

## Mahesh Vinayakram

He is the son of the prodigious **Vikku Vinayakram**, ghatam player extraordinaire. He began with *Pancha Bhuta Kiranavalim*, but along with **VV Ravi** on the violin they created a completely new interpretation of the song that was like *Muthuswamy Dikshitar* on Red Bull. After this, he sang *Om Namah Shivayah* (again, it was good, but what's with the dogged determination to refer to Shiva? I get that it's a powerful day to invoke his blessings, but it seemed a little passé after a bit) with some amazing vocal percussion.

## Sounds of Isha

The 'home band', if you will, these people have an ingenious way of combining rusty folk grooves with lush acoustic patterns and full-toned solos. What I personally love about **Sounds of Isha** is that although their music is always exuberant, there is an undertone of technique that just can't be ignored. A lot of their songs have signatures that aren't conventional (they take fives and sevens effortlessly in their stride). In spite of that, they are still so palatable even to the (hundreds of) listeners with no knowledge of music theory. Also, the bass guitarist (**Swami Medya**) was playing the electronic pad for a bit, then switched to the keyboard, then the drums and then ran back to the bass. He makes **Dave Grohl** look horribly under-accomplished. The flute and violin were sprightly and complemented the guitars perfectly while the singers spirited us all away to the Land of Happy Endings for a good sixty minutes.

## Bala Bhaskar

There is no denying the amazing skills that this artiste has. However, he should perhaps have been a little more prudent in his choice of ensemble. The electric guitar and violin just didn't go together, hitting high notes with a jar and jostling each other for attention. But the compositions were great, and the percussionist was discerning enough to know just what to play where.

Mahashivaratri is a unique experience. From the traditional to the uber radical; people from all paths seem to connect deeply with this God. We catch up on the events organized by Isha Foundation on this propitious night.

# FEST FOCUS

# Mahashivarathri



## Aruna Sairam

Do all these musicians feel their performances have to be gravely religious and spiritually incandescent just because it's *Mahashivarathri*? Somehow **Padma Shri Aruna Sairam** may be leaning towards that side of the line. She seemed a little out of her depth initially. She began with *Sabhathikkku Veru Daivam*, then moved on to *Mahadeva Shiva Shambho* and then sang *Kaana Vendamo*, all tributes to Shiva. Not that I'm complaining, because she did a good job, but the whole air of hallowed reverence was a little wearying. She did redeem herself later on, though, with *Mamavatu Sri Saraswati* that had a great thaniavarthanam, and then *Maaadu Meikkum Kanne* that the crowds loved because of its inherently heart-warming lyrics. After that, she sang *Veshamakkaara Kanna*. Here we could really appreciate her talent, eliciting images of little Krishna running around stealing butter and breaking the water pots of the gopis. A nice performance overall, very upbeat towards the end.

## Anita Ratnam

**Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev**, (the establisher of Isha Foundation) was keeping the audiences listening with rapt attention by recounting tales of how Shiva wanted to see *Krishna's Raas Leela* and dressed like a girl for it. Then there was another legend, where the seven sages of Shiva circled the Shiva-Parvathi entity every day in respect, to pay homage to Shiva's teachings. *Bhrigu* (one of the seven), however felt he had nothing to do with Parvathi and only wanted to circle Shiva. In order to achieve this, he turned himself into a wasp and tried to bore a hole between the two to just circle Shiva, his guru. All these stories were enacted by the Anita Ratnam troupe.

Oh, the horror. Gaudy costumes and awful coordination. Neo-Bharatnatyam, it's supposed to be. I couldn't see anything remotely Bharatnatyam about it and unless neo means traumatizing, the genre is a total misnomer. Shiva contemplating the womanly clothes was a botchy haze of misplaced expression, and Krishna with the women around him was a melange of hapless dancing. About the wasp that was supposed to bore a hole? Well, that looked like it was the unfortunate victim of an epileptic attack.

## Raghu Dixit Project

It was nearing three in the morning by this time and a lot of rather haggard looking people were lying down on the grass, almost as if they were about to fall asleep. Enter **Raghu Dixit**, the piece de resistance. They brought everyone to their feet, and hoe. Raghu began with *Hey Bhagwan*, my personal favourite. After this they sang a lot of their hits, like *Mysore se Aayi*, *Jag Changa* and *Lokadi Kaaladi*. But their amazing set list aside, it was about the way they transformed an atmosphere charged with torpor into an unequivocally exuberant one. Almost the entire crowd was on its feet, jumping and clapping and dancing at the prompting of the frontman. He ended with *Mahadeshwara*, a fitting tribute to Shiva.