

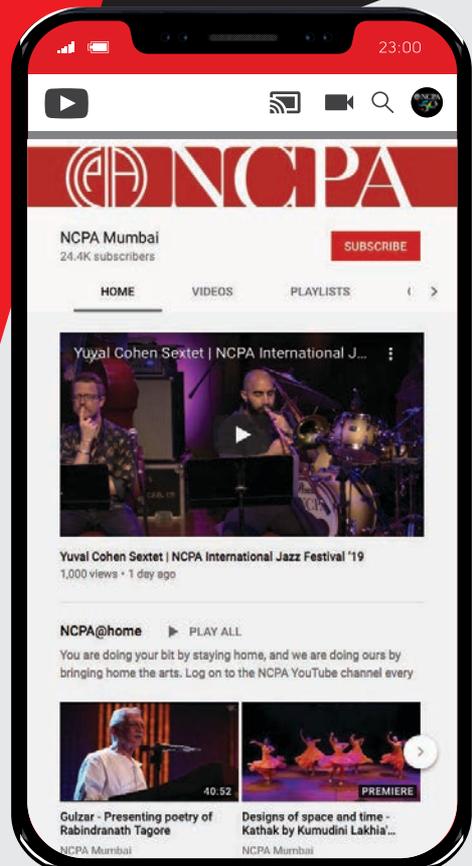
# ON Stage

VOLUME 9 • ISSUE 11



# CULTURE AT ALL TIMES

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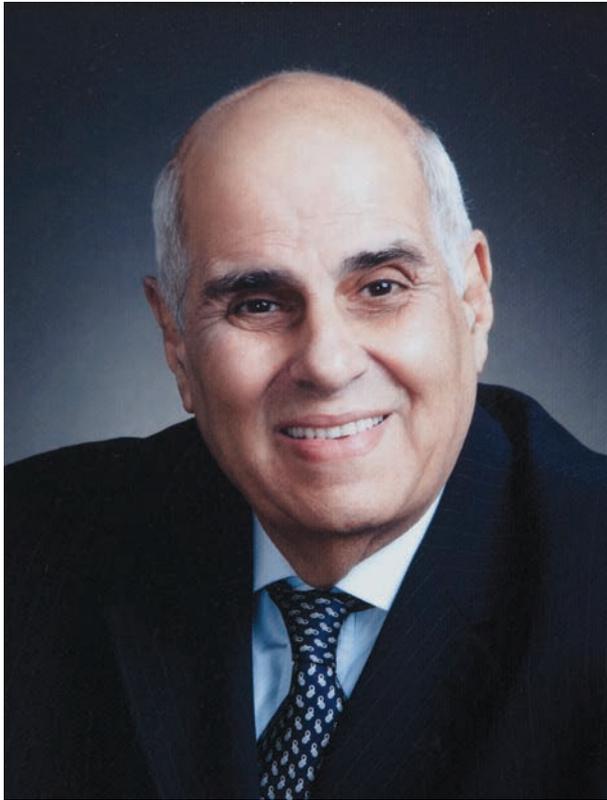


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*Welcome what's next*

# Chairman's Note



The NCPA team, now scattered around different locations in Mumbai, France, the U.K., etc., are hard at work, exchanging ideas via the internet and through the marvels of communication open to us.

The aim is to primarily keep all our associates safe, to evolve ever-changing strategies due to the uncertain future we are facing, and to finally encourage our ingenuity to emerge wiser and savvier than when we dealt with normal challenges.

NCPA@home is proving popular, but we still have some distance to go to be of the standard we are striving for. Various ideas are being tested to make audiences inside, outside, and at distances experience as far as possible the "real thing", and the solutions we hope to arrive at will make us a richer and wiser organisation.

The plan to reach out to various parts of the city has been welcomed. Our official authorities have been helpful and encouraging us to use all means to bring our unique blend of offerings to the public once the right moment arrives.

Sadly, our major productions like *The Merry Widow* are postponed and our income from various activities will be drastically reduced. Our colleagues and staff have risen to the occasion with remarkable co-operation, and we hope all of you will join us in a grand thank-you event at the appropriate time.

In the meantime, dear members and our loyal public, do stand shoulder to shoulder with us.

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

**Khushroo N. Suntook**

**NCPA Chairman**  
Khushroo N. Suntook

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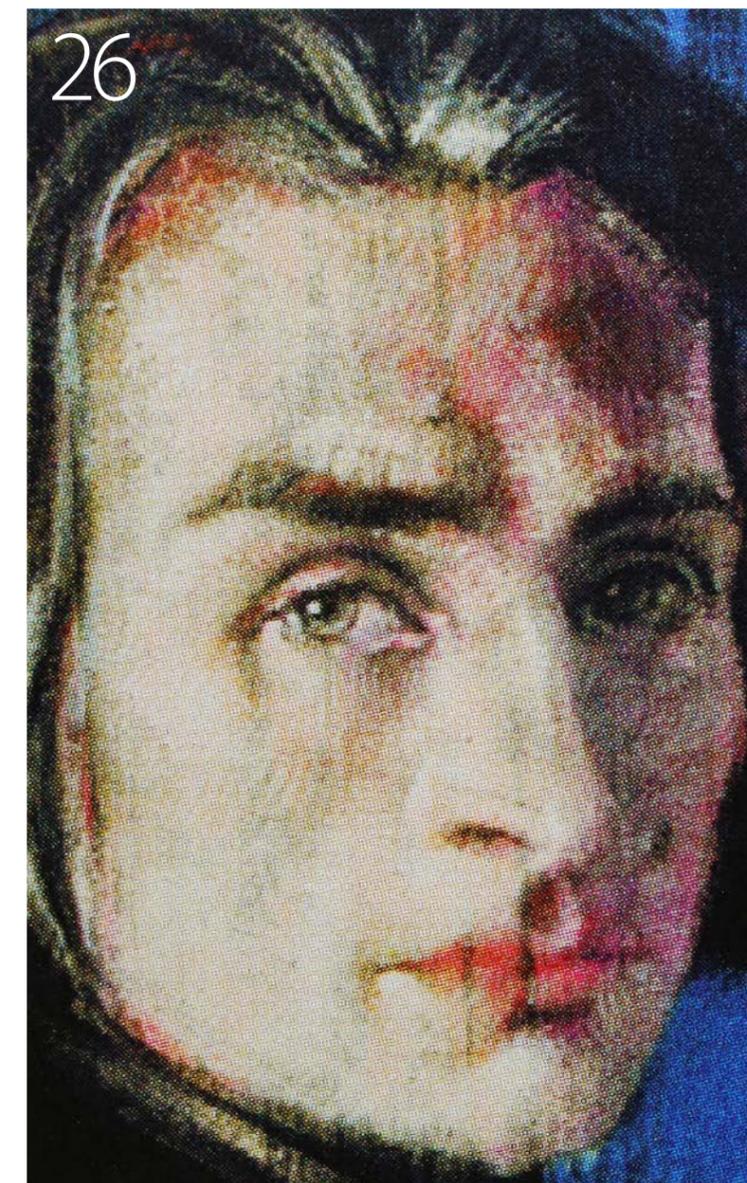
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We look forward to your feedback and suggestions. Please do drop us an email at [onstage@ncpamumbai.com](mailto:onstage@ncpamumbai.com).



# Reflections

Creation in isolation. By Anil Dharker

“Just a reminder that when Shakespeare was quarantined because of the plague, he wrote *King Lear*”, someone wrote on Twitter, creating quite a guilty storm in the West, particularly I imagine among people who spend their time on Twitter.

As it happens, Shakespeare did write *King Lear* when quarantined during the Great Plague of 1606. And not just *King Lear*, he also wrote *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare wrote at a ‘feverish’ pace most of the time (the right word to use in the context?), but to produce three great plays in just over a year in which he was quarantined must say something for the uses of isolation. The place he stayed in at Silver Street in London was right across a church which must have tolled continuously for the dead. No wonder all these three plays are the darkest of dark tragedies.

We think of the plague as an epidemic that came and went in a year, but in fact it assailed England again and again for over a century. The year 1665 was one of the worst: it killed 100,000, a quarter of the population then, in a mere 18 months. One of those who escaped the disease was Isaac Newton, then a young student of 24 at Cambridge University. When they shut down the campus, he hurried back to the family home in Woolsthorpe-by-Colsterworth, a hamlet in Lincolnshire. There, locked down for those 18 months, he investigated optics and prisms and ‘voyaging through strange seas of thought alone’. Those seas brought him to the incredible shores of differential and integral calculus which he developed, and most importantly, led to his discovery of the theory of gravity. Think about it, if he had been at Cambridge following the curriculum instead of being in isolation, no apple would have fallen on his head.

Another way of being isolated, needless to say not recommended, is to be in jail. During the freedom struggle, Jawaharlal Nehru was put in prison by the British a number of times adding up to a total of



nine years. He used his periods in isolation to write three wonderful books: his autobiography (a 672-page work written between June 1934 and February 1935), *Glimpses of World History* and *The Discovery of India*, a magisterial work written between April and September 1944. Years earlier, in 1897, Oscar Wilde was jailed too, and instead of giving in to despair, he wrote his most serious and heartfelt work ‘De Profundis’ (From the Depths).

