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Looking ahead

The best of art and technology



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Contents



Features

06
Reflections
What Bloom did.
By Anil Dharker

08
Culture for Posterity
Through the coming together of art and technology under expert guidance, the NCPA is preparing to take India's cultural heritage beyond its theatres. Chairman *Khushroo N. Suntook* on adapting to extraordinary times.

11
In Perfect Consonance
In the world of Indian classical music, a time-honoured *bandish* is a composition that is fixed, but in the sense that it provides a well-trodden

path paved by the masters. Musicologist *Meena Banerjee* decodes the nuances of the *bandish*, and explains why some are timeless and unchangeable, while others can be effortlessly pliable.

15
Dynamic Spaces
While the NCPA has been among the few organisations in the country for the propagation of diverse art forms, it has also been a creative space that not only reinforces tradition but also inspires innovation. *Vipasha Aloukik Pai* talks to luminaries from the world of Indian classical dance who have worked at, studied at, grown up in, performed at and been inspired by the spaces at the NCPA. This month, the spotlight is on the Godrej Dance Theatre.



19
On a Literary Note
From encyclopaedias to biographies, documentaries to feature films, *Farrahnaz Irani*, General Manager – International Music, NCPA, in collaboration with her team, recommends essential reading and viewing to widen your understanding of and delve deeper into jazz.

21
Peace Is the Thing with Feathers
Over 200 pictures of birds contributed by photographers from across India will go up on the walls of the Piramal Gallery when attending exhibitions becomes a part of life again. Until then, enjoy their digital showcase and a few glimpses here.

25
A Shared Experience
Last month, the Indian Express Film Club's association with the NCPA completed a year. Film critic and curator of the club, *Shubhra Gupta*, reflects on the pleasures of participatory viewing, even as the screenings and post-film discussions have temporarily shifted to the virtual space.

27
Faulty Silences
On performance, performativity and gender in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*.
By *Vara Ashita Raturi*

30
The Performing Arts Dispatch
A new series on cultural centres from around the world. In focus this month: The Royal Albert Hall.



SAMIR MOHITE (TOP); CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU (BOTTOM)

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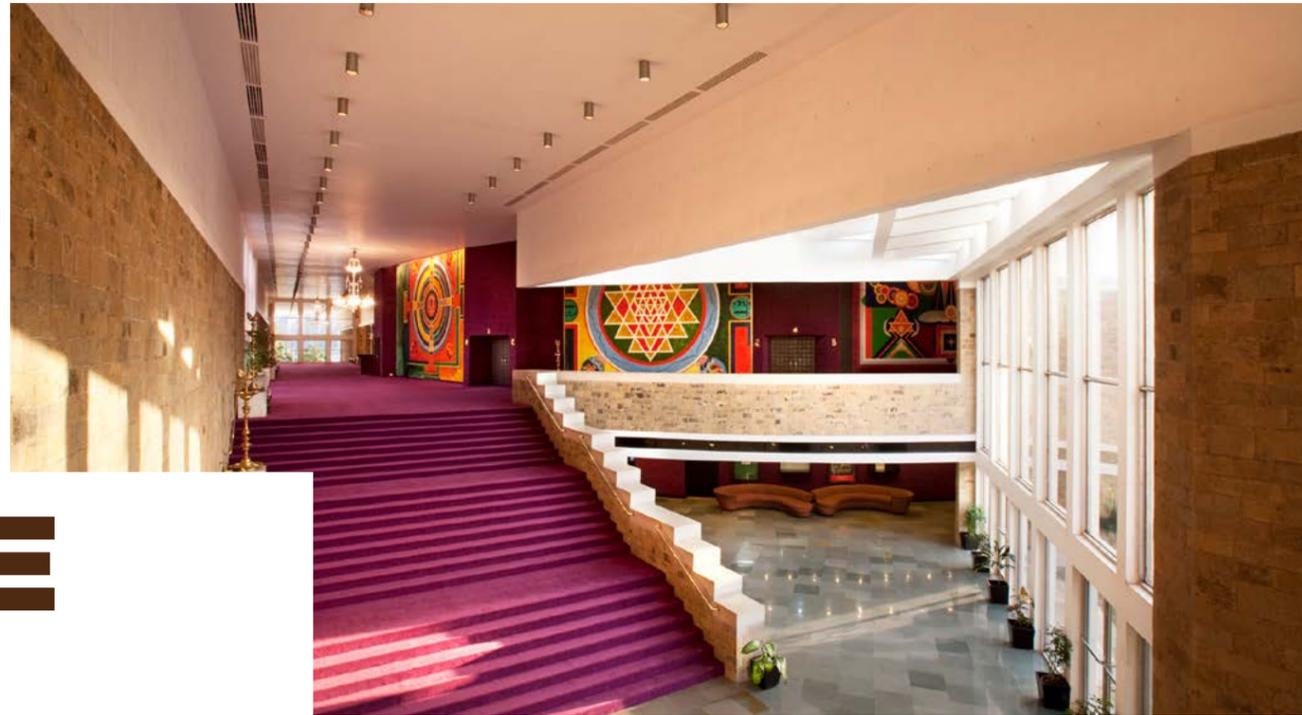
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EX
EXPERIMENTAL
THEATRE

