

 NCPA

ON Stage[®]

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2020

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE
THE YEAR WAS

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Chairman's Note



There is an odd arrogance that pervades the so-called enlightened species, the 'educated' man. He always knows better. Surely, an insignificant bug could be crushed under the superior infrastructure he has built around him over the centuries. The lessons learned in only a mite longer than a century of the huge damage done by a mere influenza strain, the misery caused by the HIV virus, etc., seem to have been forgotten.

In addition to the untold tragedy mankind suffers of its own making, whether in the Middle East, in the areas around the erstwhile Soviet Union, and in vast tracts of many continents, the fury unleashed by nature is often due to our own contempt of our environment, on which trillions of every imaginable currency have been spent, combating these horrific plagues.

If only enlightened leadership in powerful countries would establish armies for peace and powerful organisations with a preventive bent rather than expensive curative solutions, a fraction spent on steps taken to avoid or at least mitigate the present situation might see some light.

But then, we have to open earlier than our medical advisors deem sensible. The economy has to tumble along, no matter the price. The age-old argument that the army has to march on its stomach now applies to everything. That the Wall Street or the Sensex just made another billion is far more relevant news than the opening of an academy of fine arts. An investment in teaching the quality of values is all unimportant compared to the company which just hit the jackpot converting an important commodity into some silly fashion object.

Values, please.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. N. Suntook". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Khushroo N. Suntook

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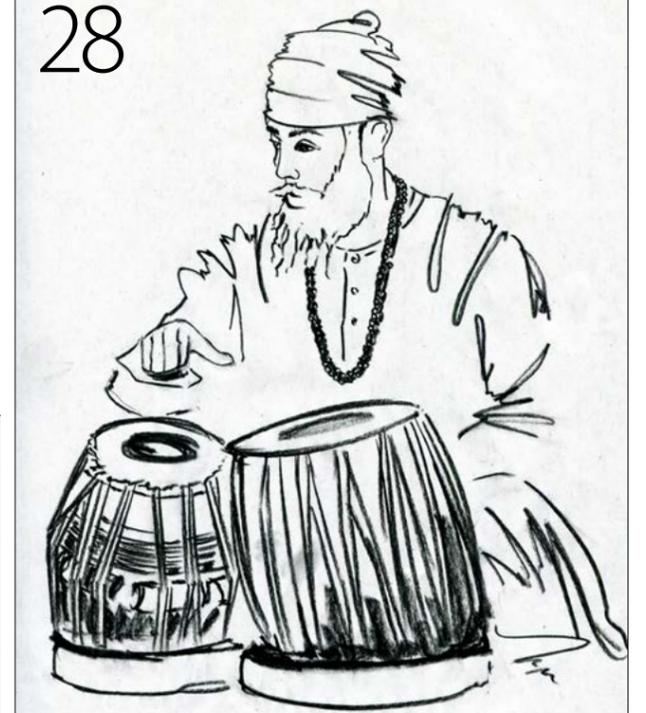
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We look forward to your feedback and suggestions. Please do drop us an email at onstage@ncpamumbai.com.



Reflections

Sleight of hand. By Anil Dharker

Picture yourself sitting in the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre listening to the Symphony Orchestra of India. Better still, imagine being in one of the uncomfortable seats of Wiener Musikverein watching musicians of the Vienna Philharmonic seemingly jousting with each other on a small stage as the bow arms of the left-handed and right-handed strings clash.

This of course, does not happen because all the string players—violin, viola, cello and double-bass, hold the bow in their right hand whatever their dominant hand is: they have to, not just because it is more harmonious visually for the audience to see all the bows moving uniformly, but also because all string instruments are made for right-handers. (Incidentally, you can now order a left-handed violin from Amazon in which the instrument is a mirror image of the standard violin, both on the outside by repositioning the neck rest and reversing the strings, and the inside by moving the bass bar and sound post).

It is estimated that only 10 per cent of people are left-handed, but a disproportionate number of them are represented in the creative arts, particularly among professional musicians. You notice this also in sports, with cricket being a prime example. At one time, the New Zealand Test team seemed to consist mainly of left-handers. You notice this also at the French Open, which Raphael Nadal seems to own, while last year Ben Stokes single- and left-handedly won the cricket World Cup for England.

'Handedness' as it is called, is a fascinating field, made even more so because so little is still known about it. Why does Sachin Tendulkar bat and bowl with his right hand but write with his left? Why do Mark Taylor, Brian Lara, Clive Lloyd, David Gower, brilliant left-handed batsmen all, write with their right? Why does Stokes bat left and bowl right? As do Suresh Raina, Sourav Ganguly, Richard Hadlee to name a few,

while Michael Clarke, Vinoo Mankad, Ravi Shastri to name just three, do the opposite? And weirdly, why does Adam Gilchrist, probably the world's best-ever wicketkeeper, batsman and a natural left-hander, play tennis right-handed, or Nadal, a natural right-hander, play left-handed? Final mystifying question: if only ten per cent of the population is left-handed, why are 20 per cent of top cricketers left-handed?

Paul Broca (1824-1880), a French surgeon and anatomist, first discovered that a region in the frontal lobe of the left hemisphere of the brain (now known as Broca's area) is the speech production centre for humans. He also formulated that handedness indicated specialisation on the opposite side of the brain; so right-handers, because of the speech centre's position on the left, have greater developed skills in language, while because of the right hemisphere's association with intuition and creativity, these are the left-handers' strong suits. Recent research shows that while both hemispheres function differently, they work together: it is just more efficient for the brain to divide major tasks between two parts, so that the work of verbalisation and the work of movement requiring motor skills are equally divided.

A disproportionately higher percentage of Nobel prize winners, writers and painters gave rise to the theory that left-handers are more intelligent than right-handers. Just look at the number of U.S. Presidents with dominant left hands: James Garfield, Herbert Hoover, Harry Truman, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H. Bush, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama...it's an impressive list for sure, but studies (those inconvenient things) show that this particular theory is no more than an unproven hypothesis and IQ scores have nothing to do with handedness.

Among musicians, the best-known left-handers are Rachmaninoff, C.P.E. Bach, Mozart, Paganini, Daniel Barenboim and Glenn Gould. Contrary



to what you would expect, the composers among them did not favour either hand, while Johann Sebastian Bach, a right-hander, gave equal work to the left hand. (A special case here: pianist Paul Wittgenstein lost his right arm during World War I, but did not want to stop playing, so he commissioned work just for the left hand; the most famous of these is Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand. Other compositions include Prokofiev's Concerto for the Left Hand which has never been performed, and works by Hindemith and Benjamin Britten.)

As it happens, we do not have much choice in the matter: ultrasound examination has shown that handedness manifests itself in foetal development. In the tenth week of gestation, foetuses begin to move their dominant hand more than the other, while in the fifteenth week the majority start sucking their right thumb. So we are born as we are, but luckily for left-handers, the prejudice against them is now gone, so they are generally 'left' alone.

It has been suggested that one can keep Alzheimer's at bay by learning to use your less dominant hand as you grow older. If that is the case, 90 per cent of us should practise using our left hand far more than we do. However, I have an inconvenient counter to this. If this theory is correct, in a world made for right-handers where left-handers learn to be more ambidextrous, wouldn't the incidence of Alzheimer's be much less in left-handed people? ■



(1926 - 2020)

**In loving memory of our great patron and friend, Mr. Vivian Liff,
who brought so much joy and dissemination of knowledge of
the noble act of singing.**

From a grateful NCPA and his many admirers.

THE YEAR THAT WAS

MR. KHUSHROO N. SUNTOOK, DR. SUARNALATA RAO AND MR. BRUCE GUTHRIE REFLECT ON HOW WHAT TRANSPIRED IN 2020 HAS AFFECTED THE WORLD OF THE PERFORMING ARTS, THE RESILIENCE IT HAS DISPLAYED, AND HOW, THOUGH THE ODD SILVER LINING SHINES THROUGH, THE ROAD TO RECOVERY IS A LONG ONE.

THE MANTLE OF CHANGE

BY KHUSHROO N. SUNTOOK, CHAIRMAN

As I put pen to paper to write this*, I hear the encouraging news of at least three effective COVID-19 vaccines in the offing and the worrying news of rising cases in different parts of India and the world. Where does a performing arts organisation such as ours find itself on this spectrum where embracing life as it once was and erring on the side of caution are its two opposite ends? Our empty theatres and barren stages have been a painful sight to behold, and writing reams about how we wish to see them come alive with your presence would not suffice. But there is a virus that lurks in the air, infusing trepidation into our plans of reopening.

Having a spanner as encumbering as this thrown in the works certainly unsettled our plans for not just 2020. We were looking forward to staging our production of Lehár's *The Merry Widow* in the Spring 2021 Season of the Symphony Orchestra of India, which we only see materialising in the Autumn season now. However, times such as these demand agility, and we at the NCPA used this long interval to grab the mantle of change. Our digital broadcast series and the SOI Music Academy's shift to the virtual classroom are fine examples of this. We have moved closer to the reality of digitising deserving items from our vast archives and future performances, and creating concerts and documentaries to be offered to audiences beyond those we can host in our theatres. If positive outcomes of the pandemic must be enumerated, the melting away of geographical boundaries would make it to the top.

The silver lining, however, does not take away from the grim situation artistes and houses of culture find

IF POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF THE PANDEMIC MUST BE ENUMERATED, THE MELTING AWAY OF GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES WOULD MAKE IT TO THE TOP



From the NCPA Dance Season in January 2020



Kirk MacDonald "Generations" Quartet performing at the NCPA in March 2020



Ameen, Amen, Shanti presented in February 2020

themselves in, particularly in the absence of institutional support. The road to recovery is going to be a long one, but embarking on it, we assure you, would not be in lieu of your safety.

**This message was written in the middle of November. An update of the situation has been described by the Chairman in his message.*



WHEN THE VIRTUAL IS REAL

BY DR. SUARNALATA RAO, PROGRAMMING HEAD-INDIAN MUSIC

We know that life is always in a flux and never static. In fact, we often desire change to bring colour to our lives. But did we ever imagine a change that would have all of us locked up indoors for months like caged birds? Isn't it ironically humbling that a microscopic virus

could shatter all the tall claims made by man of being the supreme creation, and bring the entire humanity to its knees?

In December 2019, while the pandemic was taking root in other parts of the world, we were on a high with a gala celebration marking completion of 50 glorious years of the NCPA. Ushering in 2020 on an optimistic note, the festivities continued through the early months with a host of specially curated events that ordinarily make our annual roster attractive to a wide variety of audiences.

But by mid-March the pandemic was at our doorstep, and a sudden announcement of lockdown forced us to call off a slew of equally interesting events that we had slotted during the following months at the NCPA and in other towns in collaboration with local organisers.

"When the going gets tough, the tough gets going," they say. Having seen many upheavals during the last 50 years, we, at the NCPA, readily adopted this philosophy. We realised that we must get back on our feet in the new world where the virtual space seems

OUR CAREFULLY PRESERVED ARCHIVES, BUILT OVER FIVE DECADES, PROVIDED 12 EXCEPTIONAL RECITALS OF INDIAN MUSIC UNDER THE BANNER OF NCPA@HOME OVER EIGHT WEEKS

to dominate reality, and the digital connect with our audience is the order of the day. Thanks to our carefully preserved reservoir of archives built over five decades, we could dig into it and present 12 exceptional recitals of Indian music under the banner of NCPA@home over eight weeks. The overwhelming response from our esteemed audiences was indeed gratifying.

We are also proud that despite the odds we continue unabatedly with our CSR activities, be it the training of *shishyas* by *gurus* or our 'Music for Schools' programme run in 21 schools catering to roughly 1700 underprivileged children. While we take pride in supporting the arts, we are also equally committed to the wellbeing of artistes. Considering the tough times that are upon performing musicians today, we have conceived a workshop series to help them cope with the current times. Relevant topics including understanding the digital space, managing psychological stress, understanding the legal issues governing the digital domain, production of home videos, etc., are sure to empower the artistes to deal with the present scenario.

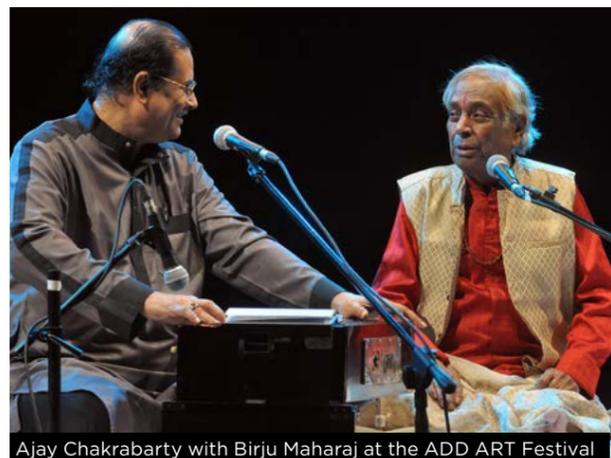
Looking beyond our organisation, we realise that in general, the lockdown has hit the music industry hard. Not only performing artistes, big and small, but also the livelihoods of a number of associates from recording

engineers to organisers and marketing professionals are affected like never before. Woefully, except the Bollywood industry, none of the other sectors are organised enough to withstand such a calamity. Not only artistic events but also social gatherings like weddings and events in posh venues, where lesser-known artistes get regular opportunities to earn their livelihood, seem to have been hugely affected. Sadly, there is no regulatory mechanism either that will give us the full extent of the damage done.

No doubt, large organisations like ours are trying to put a digital strategy in place so as to switch, at least partially, future activities to the digital domain. Resourceful musicians too have been quick to improvise and bring out home productions, often self-funded, to be offered on various OTT platforms. These efforts may appear desperate but in a battle for survival, all stops are being pulled out, albeit with no guarantee of monetary success.

If one must look for a silver lining, it is the unlimited reach of the virtual world. Geographical boundaries are not limiting anymore. With ever-advancing technology, the stage is now set to take audiences across the globe by storm.

One wonders, would we ever come back to the real world with physical events? Well, only time will tell.



Ajay Chakrabarty with Birju Maharaj at the ADD ART Festival

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

BY BRUCE GUTHRIE, HEAD OF THEATRE & FILM

The 16th of September, 2020, marked exactly one year since I moved to Mumbai to assume the role of Head of Theatre & Film at the NCPA. The potential for great work to be created and supported in this miraculous city had me bristling with ideas and energy. There is a tremendous amount of work that must happen in preparation for any live event—coordination with several departments within the organisation as well as a multitude of companies and freelance artistes. It requires skill, focus, dedication and commitment from all involved to pull off events befitting of this great institution. We began with a season of presented works from all over the city and moved on to our own production of *Constellations* by Nick Payne. This was an upgraded production from the previous year, with a move to the Hong Kong Arts Festival in the offing, come February 2020. The production ran for eight performances and was completely sold out. We were off and running.

The ADD ART Festival was a glorious send off to 2019 and the perfect way to celebrate 50 years of the NCPA. Our venues and outdoor spaces were alive with activity and a buzz of excitement. Packed houses enjoyed a vast array of programming from across the country and the world, and relaxed with delicious food and beverages in the beautiful ambience created across our campus. The META award-winning *Elephant in the Room* starring Yuki Ellias, *Where Has My Nani Gone?* by Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust, the premiere of Nicholas Hytner's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with National Theatre Live and the premiere of NCPA's own production of *Sea Wall* by Simon Stephens, starring Jim Sarbh, were amongst the theatrical offerings at the festival. The celebration was a wonderful example of what is possible at a multi-genre organisation.