There can only be one Shakespeare and one Newton, one Nehru and one Wilde, but other creative people too have turned the adversity of confinement to their advantage. When the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (whose ‘Scream’ we all know) contracted the Spanish Flu, he was in his mid-fifties. Being isolated, he had obvious limitations of subjects, so he painted himself. Portrait after self-portrait followed, the most famous being prosaically titled ‘Self Portrait with the Spanish Flu’.

The Mexican artist Frida Kahlo was even more unfortunate. At 18, she was involved in a terrible traffic accident that left her with a fractured spine and pelvis. Confined to bed for extended lengths of time and often in excruciating pain, she installed an easel next to her bed plus a very large mirror. The results were a striking series of self-

portraits in variegated Mexican outfits by which we now know her.

‘It seems to me that today if the artist wishes to be serious, he must once more sink himself in solitude’, said Edgar Degas, the great Impressionist painter. Yet apart from his self-portraits, what is he known for? His brilliant series of paintings of ballet dancers and of men and women in cafés. Surely, he didn’t paint them in self-imposed quarantine.

That is the contradictory nature of the creative process: you must go out into the hubbub of the world to experience it, and quarantine yourself to the confines of your study to express it. Even the composition of music needs this duality: The final version of Beethoven’s only opera, *Fidelio*, came about when he was almost completely deaf. This must be the ultimate example of an artist’s immersion in the world (Beethoven’s interaction with the opera company and its singers) and his isolation (the composer’s deafness). A less extreme example is his Sixth Symphony. The full title is, ‘Pastoral Symphony, or Recollections of Country Life’. Beethoven publicly declared the piece’s ‘extra-musical’ purpose: Expression of Nature. This is not surprising because he frequently left Vienna for the countryside to go on walks by himself. Look at the symphony’s programmatic ideas – A Shepherd’s Pipe, Birds in Song, Flowing Streams and Thunderstorm, and you know that these are ‘felt moments’, not ideas plucked out from the air in a bare room.

Einstein liked to go for long walks on the beach, ‘so I can listen to what is going on inside my head’. As for us, we may be alone on the beach or walking in the countryside or in a room on Silver Street or sitting under an apple tree...or in a room in an apartment in Mumbai. Having been through the tumult of our frenetic world, the lockdown is our chance to listen to what is going on inside our heads.

 **NCPA@home**

The background of the entire image is a photograph of the interior of a grand, ornate concert hall. The ceiling is a complex, dark-colored structure with a central circular medallion and radiating beams. The walls are light-colored with decorative panels. The floor is a polished, reflective surface. In the foreground, rows of dark, upholstered seats are visible, facing towards the stage area. The overall lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the architectural details.

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# THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

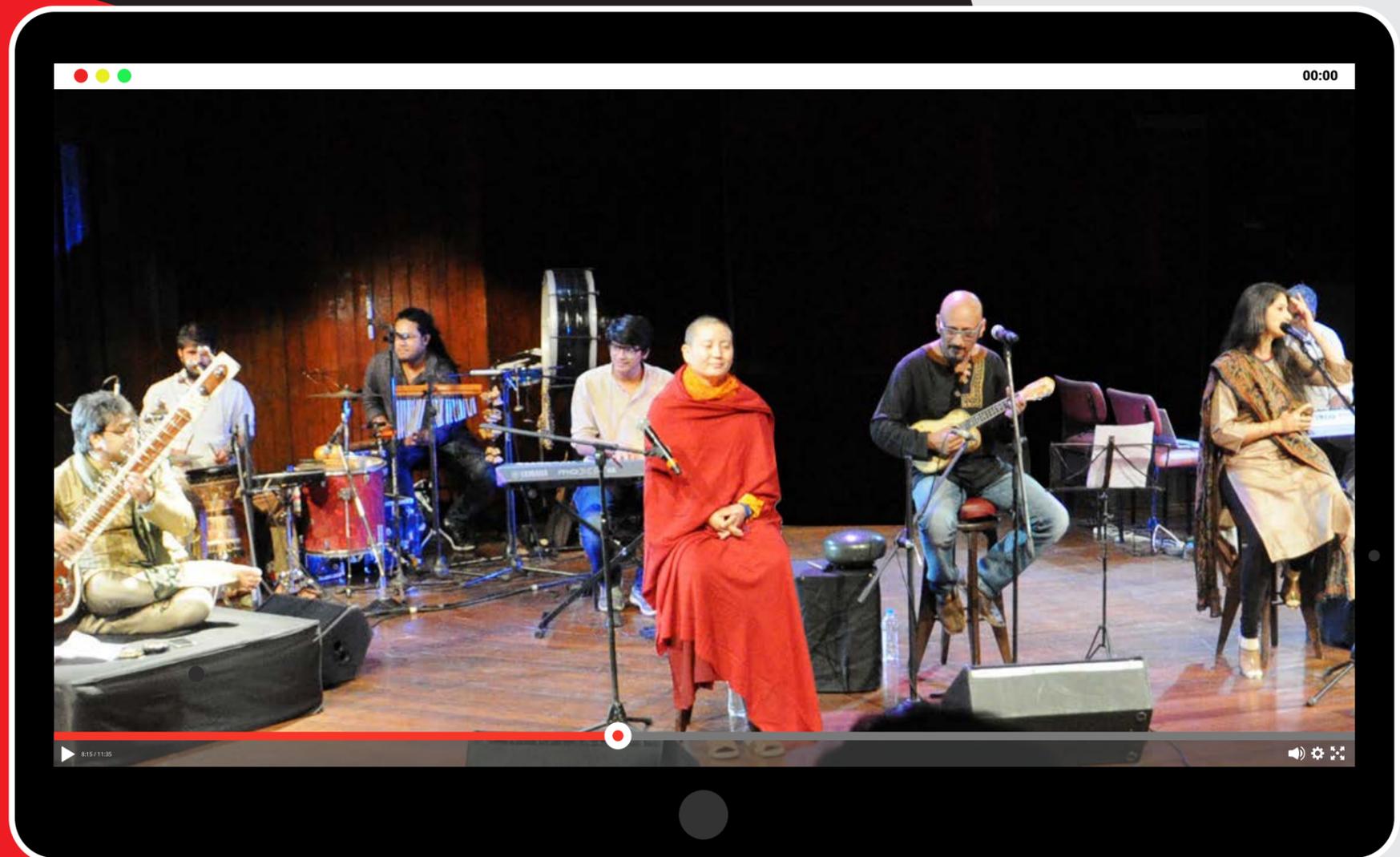
The pause on live performances at the NCPA has been a period of brainstorming that has resulted in innovative online offerings, and the creation of a strategy for times beyond the lockdown that celebrates the live medium and widens its reach digitally.

By Snigdha Hasan

**T**he beginning of March at the NCPA was about the dynamism that flows through the corridors of a cultural organisation with a packed calendar. The SOI Spring 2020 Season had just been successfully wrapped up and patrons were waiting for Sharmila Tagore's poetic tribute to the season of love. Iconic choreographies were being rehearsed for the NCPA *Mudra* Dance Festival, programming was underway for the first India World Choral Festival, International Jazz Day was only a month away and the NCPA production, *A Small Family Business*, was all set

for its premiere. But by mid-March, the vigour had made way for worry. A virus had hit the world, and it did not seem to be in the mood to make an exit anytime soon. Three months later, we are still pandering to its whims and fancies.

Even as attempts are being made to restore normalcy in critical facets of life, it will be a while until the NCPA, like other centres the world over, believes it is safe enough to open its doors again, and until even the most ardent lovers of the arts feel comfortable enough to gather to watch a live performance. In the meantime, everything is being done to bridge the distance to Nariman Point, albeit virtually.



## DIGITAL OFFERINGS

The NCPA was among the first institutions in the city to close its offices and theatres even before the lockdown was imposed, but work has not stopped for even a day. Matters of immediate concern and those of long-term planning are taken up by senior management and genre heads during daily online meetings. While initially the priority was to cancel/postpone shows, iron out the ensuing logistics, inform the audience of the same and initiate ticket refund processes online, the focus then shifted to exploring the digital medium to ensure culture reached people in these trying times in the safety of their homes. The NCPA@home YouTube broadcast series began on 3rd April and continues to present a wealth of performances from across genres of Western and Indian music and dance, chosen from the NCPA's archival library.

For an organisation whose raison d'être is the propagation of the finest quality of arts through live performances, this has not been an easy feat because the demands of the digital medium are entirely different. "Our recordings have been done for the purpose of documentation. The recordists involved lend technical expertise to the endeavour, but to make content more presentable calls for artistic inputs. Directors of photography and sound directors are better placed to decide the camera position, and take a call on the right moments for a close-up or zooming in or out," explains Nayan Kale, General Manager, Technical, NCPA.

