



**Memorable journey** The performers were excited, as were the appreciative audience

• B VELANKANNI RAJ

**TALKING TRAIN**

Thomas the Tank Engine, a fictional steam locomotive in *The Railway Series* books, was initially a wooden toy that the author Reverend Wilbert Awdry made for his son.



side the confines of Urur Kuppam to MTC buses, railway stations, and hospitals. On October 16, it was the Metro commuters' turn to get a taste of the outreach and the underlying message: 'Music binds people, even if momentarily'.

The performers were excited as they gathered at the Alandur station to board the train. This would be their first "rolling" concert, also because some of them were travelling in the Metro for the first time. Discussing the "dynamics of the new environment," Ramkumar said, "As we made a set-list of numbers to sing, we talked of the noise." He added: "I'll play a little softly, and get Malavika to sing loudly." Song choices would depend on audience response.

The audience was small, but appreciative. They walked down to the performing area when they heard 'Mayakkura poovasam' composed by Sean Roldan, whipped out the mobile phones to record 'Kantha' composed by Masala Coffee, and clapped for Ilaiyaraaja's 'Ninaivo oru paarvai', 'Inji iduppazhaga', and 'Kanmani'. When the group got off and stood on the Koyambedu platform to sing 'Aathangara marame' and 'Thaiya, Thaiya', the audience stayed on and joined the chorus. "We've performed in all sorts of spaces - small to extra-large," said Saivi. "But this one was different. I loved it." He added that there was not much of noise inside the train, but a microphone would have helped.

Passengers passing through the Koyambedu station were in for a surprise. At 6 pm, settling on a *jamakkalam* in the transit area, Koleri N Boopathy and Chittor R Devaraju tuned their *nadaswaram* while N Balaji and MG Harishankar tried a few tentative taps on their *tavil* as the troupe prepared to play. After a strong 'Chalamelara' and 'Saraswathi namosthuthu', they embarked on the difficult 'Entharomahanu bhavu', managed to do a fine rendering, and followed it with 'Kurai ondrum illai', 'Maadu maikkum Kanna' and 'Shakthi sahitha Ganapathim'. Passengers stopped to take selfies, and stood to tap the *thaalam* for 'Ulagam samanilai peravendum', an Agaththiyar *paadal*.

Two athletes from Sports Development Authority on their way from Nehru Stadium to Krishnagiri loved it all. "What an excellent idea!" the girls said. "Please hold more such events." P Rajesh, a market financier agreed: "Why not every day?"

# Music on the Metro

Can you play a violin on a train? Chennai Kalai Theruvizha organised an entire concert on one, treating delighted commuters to Alandur to some foot-tapping music

•• GEETA PADMANABHAN

Clean transit areas. Crowd-free boarding. A comfortable trip. Incredibly quick coverage of traffic-choked areas. All these define Chennai Metro. The missing element was perhaps entertainment. This gap was filled by the organisers of the Chennai Kalai Theruvizha recently. Commuters boarding the up-train to Koyambedu at Alandur station craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the music group comprising Malavika Sundar Pravin (vocals), Saivi (guitar and vocals), Ramkumar Kanakarajan (percussion) and Manoj Kumar (violin) unveil the instruments and set up an impromptu stage across the aisle. "Is this a promo for Metro travel?" asked GD Prabhakar, commuter and construction consultant.

It was not. The Chennai Kalai Theruvizha is the next step of the Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha that was started four seasons ago to use the performing arts to break social/artistic walls and build community friendships. After its success in



remoulding the perceptions of arts, making art forms available to anyone who cared, the Vizha committee decided to spread its wings. "Why not in our area?" went a chorus of requests, and the answer was to take the performances out-