Following on from ADD ART was the premiere of a new version of Agatha Christie's *The Mirror Crack'd* in January—one of her wonderful whodunnits with all the twists and turns of the best literary page-turners, previously adapted for film and television and now,



A scene from *The Mirror Crack'd*



From Winter Fiesta held in November 2020

most recently for the Indian stage. Creating the NCPA's latest large-scale theatre production was an ambitious yet thrilling proposition that brought a host of resources together, full of challenges, yet laced with opportunities. With the Agatha Christie Estate's blessing and encouragement, Mumbai-born writer, Ayeesha Menon, was engaged to adapt

the original English play for the production in India, relocating the story to Goa and the backdrop of Bollywood in the 1980s, peppered with references that would resonate with an Indian audience. With a new and relevant text as our springboard, the combined Indian and British creative team began the process of developing the production, beginning with casting the play. The securing of some of Mumbai's most talented actors was a real coup, led by Shernaz Patel, Sonali Kulkarni and Denzil Smith as part of a theatre ensemble of 14 actors. Given the scale of the production for the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre, it was necessary to augment the NCPA's theatre team and so we joined forces with one of the city's leading producing companies, QTP, to realise the physical and technical aspects of the production. The combination of technical and creative expertise within the enhanced team allowed for the ambitions of the production to be realised. In every respect, everyone engaged in the production had to step up a gear to dazzle audiences with originality and innovation. It was a deeply rewarding project,

delivering wonderfully for both audiences and all those engaged to collaborate in creating it.

March and April were due to bring more exciting new offerings from the theatre department of the NCPA. Our schools' collaboration with the National Theatre of Great Britain, *Connections* was a festival of four plays that would have been hosted at the NCPA as the centrepiece of a weekend-long festival celebrating World Theatre Day. We also had a new production of Alan Ayckbourn's *A Small Family Business* in rehearsal and due to open in April 2020. Both events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic that brought much of the world to a standstill, and still affects us all now.

The pandemic has brought global challenges to all aspects of life. The artistic community has been hit incredibly hard with the vast majority of artistes being freelancers. It has been a time when we have had to come together and work to problem-solve and innovate. The Theatre team has been working on its own internal processes as well as making connections with artistes and organisations across the country and around the world. This is a time for us to work to create the kind of world we want for the future. It has been an opportunity to listen. To contemplate. To plan. If our remit is excellence in all areas, we have been assessing

THE WINTER FIESTA HAS BEEN A GREAT SUCCESS, WITH MANY WONDERFUL MOMENTS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS, PRACTITIONERS, AND OUR NCPA TEAM

how best to achieve that, not only in the way we used to, but in ways this situation has forced us to dream of. In the absence of what we want to do, we must do what we can, and work towards our goals together.

Our latest project, The Winter Fiesta, has seen a series of interactive five-day courses take place online for children and young people aged 3-20 years. The Theatre, Dance and Western Classical Music departments collaborated to bring together a diverse range of courses. The festival has been a great success with participants reporting an excellent experience. There were so many wonderful moments between participants, practitioners, and our NCPA team. It is an example of an initiative we hope to continue beyond the COVID-19 situation as we connect with people across India in different ways. We are building for the future. We hope that when it is safe, people will have an even greater desire for live experiences than they did prior to the lockdown.

As for the future? We must continue to innovate. We long for the time when we can reopen our doors and welcome the public back to our spaces. Our patrons are the backbone of this institution. Our audiences are keen to come back and experience live events again. We at the NCPA aim to make that happen by providing experiences they will never forget. ■



Girija Devi - Presenting compositions of Shambhunath Mishra & Shyamcharan Mishra of Benaras gharana

Born in 2020: NCPA@home

The NCPA's digital broadcast series of curated performances from across genres was among the first in the country to be rolled out within days of the lockdown announcement. What started as a way of keeping members culturally engaged, went on to reach new audiences beyond India and formed a virtual community of connoisseurs, separated by distance but united in their love of art.

Nine months since the pandemic dislodged our customary ways of living, working, commuting and being, we may have got round to the new normal of Zoom meetings and classes, celebrations over video calls, big and small online transactions and consuming a digital version of practically every tactile experience known to us. But back in late March, this was all a new and shaky terrain.

At the NCPA, it was a period of ironing out the logistics of cancelled shows and putting systems in place for working remotely. At the same time, all efforts were being bent to tap into the vast reserves of recordings of performances from Indian and Western music and dance to be made available online in the absence of live concerts. On 3rd April, within 10 days of the announcement of the nationwide lockdown, NCPA@home, a YouTube series broadcasting a performance on every day of the week, was launched.

"Given the stringent lockdown measures that ruled out all movement, it was all hands on deck to make NCPA@home possible," says Pallavi Sahney Sharma, Chief Executive - PR, Marketing, Events at the NCPA. "Credit goes to the Chairman and genre heads for lending their support to this initiative. Thus far, concerts had been recorded mainly for the purpose of documentation. The genre heads started a conversation with artistes for permission to digitally broadcast their performances," she explains. Once the permissions were secured and the line-up for the broadcast carefully curated, the videos had to be suitably edited to meet the demands of the digital medium. "The technical team took over the baton to ensure the content was of broadcast quality and worked in tandem with the genre heads to add subtitles

and footnotes to make the shows more accessible to the viewers."

The task of getting the word out on the series came next and the marketing team put its mind to it, so members, missing the joy of coming to a concert, could do the next best thing under the given circumstances. "It all came together as a result of collective effort by various departments and we are grateful to have been supported in it by our partnerships. The Tata group kindly shared our programme with all its employees located in different parts of the world. In a welcome gesture, the online portal Tata Cliq approached us with the idea they would like to extend the gift of culture to their customers in these times, and put up the series announcement on their website. Before the lockdown, advertisements for our events were mainly carried in the Mumbai editions of newspapers and the local editions of publications in cities we travelled to with our events. With the NCPA concerts made digitally accessible, our channels of communication spanned diverse geographies and moved beyond the conventional media. The India Habitat Centre, Delhi, Alliance Française de Bombay, The True School of Music, Furtados Music, Serendipity Arts Foundation, Goa, The Bangalore Men choir, Bookmyshow.com, Serenade Magazine, the Parsi Times and Parsiana included information on NCPA@home series in their publications, and on their website or social media pages," adds Sahney Sharma.

The series quickly gathered steam and the conversations over the clinking of cold coffee goblets in the theatre foyers found an online counterpart as the audience logged in minutes before six every evening, waiting in anticipation for the concert of the day, while exchanging nuggets of information about the art form,

artistes, the instruments or costumes in the particular performance with fellow art lovers in the comments section. "We opted for the YouTube Premiere feature that enabled the viewers to watch a concert from start to finish at the same time as everyone else who had logged in from around the world. We wanted to make the experience as close to the collective feeling of watching a performance at the NCPA as we possibly could," says Dhanya Nair, Deputy Manager - Online Communications, NCPA. What set the

virtual experience apart, she observes, was that while audiences attend a concert at the NCPA based on the genre of their choice, they would religiously log on to YouTube at 6 pm every day (and later, from Thursday to Sunday when the series became more weekend-specific) irrespective of whether it was a classical music, jazz or dance performance.

"For some, NCPA@home was about revisiting a performance they had attended in our theatres. It was evident in the way they would alert fellow viewers to notice a *harkat* in an upcoming *aalaap* or the plucking of the violin in the movement that was to follow," adds Nair. "For some, like a lady from Ahmedabad who had visited the NCPA only once and had loved what she had seen, it was about attending concerts she otherwise couldn't." In yet another heartwarming comment, it was learnt that a gentleman, who had been a patron of the NCPA for decades, found an opportunity in the broadcast series to introduce his son and grandson to the array of art forms that were part of the showcase. "We were inundated with pictures of people cooking while watching a concert. Two couples, stuck in different places because of the lockdown, made a virtual date night of the evenings of our jazz concerts, sipping on wine and enjoying the music. While some danced alongside a show, an artist once painted a dancer as he watched her performance," says Nair.

The Live Chat feature was another welcome addition to the series. It not only allowed the viewers to engage in conversations among themselves—many of them formed their own small communities waiting for one another to join and discuss the day's concert—but also interact with artistes who would be invited to join in real time as their performance was aired.

A welcome collaboration under the series with Literature Live!, the annual literature festival the NCPA hosts, was launched on 3rd



June. Starting with T.M. Krishna's insightful talk, Art & Activism, several stimulating discussions on a spectrum of topics, from the politics of history to the soft power of culture, were made available on NCPA@home every week and were much looked forward to.

With each broadcast available for seven days, the reach of the series expanded to countries including the U.S., Canada, Brazil, the U.K., the Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark, the U.A.E., Malaysia, Japan and Australia, with new audiences discovering the offerings of the NCPA and logging in all through the week. On 18th July, when the series ended, the subscribers to the NCPA's YouTube channel had more than doubled, and today, the number stands at nearly 30,000. The total number of impressions (digital views and engagements with a piece of online content) for the series is about 19 lakh. Online engagement with

the audience continues in the form of expert talks and workshops tailored to cope with the unique challenges of the pandemic. Going forward, the digital medium will continue to remain a strong component of curation at the NCPA, informs Sahney Sharma.

She looks back on NCPA@home as a rewarding experience, "Until the lockdown, we had viewed our archives through the lens of documentation. They acquired a new meaning in these times and helped us reach an audience much beyond our physical spaces and offer them something to look forward to when they were confined to their homes.

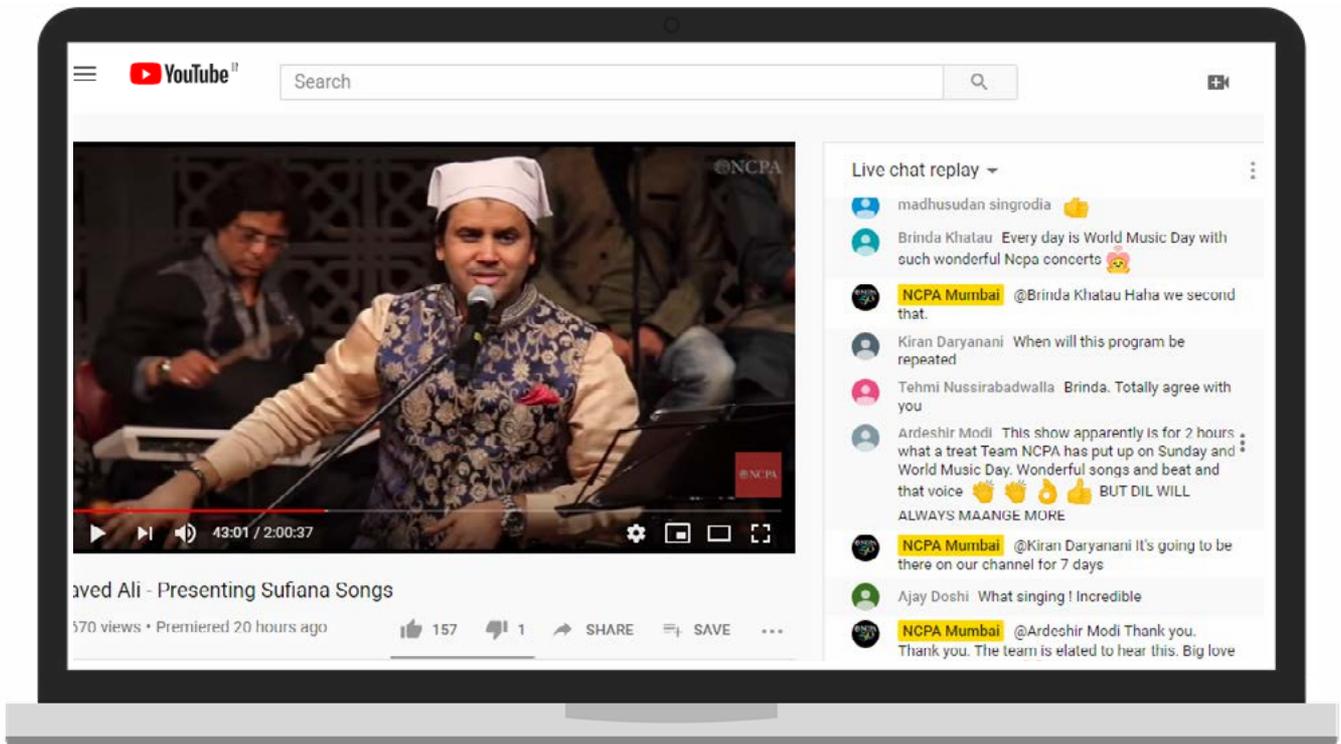
For a significant part of this audience, it was through the series that they came to know of the NCPA and its diverse offerings, which they kept coming back for every evening. We realised that there is a whole new audience around the world for what we curate that needs to be catered to through our digital component. But above all, the response to this wealth of culture only reaffirmed the fact that art has always been a healer, only more so in these times." ■

"During the lockdown, our archives acquired a new meaning and helped us reach an audience much beyond our physical spaces"



WHEN THE ARTS CAME HOME

The NCPA@home series was much loved by patrons and new audiences from Mumbai and beyond. The Live Chat option during the weekly digital showcase of performances from Indian and Western classical music, jazz and dance was testimony to how art works wonders in the most extraordinary times. A few snapshots.



We are so grateful to the NCPA@home team for bringing to us a refreshing change from Netflix and Prime. Thank you for helping us get through these trying times.

– *Sir Dinshaw Petit*

I only hope and pray that this magical initiative stays, even when everything gets back to normal. It has become such an integral part of our lives. Can't thank Team NCPA enough!

– *Rakesh Bhatia*

A great concert chosen for World Music Day. So soothing and mesmerising for a Sunday evening. Team NCPA, hats off to you, Chairman and Dr. Rao's team.

– *Ardeshir Modi on Javed Ali's rendition of Sufiana songs*

NCPA@home is always the highlight of the weekend. Thank you for bringing these wonderful concerts to us at home.

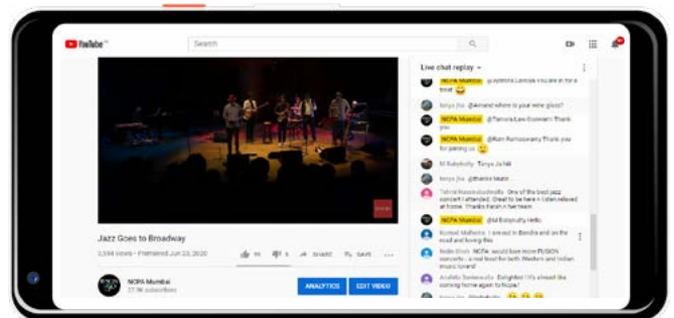
– *Rekha Krishnan*

In these uncertain times, great to relax with superimprovisations.

– *Vipool Shah*

Saw Kumudini Lakhia Kadamb today on NCPA@home. Very innovative Kathak composition. Well- trained dancers. Enjoyed. I saw *Petrushka* played by the SOI the previous day. I thought it was a mind-blowing performance.

– *Rita Rahimtoola*



Oh my! The season of music, song and dance, and even poetry, continues! The NCPA@home initiative offers a feast of world-class programmes from all over India, and international music. Their Symphony Orchestra of India which features in the initiative is to be admired for its quality. It is generous of the NCPA in making all this available complimentary, safely within the comfort of a person's home. Thank you to all, much appreciated!

– *Anil Lalwani*

One of the most different versions of 'Summertime' I have heard in the sudden surprises of instruments.

– *Narendra Kusnur, on the Jazz Goes to Broadway broadcast*

Delighted! It's like coming home again to the NCPA.

– *Anahita Davierwalla*

A Friend, Connoisseur and Guide

In Vivian Liff's passing, the NCPA lost its great patron and generous contributor to the creation of the Stuart-Liff Library. Chairman **Khushroo N. Suntook** remembers the authority on opera, renowned writer and music critic, and a dear friend.

At times, you seek solitude to be alone with your thoughts, to share personal moments with only yourself. I felt this today, the day of his funeral while standing next to Vivian's portrait in our Stuart-Liff library, mumbling something about his incredible contribution to the art of singing, his astounding knowledge of singers, his fine circle of friends and about his willingness to share great moments—in the Opera House, in front of our various sound systems in many different places, in London, the Isle of Man, in Mumbai, in my home in the country or on board a luxury liner which stopped overnight in Mumbai. And of course, at numerous meetings at the Recorded Vocal Art Society (RVAS).

