous BAA productions including *Manohra, Chakra, XPressions, Vinayaka, Brihannala* and *Kutrala Kuravanji*. With her ability to take any role and make it her own, Nishalini was particularly impressive in her role as the Evil Minister in Bhaskar's Arts' third iteration of *Manohra*. As one of BAA's fine talents, Nishalini continues to bring her personality and creativity into all her performances. Nishalini plays one of Santha's friends in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist*.



PRISHALINI RAJENDRAN

Prishalini has been learning Bharatanatyam for the past 10 years under the tutelage of Guru Neewin Hershall and completed her Diploma in 2018. A hardworking dancer who aims for perfection in her

craft, Prishalini is a Junior Company member and has performed in productions such as *Manohra* and *Kutrala Kuravanji*. To further explore her passion for dance, she started Kathakali training under the guidance of Guru Kalamandalam Biju and made her debut in *Jatayu Moksham* in 2019. She hopes to continue performing in as many productions as she can. Prishalini plays Retnamma, one of Santha's younger sisters in *Marabu* – *Footprints of an Artist*.



SARENNIYA RAMATHAS

An agile and flexible dancer, Sarenniya has been learning Bharatanatyam since she was 10 and is one of BAA's shooting stars. This notably vibrant dancer successfully completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam

in 2010 under the tutelage of Guru Neewin Hershall and joined the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society teaching faculty soon after. In all her BAA performances as a Company Dancer such as *Manohra, Thirukutrala Kuravanji, XPressions, I, Cyclops, Na Mah, Brihannala* and *Kutrala Kuravanji,* and especially in her lead role in *Vinayaka,* her impeccable executions and perfect anga saushtaava are evident, making Sarenniya a joy to watch on stage. Sarenniya plays Guru Kutralam Ganesam Pillai (Santha's Bharatanatyam Guru) and one of Santha's friends in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist.*



SHAMINI SUBRAMANIAM

Shamini started learning Bharatanatyam at the tender age of six. She recently completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam under the tutelage of Guru Ambujah Thiru. With numerous Nrityalaya performances under her belt, including Shashti, Shamini successfully auditioned into BAA's Junior Company. Since then, she has performed in works such as Manohra, Kutrala Kuranvanji and Marabu - The Forgotten Sentinels. She was also part of the BAA troupe that represented Singapore in Ninh Binh, Vietnam in 2018. A hardworking and enthusiastic dancer, Shamini hopes to continue learning the nuances of being a good performer on stage. Shamini plays Chandrasekhar, KP Bhaskar's older brother in Marabu – Footprints of an Artist.



SHIVASHNI KUMMAR

Shivashni began her dance training with Guru Santha Bhaskar at age four and immediately impressed with her maturity and abhinaya skills. She was soon chosen to play the lead role of Muruga in the Aum

Muruga series. In 2009, she also played the titular role in *Manohra*. Upon completing her Arangetram in 2001 she staged her solo production *Prachodana* in 2012. An active student and alumni dancer in NUS Centre for the Arts, Shivashni presented a duet performance *Athmeeya Bhava* in 2007. While she has not been performing regularly in the past 10 years, she is glad to be back on stage for this iconic production. Shivashni plays Santha Bhaskar in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist.*



VAARSHA NAIR

Vaarsha has been learning Bharatanatyam since the age of five. She has been under the tutelage of Guru Neewin Hershall for over 10 years, and completed her Arangetram in 2019. She auditioned for and

successfully joined BAA's Junior Company in 2018, and participated in *Manohra* that same year. Vaarsha's aptitude for Bharatanatyam has shone clear through multiple performances, reinforcing her presence on stage as a vibrant and hardworking dancer. In the coming years, she hopes to continue honing her flair for Bharatanatyam as well as tapping into other styles of classical dances. Vaarsha plays Santha's father in *Marabu – Footprints of an Artist.*

Credits

ARTISTIC DIRECTION & CHOREOGRAPHY Meenakshy Bhaskar

MUSIC COMPOSITION BV Balasai

SCRIPT & DRAMATURGY Alfian Sa'at

LIGHTING DESIGN Venkatesh Krishnan

MULTIMEDIA DESIGN KayKay Nizam

MULTIMEDIA OPERATION Sharin Zulkinia

COMPERING Indu Vijay Usha Anbalagan Dayanita Rani COSTUME CONSULT Nishalini Lakchimanathas

TAILORING Prime Arts, Paravathy (Selvi)

WARDROBE & HAIR STYLING Ambujah Thiru

STAGE MANAGEMENT Lee Xinzhi (Gigi)

PUBLICITY

Bala Saravanan Loganathan Nishalini Lakchimanathas Soneiya Chandra Kumar

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT Thava Rani Mohan





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*Figures for Esplanade's activities from Apr 2021 to Mar 2022.



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