



Swaramala

Soundbytes from SIOC

May 2022

SIOC in a new avatar

The Singapore Indian Orchestra & Choir (SIOC), founded in 1985, is one of the world's largest semi-professional performing arts groups, showcasing the richness of Indian music with its wide range of traditional and contemporary repertoire. Under the baton of Smt Lalitha Vaidyanathan (PBM), SIOC has redefined the boundaries of Indian music through exciting collaborations across genres, and infused Singapore's multi-racial cultural vibrance into its offerings for local and international audiences.

Hitherto an arm of the People's Association's PA Talents, the SIOC blossomed into an independent music company in 2022. We are excited to bring you the first edition of our quarterly newsletter.



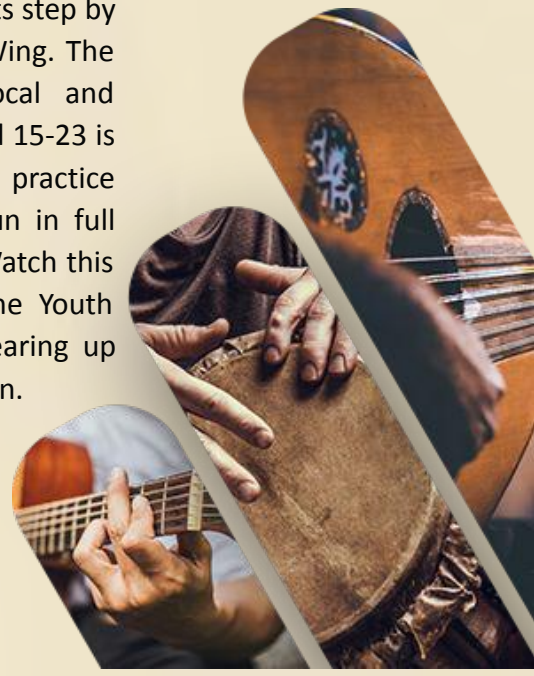
Athma Ghanam at the Esplanade

In a fitting return to the stage after the Covid restrictions, SIOC presented Athma Ghanam – music for the soul, as part of Kalaa Utsavam at the Esplanade Concert Hall on 28 Nov 2021. Our maiden show as a company, it was graced by GoH Parliamentary Secretary Mr. Eric Chua, and enjoyed by a large appreciative audience. We bring you a review by noted musician Shri Shankar Rajan, [here](#).



SIOC Youth Wing

SIOC has added a spring in its step by launching the SIOC Youth Wing. The 1st batch of talented vocal and instrumental musicians aged 15-23 is already on board, and practice sessions have already begun in full swing starting April 2022. Watch this space for news on how the Youth Wing is shaping up and gearing up for their maiden presentation.





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Workshop on Voice Training



SIOC was privileged to have Dr. Shyamala Vinod Kumar, accomplished musicologist, professional vocalist and voxologist, conduct a workshop for us on 19 & 20 March 2022. The workshop introduced participants, mainly classical vocalists, to voxology and voice production technique. Read more about this [here](#).

SIOC Digital Gems - Panchamam



Embracing the times, the SIOC flagged off our digital initiative, SIOC Digital Gems, which is featured on our [YouTube channel](#).

The 1st offering in the series, Panchamam, in collaboration with Indian Raga Singapore, presented 5 gems showcasing SIOC's rich instrumentation and choral repertoire. Read more about this [here](#).

Subscribe to our YouTube channel and stay tuned for more gems in this series!

Member in the Spotlight



As the SIOC, founded in 1985, grows in recognition and acclaim, it is a good time to put the spotlight on individual pioneers and members who have worked hard over the years to bring Indian music in Singapore to such outstanding levels.

In this edition, we fondly remember the contributions of our pioneer extraordinaire and acclaimed musician, the late Smt Saradha Shankar. Read this detailed tribute by Shri Shankar Rajan [here](#).





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SIOC in concert with 'Athma Ghanam' – music for the soul

Review by Shri Shankar Rajan, musician and musicologist



Athma Ghanam means music for the soul, conveyed through its elements of rhythm, melody, harmony and tempo.

The invocatory piece, a rendition of Saint Thyagaraja's Giriraja Sudha in Ragam Bangala (with inputs from the late L Vaidyanathan), charmed the audience with its classicism mixed with Western touches. This was followed by Nava Devatas - a garland of 9 deities, in Ragamalika and Talamalika, woven cleverly with an original score by Sudha Raghuraman. A much-appreciated tapestry, culminating in pulsating and enthralling music.

The 3rd item, Vadya Vrinda – a window to the North, in Raag Chandrakouns (orchestration set by C N Chandrashekar), was appreciated by a connoisseur in the audience as "Hindustani music at its best". This was followed by Ragam Thaanam Pallavi in Chalanata. Traditionally the centrepiece of a Carnatic concert, this piece was specially composed by Rajkumar Bharathi for SIOC's 36th year concert, aptly applying the 36th melakarta (musical scale), with an exhilarating lyrical stanza sung in Tamil.

