

# ON Stage<sup>®</sup>

VOLUME 11 • ISSUE 4



## WE ARE BACK

THE NCPA CHAIRMAN AND HEADS OF GENRES REFLECT ON THE 18 MONTHS THAT STRENGTHENED THEIR RESOLVE TO EMERGE STRONGER. OUR STELLAR LINE-UP OF OPENING PERFORMANCES ARE A TESTAMENT TO THAT

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# Chairman's Note



I did not imagine that audiences around the world missed live performances as much as the inputs I received when word got around, 'Hurrah! The NCPA is opening again.'

Whether we are suffering from Zoom fatigue or are tired of sitting in front of the box eternally is a matter for you to decide for yourself. Personally, while enjoying many of the programmes, I am delighted we shall, at last, see flesh and blood instead of light and glass.

However, let us be grateful for small mercies. Some of the programmes were truly revealing and hugely informative. I speak of well-curated programmes such as 'Intelligence Squared'. I urge all our viewers to tune in whenever they can.

The usual whodunnits and documentaries on travel, etc. were of course, a delight, but hardly comparable to our glorious countryside.

So welcome back, and I hope you will help to fill our theatres with these joyous offerings.

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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Khushroo N. Suntook

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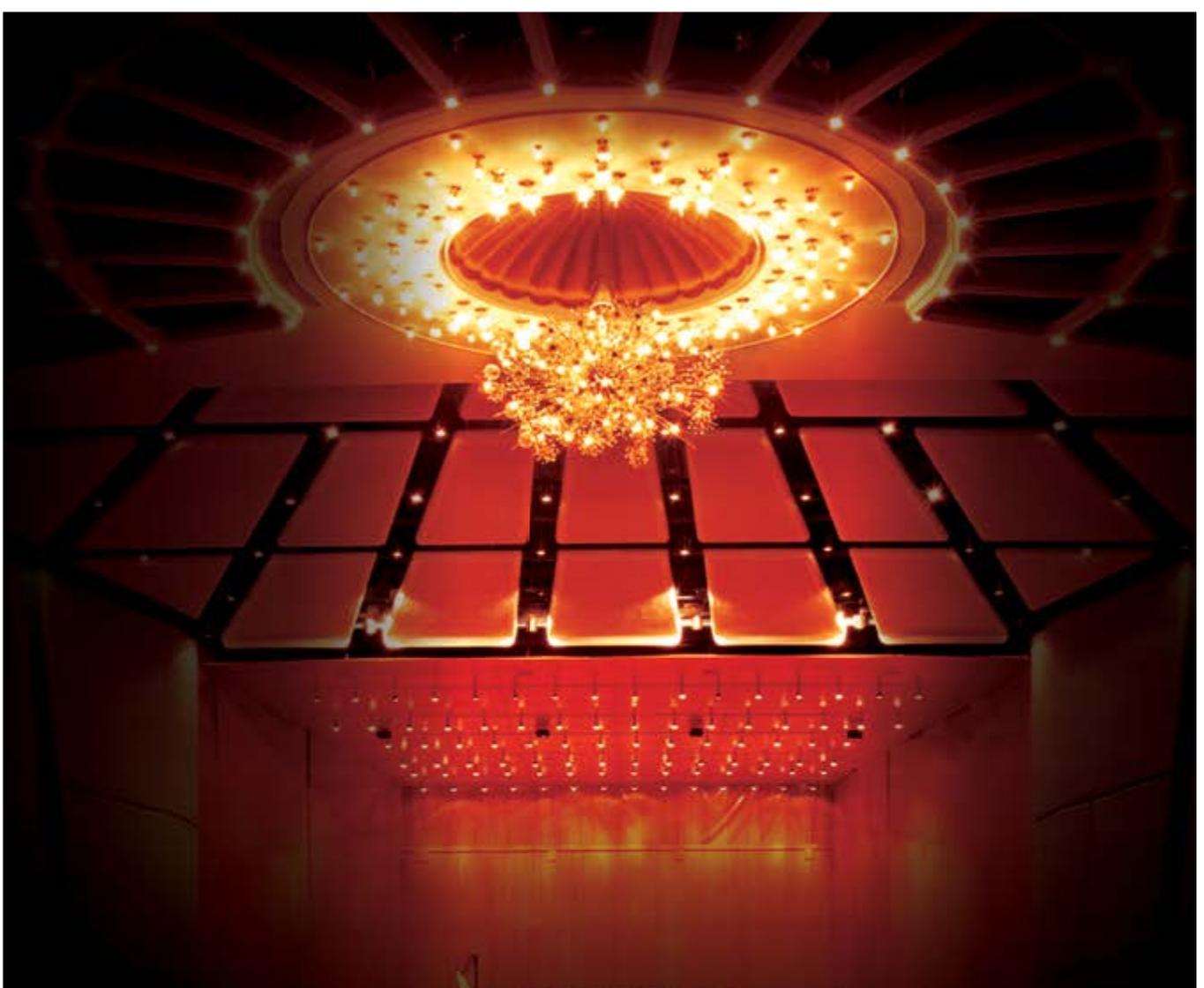
There is little doubt that the digital medium is going to remain a key component of consuming culture

even after live performances make a comeback. To reach audiences beyond its theatres, who tuned in to watch its online offerings, the NCPA has created state-of-the-art facilities in the new Digital Studio Hub. *Nayan P. Kale*, General Manager-Technical, writes about the development.

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### Fabulous Fifteen

India's first and only professional orchestra, founded at the NCPA, has turned 15. From performing challenging repertoire and playing with the legends of classical music to touring internationally with great success, the SOI has gone from strength to strength. We bring you memories, and messages from the pillars of the orchestra, the behind-the-scenes team and conductors under whose baton the SOI has performed.

A photograph of the interior of the NCPA auditorium, showing a large, ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling, illuminated with warm lights. The ceiling has a grid pattern with recessed lighting. The stage is visible in the background, and the overall atmosphere is warm and elegant.

# BACK ON STAGE

MUSIC | DANCE | THEATRE  
PHOTOGRAPHY AND MORE

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The arrival of jazz in Bombay was welcomed with open arms and it drew into the city the most notable artistes. Jazz Yatra, one of the first international festivals in Bombay, gave the genre the best possible exposure. *Narendra Kusnur* traces the journey.

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A notable name in the Hindi film industry, Anand Bakhshi's oeuvre is one that finds fans across age groups. The poet, however, was not an overnight success. Committed to his journey to becoming a lyricist, he took on the challenges life brought his way, and that's perhaps why listeners find depth and relatability in the songs penned by the wordsmith. We bring you edited excerpts from his biography, *Nagme Kisse Baatein Yaadein*, by his son, Rakesh Anand Bakshi.

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**Strength in Movement**

With its roots in martial arts and combat,

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*By Sudarshan Chakravorty*

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*ON Stage* brings you edited excerpts from the *NCPA Quarterly Journal*, an unsurpassed literary archive that ran from 1972 to 1988 and featured authoritative and wide-ranging articles. In the second part, scholar, curator

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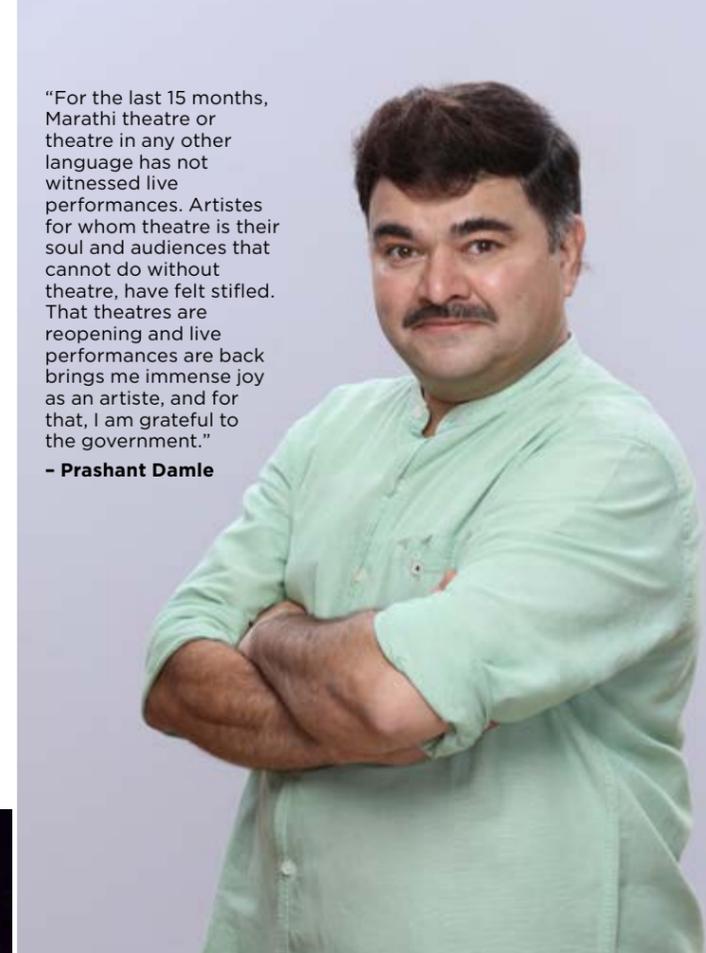
"It feels surreal to be back on stage. Two years of no live performances has been difficult. But the players are as hungry as I am and the audience will feel this hunger along with our renewed love of music. It is going to be an unforgettable evening."  
 - Marat Bisengaliev



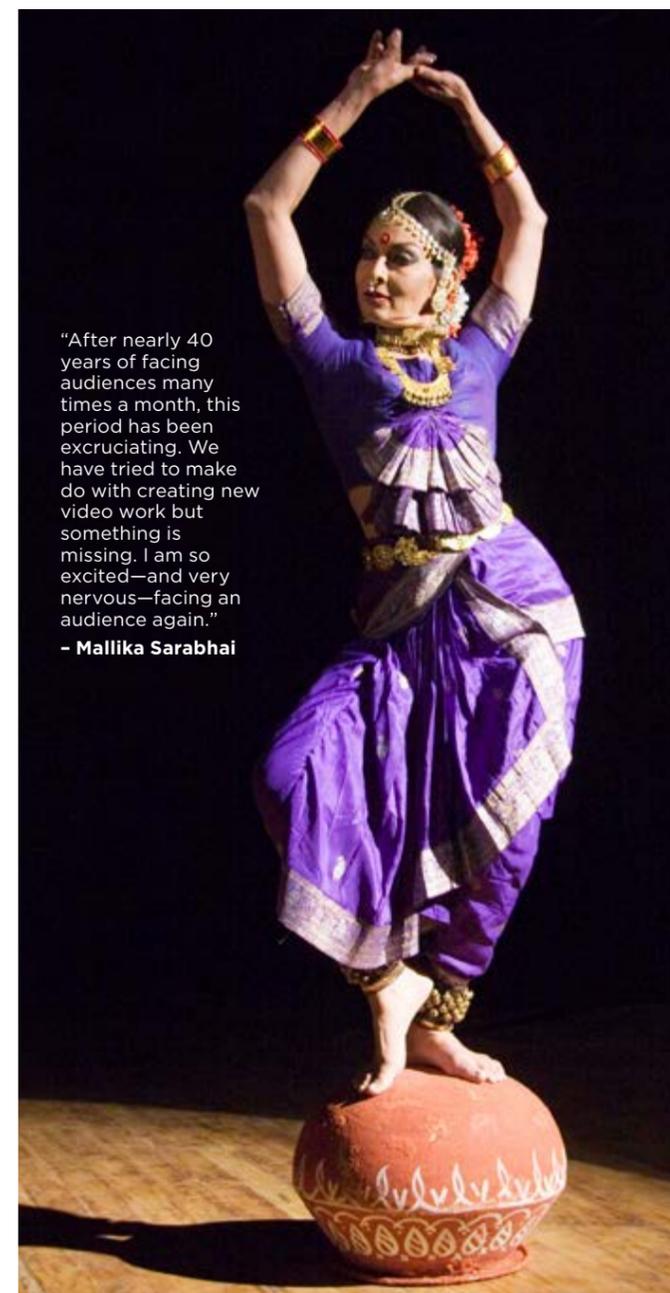
"Being back to the real deal couldn't have felt better. This will be my third live show post the 18-month hiatus and I haven't felt more alive. Though the virtual world has taken off with a big bang, nothing beats live performances. The connection one has with one's audience is what makes the performance worthwhile. The NCPA has been close to my heart and performing live at the Tata Theatre after this long a break brings nothing but sheer joy and happiness."  
 - Rashid Khan



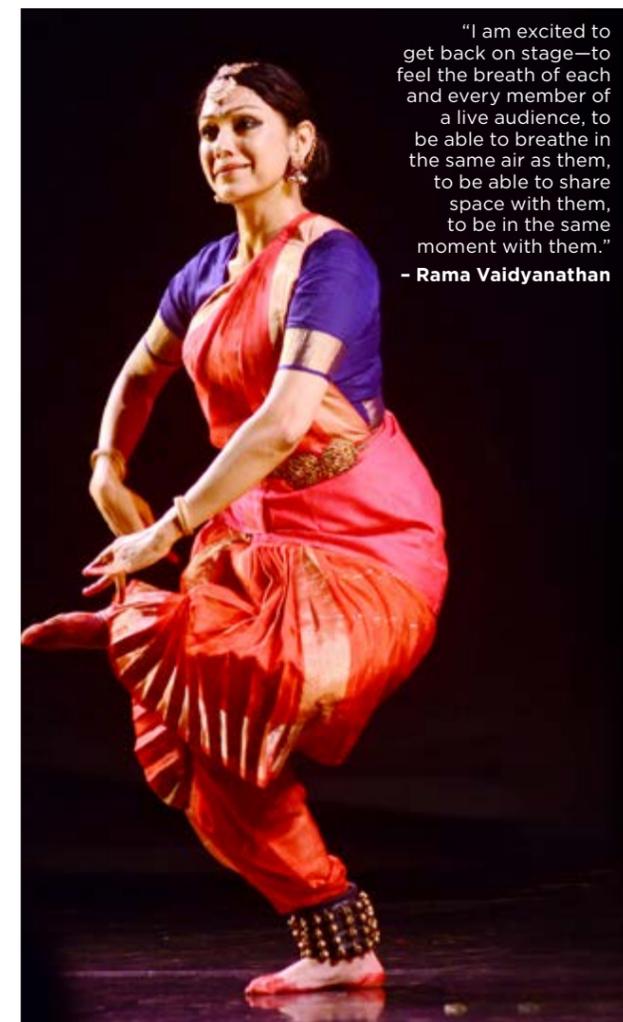
"The reopening of concert halls is a most welcome move. Nothing compares to playing live on stage to an audience applauding all the high moments in a performance. I am also aware that this bold move is not without precautionary measures that need to be followed at all times. The NCPA has always been among my most favourite concert halls—great sound, ambience and audience. Thank you, NCPA, for giving me the opportunity once again."  
 - Louiz Banks



