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ENCORE

[Nehru and the Music Academy](#)

SRIRAM VENKATKRISHNAN

Trowel in hand, the former Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of the institution in 1955.



**HAPPY OCCASION: Jawaharlal Nehru at the Music Academy function.
On his left is Rajaji.**

Despite the fact that several Presidents of India have inaugurated the Music Academy's annual conferences, a Prime Minister in office has never done so. The Academy however takes pride in the fact that the foundation stone for its present building was laid by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister.

By 1955, the Academy had been conducting its annual conference at Sundareswarar Hall, Rasika Ranjani Sabha premises, for over 10 years. Programmes were held at the National (now Lady Sivaswami Iyer) Girls School and also the P.S. High School premises. In 1946, 'Sweet Home,' a bungalow at the junction of Cathedral and Mowbrays Roads had been

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purchased. In 1951, T.T. Krishnamachari inaugurating the Sadas recommended that the Music Academy give serious thought to building an auditorium at its own premises for which he asked artistes and music lovers to contribute generously.

Writing in *The Hindu* dated September 9, 1955, K.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, president, Music Academy, stated that the Academy felt "highly gratified that our esteemed Prime Minister, Mr Jawaharlal Nehru has graciously agreed to lay the foundation stone of the new building of the Academy on October 5. The ceremony was to be followed by a concert of M.S. Subbulakshmi in aid of the Academy's Building Fund. *The Hindu* of October 5 gave details of the PM's itinerary in the city. Arriving after a 'tour of the South', the P.M. 'was to go through a busy programme'. He was expected to lay the foundation stone at the Academy at 7.00 pm.

'Madras Music Academy — New building to be constructed — Mr. Nehru lays foundation' was the heading in *The Hindu* dated October 7, which carried a report of the function. The correspondent wrote that 'it was a happy idea of those in charge of the affairs of the Academy to combine the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the building with a music performance by Srimati M.S. Subbulakshmi.'

The pandal witnessed record crowds with dignitaries such as TTK, then Union Minister for Industry and Commerce, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Minister for Railways, O.V. Alagesan, Deputy Minister, M. Ananthasayanam Iyengar, Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, C. Rajagopalachari, K. Kamaraj, then C.M. of Madras, P.V. Rajamannar, Chief Justice, along with a phalanx of brother Judges, M. Patanjali Sastry, Chief Justice of India (retired), Raja Sir M.A. Muthiah Chettiar, Rm. Alagappa Chettiar and Devdas Gandhi attending the function.

Reception committee

The PM arrived at 7.15 pm with Mrs. Gandhi and the Governor, Sri Prakasa. The Academy committee, comprising K.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, Justices Rajamannar and Basheer Ahmed Sayeed, Kasturi Srinivasan, S.S. Vasam, K.R. Sundaram Iyer, K. Balasubramanya Iyer and Dr. V. Raghavan among others, were introduced to the P.M. TTK in his welcome address traced the history of the Academy and the efforts it had taken to purchase a piece of land to build an auditorium on it. Stating that Rs.1.60 lakhs had been collected so far, he wished to thank all 'our friends and the lady who has by her innumerable benefit concerts helped many an educational and cultural cause in this country'.

This was received with loud cheers. The PM then 'applied cement' with a 'trowel handed to him' and 'pressing a button caused the tablet to slip into position,' to the accompaniment of pealing bells. The trowel used on that historic occasion is displayed in a glass case near the VIP entrance of the



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Academy's auditorium.

Pt. Nehru in his speech spoke of achievements in fine arts post Independence, and said that he felt 'a certain pride in the great development of dancing, music and other arts in India' and that he 'greatly respected those who today are star performers in these.' The PM then went on to add "On a previous occasion in Delhi, when the lady who has been singing here came there, I was asked to say a few words and I had said 'Who am I, a mere Prime Minister, to say anything about a queen, a queen of songs?' And I always feel that way".

The Prime Minister stayed on to attend the concert till the mangalam and then proceeded to TTK's residence across the road for a private dinner. The editorial of *The Hindu* that day was devoted to the Music Academy event and stated that 'Mr Nehru was at his informal best when he took part in the pleasant function'.

However all was not well. Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, then senior most among vidwans, felt slighted by the importance given to M.S. and began a boycott of the Music Academy that was to last five years. But that is another story.

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