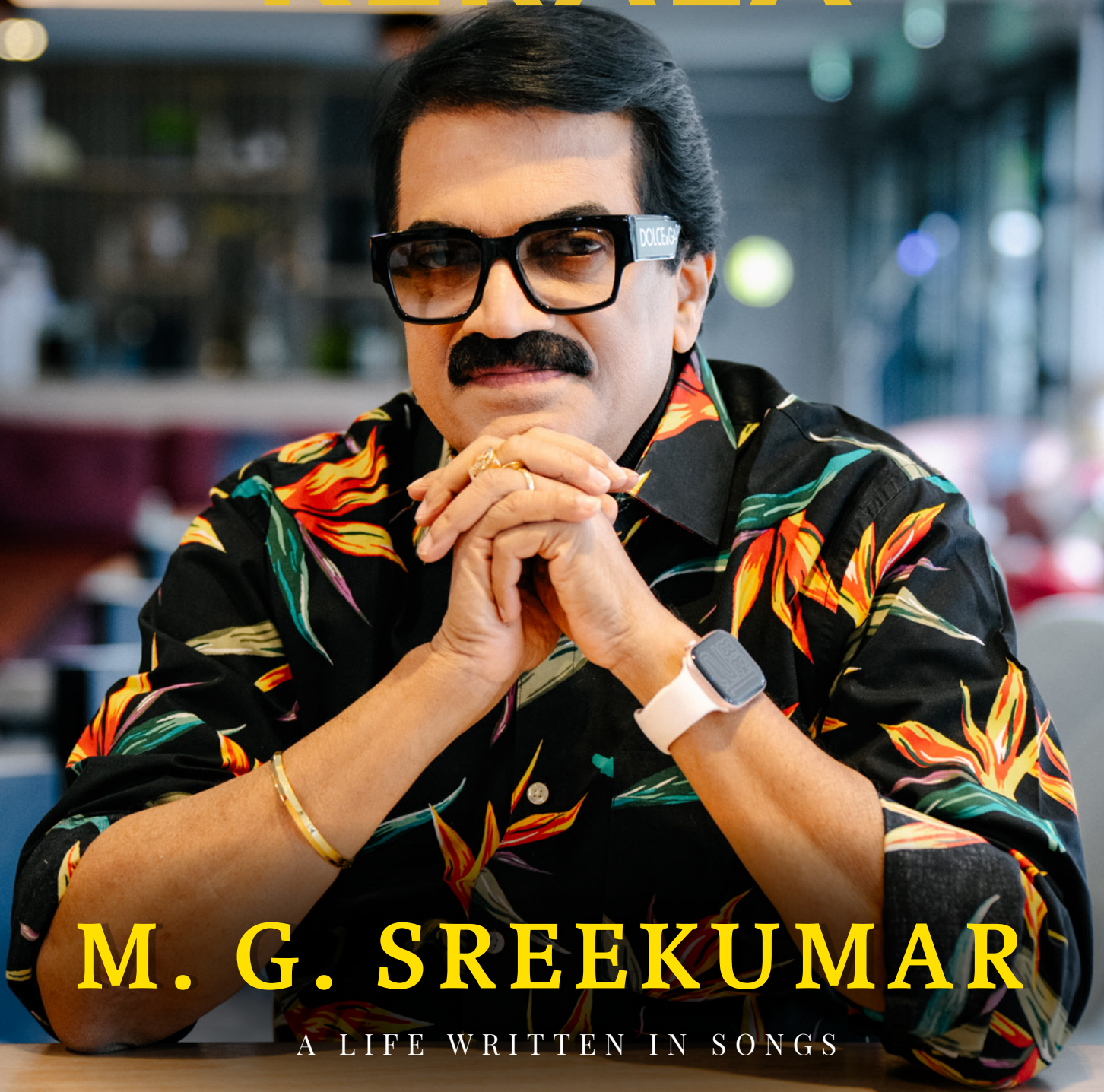


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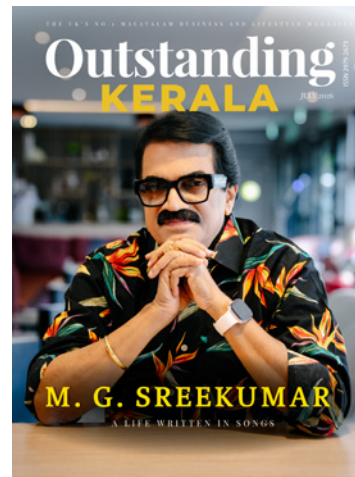
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M. G. SREEEKUMAR

A LIFE WRITTEN IN SONGS

CREATIVE TEAM



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M.G. SREEKUMAR

A Life Written in Songs



A Singer Who Defined Generations

For Malayalis across the world, M. G. Sreekumar is much more than a playback singer. His voice has accompanied celebrations, love stories, devotional moments, stage shows, television programs, and some of Malayalam cinema's most memorable scenes. Over a career spanning more than four decades, he has evolved into one of the most recognizable voices in South Indian music.