"For the last 15 months, Marathi theatre or theatre in any other language has not witnessed live performances. Artistes for whom theatre is their soul and audiences that cannot do without theatre, have felt stifled. That theatres are reopening and live performances are back brings me immense joy as an artiste, and for that, I am grateful to the government."  
 - Prashant Damle



"After nearly 40 years of facing audiences many times a month, this period has been excruciating. We have tried to make do with creating new video work but something is missing. I am so excited—and very nervous—facing an audience again."  
 - Mallika Sarabhai



"I am excited to get back on stage—to feel the breath of each and every member of a live audience, to be able to breathe in the same air as them, to be able to share space with them, to be in the same moment with them."  
 - Rama Vaidyanathan

# Back On Stage

*What is a theatre without its artistes and audience? The last 18 months revealed a sombre facet of a scenario that seemed inconceivable in the forever busy corridors of the NCPA. But with theatres been given the green light to reopen, the buzz has returned. Chairman Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook and the heads of genres reflect on this unparalleled time that only strengthened their resolve to emerge stronger. The stellar line-up of opening performances that await you is a testament to that.*



(Seated, from left):  
 Dr. Suvarnalata Rao, Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook,  
 Ms. Farrahnaz Irani; (Standing, from left):  
 Mr. Mukesh Parpiani, Mr. Bruce Guthrie,  
 Ms. Swapnokalpa Dasgupta, Mr. Xerxes F. Unvala

**W**hoever imagined that even with our state-of-the-art weapons to fight all sorts of diseases and pestilence, a virus called Covid-19 would bring the world to its knees in the 21st century, but that is exactly what happened. While we thought it was a temporary aberration, its venomous claws clung on to humanity for more than 18 months and it is still not eradicated.

In March 2020, we had just come back from a very successful Delhi trip, where the SOI played to an appreciative audience and later went to Bengaluru to complete a triumphant tour. Soon afterwards, a notification was received from the Government of Maharashtra that all theatres had to be shut down due to a pandemic which threatened to endanger audiences, and disallow any sort of gatherings and assembling of people. Such was the virulence of the virus that several thousand people lost their lives and all the might of 21st-century science was not able to stem the tide and the entire universe was wrapped in panic. Flights were cancelled, performances delayed and/or cancelled, family life was disrupted, schools were closed and the best laid plans o' mice an' men went awry.

It was a moment to gather our forces and plan during what now seemed to be a long period of introspection and silence. We decided that defeat was certainly not acceptable. We began organising Zoom meetings and, wherever possible, teachers taught by way of electronic media. However, by the time we entered mid-2021, this not only became tedious but it was also not very productive or enjoyable.

To stare into a box and expect results was not our cup of tea. Planning was a necessity and it was decided that online dissemination of our wonderful archival material and recordings and onward transmission of future concerts and recording sessions was the answer,

at least temporarily. After much thought and discussion, an investment in a studio to edit old material and purchase equipment to record fresh concerts was decided. Discussions were held with several content producers and a Head of Department was brought in to assess our archival material and supervise future recordings. This, however, was not very successful and the hunt to provide a viable alternative to future concerts is still on.

During this time, we were fortunate that negotiations had been held with a celebrity firm called ARUP, who were experts in the area of conceptualising state-of-the-art theatres and would probably have been commissioned immediately to advise the way forward. Similarly, among several companies, Tata Elxsi was approached to assist in distributing the completed content of not only our archives but also future recordings. Both these decisions seem to have found favour and are now in the process of execution.

Our musicians were practising at home. The various people, who are stymied in the NCPA without access to outside presence, employed their time profitably and sought each other's company, and continue to show creativity.

As we near the end of this dark period, perhaps there are some lessons to be learnt through it all. We certainly are stronger than the period before the epidemic disrupted our lives.

**- Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook, Chairman, NCPA**

It was Friday, 13th March 2020. We had just concluded masterclass sessions with renowned vocalist, Ajoy Chakrabarty, and were scheduled to present him in 'Meet the Maestro', a conversation series with renowned sitar player, Arvind Parekh, when we received a notification from the authorities to shut down our auditoria. We had no idea then, that it would be a good 18 months before we would be allowed to reopen our doors to welcome our esteemed audiences.

Of course, it was not complete silence at our end. Before we realised, "online" became the new mantra. We plunged into our invaluable archives. Our online presentations featured recordings of past events with great masters. This initiative was

received enthusiastically by audiences worldwide. Some of them had earlier missed our live events and the others didn't mind reliving the magic.

As the months passed by, the pandemic raged on. Amidst the pall of gloom, we kept reaching out to the practitioners—this time with several workshops under our CSR initiatives. The topics were varied and aimed at honing allied skills like mind control, sound recording, legal issues, etc. At some point around the new year, when the rules were relaxed a bit, we invited promising artistes to our studios, and presented the recordings online.

Now we have adopted a model to professionally record online workshops, which will be made available on our OTT platform, to be launched soon. Thanks to the newly created recording and editing facilities at the NCPA, some of the public

concerts will also be available on this platform.

The pandemic has shown us how fragile and uncertain life is. At the same time, we have also discovered the potential of the digital world. Enabled by the technology available today, going forward, we plan to explore possibilities such as a hybrid model, where one or more artistes are logged in virtually while others are physically present.

We will leave no stone unturned in our bid to remain connected with both, the artistes and the audience.

**- Dr. Suvarnalata Rao, Programming Head  
- Indian Music**

After the stunning silence and the taste of a life without theatres, concerts and live performances, it is good news that the theatres are coming alive with performances once again.

The past few months have been very hard on the world. Although many countries had taken measures to curb the coronavirus crisis, it had an immensely stressful effect on people's personal lives and behaviour.

The arts, theatres and artistes experienced significant economic setbacks over the last 18 months. Across the spectrum of artistic and creative endeavours, the various restrictions took a devastating toll on the sector. The full scope and scale of impact can be hard to discern, in part

because of the size and diversity of the industries that constitute art and culture.

The global pandemic has seen the livelihood and careers of many performing artistes ruined or transformed. Making a living out of creative industries had become precarious. For some, it was both a curse and a blessing as they didn't have to travel for performances and that meant a good opportunity to stay with family, create and compose music and learn to navigate a new world of home-studio rehearsing and recording.

Due to the closure of venues and curtailing of public performances, many performing arts institutions adapted to digital services, online streaming of archival performances as well as bespoke crowd-sourcing projects. Zoom, Facebook Live, Instagram became new digital platforms for artistes to collaborate and conduct workshops.

During the pandemic, the NCPA broke the silence from time to time by implementing various programmes. NCPA@home, an online initiative, showcased local and internationally acclaimed Grammy Award-winning icons from a variety of musical genres—jazz, blues, soul, funk, Latin, etc.—that have graced our stages. The NCPA 'Let's Talk Jazz' series was an initiative positioned towards introducing lay listeners to jazz to broaden their musical palates through a series of Facebook Live lectures.

International Jazz Day—officially designated by the UNESCO and Herbie Hancock Institute of Music to bring communities together through jazz—saw a three-day online celebration. Performances paying homage to the greats featured over 70 artistes from the largest jazz hubs all around the world. We have maintained our associations with such organisations and institutions through the lockdown in view of live collaborations in the future.

**- Farrahnaz Irani, General Manager  
- International Music**

As a child, I always felt that doing something the second time was much more difficult than the first. When you do something for the first time, you don't have to worry about history or the legacy matching up as much as you do when doing it again. All you have for the first time is hope, dreams and happiness (when it's done). The

second attempt brings a lot more responsibility. It is much more adult.

So, here we are trying again, and this time with much more conviction, much more experience in dealing with failure and greater thirst to begin. We have many unique plans coming up in dance, both with international and national artistes. There are premieres of new works scheduled and exciting collaborations in the offing, ready for the curtain to rise.

Now, if you have waited for so long, why not a bit longer until we announce the other upcoming events in our *ON Stage* magazine? Remember, here is where you hear it first, so do keep renewing your NCPA membership to get your complimentary copy of happy news every month.

In the meantime, thank you for your support. We are excited to conduct online classes across six schools for less privileged children again this year and equally look forward to the 30 online/physical dance lecture demonstration sessions that would reach out to schools across India as part of our new initiative, NCPA Vistaar.

When we closed in March 2020, we closed our theatres in Mumbai but now when we are opening, we are opening up to the world. This period has taught us to appreciate what we have and has made us stronger for the future. See you soon.

**- Swapnokalpa Dasgupta,  
Head of Dance Programming**

In early March of 2020, the SOI embarked on a tour to Delhi and Bengaluru—what would turn out to be our last live performances in a long time. The coronavirus was just gaining prominence in the news; though at that point, few perhaps realised the intensity with which it would hit and that it would lead to the longest shutdown in the NCPA's five-decade history, as it did with most arts centres around the world.

The SOI continued operations throughout the pandemic. We moved all lessons of the SOI Music Academy online, conducted digital workshops, and streamed performances to an audience numbering in the tens of thousands. But, the heart of any arts centre and orchestra is performing live for an audience. Our brief reopening in February 2021 to a sold-out (with appropriate distanced

seating) house brought a glimmer of hope, but only made it harder when the second wave necessitated another shutdown.

As we look forward to stepping onto the stage again, there is a cautious optimism in the air. It is an odd feeling to have had almost two years away from doing something that was once second nature. But, like the proverbial bicycle ride, it is a feeling that at once is familiar.

And while I believe we must rethink certain things in the “new normal”, and that the digital space will continue to have an expanded presence in our lives, live performance can never be replaced. The beauty of live performance is that it is ephemeral, and the indescribable feeling of sharing that experience with your fellow audience members and the artistes on stage, knowing that it exists only in that moment, is the moat against digitisation that lies deep around live art.

**- Xerxes F. Unvala, General Manager  
- SOI & Western Classical Music**

From 1918-1920, the Spanish flu (or the Great Influenza) gripped the world following the end of the First World War. It was an illness that claimed the lives of tens of millions across the world. What followed was a period in history commonly known as The Roaring Twenties. It was a period of economic prosperity and cultural dynamism, the likes of which the world had never seen. Dance, music

(particularly jazz) and theatre were rediscovered and new forms were invented. Moving pictures and radio brought technological modernity to the era. After a period of war and pandemic, the world was once again connecting, expressing and communicating.

There are many parallels between that era and our own—technological advancements in communication, methodology of artistic expression, medical advancement, and awareness of the value that lies in simply being together. As we emerge as one world from this pandemic, we find that whilst we may not have all been in the same boat, we have all experienced the same storm.

The definition of the word art is “the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.” If we focus on the first part,

we find that an artiste is someone who applies their creative skill and imagination. We have seen that all around us—in businesses, individuals, charities, pharmaceuticals. Innovation has thrived in the most challenging of circumstances.

As we process this global event, our artistes are more important than ever. Living is about more than mere survival. We must think, feel, laugh, cry, reflect and grow. The arts are food for the soul; what it is to be human. What a glorious thing to celebrate. And celebrate we must.

This time has been used for contemplation, planning and connecting with companies across the country. We have been looking forward to welcoming artistes and audiences back to our stages once again to our place to behold. The theatre we produce and present at the NCPA represents the country and the very best international talent. We look to honour our heritage while pushing boundaries—entertain, educate and enthrall.

**- Bruce Guthrie, Head - Theatre & Films**

## The arts are food for the soul; what it is to be human. What a glorious thing to celebrate. And celebrate we must

I consider myself fortunate to have been associated with this prestigious photography gallery of the NCPA since its early days, when I had my first exhibition in 1989. The NCPA’s founder, the late Dr. Jamshed Bhabha, started it on the initiative of Mr. J. Jehangir and the late Praful C. Patel. The gallery’s inaugural exhibition was ‘Through Indian Eyes’, by Judith Mara Gutman,

a noted photo historian from the USA, who exhibited photographs from the 19th- and early 20th-century India.

I joined as Head of Photography and the gallery in 2009, and since then nearly 250 photo exhibitions, talks and workshops have been organised. Some noted photographers whose works have been exhibited include A.L. Sayed, Ashok Dilwali, T.S. Satyan, Homai Vyarawalla, Gayatri Sinha, Tarpada Banerjee, Aditya Arya, Chandu Mhatre and Gopal Bodhe.

We had just wrapped up the photo exhibition by Dr. Mukesh Batra in mid-March 2020 when the lockdown was announced, and it kept getting extended indefinitely. While the gallery walls remained bare for almost 18 months due to various government restrictions, we organised online photo exhibitions and webinars.

Currently, we are giving the gallery a facelift and will reopen very soon.

**- Mukesh Parpiani, Head - Piramal Art Gallery**



### THEATRE

#### Eka Lagnachi Pudhchi Gosht

Marathi play (135 mins)

Tata Theatre

Friday, 29th October, 7 pm

Manoj and Manisha have been happily married for over 18 years. But in the quest of a few desires, their relationship enters a midlife crisis. They will now need to decide whether they are still in love with each other or if they should chase new passions.

