

November 12, 2012

A cross-cultural outing



• Sruthi Laya Ensemble and the Australian Art Orchestra.



• Guru Karaikudi Mani

Two Oceans is a dialogue between Carnatic music and Jazz

Date: November 18

Venue: Corporation Kalaiarangam

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Two countries, two genres of music and Two Oceans... the result is a visually and aurally powerful music that is unpretentious yet conveys an idea of creative harmony across borders. At *The Hindu* Friday Review November Fest's 'Two Oceans' performed by the Sruthi Laya Ensemble and the Australian Art Orchestra (AAO), Carnatic drumming rhythms will waltz with western Jazz.

The Sruthi Laya Ensemble was founded by mridangam maestro Karaikudi Mani in 1986 and combines melody and percussion. Mani, who has been associated with Carnatic music since the age of three and with the mridangam since the age of eight, is well known for his “thani avarthanam” in kutcheris. It revolutionised the role of the mridangam and led to Mani collaborating with international musicians such as Paul Simon, Paul Grabowsky of the AAO and Eero Haemmeneimi of Finland’s Naada.

The ensemble (Mani-mridangam, B.V. Balasai-flute, V. Suresh-ghatam and U.P. Raju-mandolin) will team with the AAO, which was founded in 1994 to bring together musicians with varied approaches. The orchestra comprises Sandy Evans (reeds), Adrian Sheriff (trombone), Scott Tinkler (trumpet) and Adam King (drums). Guy Smith is the sound engineer. The two groups have collaborated for Into The Fire, an enthralling blend of music, percussion and dance, which has been performed worldwide. ‘Two Oceans’ also looks at the musical intricacies that lie at the core of both ensembles.

The 80-minute concert is brought to you by the Australian Government through the Australia International Cultural Council, an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. AAO is supported by the Australia Council for the Arts and the Robert Salzer Foundation. The performance comes to India as part of Oz Fest, a four-month long festival that brings Australian culture to 18 Indian cities.

You are known to be a purist. How, then, did this collaboration come about?

This collaboration is more than a decade old. When I established a school for Carnatic music in Australia, Adrian Sheriff of the Australian Art Orchestra joined to learn the mridangam.

Later we had Sandy Evans, a saxophonist who also wanted to learn the mridangam. When the AAO visited India on a grant, many of them who were jazz musicians showed tremendous interest in learning Indian music.

Given the distance, how do you’ll work on a joint album or rehearse for concerts?

I have collaborated with Japanese, Australian and Finnish artists.

The Carnatic parts of the composition are sent across with Western notation, and when these musicians visit, Balasai and I work together with them.

My workshops in Australia have also helped us come up with the sounds we desire. The albums we produce are an outcome of these joint sittings.

Adrian Sheriff

Has Australia’s physical distance from the older centres of jazz such as New York and New Orleans resulted in an improvised, all-Australian sound?

Since the 1980s, jazz has been an international language fluently spoken in many places across the world. At the same time, it is also the language of improvisation.

The AAO references both these musical languages as well as many others in its work.

What is the purpose of your collaboration with groups such as the Sruthi Laya Ensemble?

The AAO collaborates with leading musicians from different traditions from around the world.

We have found this to be philosophically and musically invigorating. The collaboration with Sruthi Laya and Guru Karaikudi Mani is especially dear to us.

We first collaborated in 1996 and have been working together since then.

Several members of our orchestra have been inspired to study South Indian music in-depth as a direct consequence of this collaboration.

Your orchestra predominantly plays jazz, while the Sruthi Laya Ensemble plays Indian classical music. Are your concerts more than just a dialogue centered on music?

I am a sishya of Guru Mani. In addition to my career as a composer and multi-instrumentalist, I was awarded an honours degree in performance (mridangam) from Monash University in 1996.

This personal connection, combined with 16 years of mutual collaboration, has resulted in the AAO and Sruthi Laya having a deep understanding of each other's music.

On several occasions, we have extended this collaboration by working with Rajeswari Sainath to incorporate South Indian classical dance in our work.

Coimbatore, Nov 18; Corporation Kalai Arangam - [Book tickets for Coimbatore show](#)

Chennai, Nov 20; Music Academy - [Book tickets for Chennai show](#)

Hyderabad, Nov 23; Ravindra Bharathi - [Book tickets for Hyderabad show](#)