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**Sangeeta Sthalam-s - 12**  
**Heritage Landmarks in Music**

**The 'Madras' Music Season: Its Genesis**

**(Excerpts...)**

Why or how did the Music Season of Madras come about is an interesting question that has its answer in pre-independent India, the various castes and communities that made up Madras presidency, and the gradual expansion of what was once a no man's strip of land on the Coromandel into a metropolis....

...Its genesis was synonymous with the Music Academy, which was first thought of in 1926. By then Madras had become a metropolis developing on all fronts. The musicians realised its value as a centre where they could make their reputations and fortunes and soon a large scale migration of musicians to the city began. The old gurukula system (students in residence) was on the wane and musicians took to visiting the home of the well heeled to teach children music. The recording industry too led to a boom in the propagation of Carnatic music. There was widespread fear that the traditional standards of singing were getting diluted and that, despite the publishing of several works, several musical pieces were fast fading into oblivion. It was felt that a central body for the serious study of Carnatic music was needed. It was in these circumstances that the Music Academy came into being....

**The Music Academy-- now**



...It was the annual All India Congress Session of 1927 that gave fresh impetus to the establishment of the Music Academy. It had been the practice to hold a Music Conference in conjunction with the Congress Sessions in north India and when Madras was decided as the venue for 1927, S. Sathyamurthy, the Congress stalwart decided that a music conference ought to be held as well.... The venue for the conference was the Congress Nagar that came up at the Spur Tank, and the Conference was formally inaugurated on 24th December 1927 by Diwan Bahadur K. Suryanarayanamurthi Naidu of Coconada.... The conference spanned eight days and concluded on 31st December. Several concert performances were held at the venue and at the Museum Theatre. In addition, papers on music were presented and discussed....

The Music Academy was formally inaugurated on 18th August 1928 at the YMCA Buildings, Esplanade, by Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. The inauguration was followed by a concert of Kanchipuram Naina Pillai, accompanied by Madras Balakrishna Iyer on the violin and Akhileshwara Iyer on the mridanga....

The first Conference of the Academy was held in March 1929 at Mani Iyer's Hall, Raja Hanumantha Lala Street, Triplicane and was inaugurated by the Zamindar of Seithur. The conference spanned three days and was presided over by a senior musician or musicologist on each of the three days, with T.V. Subba Rao being the President on the first day, followed by Keertanacharya C.R. Srinivasa Iyengar on the second and M.S. Ramaswami Iyer on the third. It was decided that subsequent conferences would be held to coincide with the Christmas Week and that one senior musician would be called upon to preside over each year's conference....

From 1930 onwards the Academy began the tradition of holding a week-long musical festival in the last week of December and thus began the Music Season....

....The proliferation of sabha-s began with the Indian Fine Arts Society coming up in 1935.... Then came the Tamil Isai Sangam as a direct fallout of the Tamil Isai Movement of the 1930s and early 40s.

The Music Academy introduced the concept of a Sadas or convocation in 1936 when select vidwans and vidushi-s were honoured. In 1942, the title of Sangeeta Kalanidhi was created at the instance of K.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, the then President and it was conferred on all the musicians who had presided over the annual conference of the Academy from its inception. This title continues to be the most coveted in the music world....

Throughout the 1940s and 50s several other sabha-s came up, such as the Mylapore Fine Arts Club, the Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha (Vani Mahal) and the Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (SKGS).... It was really in the 1970s that one saw the boom in the sabha culture. Many of the older sabha-s too began holding festivals in December which made the "season" spread all over the city with hundreds of performances happening at the same time. To some it is a mad mad mad season. To others it is something to look forward to. One thing cannot be denied. It is the time of the year when Carnatic music stands up to be counted.

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