Written and Directed by **Adwait Dadarkar**

Presenter: **Zee Marathi, Sargam**

Original Story: **Imtiyaz Patel**

Cast: **Prashant Damle, Kavita Lad-Medhekar, Atul Todankar, Mrunal Chemburkar, Pratiksha Shivankar & Parag Dange**

Set Design: **Pradip Mulye**

Music: **Ashok Patki**

Produced by **Prashant Damle Fan Foundation, Gauri Theatres**

**Tickets: ₹375,300 & 225/- (Members)  
₹500, 400 & 300/- (Public)**

**Box office now open**

### INTERNATIONAL MUSIC

#### Blast from the Past With Louiz Banks

(Approx. 120 mins plus interval)

Tata Theatre

**Saturday, 30th October, 6.30 pm**

**Rahul Jhunjhunwala** – Keys

**Gino Banks** – Drums

**Sheldon D’Silva** – Bass

**Kush Upadhyay** – Guitar

**Thomson Andrews** – Male Vocal

**Trisha Rego** – Female Vocal

**Kesang Alexander** – Female Vocal

After a long wait, the NCPA welcomes you back with a blast from the past with an evening of classic hits featuring renowned Grammy-nominated jazz pianist/keyboardist, composer, music director and producer, Louiz Banks. He has performed with Indian greats such as Ravi Shankar, Hariprasad Chaurasia, Zakir Hussain and many more, in addition to world-renowned international jazz icons such as Dizzy Gillespie and Wayne Shorter.

The performance will consist of famously nostalgic tunes that have hit the silver screen. This band brings together some of the finest musicians of India featuring guest vocalists including Thomson Andrews, Trisha Rego and Kesang Alexander, accompanied by Gino Banks, Kush Upadhyay and Sheldon D’Silva in the rhythm section.

**Tickets: ₹750, 600 & 375/- (Members)  
₹1000, 800 & 500/- (Public)  
(Plus GST)**

**Box office now open**





**WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC**

**SOI Chamber Orchestra**

Marat Bisengaliev, conductor  
Tata Theatre  
Sunday, 31st October, 5 pm

Vivaldi: Concerto for four violins  
Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 3  
Haydn: Cello Concerto No. 1 and more

The SOI Chamber Orchestra, led by music director Marat Bisengaliev, returns to the stage with a programme of beloved classics featuring members of the SOI as soloists. Cellist Salauat Karibayev performs the solo in Haydn's cello concerto, a performance which drew rave reviews on tour in the SOI's last concerts in 2020.

Tickets: ₹900, 600 & 375/- (Members)  
₹1200, 800 & 500/- (Public)  
(Inclusive of GST)

Box office now open

**INDIAN MUSIC**

**Rashid Khan in Concert**

Accompanied by Sabir Khan (sarangi), Ajay Joglekar (harmonium), Ojas Adhiya (tabla)

(Approx. 90 mins)  
Tata Theatre  
Friday, 12th November, 6.30 pm

Rashid Khan is the torchbearer of Rampur-Sahaswan *gharana*. With his robust yet sonorous voice, uncanny technical control over *sargam* and *taans*, effortless rendition of varied forms, from *khayal* and *tarana* to *thumri* and *geet*, Khan is one of the most sought-after vocalists today.



He will perform a traditional format featuring *bada khayal*, *chhota khayal* and *tarana* in *ragas* assigned to the time of sunset and the first quarter of the evening.

Tickets: ₹750, 570, 375 & 225/- (Members)  
₹1000, 760, 500 & 300/- (Public)  
(Inclusive of GST)

Box office now open



**DANCE**

**Bharatanatyam by Rama Vaidyanathan and Kuchipudi by Mallika Sarabhai**

(Approx. 90 mins)  
Tata Theatre  
Saturday, 13th November, 6.30 pm

Rama Vaidyanathan took Bharatanatyam to a new era of conscious thinking. Her ability to use her Bharatanatyam compositions to observe the universe set her apart in the realm of classical dance. She found her own meaning in the dance form and used the same to showcase her outlook on the mystical that permeates through each of us. Her bond with the spiritual, combined with a knack for instinctually gravitating towards the abstract, has made her one of the most formidable creators in Bharatanatyam. Her basics were forged under the tutelage of Guru Yamini Krishnamurthy and Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan. With her foundation firm, she decided to break free from the shackles of conventions and define her own art. Her dance is her interpretation of the known and unknown, and into this infinite space, she leaped headfirst. She derives unconventional pieces, picks phrases



from different languages and texts, and seeks meaning in places that people tend to ignore. While it confounded the purists, her quest for a higher meaning was undeniable, based on the sheer earnestness of her approach. An artiste going beyond the surface to seek a truer understanding of their art form is a blessing to society. The answers they find tend to resonate with people across all social boundaries. She hosts a plethora of workshops, disseminating the nuances of Bharatanatyam to an entirely new generation of dancers. Her performances represent the gold standard in art form, and her compositions are among the foremost in sparking conversation on the meaning of life itself.

Rama Vaidyanathan & Ensemble will be presenting *Pratibodhana-The Awakening*

Mallika Sarabhai is one of India's leading choreographers and dancers, in constant demand as a soloist and with her own dance company, Darpana, creating and performing both classical and contemporary works. She has a PhD in organisational behaviour and has been the co-director of the prestigious arts institution, Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, for nearly 30 years. She first made a name for herself in India as a film actress but soon was recognised as an exceptional young dancer in the classical forms of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi. At 18, she won the

first of many awards. She first came to international notice when she played the role of Draupadi in Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* for five years, first in French and then English, performing in France, North America, Australia, Japan and Scotland. Always an activist for societal education and women's empowerment, Sarabhai began using her work for change. In 1989, she created the first of her hard-hitting solo theatrical works, *Shakti: The Power of Women*. Since then, she has created numerous stage productions which have raised awareness, highlighted crucial issues and advocated change, several of which productions have toured internationally as well as throughout India. In the mid-90s, she began to develop her own contemporary dance vocabulary and went on to create short and full-length works which have been presented in North America, Scotland, Singapore, China and Australia, as well as in India.

Mallika Sarabhai & Ensemble will be presenting *Gems of Kuchipudi*.

Tickets: ₹900, 600 & 375 (Members)  
₹1200, 800 & 500 (Public)  
(Inclusive of GST)

Box office now open ■

*The reopening protocols are subject to government and NCPA guidelines. For latest information, kindly log on to [www.ncpamumbai.com](http://www.ncpamumbai.com) or call 66548137/38*

# A Hub for the Future

*There is little doubt that the digital medium is going to remain a key component of consuming culture even after live performances make a comeback. To reach audiences beyond its theatres, who tuned in to watch its online offerings, the NCPA has created state-of-the-art facilities in the new Digital Studio Hub. Nayan P. Kale, General Manager-Technical, writes about the development.*

The executives at the NCPA worked to create infrastructure for disseminating archival and future performances through the digital medium during the lockdown. One of the requirements to expand the NCPA's presence digitally was to build a state-of-the-art, in-house Digital Studio Hub. The primary purpose of this Studio Hub is to complement the NCPA's proposed OTT platform. Therefore, editing, colour correction, remixing and mastering are required for the created content, as well as various genres of online and archival contents to keep up with the industry standards.

The studio space's design has an ambient noise criterion <NC25, as is the norm in the industry. The core studio comprises a room-within-a-room construction that is effectively isolated from heavy structure-borne impact noise and airborne noise transmission. The studio is equipped with an audio workstation and an attached dubbing room, two video edit rooms, a data and storage room and provisions to include a production control room for live broadcasts.

The audio workstation hardware includes an Amphion 5.1 surround speaker system, which enables the creation of audio in Dolby Atmos (Surround), if

required, Avid MTRX interface and a 2021 iMac Pro. The workstation is expandable in every sense. There is room for additional speakers to set up a 7.1.2 system, there's a facility to enable multiple digital mixing control surfaces (Avid SI), and the process of installing cables to connect the workstation to the video edit rooms and to all the theatres is underway too.

**The studio has an audio workstation with an attached dubbing room, two video edit rooms, a data and storage room and provisions for a production control room for live broadcasts**

edits, stand-alone shoots and meeting any editing technique demand to make the videos cinematic and creative for the audience. To ensure a seamless editing process, the editing rooms are linked through Simply Workspace, thus eliminating the need for hard disks and possibility of data loss. It is a significant improvement to the existing recording and editing set-up in many ways.

The combination of Premier Pro, After Effects, DaVinci Resolve Studio 17, the DaVinci Mini Panel and the 5K Apple Cinema Display with Tannoy Studio Monitors makes editing videos and shows a blissful experience.

Chairman Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook, who has lent all his support to the creation of the studio, said, "The hub will enable us to present our archival and newly recorded performances in the finest quality possible. Ideally, one should have a viewing room to properly assess the finish and completeness of a documentary or film. We do not have one at present nor do I wish to build one immediately. However, I would appreciate views on when such a facility should be made available." ■



The video edit rooms are equipped with Mac Pro, Apple Cine Display, and the DaVinci Mini Panel for colour correction to bring out the best in the videos in the quickest and most efficient manner. In addition to these features, both the studios are fully capable of handling Graphic Design VFX, Chroma



# Fabulous fifteen

*India's first and only professional orchestra, founded at the NCPA, has turned 15. From performing challenging repertoire and playing with the legends of classical music to touring internationally with great success, the SOI has gone from strength to strength. We bring you memories, and messages from the pillars of the orchestra, the behind-the-scenes team and conductors under whose baton the SOI has performed.*



(From left) Mr. Zane Dalal,  
Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook,  
Mr. Marat Bisengaliev

## Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook

*Chairman, NCPA and Co-founder, Symphony Orchestra of India*

Many years ago in London, strolling down Piccadilly, we went backstage at a concert and heard Marat Bisengaliev and his merry band of young violinists play brilliantly. We invited the orchestra to India, and much to my delight, when Dr. Jamshed Bhabha heard them, he immediately approved, not just their playing, but

also how well they presented themselves.

The first performance was Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* and we gathered a lot of musicians from all over the world to play with our newly formed orchestra. The conductor, who shall remain unnamed, apparently did not please Marat, and after much had transpired, a great conductor from the Bolshoi Theatre was brought in. He put everything in order and the performance went off fairly well. There were a few shenanigans which will

remain unreported, however, I wondered how we would manage if the first season went off so dramatically. Thereafter, things cooled down and season after season, it was a triumph. We had wonderful artistes who were surprisingly happy to encounter a fine orchestra in India.

For the sake of new members, we are happy to append a list of the concerts held by the orchestra over the last 15 years and I hope people would realise the quality we mentioned. The SOI has gone from strength to strength, with visits to Oman, Switzerland, the UK, Abu Dhabi as well as a sparkling debut at the Kremlin with Beethoven being a gradual feature in the growth of these fine musicians.

The creation of an orchestra with fine international musicians, supported by a growing number of Indian players, was sort of a dream come true and gradually, the strength of the Indian musicians increased. The SOI is now a hub of good Indian players and I hope it will be a happy hunting ground for players seeking an international reputation.

Our team of dedicated musicians, who make up this orchestra, is unbelievable, and many conductors/soloists have commented on the fine playing they encountered while giving concerts with them.

## Marat Bisengaliev

*Music Director and Co-founder, SOI*

Fifteen years is a significant milestone and I am happy that the orchestra is going in the right direction. I am also happy that I have Khushroo, my comrade-in-arms, in this endeavour. From the SOI management, Farrahnaz Irani, Xerxes Unvala and Onay Zhumabayeva, technical head, Nayan Kale, to stage manager, Sakharam Gawde—they make the SOI story. And to them, I am grateful.

Over the years, though the composition of the orchestra has changed, the skeleton has remained the same. The founding members have been loyal to the SOI and have stayed on.

The repertoire choice for our seasons and other concerts involves a lot of discussion with the Chairman. I follow a multidirectional approach with the need to explore compositions of diverse periods. The other view is the need to first finish all the symphonies by major composers. These are interesting, friendly discussions and we always come up with the best solution.

Having a greater presence of Indian players in the SOI is a natural process that involves scouting for talent, recruiting musicians as apprentices first and then training them to see if they make the cut. We are constantly working towards it. Prayash Biswakarma, for instance, has been a great find. I have witnessed his growth from a promising boy who was part of a youth orchestra to now being an established team player in the SOI.

The SOI now has the music academy, and like the orchestra itself, it is the only one of its kind in India, offering the Russian method of teaching. Our graduates are not only potential players in the orchestra for the future but also musicians professionally trained in Western classical music who are valuable to India.

The orchestra has gone from strength to strength and survived these difficult times while streaming performances online and recording programmes. It is to the NCPA's credit that all musicians have been paid their salaries throughout the lockdown. These two years have proved the NCPA's and Khushroo's love for the orchestra.

## Zane Dalal

*Associate Music Director, SOI*

After almost 15 years at the SOI, I personally can look back with some pride and pleasure. Not only to speak a little of our journey and my perspectives on it, but to mention my personal gratitude to certain persons, without whom it is difficult to imagine our current position.

We are grateful for the perseverance through all odds of our Chairman. The SOI has not only flourished, but gone on tour, received international recognition, coproduced and performed grand operas and grown a roster of fine international soloists and conductors.

As our international travelling increases and brings us good notices, the platform on which the SOI presents itself and the reputation of the NCPA grows in strength and standing. Our international footprint is a presence on the world stage that has been carefully forged nearly single-handedly by Khushroo. It is perhaps the most important process at the NCPA. Whether it is organisations like the Alliance of Asia-Pacific Region Orchestras (AAPRO) or forging ties with the NCPA Beijing, or the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres (AAPPAC) or The International Artist Managers' Association (IAMA), or countless trips to London and Europe to expose the grand work of the NCPA—the end result is a complex and vibrant quilt woven by a single man. The benefits of these established ties will continue to be apparent for years to come.

Over the years, we have not only improved the way we manage our personnel, but seek to provide an environment in which there is not only challenge and superior quality in the musical work, but joy, recognition and stability in their connection to our organisation.

In all the things that I remark upon here, our Music Director, Marat Bisengaliev has shared the same road, through ups and downs, through triumphs and despairs, through thick and thin, and yes, with a level of passion for the job and duty and loyalty to the organisation that has been a testament of his character. His extraordinary devotion and commitment to the SOI not only as its Founder Music Director and resident virtuoso but as the tireless champion of the education programmes that feed the orchestra with new home-grown talent will, I'm certain, prove to be the lasting legacy of the institution as a whole.

I recount all these things with pleasure and pride, because I have had the duty and privilege of contributing personally to all these great undertakings at the SOI. I'm convinced that we are on a trajectory of high importance, not only for the lives of Mumbaikars but also for the nation.



## Edward Smith

Consultant to the SOI and former Chief Executive of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

The SOI was already five years old when Khushroo invited me to be involved. Having spent my career with orchestras that have been around for over a century, it was quite an adventure.