Going back a bit, the 1950s were the heady years when John Freestone wrote a widely read column, Collector's Corner, in the *Gramophone*. When during a weekend John offered to drive me down to meet Vivian Liff and George Stuart, celebrated record collectors living in The Commons at Tunbridge Wells, I jumped at the idea. I did expect a rather splendid mansion, but not what I encountered. I was ushered into a large, richly furnished room with plush Victorian sofas and armchairs, a grand piano and a mouthwatering 78-rpm playing machine, and more temptingly, a huge pile of 78 records he had just brought back from Paris. When I started looking through them, I realised this was no ordinary collection—Litvinne, Battistinni, Scotti, Fonos of great Italian and French artistes, all occupied pride of place in this latest acquisition.

It was not so much the playing of the record, and appreciating the reproduction, as much as the acute perception of the minute points—the loss in pitch, possibly the wrong speed and so many other finer points of interpretation which sharpened your awareness of the item played. It was a remarkable critical faculty which made me so much more aware of what it was all about.

Vivian's appreciation of this very quality saw his friendship with my dear mentor and friend, John, flower. He admired the meticulousness of Michael Henstock's incredible attention to detail in two fine volumes of scholarship, on Fernando De Lucia and Fonotopia Records. His admiration for the labour of love Larry Lustig showered on his invaluable *The Record Collector*, and his admiration for Alan Bilgora's



↑ Mr. Vivian Liff and Mr. George Stuart with Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook's audio equipment at his residence



← Dinner after Lord Harewood's talk at the Recorded Vocal Art Society with Mr. Suntook, Mr. Liff and Mr. Stuart in attendance

enormous knowledge of the voice, particularly the tenor, were expressed several times. His friendship with many great personalities and artistes could be witnessed in the vast evidence in his homes.

As time took its toll, and memory started to fade (yet sparks could fly), he became gentler. Sad that life had decided to treat him so cruelly. Did it begin when his dearly beloved George passed away? It deeply affected him. There was a perceptible change in his demeanour, in his somewhat more subdued pattern of communication, and in so many different ways.

Since that day, nearly 50 years ago, when John became the initiator of what was to be my lifelong association with George and Vivian, they were incredibly kind. Vivian's stupendous (and I use the word advisedly) generosity towards donating thousands of books, LPs and now, as a legacy to the National Centre for the Performing Arts, thousands of CDs and memorabilia, will never be forgotten. ■

Reflections on a Pandemic

Renowned names from the world of Western classical music, whom the NCPA has hosted on its stage, weigh in on what cancelled concerts, the gift of gestation, and the return to live performances amidst restrictions entail for the performing arts.



Dame Felicity Lott, Soprano

This pandemic has made me try to live in the present and to enjoy simple things like working in the garden and baking. I'm lucky to have a garden and to have been home to see the roses bloom and the fruit ripen. Usually, I had to go away just as the beans were ready to pick or the raspberries were ripe. I have never spent so long at home; I thought that if I stopped working and was here all the time I would go crazy, but I seem not to have done so...you could check that with my husband however.

I am amazed at the way musicians have adapted to this weird situation. All my concerts and masterclasses in France were cancelled but I have managed a coaching session via Zoom with singers from all over the world: Sweden, Rumania, Scotland and London. And I have been able to "talk" via Zoom with students from various colleges, and to attend, from my music room, the AGM of my old Choral Society in Cheltenham.

The Wigmore Hall has given many wonderful concerts since June, to an empty hall at first and now with a small audience. Via the internet, I have been able to "go to" many of these recitals. As I write this, I'm half



Dame Felicity Lott with the Artie's Chamber Orchestra at the Tata Theatre in November 2014

watching and wholly listening to a recital from the Oxford Lieder Festival which I could not have attended except for this pandemic. The opera houses and theatres have made so many performances available: one could sit in front of a screen all day.

I hope and pray that this pandemic will soon have run its course and that young people will be able to seize their life chances once again, and reunite with their families. I am grateful to be as old as I am and to have had so many opportunities to travel and to sing: I loved

As I write this, I'm half watching and wholly listening to a recital from the Oxford Lieder Festival which I could not have attended except for this pandemic

my visits to Mumbai and the NCPA. I came first with Maciej Pikulski, and then with Gauthier Hermann and the wonderful musicians of the Artie's Chamber Orchestra. I only remember good things about my visits: wonderful warm audiences and the kind and friendly reception from the audience and organisers alike. I am thrilled to have been able to come to India and experience your famous hospitality. I send my very best wishes to you all for your health and safety. Keep the music playing.



Barry Douglas, pianist and conductor

I was in Paris in March 2020 with my orchestra Camerata Ireland—we were performing the complete Beethoven Piano Concertos at The Royal Opera in Versailles and the director said that our concerts were probably the last ones being performed before the lockdown in France. I was incredulous. Sure enough, they closed the next day and our concerts in Spain the following week were postponed to 2021. From then until December 2020, my concerts in Turkey, France, England, Ireland and many countries have all been cancelled or postponed.

Having the extra time has meant that I was able to read more, study and explore more music, and cook and do some gardening. I started to make videos in my piano room at home and give masterclasses and talks to students all over the world. To be able to connect with young musicians was very exciting. I did a recital in June at the National Concert Hall in Dublin with no audience, as part of the NCH Livestream Series.

We had to cancel our annual Clondeboyne Festival this summer, and so I had the idea to get the orchestra together, distanced properly of course, and record and stream the complete Beethoven Piano Concertos—the last time we had all been together had been in March

in France. It was brilliant—they played wonderfully and it is available to watch on www.camerata-ireland.com for a year.

Recently, I have been able to play in a few concerts in Ireland, Russia and London and it was great to be back with an audience. Playing and conducting in Moscow in September—with Covid tests done before flying to and from the Russian capital—was fantastic. The orchestra was distanced and so was the audience. Everyone was grateful to listen to live music again.

I plan to prepare for all concerts, even if they may be cancelled or postponed, as life and the arts must continue. I take issue with some governments who don't think of freelance musicians—we, in the arts, don't seem to be a priority. I know so many freelance musicians, even in famous orchestras, who are now working in supermarkets. I know that healthcare workers and school teachers are important, but the arts are the way for people to be uplifted and get food for their souls.

I send the audiences at the NCPA my warmest wishes. I have so many happy memories of a great hall and great audiences. See you soon.



Barry Douglas performs in the SOI Autumn 2019 Season at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre

Dan Zhu, violinist

The loss of concert activity under lockdown has had its repercussions, professionally and financially speaking, but the emotional side to it has been the hardest. I have lost the way I used to communicate with the world which was through my music, performing live on the stage.

We are living in a kind of duality—the pandemic has brought about a very difficult situation in terms of work and life. At the same time, it has put a sudden stop to the frenetic pace of the world we live in and given us time to think about what is wrong with the way it has been functioning. It has forced us to reconsider how we should live, work and communicate with each other. The pandemic has also made us realise that the world is a lot smaller and connected than we think it to be.

No live concerts in the initial phase of the lockdown meant readjusting what I do professionally, including moving my violin masterclasses online. I created an online concert series called [Dan Zhu & Friends Music Connects](#) under which I invited many of my international colleagues—distinguished artistes from different parts of the world—to collaborate with me in duo or trio format.

Online platforms are wonderful under these circumstances to connect with not only fellow musicians but also to keep the hope alive for the listeners through music. Of course, the essential quality of music-making cannot be replicated on the internet. Nothing can replace the beauty and magic of being together in the same space and sharing a moment. As an artiste, I consider music a universal language, a great example of how people connect with each other. Music is a symbol of love and hope to humanity which is needed more than ever in a time like this.

I have just returned from a concert in Hong Kong, which was my first transcontinental concert since the lockdown, as well as the city's first recital after the reopening of concert halls. To see half-empty venues is sad, but it evokes hope to see people, who have been missing this emotion and contact through a great form of art, come to appreciate music and culture with such passion. It takes courage and it encourages me to share



this moment which is more precious than ever and I feel grateful to be able to do what I do.

Another facet of my work that I am grateful for are my trips to India. It fascinates me with its history and atmosphere. It is a great example of multiculturalism. The audience in India is very musical, passionate, appreciative of the arts and open-minded about different types of music.

My first concert in Mumbai was in 2012 and since then, I have been back several times. The Symphony Orchestra of India (SOI) is world-class. I remember the 2017 concert where I played the violin concerto by Korngold which is a very challenging piece, and the musicians of the SOI performed brilliantly. They are cooperative, have a very strong sense of collaboration and musicality, and are quick to adapt to different styles of music and artistes they work with. I have very fond memories and I am always looking forward to going back and playing with them again. ■



Dan Zhu's recital with piano maestro Kun-Woo Paik, at Museo del Violino in Cremona, Italy, in September 2020



‘THE ORCHESTRA IS A MICROCOSM OF LIFE’

Before he went on to become a bestselling author of unputdownable novels, Dan Brown studied music to forge a career as a singer-songwriter and pianist. Seven thrillers later, he returns to classical music with his first picture book for young readers about a unique orchestra in the wild. In an exclusive interview with *ON Stage*, Brown reflects on writing music and fiction, and why the twain do meet.

By Snigdha Hasan

‘Long before I wrote stories...I wrote music,’ says Dan Brown in his note to readers at the back of *Wild Symphony*, his latest offering, telling them how playing the piano with his tiny fingers as a three-year-old became an inseparable part of his being. ‘Even now, I play piano every day—usually after I finish a long day of writing,’ he ties it up, spanning the 53 years in the interim. Music, however, was not a hobby for the author of *The Da Vinci Code*, but his first career choice for which he studied composition at Amherst College. It was not to be for sundry reasons, and Brown’s creative output took the form of gripping mystery thrillers peppered with codes and symbols. But that is the beauty of being an author—you can create worlds you cannot always inhabit.

In *Wild Symphony* (Penguin Random House), he creates one such world for young readers, painting a vivid picture of each member of a symphony orchestra in the jungle with his poems, beautifully illustrated by Susan Batori. All poems, accompanied by an orchestral score, each composed by Brown, encase life lessons with his signature codes and puzzles thrown in. The music, played by the Zagreb Festival Orchestra, can be heard using an app, by hovering the phone over the poems—an ingenious way of introducing children to symphonic music and the workings of an orchestra.

Here are excerpts from an email interview with Brown, the composer and novelist, from his home in New England:

Snigdha Hasan (SH): ‘Music is a kind of storytelling’, you write. When listened to with your pithy poems, the orchestral movements set the pace for the words and the light in which they

should be read. What came first: the words or the music, or was it a simultaneous evolution?

Dan Brown (DB): I grew up surrounded by classical music. Both of my parents were musicians, and they chose not to have a TV in the house. So, I played the piano, sang in choirs, and went to lots of concerts. Music was a secret sanctuary for me as a child. It calmed me when I felt frustrated, was a trusted friend when I felt lonely, helped me express my joy when I was happy, and, best of all, sparked my creativity and imagination. In addition to loving music, I was mesmerised by the picture books of Dr. Seuss, with their zany creatures and silly poetry. With *Wild Symphony*, I wanted to create a similar magical world of pictures and poetry aimed at a new generation of young people, and to add to it a unique piece of modern classical music to reflect each animal’s special personality. In some instances, the musical idea came before the poetry—as it did with *Brilliant Bats*, which I originally composed for the pipe organ and decided it sounded like flying bats. And other times, the poem came first—as with *Anxious Ostrich*—which, after completing, I faced the fun musical puzzle of figuring out: “What does an ostrich sound like with his head buried underground?!”

SH: How did you pair the instrument with its corresponding animal? The ostrich-bassoon pair, for instance, was an interesting one and the spider-harp combination a pleasant surprise that also made visual sense.

DB: Thanks for noticing the visual connection between the spider and the harp, which was in fact the fundamental inspiration for the piece—the image of spiders playing their webs as instruments. I’ve always loved watching spiders move across their webs because the stickiness of the web on the spider’s legs creates the illusion that they are

How Not to Pickle Composers

The Resident Conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of India, **Mikel Toms**, takes a moment out of rehearsals to consider the point of it all as he asks and answers an important question: why do we rehearse at all?



For years, I have been fascinated by the etymology of the word “rehearse”. Not so fascinated, I concede, that I have ever looked it up but, all the same, I do think about it from time to time when eating celery. To rehearse. To re-hearse. To hearse again. To place someone in a burial cart not for the first time, which begs the question, “Why wasn’t the first rehearsal enough to finish the blighter off?” In short, in the word “rehearse”, we learn the most important thing to avoid in rehearsal: bringing out your dead. Again.

It’s a sort of Janus word, an auto-antonym, if you like. A word that is its own opposite – like “despite bolting the horse in the stable, the horse bolted and no horse was left, for the horse had left.” That sort of thing.

“What in blazes is your point?”, I hear you ask, not unreasonably. My point is that when we are rehearsing music that was first performed, let us say, 200 years ago, we have to remember that it is still new music. Nobody writes music that needs to be aged in oak barrels for a couple of decades in order for it to acquire a fruity, citrus nose. It already sounds the way it should on the day it is first performed. If, a couple of centuries later, our audience

The paradox of rehearsing is that even as we familiarise ourselves with every last detail of a piece of music, the wider aim is to find a way of performing as though we are hearing the story for the first time ourselves

hears a lovely, old piece of music, tinted rosily through a hundred years of recordings, a kindly, affable cove toasting its quavers by the fireside, we have failed. The point of rehearsal is to make audiences feel they are witnessing a birth with all its concomitant squeals of agony and delight; not to make them feel they are trudging past the pickled corpse of Lenin.

The paradox of rehearsing is that even as we familiarise ourselves with every last detail of a piece of music, the wider aim is to find a way of performing as though we are hearing the story for the first time ourselves. We learn the music and, at the same time, we unlearn all the previous times we have played it. Mozart, for example, is often presented as a precious stone whose sharp edges have been rounded off by centuries of sloshing about in a sea of cotton wool. This needs to be unlearned; we like the sharp edges.

Generally, his music is either loud (*forte*) or soft (*piano*) and by making it much more nuanced than this, we lose the vitality of the conversational exchanges or the robustness of its architecture. The opening of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* is, as generations of curmudgeons would have us believe, a dire and weighty portent of fate but he asks for it to be played *Allegro con brio* (*fast and bright*) and this makes so much more sense.

The most important tool we bring to rehearsals, I find, is a giant (albeit thankfully metaphorical) cobweb brush and if anyone hears our performance and then decides to mount their own concert of the same music, we fully expect (nay, welcome!) a jolly stiff brushing of our own. The last thing we need from dead composers is dead music.

Incidentally, for those of you who, in the time it has taken to read this article, have actually gone to the trouble of finding out that “rehearse” derives from the Middle English word for “repeat aloud”, I plead alternative facts. I’m sticking to my story.

This article was first published in the April 2020 digital issue (Volume 9, Issue 9) of ON Stage.

The Battle Within

As part of a series on artistes' reflections on dance productions they have presented at the NCPA, **Malavika Sarukkai** discusses the creation of a production that takes on the formidable text of the Bhagavad Gita. The result is a powerful solo performance in which the Gita is interpreted on a battlefield that is both physical and psychological.

The National Centre for the Performing Arts holds a special place in my dance journey, marking several milestones. I have seen the organisation grow from a one-auditorium centre to the present prestigious complex hosting multiple venues. The years of association have also marked my evolution from a young student of dance to a sensitive dancer to a mature artiste. And today, when I return to perform at the NCPA, there is a sense of familiarity, as when meeting with a good friend.

In the packed theatre spaces of the NCPA, I have presented many premieres in solo and ensemble work. On days when everything falls into place, the theatre space resonates with an electrifying energy, taking the artiste and audience into a surprising new world. These moments afford the artiste and audience the ephemeral, intangible yet powerful experience of classical dance which is transformative in more ways than one.



The introduction

The path to creativity is endless. The language of classical dance is limitless and this quality has never failed to astound me. The deeper I explore the articulation of my training, the more I excavate. Sometimes I ask myself, how does a classical dance form like Bharatanatyam grant freedom within discipline, allowing an artiste space to dream? Unwilling to be constrained by a rigid understanding of tradition, I embrace this paradox, allowing ideas and impressions to filter through my mind. Over time, I find a concept takes root and begins to germinate. After much deliberation with mind and heart, amorphous thoughts begin to translate ever so slowly into the language of dance.