Whether it is a romantic melody, a classical composition, a devotional song, a stage performance, or a television reality show, M. G. Sreekumar has consistently demonstrated remarkable versatility. Few singers have managed to remain relevant

across so many generations while continuing to command the affection of audiences.

To date, he has sung more than 2500 songs across Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi, making him one of the most prolific playback singers in Indian cinema. At a time when K. J. Yesudas dominated Malayalam playback singing, M. G. Sreekumar carved out a distinct identity through unforgettable songs such as Kanneer Poovinte Kavilil Thalodi, Nadharoopini, Soorya Kireedam, and many others. His arrival introduced a fresh voice to Malayalam cinema, and over the years he grew into one of the most beloved singers in Kerala.

Roots in a Musical Family

M. G. Sreekumar was born on 25 May 1957 in Haripad, in Kerala's Alappuzha district. When he was just two years old, his family moved to Thykad in Thiruvananthapuram, a place that would become closely associated with his childhood and musical journey.

Music was part of everyday life in his home.

His father, Malabar Gopalan Nair, was a harmonium player and a respected musician. His mother, Kamalakshi Amma, worked as a teacher at Karamana School. The family valued both education and the arts, creating an environment that nurtured creativity from an early age.

His elder brother was the legendary music director and composer M. G. Radhakrishnan, while his sister K. Omanakutty became a renowned Carnatic musician and educator. Growing up in such an atmosphere naturally drew young Sreekumar toward music.

A Family Steeped in Music

M. G. Sreekumar belongs to one of Kerala's most respected musical families. The family's contribution to music extends beyond a single generation.

His elder brother M. G. Radhakrishnan remains one of Malayalam cinema's most admired composers. His nephew M. R. Rajakrishnan, son of M. G. Radhakrishnan, is among India's leading audiographers and sound engineers, having worked on numerous acclaimed films across languages.

His sister K. Omanakutty served as a music college professor and Carnatic musician. Her grandson Harishankar has also entered the world of music and is steadily building a reputation as a singer. Thus, music continues to flow through successive generations of the family.





Learning from a Brother, Mentor, and Guide

There was nearly a twenty-year age gap between M. G. Sreekumar and his elder brother M. G. Radhakrishnan. During his pre-degree years, the family suffered a major loss when their father passed away.

At that stage of life, M. G. Radhakrishnan became much more than an elder brother.

He became a guide, mentor, teacher, and father figure.

M. G. Sreekumar often acknowledges that his real music school was his brother. It was through observing and working alongside him that he learned not only music but also how to conduct himself as a performer. Understanding audiences, handling stage performances, respecting fellow musicians, and maintaining professional discipline were lessons he absorbed from his brother.

His formal guru was Cherthala Gopalan Nair, whose training strengthened his musical foundation. Yet he has often described M. G. Radhakrishnan as a guru-like presence who shaped every stage of his artistic growth.

From Bank Employee to Playback Singer

Before becoming a full-time singer, M. G. Sreekumar worked in the banking sector. He was employed at a bank in Mundakayam and was later transferred to Kayamkulam.

Music, however, continued to occupy the center of his life.

Even while working, he actively participated in concerts and musical programs. The dream of becoming a professional singer remained alive, and opportunities gradually began to emerge. Like many aspiring singers of that era, he spent years working behind the scenes before receiving major recognition.

Early Days in Cinema

Before getting a break as a playback singer, M. G. Sreekumar frequently sang track versions for K. J. Yesudas at Tarangini and Chithranjali Studio. These recordings helped him gain valuable experience and exposure within the film industry.

His first film song came in 1983 for the movie Coolie. The opportunity was provided by producer Suresh Kumar, while the film was directed by Ashokan. The music was composed by Raveendran Master.

The song, "Velli Kolusode Kalyaadum Azhake," marked his official entry into Malayalam cinema.