On first hearing the orchestra, I was really surprised at just how good this infant band was then. But what's more important is how it has grown into the elite group it is now.

And that's thanks to the selfless dedication and commitment of so many people—particularly Marat, Zane and the guiding hand of Khushroo and his colleagues.

It was no mean feat (musically, financially and logistically) to embark on tours to Switzerland and the UK in recent years and to hear them play there with such character and confidence was a great experience. To stand alongside the major international touring orchestras without any allowances for its relative inexperience and with no condescension from promoters or critics was testament to just what a treasure the orchestra is for Mumbai and India.

What's next? What will the scene be in 2036? Well, with the continued inspiration from musical and managerial leaders and a steadily increasing number of Indian musicians acquiring the necessary skills to join the orchestra, the future can only be one of continuing development. And let's hope that the orchestra can expand its reach to a bigger range of audiences and develop a community of Indian-born, bred and taught players who can act as ambassadors and share their enthusiasm for the wonderful fulfilment a great orchestra can bring to its community.

## Laurent Petitgirard

Paris-based conductor and composer

I have vivid memories of my concert with the Symphony Orchestra of India, for the quality of all the musicians, for their receptivity, and for the pleasant and focused working atmosphere, as our programme, between Camille Saint-Saëns and César Franck was not easy. The collaboration between my dear friend Jean-Philippe Collard and the orchestra was very rich, and the organisation of our stay, perfect.

Of course, it was a very strong emotion for me to discover India and this incredible city for the first time. The memories of this concert are etched on my mind for another reason. As I came back to France, my entire conducting programme was cancelled. March 1, 2020 was my last concert and I did start again only in July 2021. For all these reasons, the Symphony Orchestra of India has a special place in my heart.



The 10th anniversary special edition of ON Stage brought you snapshots of the SOI's journey from 2006 to 2016.

Here's continuing the story of the musical feats of the orchestra from the year 2017 to date.

## 2017



An opera gala conducted by Carlo Rizzi featured excerpts from Verdi's *Otello* and Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, and Bizet's *Carmen Suites*. The Italian maestro is seen here with soprano Maria José Siri



The highlight of the Spring 2017 Season was *La Bohème*, an innovative new production of Puccini's masterpiece, with an international star cast



Soprano Maria Mudryak, who played the role of Musetta, in a quiet moment before her entry



An orchestral concert featuring works by Tchaikovsky and Dvořák was presented under the baton of Polish conductor Jacek Kaspszyk and featured cellist István Várdai in the Autumn 2017 Season



István Várdai interacted with students of the SOI Music Academy. He is seen here with SOI physician Dr. Cavas Bilimoria, SOI violinist Gulzara Shakir and SOI cellist Margarita Gapparova



Conductor Evgeny Bushkov (centre) with Chairman Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook, pianist Stephen Hough and SOI musicians. Seen here (standing, from left): violinist Averell DeSouza, violinist Prayash Biswakarma, violist Francis Mendes, violinist Mario Fernandes, violist Mark Nunes, violinist Suresh Lalwani, violinist Prabhat Kishore, and violinist Deon D'Souza



Violinist Dan Zhu played Korngold's Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35, in a concert featuring Verdi's Overture to *Nabucco* and Dvořák's Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70 B. 141



Sir Karl Jenkins



Xerxes Unvala, General Manager - SOI & Western Classical Music, Onay Zhumabayeva, orchestra manager, and SOI musician Nicholas Ellis share a light moment with Sir Karl Jenkins after the concert



British conductor and baritone Gavin Carr conducted two choral works by Beethoven and Haydn in the Spring Season. Carr seen here with Erica Eloff, soprano, Marta Fontanals-Simmons, mezzo soprano, Toby Spence, tenor, and Neal Davies, baritone



The second concert of the season included the romantic music of Gustav Mahler sung by German baritone Benjamin Appl



Sir Karl Jenkins's *The Universe* had its international premiere with the SOI in the season



The horn section of the orchestra captured backstage at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre



The opening concert of the Autumn Season was led by Russian conductor Alexander Lazarev in a programme including Wagner's Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Bloch's Violin Concerto, and Tchaikovsky's Suite No. 3 in G major, Op. 55. The concert featured Israeli violinist Nurit Stark

# 2018



The Bournemouth Symphony Chorus from the UK returned to Mumbai for choral works by Beethoven and Haydn, and Handel's *Messiah* conducted by Zane Dalal



The string section of the orchestra, ahead of a concert.



Marat Bisengaliev led this programme featuring the works of Dvořák and Prokofiev. Armenian cellist Sevak Avanesyan opened the concert with Dvořák's beloved cello concerto



In a concert including works by Mozart, Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff under the baton of Zane Dalal, pianist Alexei Volodin joined the SOI to perform Rachmaninoff's third piano concerto, one of the most technically challenging piano concertos in the standard classical repertoire



One of the highlights of the Spring 2019 Season was Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. British conductor Martyn Brabbins led the SOI and joint choirs from India and abroad in the seminal work



Martyn Brabbins



In recognition of the achievements of the SOI since its inception, Lady Valerie Solti presented to Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook an autographed baton of her late husband, the renowned Hungarian-born conductor Sir Georg Solti



Zane Dalal led a concert that included Zakir Hussain's *Peshkar*, a concerto for tabla and orchestra, commissioned by the SOI in 2015



The Autumn Season opened with Chausson and Mendelssohn, in two concerti for violin, piano, and strings performed by Marat Bisengaliev and Italian pianist Roberto Prosseda. They were also joined by students of the SOI Music Academy



Soon after the season was wrapped up, the SOI embarked on its debut tour of the UK. The orchestra's six-concert schedule encompassed a series of performances by maestros including Zakir Hussain, Martyn Brabbins, Marat Bisengaliev and Zane Dalal across five cities. The critical acclaim marked the arrival of the SOI on the international scene as a serious contender



Tenor Simon O'Neill returned to the SOI, accompanied by fellow New Zealander, soprano Amanda Atlas, in an all-Wagner gala



Zane Dalal is known for his workshops that make music more accessible and familiarise children with the workings of a symphony orchestra. In one such session, blind children were invited to sit on the stage to feel the vibrations of the instruments



Mikel Toms, Resident Conductor of the orchestra, led the SOI Chamber Orchestra in a concert of works by Puccini, Vaughan Williams and more



The anniversary-special concert featured works by Mendelssohn, Haydn and Mozart



Irish pianist Barry Douglas performed Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2.



During Add Art, the NCPA's 50th anniversary celebration, a plaque dedicated to Citi's longstanding partnership with the NCPA in the propagation of the arts—Citi is the SOI's first patron—was unveiled at the Tata Theatre. Seen here: NCPA Chairman Khushroo N. Suntook with Ashu Khullar, Chief Executive Officer, Citi India and Regional Head for South Asia



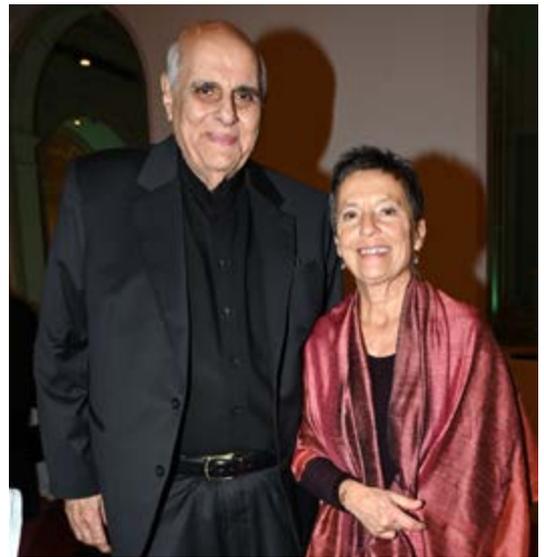
Members of the royal family of Mysore attended a concert celebrating 50 years of the NCPA. In July 2019, the SOI had performed at an event commemorating the birth centenary celebration of Maharaja Jayachamaraja Wadiyar of Mysore, one of the great patrons of Western classical music. Seen here: (From left) NCPA Council Member Ms. Brinda Khatau, NCPA Chairman Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook, Maharani Pramoda Devi Wadiyar and Maharajkumari Indrakshi Devi



Marat Bisengaliev performed Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor in the concert



The SOI Spring 2020 Season, the last season before the lockdown, saw the grand return of pianist Maria João Pires and conductor and violinist Augustin Dumay. They performed in a programme that featured the heart of the classical repertoire—the music of Mozart and Beethoven



Chairman Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook with Maria João Pires



The SOI presented a rare musical theatre gala, featuring stars of the West End, Lucie Jones and Adam Bayjou. Daniel Bowling, music director for productions of *Mary Poppins*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, conducted the concert



The concert saw the SOI come together with some of the biggest names in the Indian music scene



Zane Dalal conducted the India premiere of a unique work composed by Zakir Hussain. *Ameen, Amen, Shanti*, a concerto for four soloists featured Hussain on tabla, and Shankar Mahadevan, Hariharan and mezzo-soprano Kelley O'Connor as the vocalists



The final concert of the season featured an evening of French music with two specialists: conductor Laurent Petitgirard (left) and pianist Jean-Philippe Collard. The programme included Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 5 and Franck's radical Symphony in D minor

**The list of concerts held by the SOI over the years can be viewed on:**

[www.soimumbai.com/archives](http://www.soimumbai.com/archives)

# JAZZ IN THE CITY

The arrival of jazz in Bombay was welcomed with open arms and it drew into the city the most notable artistes. Jazz Yatra, one of the first international festivals in Bombay, gave the genre the best possible exposure.

**Narendra Kusnur** traces the journey.

**T**he year 1978 was a turning point for Mumbai's jazz scene, as it confirmed the city's status as India's jazz capital. The Jazz Yatra was launched, attracting great Western maestros like saxophonists Sonny Rollins and Sadao Watanabe, and trumpeter Clark Terry, to its opening fiesta at Rang Bhavan.

Jazz had been a regular feature in Mumbai since the 1930s, with the Hotel Taj Mahal regularly hosting events. But slowly, Calcutta took over; Park Street became the hottest area for jazz in the country, with pianist Louiz Banks, saxophonist Braz Gonsalves, vocalist Pam Crain and guitarist Carlton Kitto being active on the scene.

The 1978 Yatra changed everything. As the late Niranjan Jhaveri of 'Jazz India' once said, "It was truly a yatra. The West hailed the East, and the East reciprocated, where journeymen met and exchanged views." According to Banks, who had decided to move to Bombay around the same time, the first Yatra



Jazz Yatra was a week-long celebration of the genre in India, and it called together some of the finest musicians from around the world



Sadao Watanabe was one of the many greats who came to India to be part of the Yatra



Dave Brubeck was the first jazz musician to come to India in 1958. He's seen here with his saxophonist Paul Desmond

also showcased Indian jazz in a big way. “We had the Jazz India Ensemble with me and saxophonist Braz Gonsalves, and we had a chance to display our skills to the people we idolised,” he says. The local jazz scene in Bombay, thus, saw a revival too.

Jazz, however, wasn't the only genre showcased at the Yatra. Indian classical music and dance with explanatory commentaries by Dr. Narayan Menon, then executive director of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, were highlights of the festival too. Music lovers who were part of the inaugural edition still remember the sitar-tabla *jugalbandi* of Vilayat Khan and Zakir Hussain. This was perhaps a reflection of the diverse backgrounds of the patrons of Jazz Yatra '78—Sonny Rollins, sitar maestro Ravi Shankar, violinist Yehudi Menuhin and Dr. Menon. Held every two years, it was one of Mumbai's leading cultural events until 2004.

### A MEETING POINT

One could divide Mumbai jazz into three phases—pre-Yatra, the Yatra years, and post-Yatra. Cut to the 1930s, when racism was rampant in the US, many Afro-American musicians were looking at newer venues to earn a livelihood. India was one such destination, and in 1935, the Taj Mahal Hotel commissioned violinist Leon Abbey to form a resident jazz band. Pianist Teddy Weatherford, who was with Louis Armstrong's band, and trumpeter Crickett Smith also played at the lavish Taj Ballroom to elite crowds.

Soon, many Goan musicians became part of the Mumbai scene, balancing their jazz careers with stints in Hindi film music.



Duke Ellington was no stranger to the jazz scene in India. His band worked with local musicians quite often

The other venues across the city included the Ambassador, the Bristol Grill, West End, Astoria, Ritz, Dadar Catholic Institute and YMCA. Some of the most famous musicians then were trumpeter Chic Chocolate, bandleader Mickey Correa, and saxophonist Rudy Cotton, who also presented the opening act at Yatra '78. In the 1960s, bandleader Chris Perry also became a regular, often with Lorna Cordeiro on vocals.

In the 1950s, the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union had an indirect effect on Indian jazz, as the Americans used cultural diplomacy to attract people from different regions. Renowned jazz musicians began coming to India, and the first was pianist Dave Brubeck in 1958.

Bandleader Duke Ellington and singer-trumpeter Louis Armstrong followed.

In a presentation given in 2012, Naresh Fernandes, journalist and author of the book *Taj Mahal Foxtrot: The Story of Bombay's Jazz Age*, said Brubeck did not remember much about his show. “But he remembered that his piano got warped in the heat, and he got a replacement in a local store, possibly Furtados. However, the new piano had to be carried to the venue at Eros Theatre by porters who had to march in proper step to ensure that this one didn't go wrong either,” he recalled.

Brubeck's band had saxophonist Paul Desmond, who wrote the famous 'Take Five', bassist Eugene Wright and drummer Joe Morello. He also played at a private gig, jamming with Indian percussionists and sitar exponent Abdul Halim Jaffer Khan. In an earlier interview with this writer, Khan said, “People keep talking of fusion today. What we

played that day was proper fusion before anybody used the word.”

Brubeck visited Calcutta too, and wrote the piece 'Calcutta Blues'. Likewise, it was on his India visit that Ellington wrote 'Bluebird Of Delhi' and 'Agra', and though he didn't use Bombay in any title, his shows at Sion's Shanmukhananda Hall in 1963 got rave reviews, with songs like 'Caravan', 'In A Sentimental Mood' and 'Take The 'A' Train'. He was accompanied by pianist-arranger Billy Strayhorn, alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves and trumpeter Cat Anderson.