My initial introduction to the Gita was when I noticed my mother Saroja Kamakshi constantly seeking it out in the last few years of her life. The Gita would lie invitingly by her side or nestled in the folds of her sari as she pored over its contents. It seemed to bring her solace. Observing her made a profound impression on me.

Many years later, rather unexpectedly, my path intersected with the Gita yet again. This time, in connection with choreography on the Vishwaroopam of Lord Krishna. The challenge to interpret this seemed daunting as I knew it would demand I stretch the boundaries of Bharatanatyam. How else could I interpret this profound text



on philosophy? Without a sense of context, any attempt seemed impossible. With tentative caution, I ventured into the world of philosophy, taking a step at a time. As I immersed myself in the text, I realised the voice of Krishna was essentially the voice of Arjuna's deeper self. This in turn implied that, in my interpretation, I had to play two male characters physically embodying completely different energies. Whilst emotionally, I had to discover different levels of intensity, human and divine, to reflect Arjuna's existential crisis and the ultimate revelation of Krishna's Vishwaroopam.

The deep dive

Fortuitously, during this time, I had the chance to attend a five-day retreat on the Gita by scholar Ravi Ravindra. Additionally, I also read his book *The Bhagavad Gita: A Guide To Navigating The Battle of Life*. Both these serendipitous opportunities provided an entry into the inspiring, immense and complex world of the Gita.

I immersed myself in reading the authoritative commentary on the Gita by Swami Chidbhavananda, published by Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam. Hours of poring over the translation proved useful and I found a powerful narrative unravel as I chose verses spread across the entire text. This meant that instead of creating a singular choreography, I had unknowingly committed to envisioning a full production. Obviously, in my mind, the existential conflict in the Gita had grown to epic proportions fueled by the majesty and gravitas of the emotions. The thought of committing to a new full-length production, completely out of my terrain, was both inspiring and formidable. For days my rational mind restlessly questioned whether I had the imagination, technique and movement vocabulary to venture into an interpretation of the Gita. And yet, at another level I heard a subliminal calling from within. A calling I could not ignore. And

As I immersed myself in the Gita, I realised the voice of Krishna was essentially the voice of Arjuna's deeper self

it is with this faith that I started envisioning *The Battle Within*, a dramatic interpretation inspired by the Bhagavad Gita.

The creative process of *The Battle Within* was a long, solitary one. My days were spent researching the overarching concept from several sources. This length of time spent 'staying' with the concept is always a critical period for me as it determines the range and possible levels of investigation. Like



the flow of water into a well, I find my mind needs multiple points of infusion before an exploration is ventured into. Nothing can be rushed or commanded at this point. I have found the transformation from text to music to dance interpretation to be a profound one. For it is at the moment when dance is birthed, that the dancing body starts to inhabit the complexity of emotions. It is now that the text begins to come to life.

The Bhagavad Gita takes place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Though war is imminent between two families, the Gita becomes a universal and timeless text, for it addresses the war within each of us. Kurukshetra is both a physical and psychological battlefield. The drama starts at a high point when the chariot of Arjuna comes to a grinding halt in the midst of the battlefield where the armies of the Pandavas and Kauravas are positioned against each other on the dusty plains. The emotional charge in the narrative is epic as it confronts the existential crisis of valiant warrior Arjuna in the presence of Krishna, his charioteer and unbeknownst to him, the divine Lord.

The collaborators

Working with Sumantra Ghosal, who brought a new dimension to the work, was exciting. Discussing the possible intersections when dance and visuals could come together in this production was breaking new ground for both of us. It was uncharted territory. Our collaboration helped us understand each other's aesthetics, our purposes for creating art and strengthened our belief that less is more. Finding unseen connections gave us a sense of discovery and substantiated the creative process to which both of us are committed.

In *The Battle Within*, the language of dance brings alive the internal spaces of the heart and mind, fired by emotions of conflict, despair and transformation. Meanwhile, the visual design conceived by Ghosal depicts vast and cosmic worlds and expands the meaning of the text. It invites us to enter the world of imagination whilst confronting our personal selves.

Shaping the texture of the verses as I imagined them for the dance, I worked on the music concept with Murali Parthasarathy. Having collaborated with me on earlier productions, he composed stirring music for

the chosen verses from the Gita. The music production and sound design was done by Sai Shrivani at Resound India. Keeping in mind the majesty of the text, there was a compelling need to keep the sound design minimal, sophisticated and non-decorative. This idea was astutely followed in the hours of creative work which went into making the recording. Shrivani, as sound engineer and musician, brought artistic merit to the recording in addition to the extraordinary fine balance in mastering the music.

From the outset of conceiving *The Battle Within*, I made a conscious decision to have a female voice represent Arjuna and a male voice represent Krishna. This choice was determined by the need to explore, through the tone of voice, emotions of vulnerability, despair, confusion, aggression, strength, power, resistance, fear, terror, transformation, divinity and courage. Two Carnatic vocalists provided the amazing soundtrack—Vasudha Ravi from Chennai and Aditya Prakash from Los Angeles. They brought

imagination, passion and conviction to the recording. The recording also featured S. Srilatha on the nattuvangam, Nellai A. Balaji on the mridangam, Bhavani Prasad on the veena and JB Sruti Sagar on the flute. The light designer, Niranjana Gokhale, was part of the core team who brought alive, on the proscenium stage, the dynamic shifts of moods in the Gita as the narrative unravelled. Keeping in mind the three LED

screens on the stage, the lighting demanded precision which was subtle yet clear, imaginative yet non-interfering. In addition, the lighting had to play off the subtle shades of the costume designed by Sandhya Raman.

Each time I present *The Battle Within*, it is an immersion. It leaves me with a feeling of *vismaya*, wonderment and silence. Like watching the first

rays of the sun bring to life the rising mountain peaks of the Himalayas. Endless and vast. ■

The Battle Within was presented as part of the NCPA's Pravaha Dance Festival in December 2019.

I have found the transformation from text to music to dance interpretation to be a profound one

Historical Beats

To shed light on the elusive Punjab *gharana*, which has been shrouded in misconception due to the separation of Punjab into India and Pakistan, **Jasdeep Singh**, guided by tabla exponent Yogesh Samsi, discusses the historical development of the pakhawaj, jori, tabla and other percussive traditions in the region

The mridang, more commonly referred to as the pakhawaj, existed in conjunction with the *chhand-prabandh* tradition, which is the oldest surviving form of North-Indian classical music to date. Considered the grandfather of all classical percussion instruments, it developed in the *dhrupad* tradition in the Mughal era, in the Vaishnava temple tradition and in the royal courts and darbars of rajas and maharajas. At this time, the pakhawaj was also an accompaniment to instruments such as the veena and rabab, and dance forms such as Kathak.

The origins

It is held by most modern-day scholars and practitioners that the fountainhead of the percussive tradition of the Punjab region was a certain Lala Bhawani Das. Due to similarly named pakhawaj players, there has been much confusion surrounding this figure, as this article will highlight, but it is near certain that the Punjab *gharana* percussive tradition traces its origins back to an 18th-century musician named Lala Bhawani Das.

Tabla player and scholar Aban Mistry shows that there may have been several pakhawaj players named Bhawani between the 18th and 19th centuries. There was a Lala Bhawani Das (Das being a Vaishnava name) who performed in the court of Mohammad Shah Rangila. In the mid-19th century, there was Lala Bhawani Singh, teacher of Kudau Singh, a Brahmin musician of the Datia court. It would be almost impossible for the same Lala Bhawani Das (born circa 1700) to have been a contemporary to Sidhar Khan Dhadi and to have

taught Kudau Singh (born circa 1815). Nor does any substantial evidence exist to confirm that Babu Jodh Singh, a contemporary of Kudau Singh, ever learnt from Lala Bhawani Das.

Therefore, the theory of separate identities would not be amiss. This is a viewpoint also shared by Alla Rakha Qureshi, a representative of the Punjab lineage. In light of this theory, it is plausible to say that the *gharanas*, namely Kudau Singh and Nana Panse, are more likely to be connected with the mid-19th century Lala Bhawani Singh.

The Lala Bhawani Das of the 18th century—who was the grandson of noted 17th-century pakhawaj player Lala Keval Kishen—whilst under the employment of Mohammad Shah Rangila, was invited by the subedar of Lahore, where he taught a hybrid style of pakhawaj in the form of *dukkar*, which we have now come to know as jori, to Miyan Qadar Baksh Pratham, among others. Being a disciple of such a prominent pakhawaj maestro, the descendants of Baksh went on to become the leading exponents of this style, thus establishing the Punjab *gharana*.

Speculative claims by modern-day Sikh ‘scholars’, go on to suggest that the jori was created by *rababis*, Bhai Sata and Balwand, of the court of Guru Arjan (1563-1606). Under further observation of these claims, they are seen to originate from the Singh Sabha agenda of Giani Gian Singh, in order to Sikhify such instruments. Given the 18th-century origins of the *dukkar baaj*, there is insufficient evidence to support the existence of a jori or a *dukkar* tradition within the Guru’s court. References to ‘mirdang’ and pakhawaj, on the contrary, are widespread

Court-Based Pakhawajis in the 1500s to 1600s

Lala Bhagwandas, accompanist of Tansen (1500-1586)

Raja Maan Singh Tomar of emperor Akbar’s court (reign 1556-1605)

Firoze Khan Dhari, pakhawaj player of Lahore (1600-1660)

Kirpal Rai who was honoured with the title of Mridang Rai by Aurangzeb (1618-1707)

Lala Keval Kishen of Braj (17C)

(Grand disciple of Lala Bhagwandas and Grandfather of Lala Bhawani Das)

Court-Based Pakhawajis in mid-1700s

Sidhar Khan Dhadi (b.1710) of Punjab, noted in the period of Mohammad Shah Rangila

(1719-1748)

Babu Jodh Singh Mridang-Kesari (Mridang Lion) Lala Bhawani Das (1700-1768)

Court-Based Pakhawajis in the 1800s

Maharaja Kudau Singh (1815-1907), Taj Khan Deredar of Punjab, Haddu Khan Lahorewale; all disciples of Lala Bhawani Singh

Nana Panse, disciple of Babu Jodh Singh, Gulab Singh, Ustad Makhu of Delhi

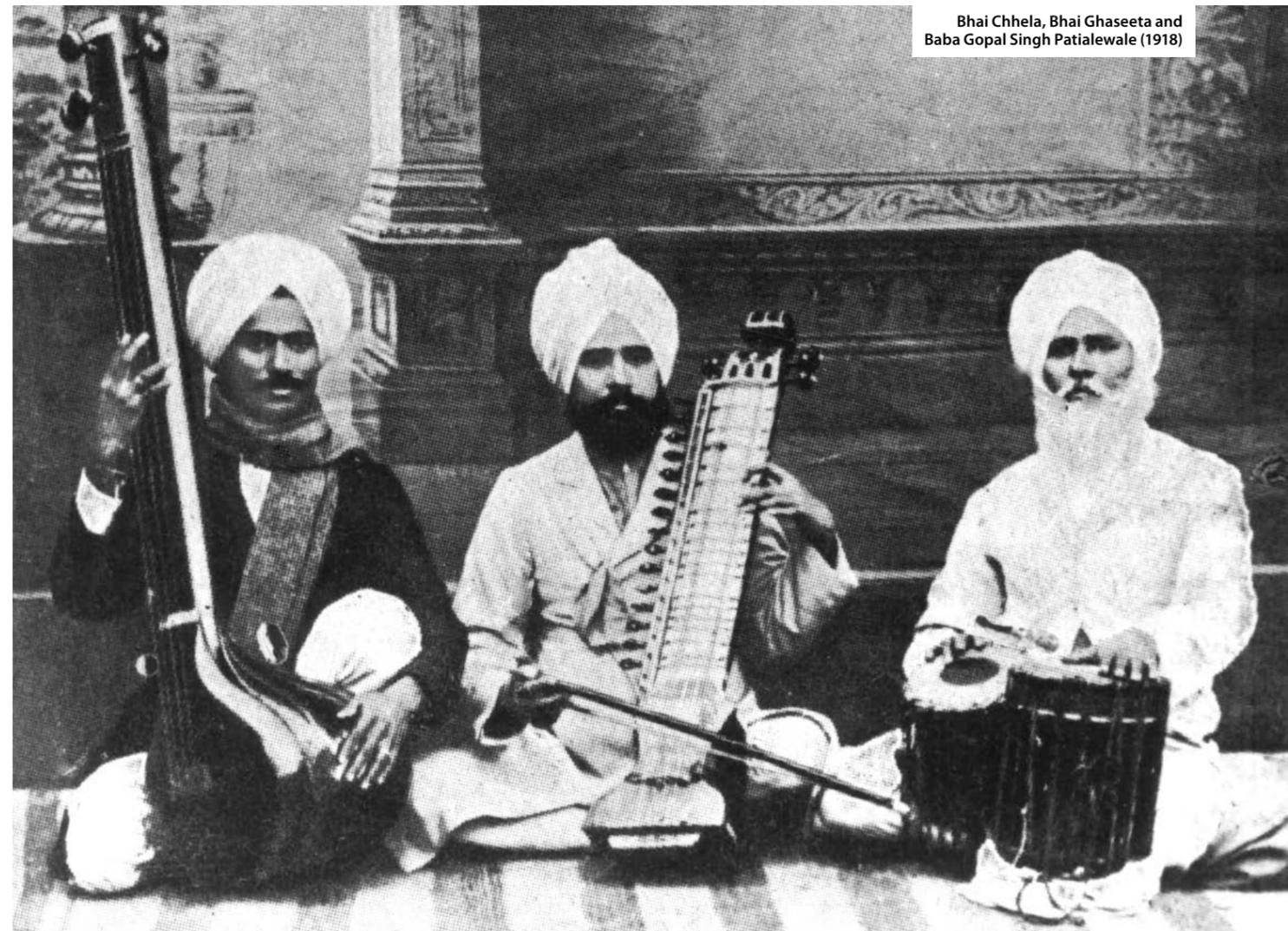
and numerous in contemporary Sikh texts of that era. The jori was evidently developed under the influence of multiple genres, which leads to its versatility and uniqueness amongst percussive instruments.

Due to the Partition of India and the creation of the state of Pakistan, India was left with limited representation of the Punjab *gharana* because a large majority of musicians migrated to Pakistan. Therefore, it is evident that the work carried out by Robert S. Gottlieb and Mistry, with regard to the Punjab *gharana* lineage, although well-meaning, is let down by the fact that they had little direct interaction with the Baksh clan. Collectively, the work of musicologist Rebecca Stewart and Pakistani scholars Parvez Paras, Ustad Badaruzzaman and Saqib Razaq, along with visiting scholar Lowell Lybarger, prove more useful a source on the *gharana*.

Post Lala Bhawani Das, the term *pakhawaji* in Punjab commonly refers to any exponent of the pakhawaj style of playing, including jori and pakhawaj exponents, as alluded to by Pakistani tabla exponent Ustad Shaukat Hussain.

Punjab, in this era, would have been populated by a Muslim majority and was known as a Sufi stronghold for over five centuries. Therefore, the *qawwali* and *khayal* tradition of music would have been a major source of patronage for *dholakias*. Perhaps, given that the Baksh clan historically

Bhai Chhela, Bhai Ghaseeta and Baba Gopal Singh Patialewale (1918)



The Baksh Lineage

Two Generations of Dholakias

Miyan Qadar: the first dholak - pakhawaj - jori (c.1700)
 Miyan Kalu Khan: pakhawaj - jori (c.1730)
 Miyan Gami Khan: pakhawaj - jori (c.1760)
 Miyan Saddu Khan: pakhawaj - jori (c.1790)
 Miyan Hussain: pakhawaj - jori (1820-1880)
 Miyan Faqir: pakhawaj - jori - tabla (1850-1906)
 Miyan Qadar: the second pakhawaj - jori - tabla (1902-1960)
 Khalifa Akhtar Hussain: tabla (1947-2001)
 Khalifa Dildar Ali Tony: tabla (1970-2017)

descend from a family of *dholakias*, Lala Bhawani Das may have taught them a synthesised version of pakhawaj fused with *dholak* that came to be known as the *dukkar baaj*. It was common for *dholakias* to also study *pakhawaj*, as seen by the 18th-century pakhawaji Khabbe Hussain Dholakia, whose son was a noted disciple of Lala Bhawani Das, and said to be famous for propagating *dukkar baaj*.

