Rithvik Raja

Carnatic Musician

Singer | Educator | Composer | Curator

rithvikraja@gmail.com
www.rithvikraja.com

Introduction

Rithvik Raja stands as a compelling voice in contemporary Carnatic music, seamlessly blending traditional mastery with innovative expressions. With over two decades of extensive training and performance experience, his music is defined by emotional depth, intellectual rigor, and spontaneous creativity. Known for his powerful voice and commitment to preserving classical traditions, Rithvik's artistry transcends mere performance; it is a journey through a rich cultural heritage, inviting audiences to experience the transformative power of music. Rithvik's approach is characterised by a perfect blend of intellectual rigor, emotional depth, and spontaneous expression—traits that make his music both profound and exhilarating.His work as a performer, educator, and advocate underscores his pivotal role in both the Carnatic music world and the larger arts community.

Family

Rithvik's musical journey is deeply intertwined with a legacy that spans multiple generations, shaping his profound connection to both music and culture. Raised in a family rich in artistic traditions, he was surrounded by scholars, musicians, and passionate patrons of the arts. His maternal great-grandfather, H. Hariharasubramaniam, a direct disciple of Kallidaikurichi Shri Vedantha Bhagavatar, hailed from the esteemed musical lineage of Muttusvami Dikshitar. On his paternal side, his great-grandfather, T.E. Krishnamachari, was a trailblazer in Tamil theatre, known for his groundbreaking work in both film and stage. Both of Rithvik's grandmothers were avid music enthusiasts, who had studied the form in their youth, and their daily rituals—singing songs and listening to cassettes—became a constant backdrop to his childhood. Guided by his mother, Sudha Raja, an accomplished musician and teacher, Rithvik's early years were shaped by a natural immersion in music, not just as a discipline, but as an intrinsic part of his life's journey toward excellence.

Music Learning

Rithvik's musical training spans both the intellectual and emotional realms of Carnatic music. His foundational education came from his mother, **Sudha Raja**, whose ability to kindle the joy of singing and meticulous attention to detail laid a firm foundation for his musical development. His pursuit of music was further enriched under the tutelage of eminent musicologist **Sulochana Pattabhiraman**, whose approach blended both scholarly insight and artistic expression. Yet, it was his association with **T.M. Krishna**, starting in 2003, that truly transformed Rithvik's musical vision. Krishna's mentorship allowed Rithvik to fully embrace his own voice, encouraging him to take bold creative risks while maintaining a deep reverence for tradition.

Education

Rithvik's academic journey reflects his holistic approach to life, blending intellectual pursuits with his artistic endeavors. From his early schooling at **Vidya Mandir, Mylapore**, where he excelled not just academically but in extracurricular activities like music and cricket, to his college studies in Commerce at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College**, Rithvik cultivated a well-rounded perspective that would later inform his work as a musician. His decision to study web and graphic design and later sound engineering further underscores his commitment to understanding the evolving world of music technology. This diverse academic background, combined with his deep artistic roots, has allowed him to seamlessly integrate modern tools with classical practices, creating a fusion that enhances both his performances and his outreach efforts.

Achievements & Recognition

Rithvik's career trajectory is marked by a steady rise, rooted in years of disciplined practice, from early triumphs, a series of breakthrough performances, to international acclaim. His debut performance at the age of 12 was the first of many, as he went on to win numerous awards and distinctions, including **Isai Chudar** (Kartik Fine Arts) and **Yuvakalabharathi** (Bharat Kalachar) while still in his youth. Yet, it was his decision at 19 to pursue music full-time that solidified his commitment to a career that now spans continents. His performances have been celebrated across the world, with audiences drawn to his ability to infuse classic compositions with a vibrancy that feels both fresh and timeless. Alongside critical acclaim, Rithvik has received several prestigious government scholarships and recognitions for his contributions to the art, further cementing his status as an emerging luminary in Carnatic music.

Global Performances

With over 20 years of performance experience, Rithvik has captivated audiences on some of the most esteemed stages worldwide. His concert tours have included multiple cities across North America, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the Middle East. Key performances include:

- **North America:** 23 concerts across 23 cities (2018), 26 concerts across 24 cities (2015)
- **Australia:** Sydney, Melbourne & Adelaide (2014)
- **United Kingdom & Europe:** England, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, France (2016)
- **New Zealand:** Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington for 4 concerts (2016)
- **Global Festivals:**
    - London International Arts Festival (2016)
    - Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana (2013, 2015, 2017)
    - Ragamalika Festival in Abu Dhabi (2016)
    - Parramasala Multicultural Festival in Sydney (2016)
    - Esplanade Recital Studio, Singapore for SIFAS & Kartik Fine Arts (2014)
    - Swara Raga Sudha Festival in Malaysia (2016)
    - Rtam Festival by Sabha Inc. in Kuwait (2017)
    - Kala Utsavam at Esplanade, Singapore (2024)
    - Rithvik's versatility and dynamic performances have earned him a dedicated following worldwide.

Collaborations

Rithvik has had the privilege of working with some of the most respected names in the Carnatic music world, including T.K. Murthy, M.S. Anantharaman, Dr. K. Sivaraman, and Dr. Trichy Sankaran, among many others. His collaborations extend beyond the Carnatic tradition, as he has worked with artists from diverse musical backgrounds, pushing the boundaries of traditional forms while maintaining their integrity. Key collaborations include:

- **Umayalpuram Dr. K. Sivaraman:** 'Nama Pravaham' along with musicians Sandeep Narayan, Bharat Sundar and Sean Roldan for Kalpadruma Arts Festival (2014) and Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha (2014)
- **Jaikishore Mosalikanti & Padmavani Mosalikanti:** Kuchipudi Collaboration 'Srimad Bhagavatam' production premiered at Cleveland Thyagaraja Utsavam (2017)
- **Shweta Prachande:** Bharatanatyam Collaboration at Dharani Festival, Kochi (2017), Blue Planet Series, First Edition Arts (2021), Bangalore International Centre (2022)
- **R.K. Shriramkumar:** Lecture Demonstration on Muttusvami Dikshitar at Hamsadhwani (2015) and Compositions of Sringeri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Mahasvami at Sudharma (2016) along with Amritha Murali, Ramakrishnan Murthy and Bharathi Ramasubban
- **Jayanthi Subramaniam, Nithyakalyani Vaidhyanathan, Roja Kannan and other students of Guru Adayar K. Lakshman:** Tribute production premiered at Cleveland Thyagaraja Utsavam (2015)
- **Ramakrishnan Murthy:** 'Raga Sudha Rasa' National Festival in Mangalore (2014)
- **Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi:** Presented the opera composed by Maestro Lalgudi G. Jayaraman along with musicians Sandeep Narayan, K. Gayatri and Subiksha Rangarajan at Krishna Gana Sabha (2014)
- **Shyama Shastri Jayanti:** Special program of Syama Sastri Swarajatis along with musicians Sandeep Narayan, Prasanna Venkatraman, Amritha Murali, K. Gayatri, Bharathi Ramasubban and Sriranjani Santhanagopalan
- **Prasanna Venkatraman:** Bharat Sangeet Utsav (2014), Gudiya Sambhrama Festival (2017), Mysuru Ganesh Utsav (2021)
- **Vignesh Ishwar:** 'Madrasana' Festival (2024) and Esplanade, Singapore (2025)
- **Ensemble:** A collaborative Karnatik concert experience curated for Madrasana and Sruti Foundation along with musicians H.N. Bhaskar, N. Guruprasad, G. Ravikiran, V. Anirudh Athreya, Vignesh Ishwar, Praveen Sparsh (2023)
- **Students of T.M. Krishna:** Performed concerts and lectures along with other students of T.M. Krishna for presentations and concerts at Bharat Sangeet Utsav, The Hindu LitFest and Sri Krishna Gana Sabha
- **Issai Mazhalai:** Performed as part of Abaswaram Ramjhi's Issai Mazhalai from 1999-2003 at various cities across India, Singapore and Sri Lanka
- **Madras Youth Choir:** Sang as part of the Junior Wing of Shri M.B. Shrinivasan's Madras Youth Choir from 1997-2001

Lectures, Demonstrations, Workshops, Interviews & Conversations

Beyond his performances, Rithvik has made a lasting impact by dedicating much of his career to educating and spreading the knowledge of Carnatic music. His lecture-demonstrations and workshops have reached diverse audiences across the globe—ranging from students and scholars to musicians, connoisseurs, and those new to the art form. These sessions are thoughtfully crafted to demystify classical music, inviting listeners of all backgrounds to engage with its depth and complexity.

Rithvik's skill in making complex musical concepts approachable is one of the hallmarks of his educational outreach. Notable initiatives include:

- **BAR (Build-A-Rasika)**: Outreach program for over 60 schools
- **CompMusic Project**: Panel discussion on the intersection of technology and tradition at IIT Madras
- **International Workshops**: Sessions in Malaysia, Ireland, UK, Australia, and North America

1. **Malaysia** - Rithvik was the guest examiner for the annual assessments of 'Swara Raga Sudha' and also conducted a lecture demonstration for the students of the music school

2. **Dublin, Ireland** - Rithvik conducted an exclusive workshop session on the basics, varnas and compositions and taught how to learn and approach them during practice to improve Manodharma and spontaneity

3. **London, UK** - Among other workshops, Rithvik conducted a special session on basic lessons and taught many compositions to young aspirants who are learning the art form and shared insights into the nuances for the London International Arts Festival

4. **North America** - Rithvik has conducted workshops and lectures in parts of North America for students, musicians and connoisseurs

5. **Sydney, Australia** - He presented a 3 hour lecture which was a crash course on Carnatic Music for students and young performers of YSM in Sydney, Australia in 2014

6. **BAR (Build-A-Rasika)** - Rithvik has been instrumental in taking Carnatic Music to many schools across the country and has spearheaded the revival of the BAR program under YACM and conducted outreach awareness programs in over 60 schools during a 6 year period. He still continues to present the module, the brainchild of N. Vijay Siva

7. **CompMusic Project** - Rithvik was part of a panel, which discussed the effect and influence of Technology in music and its specific application to Carnatic Music, based on the research undertaken by CompMusic based in Barcelona, Spain at IIT (Indian Institute of Technology), Madras

8. **Panels** - Rithvik has participated in a number of other panel discussions and talks, which deals with the aesthetics and content of Carnatic Music such as 'Laya and Melody in Carnatic Music', 'Structure and Aesthetics of Ragam Tanam Pallavi', 'Carnatic Music - Past, Present and Future', 'Breaking Boundaries in Carnatic Music' and so on

9. **Lectures** - Rithvik presented a detailed lecture demonstration along with K. Bharat Sundar for Parthasarathy Swami Sabha during the December Season festival in 2019

10. **Interviews** - Rithvik was also one of the earliest guests as part of the talk series titled "Bliss Catchers" hosted by AVIS Viswanathan, that invites people from various walks of life to share their experience in following their bliss by pursuing a passion as a full time profession

Reviews

Critics and audiences alike have lauded Rithvik for his command over the voice, his sensitivity to raga, and his creative improvisations. G. Swaminathan notes that Rithvik's voice conveys not only technical precision but also an emotional depth that elevates his performances. Rupa Gopal, in her review, highlights how Rithvik's ability to absorb and internalise the teaching of his gurus, while still infusing his own individuality, sets him apart as one of the most promising young artists of his generation. From concerts in Chennai to international stages, the accolades continue to affirm that Rithvik is on a path to greatness—both as an artist and a cultural ambassador.

• G Swaminathan | Chennai (The Hindu)

Rithvik has a strong voice, which he uses well to express his musical vision. With a variety of techniques from flamboyant to sedate, he achieved a perfect balance.

• PS Krishnamurthy | Chennai (Indian Express)

Rithvik holds his sruti perfectly, sings his kritis faithfully and is capable of appealing melody. The delivery of his music bore the stamp of expert training.

• TT Narendran | Chennai (Sruti)

His akara passages in the alapanas bore the unmistakable style of Semmangudi. There is an all-rounded accomplishment in various aspects of his singing.

• Rupa Gopal | Singapore (The Hindu)

Rithvik certainly seems to have absorbed the best from his guru, and is carving a distinct niche of his own.

• K Ganapathi | Palghat (The Hindu)

He established a fine rapport with the audience from the word go and sustained it till the end. His renditions were steeped in deep classicism.

Albums & Discography

Rithvik's albums showcase his unique ability to blend traditional Carnatic music with personal expression and reflects his commitment to capturing the emotional and intellectual depth of the music while appealing to contemporary sensibilities. Some of his notable releases include:

- **Rakti Gitam** - Melodies for the Soul (Kalakendra)
- **Sharanagati** - Surrender (Charsur)
- **Saphala** - Testimony to a Glorious Tradition (Kalakendra)
- **Sanmarga** (Giri Trading)
- **Nama Pravaham** - Bhajana Sangita (Kalakendra)
- **Kutcheri** - A Concert Experience (Kalakendra)
- **Arjita** - Acquired from an Illustrious Lineage (The Artery)
- **Madrasana** - 'A Garden Concert' (Madrasana)
- **Ragamalika** - Ragam Thanam Pallavi
- **#WFH** (Begada Records)
- **Sresta** - Creations of the Trinity (Begada Records)

Contributions to the Arts

Rithvik's contributions extend beyond performance. As the head of **ArtMove**, an initiative to rethink the way the arts are presented and archived, and as a founding member of **Svanubhava**, a festival that bridges the gap between students and leading performers, Rithvik has played a key role in fostering a new generation of musicians. His leadership at **YACM (Youth Association for Classical Music)** reflected his ongoing commitment to the arts community and the next generation of musicians and curating festivals that engage and inspire a younger audience.

• ArtMove

Rithvik Raja is the founder of **ArtMove**, a dynamic initiative designed to spark meaningful conversations, facilitate collaborations, and push the boundaries of the arts. At its core, ArtMove is dedicated to capturing the essence of artistic expression, preserving it for future generations, and making it accessible to a wider audience. The initiative strives to break down traditional barriers by bringing the arts into open, public spaces, making them free and accessible to all. It aims to move beyond debates around classicism, purism, and geography, focusing instead on the universal appeal of the arts in all their diverse forms.

ArtMove also plays an active role in fostering the growth of young artists by hosting lectures, presentations, and academic platforms where emerging performers can explore and research a broad spectrum of artistic subjects. Under the ArtMove umbrella, Rithvik has also nurtured two earlier initiatives—**Avartana** and **Madrasika**—both of which expand ArtMove's influence into various cultural spheres, enriching the artistic landscape even further.

• YACM (Youth Association for Classical Music)

Rithvik Raja played a pivotal role in the growth and promotion of Carnatic music among the youth through his leadership of **YACM (Youth Association for Classical Music)**. Serving as its President from 2008 to 2012, Rithvik was instrumental in creating a platform that fostered a deep connection to the art form for young, aspiring musicians. Under his guidance, YACM became a hub for innovation, organizing numerous workshops, concerts, lecture-demonstrations, and programs that provided valuable opportunities for youth to gain a deeper understanding of Carnatic music. This initiative was a key factor in the rise of many young artists now actively performing in the Carnatic ecosystem.