The following year, Armstrong had the crowds swinging to 'When the Saints Go Marchin' In', 'Hello Dolly' and 'St Louis Blues'. Fernandes also referred to visits by trombonist Jack Teagarden and cornetist Red Nichols. However, in the late 1960s, the US shifted its attention to soul and rhythm & blues, bringing in gospel singer Mahalia Jackson.



Tours by the pioneer of the bebop jazz movement, Dizzy Gillespie, and frequent visits by guitarists John McLaughlin and Larry Coryell showed that jazz had many takers in India

### AIMING FOR THE STARS

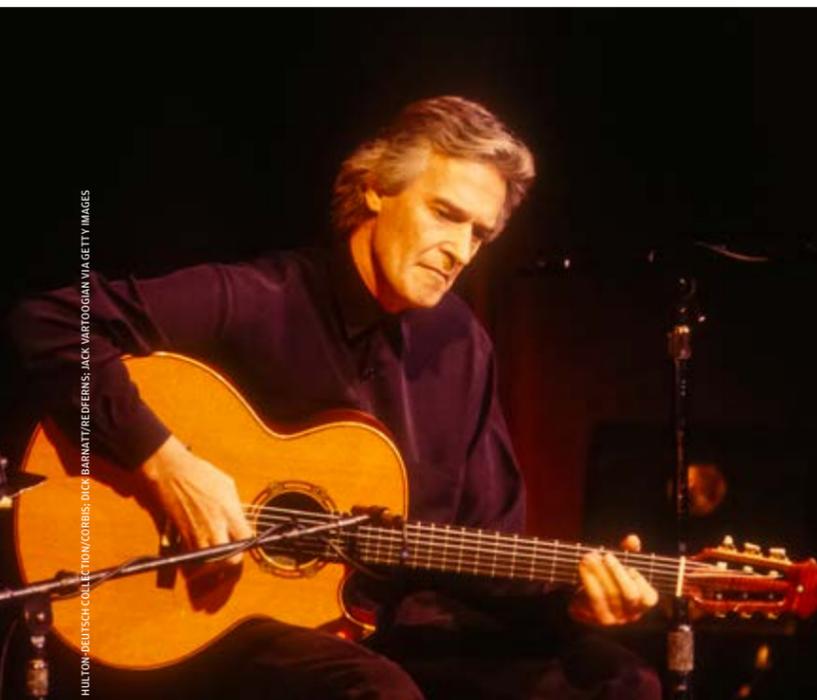
Jazz Yatra continued to grow. The great tenor saxophonist Stan Getz was part of the second instalment. Subsequent festivals featured flautist Herbie Mann, saxophonist-flautist Henry Threadgill, saxophonists Charlie Mariano and Illinois Jacquet, and guitarist Charlie Byrd. In 1980, sitar maestro Ravi Shankar played with his Jazzmine orchestra.

Outside the Yatra, the great trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie did a three-city tour of India, including a show at the Rang Bhavan, accompanied by Banks. Guitarists John McLaughlin and Larry Coryell made regular visits.

Jazz Yatra was a much-awaited event in Mumbai, and people came from other cities to be a part of it. Guitarist Charlie Byrd, who played in 1996, told this writer after his show, "I had heard good things about the festival, and the organisers made many promises. Of course, they fulfilled the promises, and I have picked up a lot of Indian music too."



The 2019 edition of the NCPA International Jazz Festival marked the India debut of the Mingus Dynasty Quintet



Grammy Winner Arturo Sandoval had his first live concert in India at the 2019 NCPA Add Art Festival

Other briefly lasting events like Teachers Jazz (which featured shows by keyboardist Joe Zawinul and vocalist Betty Carter in 1997), the Australian Art Orchestra, Indian Jazz Yatra and Asian Jazz Yatra also gained traction. Foreign consulates brought in many talented acts, mainly from Europe. Jhaveri started the Jazz-India Vocal Institute, where foreign vocalists would learn Indian techniques from thumri exponent Dhanashree Pandit Rai, and sing at the Oberoi (now Trident) in the evenings.

Jazz Yatra eventually made way for Jazz Utsav, which was organised by Capital Jazz, led by eminent lawyer Soli Sorabjee. Later, the NCPA hosted JazzMatazz and Jazz Addicts organised Jus Jazz. The NCPA International Jazz Festival and the International Jazz Day concert on April 30 followed. One attraction of the 2019 edition of the festival was the debut of the Mingus Dynasty Quintet in India. Famous trumpeter Arturo Sandoval performed at the Add Art festival held to celebrate 50 years of the NCPA in 2019. Earlier, pianist Chick Corea played at Bandra's Bal Gandharva Rangmandir (now Sheila Raheja Auditorium).

Sadly, the live scenario was badly affected by the pandemic, and several venues were hit. While a few online events were conducted, everyone's waiting for the live scene to get back in full swing.

Mumbai has had a remarkable jazz history. While some great musicians have graced it in the past, the consensus is that there's a lot of talent today. Hopefully, things will soon continue from where they were before the pandemic. ■

Other developments took place during the Yatra years. The local scene began having more shows, as musicians like Banks, saxophonist Joe Pereira aka Jazzy Joe, trombonist Anibal Castro, vocalist Mabel Castro, and the Monsorate brothers Blasco and Bosco did regular shows, including all-night events at Manori. Venues like Just Desserts and Jazz By The Bay (now known as Pizza By The Bay) promoted the genre.

# A MAN OF HIS WORD

A notable name in the Hindi film industry, Anand Bakhshi's oeuvre is one that finds fans across age groups. The poet, however, was not an overnight success. Committed to his journey to becoming a lyricist, he took on the challenges life brought his way, and that's perhaps why listeners find depth and relatability in the songs penned by the wordsmith. We bring you edited excerpts from his biography, *Nagme, Kisse, Baatein, Yaadein*, by his son, Rakesh Anand Bakshi.



**I**n 1956, Anand Prakash Bakhshi made his second attempt at trying his luck in Bombay knowing the challenges that lay ahead. 'Either I'll become an artiste or I'll drive a taxi. But I won't go back without a respectable livelihood.' He already had a driving licence, as he had driven transportation trucks during his training in the army meant for military and commercial use. He thought driving a taxi could become his part-time occupation, a means to sustain his life in Bombay till he found a job in films. 'I had no other educational qualification nor family support to fall back on so I had to work at it harder than others.'

The first place Bakhshi stayed at was the passengers' waiting room at the Dadar railway station. A few days later, he rented a room at Dadar Guest House, Tulsi Pipe Road, after which he shifted to Hotel Evergreen (later known as Hotel Guru) in Khar West. He would spend all his time writing songs. The hotel was close to the houses of some established music composers—S.D. Burman was in Khar and Roshan in Santacruz. Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia and his wife were also guests at Hotel Evergreen and would leave daily to look for work. Bakhshi would talk less, write more, and he would sometimes entertain those around him by singing his poems and songs. He would have his meals at a sweet shop nearby and eat paan.

The person cleaning his room always complained that Bakhshi threw a lot of paper away with his handwritten Urdu notes and that he ate lots of paans.

Living a bachelor's life in Bombay, he would finish his dinner and begin writing. He wrote standing under a street lamp outside a sweet shop near the Khar station. The owner of the sweet shop was fond of poetry and soon struck up a friendship with Bakhshi. After a few months, he confided in him, 'Bakhshi, *dekho*, I like your poems and I like you. So I will tell you something I don't want you sharing with anyone. We put blotting paper in our rabdi to make it thicker. I know you are very fond of rabdi, but I don't want to deceive you. So don't eat our rabdi.'

Back in the 1950s, when he first arrived in Bombay, it had been difficult for him to make a breakthrough. Writers, composers and film-makers worked in set teams; they had their own favourites and did not want to experiment with newcomers. Film-making is expensive and film-makers, in my own experience too, are very superstitious. They pursue hits often blindly and shun people associated with flops as blindly. In the '50s and '60s, music composers and lyricists were a very close-knit group, and a newcomer could not easily get the attention of the composers. Bakhshi made it a point to meet three or four people daily to ask for work. He would also visit film studios—like the Famous Studios in Mahalaxmi, Kardar Studios in Dadar and Filmistaan in Goregaon among others—every day. A few composers did not take him seriously as a writer when they felt that he wanted to be a singer too and that may have worked against him.

Anuradha Roy, Hariprasad Chaurasia's wife, told me, 'In the late '50s or early '60s, Bakhshiji was staying in the same guest house (Evergreen Hotel), that my husband, Hariji, and I were staying at. His family lived in Lucknow, I was told. And he lived here on his own as he could not afford to bring them to Bombay. We had rooms on the same floor, so when I would pass by his room, I would often encounter the sweeper complaining that he had found too many crumpled papers in Bakhshiji's room. And I wondered what Bakhshiji wrote, since he threw away so much paper every day, making the sweeper's job harder. Two decades later, we happened to live in the same residential building in Bandra. We were one floor above his, and every day we would see the best of cars and the best of composers, producers, directors and actors arriving to meet Bakhshiji for music sittings. We could hear the music sittings going on in his house until late, up to 9 or 10 pm. That sweeper had no idea

that the guest in his hotel was to one day become such a big lyricist.'

After a few months in Bombay, when he could not find work as a truck or car driver, he even pretended to be a motor mechanic and landed a job. But the owner of the car garage found out that Bakhshi was not good at the job on the very first day and told him to leave.

These minor misfortunes aside, Bakhshi was soon to land a film, his first, which he considered his biggest film ever. Far bigger than *Sholay* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* decades later.

Desperate for a break and scared he would run out of his savings, Bakhshi would visit all the film and song recording studios in Bombay, waiting for long hours to meet any film-maker or composer he could run into. The *ex-fauji* strategised it all like a war drill, aiming to meet at least five people daily before returning to his room. During one such strategised visit, he was waiting outside the office of actor Bhagwan Dada (Bhagwan Abhaji Palav) at Ranjit Studios. Bhagwan Dada was a star actor in those days, working on his directorial venture *Bhala Aadmi*, produced by Brij Mohan. Bakhshi befriended the office boy and found out that Bhagwan Dada was stressed about his lyricist not having turned up for a song sitting that day and was looking for a replacement. Bakhshi seized the moment and 'encountered' Bhagwan Dada—by barging straight into his cabin to ask for work.

Bhagwan Dada was taken by surprise and asked him what he wanted. Bakhshi said he was a songwriter looking for work. Bhagwan Dada said, 'Let's see if you can write a song.' He then narrated the story of the film to Bakhshi and gave him fifteen days to write the song.

Within fifteen days, Bakhshi had managed to write the lyrics of four songs. It was not a difficult task for him because in his army days, he would rewrite all the songs, of some of the films he had enjoyed watching. Bhagwan Dada liked all the four songs and signed him as the second lyricist of the film. It was an action film, something Bakhshi had loved watching in his formative years. He was paid ₹150 for these four songs. The first one—'*Dharti ke lal, na kar itna malal, dharti tere liye, tu dharti ke liye*'—was recorded on 9th November 1956. The music composer was Nisar Bazmi who a few years later migrated to Pakistan.

Within two months of his second stint in Bombay, the *geetkar* had been finally born. 'I thought I'd conquered the world! I thought all my problems were over. Little did I realise that they'd only just begun.' The film took two years to complete, was a box-office failure and went unnoticed. So did Bakhshi. For the next six years, he did not have much work in the movie industry. He said, 'You either have no work or you have too much of work. I have experienced both. I was blessed that I experienced the former only in the first eight years of my career.'

A decade later, a few months after the success of *Jab Jab Phool Khile* in 1965, Bhagwan Dada happened to meet the *geetkar* Anand Bakhshi at a film party. He was going through a low phase in his career as an actor and advised him, 'Anand Bakhshi Sahib, *khushi*

*ki baat hai, aap ka bahut naam ho gaya hai. Magar ek baat yaad rakhna, ke yahan iss duniya mein aadmi ko naam se zyada uss ka kaam zinda rakhta hai* (It's great to know that you've made a name for yourself. But always remember that what a man needs to survive in this world is good work rather than just a name).' As Dad told us, 'I never ever forgot those golden words from my first benefactor in the industry.'

*Bhala Aadmi* was released in 1958, two years after the songs had been recorded. Bakhshi had still not found work in films. He was writing a song or two every few months; for some of these he received payment but his name was not credited.

'When I saw my name in the credits, I cried in happiness. Today, if I am called a successful writer, it is because of Bhagwan Dada. A star actor and producer giving me work was a validation of my dreams, prayers and hopes. *Bhala Aadmi*...did not do well at the box office, nor were the songs popular; so it did nothing for my career, *lekin phir bhi, mere liye woh hamesha meri sabse badi film hai aur hamesha rahegi. Kyunki uss film ne hi to he geetkar ko iss duniya mein janam diya* (. . . and yet, for me, it will always be my biggest film. Because it was that film that brought the lyricist into this world).'

In his copy of the newsprint poster of the film, he has underlined his name in red ink. How excited he was! On this poster, his surname was spelt as 'Bakshi' instead of Bakhshi, and the misspelling stuck. He didn't care, because his priorities were different. In his own words, 'I am just looking for another chance to write.' This was his life's philosophy from 1950 all the way to 2002.

After recording his first four songs in 1956, he found no work until 1959. He used to say that this was among the most difficult phases of his life in Bombay. He was running out of patience, because he was running out of his savings and his family back home was cursing him for leaving the pension *wali* army job. Once again, he wrote a personal statement, this time in the form of a poem, titled 'Woh Tadbeerien Nahi Hoti', to inspire himself. It was published more than two decades later, in 1980, in *Ruby* magazine, New Delhi. Seeing that Bakhshi could not find work even after the release of *Bhala Aadmi*, someone told him that he should return to the army. 'The army needs you, the film industry does not.'

But this remark, thrown at him like a rock, only galvanised the *fauji* in him to try harder and show them that they were all wrong. Bakhshi used every stone thrown at him to make the path he walked sturdier and to build the castle of his childhood dreams. '*Ek din mere gaane radio pe bajenge* (One day, my songs would play on the radio)'. The first time he happened to hear his song on the radio, it was in a bazaar, in 1959. ■

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# STRENGTH IN MOVEMENT

With its roots in martial arts and combat, and strength being an essential skill onstage, it is no surprise that Chhau has paved its own path. The colourful masks, the detailed costumes and the deftness of the dancers paint an extraordinary spectacle.