Kapi Espresso, an item composed by Rajhesh Vaidya, saw the fusion of the South Indian Carnatic genre with the North Indian Hindustani genre, linked by a common raga – Kapi in the South, or Kafi in the North. An interesting twist was introduced at this juncture with the entry of SIFAS dancers, Guru Vikas and Guru Sriliji, who danced with gusto to end the piece with 'Mukunda Mukunda' from the film Dasaavatharam, sending the crowd into applause, and uplifting the show.

It was time for Mozart and Vivaldi to Meet Thyagaraja in Smt Lalitha's special arrangement - a crossover of the great composers. This was followed by Acapella with Kani Idai and Choral with Paadum Paravaigal, pieces composed by Radha Vijayan and S Rajarajeswari. SIOC has been innovating with the choral singing genre for several years, and listening to the Tamil language in harmonised singing was an awakening experience indeed!

Next up was Global Music that Binds - an interesting medley of tribal/folk songs from the 7 continents, celebrating the diversity of music and how we are all one in the name of music. It had marvellous arrangement by Smt Lalitha and wonderful tongue-twister lyrics rendered perfectly by the voices. In a traditional finish, the Jugalbandi Thillana specially composed by Mohan Vaidya, in Ragamalika and Talamalika, came out very well with soloists playing together, yet not competing but complementing. Fittingly, it culminated in a verse that describes SIOC's Yatra.



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Workshop on Voice Technique



Dr. Shyamala Vinod Kumar has wide experience in performing and teaching music in India, Middle East and online. She offers Voice Therapy and Voice Culture training to several top-ranking vocalists. She has also been a guide and voice expert on music reality shows on Tamil TV channels, and instrumental in developing the voices of many upcoming cine playback singers. She is a visiting faculty at The Music Academy, Chennai, and select universities, and the founder of Shri Rajashyamala School of Music, Chennai.

The Workshop, over 4 sessions, covered voxology and voice production technique, a professional assessment of voices, basic exercises for ideal voice production technique, and voice hazards and maintenance.



SIOC Digital Gems series – Panchamam

The offering of 5 exclusive musical compositions started off auspiciously with a Tamil choral piece, based on Mahakavi Bharathiyar's invocation of Goddess Lakshmi. This was followed by an *acapella* piece, an invigorating *tala* extravaganza juxtaposing 5 different talas in one composition, and a melodious Hindustani repertoire that showcased the versatility & dexterity of the orchestra. An ingenious orchestral and choir piece brought up the finale, blending a unique crossover of 3 famed Carnatic compositions in Keeravani into an evocative melody.



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Member in the Spotlight – (Late) Smt Saradha Shankar

Born in Singapore in 1953, Smt Saradha Shankar's exposure to Indian classical music began at the tender age of 6. Recognising her immense potential, Saradha's father sent her to India to nurture and refine her innate musical skills. Upon completing her Arangetram in 1968, Saradha returned to Singapore at the age of 15.



With her mellifluous voice, Saradha carved out a niche for herself in Indian classical, semi-classical and light music in the 1970s. A regular recording artiste for radio and television programmes with her husband Shankar Rajan, Saradha also sang extensively at music concerts and at temple festivals and religious functions. Not surprisingly, she was a much sought-after vocalist for dance programmes.

Saradha's intimate knowledge of Carnatic music as practitioner and tutor drew her into organisations such as SIFAS and SIOC. In 1990, when SIOC was still a young organisation placing its footprint in Singapore as an instrumental orchestra, Saradha joined SIOC and set up a vocal group with just 7 members. With extraordinary zest, she nurtured and developed the vocal singing skills of the members and structured the delivery of their music. She was also the lead soprano singer of the acapella-type choral singing in Tamil, a genre pioneered by SIOC. From the 90s onwards, the vocal and choral groups started performing extensively in Malaysia, India, Australia, Thailand and Japan.

In recognition of her dedication and contribution to the growth and promotion of Indian music in Singapore, Saradha received several awards such as the Kala Ratna from SIFAS, Singai-Gamma Award, Veteran Musician's Award etc. Perhaps her greatest contribution to the music field was the training of a new generation of over 70 Indian classical singers.

Saradha belonged to an exclusive group of musicians who held centrestage in the field of Carnatic and semi-classical music for more than three decades, until her untimely demise in 2006.

For her invaluable contributions, achievements and accomplishments in the field of Indian music, SIOC has the honour of recognising her as PIONEER EXTRAORDINAIRE.





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**Looking to join us as an artist,
volunteer or patron?
Contact SIOC and we would love
to connect with you!**



contact@sioc.com.sg



<https://www.sioc.com.sg/>



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