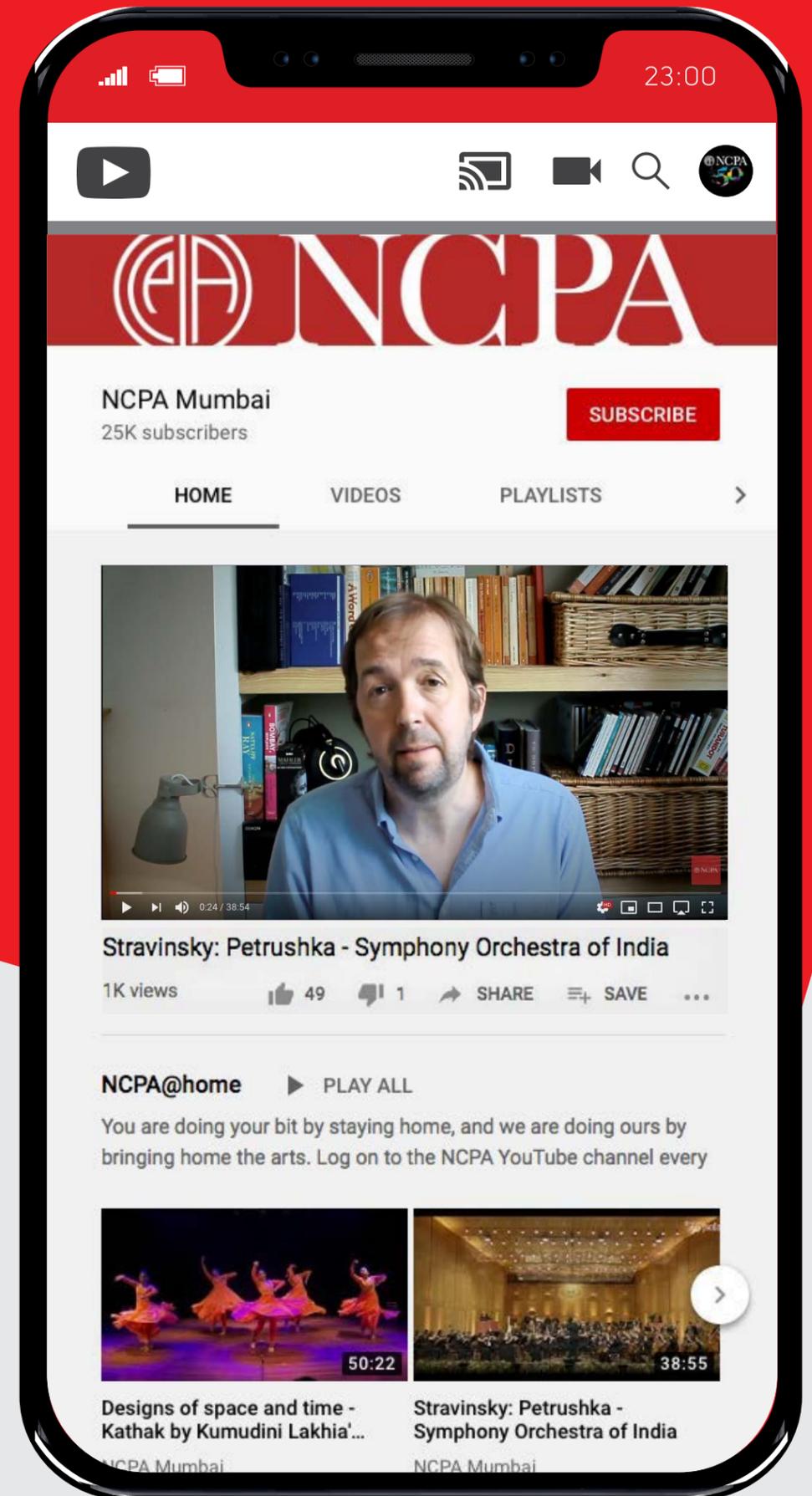
This relook at the existing recordings has proved to be helpful for the future. "We are now revisiting the material we already have to add a flavour of the pre-show and interval experience. There is some re-editing of the original footage where possible, though this is of necessity a painstaking process. The primary challenge is to create consistency across the finished broadcasts, and we are now working to ensure the recordings remain individual but are of consistent style, colour, brightness and quality," says Richard Nowell, Consultant, Technical, NCPA. A fine example of this revisit was the introductory video for the recent YouTube broadcast of the Symphony Orchestra of India's (SOI's) 2019 performance of *Petrushka*, under the baton of Alexander Lazarev. The insightful introduction by Mikel Toms, Resident Conductor, SOI, was recorded and rendered in the U.K. and added seamlessly to the concert recording for better

appreciation of the music in the context of the time it was composed in and the cultural setting of the famous ballet itself.

In keeping with social-distancing norms, the NCPA is also exploring the possibility of a format where artistes come together in the auditorium to perform, without the audience, so it can be uploaded online or aired digitally as a live show. And for this, the aesthetic considerations and technical requirements will vary. Nowell points out, "If we have a live audience as we record, there are two primary concerns: the first is to minimise the disturbance to the patrons caused by cameras and operators, the second is to try to capture some of the atmosphere and audience experience. Without an audience we have a great deal more flexibility in terms of camera positions and actions and the emphasis shifts to ensuring the most is made of the freedom to capture close-up detail and to shoot details from angles an audience may not normally see."

Innovation in online offerings from the NCPA is an ongoing process. While virtual lessons for the students of the SOI Music Academy are on in full swing, famous music pieces by international composers have been recorded by members of

**AN INSIGHTFUL INTRODUCTION BY MIKEL TOMS, RESIDENT CONDUCTOR, SOI, WAS RECORDED IN THE U.K. AND ADDED SEAMLESSLY TO THE RECENT YOUTUBE BROADCAST OF THE SOI'S 2019 PERFORMANCE OF *PETRUSHKA*, UNDER THE BATON OF ALEXANDER LAZAREV**





**IN KEEPING WITH SOCIAL-DISTANCING NORMS, THE NCPA IS ALSO EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF A FORMAT WHERE ARTISTES COME TOGETHER IN THE AUDITORIUM TO PERFORM, WITHOUT THE AUDIENCE, SO IT CAN BE UPLOADED ONLINE OR AIRED DIGITALLY AS A LIVE SHOW**

the SOI and the students from their respective locations the world over, with Music Director Marat Bisengaliev at the helm. Overcoming the issues of time difference, internet connectivity and ambient noise aside, recording individual instruments, stitching them together and streaming them online in a lossless format has been a new experience.

On International Dance Day on 29th April, Kathak exponent Aditi Mangaldas conducted a masterclass through the Facebook Live feature while a three-day celebration of International Jazz Day, an online initiative on the NCPA's Facebook page with the hashtag NCPACelebratesJazzSeries, saw 75 musicians from the world over perform from their homes.

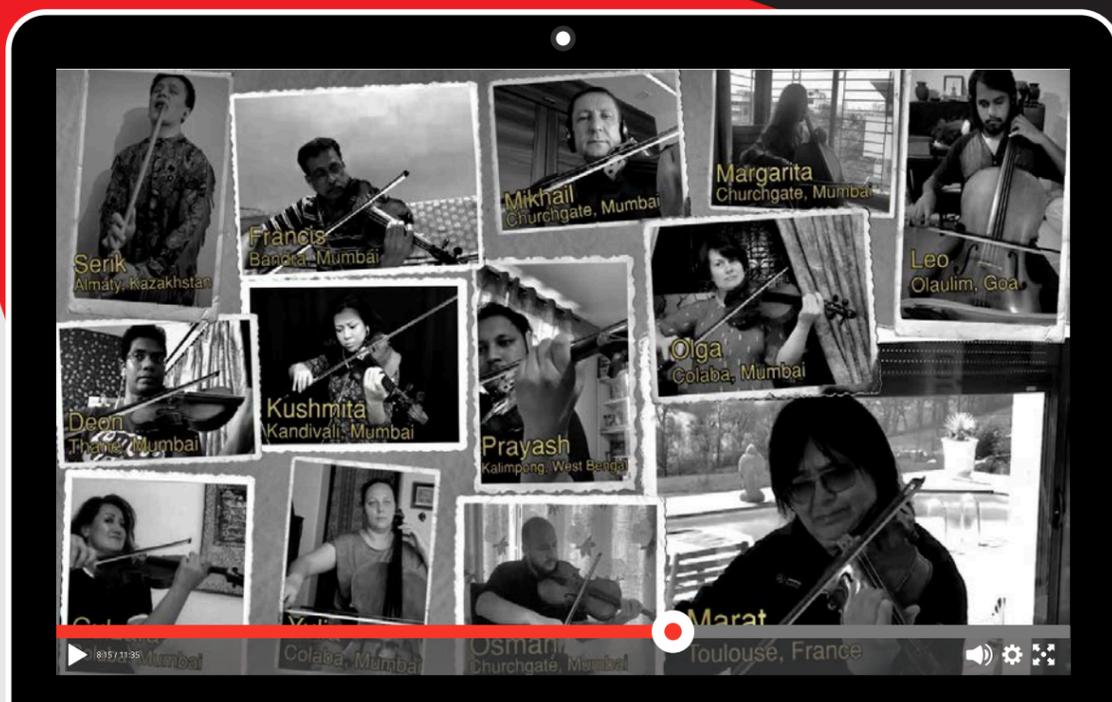
Live online interaction with artistes at the time of YouTube broadcasts has been facilitated wherever possible. Viewers were in for a surprise when during the streaming of *Song of the Himalayas*, curated by the Indian Music genre, composer Shantanu Moitra, vocalist, Buddhist nun and UNICEF Goodwill ambassador Ani Choying Drolma, vocalist Kaushiki Chakraborty, sitarist Purbayan Chatterjee and flautist Ashwin Shrinivasan were virtually present using the Live Chat option to answer questions and explain musical intricacies.

### HOME OF LIVE PERFORMANCES

Digital streaming has undoubtedly widened the reach of the NCPA and taken its carefully curated programmes to viewers beyond Mumbai and India. "NCPA senior management is taking great care to understand the needs of our existing audience and the desires of our possible future audience. Establishing

a sustainable, high-quality online offering is critical to our future and our strength lies in the depth and breadth of our different genres. At the same time, the management is well aware that an online presence is important but in the end, we want people to come to our campus and experience great artistic works together. The live experience and sense of sharing that experience remains crucial," says Nowell.

When the theatres reopen, capturing a live event without intruding on the audience experience will call for a protocol, which is being worked on. "It is important that high-quality cameras and lighting is used to record productions, but one of the key priorities is to ensure they are as compact as possible and located in positions that provide both the best camera angles and least audience disruption...The refurbishment of our video editing suite has moved up the priority list as post-production editing is time-consuming and should be brought in-house. We are also investigating having our own dedicated media servers and possibly even our own online platform to ensure our content is available to all at all times. Such an investment is huge and though time is of the essence during the current pandemic, the management is well aware it is easy to make mistakes by rushing to make a decision on such things," Nowell elaborates, while underlining what is of essence when it comes to carving the way forward, "The NCPA is about excellent work performed live and experienced together. The one thing we are keen to maintain is the absolute focus on quality. As always, technical must and will follow the art wherever it leads." ■



# THE STAGE IS SET

**Bruce Guthrie**, Head of Theatre and Film at the NCPA, talks about his vision for the department, the makings of good theatre and the performing arts in a post-Corona world.

**ON Stage (OS):** When you arrived here six months ago, what sense did you get of the theatre scene in Mumbai?

**Bruce Guthrie (BG):** Theatre in Mumbai is very vibrant. I spent the first three months meeting a lot of individuals and seeing as much theatre as I could. There are some incredibly driven people out there whose work is varied, immediate and alive. A very active dialogue goes on between the actor and the audience here, and that is not just in theatre, but most mediums of live performance. In terms of the craft, it is rather refreshing that it is not merely governed by design and technical attributes, but it is also very much about the story being told and the storytellers themselves. For the foreseeable future, a significant part of the work that will be made all around the world is going to be about the latter, which Indian theatre does really well.

In February this year, we had an open house at the NCPA, where several theatre groups came and discussed current practices. People asked me questions and I got to hear what's on their mind. It was a lovely way of introduction and I am hoping to have that dialogue with the theatre community on a more regular basis.

**OS:** Based on your experience of working with theatres in different parts of the world, what are some of the processes that you aim to put in place here?

**BG:** Structures and processes are there to support

A scene from *Constellations*, directed by Guthrie



and not to hinder. The infrastructure and bureaucracy that surrounds a production is a result of that, not a prerequisite for it to happen. Productions can very easily drown in administration. It is a critical point to make that in most of the places I have been in all over the world, it is about finding the right dialogue with the community, being sensitive towards what works within the community and what does not. We want to have transparency in why we make the work we make and how we go about making it. We want to make the NCPA as accessible as possible. We have a duty to present and produce the very best work for our audiences and that work needs support. We can be a bridge between cultures and disciplines, which will lead to exciting work emerging.

**OS:** Tell us about the direction in which you wish to steer theatre at the NCPA.

**BG:** We are moving from being a purely hosting venue to being a producing house where we create our own work. It has been a while since the theatre department has been headed by someone who is also a director – Dr. Vijaya Mehta was one of them – and that makes a difference because not only am I programming work that will appeal to audiences in the city and on the international stage, but I am also hoping that we will be able to produce and facilitate the work of other directors and writers. Being able to visualise that is exciting.

We have also been looking at festivals that have worked previously but have stopped for one reason



Bruce Guthrie (left) in conversation with Jim Sarbh after the staging of *Sea Wall*

or another by asking questions like “if we revisited them what would they look like?” As someone who has come into the role from outside the country, I have no preconceived notions about what is possible and what isn’t, which is exciting. It means there is an openness to rediscover and build on past success by asking robust questions about how we improve and develop going forward. In addition to that, we plan to present more local work with regional companies. But the emphasis is always on quality. Our core values of artistic excellence – work that informs, entertains and ultimately moves people – is what good theatre is to me and we are trying to achieve that in as many different ways as we can. The idea is to welcome artistes and audiences to celebrate our spaces and we have got great spaces. There is a tremendous history to the organisation and to theatre in Mumbai. What I want to do is to tap into that and respect that whilst also taking it forward in a direction that maybe it has never been taken before. If we apply a common theatrical methodology and think in terms of Stanislavski’s ‘what if?’ we end up with an array of possibilities that the NCPA has a unique potential to realise.

**OS: Has the pandemic proved to be a dampener on those possibilities?**

**BG:** When the lockdown was imposed, several plans were very close to being realised including taking shows to London and other European venues, partnering up with companies in Singapore,

commissioning of new writing, etc. Everything has been put on hold at the moment, but we are working hard to keep those relationships up and to brainstorm ways in which we can continue to collaborate with companies that may well want our work in the future. By creating those links outside, you create a two-way street – bringing world-class international work to the NCPA, which we already do, and taking world-class work that is made in India by Indian writers, performers, directors and producers to the international stage. It is critical for the growth of theatre in Mumbai. Until we know how the COVID-19 situation unfolds, it is going to be difficult to nail down dates but floating plans can still be made. If we are in a position to act on those plans relatively swiftly whenever possible, it would be a positive step towards helping the theatre community get back on its feet.

There are several questions we are asking at the NCPA. Once the lockdown is over, what would the new normal be? How do we connect with audiences and how do we welcome them back to our theatres once it is safe and responsible to do so? When we come back, how do we come back better than ever? How do we make audiences excited about experiencing art together? We are animals of community. We thrive in company. We need connection and that connection comes through a live experience. We have been thinking about how to provide people with cultural nutrition and we are doing that through the NCPA@home

online series.

The lockdown has also given us the time to reflect upon things that work well and things that we can improve. We have staged *Constellations*, *Sea Wall*, curated several events for the ADD ART Festival, and *The Mirror Crack’d* was our first properly produced play at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre. The act of doing is how you learn.

**OS: Both *Constellations* and *The Mirror Crack’d* had long runs. Is this something you plan to continue with other NCPA productions?**

**BG:** The benefits of doing longer runs are universal. It allows all departments to make improvements. While we did have a longer run of shows for *The Mirror Crack’d*, we did not have very many previews. In the West, certainly in London and New York, the actual shows are preceded by a series of previews because as soon as you put something in front of the audience, the dynamic changes. If we can do that here, and have a run of 10, 20 or 30 shows, the actors would get a proper opportunity to investigate their characters. It is also critical to the environment in which designers wish to create and realise work. The quality of work would improve because it will settle. And I believe there is an audience for that kind of work.

I have seen plays quite early on in the run and then

**We are animals of community. We thrive in company. We need connection and that connection comes through a live experience.**

gone back and seen them much later. Things develop massively in the later shows because the actors have practised. Being an actor is one of the most difficult jobs you can have. There is a reason there are only a handful of properly celebrated actors in the world because it is incredibly difficult to bare your soul and give up a little piece of yourself for the audience’s viewing pleasure. If we want actors to have an opportunity to tell a story in the best way that they possibly can, they need to be given more opportunities to tell the story.

**OS: Rehearsals and rehearsal spaces in the city are another challenge.**

**BG:** It would be brilliant to have our spaces alive with rehearsal all the time, but we need to find a way of making it cost-effective and accessible for companies. When theatre companies are in rehearsal, they have no income from box office to pay their actors, director, stage management, etc. Like many companies now, we pay people for rehearsal and it is something I want to make sure we continue doing because that is the labour-intensive part for the company. It is important for actors to feel that they can give you their full attention and not be doing other jobs because they need to keep the money coming in. I am in awe of people doing so many different things here and doing them rather well. That said, creating an environment where people can be specialists in their chosen role would be preferable

to enforced multitasking by necessity. If we can do that, then the likelihood of having better quality work is much higher.

**OS: You have conducted several theatre-based workshops, a practice you are now continuing online.**

**BG:** I have conducted online sessions for the Drama School Mumbai, Royal Academy of Music, and will be doing

the same for the Guildford School of Acting, and London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. I have been making time for ‘surgeries’ every two weeks, where anyone from the field of theatre can get in touch with me and ask me questions about directing career, projects, being an actor, etc. There are several young actors out there who have just graduated and are about to come out into the industry, but it has been taken away from them. To have that rhythm completely upset is difficult for a young person to cope with. Just to be able to talk about theatre and the art itself makes us feel better. In May, there was a ZOOM Theatre Adda where it was wonderful to see theatre makers from across the country join in for a group meeting.

Ultimately, what we do is live experience. We all live in hope that the world scientific community comes up with a solution to this common issue. I think people will have a renewed sense of value in live experiences following the lockdown. I look forward to the day when we will all be back together and telling each other stories. ■

# GOING ONLINE: A NEW REALM FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

From what it means to perform before a camera to consuming art for free, **Swapnokalpa Dasgupta**, Head – Programming (Dance), NCPA, addresses the many questions that the digital shift in cultural consumption has given rise to

**N**o one can undermine the effect of a live performance. The experience of alert minds bonding through the arts. A silent exchange of energy, a silent connection giving rise to multiple emotions. A few weeks ago, this medium suddenly came to a standstill. With the country under lockdown, live performance spaces closed. Empty stage, vacant seats. But the show must go on. And it did, with the NCPA and many more cultural organisations screening their archival treasures online.

As an arts manager at the NCPA, going online has given us the opportunity to add more art to the lives of our audiences. With live shows we were only able to reach out to people who physically visit our venues, but the digital presence has helped us take our shows to the lady who perhaps has never stepped out of her kitchen.

## Personal engagement

My grandmother would listen to the radio as she cooked. Those memories of Indian classical music drenched in her mild spices still linger in that space. Growing up, her kitchen was a space that I connected with good art. An experience dotted with explanations of ragas or stories of wondrous *sadhanas* of acclaimed artistes as she chopped away, which was no less than a course in music appreciation for a young mind. She always missed not being able to watch dance performances. Today, she would have been happy.

Every time we have a screening of our music and dance shows, we have audiences sharing photos of themselves – at their homes, with their kids watching a classical performance. Going online has created a

Mallika Sarabhai



Aditi Mangaldas



Nrityagram



Malavika Sarukkai



Birju Maharaj



new venue for us – both to perform and to experience.

But how different is it? How is the community engaging with it? It is not that Facebook, YouTube and similar portals did not exist before. But with other avenues for performance being closed, they are under the spotlight. For dance, the online platform is being used in multiple ways – dance classes are being conducted through portals, videos of performances are being uploaded, the Live feature on Facebook has given artistes an opportunity to perform from their homes during lockdown. Artistes are also presenting collaborative videos put together as one dance piece with snippets of them performing in their respective spaces across the globe.

## Wonders and worries

On International Dance Day, celebrated on 29th April, we took the opportunity to conduct our first Facebook Live dance workshop with acclaimed artiste Aditi Mangaldas. It was a unique experience for me, which I organised and attended – all from the confines of my home. My helplessness at not being able to be physically present at the performance venue slowly turned into a feeling mixed with wonder and satisfaction when over 200 people started engaging with the telecast as Aditiji went live from her home. As she went from one step to the other, carefully explaining each stance, all the while addressing 200 students without seeing them from her empty room, I wondered how the art itself is changing with the venue. When I spoke to Aditiji about the experience, she said, “My living room has become my stage and I look for audiences within me. Maybe this immersion will help us reach out over dots and dashes across the globe.”

With opportunity comes the necessity of focussed research and planning so that the presentations do justice to the art and the artiste. And with that also comes the question of sustainability.

I know that the NCPA and other organisations that ticket their shows have put in a lot of effort in cultivating the habit of paying for good art. With a lot of content now being shared for free – though a beautiful way of reaching out in such tragic conditions – there is also a growing concern over this habit being lost. Though in most cases, the box office collection for classical arts performances barely covers the expenses of putting up the show, this participation from the audience in acknowledging the efforts and years of hard work put in by the artistes is important. It is important to that young kid sitting with her parents watching Indian classical dance with a paid subscription to believe in her dancing talent and that it matters to the world as much as her skills in solving trigonometry.

So what kind of content then should be made available for free online? It is tough to answer this. Probably something which cannot be recreated or has been extensively performed (and some investment has been recovered). New content (unless supporting a cause) should be reserved for the special person who shows respect to the process of creation through subscription. ■

# ON A LITERARY NOTE

From encyclopaedias and biographies to tomes on pedagogy and online resources, **Dr. Suvarnalata Rao**, Programming Head - Indian Music at the NCPA, recommends essential reading to widen your understanding of and delve deeper into the genre.

## On Hindustani music

The NCPA Reference Library is a repository of books on the performing arts as well as material that sets the arts in their widest context. *Essays in Indian Ethnomusicology* (1998) by renowned scholar-musician, composer and ethnomusicologist Dr. Ashok Ranade is a microcosm of this defining principle of the library from the shelves of which it has been picked up by several researchers and students. Through 27 essays, the book places music in India in the wider perspectives of religion, philosophy, linguistics, poetics, theatre-arts, folklore and aesthetics, helping readers appreciate Indian music and culture as inseparable entities.

Any essential reading on Hindustani music is incomplete without a mention of another of Dr. Ranade's seminal works, *Hindustani Sangeet* (1997). It sheds light on the structure, concepts and forms of Indian music in a detailed yet easy-to-grasp manner. The various styles of singing (from *thumri* to *ghazal* and *bhajan*), the many *gharanas* of music and the rich musical instruments of India all get their due in the book.

*Pillars of Hindustani Music* (1993) by B.R. Deodhar is rare to come by in bookstores today. A classical singer, musicologist and music educator of repute who was awarded the Padma Shri, Deodhar edited the Hindi music monthly, *Sangeet Kala Vihar*. His columns in the magazine, which included biographies of 19th-century Indian musicians, were published in this book, regarded as an important publication in the documentation of the Hindustani music tradition.

An eminent scholar of literature, philosophy and music, Dr. Thakur Jaideva Singh's *History of Indian Music* (1994) covers diverse periods that left an indelible mark on making Hindustani and Carnatic musical traditions what they are today. From the music of the Indus Valley Civilisation to that of the Vedic and Epic ages as well as that found in other religious scriptures, the book documents it all while also featuring authors, composers and musicians from the 9th to 20th centuries.

From Swami Prajnananda's relentless work in the history and philosophy of Indian music emerged several scholarly gems, one of which is *A Historical Study of Indian Music* (1965). Covering a vast expanse of time, the book explores ancient musical instruments, the concept of raga, the origin and development of *dhrupad* and *khayal*, and the close

relationship between music and dance.

*Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (1993) by Allyn Miner brings to light the early history of the two most prominent stringed instruments of northern India, distilled from written, oral, and pictorial sources. Miner, a concert performer on the sitar, is a lecturer in the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Her area of work includes the social history of music in South Asia, and Sanskrit, Hindi and Urdu musicological literature.

Among his many works that contributed greatly to scholarly understanding of Carnatic music, P. Sambamurthy's *Aids to the Teaching of Music* (1984) draws from his own life. A law graduate, he chose a career in music, becoming the Head of the Department of Indian Music at the Madras University. The book includes chapters on such topics as music and its place in education, music in training schools and training colleges, musical tests, music as a career, etc.

## For reference

The world of music is enormous, and an academic publication that does justice to this vastness with authority is *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (1988). A series of encyclopaedias, it comprises volumes dedicated to the music of Africa, South America, The United States and Canada, Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, The Middle East, Europe, and Australia and the Pacific Islands, each edited by ethnomusicologists from the specialised area of study.

## Biographies, etc

The story of Gauhar Jaan is, in a way, the story of the momentous changes music in India went through at the turn of the 20th century. *My Name is Gauhar Jaan: The Life and Times of a Musician* by Vikram Sampath chronicles the journey of the eminent Hindustani vocalist whose was the first Indian voice to ever be recorded. Despite her significant contribution to popularising classical music, her name was nearly lost in the annals of history until the biography revived interest in her life.

For 70 plus years, the Nightingale of India, as Sarojini Naidu christened M.S. Subbulakshmi, made the country gasp each time she sang in her exquisite voice, hitting the perfect notes. *M.S. Subbulakshmi:*



*The Definitive Biography* (previously published as *MS: A Life in Music*; 2004), by noted writer and columnist T.J.S. George recounts the journey of the singer extraordinaire, her musical upbringing and growth as a classical vocalist, her many influences and mentors, and the cultural icon she will always be remembered as.

Some lives are so grandly lived they need revisiting from time to time. While Oliver Craske's *Indian Sun: The Life and Music of Ravi Shankar*, the first biography of the sitar maestro, is an eagerly awaited one by connoisseurs in India, Ravi Shankar had himself chronicled his moments of introspection in the form of the autobiographies, *My Music, My Life* (1968) and *Raga Mala: Autobiography of Ravi Shankar* (1997; edited by George Harrison). The latter is a tell-all memoir, acclaimed as much for its candour as for it being steeped in the sitarist's musicality.

## Online resource

Music in Motion: The Automated Transcription for Indian Music (AUTRIM) is a groundbreaking project by the NCPA and University of Amsterdam, which puts at the disposal of students, teachers and researchers of music a tool that enables them to take a zoomed-in look-and-listen of North Indian music. The project was undertaken at the behest of former chairman of NCPA, the late Dr. Jamshed Bhabha, who dreamt of developing a system of notation that would be specifically fit to describe and analyse Indian music with all its fine nuances and inflections. The website presents a wealth of information on the theoretical concepts governing the North Indian art music and offers over 100 compositions in 84 ragas performed by top-ranking vocalists, transcriptions of which can be both "seen" and "heard" in great detail. For more information, visit [www.autrimncpa.wordpress.com](http://www.autrimncpa.wordpress.com) ■

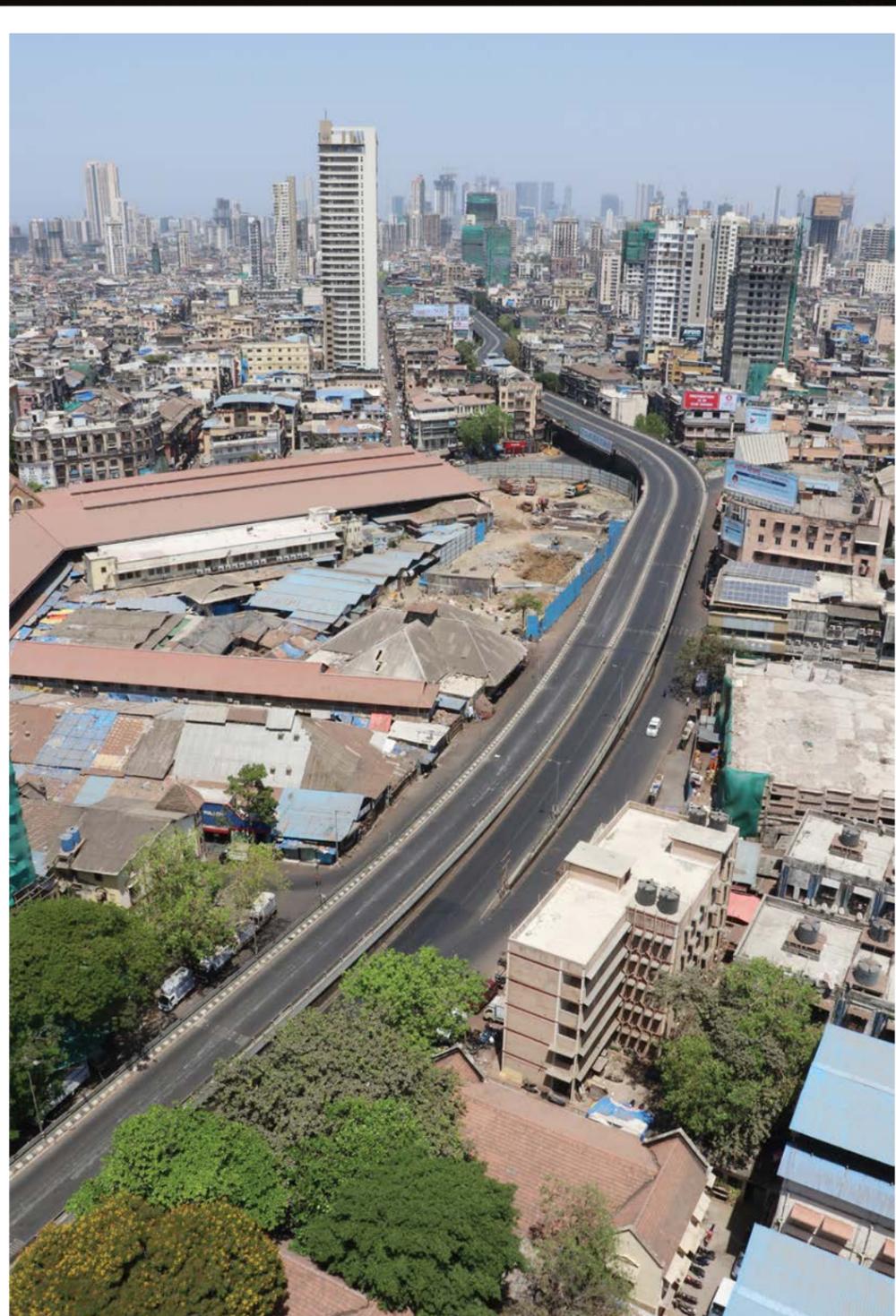
# A Crisis Captured

As the Piramal Gallery at the NCPA prepares to host an exhibition that documents the city battling a pandemic, we bring you glimpses of what photographers from Mumbai witnessed through their lenses.

From masked faces, and policemen and healthcare workers taking on a mysterious foe to empty roads and serpentine queues of the makers of our homes desperate to reach home, the unravelling of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented many shades of humanity. When life trudges back to normal, these images may begin to fade away from our memories as the more immediate needs take precedence.

As a way of documenting a pandemic that gripped the world and brought the city that never sleeps to a standstill, the Piramal Gallery will be organising a photo exhibition, which will be hosted at the NCPA once the lockdown is systematically lifted and it is declared safe to visit public places. "This exhibition will also be an online one, so that those who are unable to travel can experience moments that photographers and photojournalists have captured," says Mukesh Parpiani, Head, Piramal Gallery.

As submissions start pouring in, we bring you frames from across Mumbai that speak of a city's tryst with a virus.



→ A CHILD HOLDS A PLACARD ON GUDI PADWA IN GIRGAUM. PIC/BHUSHAN KOYANDE

↓ J.J. FLYOVER, SHOT FROM HAJ HOUSE. PIC/VASANT PRABHU





↑  
DESERTED C.S.T. AREA AS SEEN FROM D.N. ROAD.  
PIC/VASANT PRABHU

↓  
A MIGRANT FAMILY WALKS ON MUMBAI-NASHIK HIGHWAY.  
PIC/PRAVEEN KAJROLKAR



↑  
POLICE ENFORCE LOCKDOWN ON  
MOHAMMED ALI ROAD.  
PIC/BHUSHAN KOYANDE



↓  
TRAINS PARKED ON  
PLATFORMS AT C.S.M.T.  
PIC/VASANT PRABHU

↑  
A SECURITY GUARD AT WORK  
BELOW PAREL FLYOVER.  
PIC/BHUSHAN KOYANDE



→  
A MEDICAL TEAM CHECKS TEMPERATURES IN A  
DOOR-TO-DOOR CAMPAIGN IN LOWER PAREL.  
PIC/BHUSHAN KOYANDE



ULLSTEIN BILD/ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES

# MAN OF MANY

## *Firsts*

**Cited as the first composer to rethink every parameter of his music, Franz Liszt was an inveterate boundary-pusher, as eccentric as he was prolific, and without a doubt, the prototype of the modern-day rock star.**

**By Manohar Parnerkar**

**F**ranz Liszt, the 19th-century Hungarian-born composer, pianist and conductor, will always remain special to me for two reasons: One, he was the first major composer of Western classical music whom I discovered through a Hollywood movie. This was the 1960 biopic, *A Song Without End*, starring British actor Dirk Bogarde as Liszt. And two, what

kindled my lifelong love affair with Western classical music was Liszt's perennially popular composition, Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp minor for solo piano. Little did I know then that not only was Liszt a pianist's pianist, but he was even more charismatic and colourful in real life than the version evoked on screen by Bogarde. Needless to add, Liszt was also a primeval force of 19th-century Romanticism.

## An overview

If the Romantic era were to be defined by one single composer, it would have to be Liszt. Yet, to say that the maestro was a colourful figure would be a truism, somewhat like saying that there are many stars in the sky. However, before coming to the many fascinating facets of Liszt's persona, let us take a quick look at his highly abbreviated curriculum vitae.