By Sudarshan Chakravorty

I have always been intrigued by the various folk and martial dance forms of India, and being from Bengal, I have had the chance to closely observe Chhau dancers from the district of Purulia. The virtuosity, flexibility, power and vocabulary of this dance form mesmerised me. The use of larger-than-life masks to depict mythological characters, the detailed and elaborate costumes were reminiscent of Kathakali but the dance idiom here was militant, vibrant and kinesthetically demanding.

What amazed me was that in the guise of these ornate 'Gods', were skinny and malnourished dancers, as if this gave them an opportunity to transform themselves and earn the reverence and attention that otherwise evades this community. Purulia is one of the poorest districts of West Bengal, and the Chhau dancers, many of whom are farmers in an arid land, lead a life of deep impoverishment, with minimal opportunities for income generation.

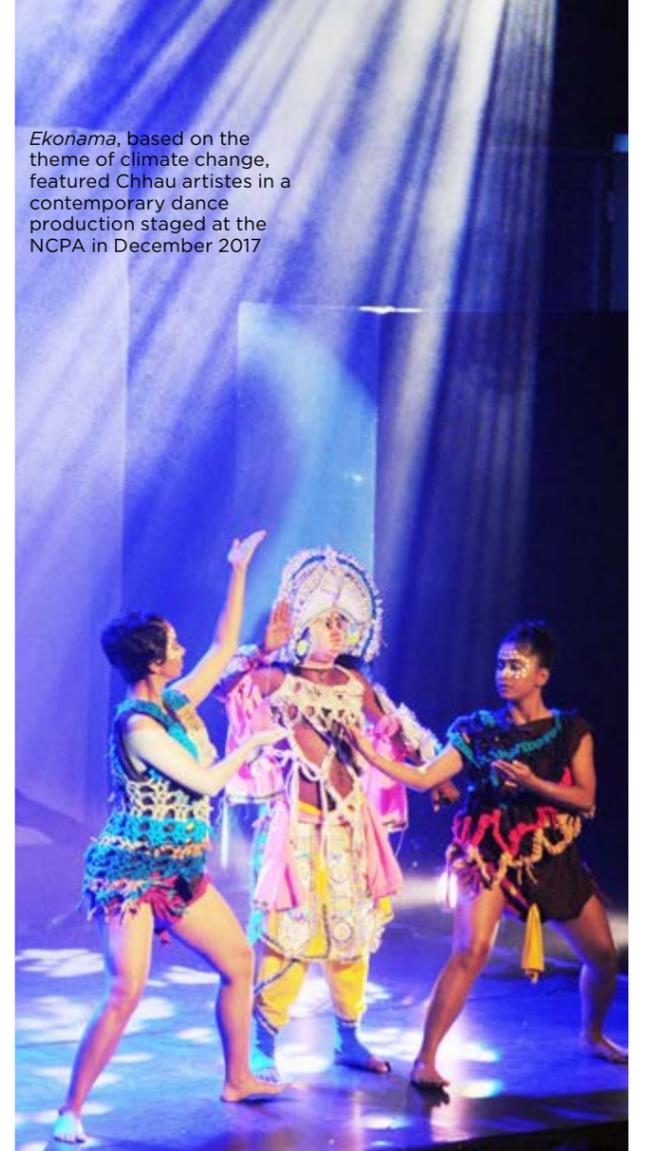
## TRACING THE EVOLUTION

We know that in all traditional styles or forms of dance, *aharya* plays an important part as it recasts the performer's real-life persona as the character they want to depict onstage. For a successful transformation, there are four aspects that need to work in unison; the primary being *aharya* or the costume, jewellery, and make-up. Together, they change the artiste into someone completely new onstage. These are the factors that distinguish each dance style and lend them a unique identity. The other aspects are *vachika*, spoken words; *angika*, body language and gestures; and *satwika*, the pure essence of the form depicted through emotions.

According to Chhau scholar Sunil Mahato, the dance form has gone through several stages of change. It is one of the most heavily adorned dances in India, which is fascinating, considering the kinesthetic challenges posed by this style that includes somersaults, jumps, one-foot pirouettes and turns.

It is noteworthy that this evolution of the Chhau dance form that we see today—with the elaborate use of lights, physically demanding moves, ornate costumes and a live orchestra accompanying the

*Ekonama*, based on the theme of climate change, featured Chhau artistes in a contemporary dance production staged at the NCPA in December 2017



Performances can be based around various themes, including abstract topics, folklore and stories from *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*



dancers—was not prevalent even 35 to 40 years ago in Mahato's village of Kaluhar in West Bengal.

It was here that a community of Napits was brought in and given some land to till, offering them refuge. Out of the three brothers from a family belonging to the community, the oldest, Gour Napit, was proficient in dance and music, and it was he who started the first 'group' of Chhau dancers and included sequences like *Ganesh Nach* and *Parashuram Nach*, which were performed to vibrant beats played by the middle brother, Abu, who was a skilled drummer.

In a typical performance by the group, the lower body was draped in a short dhoti and a *kamarbandh* (waistband), a smaller mask was used and the dancer's body covered in



This acrobatic martial art-based dance form is one that relies heavily on the endurance and skill of the performers

## CHHAU IS A FASCINATING AMALGAM OF ACROBATICS, AESTHETICS AND MYTHOLOGY AND IT PROVES THE DYNAMISM, POWER, STRENGTH AND VITALITY OF THE ARTISTES INVOLVED, EARNING THEM THE RESPECT THEY DESERVE

brick powder. That was the initial stage of aharya in Chhau, which, compared to today's paraphernalia, would seem amateur.

Competition was also fostered by introducing other dance groups like the one of Buchon Mahato from the village of Khudiyatar. This proved helpful as the competitive spirit gradually pushed the form and presentation to evolve. It brought in the use of elaborate costumes, with more layers of waistbands, an ornate cape made from stiffer materials to be worn around the neck, floral armlets and wristbands. The masks became larger and, at times, were the focal point of the entire costume. The professionalism and popularity of the Chhau groups was determined by the quality of the masks and costumes first and then by the act itself.

Gradually, the introduction of famous names, like Dhudha Mahato, Gambhir Singh, Anil Mahato, Nepal Mahato and Juru Kumar, added value, stardom and glory to the dance form.

### LAYERED WORK

In its nascent stage, Chhau was performed without a *mukosh* (mask). The dancers would paint their faces and wear a small *mukut* (crown), and move to spoken words and songs sung by the artiste himself. This was the starting point of the dance form in the village of Ranga Metyo of Para Ana, Purulia. Soon, dance



Chhau is traditionally performed in an open ground, and starts late in the day and continues till dawn

groups started donning masks, and, for a while, Purulia witnessed both the styles being followed simultaneously. First to be introduced were wooden masks. They were created in Charida in Baghmundi by the Sutradhar community, but performing such demanding moves proved to be difficult with heavy wooden masks. So, the makers devised an option from papier-mâché. This resulted in much lighter masks, facilitating the easy execution of the acrobatic movements. These masks continue to be in use.



The mask is central to a Chhau performance and making it calls for a high level of craftsmanship

character, which may be Goddess Durga, Lord Ganesha, Shiva, Kartikeya, etc. A special ointment is then applied to the mask to give it a glossy, attractive look. Wool or dried jute is used to make the hair. Different colours and accessories are used to depict a particular god or demon, and various embellishments like artificial flowers, *zari* (gold threads), peacock feathers, etc. are added to make the mask a striking visual in the whole performance.

The masks of Purulia Chhau are unique and quite unlike the ones used in the Chhau dances of Seraikela from Jharkhand and Mayurbhanj from Odisha. In the years spent perfecting the art

Over time, the popularity of the masked Chhau groups overshadowed that of the groups that didn't wear them, with the latter being pushed to the periphery and eventually into oblivion. Today, we only see masked performers.

The process of making masks is an intricate one. The artisans first create a *chaach* (mould) of the faces; this could be of gods or goddesses, real people or even ferocious animals. They then use a thin cotton cloth with *poli mati* (clay and mud) as a layer. Once several layers are placed, the masks are dried in the sun. When fully dry, the paper masks are separated from the moulds and are ready to be painted.

The craftsmen add colour, bringing out the expression of the eyes and shape of the lips, and structure the face to give it the look of the intended

form, the visual extravagance of the Chhau dance has made a name for itself on the international stage. It is a fascinating amalgam of acrobatics, aesthetics and mythology and it proves the dynamism, power, strength and vitality of the artistes involved, earning them the respect they deserve in the global dance scene and the status of intangible cultural heritage of India. ■

- (With inputs from Sunil Mahato)

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Sudarshan Chakravorty is a pioneer of an experimental form resulting from individual and ensemble mind-body improvisations. He is Founder-Director, Sapphire Creations Dance Company, Chairman, Subijoya Dance Foundation Trust, and Director of Interface, Eastern India's First International Dance Biennial.

## The message behind *Ekonama*

Between 2015 and 2018, I collaborated with the Chhau dancers of Purulia to create my production *Ekonama* on climate change. My interest in including Chhau artistes in a contemporary dance production had two important reasons. First, to showcase the physical martial vocabulary of the traditional form intercepted by the physicality of contemporary dance. Another reason was to have a greater insight into the details of the Chhau idiom that is often hidden behind the elaborate costumes and masks and to attempt to dissolve the divide of the urban and rural artistes in a single performance.

As the production demanded the role of dying gods on arid, parched, grey earth, with the frenzied attempt of the human race to restore life, the gradual stripping of the Chhau dancers

from their magnificent attire towards minimalism only evoked and highlighted the fragility of the human body—fitting for the narrative of the impending doom global warming holds for us. Another unique factor was that the Chhau dancers were co-choreographed by a Turkish director and they performed to digital music created by two international musicians. Thus, the production was a successful collaboration that blurred the divide of culture, race and form and was bound by just the spirit of the arts.

The show premiered in Kolkata in 2016 and also travelled to the Seattle International Dance Festival in 2017, followed by several other performances, including one in the Contemporary Dance Season of NCPA in December 2017.

# Truth and Fiction

ON Stage brings you edited excerpts from the *NCPA Quarterly Journal*, an unsurpassed literary archive that ran from 1972 to 1988 and featured authoritative and wide-ranging articles. In the second part, scholar, curator and Indophile **Robert J. Del Bonta** discusses the West's understanding of India's heritage and traditions, and the sometimes skewed portrayal of it.

The most interesting thing for an Indophile is that few of these operas owe much to the real India. One might presume that this fact would be disappointing but many of the mistakes and oddities of the libretti illustrate the way the West has viewed India over the past few centuries, beginning with the lush tropical setting for melodrama in Adolphe Adam's *Si j'étais Roi* and ending with Phillip Glass's rather surrealistic vision of the Mahatma, set to verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* sung in Sanskrit in his opera, *Satyagraha*.

With the exception of the most recent operas concerning India, the picture of India is often lumped together with an equally hazy vision of the Islamic world. This may not seem true at first glance—

considering that the plot lines of the most popular ones are consistently Hindu.

Leila is the name of the Hindu priestess in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, but it is also the name of a very popular heroine in Persian literature, indeed the heroine of the opera *Leyli and Medzhnun* by Uzeir Abdul Husein Hajibeyov, a Persian composer from Azerbaijan. Nadir, Zurga and Nourabad are Persian as well, but they are all plopped down in a fishing village in Sri Lanka, the tropical paradise depicted in so many of the French operas about India.

After the duet "Au fond du temple saint" for tenor and baritone (often referred to as "That duet from *The Pearl Fishers*" on FM radio), the priestess Leila makes her entrance. Both the tenor and

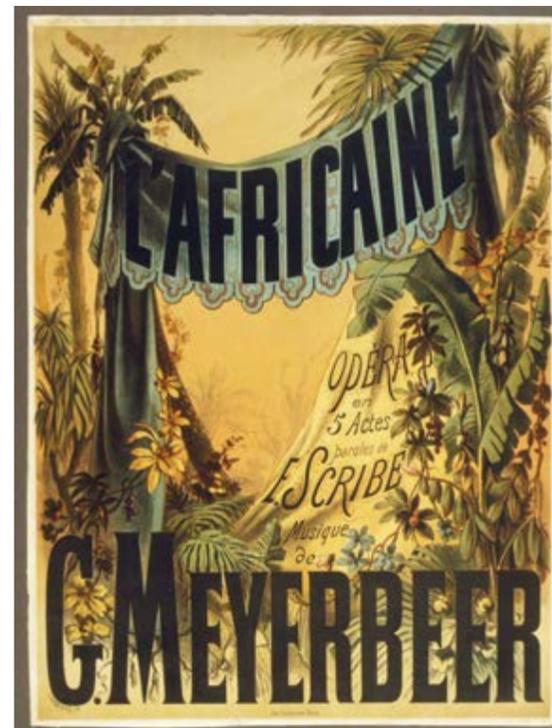
baritone have loved and forsaken her, but her reappearance—heavily veiled and ordered not to speak to any man—gets the drama rolling. Needless to say, the tenor and soprano sing lengthily of their love, the baritone finds out, condemns them and then saves them. The whole plot rests on the fact that the lady is veiled.

### Down to perception

Most of these operas are Hindu in theme, but much of their romance owes a great deal to the picture of the veiled lady in the harem, removed from the world, and, therefore, desired by every male around—they must be beautiful if they are protected in such a fashion, after all. For an old India hand with a rather strong penchant for the Hindu world,



*Les Pêcheurs de Perles* is the story of Leila, a priestess, who is courted by pearl divers



*L'Africaine* is one of the grandest of the 19th century French operas

Leila's predicament as she sings to the great god Brahma is musically beautiful but difficult to accept when forced into a historical setting.

The grandest of the 19th-century French grand operas is *L'Africaine*, the last work of Giacomo Meyerbeer. Again, we are presented with a tropical landscape, including a deadly tree under which the Indian beauty Selika grandly inhales its perfumes in a sophisticated and melodic, if not quite believable, suicide. Her Western lover, Vasco da Gama, lends some basis of historical accuracy to the plot, but, as seen in these Indian operas, the name 'Selika' hints at an Arabic heritage for this Hindu queen-priestess, just as the earlier protagonists of Bizet's opera hint at Persian origins.