Although it was a significant milestone, widespread recognition would take a few more years.

The Song That Changed Everything

During the early years of his playback career, M. G. Sreekumar lent his voice to several popular films including Dheem Tharikida Thom, Odaruthammava Aalariyam, Ayalvasi Oru Daridravasi, Punnaram Cholli Cholli, Onnanam Kunnil Oradi Kunnil, and Mazha Peyyunnu Maddalam Kottunnu. These songs helped establish him as a promising young singer in Malayalam cinema, but the defining breakthrough of his career arrived with the song "Ponveene Ennullil..." from Priyadarshan's Chithram (1988). The melody struck an emotional chord with audiences and quickly became one of the most beloved songs of its era.

Years later, whenever M. G. Sreekumar performed the song at ganamela shows and stage concerts, the audience response remained extraordinary. Often, the moment he began the opening lines, loud applause would erupt across the venue. It was a clear sign that Ponveene Ennullil had transcended its cinematic origins and found a permanent place in the hearts of Malayalis. More than just a hit song, it became the turning point that transformed M. G. Sreekumar from a promising playback singer into one of the defining voices of Malayalam cinema. The late 1980s and 1990s witnessed his rise as one of the dominant male voices in the industry.



A Long Association with Malayalam Cinema's Finest

Throughout his career, M. G. Sreekumar collaborated with many of Malayalam cinema's most celebrated filmmakers.

He worked extensively with directors such as Priyadarshan, Thambi Kannanthanam, Dennis Joseph, Hariharan, Joshy, Fazil, Siby Malayil, Ranjith, Shaji Kailas, Balu Kiriya, Rajasenan and Thulasi Das among others.

His voice became closely associated with actor Mohanlal, creating one of Malayalam cinema's most successful actor-singer combinations.

Across decades, audiences embraced this partnership, with many iconic songs picturized on Mohanlal being sung by M. G. Sreekumar.



Working with Legendary Music Directors

Few singers have had the opportunity to work with as many renowned composers as M. G. Sreekumar. His career includes collaborations with Raveendran Master, Johnson Master, Ouseppachan, Kannur Rajan, S. P. Venkitesh, Ilaiyaraaja, M. S. Viswanathan, A. R. Rahman, Vidyasagar, Mohan Sithara, Deepak Dev, Berny-Ignatius, and numerous other leading composers.

He has rendered memorable songs under the baton of masters such as Ilaiyaraaja and A. R. Rahman while also maintaining long-standing creative relationships with composers like Johnson Master and Deepak Dev.

Each collaboration showcased a different aspect of his vocal ability, from classical compositions and devotional songs to romantic melodies and energetic stage numbers.

The Voice Behind Mohanlal's Most Memorable Moments

Perhaps no collaboration shaped M. G. Sreekumar's career more than his long and successful association with Mohanlal. Over the years, his voice became so closely linked with the actor that many audiences instinctively associated the two. When Mohanlal smiled, loved, celebrated, or suffered on screen, it was often M. G. Sreekumar's voice that carried those emotions to the audience.

The partnership produced some of Malayalam cinema's most cherished songs. Tracks such as "Pon-veene Ennullil" and "Doore Kizhakkudikkum" from Chithram, "Kilukil Pambaram" from Kilukkam, "Aattirambile Kombile" from Kaalapani, "Manikyakallal" from Varnapakittu, "Vennilavo Chandanamo" from Pingami, and later songs like "Minungum Minnaminunge" and "Chinnamma" from Oppam became deeply embedded in popular culture. These were not merely film songs; they became part of the emotional memory of Malayali audiences.

What made the combination special was the natural fit between Mohanlal's expressive screen presence and M. G. Sreekumar's emotionally rich voice. Whether it was romance, nostalgia, humour, longing, or celebration, the singer seemed to instinctively understand the mood of the character. As a result, many of Mohanlal's most memorable cinematic moments are remembered not only for the performance on screen but also for the voice that accompanied it. Together, they created one of the most iconic actor-singer partnerships in the history of Malayalam cinema.

National Awards and Major Recognition

Recognition soon followed his growing popularity. M. G. Sreekumar won the National Film Award for Best Male Playback Singer twice.

His first National Award came for the song "Nadharoopini" from His Highness Abdullah (1990). The song remains one of the finest examples of classi-



cal-based film music in Malayalam cinema and showcased his ability to handle demanding compositions with ease.