It must also be noted that the concept of *dangal* played a considerable role in the music scene of that era. For a period of nine consecutive years, it was said that Sidar Khan Dhadi was defeated in the royal court of Raigarh by Lala Bhawani Das, which ultimately led to Sidar Khan developing a new instrument, the tabla, thus establishing the Delhi *gharana*. In theory, this rivalry may have been the motive for Lala Bhawani Das's development of *dukkar baaj* in response to his contemporary. As a result, it must be noted, the later-developed Punjab *tabla* tradition maintains its own origins, unlike other *tabla gharanas*. Mid-19th century exponents, Miyan Faqir Baksh and Miyan Fateh Din, were instrumental in the development of *gat-kari*. Fateh Din, the prominent tabla exponent hailing from Qasur, made a vast contribution to the aesthetic of *nikas* (i.e. finger technique), evolving the then prominent *khulla* or *dukkar baaj* (open style of playing) to more *bandh* (non-resonating) strokes, thus constituting subsequent pedagogy to enforce a more 'tablaic' approach. His contribution also extends to teaching traditional *dukkar baaj* to Miyan Qadar Baksh Dvitiya.

In 19th-century Punjab, the *akharas*, *deras* and *gurudwaras* of the Sikh community constituted some of the most important and widespread sites of musical patronage. Shamchurasi, Nowshera Nangli, Talwandi, Kapurthala, Haryana and the Qasur vocal *gharanas*, as well as the *rababis*, all found patronage among the Sikhs. Notably, members of the Baksh lineage were employed at Sri Nankana Sahib Gurdwara.

Bhai Nasira (Nasir Din), belonging to the *khaduria rababis*, was the son of the famous pakhawaj player of Sri Darbar Sahib, Bhai Amir of Amritsar. Before



JASDEEP SINGH

learning from Miyan Qadir Baksh Dvitiya, he learnt the jori from his uncle Bhai Chiragh, who was said to have played *dukkar baaj*. In an era where *dangals* would regularly take place in royal courts, they say, Bhai Nasira encountered Darbari Prabhat Singh (1876-1951), nephew of Kudau Singh, defeated him and gained the title of *Taal Samrat* from the Maharaja of Raigarh. He accompanied all major musicians and *rababis* of his time, including the senior Dagers, and was awarded the title of 'Star of India'. After the death of Bhai Moti, whom he used to accompany, he was employed at Sri Darbar Sahib where he worked for six years accompanying Bhai Sain Ditta, Bhai Desa and Bhai Taba (Tabe Hussain). Upon leaving this job, he worked as a freelance musician and teacher, and was often invited to perform on special *Gurpurabs* and conferences whilst teaching across Punjab. He died in Lahore 1961.

Baba Malang, given the title of Bhai Malang among the Sikhs for his participation in the *kirtan parampara*, of Bohan Patti village (Hoshiarpur district), was known as one of Miyan Faqir Baksh's main disciples, and recognised as a master of *Dhamar* and *Chautaal*. He played both pakhawaj and tabla with the great maestros of his time, and was declared one of the greatest *tabla* players of Harivallabh. It is said that he also learnt pakhawaj from the nagara players of Multan, whilst pursuing training in veena and sitar. He was a disciple of the eminent sitar maestro of the Senia-Etawah

gharana, Ustad Imdad Khan, and studied vocal music from Ustad Fateh Ali Karnail. His disciples include Mubarak Ali, Hussain Baksh, Ustad Inayat Ali Sultani, and Ustad Talib Hussain. He died, aged 75, in Pakistan, a year after the partition.

Rababis and *marasis*, although being great contributors to the Punjab *gharana* across generations, showed allegiance to their *ustad khana* (teacher's lineage). In this way, Bhai Bhag although being the disciple of Miyan Hussain Baksh thought it appropriate to have both his sons, Bhai Amir and Chirag, become disciples of his *ustad khana*. Following suit, Baba Malang Khan also showed his allegiance by offering *nazarana* to his *khalifa* Miyan Qadar Baksh Dvitiya, despite being older. Later, Talib Hussain, despite receiving tutelage from Baba Gami Khan of Delhi, also became a disciple of Miyan Qadar Baksh Dvitiya out of respect.

Miyan Qadar Baksh Dvitiya was said to be skilled in both pakhawaj and tabla by the time he was eight or nine years old. Due to the early demise of Miyan Faqir Baksh, it is noted that his *taaleem* would then be undertaken by the then disciples of his late father. Following this etiquette of *ustad khana*, Bhai Nasir became a disciple of Miyan Qadar Baksh Dvitiya whilst also teaching him. Following his *taaleem*, he was appointed as court *pakhawaji* at the Raigarh Darbar of Raja Chakradhar Singh, where he received the title of *Rustam-e-Hind*. Alongside this he would often give *hazri* at Sri Nankana Sahib, where it was said he was particularly proficient at the accompaniment of Guru Nanak's *Asa Di Var*.

Royal patronage

From the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) onwards, a new lineage of Sikh percussionists was encouraged through the patronage of the maharaja. Prior to colonial influence, music of the courts, *gurudwaras* and temples was largely under the clasp of generational musicians. The maharaja's new courtesan-wife Moran Sarkar requested a competent pakhawaj accompanist, upon which the maharaja chose to offer a scholarship to a prospective student amongst the Sikhs. To his dismay, no Sikh was forthcoming due to the low status attached to professional musicians. It was then that a low-caste hygienist (*nai*) of the Maharaja accepted this scholarship of a sum of ₹30 a month, nominating his son Maiya Singh. One possible explanation for the maharaja's wish for a Sikh accompanist was that Moran Sarkar was now elevated socially from courtesan to maharani, making it socially acceptable to have a Sikh rather than Muslim *marasi* accompanist, given the new protocol of purdah. Further to this, recent claims of Lala Bhawani Das being a disciple of Bhai Maiya would substantiate the theory of multiple Lala Bhawani-named practitioners. However, in this regard, it must be noted that the likelihood of such claims is highly questionable. I suggest that it is

likely that Bhai Maiya would have been sponsored to either learn from the *rababi* musicians or a leading exponent of the Baksh lineage, Miyan Saddu Khan. Since then, there have been many great *pakhawajis* of this lineage.

Ustad Harnam Singh Jammuwale (1850-1927) was a student of Bhai Bhoop, Bhai Mehtab and Bhai Mahanda. It is said he also became a student of Kudau Singh whilst traveling to Datia. After an eight-year employment with the Victoria Film Company, he was appointed at the Jammu *darbar* following the retirement of Miyan Hussain Baksh, where it is said he stayed until the passing of the maharaja after which he returned to Amritsar. He was recognised as one of the very few Sikhs of that era to earn the title of *Ustad*.

After the decline of the Sikh empire, important patrons went on to include the princely states of Patiala and Kapurthala. With music playing an integral part in the Sikh tradition, the Sikhs can be seen to be the first to establish educational institutions at which music was taught. With the establishment of the Amritsar Central Khalsa Yatimkhana (1904) and the Khalsa Parcharak Vidyala (1908), the Sikh community was the first to usher in the democratisation of musical education. It is for this reason that the early 20th century saw a drastic rise in the number of Sikh musicians.

Additional representatives of the Punjab *gharana* include the Faisalabad lineage of *pakhawajis*, who were disciples to the Baba Malang Khan Bohnwalepati lineage, Baba Inayat and Allah Lok. In Jalandhar, another lineage of *pakhawajis* from the family of famous Pakistani folk singer, Tufail Niyazi, existed. This demonstrates the widespread influence of the Baksh lineage in Punjab that is said to have had 125,000 students.

This article has thus shown the journey of the Punjab *gharana* from its beginnings to the more recent pre-partition period. I hope to have demystified the confusion surrounding the figure Lala Bhawani Das and shown the centrality of the Baksh lineage in the development of the Punjab *gharana* whilst highlighting the contribution of the *qawwals* and Sikh musical traditions like that of the *rababi* and *ragis*. In the post-Partition era, representation of the Punjab *gharana* is found in small non-uniform pockets with almost no representation of the pakhawaj tradition in either India or Pakistan. ■

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 For an extended version of this article please visit www.jasdeep.co.uk. The author is one of the few exponents of the jori, having studied under the leading representative of the instrument, Sukhvinder Singh Namdhari, and is currently taking further guidance under one of the world's leading tabla exponents, Yogesh Samsi. His research interests relate to the lost traditions and percussion of Punjab and he is actively involved in archiving repertoire of pakhawaj, jori and tabla across India and Pakistan.

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.

Memoirs & Biographies

Louis Armstrong, apart from being one of the most influential figures in jazz, was also a prolific writer, especially while on the road. *Swing That Music* (Da Capo, 1936), though partly ghostwritten, is an intimate account of his personal life and professional success, while *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (Da Capo, 1952) is an in-depth vibrant account of his time in the birthplace of jazz before his momentous move to Chicago. Of all his writing, the latter provides the most vivid portal into an old New Orleans, rich and intense, both culturally and musically.

Master of innovation and the king of cool, Miles Davis is undoubtedly the most widely recognised jazz musician of his time. In his five-decade-long career, he changed forever the course of jazz. Writer William Ruhlmann of *AllMusic* once wrote, “It can even be argued that jazz stopped evolving when Davis wasn’t there to push it forward.” In *Miles: The Autobiography* (Simon & Schuster, 1989), Davis is disarmingly frank as he opens up about sex, drugs, racism and, not least of all, the powerful music that was the driving force of his life.

The life arc of Charles Mingus swung wildly between a rough adolescence filled with pimps and junkies to sparkling success where he rubbed shoulders with Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, among many others. His own work as a musician knew no boundaries—as a composer, bassist, bandleader and pianist, he was immensely influential. He explores all these facets of his life in *Beneath the Underdog* (Vintage, 1971), a book that *Rolling Stone* describes as ‘the purest of dynamite’.

In *An Extravagant Life* (Bantam Dell Pub, 1997), biographer Laurence Bergreen shines a spotlight on the remarkable life of Louis Armstrong, the founding father of jazz. Collating information from Armstrong’s own writings, archival photographs and 1,800 hours of tape-recorded reminiscences, the work focuses more on the salacious life of a jazz superstar instead of the musicianship of an outstanding artiste.

From humble beginnings to worldwide success, Ella Fitzgerald’s innate sweetness of voice combined with her mastery of rhythm made her one of the most celebrated figures of jazz. Drawing from interviews and original documents, Stuart Nicholson’s *Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography of the First Lady of Jazz* (Da Capo, 1994) on the life of the very private singer is refreshingly comprehensive. According to *DownBeat*,

the book is ‘a thoroughly researched and carefully considered study that is also a delightful read.’

Lewis Porter’s *Lester Young* (University of Michigan Press, 1985) is not a straightforward biography of the tenor saxophonist. Instead, it is an extensive analysis of the evolution of Young’s music. In the book, Porter writes, “I examined all of Young’s recorded solos, including all bootleg issues and some unissued private tapes. I then selected a sample of thirty-four solos to examine more closely and subjected them to an array of analytical procedures, including computer analysis.” Considered to be ‘a monumental work’ by friend and colleague by Dizzy Gillespie, this is an indispensable read for fans of jazz.

Encyclopaedias & Reference

When Leonard Feather published the immensely readable *The Encyclopedia of Jazz* (Horizon Press) in 1955, he was filling a serious void in reference works dedicated solely to the genre. He followed the thumping success of this work with *The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Sixties* and *The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Seventies* (with Ira Gitler), both meticulously researched and must-haves for any decent public or private music library. Apart from his decades-long contributions to *Metronome* and *DownBeat*, and his work as jazz critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, he was also a pianist, composer and producer, making his works nothing if not authoritative.

For those amongst us who are interested in jazz, but do not know enough about it, Jerry Coker’s *How to Listen to Jazz* (Jamey Aebersold Jazz, 1990) comes to much-needed rescue. That it is readable, non-technical and practical—it explains the structure and chronology of the form and also what elements to look for in a specific work of music—is to the credit of Coker, who also happens to be a teacher, composer and saxophonist. An extension of this work is Alope Mookerjee’s *The Jazz Bug* (Notion Press, 2019), which traces the history and evolution of jazz, making it a vital read for beginners.

Two more comprehensive works that deserve to be included on this list are Richard Cook’s *Jazz Encyclopedia* (Penguin, 2007) which is informative, entertaining and essential reading for all jazz enthusiasts while Bob Blumenthal’s *Jazz: An Introduction to the History and Legends Behind America’s Music* (Harper Perennial, 2007) has been called ‘the single best compact introduction to jazz currently available’.



Films, Documentaries & Series

The 10-part series *Jazz* (2000) by filmmaker Ken Burns tells the story of the genre through 75 interviews, 500 works of music, 2,400 images and 2,000 archival clips. Burns has said, “When I began this project, I had perhaps two jazz records in my fairly large collection. Today, I can’t find the other records. I listen to jazz all the time—old and new, straight-ahead and avant-garde and fusion, swing and bop and cool. I play it day and night, in the car, as I go to bed, as I write now.” While the series has received as many negative reviews as raves, it remains an enlightening work that explores the history of jazz.

The critically acclaimed feature film *Bird* (1988) is directed by noted jazz enthusiast and Academy Award-winner Clint Eastwood and features another celebrated Academy Award-winner Forest Whitaker, who portrays jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker. Eastwood was also instrumental in getting Charlotte Zwerin’s *Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser* (1988), a documentary about the otherwise reclusive pianist and composer, to the big screen.

Stanley Nelson, Jr.’s 2019 documentary *Miles Davis: Birth of the Cool* is a must-watch for fans who want to know more about the man and because it

is, as one critic has said, “truthful, gritty, elegantly musical, unpredictable and even surprising.” It is a fruitful watch even for those unfamiliar with Davis’s musical genius.

Regarded as one of the greatest jazz saxophonists of all time, Sonny Rollins is the delightful subject of director Robert Mugge’s *Saxophone Colossus* (1986). Using concert footage recorded when Rollins was at the height of his powers, and in-depth interviews that prove what we have always suspected—that Rollins is as humble as he is great—this a must-watch for jazz aficionados.

What Happened, Miss Simone? (2015), directed by Liz Garbus, documents the tumultuous life of Nina Simone, who is often called the High Priestess of Soul. It explores the rejection, abuse, racism she faced and how it powered her brilliant music. It reiterates her genius but does not shy away from examining her problematic behaviour in other aspects of life. The film opened the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for ‘Best Documentary Feature’ at the 88th Academy Awards. ■

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Performing Arts: The Challenge and the Opportunity

Eminent businesswoman, **Vinita Bali**, draws on her experience in the corporate world to examine why supporting the performing arts is not only culturally important but is also good for business.

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time”
Thomas Merton

The cultural heritage of civilisations is formed by artistes and nurtured by societies where governments, other institutions and individuals provide adequate resources and encouraging environments for great artistes to do their best work. The role of the Medici Family in the revival of the arts in 15th-Century Italy is legendary and became a catalyst for the Renaissance to spread across Europe. The universal emotions that the arts evoke connect us in an intricate tapestry of inspiration and awe.

The ongoing reality of a locked-down world has demonstrated the unique ability of art to uphold the spirit of people, even as lives and livelihoods are threatened. Access to art from across the world, made possible by the generosity of artistes and curated by art centres—from museum tours to dance and music concerts, theatre and folk art, etc.—provided a soothing palliative to anxiety, ambiguity, uncertainty and even chaos and despair. Recordings of concerts, digitally available on various platforms, and mostly free for a long time, have kept the world connected and engaged, even as digital access has exponentially expanded audience reach globally. And, all this at a time when there are no live performances and therefore no income for artistes and others involved in allied services dependent on live performance (light, sound, props, cafeterias at theatres, etc.)

