

Akkarai Sisters

S Subhalakshmi & S Sornalatha

Akkarai Sisters S Subhalakshmi and S Sornalatha are among India's most distinguished musicians today, renowned for their soulful music that has won the hearts of music lovers worldwide.

The sisters hail from a family with a rich background in Indian classical music. Their grandfather, Suchindram Shri S P Sivasubramanian, was a multifaceted musician renowned as a vocalist, violinist, and composer, and their grandmother Smt R Sornambal was a Harikatha exponent. The sisters are the disciples of their father, Akkarai Shri S Swamynathan, a veteran violinist and founder of the Swara Raga Sudha school of music. Under his rigorous training, they both came to the stage by the age of eight and stunned the world with a skill and maturity that belied their years. The sisters also learnt under other renowned gurus such as Shri V Janakiraman, Shri O V Subramanian and his daughter Smt Padma Natesan of New Delhi, and later on, Padmabhushan Shri P S Narayanaswamy and chitravina maestro Shri N Ravikiran.

Today, Akkarai Sisters hold the unique distinction of being highly sought-after as both vocalists and violinists. They are renowned for their soulful music filled with fine nuances and creative artistry, whether in their duets, their skillful and sensitive accompaniment for many a legendary artiste, or their acclaimed collaborations with Hindustani, Jazz, Western Classical, and other artistes from around the world.

Both the sisters have performed at numerous prestigious venues around the world, including the Indo-Russian cultural exchange programme, the Théâtre de la Ville Festival (Paris), the farewell concert for Zubin Mehta (Munich), the Queen Elizabeth Hall and BBC Radio (London), the Mahatma Gandhi Institute Sangeet Utsav (Mauritius), Umeå Jazzfestival (Sweden), and a special duet concert for the Emperor and Empress of Japan and the Chief Minister and Governor of Tamil Nadu in 2013. They have had the privilege of being accompanied by stalwart accompanists, including the tavil legend Aridwaramangalam Shri A K Pazhanivel, in their concerts.

The sisters have been honoured with a host of awards and accolades; Subhalakshmi received the Rajiv Gandhi Yuva Puraskar award from the President of India at age thirteen, and has since earned the Yuva Kala Bharathi (2002), the Kalki Krishnamurthy Memorial Award (2007), the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar (2007), Vani Kala Nipuna (2012), Kala Rathna from the Cleveland Tyagaraja Aradhana (2013), and many more. She was identified as one of India's 50 most promising individuals across all fields in The Week magazine's 2003 Independence Day special. Sornalatha is a gold medalist MA music graduate from the University of Madras, and her accolades include Kalashree, Yuva Kala Bharathi, the Vipanchee Award, the national gold medal at the intercollegiate competition held in Kurukshetra (2005-06), and the Best Violinist Award from the Indian Fine Arts Society (2007). The sisters were together awarded the Shanmukha Sangeeta Shiromani from Shanmukhananda Sabha, Mumbai (2009), and the Yuva Purandara Award from Indiranagar Sangeetha Sabha, Bangalore (2016).

At age fifteen, Subhalakshmi released her first album, an unprecedented feat in which she accompanied her own vocal on the violin. The sisters have since released many more albums, both violin and vocal, including 'Ananda Tandavam' (released in their early teens), 'Double Bow', 'Inta Saukhyam', 'Varali', 'Keeravani', and Charsur's 'December Season' 2012 & 2013. They are highly sought-after as teachers, and students around the world have benefited from their knowledge and experience.

They attribute all their success to their gurus, especially their father Akkarai Shri S Swamynathan, who established them as musicians and continues to guide them.