

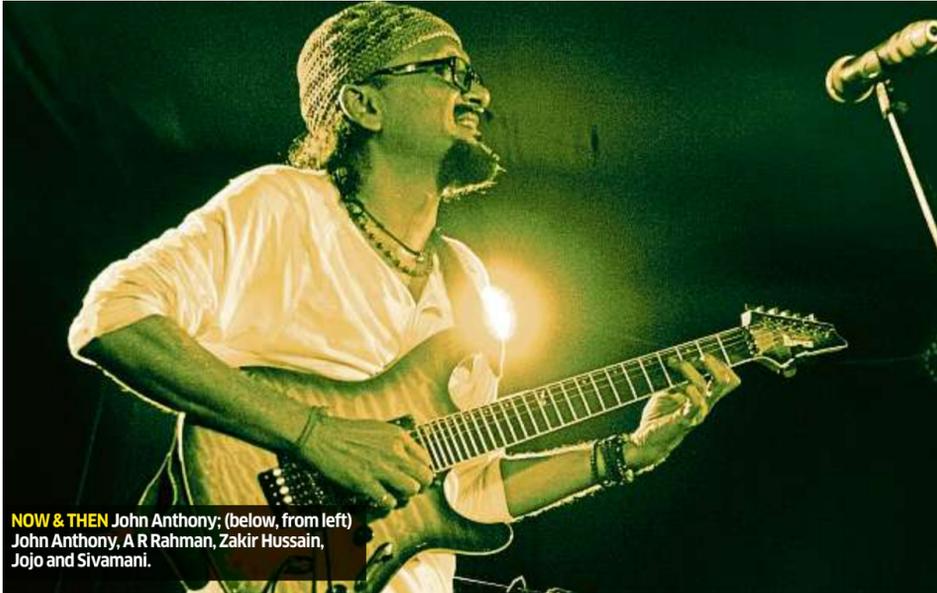
Too real to be true?

When French artist Auguste Rodin's breakout sculpture 'The Age Of Bronze' was displayed in Brussels, it caused a scandal for its 'extreme naturalism' and 'ambiguous subject matter'. It was based on a live model.

MUSICAL SPHERE

The guitar man

Band Karnatriix frontman John Anthony speaks of his experiments in classical music and jazz, and introduces nostalgia in conversation with REJI VARGHESE



NOW & THEN John Anthony, (below, from left) John Anthony, A R Rahman, Zakir Hussain, Jojo and Sivamani.

I am in an empty auditorium. Except for a few lights onstage, all the other lights have been switched off. There are a few stagehands clearing up the last piece of equipment. I am at the Lady Andal auditorium in Chennai, and I have just been treated to the most soulful and magical piece of music I have heard in a long time. The band Karnatriix has performed with French dancer Claire Le Michel, and the artistes have retired to the green room. I wait to meet their iconic guitarist and frontman John Anthony. After a few minutes, John Anthony appears with a big smile on his face. I'm seeing him after seven years, but he hasn't aged. He comes over, shakes my hand, and we sit down to talk...

Tell us about this series of gigs you are doing with Claire.

The idea for this came about when Claire was introduced to me by the renowned painter Blodow. She listened to our music and was moved by the range of emotions that the music brought out in her, and we decided to collaborate. The theme we hit upon was about the cycle of life — from the stillness of the womb to the last breath — portrayed in music and dance. Claire approached the Alliance Francaise in Trivandrum and the institute decided to have a series of five performances in Cochin, Chennai, Bengaluru, Chandigarh and Delhi.

You are on the cutting edge of fusion music, experimenting. Does the audience always appreciate this experimentation?

We play to the audiences that want to hear something different. Experimental music is gaining acceptance and the testimony of this is that most of our shows in India and (especially) abroad are sold out. As a musician, you can find a niche if you experiment. I'm constantly tinkering with my processor and my guitar to get that special tone. I also experiment with jazz and Indian scales.

Are you trained in Carnatic music?

I'm not a formally trained Carnatic musician, but while in Trivandrum I had the good fortune to meet music



composer and Carnatic vocalist M G Radhakrishnan. Radhakrishnan sir became my friend, philosopher, guide and mentor, and whatever I've learnt of Carnatic music over the years has been imparted to me mainly by him.

Why did you choose the guitar as your instrument of choice and when did this happen?

I was around 14. In those days, the latest songs were available only on radio — on international channels like Radio Australia and Radio Ceylon. One night, I remember listening to the song 'Jingo' by Carlos Santana. I was so moved by it that I decided I would become a guitarist. I got my parents to buy me a guitar and started practising day and night. I was immature and it was an impulsive decision, but here I am, 48 years later, with no regrets at all.

Tell us about the early part of your career.

I started off playing with a few bands in Cochin and I made a name for myself as a rock guitarist who could play the fast licks. In a few years, I was playing with the big Cochin bands (like the Hijackers).