His second National Award came for "Chanthu Pottum Chankelassum Charthi Varunnavale" from Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum. Interestingly, Sreekumar has often mentioned that he never expected the song to win him a National Award, making the recognition even more special.

In addition, he has won multiple Kerala State Film Awards, Filmfare Awards South, Kerala Film Critics Awards, Asianet Film Awards, and several lifetime achievement honors throughout his career.

Beyond Playback Singing

While M. G. Sreekumar is primarily celebrated as one of Malayalam cinema's finest playback singers, he has also made a notable contribution as a music director. Over the years, he has handled music direction for several Malayalam films, showcasing a creative side that extends beyond singing. His work behind the scenes reflected the same musical sensitivity, melodic richness, and audience appeal that have defined his singing career.

Among the films for which he served as music director are Thandavam, Chathurangam, Oru Naal Varum, Sakudumbam Shyamala, Husbands in Goa, Njanum Ente Familyum, Arabiyum Ottakavum P. Madhavan Nairum, and Ardhanari, along with a number of other projects. Across these films, he supervised and shaped the musical direction of approximately twenty songs, ranging from light-hearted commercial numbers to emotionally driven melodies.

Although playback singing remained the central pillar of his career, his work as a music director highlighted his versatility and comprehensive

understanding of film music. It demonstrated that M. G. Sreekumar was not only a gifted performer before the microphone but also a creative musician capable of guiding the musical identity of an entire film.

He also ventured into film production and was associated with the film Ardhanari as a producer. Beyond cinema, he established his own music institution and music company, helping nurture young talent and promote musical education.

The Composer's Musical Signature

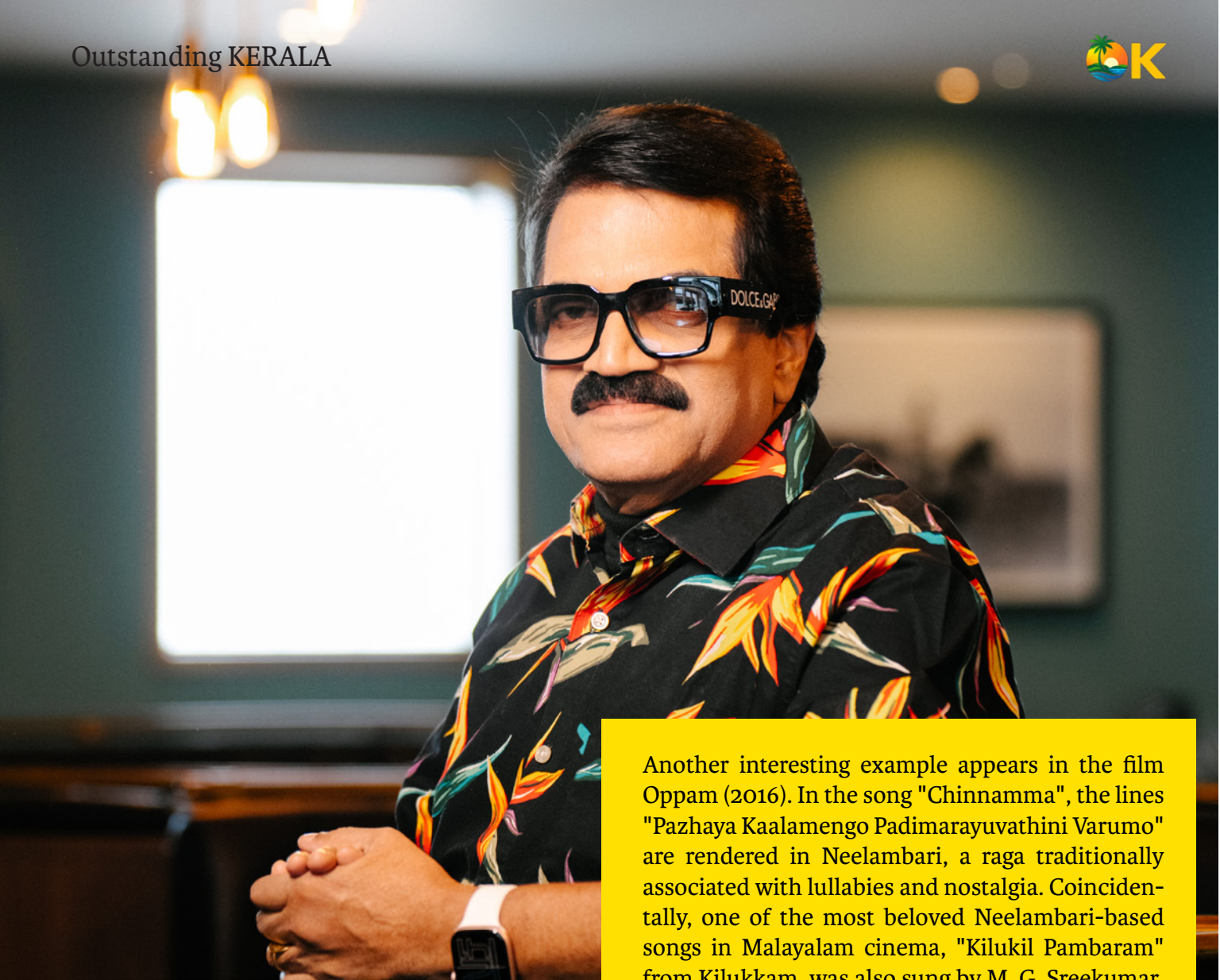
As a composer, M. G. Sreekumar developed a distinctive style that appealed to both classical music lovers and mainstream audiences. One of the notable features of his compositions is the way he incorporates classical Carnatic kritis into film songs. Rather than using them merely as references, he seamlessly blends them into the emotional flow of the composition, enhancing its musical richness.