CULTURE FOR POSTERITY

Through the coming together of art and technology under expert guidance, the NCPA is preparing to take India's cultural heritage beyond its theatres. Chairman **Khushroo N. Suntook** on adapting to extraordinary times.



Since the lockdown in mid-March, the NCPA has been engaged in utilising the time to first reschedule its planned seasons this year, hoping that we may be able to resume within a few months. But it was not to be.

It was time to take stock, examine our status, and prepare for a different analytical evaluation of the way forward. Since chances of performances to even reduced audiences seemed increasingly remote, we turned to the rich repository of historical and current recordings in our archives.

These were recorded for only archival and promotional purposes, and the challenge lay in identifying potentially promising material for editing, enhancing, and making it attractive for viewers with a 'prelude' and a professionally polished conclusion when it is put up for public consumption.

This was a mission where professionals in the field were required. Mr. Sankalp Meshram, a four-time National Award winner in the field of directing and editing with an essential love of the performing arts, agreed to come on board with a mission to do what was needed. A cell is now in the process of being set up to achieve this goal. The cell will breathe new life into material which has the potential to remind the present generation of the glorious art of old masters, dancers, singers, instrumentalists and all that is worth our remembrance.

Fine writer and critic, Richard Osborne, wrote about the coinciding of Beethoven's death centenary and the arrival of electronic microphone-made recording in *Gramophone*, "There are moments in history when art and technology come together in a way that borders on the providential." Perhaps one such moment has, yet again, arrived.

In the meanwhile, plans were brewing to ensure that the NCPA was not being gradually scrubbed from awareness.

THERE IS NOT A SHADOW OF DOUBT THAT THE MUSIC AND DANCE PERFORMANCES AT THE NCPA ARE OF A SUFFICIENTLY HIGH STANDARD TO BE SELECTIVELY PRESERVED FOR PUBLIC DISSEMINATION

Our dedicated musicians in residence and our students, who were giving and taking lessons via iPhones, tablets, etc., have prepared themselves for concerts when they resume.

There is not a shadow of doubt that the music and dance performances at the NCPA are of a sufficiently high standard to be henceforth selectively preserved for public dissemination.

All of us at home are grateful for the offerings by so many great musicians, theatres, actors, and venerable houses, whose very names have an awesome aura of quality.

The upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has rocked almost every human endeavour and left deep scars on essential and august institutions. Some, centuries old. Heartbreaking tales of the plight of fine artistes, actors, musicians keep surfacing, and unless a concerted effort is made, we may lose a great deal of our civilised heritage.

Enlightened governments, businesses, patrons and all those with an understanding of what might be lost, should come forward and offer their mite, however modest. History is replete with the sad neglect of its illustrious citizens, its grand monuments, its historical institutions, and its custodians of culture. It was Dr. Jamshed Bhabha's vision of setting up a fine institution in India which could be a custodian of her culture that led to formation of the NCPA. JRD Tata, in lending his steadfast support to Dr. Bhabha, had said, "While we want to build a prosperous society, we do not want it to be merely a materialistic, consumer society. Apart from the fact that a nation like ours, with its ancient civilisation, cannot afford to neglect the cultural heritage handed down to it over the centuries."

Fifty years later, the words continue to ring true, and in this coming together of art and technology during extraordinary times, the NCPA is on its mettle to take India's cultural heritage and international art forms to audiences much beyond its theatres. ■



Constant inspiration: Dr. Jamshed Bhabha with JRD Tata

HEARTBREAKING TALES OF THE PLIGHT OF FINE ARTISTES, ACTORS, MUSICIANS KEEP SURFACING, AND UNLESS A CONCERTED EFFORT IS MADE, WE MAY LOSE A GREAT DEAL OF OUR CIVILISED HERITAGE