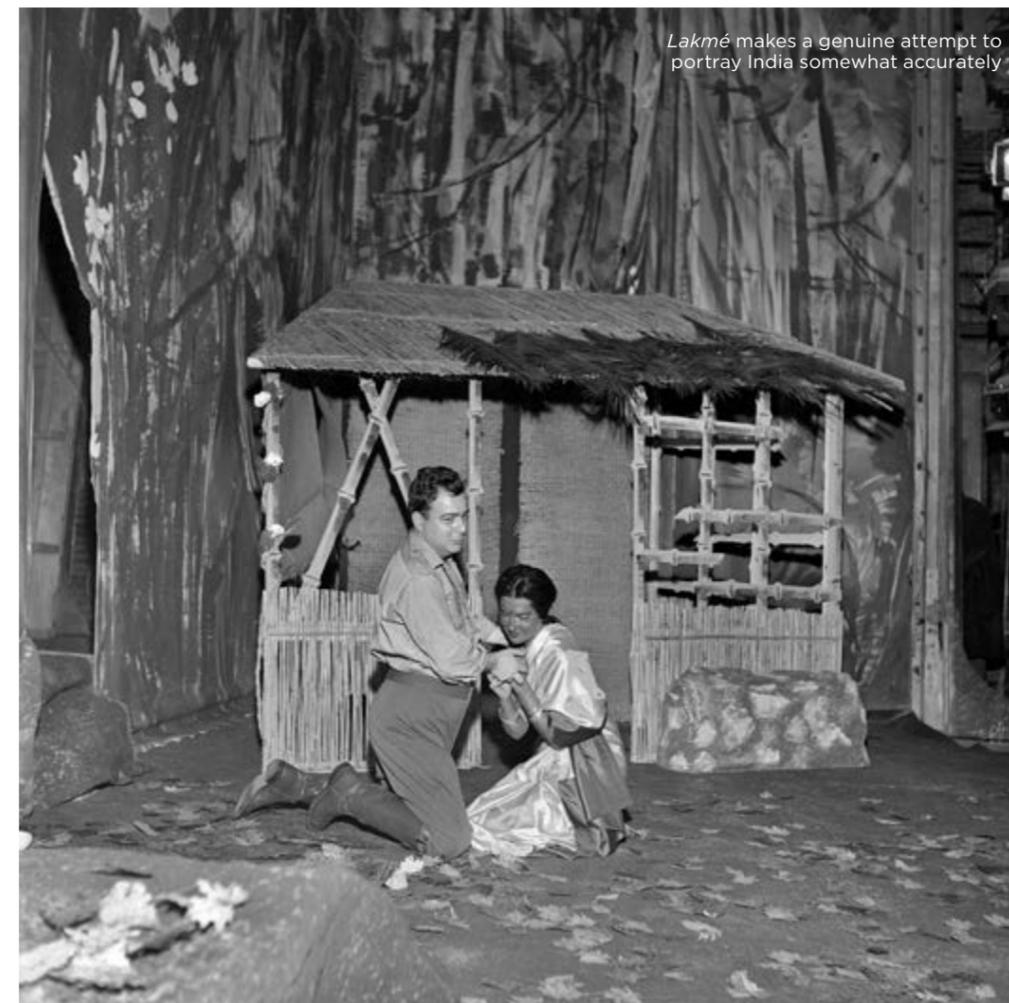
The plotline of *L'Africaine* is anticipated in part by the opera *Jessonda* of 1823 by Louis Spohr, based on A.M. Lemierre's *La Veuve de Malabar* about the love of Tristan d'Acunha for the widow of the Maharaja of Goa. The similarities are primarily the Portuguese-Indian connection since the lovers are united after the widow is saved from death on her husband's funeral pyre.

While at least one source suggests that Jules Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore*—his first opera written for L'Opera in Paris—was based on a story from the *Mahabharata*, the story suggests

otherwise. Again, the names used are surprising. Timour, the name of the Central Asian conqueror (the *Tamerlane* of our high school English classes) is quite inappropriate for a Brahman priest. Scindia, the name of the heroine's uncle, is an Indian name but one that's used only by the most recent ruling family of Gwalior, many years and miles removed from Lahore during the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century. Sita, the heroine, and the god Indra are the only authentic Hindu names of the lot.

My favourite Indian opera for a variety of reasons is Leo Delibe's *Lakmé*, which owes much to the same interest in the exotic of the earlier French operas. There is a definite attempt to portray India in this opera, although some of it may seem wrong. We can notice these errors since we are in a more fortunate position to understand India better than 19th-century librettists.

It is often stated that the libretto of *Lakmé* is based on *Le Manage de Loti* by Pierre Loti (pseudonym of Julien



*Lakmé* makes a genuine attempt to portray India somewhat accurately

Puccini and his librettists did a lot of research to keep *Madama Butterfly* as realistic as possible, and this included travelling to Nagasaki and understanding Japanese music



Viaud), but even after a glance at this charming fictionalised travelogue, it is soon discovered that it is not about India at all and instead takes place in the South Seas. The point is that rather than saying “based on”, these accounts of the opera should read “inspired by”. Both works concern an East-West romance and on one level may suggest the non-Western siren, but both Rarahu, the primitive girl from Bora-Bora in the novel, and Lakmé, clearly the product of a sophisticated and highly moral ancient civilisation, are destroyed by their encounters with the West. The men survive. Lakmé is driven to suicide, while Rarahu takes on with any good-looking sailor before she succumbs to her malady.

For the opera buff, it is curious that another book by Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, was the inspiration for the series of works that led to Giacomo Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. Although about Japan and a Japanese wife for a foreigner, *Madame Chrysanthème* has little to do with Puccini’s popular opera. Where Loti plays the amoral Frenchman, the operatic characters of Gerald and Pinkerton are quite different.

I am not sure if many who have

visited India can completely believe the setting of *Lakmé*. I have yet to find the tropical garden in which Lakmé was kept by her father; I have searched for it on my travels to India and I really do

in sentiment and content. Where in *Madama Butterfly*, the amoral and somewhat dense Pinkerton pushes Cio-Cio-San to her grand rite of suicide, Gerald seems less guilty. He certainly

***Savitri* truly is a tale from the Mahabharata, and Holst, his own librettist, tells it as it was written. With its small orchestra consisting of two string quartets, a contra-bass, two flutes and an English horn, the music of *Savitri* may not be in the same grand manner of the French operas discussed, but it is extremely compelling**

hope I find such a thing amid the harsh realities of India. At the same time, the story of the love between the innocent Lakmé and the Britisher, whose call to duty leads her so quietly into suicide, is extremely moving, if not quite Indian

has no Sharpless to warn him of the delicate nature of the heroine; rather, he and Lakmé become the victims of the confrontation of two cultures.

*Lakmé* is the only opera holding the stage which deals with the English

experience in India, while both *Jessonda* and *L’Africaine* deal with the Portuguese in India. It is interesting that British literature did not give rise to any opera still performed today. The only operas mentioned in the standard references are based on Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* from his *Oriental Tales*. They are Spontini’s *Nurmahal* of 1822 (based on his play with songs *Lalla Rookh* of 1821), Rubinstein’s *Feramors* of 1863, David’s *Lalla Rookh* of 1877, Lalo’s *Namoura* of 1882, and a few ballets. The most telling revival of an opera could be of *The Englishmen in India* of 1828 by Sir Henry Bishop.

**In touch with reality**

It is with *Savitri* by Gustav Holst that we find our first genuine Indian story. This falls into what is called Holst’s Indian period which includes an opera *Sita* of 1900-06, a cantata entitled *Cloud Messenger* of 1909-10, and both Hymns and Choral Hymns from the *Rig Veda*. *Savitri* truly is a tale from the *Mahabharata*, and Holst, his own librettist, tells it as it was written. With its small orchestra consisting of two string quartets, a contra-bass, two flutes and an English horn, the music of *Savitri* may not be in the same grand manner as the French operas already discussed, but it is extremely compelling. It tells the beautiful story of the outwitting of Death by Savitri, the devoted wife, and the return to life of her husband Satyavan. Rather than offer her own life to save that of her husband, as does the Western Alceste in Gluck’s opera, *Savitri* approaches the matter from a purely Indian point of view—she asks for her own life. When Death points out that she already has it, she instructs him in the definition of what life is to a woman: to

fulfil her functions of wife and mother. In India, a husband’s death is related to the merit(karma) of his wife, and the plight of the childless widow is often extremely unpleasant. Only the land which shocked the British with its numerous *suttees* (satis) could present such a non-modern sentiment in so poignant a manner.

While Holst’s story comes from the ancient literature of India, as did the few operas based on Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala*, I have to date heard only one opera which is based on an actual event in the rich history of India, and that is *Padmavati* by Albert Roussel. There is also a ballet by the same title by Leo Staats from 1923.

The characters of the opera are, on the whole, accurately named. Ratan Sen is Ratan Singh, the Maharaja of

Chitor, and the husband of the beautiful and the accomplished Padmavati, originally a princess from Sri Lanka and named Padmini in history. The historical uncle and cousin of Padmini, Gora and Badal respectively, are members of Ratan Sen’s staff in the opera. Ala-ud-din Khalji is presented as a Mughal, although the Mughals did not take control of India until the fall of the Delhi Sultanate in the early 16th century. ■

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This article first appeared in its entirety in the NCPA Quarterly Journal in March 1988 (Vol XVII, No. 1).

The writer’s use of the names of religious communities is purely for the academic purpose of highlighting historical and factual inconsistencies in the naming of characters.



Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* was an inspiration for many composers and it was seen a number of adaptations

# Programme Guide

November 2021

(Programmes are subject to change. Please check the website and refer to our emails for updated information.)



## WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC



SOI Chamber Orchestra, 14th, Tata Theatre

**SOI Chamber Orchestra**  
Marat Bisengaliev, conductor & violin  
*Entirely Elgar*  
(70 mins)  
Tata Theatre  
Sunday, 14th – 5.00 pm

### An NCPA Presentation

SOI Music Director **Marat Bisengaliev** is a noted interpreter of the works of Sir Edward Elgar. His album *Elgar: Rediscovered works for violin, Vol. 1* was nominated for a Gramophone Award and the second volume was named by Classic FM as one of the "Top 5 Elgar recordings". In 2013, Bisengaliev received the first Elgar Proliferation Award from the American Elgar Foundation. In this concert, Bisengaliev will lead the SOI Chamber Orchestra as conductor and violin soloist in a programme dedicated entirely to Elgar that delves into works spanning the composer's life.

### Programme:

Elgar:  
Romance, Op. 1  
Serenade (arr. Szigeti)  
*Salut d'Amour*  
Intermezzo  
*Introduction and allegro*  
Serenade for strings  
*Sospiri*, Op. 70  
'Nimrod' from *Enigma Variations*  
Adieu

Tickets: ₹1,125, 750 & 375/- (Members)

₹1,500, 1,000 & 500/- (Public)  
(Inclusive of GST)  
Box Office: 26th October for  
Members & 29th October for Public

## SCREENING



The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess, 17th, Godrej Dance Theatre

**The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess**  
Opera Screening (195 mins)  
Sung in English with English Subtitles  
Godrej Dance Theatre  
Wednesday, 17th – 5.00 pm

### An NCPA – The Metropolitan Opera (New York) Presentation

"Splendid... gripping" —*The New York Times*

The dazzling new production of the Gershwins' great American opera was the Met's biggest crowd-pleasing hit of the season, with a superlative cast led by Eric Owens and Angel Blue in the title roles. *The Washington Post* hailed it as it "a *Porgy* of its time that speaks to ours."

*Porgy and Bess* is set in Catfish Row, a dockside area of Charleston, about 1930. The plot depicts the story of Porgy, a disabled black street-beggar living in the slums of Charleston, and Bess who wants to turn away from her former life as a prostitute and addict. Following a murder, Bess's abusive partner Crown flees, leaving her amongst a disapproving community. Porgy and Bess develop an unlikely

relationship and Bess finally finds acceptance on Catfish Row – until a hurricane and return of Crown change everything.

Conductor: **David Robertson**  
Production: **James Robinson**  
Cast: **Angel Blue, Golda Schultz, Latonia Moore, Denyce Graves, Frederick Ballentine, Eric Owens, Alfred Walker & Donovan Singletary**

Tickets:  
₹450/- (Members)  
₹500/- (Public)  
Box Office: 26th October for  
Members & 29th October for Public

## DANCE

**Catalyst**  
An evening celebrating choreographies born during lockdown  
Bharatanatyam by Anand Sachitanandan & Jayalakshmi, Kathak by Pooja Pant Dance Company, and Mohiniattam by Sujatha Nair  
(Approx. 60 mins)  
Experimental Theatre  
Thursday, 18th – 6.30pm

### An NCPA Presentation

The national lockdown may have taken away a lot of privileges from us but it has also been a good teacher, a



Catalyst, 18th, Experimental Theatre



Catalyst, 18th, Experimental Theatre

catalyst that has sowed the seeds of new knowledge and forced artists to start thinking out of the box and create work never thought of before. This evening is the first of many such presentations which feature choreographies that have been born during the lockdown. Some of these choreographies have been presented online in a limited space to suit the mobile camera screen and will now be remodelled to be featured on a live performance stage. There will be presentations by group members who have redesigned a choreography that was originally created by merging videos shot in their individual spaces. The NCPA brings them all together, not online but physically for the first time after a long gap. The edition would have a Bharatanatyam duet presentation by Anand – Jayalakshmi, a group presentation by Pooja Pant Dance Company, and Mohiniattam by Sujatha Nair

Tickets:  
₹360 & 270 /- (Members)  
₹400 & 300/- (Public)  
Box Office: 26th October for  
Members & 29th October for Public

## SCREENING



The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, 24th, Godrej Dance Theatre

**The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time**  
Theatre Screening  
Godrej Dance Theatre

Wednesday, 24th – 5.00 pm

### An NCPA-National Theatre Live (London) Presentation

Christopher, 15 years old, stands beside Mrs Shears's dead dog. It is seven minutes after midnight and Christopher is under suspicion. He records each fact in the book he is writing to solve the mystery of who murdered Wellington. He has an extraordinary brain, exceptional at maths while ill-equipped to interpret everyday life. He has never ventured alone beyond the end of his road; he detests being touched and he distrusts strangers. But his detective work, forbidden by his father, takes him on a frightening journey that upturns his world.