About four years after I first picked up the guitar, I wanted to get formal Western classical music training and I went to Trivandrum to playback singer K J Yesudas's music school, Tharanganisari, where the famed American pianist Roger D Jahnke was the principal. Soon, Roger sir asked me if I would be interested in teaching guitar at the school! I was only 18 and many of the students were older than me. I told him I didn't know how to read and write music, and he gave me a sheaf of notes, pointed out a few basic notes, and asked me to figure out the rest on my own. I burned the midnight oil for the next 30 days to fluently read and play the music. Roger sir had set in front of me.

How was the move to Chennai and your life there.

I made the move to Chennai because that's where I could make a living as a sessions guitarist for the movie industry. I got a lucky break — to play for music director Shyam sir, and he was impressed by my style of playing. There was no looking back after that. I've played on over 2,000 film songs since then. It's also how I happened to meet my band mates Dileep (A R

Rahman) and Sivamani.

Tell us about your special relationship with A R Rahman and Sivamani...

They're more like family than friends. Rahman had visited me in my house in Trivandrum a few months back despite his busy schedule. In 1984, Dileep, as A R Rahman was known those days, Sivamani, Jojo and I decided to form a band. We experimented with a mix of jazz and Indian classical. When we meet now, we talk about the good old days. Occasionally, we even talk of regrouping, but in our hearts we all know that's just wishful thinking.

And what about Karnatriix and your journey from rock to fusion?

It was a chance meeting with L. Vaidyanathan that opened the door to fusion concerts for me. Through him, I got the opportunity to play with some of the big names in Carnatic and Hindustani music — M Balamuralikrishna, T V Gopalakrishnan, Karaikudi Mani, Basvaraj brothers, Zakir Hussain, L. Shankar, L. Subramaniam etc.

During a trip to South Africa with the Basvaraj brothers, I learned to play Thygaraja's 'Endaro Mahanubhavalu' and I mastered it in about a month. But while I was doing these fusion gigs all over the world, there was another music that was playing in my head. That turned out to be Karnatriix's first album, 'Namaste', with Sarangi maestro Sultan Fayaz Ahmed Khan.

What are your plans for the future?

Karnatriix has about 12 tracks we are working on, and we are looking for an international release of this on various platforms like iTunes etc. I also have a separate rock act with the Canadian band Lazie Bison. We will tour Canada and North America towards the end of this year and early next year.

ROGAN PAINTINGS

World sees an art form

The dusty village of Nirona, in the Kutch region of Gujarat, is home to an awesome art that goes by the name rogan. I wouldn't have known about this 300-year-old art if not for the fact that our prime minister carried two rogan artworks as a gift to the former US president Barack Obama on his 2014 US visit. My interest being piqued, I was waiting for an opportunity to visit Nirona to learn more about it, and when it finally happened, my joy knew no bounds.

'Rogan', meaning 'oil-based' in Persian, is an intricate form of painting practised by the Khatri family of Nirona, which traces its origins to Sindh, Pakistan.

A friendly lot, the entire family is always willing to give its visitors a demonstration of the art of rogan painting. A time-consuming art form, it involves the making of paints and drawing them on fabrics. Brothers Khatri Abdul Gafoor and Khatri Sumar Daud explain the process involved.



MASTERFUL A rogan design patterned using malleable paints.

According to them, castor oil is boiled for almost 12-15 hours (till it catches fire) and then cast into cold water so that there is a thick residue. This residue is the sticky elastic paste called rogan. To this sticky paste are added vegetable pigments to get the desired colours, and the paints are then stored in earthen pots. When the artists sit down to paint, they take little amounts of paints on their palms, use a six-inch-long metal rod to stretch some strands out of the malleable paints, and place them on the desired fabric in patterns of their choice.

The best part about this form of painting is that no outlines are drawn, and no figures are traced on the fabric. They paint patterns that range from animal motifs to trees to characters drawn from history and folk culture. And, not once does the metal rod used for painting comes in contact with the fabric. While the artists hold the metal rod in one hand, they hold the fabric in their other hand, and use their fingers under the fabric to guide the design. Once the design is painted, the fabric is folded to create mirror images.

"Till recently, the art of rogan painting was a closely guarded secret. Women were never taught to paint as we feared they would take the craft to their in-laws' families and spread the secret. Not anymore. Today, we want more and more people to learn this form of painting," say the Khatri brothers. "Earlier, rogan paintings on cloth were bought as

part of wedding trousseaus, hence only a handful of artists was into rogan painting during the wedding season. When cheaper, machine-made textiles became available, the demand for rogan-painted fabrics came down, forcing many artists to look for alternative sources of income. However, our family, for love of the craft, continued in the same profession," say the Khatri brothers.

Despite the hardships they faced, they held on to their age-old craft. Things changed for the better after the devastating Gujarat earthquake in 2001, when the infrastructure received a boost and more and more people started visiting the place and discovering the beauty of this art form. "That was when some resourceful people helped our products reach the urban and the online markets," they add.

Another positive development was the members of the Khatri family winning several national and state awards for their art. And, of course, the art form adorning the walls of the White House.

With the world waking up to this rare art, the demand for it has increased beyond the artists' expectations. Other than sarees, rogan-painted fabrics are now used to make decorative wall hangings, cushion covers, table covers and file folders, too. Their clientele includes the who's who of Bollywood, including Amitabh Bachchan and Shabana Azmi, as also most foreign tourists visiting Gujarat.

They also get free stalls in most handicraft exhibitions of repute to showcase their art. "We are a happy lot because we are doing what we like and are being recognised for it," the Khatri brothers declare.

VATHSALA V P

SUCCESS STORIES

From the entrepreneurial streak

» Continued from Page 1

With traditional methods of farming being susceptible to unpredictable weather conditions along with the scarcity of arable land and dwindling water resources, Naik believes that using modern agricultural technology to grow healthy food is the need of the hour. His quest for solutions led him to hydroponics — the science of growing plants without soil, using only mineral nutrients and water.

But starting out wasn't as easy as Naik had expected. It took a few months of intense research, a visit to a plant nutritionist, besides importing set-up material, before he could begin reaping the yield from his indoor farm, spread across 150 square metres. However, one of the biggest challenges, as Naik admits, in his case, was that of high capital expenditure required to set up and run the facility. For instance, Letcetra uses ACs to control the temperature and humidity, while LED lights are used to compensate for sunlight. Then there are automated systems that monitor and control water temperature, pH and nutrient level etc. With these systems in place, the cost of production does go up as compared to traditional farming.



Rohan Rehani & Nitin Vishwas (top) of Moonshine Meadery.

But again, on the plus side, hydroponics requires very less land, water and labour. Plants are grown in a controlled environment, which also reduces the risk of them dying out due to weather anomalies and disease. In comparison to traditional agriculture, hydroponically grown plants are said to grow faster and yield top-quality pesticide-free produce, thus making hydroponics a viable commercial venture, which offers good returns in the long run. Letcetra has expanded to include two more farms with an overall area of 2,300 square metres. The combined fresh produce from all three farms put together is about 6-8 tonnes of different varieties of lettuce and other leafy greens, per month.

However, "the market for vegetables is always volatile," warns Naik, who currently supplies to hotels and retail customers across Goa. Recent investor funding has made further expansion possible for Naik, who is looking at setting up farms in other cities.

Apple Cyder & Coffee Mead bottles.

Dismissing the challenges that he faces as an entrepreneur, he says, "Entrepreneurs are passionate people. Even with all the difficulties and hurdles, they don't stop, they don't give up. And that's the key to success."

Hey Deedee: Women empowerment all the way

They say when the going gets tough, the tough get going. And that's exactly what Revathi Roy did. She got going — or rather driving, "because that was the best skill I had," she says, despite holding a Masters degree in economics. Plus, "It was my need to survive that led me to start driving for a living," she adds. With a husband in coma, and mounting hospital bills, Roy borrowed a tourist taxi from a friend and got on the streets of Mumbai to ferry passengers.

From having to deal with the emotional pain of losing a spouse, to facing an impending financial crisis, Roy has seen it all and emerged much stronger. Dubbed as a serial entrepreneur, she went from being just a taxi driver at the Mumbai airport to pioneering Asia's first, all-women taxi service — Forsche (2007), then setting up another all-women taxi service, Viira (2010), and more recently, by founding Hey Deedee (2016), India's first all-women instant parcel delivery service.

When asked if she always possessed an entrepreneurial streak, Roy says, "Yes, but it came to light at a time when I needed it the most." The driving force behind Hey Deedee is Roy's ultimate aim of training and employing 10,000 underprivileged women by the end of 2018.

Hey Deedee offers a 45-day two-wheeler training programme and currently has 100-plus women riders operating across Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune and Bengaluru delivering food, medicines, grocery, gifts, couriers etc. Roy has also made it possible for the women to buy their own scooters by arranging for soft loans, where the money gets deducted from their monthly salaries.

Having recently raised pre-seed funding of Rs 3.3 crore from Metaform Ventures, Roy is closer to her vision of making Hey Deedee one of the largest players in the logistics arena. And while we speak of expansion, the serial entrepreneur has already announced an entry into the four-wheeler warehouse-to-hub deliveries sector, again with women drivers.

Having made a difference to the lives of hundreds of women from lesser-privileged backgrounds over a decade, Roy's efforts have won her a host of awards. Her first start-up Forsche also features as a case study at the Darden School of Business, Virginia, USA.

However, clichéd as it may sound, Revathi Roy sure has come a long way — up. After all, as she herself says, "...after hitting rock bottom, you can go nowhere but up."

BLONDIE