The performing arts continue to face uncertainty and ambiguity even as art centres and organisers are trying hard to pivot to new (hybrid) models of performance, viewership and revenue generation. The silver lining in this dark and dense cloud is the potential for greater audience reach through digital means. However, the absence of uniquely experiencing a live performance—both for artistes as well as the audience—cannot be ignored. There is little doubt that the current pandemic has centered the role and relationship of art and people



as never before.

In the context of this stark new pandemic reality, juxtaposed with the already under-funded world of the performing arts in India, both by government agencies and corporates/individuals, the future of the arts stands at a crossroads, and it will be the collective action of all of us that will determine its future trajectory.

If we allow our vibrant performing arts to atrophy because of insufficient support, exacerbated by the new challenges, we will end up destroying the rich fabric of our cultural heritage, which dates back to thousands of years when Bharata's *Natyashastra*—the most comprehensive treatise on the performing arts, comprising theatre, dance and music—was first composed.

Philanthropy plus sponsorship

May I venture to suggest that from an individual and corporate perspective, our mindset has to add philanthropy to sponsorship. Sponsorship is about a quantified monetary return that somehow helps the sponsor rationalise and justify the money spent. However, how do we quantify the intangible value of the performing arts? How do we compute the feeling of upliftment and rejuvenation that music, dance and theatre create? How do we measure the sensibilities and sensitivities that people



develop after they have been exposed to great art and artistes? Most importantly, should there even be a need to justify the emotional and cultural refinement that develops from experiencing great art?

To illustrate, with some poetic licence, while valuing a business or brand, what cannot be explained through a formula is termed goodwill or intangible value, which oftentimes exceeds the tangible value of the asset. Well, *all* of art is intangible value and when that is delivered through a great performance there is *a lot* of intangible value. The performing arts inspire and move us because they enable us to access experiences that are profound and deep and not ordinarily attainable. They help us to interpret reality and nurture empathy and relationships—qualities our planet desperately needs in great measure. All of this requires a generosity of spirit and a conviction that the performing arts are part of the critical heritage of India and artistes who have/are dedicating their lives to this pursuit must be financially rewarded, encouraged to create and validated through programmes and recognition.

There is another compelling reason for generosity in philanthropy when it comes to the arts—excellence and mastery require decades of dedicated practice and discipline, and even after that there is no guarantee or safety net for professional artistes. “If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set artists free wherever it takes them,” said John F. Kennedy.

What gets funded gets done

This is the time for individuals and institutions to come forward and make generous philanthropic contributions to the performing arts because of their conviction in the power of art to transform society. “A nation’s culture,” said Mahatma Gandhi, resides in the hearts and in the souls of its people.” Here, I must acknowledge the contribution of a few recently established foundations that are already shifting the paradigm in this direction. But, we need more, *many more*, to come forward.

When Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013 on CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) came into effect in 2014, there was widespread hope that contribution for the arts will increase. In reality, less than two per cent of the total CSR expenditure is allocated to heritage/art/culture, and most of that goes to repairing buildings and monuments, etc. It is the same with the Ministry of Culture, where a minuscule proportion—

approximately ₹20 crore per annum—is allocated to the performing arts. It is therefore critical for institutional and individual philanthropy to play the major role of funding the performing arts through sponsorship *and* philanthropy. This could be in the form of contributions to already established centres of repute like the NCPA, establishing Chairs of Excellence, commissioning new works and funding their performance not just across India but also in the mainstream theatres around the world.

Unexplored business benefits

Another beneficial opportunity wide open for business is the inspiration that the arts provide—for excellence, creativity, teamwork, alignment, emotional intelligence, design thinking, lateral thinking, etc. Somehow, the arts have a diffused image amongst decision-makers in business and yet, the arts embody everything that businesses need—the capacity to envision and create, the discipline and processes to explore and improvise, a restless quest for new ideas and forms of expression,



It is critical for institutional and individual philanthropy to play the major role of funding the performing arts through sponsorship and philanthropy

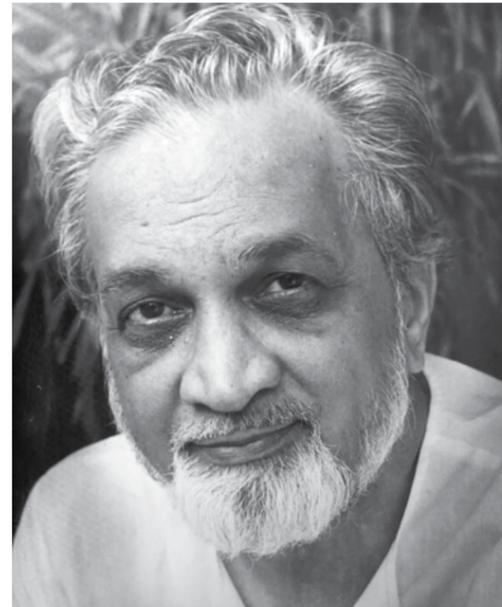
and a spirit of reflection, curiosity and inquiry.

I speak from personal experience when I say that just as sports have been used by business as a metaphor for teamwork, etc., the depth, range and diverse dimensions of the arts have the gravitas and potential to inspire all to transcend the ordinary, pursue excellence and sustain superior performance. ■

Vinita Bali is a global business leader with extensive experience in leading large companies both in India and overseas. She is currently an Independent Director on several business and academic boards and has always been passionate about the arts.

Faulty Silences

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



Called the ‘vanguard of modernity’ by filmmaker Govind Nihalani, Vijay Tendulkar is an Indian playwright every theatre enthusiast is aware of, and if not, should be made aware of right away. Tendulkar’s Marathi-language plays *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (*Silence! The Court is in Session*), *Kamala*, *Kanyadaan*, among many others, were crucial in making him one of the most influential theatre personalities in India. His plays, many of which have been adapted for the screen by renowned filmmakers of the parallel cinema movement, like Shyam Benegal and Nihalani, ushered Indian theatre into the age of a modern and socially conscious India. Through his scripts—which went on to be translated into multiple languages and staged in multiple Indian as well as foreign cities—and with the use of an array of plot devices, Tendulkar grappled with important ideas in novel ways.

We live in times of incessant social media trials, when judging and discriminating against others comes easy. How far have we come, then, in the 50-plus years since Tendulkar wrote *Silence! The Court is in Session*? The time seems ripe to revisit one of the dramatist’s most popular plays, with a focus on the idea of performance and performativity as explored in it, and how Tendulkar’s writing mirrors the harsh gender inequalities of the real, social world.

An overview

Originally written in 1967 in Marathi, *Silence! The Court is in Session* is often regarded as a milestone in the history of Indian theatre. Though some believe it to be inspired by Swiss writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s dark novella, *A Dangerous Game* (*Die Panne*), Tendulkar’s play unfolds within an extremely Indian context and follows a day in the life of the members of an amateur social theatre group.

The members of this group—called ‘Sonar Moti

Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association’—intend to use their plays to throw light on various social issues that the world is faced with, and their play follows a mock trial session in a court to portray this. While rehearsing for one of these trials, the members change the script on the spot after one of the actors fails to make it for the show. The misuse of atomic weapons, the issue they were about to deliberate over, makes way for a discussion about infanticide. As the improvised trial unravels, it is evident that the group is trying to humiliate the bold and bright Leela Benare, an unmarried schoolteacher who allegedly was having an affair with Professor Damle, the missing cast member, and is pregnant with his child.

The trial eventually becomes the kind that reinstates the problematic and disproportionate power society wields over the body, actions and behaviour of a woman—especially if she chooses to be unconventional, such as being unmarried in their middle age like Benare. Thus, the trial which was intended to be applied by the theatre group to spread social awareness and bring about positive change in society, negates its own agenda in a hypocritical manner, which goes tragically unnoticed by all members of the troupe.

Layered accusations

The actors of the real world in Tendulkar’s play within a play portray amateur actors. This double-layered, meta performance is observed by most members of the audience, yet there is a third layer that lies beneath the surface. Tendulkar created the character of Samant, a villager, who represents the audience in a way. Samant, who is confounded by how this mock trial is unfolding, is constantly prodded by Mrs. Kashikar to pay attention during specific moments, becoming the perfect embodiment of the collective audience. It is through moments like these that Tendulkar pulls the viewer’s attention back in when it is required the most, using dialogues like “You’re grasping it all, aren’t you?” as if Mrs. Kashikar is looking the viewers in the eye and asking them if they are still with the play, and as if Tendulkar is asking us: do you see what is happening here?

Quite like Samant, the audience or readers may find it difficult to tell a rehearsal from a real conversation among the characters. Instances where characters like Ponkshe and Mr. Kashikar share silly banter over the precise number of seconds to be allotted for the spitting of ‘paan’, or pause the trial because of a missing ear-pick are especially confounding yet telling. Tendulkar has devised these easily digestible moments to delude the audience by providing a source of comfort, leaving them thinking of the play as a fun and light read, when in fact, it is a play that casts a stark spotlight on chauvinism, if not misogyny.

When the troupe decides to change the topic of discussion to infanticide, presumably to hold Benare guilty, the audience is caught unawares, much like Benare herself. The play gathers increasing complexity from this point on, and the spectacle of ‘performance’ in it becomes manifold from its two-fold existence.

Since the format of the mock trial sessions that

this group often holds follows the real names of each character, it becomes all the more confusing to grasp when the actual banter ends and scripted dialogue begins. The dialogue where Kashikar drops a bomb on Benare—by saying, “Prisoner Miss Benare, under Section No. 302 of the Indian Penal Code, you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime?”—comes right after Benare’s innocent humming of a song about a sparrow’s nest being stolen away. It makes sense that Benare would react with shock and confusion here, for it is her real name, after all, that Kashikar uses for this accusation.

Understanding performativity

By the time the audience reaches Act Two, it is obvious that Tendulkar’s actors are performing twice—first as their character in the play and second as their character’s character in the rehearsal within the play. However, there exists a third layer of performance that comes out naturally and unconsciously by humans who have been conditioned by society to behave a certain way.

Often, these performances of impulse are churned out of gender stereotypes, as was pointed out by Judith Butler when she spoke about performativity—behaviour that is a kind of unconscious mimicry of others whom one has observed. For example, when a couple about to get married exchange their vows, their words are performative because they have observed other couples on their wedding day and unconsciously registered their behaviour. Jacques Derrida believed that every sentence spoken by humans is a citation of something their mind has registered unconsciously. It is this idea, of meaning being assigned to the arbitrary, that has been taken forward in the discussion about performativity. Combining Simon de Beauvoir’s essential critique of assigned gender with Butler’s concept of gender as a performance, it is evident that all the members of the group in Tendulkar’s play perform their gender perfectly and expect the same out of Benare.

Tendulkar uses subtle symbolism, like the courtroom being an emblem of the Indian society, which comes with its own ‘judges’ and moral patrolmen, especially when it comes to the behaviour of women. It becomes clear that the reason everyone humiliates Benare is that her performance as a woman has not matched their ideologies and expectations. By taking charge of her sexuality, and by choosing to make her own decisions for her body, Benare does the complete opposite of what society expects a woman to do. The irony, of course, is that the group insists on ‘spreading enlightenment’, and Kashikar reiterates his idea that the charge to be discussed should be of ‘social significance’. Kashikar—who does not have any time for Mrs. Kashikar and silences her no matter what she says—enjoys humiliating Benare under this garb. One can observe that today, too, many men worry about being socially significant and effecting a change in the world without considering the rights of women, without including half the world in their fight for freedom. And women, like Mrs. Kashikar, who have internalised this widespread mentality, eventually join in, in perpetuating and repeating

Tendulkar has masterfully created a layered scenario where the misogynistic and patriarchal values of the court members reflect in ways both subtle as well as overt

the cycle of shaming women into submission to the society’s idea of gender.

Who is being ‘silenced’?

Tendulkar has masterfully created a layered scenario where the misogynistic and patriarchal values of the court members reflect in ways both subtle as well as overt. Gender as a social construct comes with its excessive baggage, and though it affects all genders, it is often the women who suffer the most.

There are only two female characters in the play—an accurate representation of what most heterosocial groups look like in India: Benare, who is humiliated and ridiculed to no end just for being free, and Mrs. Kashikar, who is shut down by her own husband whenever she attempts to speak. The readers never get to learn her first name either, because that is how non-existent her individuality has been made. Her identity has been reduced to being the wife of Kashikar, and her autonomy continues to be further diminished every time her husband snubs her. The men of the courtroom can elaborately waste as much time as they want—they can have frivolous discussions (like those pertaining to paan), blabber on about Benare and her ‘situation’, and do many more idiosyncratic things, without an eyebrow being raised. Not only do they get away with it, they are also celebrated for it, quite like real life. However, when Mrs. Kashikar supports her husband’s point, Kashikar is somehow reminded of the austerity that he must portray while playing a courtroom judge and silences her. Steeped in irony, *Silence! The Court is in Session* is peppered with such instances.

There is another type of silencing that is happening in the courtroom, and that is the silencing of an independent woman’s free will, and her right to exercise her choice. We see Benare as a talkative and lively woman humming away to her heart’s glory in the first act, and then we see her speaking in monosyllables. Her attempt to leave the room when the agenda of her humiliation becomes clear fails because of the faulty lock—another metaphor for how difficult it is to get out of a system that thrives on gender hierarchy. After her failed attempt to get out of the room, she maintains a sad silence throughout the rest of the act, except for a few demure objections that she manages to utter. In the chilling final scene, we see her lie silently on the floor, inaudibly humming the song about a sparrow’s stolen nest. She has been defeated by society, silenced, ‘put in her place’ by the court members who later go on to joke about the entire ordeal, dismissing it as mere fiction. Her liberated, autonomous voice has been silenced because the court works this way and so does the world; and don’t make any noise about this, for it is always in session. ■

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The Dance Renaissance

In the final part of a two-part series, eminent public intellectual **Jawhar Sircar** writes a sweeping history of the renewal and revival of each of the eight classical dance forms of India.

Now that we have analysed the basic theme, we may take a look at individual classical dance forms, beginning with Bharatanatyam, a form that was completely overhauled in the 1930s. The 30th of December, 1935, is a landmark date in its history, as it is on this day that a very daring 31-year-old Brahmin girl, Rukmini Devi Arundale, created a stir by taking head-on the issues connected to Bharatanatyam. The elite in Madras was agog with the news that this young lady of high social standing was actually going to perform the dance of the low *sadirs*, but when Rukmini Devi started walking up to the stage at the Adyar Theatre before an amazed audience, the social leaders from her own Brahmin community of Madras staged a walkout in sheer disgust. Rukmini Devi, who had dared to marry a Christian, learnt Western dance from Anna Pavlova when she had gone to Europe with her husband. After returning to India, she took the trouble to learn Bharatanatyam from a renowned traditional *devadasi* dancer and her shattering of tradition added a lot of fuel to a raging controversy around the very existence of Bharatanatyam. As a temple dance based on the institution of *devadasis*, it was under attack by the British, as a grossly immoral system. An 'Anti-Nautch Movement' was inspired by Christian missionaries and moralistic Europeans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries not only in Madras but in Odisha and several parts of India.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Rebel redeemers

We come across accounts of high-minded activists, like one prudish Miss Tennant, who were fighting against "wicked forms of dance" and in 1910, they managed to have a partial ban imposed on dances held in temples. In 1927, the Viceroy's Council of State in Delhi seriously deliberated on a motion to tackle the evils associated with the *devadasi* system itself and licentious dances. The debate that affected Rukmini Devi in Madras was triggered by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, an activist legislator who was the daughter of a *devadasi*. She was determined to end this age-old system of dedicating girls to temples, for dance as well as for physical exploitation. Ranged on the other side were people like E. Krishna Iyer, a Brahmin *rasika* or connoisseur of Bharatanatyam, who demanded that this exquisite, ancient dance form be preserved, while the controversial institution of *devadasis* could be dumped. He obtained the support of the Congress and organised the first All India Music Conference in Madras in 1927, which led to the founding of the iconic Madras Music Academy in 1928. On her part, Reddy had persuaded the Madras Legislative Council to pass a stern resolution against "this social evil", and in 1930, she moved a Bill to abolish the *devadasi* system altogether. This was, however, opposed by many like Iyer, and even by quite a few *devadasis*, who claimed they were highly acclaimed artistes of an ancient cultural form and certainly not the vulnerable prostitutes that the Bill made them out to be. Incidentally, it was only in 1947, that the Devadasi Abolition Bill was finally approved in Madras, by a Congress government.