Based on the novel by **Mark Haddon**  
Adapted by **Simon Stephens**  
Cast: **Luke Treadaway, Niamh Cusack, Paul Ritter, Nicola Walker and Sophie Duval**

Tickets:  
₹360/- (Members)  
₹400/- (Public)  
Box Office: 26th October for Members  
and 29th October for Public

## SCREENING



Boris Godunov By Modest Mussorgsky, 25th, Godrej Dance Theatre

**Boris Godunov By Modest Mussorgsky**  
(160 mins)  
Opera Screening  
Godrej Dance Theatre  
Thursday, 25th – 6.00 pm

### An NCPA - The Metropolitan Opera (New York) Presentation

Bass René Pape reprises his tremendous portrayal of the tortured tsar caught between grasping ambition and crippling paranoia, kicking off the 2021-22 Live in HD season. Conductor Sebastian Weigle

leads Mussorgsky's masterwork, a pillar of the Russian repertoire, in its original 1869 version. Stephen Wadsworth's affecting production poignantly captures the hope and suffering of the Russian people, as well as the title ruler himself.

Conductor: **Sebastian Weigle**  
Production: **Stephen Wadsworth**  
Set Designer: **Ferdinand Wögerbauer**  
Costume Designer: **Moidele Bickel**  
Lighting Designer: **Duane Schuler**  
Cast: **David Butt Philip, Maxim Paster, Aleksey Bogdanov, René Pape, Ain Anger & Ryan Speedo Green**

Tickets:  
₹450/- (Members)  
₹500/- (Public)  
Box Office: 9th November for  
Members & 12th November for Public

## INTERNATIONAL MUSIC



Retromagic, 27th, Tata Theatre

**Retromagic**  
(Approx. 100 mins)  
Tata Theatre  
Saturday, 27th – 7.00 pm

### An NCPA Presentation

Let **Samantha Noella** and the **Crooked Tailbones** take you back in time to a place where music made you dance the night away, groove your cares away, lift your spirits to a new high. Music from the '60s to the '90s— from Abba to the Spice Girls, Aretha to Cher, The Cranberries to Whitney, The Bee Gees to Bruno Mars, Ed Sheeran to Michael Jackson, Bangles to the Beatles, Boney M to Simply Red, Earth, Wind & Fire to The Police, and many more—awaits you.

Tickets: ₹750, 600 & 375/- (Members)  
₹1,000, 800 & 500/- (Public) (Plus GST)  
Box Office: 26th October for  
Members & 29th October for Public

# What's Next

DECEMBER 2021 & JANUARY 2022

(Programmes are subject to change. Please check the website and refer to our emails for updated information.)

## WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC



SOI Chamber Orchestra, 2nd December, Tata Theatre

### SOI Chamber Orchestra

Tata Theatre  
Thursday, 2nd December – 7.00 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation

Programme details to be announced shortly

Tickets: ₹1,125, 750 & 375/- (Members)  
1,500, 1,000 & 500/- (Public)  
(Inclusive of GST)

Box Office: 9th November for Members  
& 12th November for Public

## SCREENING

### The Lehman Trilogy

Theatre Screening (210 mins)  
Godrej Dance Theatre  
Wednesday, 8th December – 5.00 pm

#### An NCPA-National Theatre Live (London) Presentation

The story of a family and a company that changed the world, told in three parts on a single evening.

Academy Award-winner Sam Mendes (*Skyfall*, *The Ferryman*) directs **Simon Russell Beale**, **Adam Godley** and **Ben Miles** who play the



The Lehman Trilogy, 8th December, Godrej Dance Theatre

Lehman Brothers, their sons, and grandsons. On a cold September morning in 1844, a young man from Bavaria stands on a New York dockside dreaming of a new life in the new world. He is joined by his two brothers and an American epic begins. One hundred and sixty-years later, the firm they establish – Lehman Brothers – spectacularly collapses into bankruptcy and triggers the largest financial crisis in history.

This critically acclaimed and five-time Olivier Award-nominated play features stunning set design from **Es Devlin** (NT Live: *Hamlet*)

Adapted by **Ben Power**  
Written by **Stefano Massini**  
Directed by **Sam Mendes**

Tickets: ₹360/- (Members)  
₹400/- (Public)  
Box Office: 9th November for Members  
& 12th November for Public

## DANCE

### Catalyst

An evening celebrating choreographies born during lockdown  
Bharatanatyam solo by **Keerthana Ravi**, Duet by **Pavitra Bhat & Aparna Shastry**, and Odissi by **Asha Nambiar & Group**  
(Approx. 60 mins)

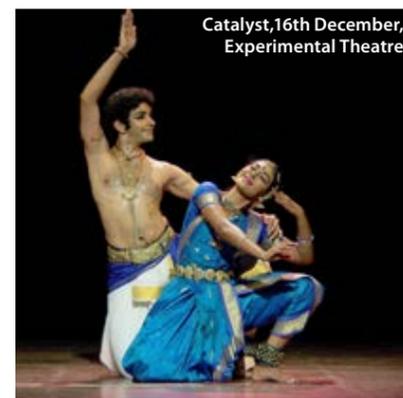
Experimental Theatre  
Thursday, 16th December – 6.30 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation

The national lockdown may have taken away a lot of privileges from us but it has also been a good teacher, a catalyst that has sowed the seeds of new knowledge and forced artistes to start thinking out of the box and create work never thought of before. This evening is the first of many such presentations which features choreographies that have been born during the lockdown. Some of these choreographies have been presented online in a limited space to suit the mobile camera screen and will now be remodelled to be featured on a live performance stage. There will be presentations by group members who have redesigned a choreography that was originally created by merging videos shot in their individual spaces. The NCPA brings



Catalyst, 16th December, Experimental Theatre



Catalyst, 16th December, Experimental Theatre

them all together, not online but physically for the first time after a long gap. The edition will feature a solo by Bharatanatyam artiste **Keerthana Ravi**, a Bharatanatyam duet by **Pavitra Bhat & Aparna Shastry**, and Odissi by **Asha Nambiar & Group**.

Tickets: ₹360 & 270/- (Members)  
₹400 & 300/- (Public)  
Box Office: 9th November for Members & 12th November for Public

## INTERNATIONAL MUSIC



It's Christmas with Merlin and The All Stars, 17th December, Tata Theatre

### It's Christmas with Merlin and The All Stars

Tata Theatre  
Friday, 17th December – 7.00 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation

Come join us as we celebrate the joyous season of the year 2021, and sing Christmas carols and timeless classics with the country's leading artistes performing at the NCPA.

Tickets: ₹750, 600 & 375/- (Members)  
₹1,000, 800 & 500/- (Public) (Plus GST)  
Box Office: 9th November for Members  
& 12th November for Public

## SCREENING



War Horse, 22nd December, Godrej Dance Theatre

### War Horse

Theatre Screening (165 mins)  
Godrej Dance Theatre  
Wednesday, 22nd December – 6.00 pm

#### An NCPA-National Theatre Live (London) Presentation

At the outbreak of World War One, Joey, young Albert's beloved horse, is sold to the cavalry

and shipped to France. He's soon caught up in enemy fire, and fate takes him on an extraordinary journey, serving on both sides before finding himself alone in no man's land. Albert, who remained on his parents' Devon farm, cannot forget Joey. Though still not old enough to enlist, he embarks on a treacherous mission to find him and bring him home. Based on the beloved novel by Michael Morpurgo, this powerfully moving and imaginative drama, filled with stirring music and songs, is a show of phenomenal inventiveness. At its heart are astonishing life-sized horses by South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company, who bring breathing, galloping, charging horses to thrilling life on stage. *War Horse* is an unforgettable theatrical event which takes audiences on an extraordinary journey from the fields of rural Devon to the trenches of First World War France.

Playwright: **Nick Stafford**  
Directed by **Marianne Elliott & Tom Morris**

Tickets: ₹360/- (Members)  
₹400/- (Public)  
Box Office: 9th November for Members  
& 12th November for Public

## SCREENING



The Nutcracker, 23rd December, Godrej Dance Theatre

### The Nutcracker

Ballet Screening (135 mins)  
Godrej Dance Theatre  
Thursday, 23rd December – 6.00 pm

#### An NCPA – Pathé Live (Paris) Presentation

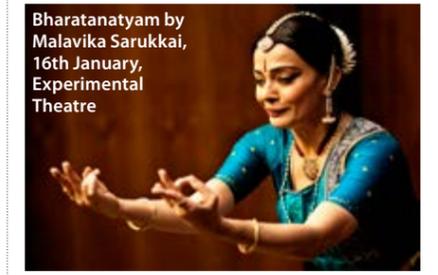
Tchaikovsky's beloved score which has delighted the hearts and ears of generations of music lovers is brought to life by the Bolshoi Ballet dancers in *The Nutcracker*. On Christmas eve, Marie and her whole family are gathered around the tree in celebration of the holiday. She receives a magical gift from her godfather Drosselmeyer and soon enough, this Christmas eve will take an unexpected turn for her. Marie's new doll comes alive and carries her into a whirlwind adventure. Experience this holiday classic with the whole family through the eyes of Marie and her Nutcracker Prince on the big screen.

Music: **Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

Choreography: **Yuri Grigorovich**  
Libretto: **Yuri Grigorovich** (after E.T.A. Hoffmann and Marius Petipa)  
Cast: **Margarita Shrayner, Semyon Chudin, Denis Savin, Alexander Vodopetov & the Bolshoi Corps Ballet**

Tickets: ₹450/- (Members)  
₹500/- (Public)  
Box Office: 9th December for Members  
& 12th December for Public

## DANCE



Bharatanatyam by Malavika Sarukkai, 16th January, Experimental Theatre

### Bharatanatyam by Malavika Sarukkai

(Approx. 90 mins)  
Experimental Theatre  
Sunday, 16th January 2022 – 5.00 pm

**Malavika Sarukkai** was trained in Bharatanatyam by gurus Kalyanasundaram, Swamimalai S.K. Rajarathnam and Kalanidhi Narayanan and has been performing for more than three decades. She is proficient in Odissi which she learnt from Gurus Kelucharan Mohapatra and Ramani Jena. She is a dancer, choreographer and teaches a few select students. She has performed in major dance festivals in India and abroad. Some of them are the Festivals of India in the US, France, the UK, Japan, Spain and Brazil, international festivals and cultural events at Jacob's Pillow, UCLA, Asia Society, Theatre de la Ville, Edinburgh Festival, etc.

She is a recipient of senior fellowships and production grants from the Department of Culture, Government of India, for creating new work and extending the repertoire. She has choreographed and performed solo thematic productions. Sarukkai has received several awards, notably Padma Shri, Sangeet Natak Akademi national award, Kalaimamani, Nritya Choodamani (Sree Krishna Gana Sabha), Mrinalini Sarabhai Award, the Raza Award for the Arts, etc.

Tickets: ₹450 & 360/- (Members)  
₹500 & 400/- (Public)  
Box Office: 9th December for Members  
& 12th December for Public

**Membership Categories (Renewal Rates):**

<b>Annual Membership</b>	<b>Rates** (₹):</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	7,500
<input type="checkbox"/> Couple	10,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Student*	2,500 (6-21 yrs)
<input type="checkbox"/> Differently Abled	750
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen (Individual)	4,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen (Couple)	5,000

<b>Life Membership (25 yrs.)</b>	<b>Rates** (₹):</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	1,87,500
<input type="checkbox"/> Couple	2,50,000

<b>Special Membership Packages</b>	<b>Rates** (₹):</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Defence Personnel (Army/Navy/Air Force)	On Request
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Membership	On Request
<input type="checkbox"/> Group & Family Membership	On Request

**Membership Benefits:**

- ▶ Avail generous discounts on tickets for events and workshops
- ▶ Enjoy priority booking facility
- ▶ Access privileged seating to more than 36 free events in a year across various genres.
- ▶ Receive a personal free copy of the NCPA's monthly arts magazine and programme guide, **ON Stage**, couriered to your doorstep
- ▶ Receive advance e-mail notification of events
- ▶ Get a personalised membership card and gain free access to the NCPA Books and Music library
- ▶ Enjoy exclusive discounts offered by our brand partners

\* Conditions apply



# Membership Application form

Dear Member,

This is a reminder to renew your membership for the next annual term. Renewals are open for memberships that have expired. You also have the option of renewing your membership for the next two years. In order to keep all information up to date and recent, we request you to please fill in this membership form in order to renew your membership. Kindly submit this form along with **recent passport-sized photograph/s and your membership card/s to the membership department. You can now renew your membership online. Log on to [www.ncpamumbai.com](http://www.ncpamumbai.com) for details. For enquiry on new membership, please contact the Membership Department.**

Primary Member Name: .....

Joint Member Name: ..... (in case of couple membership)

Membership No. ....

Address: .....

..... Pin Code: .....

Telephone: ..... Mobile: .....

Email: ..... Date of Birth: .....

Occupation: ..... Company: .....

Date: ..... Signature: .....



## Be a Friend

Dear Friend of the SOI,

Thank you for your continued support of the Symphony Orchestra of India. We'd like to take this opportunity to remind you that it is time to renew your association with the SOI. Renewals are open for memberships that have expired. **Please check the validity on your card.** In order to keep all information up to date, we request you to please fill in this renewal form along with a recent passport-sized photograph and submit it to the Membership department at the Tata Theatre. A new SOI card will be issued to you immediately.

Dear Sir,

I wish to renew my association with the Symphony Orchestra of India

Name: .....

SOI Card No.: .....

Address: .....

..... Pin Code: .....

Telephone: ..... Mobile: .....

Email: ..... Date of Birth: .....

Occupation: ..... Company: .....

Cheque No.: ..... Date: .....

Drawn On: .....

Date: ..... Signature: .....

Become a Friend of the SOI by contributing ₹15,000 p.a \*\*. Each friend of the SOI is entitled to the following benefits:

- ▶ Acknowledgement in the SOI Souvenir Brochure
- ▶ Two complimentary tickets for any one performance each season
- ▶ Priority booking
- ▶ Invitation to at least one private reception every year
- ▶ Opportunity to meet the artistes
- ