Events

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Mehfils, brass bands, and vanishing songs: ARPO traces Kochi's sonic roots at Fort Kochi

Somewhere in Mattancherry, an old harmonium gathers dust. On April 11 and 12, ARPO asks what this coast sounds like when you really listen.

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Dates **11 April 2026 – 12 April 2026**
Booking Book a place

Where

David Hall-Art Gallery & Cafe
Art gallery · Opp Parade Ground, Fort Kochi

Drawn from OpenStreetMap, by its contributors.

Somewhere in Mattancherry, an old harmonium gathers dust. The man who played it at Friday mehfils passed away years ago. His granddaughter remembers the songs but not the words. The neighbours remember the words but not the tune.

Is this how music disappears? Not in a single dramatic moment, but slowly, one generation's forgetting at a time.

On April 11 and 12, ARPO (the Archival and Research Project) brings nostalgia to My Beloved Fort Kochi. It asks a simple, urgent question: what does this coast sound like when you really listen?

Three Programmes, One Coastline

The two-day fest unfolds across three distinct programmes at David Hall Art Gallery. Each traces a different thread of Kochi's musical past and present.

A Time Long Past

This programme looks at Mattancherry's Hindustani music roots. Video installations and an image exhibition will trace the area's vintage mehfil culture. They also cover the nearly forgotten Kaikotti Paatu singing traditions and the legacy of musicians like Gul Mohammed.

Read our piece on Mehboob Memorial Orchestra to learn how Mattancherry's Deccani Muslim community has kept ghazal and Hindustani music alive for generations. The Vittobha Temple in Mattancherry has drawn Hindustani singers for decades.

A Different Land

Fort Kochi's Anglo-Indian community once filled the evenings with brass bands, dance nights, and elaborate banquet traditions. This programme features video installations and historical talks tracing that cultural fusion, alongside stories of the city's now-quiet shipbuilding past.

These are communities whose contributions to Kochi's identity are often left out of the usual tourist narratives. Researchers and collectors lead the talks. They have spent years piecing together what mainstream history has overlooked.

Merged Sessions

Here is where past meets present. Local indie musicians take the traditional sounds documented in the first two programmes. They run them through contemporary sampling and electronic production.

The Shore Remembers

The event packs a lot into two days. You will find video installations and archival films running through both days. A curated 16-frame photo exhibition. Talks by researchers and cultural collectors. And live performances that bring old traditions back to a stage.

Who is ARPO?

The Archival and Research Project (ARPO) is a nonprofit that documents and shares lesser-known aspects of Kerala's cultural heritage. Their SAGA video series with historian Manu S Pillai has a large audience. They have archived over 1,700 folk songs and tales through their LoreKeepers project. Their restoration of Karnikara Mandapam in Kozhikode won a UNESCO Asia Pacific Heritage Award in 2023.

Event Details

The venue is David Hall Art Gallery & Cafe on Napier Street, opposite Parade Ground, in Fort Kochi. The same 300-year-old Dutch bungalow regularly hosts art exhibitions and Biennale programmes. Read more in our guide to things to do in Fort Kochi.

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Fort KochiNapier Street
Street
Mehboob Memorial Orchestra
Orchestra
Mattancherry