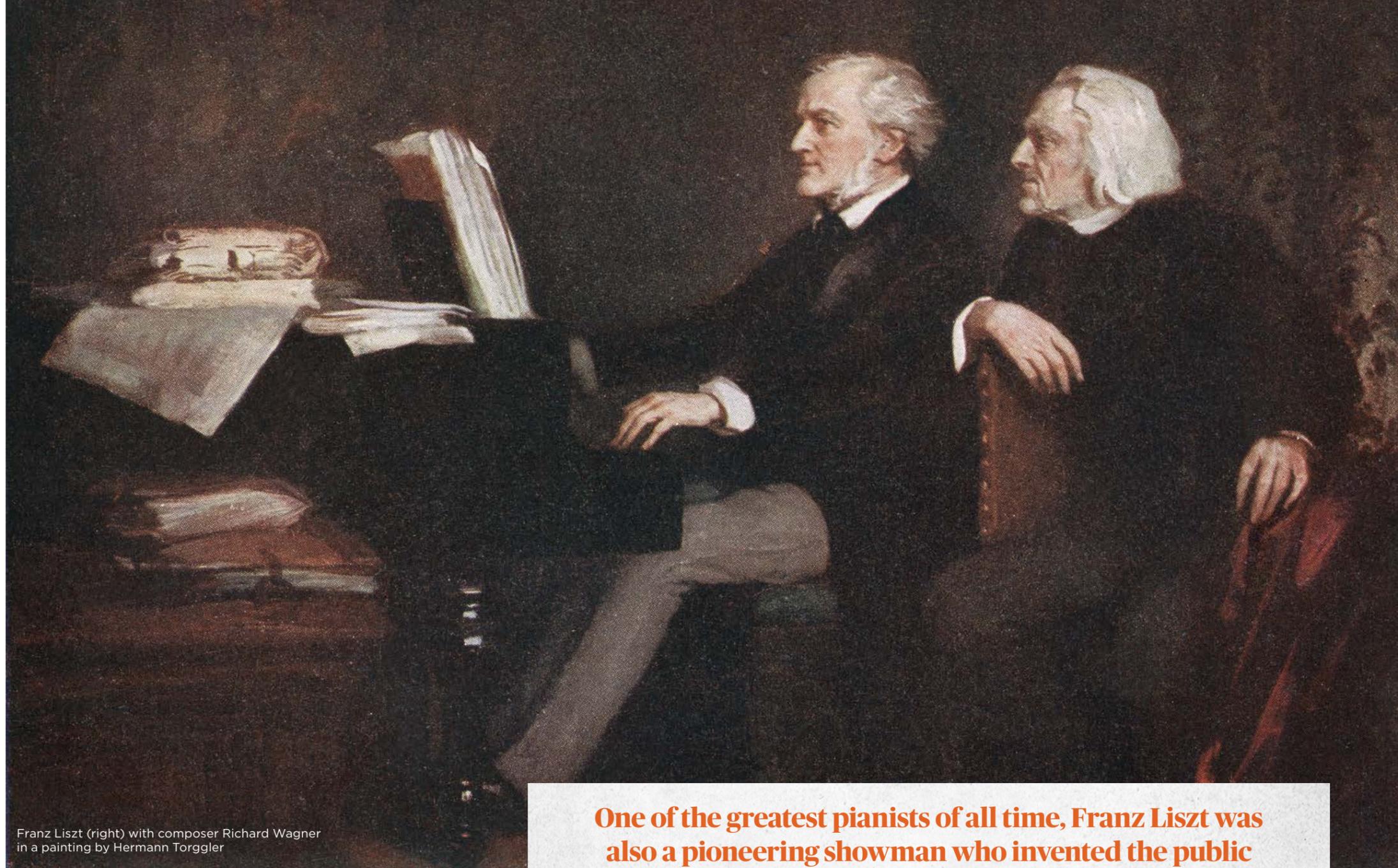
Liszt was born in Raiding (Hungary) in 1811, and died in Bayreuth (Germany) in 1886. After 1827, he lived most of his life in Paris. One of the greatest pianists of all time, he was also a pioneering showman who practically invented the public piano concert format and became the first international superstar of Western classical music. A versatile composer who wrote symphonies, songs, Masses, oratorios and concertos, he also invented a new musical genre called the symphonic poem. Not only was he a great conductor of music, he was also a piano teacher, a critic, an essayist and a littérateur.

## Lionised Liszt

The Pulitzer Prize-winning American music writer Harold C. Schonberg once characterised Liszt as a "virtuoso, charlatan, and prophet". Liszt could indeed be described as the perfect embodiment of Faust and Mephistopheles, the two polar protagonists of Goethe's classic play *Faust*; suffice it to say, the first stands for idealism while the second embodies the Devil himself. It also seems singularly apposite that Liszt based his famed *Faust Symphony* on the German poet's eponymous play in three movements, of which the first and third are titled *Faust* and *Mephistopheles* respectively.

Liszt was a man of legendary charisma, magnetism and aura. Tall and slim with a forceful mien, shoulder-length hair and a large forehead, Liszt cut a strikingly handsome figure. He was a piano conjurer who was armed with colossal technique and unprecedented sonority, and who would rouse his audiences with his playing to such ecstatic and frenzied states that the phenomenon that swept Europe came to be named as 'Lisztomania'. Women swooned over Liszt: some fought over shreds of his handkerchiefs and gloves. This latter-day Don Juan, who never married, acquired such notoriety even as a young lad that the last words ascribed to his dying father are supposed to be, "I fear for you and the women..."

Liszt's countless amorous conquests included Marie de Flavigny, countess d'Agoult and Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. He also took for a while as a mistress Marie Duplessis, the most famous French courtesan of her day, whose thinly veiled depiction appeared as Marguerite Gautier, the main character of the novel *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas the younger, and as Violetta, the heroine of Verdi's famous opera *La Traviata*. Cosima, one of the progeny he sired out of wedlock, was married first to the famous German conductor, pianist and composer Hans von Bülow, whom she divorced to marry Richard Wagner, Bülow's mentor.



Franz Liszt (right) with composer Richard Wagner in a painting by Hermann Torggler

The crowning irony was that Liszt was a personal friend of Pope Pius IX and in 1865, when the composer was 53, he took lower orders becoming an Abbe in the Catholic Church, even as he carried on his amorous escapades.

I must, however, clarify that the epithet 'charlatan' used by Schonberg for Liszt may not always justifiably apply to the composer. The first major music critic to describe him as 'charlatan', as early as in 1878, was none other than George Bernard Shaw. But to be fair to Liszt, Shaw's judgment of him was based on the composer's single work, his symphonic poem *Mazeppa*, which the redoubtable critic had found to be "false art lacking in musical power". Suffice it to say, later critical opinion on this particular attribute of the composer has been divided.

## A varied legacy

It is difficult to believe that the man who appears as something of a devilish Casanova also hid within

**One of the greatest pianists of all time, Franz Liszt was also a pioneering showman who invented the public piano concert format and became the first international superstar of Western classical music**

himself a most noble aspect. He was tireless in his charity work, and taught many young pianists, never charging them even when his own means were slender. As a proselytiser, he selflessly promoted or enhanced careers of several composers including those of Wagner and Chopin, the two most famous beneficiaries of his generosity.

A big part of Liszt's legacy are his splendid innovations. He invented the symphonic poem, also called a tone poem, which is a one-movement programmatic piece for orchestra. The programme on which the music is based may be narrative - for example, a legend, an episode from history, a story, a play, a poem or a painting which may have fired the composer's imagination. Liszt invented this entirely new musical form in the late 1840s, and wrote 13

symphonic poems including *Les préludes*, *Tasso* and *Mazeppa*.

As for his oeuvre, the paradoxes, contrasts and excesses that so dramatically marked Liszt as a man are fully reflected in the range of music that he created. To quote Alan Walker, the author of an impressive three-volume biography of Liszt published in 1996, "Liszt's music, like his life, is filled with contrast and unfolds across a variety of genres. It moves from the sacred to the secular, from the stage to the study, from 'programme' to 'absolute' music, from God to the devil. And these categories are themselves made more complicated by the variety of styles which cut across them. Some of Liszt's works are full-blooded, outgoing, flamboyant. Others are withdrawn, economical, ascetic." ■

# The Freedom Vector

On the occasion of International Jazz Day, the NCPA brought together 75 artistes from around the world in a virtual multi-day celebration.

According to American pianist Herbie Hancock, jazz is about 'being in the moment.' During an unprecedented global pandemic, this moment must come forth virtually, as it did during the NCPA's celebration of International Jazz Day last month.

## Virtual delight

First established in 2011 by UNESCO to raise awareness and promote interculturalism, International Jazz Day has been celebrated around the world on 30th April every year. In Mumbai, the day is celebrated with much aplomb as artistes and lovers of jazz converge on venues at the NCPA for a night to remember. This year, as we struggle to get used to a world in which social distancing signifies the new normal, and coming together is impossible, the NCPA started an online initiative on its Facebook page with the hashtag [NCPACelebratesJazzSeries](#). The series saw 75 artistes from India, Italy, Japan, Israel, Germany, Singapore, the Netherlands, U.K. and U.S.A among other countries, perform from their homes the genre of music that evokes freedom, unity and peace.

From the Netherlands, jazz vocalist Deborah J. Carter performed with husband Mark Zandveld on bass, while saxophonist Alexander Beets presented free improvisation after talking about how, in quarantine, 'the best we can do is study the legacy'. From Ohio, vocalist Mandy Gaines sang the 1971 song 'Sing' in her powerful voice, reminding us to sing out loud and sing out strong. Saxophonist Yuval Cohen from Israel, Philipp Meshcheryakov from Russia and two Viennese jazz groups, Triple Ace and Worry Later, also shared memorable performances.

## Inclusive all the way

Also part of the series are candid video messages of peace and love from many artistes, including New York City-based saxophonist and vocalist Camille Thurman and the wonderful Brazilian singer Jim Porto. Lovers of jazz in Mumbai will remember the exquisite talent and undeniable warmth of American-Cuban trumpeter Arturo Sandoval, who celebrated the NCPA ADD ART Festival with us last year. Sandoval shared an exclusive five-minute long piano improvisation for the [#NCPACelebratesJazzSeries](#), a virtual and literal treat for listeners. The series also includes videos from an array of very talented Indian artistes like Louiz Banks, Gino Banks, Keshia B, Anurag Naidu, Vinayak Pol, Sudhir Nagpal, Sarosh Nanavaty, and many others. A special performance of 'A Day in the Life of a Fool' and 'Manhã de Carnaval' featured musicians Olga Lyapina (violin), Osman Yarullin (violin) and Yulia Gallyamova (cello), from the Symphony Orchestra of India.

The comprehensive list of artistes who participated in this



**The [#NCPACelebratesJazzSeries](#) saw 75 artistes from India and around the world, perform from their homes the genre of music that evokes freedom, unity and peace**

initiative is daunting, to say the least. "We have a large pre-existing database of artistes who have performed at the NCPA over the years, all of whom are of the highest quality. We contacted musicians that performed at the International Jazz Festival in the past three years as well as local musicians who are actively involved in the jazz scene today," said Farrahnaz Irani, General Manager - International Music. The series took weeks of hard work by the International Music team, led by Irani. But with overwhelming response from local and international artistes, as well as from listeners of jazz, the result has been a jazzy success. ■

To watch this series, please visit [www.facebook.com/NCPAMumbai](https://www.facebook.com/NCPAMumbai) and search for [#NCPACelebratesJazzSeries](#)

# Version 2.0

All set to be launched on 1st June, the NCPA's website, [www.ncpamumbai.com](http://www.ncpamumbai.com), in its revamped avatar promises easier navigation and better access to the latest in the performing arts at the organisation.

“When the lockdown is lifted, how do we come back better?” is a question that has served as the compass for all matters discussed by the NCPA management in these last couple of months. While the fruits of the curatorial work undertaken by the genre heads can only be savoured once the theatres reopen, there is perhaps no better time than now to make digital improvements.

The new NCPA website, which goes live on 1st June, is a result of this effort.

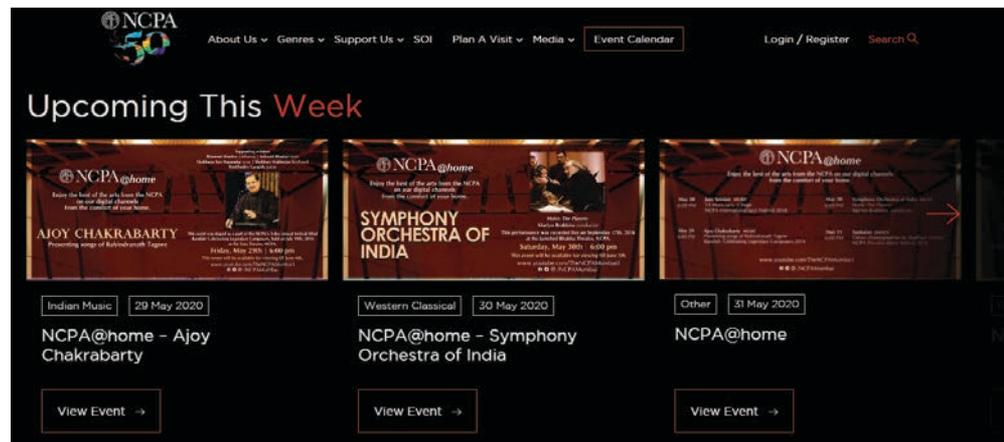
Technologically superior and faster to navigate than its earlier version, the site has been redesigned with the idea that its online presence must be duly representative of all that the NCPA stands for offline. With a fluid aesthetic that gives access to the genres of Indian, Western Classical and International Music, Dance and Theatre in one go, this digital home for the NCPA allows users from all over the world to experience and engage with the thoughtful curation of arts and culture that the institute is renowned for.

With many of us now surfing the internet on phones and tablets, the new design ensures the website loads smoothly on hand-held devices. At the same time, it has been kept in mind that the website needs to appeal to a wide audience and be universally accessible to both, ‘digital natives’ and those new to the online realm.

Some of the noteworthy features include:

## 1. NCPA@Home

With the NCPA broadcasting shows on YouTube from its archival library in the wake of the pandemic, a new feature allows users to enjoy and engage with them directly on the website itself. Under the ‘Venues’ section, ‘NCPA@Home’ houses these digital events, while also opening up the possibility for users outside of India to access with ease the talent, experiences and stories that the NCPA is known to curate.



## 2. Event Reminders

Through user research and interviews, it was learnt that while several members and patrons discover an upcoming event at the NCPA through the website, they are often unable to buy tickets or register for it at that time as ticket sales may not have been opened yet. And they may not always remember to do the same by the time box office opens. A feature has been developed to allow users to sign up for notifications to alert them when an event's registration or ticket sales open, so they never miss their favourite shows. Work is also underway to enable direct ticket purchase on the website, so members can avail discounts online.

## 3. Personalised Newsletters

The new website has the ability to understand the kind of events users like to attend and learn from their behaviour. This information is then used by custom recommendation algorithms that have been built to automatically send personalised newsletters that will include events that each recipient would most likely be interested in.

## 4. A Revamped Event Calendar

Through analysis of past traffic patterns, it has been learnt that users visit the NCPA website often to discover what's

going on as opposed to learning about a specific event. To help answer the question, “What's happening this weekend?” an easy-to-use calendar gives users quick access to discover events on their own terms, by sorting out programmes genre-, category- and date-wise, and plan their weekends around events happening at the NCPA.

## 5. The NCPA Connect

Much thought has been given to features to help members, patrons and new users stay connected with the latest in the performing arts at the NCPA. A new section called ‘In the News’ will be this window to the organisation. At the same time, the fascinating history of the NCPA – from its construction on land reclaimed from the sea to rare recordings of musical stalwarts, and visits of many luminaries – is now part of a timeline that strings together these milestones in a nutshell.

## 6. For Memorable Evenings

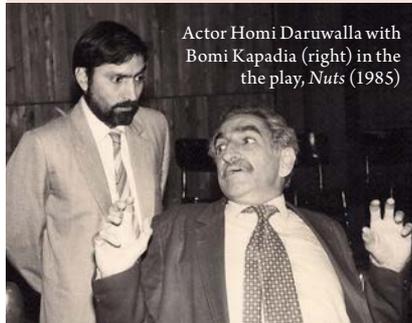
In addition to helping users find events to attend, the NCPA website will now be publishing information on what attendees can do before and after events. The website will help visitors discover great restaurants, bars and other experiences to plan their evenings of culture and make every visit to the NCPA a memorable one. ■

# Kaleidoscope

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

## ↘ A bold, operatic work

*The Central Park Five*, an opera about crime, punishment and eventual exoneration composed by Anthony Davis, with a libretto by Richard Wesley, has won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Music. In 1989, five African American and Latino teenagers (four of whom were younger than 16, and one was 16 years old at the time) were convicted of a horrific rape of a white woman that took place in New York City's Central Park, only to be exonerated through DNA evidence 13 years later. The case, that has resonated with America for over three decades, has seen numerous representations in media, including a documentary by Ken Burns and a Netflix series. Davis, who has been called a 'national treasure' for his work in opera, was in the city when the crime was committed, and has said that the idea of *The Central Park Five* came to him when Donald Trump, who is a character in the opera, became a serious contender for President of the United States. According to the Pulitzer jury, the opera 'skillfully transforms a notorious example of contemporary injustice into something empathetic and hopeful.' Currently, a professor of music at the University of California in San Diego, Davis has been honoured for his work by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the New York Foundation of the Arts, the MAP fund with the Rockefeller Foundation, Opera America, among many others. For more information, visit [www.longbeachopera.org/the-season/central-park-five](http://www.longbeachopera.org/the-season/central-park-five)



Actor Homi Daruwalla with Bomi Kapadia (right) in the play, *Nuts* (1985)



Bomi Dotiwala and Ruby Patel in the play *Laughter in the House - 2* (2017), at the Tata Theatre

## ↑ In memoriam

On 4th May, veteran theatre actor **Bomi Kapadia**, who acted in several English plays at the NCPA during the 1970s and 80s, passed away in Mumbai. He was an indispensable part of English-language theatre scene that gained popularity in the 1950s and '60s, and was beloved for his comedic timing in several Indian adaptations of popular English plays, including Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*. His passing was deeply felt by the thespians of Mumbai, including Rahul da Cunha who, having worked with him, wrote of the range of Kapadia's talent in a tribute: 'Bomi had that quality, where you felt he could deliver a line in a 100 different ways — pull it back, punch it, perform it, pause it, play it up.' Kapadia was 93 years old.

In another jolt to Mumbai's theatre community, senior actor **Ruby Patel**, who strode the worlds of English and Gujarati theatre with equal elan, passed away on 11th May. With several popular and acclaimed plays, including *Gher Ghungro Ne Ghotalo*, *Mota Dilna Mota Bawa*, *Hello Inspector*, *Nuts* and *Broadway Bound* to her credit she was a regular presence on the stages of the NCPA from the 1960s to '80s. Spotted early on for acting talent by the legendary writer-director Adi Marzban, she played a key role



Phillip Zarrilli

in *Laughter in the House*, a two-part tribute to Marzban, directed by Sam Kerawalla and staged at the NCPA in 2014 and 2017. Patel was 86, and is survived by husband and veteran actor Burjor Patel and three children including actor Shernaz Patel.

Performer, pedagogue and renowned theatre director **Phillip Zarrilli** succumbed to a 14-year-long battle with cancer on 28th April in the U.K. Lest these words mislead you, his partner and collaborator Kaite O'Reilly has written, 'I believe Phillip inhabited every second of his life until he departed, soaring, on a breath.' Only a few months ago, in January 2020, he spent a month in Kerala, staging his play, *Told by the Wind*, at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala, conducting workshops and connecting with his 'Indian family'. A trained artiste in Kathakali and Kalaripayattu, Zarrilli was also an award-winning author, whose books include *Psycho Physical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski*, in which he discussed his unique training process. He was 73 years old. For more information, visit [phillipzarrilli.com](http://phillipzarrilli.com)