

cats of kochiStory

Published 24 June 2025

Music and memories: inside the Mehboob Memorial Orchestra

Mehboob Memorial Orchestra is a community music space in Fort Kochi, named after singer Bayi Mehboob. Fridays at 6:30 p.m. are open for karaoke in Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil.

In this page

Dear readers of Fort Kochi, meow again! It's Aroo and today I come with a secret. Do not tell this to the hooman at the residence of Cats of Kochi. I'm

afraid I will be exploited if I reveal my secret to him. As the matriarch, I've got a reputation to maintain.

It's between me and you, alright? If this goes out, then you're done for. An eye for an eye and beware. I have sharp claws in my paws.

⏱ Mehboob Memorial Orchestra in 1 minute

Mehboob Memorial Orchestra (MMO) is a community music space in Fort Kochi named after Bayi Mehboob, a singer from the Deccani Muslim community popular in the 1950s–60s.

Every Friday at 6:30 p.m., anyone can walk in and sing or listen to karaoke performances across Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, no restrictions.

Map

Accessible only by stairs. Located near Aspinwall Junction.

Keep reading: The Friday Harmony gathering · Mehboob and the Deccani ghazal tradition

---

I'll get to the secret soon. It started one day when I was strolling along the Aspin Wall Junction. This is an area of Fort Kochi famous for the annual Kochi Muziris Biennale.

It was late in the evening and I was getting bored thinking about history, my fellow feline Bandit and what not. Although, a cat's brain is said to be big and intelligent. One of the finest in all creatures of the planet. I can only think about so much spice trade and colonialism and kings and rulers.

Bored out of my big brain, I walked towards the first thing that caught my eye. A building with a red wall.

Hoomans call it a political party office or something, I assume. I do not care for it. The colors were alluring, so I went and played with some of the red cloth that was lying down.

And that's when I heard it, "Saanson ki maala peh simroon mein pi ka naam". For the first time in my cat life, I felt like I could comprehend the human voice. Because usually to be fair, what they say goes over my head.

But this was different. They were singing. And I could feel every emotion expressed in their voice. Even if it was in a language I've never ever heard of.

I followed the voice and it led me through a narrow staircase. The sound was getting louder.

Suddenly, I was picked up by someone. An old looking gentleman with a kind face. He kept petting me and spinning me around. I already liked this place.

I had not even looked around, but the first question they asked me was, "Can you sing?" I let out the most melodious meow and kept purring a hum. After I was done, I got a big applause.

The secret is out, my readers. I have unlocked the new talent of singing. And that too, beautifully.

> **"When you think of music in Kochi, Mehmoob Memorial Orchestra is the first thing that comes to anyone's mind." said a veteran singer who was a long time supporter of the orchestra.**

Friday Harmony - Ending the week with a song

What I walked upon was the Friday Harmony, a gathering organized by the Mehboob Memorial Orchestra (or MMO). It happens **every Friday at 6:30 p.m.** at their office near the Aspin Wall Junction.

Singers of all ages, gender, class and religion who had a real appreciation of music would gather on evenings at the end of the week. Some came after working hard at their jobs. Some came after studying. Some needed a break from home. They wanted to lose (or perhaps, find) themselves in music by singing and listening to karaoke performances of each other.

The name is a remembrance to H. Mehboob, also known as Bayi. He was a singer popular in Kochi's soundscape in the 1950s and 60s.

I wonder if there's any legendary cat singer whom I can take an inspiration from in this new found career!

The 'memorial' aspect of the office comes alive when you step inside the auditorium. A small stage stands at the front. Many pictures cover the walls around it. On the stage is a seating arrangement unusual to Kochi music gatherings, a sofa that resembles the Sufi Qawwalis and Mushairas. However, the singers of the Friday Harmony do not perform there because the sofa is reserved for bigger events.

Musical Memories adorning the walls at MMO

MMO has no language limits. You can see that they even let us sing in our feline language. All kinds of tunes are welcome, from "Main Koi Aisa Geet Gaaon" to "Sundari Kannal Oru Sethi" and "Sathyam Shivam Sundaram".

Mostly, people sing in either Hindi, Malayalam or Tamil. I hope I inspire my cat fellows to also come and grace the stage one day. I highly recommend all music enthusiasts, even the ones who think they cannot sing, to come and listen to the melodious rhythms.

One of the singers who sang "Ghar Se Nikalte Hi" told me about the annual event organized by MMO. It is much awaited by many people in Kochi. They have been conducting this for decades. The Rafi Nite. A tribute to the legendary playback singer Mohammed Rafi.

Mehboob and ghazals

Mehboob was born in Fort Kochi. He grew up in Mattancherry, near Pattalam which used to be the Bengal Battalion Military Camp. He was from the community of Deccani Muslims, one of the communities in Fort Kochi.

As their name implies, their ancestors hailed from the Deccan region of India. This happened presumably during the invasion of Tipu Sultan in Travancore before the 19th century. I wonder how many of the cats I meet around in Fort Kochi are originally from places far, far away from here.

The community mainly speaks the language of Urdu at home. The Deccani Muslims of Kochi, with about 300 families, are the main contributors for

the ghazal music scene. They continue to preserve their Deccani culture and heritage. Just like how, like my ancestors, I maintain my tradition of clawing at any cushion I see. My latest target was the sofa on the stage inside MMO.

Through some of the photos, I found out that Mehboob also got to sing with Mohammed Rafi! That event probably envisioned the Rafi Nites by the Mehboob Memorial Orchestra in the future.

Pictures of Mehboob and Rafi inside the MMO

Just like how my claw marks will live on in the sofa cushion of MMO, Bayi's music and Deccani music tradition will also continue to live on in the soundscape of Kochi. Here's a glimpse into the music curated by MMO. And soon there will be Aroo Memorial Orcatstra! You can reach the place through the Google Maps location link below! Also note that the MMO is accessible only by stairs.

Mehboob Memorial Orchestra · Kochi, Kerala

Links to Sources

MMO, TheNewsMinute, Pattalam, Ashish Sood

Places in this story 3

Mehboob Memorial Orchestra
Orchestra
MattancherryFort Kochi