When discussing Rukmini Devi, we must mention another pioneering dancer, an American lady, Esther Sherman, who stormed the world of Indian classical dance even before Rukmini Devi did. Sherman, who declared herself to be 'reborn' as Ragini Devi, had arrived in India in the early 1930s, to learn and propagate South Indian classical dances. We place her name after Rukmini Devi's because the chronology of her mission and important dates are a bit hazy, but also because Rukmini Devi's impact on a single dance form in Madras was really astounding, while Ragini moved from form to form and all over India, Europe and America. We know that in America, she had published a book on Indian dance in 1930 and that she had tried to absorb, quite voraciously, the skills of Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Mohiniattam and Kuchipudi. Ragini also gave public performances in many parts of India in order to revive these forms and helped to re-package them, while bestowing greater respectability on a vocation that was not viewed favourably. She met Vallathol Narayana Menon, the legendary Malayali poet and social activist. He had founded Kerala Kalamandalam in Thrissur in 1930 and Ragini sought his blessings. The high-water mark of her career was when she danced in partnership with the great Kathakali dancer, Guru Gopinath. Ragini tried many

forms, but she is better known for popularising Kathakali, which, incidentally, was not held as disreputable, and Kuchipudi.

Since we mentioned Vallathol, we may as well touch upon the other dance form he retrieved and 'modernised'—also in the 1930s. We refer to Kerala's Mohiniattam, that adheres to the *Lasya* type, a more graceful and feminine form of dancing. We come across Mohiniattam poses in the sculptures at the 11th-century Vishnu temple at Thrikkodithanam, and the Kidangoor Subramanya temple. We get the first direct reference to it in the 16th-century legal text called *Vyavaharamala*, and we know that the normative structure of this dance form was finalised in the 18th century. But as it was associated with sensuality and sexual exploitation, the British banned it in the 1930s. This led to greater public awareness in Travancore-Cochin and also to protests led by the iconic Vallathol, to revive this traditional dance of Kerala, by purging undesirable elements. Consequently, the prohibition was partially relaxed in 1940. As mentioned, he established the Kalamandalam as the centre from which Mohiniattam and Kathakali were spread all over. Among other stalwarts who pioneered the revival of Mohiniattam in the middle and late decades of the 20th century were Mukundraja, Krishna Panicker, Thankamony, as well as the guru and dancer Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma. As in most other age-old dance forms, we note that in Mohiniattam also, quite a bit of repackaging began in the 1930s, once a new class that was socially and economically superior to the customary practitioners entered the arena and 'sanitised' this dance.

We now return to Ragini Devi to recall her contribution to another form of classical dance of the south, Kuchipudi. This dance-drama category originated from a village in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh and Ragini Devi claimed that this name is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kusilavapuram' or "the village of actors". Like other classical dances, it invokes the *Natyashastra* for its inspiration and presentation techniques, from postures and gestures to *bhava*, *rasa*, steps and other dance methods. The older, original version of Kuchipudi is mentioned in copper plate inscriptions of the 10th century, and then it is referred to in texts in the 15th century, but it was only in the 17th century that a monk named Tirtha Narayanayati and his disciple, Siddhendra Yogi, rebuilt the dance form in its modern avatar. It was always a dance-drama performed only by Brahmin males, even where female roles were concerned. Despite some support from the Qutb Shahis, the rulers of Golconda, the form languished from the 17th century and the British colonial Raj's distaste for Indian dances and its frequent clampdowns only worsened the situation. From the 1930s, revivalists like Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastri, Vempati Venkatanarayana Sastri and Chinta Venkataramayya started retrieving the situation from the 1930s, by re-codifying the

form, permitting women into it and taking advantage of modern techniques. This is an interesting case of de-Brahminisation of the dance form and adding doses of sensuality by women instead of the other way round. In fact, female dancers like Ragini Devi, her daughter Indrani Rahman, and actress Hema Malini would eventually bring worldwide fame to it, as did iconic couples like Raja-Radha Reddy, the Dhananjayans and the Narasimhacharis.

Generational guardians

Moving to north India, we discover that Kathak had the privileged history of being popularised at the national and international level by males of the Maharaj (Mishra) clan of Lucknow. This runs counter to the picture in the public mind of it being associated with seductive courtesans, and we may recall that even the British were entertained by these 'nautch girls' from the earliest days of their arrival. This is, of course, not to say that women did not play a major role here. They did, but where the revival

and reorganisation of this dance form in the 20th century is concerned, none can deny the greatest contribution that was made by the Maharaj family. Though this clan of Kathak specialists had entered the palaces of Awadh with this dance in the latter part of the 19th century, it was actually its third generation that really took it out of the traditional habitat and converted it into a stage-worthy art. The

two names to remember are Shambhu Maharaj and Lachhu Maharaj, whose best period was from around the middle of the 20th century. While Shambhu moved to India's capital, Delhi, to lead the new Kathak Kendra and train the first two to three generations of dancers from respectable, non-traditional families, Lachhu made the film capital of India, Mumbai, his base. Besides outstanding stage performances, Lachhu made his mark as a film choreographer who crafted the unforgettable dance scenes in Hindi classic movies—from *Mahal* in the late 1940s to *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Pakeezah* in the 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, we note that the repackaging of Kathak took place some two decades after Bharatanatyam and Kathakali. Nevertheless, it appeared to outshine them not only as the hallmark of 'north Indian culture' but also thanks to the very popular Hindi film industry. Interestingly, while in many other dance forms, the new upper caste dancers appropriated them from women of lower social strata, and thereafter 'sanitised' the dance, in Kathak, the leading lights were themselves males from the upper castes, who passed on the skills to great women dancers.

Where the revival and reorganisation of Kathak in the 20th century is concerned, none can deny the great contribution that was made by the Maharaj family

Coming to Odissi, we find that though it was surely among the oldest forms of classical dances and is the only one that is depicted in bas relief sculptures in the pre-Christian era, it was sadly languishing from the late 19th century till the middle of the 20th century. As we have mentioned, women temple dancers were equated with public prostitution and several restrictions were imposed on them by the British. Consequently, the traditional *mahari* dancers at Puri and elsewhere were held in disrepute, despite the intricate skills and aesthetics that they had evolved and preserved for several centuries. Protests against the colonial ban arose in the middle of the 20th century and it was decried as cultural discrimination against the Hindus. But progress to reform Odissi was slow and it was only after the British left in 1947, could pioneering gurus get into the act. Among the latter were worthies like Kelucharan Mohapatra, Mayadhar Raut, Gangadhar Pradhan, Pankaj Charan Das and Deba Prasad Das who could finally revive Odissi. In fact, Laxmipriya Mohapatra did to Odissi in 1948 what Rukmini Devi

had done to Bharatanatyam in 1935, by performing a dance recital, an Odissi *abhinaya*, in the Annapurna Theatre in Cuttack. In the 1950s, a disciple of Kelucharan, Sanjukta Panigrahi, was among the earliest to popularise modern Odissi in India and abroad, while a decade later, in the mid-'60s, his noted disciples like Kumkum Mohanty and Sonal Mansingh stormed the Indian dance world with Odissi. Others like Kasturi Pattanaik followed and enhanced the artistic impact of this form, integrating the two streams,

mahari and *gotipua* dances, that led to modern Odissi. Here again, we find that the upper castes of Odisha led by the Karans, Khandayats and Brahmins, were the ones who created the new wave of enthusiasm and refinement—while the original discredited performers disappeared.

Unusual champions

We now travel to Manipur in the north-east of India to take a look at the seventh form of classical dance that evolved there, from the 14th or 15th centuries. Though Manipuri claims a Vedic past, it is clear that some components of this dance have surely deep roots in the tribal history of the Meitei, the majority community. The fact is, however, that much of the present-day version goes back to just two centuries, well after this kingdom adopted Gaudiya Vaishnavism from Bengal as its state religion. Manipuri combines the 'great tradition' of the east and northeast of the country with the little tradition of its local 'Lai Hardoba' and other pre-Hindu festivals and rituals. The first major intervention to introduce this unique and graceful dance to the world was taken by Rabindranath Tagore in 1919. India's Nobel Laureate had witnessed a dance

composition of this school, called *Goshtha Lila*, in Sylhet that year and was completely overwhelmed by its inherent grace and subdued delicate movements. He took immediate steps to introduce Manipuri dance teaching in Santiniketan, his internationally famous cultural institution in Bengal. He invited the finest expert of this dance form of the kingdom of Manipur, Budhimantra Singh, to join and a few years later, he induced Naba Kumar to teach. Later, other celebrated gurus like Senarik Singh Rajkumar, Nileshwar Mukherji and Atomba Singh were also invited to teach at Santiniketan.

These masters also assisted Tagore to choreograph many of his own dance-dramas, Rabindra Nrittya, where the *mudras*, gestures and sublime elegance of Manipuri is so pronounced. Since Tagore took up his initiatives in the 1920s, his intervention in Indian classical dance actually preceded the modernisation of older dance traditions of south India, which commenced in the 1930s. Manipuri can thus actually claim to be the first of the classical dances to undergo systematisation and readjustment to the new habitat of halls, lights and sounds in modern India. Since there was no opprobrium attached to this religious dance, no sanitisation was required and we cannot decipher any planned appropriation by upper castes or non-traditional groups here. But Tagore's encouragement and the support of other critical persons, like the Gaekwad of Baroda, meant that its renown soared from the 1920s and 1930s, and several new practitioners from all parts of India joined its fold. Bipin Singh took the form to Kolkata and Mumbai where it became immensely popular. The Jhaveri sisters of the latter city elevated it to new heights, as did Devyani Chalia and Charu Mathur.

We now come to Sattriya of Assam, the last of the eight original classical dances traditionally recognised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, which received this honour only in 2000. Though this was much after the first seven forms, its history goes back at least to the 16th century when Srimanta Sankaradeva popularised it. Sankaradeva found this dance, and its one-act plays called Ankiya Nat, to be very effective in spreading his message of love and brotherhood and popularising the life of Krishna and Radha, and he used it as a powerful medium of mass propagation of Vaishnava religion. Like Kuchipudi, it thus started as a religious dance performance only of males, mainly the monks, who displayed it at the *sattras* or monasteries of Assamese Vaishnavism or in the public prayer and dance halls called *namghars*. Maheshwar Neog formalised the modern form of Sattriya, while

Rasheswar Saikia Borbayan and Maniram Datta Moktar played a big role as well. Without getting into great details, we find that the major tasks in modernising this medieval dance were to secularise it by delinking it from religious spaces, and also to permit women to dance. Besides, like other dance forms, Sattriya also had to adapt to the modern stage, lights and sound. Though it was surely a temple dance, this form was not associated with the sleaze that marked its counterpart temple dances, where women were used and exploited.

We have briefly covered the short history of how all the major classical dances of India had to go through different processes of modernisation some of which were common—like moving out of their traditional settings. All of them had to re-choreograph their earlier performances to suit the confines of the proscenium stage; adjust to and utilise modern light and sound technologies; and, what is more important, shorten the time of their recitals to suit contemporary audiences.

In several cases, we have seen how the lotus of classical dance rose from muck, while in others, men had to make way for women to enter their preserve. In almost all cases, a new class of better-educated professionals from the more solvent upper and middle classes (and castes) emerged, to lead these forms. Interestingly, many dancers chose to specialise in forms that were not connected to their own regions or states but had developed in other parts of India. This helped cross-connect Indians of all corners with dances of their preferences, even if they were at the other end of the vast country, which helped unify the nation. It also entailed that entrants had to learn not only the language in which the dance form they chose had arisen or was nursed, but also the culture and history of the region.

It is undeniable that these classical dances have all gone through remarkable transformation and rigorous modernisation in just a few decades, which means that they appear considerably different from their original traditions. Independent India needed to reconstruct and reclaim its past and secure for itself the aristocracy that only antiquity can bestow—so it acquired classical dance, sans the traditional practitioners, in most cases. But that is now history. ■

This article was first published in the May 2020 digital issue (Volume 9, Issue 10) of ON Stage. Jawhar Sircar, a public intellectual, writer and speaker, has served as India's longest-tenured Culture Secretary and was also CEO of Prasar Bharati (Akashvani & Doordarshan).

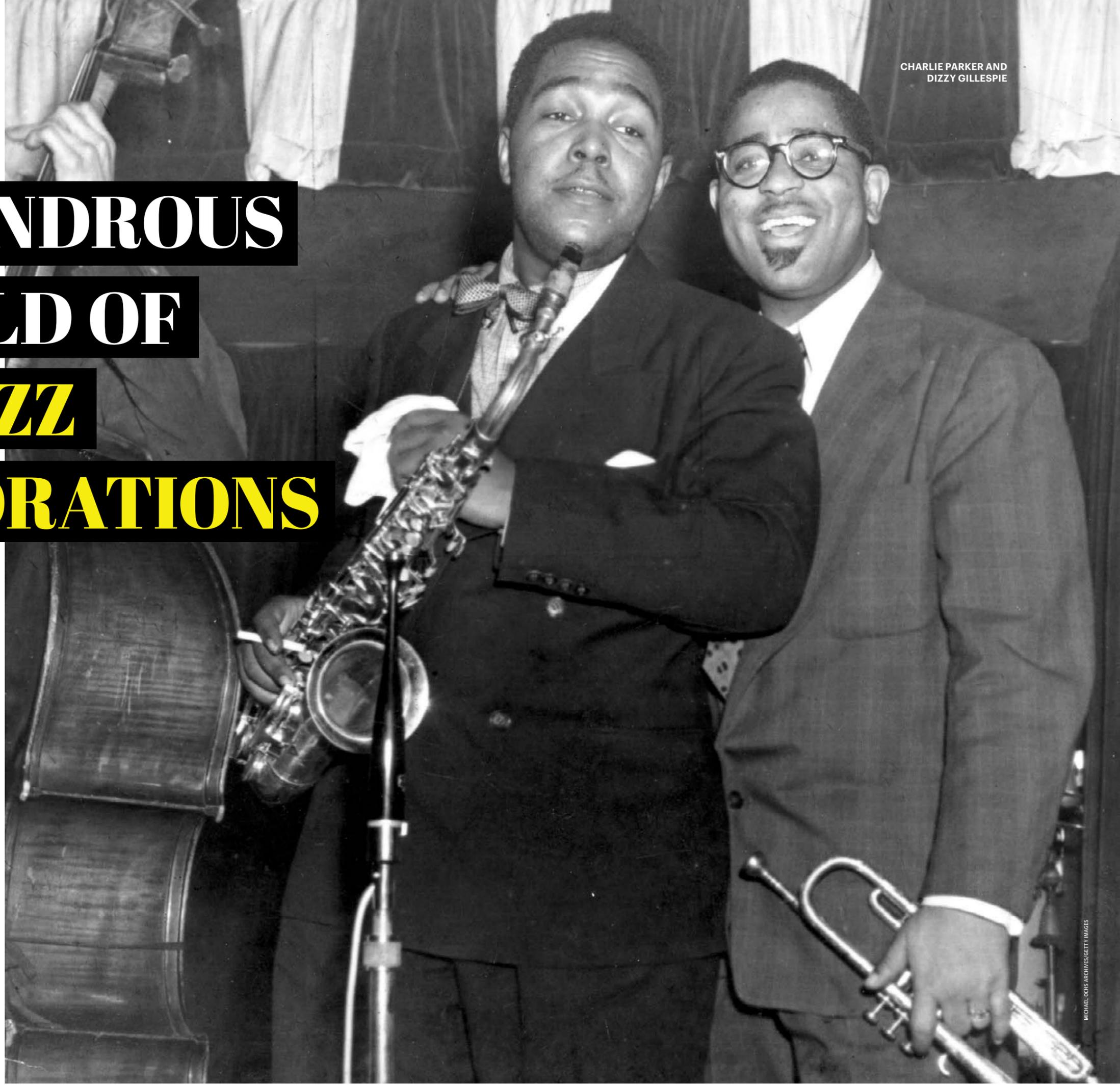
Manipuri combines the 'great tradition' of the east and northeast of the country with the little tradition of its local 'Lai Hardoba' and other pre-Hindu festivals and rituals

THE WONDROUS WORLD OF JAZZ

COLLABORATIONS

Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, poles apart in their musicality, came together multiple times to create great music, while two brilliant saxophonists, Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster, jammed for one night and ended up making an album that is considered a jazz masterclass. **Anurag Tagat** takes a look at some powerful collaborations, replete with skilful improvisation and intense receptivity between some of the greatest jazz musicians of the 20th century.