A fine example is the song "Paadam Vanamali" from Kakkakuyil (2001), composed in the raga Hindolam. Towards the end of the song, he introduces Tyagara-ja's celebrated kriti "Samaja Vara Gamana", also based on Hindolam. This integration elevates the composition and gives it a classical depth rarely seen in commercial cinema.

Similarly, in the song "Chembakavallikalil Thulumbiya Chandana Mamazhayil" from Oru Marubhoomikkatha (2011), composed in Abheri, he incorporates the famous Tyagaraja kriti "Nagumomu Ganaleni" before the anupallavi. Sung beautifully by M. G. Sreekumar and Swetha Menon, the song remains one of the most admired melodies from the film.

His willingness to experiment with ragas also set him apart. While composers like Ilaiyaraaja and A. R. Rahman occasionally used Mayamalavagowla for romantic melodies, M. G. Sreekumar explored similar possibilities in the song "Kuzhaloothum Kunjukurivi" from Priyadarshan's Aamayum Muyalum, creating a refreshing romantic composition in the raga.





The Singer and His Classical Sensibilities

Listeners often notice the distinctive nasal texture in M. G. Sreekumar's voice. Rather than becoming a limitation, this unique tonal quality evolved into one of his greatest strengths.

Among the songs that earned him immense appreciation from music lovers and critics alike is "Himagiri Nirakal Ponthudikalilunarum" from Thandavam (2002). Based on the Carnatic raga Saramathi, the song showcased his command over classical nuances and remains one of the finest examples of his singing prowess.

His deep understanding of ragas has enabled him to bring authenticity to numerous classical-based film songs throughout his career.

Another interesting example appears in the film Oppam (2016). In the song "Chinnamma", the lines "Pazhaya Kaalamengo Padimarayuvathini Varumo" are rendered in Neelambari, a raga traditionally associated with lullabies and nostalgia. Coincidentally, one of the most beloved Neelambari-based songs in Malayalam cinema, "Kilukil Pambaram" from Kilukkam, was also sung by M. G. Sreekumar, highlighting his long association with melody-rich classical compositions.

Devotional Music and Albums

Another major chapter in his career is devotional music.

Among devotees, M. G. Sreekumar enjoys immense popularity for his Ayyappa devotional songs. His voice has become an inseparable part of the Sabarimala pilgrimage season, with countless devotees listening to his songs during their spiritual journey. Perhaps his most celebrated Ayyappa devotional song is "Samavedam Navilunarthiya Swamiye"

from the album Swami Ayyappan. The lyrics were written by Rajeev Alunkal, while the tune was composed by M. G. Sreekumar himself. The song remains one of the most cherished Ayyappa devotional tracks ever recorded in Malayalam. Many of his popular devotional compositions were created in collaboration with lyricists Gireesh Puthenchery and Rajeev Alunkal. Together, they produced numerous songs that continue to be sung by devotees across Kerala and beyond.

His renditions of Ayyappa songs, Krishna bhajans, Devi devotional albums, and Hindu spiritual compositions enjoy enormous popularity among Malayali audiences.

