

T.M. KRISHNA

Bio

T.M. Krishna, is one of the pre-eminent vocalists in the rigorous Karnatik tradition of India's classical music. His tutelage is in this form that originated in the southern peninsula of the subcontinent nearly five hundred years ago. His training has been under the distinguished *gurus*, B. Seetharama Sarma, Chengalpet Ranganathan and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, placing him in the highest reaches of that time-honored system. He has, at the same time, come to occupy a markedly distinct place in the Karnatik universe for the stunning individuality of his renditions, distinguished for an inner luminosity and a passionate intensity that are all his own. Krishna belongs to a tradition, but is not owned by it. His concert stage, whether in his hometown of Chennai or anywhere else in the world, is wholly classical but his concert practice is uncompromisingly his own.

As a public intellectual, Krishna speaks and writes about issues affecting the human condition and about matters cultural. He has started and is involved in many organizations whose work is spread across the whole spectrum of music and culture. He has co-authored *Voices Within: Carnatic Music – Passing on an Inheritance*, a book dedicated to the greats of Karnatik music. His path-breaking book, *A Southern Music – The Karnatik Story*, published by HarperCollins in 2013 was a first-of-its-kind philosophical, aesthetic and socio-political exploration of Karnatik music. For this he was awarded the 2014 Tata Literature Award for Best First Book in the non-fiction category.

His long-form essay *MS Understood*, for The Caravan, was featured in The Caravan Book of Profiles, as one of their “twelve definitive profiles.” It has been translated into Tamil and published as a book ‘*Katrinile Karainda Tugar*’ by Kalachuvadu Publications. His book *Reshaping Art* published by Aleph Book Company in 2018, asks important questions about how art is made, performed and disseminated and addresses crucial issues of caste, class and gender within society while exploring the contours of democracy, culture and learning. His book *Sebastian and Sons* published by Context in 2020, traces the history of the mrdangam-maker and the mrdangam over the past century. It received the Tata Lit Live Award for the Best Non-Fiction book for the year 2020.

For the first time, T.M. Krishna’s key writings have been put together in this extraordinary collection titled, *The Spirit of Enquiry: Dissent as an Art Form*, which draws from his rich body of work. This is a collection that reflects the critical and cultural engagement of one of our finest thinkers, public intellectuals and practitioners of art.

His books, *Sebastian & Sons: A Brief History of Mrdangam Makers* and *A Southern Music - The Karnatik Story* have been translated by D I Aravindan and published by Kalachuvadu Publications in April 2022.

He has been part of inspiring musical productions and collaborations, such as the Chennai Poromboke Paadal with environmentalist Nityanand Jayaraman, performances with the Jogappas (transgender musicians) and co-conceptualising and performing Karnatik Kattaikuttu, an unusual aesthetic conversation between art forms and communities that belong to two ends of the social spectrum.

In 2011 Sri Lanka was just recovering from three decades of civil war. T.M. Krishna was the first musician in 30 years to tour the war ravaged Northern Provinces of Sri Lanka and performed in many towns that had been torn apart due to the conflict.

His musico-poetic partnership with India's leading contemporary Tamil writer Perumal Murugan, is unprecedented. Rarely has a poet and a musician, who are contemporaries collaborated to bring out works of art on the 'classical' stage. He has also been a pioneer in bringing the poetry of the social reformer and philosopher Sree Narayana Guru into the Karnatik fold.

In collaboration with the Ashoka University, T.M. Krishna is now involved in The Edict Project, an attempt to reimagine Ashoka's edicts in musical form. The project aims at creating vibrant aesthetic, socio-political and academic conversations around the edicts.

He is the driving force behind the Chennai Kalai Theru Vizha (formerly Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha) and the Svanubhava initiatives.

In 2016, Krishna received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in recognition of 'his forceful commitment as artist and advocate to art's power to heal India's deep social divisions'. In 2017 he received the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration Award for his services in promoting and preserving national integration in the country. In 2017, he has also received the Professor V Aravindakshan Memorial Award for connecting Karnatik music with the common man.

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