While jazz has always lived up to enormous crossover potential with other genres, even within jazz, history has stood witness to plenty of odd pairings. Jazz greats, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie came together first as instrumentalists and then as composers, showcasing enormous growth and maturity. A little earlier, in 1939, a young pianist named Billy Strayhorn joined Duke Ellington's orchestra and ended up composing 'Take the A Train', one of the greatest jazz standards there is. Pianist and bandleader Gil Evans went from being part of bands with Miles Davis to actually shaping records together, even though they came from fairly different interests.





ELLA FITZGERALD AND LOUIS ARMSTRONG

Whether it is mutual respect, long-standing admiration or a growing friendship that stood the test of time, these collaborations have brought out the unexpected as well as the familiar from both camps. We round up five striking collaborations and the history behind them and what makes these pairings timeless and powerful in the world of jazz.

Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie

Jazz saxophone great Charlie Parker and trumpet legend Dizzy Gillespie birthed bebop and were part of the moment that shaped modern jazz. That was arguably in their individual capacities through their careers. They started running together by 1945 with the Bebop Six and by 1950, they had recorded a singularly brilliant album, *Bird and Diz*. Released

only in 1952, the record was produced by Norman Granz and included songs like 'Mohawk', 'Visa' and 'Bloomdido'. The duo also worked together on one of Gillespie's greatest compositions, 'Salt Peanuts'. In a 1986 interview, Gillespie talked about how he and Parker shared an unrelenting passion for music. "He had a great sense of rhythm. And all he needed was somebody to pull his coat to some harmonics, you know. And that's where I came in. I had the rhythm and the harmonics.

It so happened that when we came together...it just worked. When Charlie Parker created the style, that really rounded everything out because we had rhythm, we had harmony. He was influenced a great deal by my harmonic experience and I was influenced by his style."

A towering music figure when it came to exploring the shape-shifting nature of jazz, Miles Davis was aided in this by pianist and bandleader Gil Evans

Although Parker died prematurely in 1955, he left an unforgettable mark on the way jazz would be performed and written, something Gillespie did well to carry forward in the following decades.

Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong

How does the distinctively raspy and gravelly voice of someone like Louis Armstrong perfectly complement the charming, mood-lifter that is Ella Fitzgerald? They had three albums together and toured on the same billing as well, starting in the late 1950s with *Ella and Louis*, which is often considered



MILES DAVIS AND GIL EVANS

a near-perfect collaboration between jazz artistes at different stages in their career. They had first duetted in 1946, but when *Ella and Louis* came to them, Armstrong was in his 50s and Fitzgerald in her late 30s. She recalled in an interview, "He came in like it was nothing to it—just gonna have a ball. And I would always mess up because I [was] so fascinated watching him that sometimes I wouldn't come in on time on

my song because he would go through the whole motion—"Sing it, Ella!"—and he'd be talking and cracking and making jokes while he's talking and you don't know whether you should sing or laugh, but that's the kind of guy he was."

Songs such as 'Cheek to Cheek', 'Bess, You Is My Woman Now' and 'Let's Call the Whole Thing Off' are perhaps etched in our collective memories thanks to this magical pair.

Miles Davis and Gil Evans

An all-round towering music figure

when it came to exploring the experimental and shape-shifting nature of jazz, Miles Davis was aided in this by pianist and bandleader Gil Evans. If you are seeking proof of just how well they gelled, *Miles Davis & Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* is a masterwork unto itself with six CDs and a 198-page



BEN WEBSTER AND COLEMAN HAWKINS

booklet. Other albums like *Miles Ahead*, *Porgy and Bess* and *Sketches of Spain* showcased versatility and a daring level of experimentation. The conductor Evans put Davis in front of orchestras, woodwind ensembles, and more, for exemplary jazz-fusion records that took inspiration from Spanish music (for example, in 'Concierto de Aranjuez') and built on the existing work written by Dave Brubeck ('The Duke'), Sonny Rollins ('Oleo') and more. Evans's own work—'Saeta' and 'Solea'—proved that he arguably did all the heavy lifting on *Sketches of Spain*, and was allegedly a tough taskmaster. Davis said in a 1986 interview, "I learned a lot from Gil. You could take one of Gil's scores and you won't need to go to any school."

'Moon Dreams' and 'Boplicity' are only some of several songs in which Davis and Evans share the room, but their career also included later creations like 'Falling Water', which saw them both dive headlong towards diverse percussion elements and electric instrumentation.

Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins

Spontaneity is often a gift in music and especially so in jazz. Two of the most respected saxophonists in jazz, Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins arguably ensured that every tenor saxophonist who would follow had a solid body of material to draw influence from. Their 1957 recording—which was eventually released in 1959—was called *Coleman Hawkins Encounters Ben Webster*. Both were middle-aged by then and had walked a long way in the jazz world. There is a juxtaposition of Hawkins's more

gruff and unpolished playing, and the dramatic-yet-restrained style of Webster. Also produced by Granz in Hollywood, what certainly helped this unlikely pairing was a solid band in the same room. Pianist Oscar Peterson was an anchoring force, while guitarist Herb Ellis, drummer Alvin Stoller and Ray Brown on bass provided a powerful bedrock for the moods evoked.

Coleman Hawkins Encounters Ben Webster features seven tracks, including the saxophonists' version of 'Tangerine', taking what had been a vocal jazz hit and turning it into a saxophone-based masterpiece. Hawkins's composition, 'Blues for Yolande', stands out remarkably as well, ensuring that these artistes were not in the room just to jam, but to create jazz history.



DUKE ELLINGTON AND BILLY STRAYHORN

Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn

For 28 years, Billy Strayhorn worked with Duke Ellington, apparently without even a contract. Though that displays a level of trust that would shock many in the music industry, right from back in the 1940s to today, it clearly did not matter to Strayhorn. In his stint with Ellington's genre-shaping orchestra, Strayhorn wrote more than a hundred tunes. David Hajdu, author of *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn*, told NPR, "Strayhorn was interested in hues of the emotional spectrum that we don't often encounter in popular music or jazz. In Strayhorn we find a lot of grey tones. And muted colours. We find a bittersweet quality. We find tinges of remorse and regret."

While 'Take the A Train' became the Duke Ellington Orchestra's theme song, and 'Lotus Blossom' was the bandleader's signature, the pianist in Strayhorn also pitched in on bebop tunes like 'Johnny Come Lately'. Through the years,

Strayhorn was well settled into the orchestra and also well attuned to Ellington's technique. Although differing in age, they worked fairly closely, bringing no-nonsense jazz to the world that has stood the test of time. ■

This article was first published in the September 2020 digital issue (Volume 10, Issue 2) of ON Stage.

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.



← Blue-tailed bee-eater. Hiren Kadikar

As you travel down the jungle roads during your safaris, chances are that the first sighting would most likely be that of a bird. The Indian robin, the woodpecker, or even a peacock. For me, initially, it used to be just a splash of colour flitting from one tree to another. As you experience more safaris, slowly your eyes get trained and you start noticing the sheer variety of birds around. It is then a natural progression to try and capture these graceful creatures on your camera, but that is an extremely difficult prospect.

Birds are a diverse and huge group, ranging from the Tickell's flowerpecker (8 cm) to the great Indian bustard (1 m) and with varied wingspans, the longest being that of the wandering albatross. Unique hunting strategies, various types of beaks, multiple nesting and feeding

methods and diverse plumage – it takes exceptional skill set to photograph and categorise them.

In order to bring to the fore this fascinating avian world, Mukesh Parpiani, Head of the Piramal Gallery, has curated an exhibition of 200 bird photographs shot in India. These will be exhibited when normalcy prevails again. Currently, they are being showcased on digital media.

The Piramal Gallery at the NCPA was established in 1987 and has hosted nearly 1,000 exhibitions to date. This exhibition carries the message of "Peace will prevail", and birds, free and unshackled, are the true ambassadors of this message. ■

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↓ African fish eagle. J. Jehangir



↑ Purple-rumped sunbird. J. Jehangir



↑ Juvenile Brahminy kite. J. Jehangir



↑ A pair of spoonbills. J. Jehangir



↑ Northern pintail. Navin Kumar



↑ Red-vented bulbul. Anupama Naik



↑ Flamingoes. Dhruv Vernekar



↑ Peacock. Nandini D'souza



↑ Red-billed leiothrix. Hema Chandna



↑ Black-capped kingfisher. Hemant Krishnani



↑ A pair of lesser golden-backed woodpeckers. Sudhir Kumar Saxena



↑ Black-naped monarch. Nagrajan Venkataramanan



↑ Great cormorant. Sudhanshu Tiwari



↑ Black-winged stilt. Sudheer Dharmadhikari



↑ Indian eagle-owl. Mann Arya



↑ Baya weaver. Kola Venkateswarlu



↑ Egrets fighting. Abhijit Dey



↑ Crested hawk-eagle. Hira Punjabi

Kaleidoscope

Your window to the latest in the performing arts across India and the world.

Desi splendour

The 20th edition of Italy's only film festival dedicated to Indian cinema, the River to River Florence Indian Film Festival, will be hosted online this year from 3rd to 8th December. The festival, created by Selvaggia Velo, will see guests like Amitabh Bachchan, Kabir Bedi, Deepa Mehta, among others. Writer and activist Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, President of the National Gandhi Museum and granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, will present a talk on khadi as a symbol of Indian independence. The entire festival can be watched online with a €9.90 ticket on www.mymovies.it. All live content, including meetings with the guests and introductions to the films, will be available for free on the festival's Facebook and YouTube pages. For more information, visit www.rivertoriver.it



In memoriam

On 6th October, Indian cinema suffered a tremendous loss in the passing of legendary actor Soumitra Chatterjee, who had contracted COVID-19 and eventually succumbed to related complications. Chatterjee, who started his illustrious six-decade-long career playing the adult Apu in *Apur Sansar*, the final part of Satyajit Ray's *The Apu Trilogy*, worked in over 300 films with eminent directors in Bengali cinema, while notably staying away from Bollywood. He won innumerable laurels including the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, India's highest award in cinema and the Legion of Honour, France's highest civilian order of merit. His bustling



creativity was not limited to acting; he was a prolific writer of essays, plays and poetry and, for a while, edited the literary magazine *Ekkhon*. The outpouring of grief from those who knew him, knew of him, learnt from him and were inspired by him is a testament to the monumental impact he had on the performing arts. He was 85 years old.

Getting artistic

Since its opening in 1991, the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) has established itself as a dynamic institution in the world of art, both Irish and international. As lockdowns of varying



degrees are upheld around the world, IMMA has provided a wide array of online activities that can be accessed from home. In addition to exploring the museum's collection online, watching exhibition videos and listening to archival talks featuring artists, curators and educators, the website also has specific sections for artistic activities aimed at children, teens, elders and people living with dementia. Learn how to create fabulous collages inspired by artist Fred Tomaselli or a rainbow hand fan inspired by the work of Patrick Hughes. Follow step-by-step guides to make note cards from pressed seeds or create your own night sky with paper, crayons and paint. For more information, visit www.imma.ie



A Scottish Season

Established over 125 years ago, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO) is one of Europe's leading orchestras. From October 2020 to February 2021, the RSNO is hosting its first-ever digital season. Available to watch with a subscription or a pay-per-concert basis, audiences can enjoy ten concerts which will be filmed live for the digital season. RSNO Music Director Thomas Søndergård will conduct five special concerts which will include works by Chevalier de Saint-Georges and Beethoven, among other composers. World-renowned violinist Midori will perform Beethoven's Violin Concerto with Søndergård, while Mozart's Clarinet Concerto and Wagner's Wesendonck-Lieder will also feature in a season that promises to be unmissable. For more information, visit www.rsno.org.uk/digital-season

The Performing Arts Dispatch

A series on performing arts venues from around the world. In focus this month: Sydney Opera House

When houses of culture are built,

culture makes its way there without quite concerning itself with ribbon-cutting galas. Years before the NCPA came to call Nariman Point its permanent residence, music had begun to swaddle it in a Breach Candy building. A decade earlier and 6,000-plus miles to the east, when the Sydney Opera House was still under construction, American bass baritone Paul Robeson became the first person to perform there in 1960, the inaugural ceremony still a good 13 years away. He climbed the scaffolding and sang ‘Ol’ Man River’ to the construction workers as they ate lunch.

From that single no-frills recital to over 1800 a year with more than 10.9 million people visiting the iconic Australian venue annually—it is the kind of trajectory a performing arts complex would contentedly like to be on, perhaps barring minor glitches like the incident in the 1980s during the opera *Boris Godunov* that featured live chickens, when one bird walked off the stage and landed on top of a cellist. (A net was subsequently installed above the orchestra pit in the Joan Sutherland Theatre.) But what happens when a pandemic strikes and unsettles the very foundation of the communal experience that draws people to concert halls and theatres? The show moves online, as it did at the Sydney Opera House from March to October 2020.

Now, as a semblance of normalcy returns to the harbour, the venue has started welcoming audiences back with an already busy calendar. A spokesperson for the Sydney Opera House tells us more about the reopening.

What kind of preparations—at the level of programming/repertoire choice as well as social distancing and safety—were made for the Sydney Opera House to reopen?

It’s fantastic to see COVID-19 restrictions easing in New South Wales (NSW), much-loved theatres beginning to reopen, and the artistic and cultural community re-emerging from the significant



challenges of 2020. Following the welcome news that theatres in NSW can welcome back artistes, audiences and visitors, the Sydney Opera House has reopened a number of venues with a vibrant programme of live performances, events, dining experiences and tours. All events and activities will be conducted in line with NSW Health advice, with a range of robust on-site measures in line with our commitment to the safety and well-being of all. The programme includes contemporary performance work across dance, music, live art and theatre, an inspiring and diverse calendar of First Nations culture and storytelling, comedy, live music, musicals, kids shows and new work by independent local artistes curated by Sydney Opera House Presents.

Do you plan to continue engaging with audiences digitally through the From Our House to Yours series now that the opera house has reopened?

The success of the From Our House to

Yours digital programme, which presented new work every week from March to October 2020, has been vital to maintain the shared experience of attending art and cultural events for online audiences and communities. The programme was enthusiastically received locally and around the world with more than six million views and downloads, including over 23 million minutes viewed of video and 103 thousand

podcast downloads. The archive is available to watch for free on the Sydney Opera House [YouTube channel](#). We will continue to present digital programming that will be accessible to audiences around the world.

What are some of the key learnings from the lockdown period that will continue to guide the functioning of the Opera House?

Commissioning and presenting new work on our digital stage played an important role in keeping our audiences connected with live performance and the arts, and this will continue to be a focus as we welcome back audiences. We recently launched New Work Now, a commissioning programme created in response to COVID-19 to provide meaningful support to local Australian artistes and arts workers through developing and presenting new work by them for the opera house’s digital and physical stages. ■

- Snigdha Hasan

- The original indigenous people of the Sydney Harbour area are the Gadigal clan. The Aboriginal name for the Point was Tu-bow-gule meaning ‘meeting of the waters’.
- 233 designs were submitted for the opera house international design competition held in 1956. In January 1957, Jørn Utzon from Denmark was announced the winner, receiving £5000 for his design.
- The biggest crowd to ever attend a performance at Sydney Opera House was in 1996 for the ‘Farewell to the World’ outdoor concert by the band Crowded House. It was televised around the world. A decade later, Crowded House announced its return to the Opera House with an encore performance on the Forecourt.
- Sydney Opera House is cooled using seawater taken directly from the harbour. The system circulates cold water from the harbour through 35 kilometres of pipes to power both the heating and air conditioning in the building.



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