• Svanubhava

Founded in 2008, Svanubhava is a groundbreaking festival that bridges the gap between students and leading artists. Initially created to offer students an opportunity to experience live performances of the arts, it has since evolved into a platform for arts appreciation and audience development. The festival fosters inter-art conversations, encouraging collaboration between various art forms. By creating a community of students, Svanubhava instills pride and ownership, while offering rare opportunities to interact with top artists. Over the past decade, it has staged over 100 performances across the country in Chennai, Trichy, Coimbatore, Delhi, and even Jaffna, Sri Lanka, nurturing future generations to actively contribute to India's vibrant performing arts scene.

• December Season Portal

In 2009, a group of students led by T.M. Krishna launched the pioneering December Season Portal, known as **theDecemberSeason.com**. This platform was designed to provide easy access to resources and information about the world's largest classical music festival, the Chennai December Season. It quickly became an invaluable tool for music enthusiasts, offering detailed schedules, concert listings, venue information, and more.

Building on this success, Rithvik co-founded **Kutcheris.com** in 2010, expanding the scope of this digital initiative. As a key collaborator, he helped guide the platform's development and spearheaded its efforts until 2012. Kutcheris.com provided comprehensive details about concerts, venues, locations, as well as news, reviews, and other critical information, further enriching the cultural landscape and making the December Season more accessible to a global audience.

• Other Projects

Rithvik is deeply committed to a range of initiatives aimed at raising awareness and advancing the cause of the arts. His involvement extends across multiple projects, where he collaborates closely with various organizations to promote cultural engagement and create lasting impact. Rithvik's passion for change is evident in his unwavering dedication to causes he believes in, often volunteering his time and expertise.

He has played a significant role in the work of numerous influential organizations, including the **Sumanasa Foundation, Sampradaya, Matrka, Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha, and Kalaachaara Marumalarchi,** among others. Over the years, Rithvik has generously devoted his time, energy, and expertise to support these initiatives, contributing to their success and helping foster a deeper appreciation for the arts in diverse communities. His continued efforts reflect his commitment to bringing about positive cultural change and supporting the growth of the arts in meaningful ways.

Awards & Accolades

Rithvik has been recognized with numerous awards for his vocal prowess and contribution to the Carnatic music tradition, including:

- **Isai Chudar** (Kartik Fine Arts)
- **Yuvakalabharathi** (Bharat Kalachar)
- **Maharajapuram Santhanam Award** (Sri Krishna Gana Sabha)
- **Mahalingam Endowment Award** (Narada Gana Sabha)
- **GNB Award** (Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha)
- **MS Subbulakshmi Award** (Narada Gana Sabha)
- **Isai Arasar** (Trinity Fine Arts)
- **Best Ragam Tanam Pallavi Award** (Music Forum)
- **Best Vocalist Award**
    - Narada Gana Sabha
    - Parthasarathy Swami Sabha
    - Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha
    - Indian Fine Arts

Other Interests & Background

Before fully dedicating himself to music, Rithvik was a talented athlete, excelling in cricket and long-distance running. He captained his school cricket team and played for the city in 2004. He even participated in the 42.2 km marathon, representing Tamil Nadu in 2005. His athletic background speaks to his discipline and focus, which he has carried into his musical pursuits. He is currently an active runner, part of the Chennai Runners community, and participates in running events across the world.

Conclusion

Rithvik Raja's career is a testament to the deep connection between tradition and innovation in the realm of Carnatic music. With an expansive and varied body of work as a performer, educator, and advocate, Rithvik continues to shape the landscape of contemporary Carnatic music. His commitment to preserving the richness of the tradition while embracing the future ensures his place as one of the most influential and dynamic voices in the field today. As a cultural ambassador and arts advocate, Rithvik's work will undoubtedly inspire generations to come, bridging cultures and creating spaces for music to thrive in the modern world.