Many of these devotional albums continue to be played in homes, temples, and festivals across Kerala.

His devotional recordings have introduced his voice to listeners who may never have followed cinema music closely.

Television, Reality Shows and Cultural Influence

In recent decades, M. G. Sreekumar successfully expanded into television and became one of the most recognizable faces on Malayalam television. Programs such as Sa Re Ga Ma, Idea Star Singer, Top Singer, and several other music-based reality shows transformed him from a playback singer into a mentor and cultural personality. Week after week, audiences welcomed him into their homes, not merely as a judge but as an ambassador of Malayalam music.

His judging style stood apart from many television personalities. He combined humour, technical observation, emotional encouragement, and occasional blunt honesty. Contestants appreciated his ability to identify subtle musical nuances while also motivating young singers to improve. For many aspiring artists, sharing a stage with M. G. Sreekumar was an opportunity to learn directly from someone who had witnessed Malayalam film music evolve over several decades. Younger singers

often viewed him not simply as a celebrity judge, but as a bridge connecting them to Malayalam music's golden generation.

Beyond judging, he has hosted television programs, appeared in musical specials, and actively participated in cultural events that promoted music education and talent development.

Through KMG Musics and the Saregama School of Music in Thiruvananthapuram, he has also invested in nurturing future talent and sustaining musical education. These initiatives reflect his belief that music must be continuously passed on to future generations.



Awards and Honours

A career spanning more than four decades naturally brought numerous honours and recognitions. M. G. Sreekumar remains one of the most decorated singers in Malayalam cinema.

National Film Awards

- 1990 – Best Male Playback Singer – His Highness Abdullah ("Nadha Roopini")
- 1999 – Best Male Playback Singer – Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum ("Chanthu Pottum")

Winning two National Awards placed him among the elite playback singers of Indian cinema and established him as a singer capable of excelling in both classical and mainstream compositions.

Kerala State Film Awards

- 1989 – Best Male Playback Singer
 - Kireedam ("Kanneer Poovinte")
 - Vadakkunokkiyantram ("Mayamayooram Peeliveeshiyo")
- 1991 – Best Male Playback Singer
 - Kilukkam ("Kilukil Pambaram")
 - Thudarkkadha ("Aathiravaravayi")
- 1992 – Best Playback Singer – Various films

Kerala Film Critics Awards

- 1998 – Best Male Playback Singer – Kottaram Veettil Apputtan, Punjabi House, Summer in Bethlehem
- 1999 – Best Male Playback Singer – Megham, Chandranudikkunna Dikkil, Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njaanum
- 2000 – Best Male Playback Singer – Kattu Vannu Vilichappol
- 2001 – Best Male Playback Singer – Achaneyanikkishtam, Praja
- 2002 – Best Male Playback Singer – Nandanam
- 2005 – Best Male Playback Singer – Mayookham, Balyam
- 2006 – Best Male Playback Singer – Keerthi Chakra, Pothan Vava
- 2011 – Best Music Director – Oru Marubhoomikkadha



Filmfare Awards South

- 2016 – Best Male Playback Singer (Malayalam) – Oppam ("Chinnamma")

Asianet Film Awards

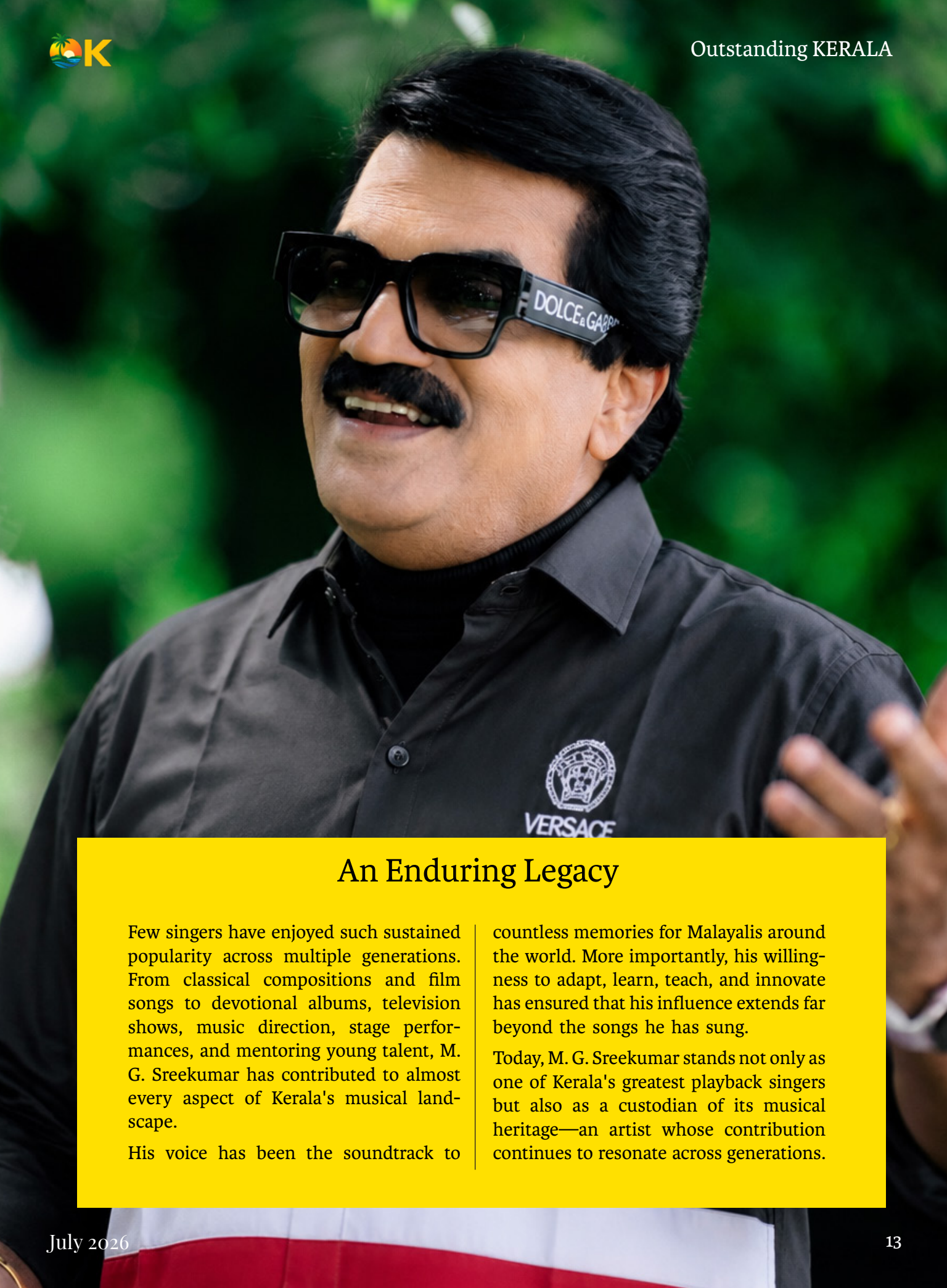
- 2003 – Best Male Playback Singer – Manassinakkare
- 2005 – Best Male Playback Singer – Thanmathra, Ananthabhadram
- 2008 – Best Male Playback Singer – Innathe Chintha Vishayam
- 2010 – Best Music Director – Oru Naal Varum

Surya TV Awards

- 2008 – Best Playback Singer – Innathe Chintha Vishayam
- 2010 – Best Playback Singer – Oru Naal Varum

Other Major Honours

- 2008 – Raju Pilakkattu Memorial Award
- 2008 – Jeevan TV P. Jayachandran Award
- 2010 – Asiavision Movie Award for Best Music Director – Oru Naal Varum
- 2011 – Swaralaya Kairali Yesudas Award
- 2016 – Harivarasanam Award
- 2016 – Asiavision Award for Best Male Singer – "Minungum Minnaminunge" (Oppam)
- 2016 – Mazhavil Mango Music Award – Special Jury Award – "Chinnamma" (Oppam)
- 2023 – V. M. Kutty Award instituted by the Ishal Samskarika Samithi



An Enduring Legacy

Few singers have enjoyed such sustained popularity across multiple generations. From classical compositions and film songs to devotional albums, television shows, music direction, stage performances, and mentoring young talent, M. G. Sreekumar has contributed to almost every aspect of Kerala's musical landscape.

His voice has been the soundtrack to

countless memories for Malayalis around the world. More importantly, his willingness to adapt, learn, teach, and innovate has ensured that his influence extends far beyond the songs he has sung.

Today, M. G. Sreekumar stands not only as one of Kerala's greatest playback singers but also as a custodian of its musical heritage—an artist whose contribution continues to resonate across generations.

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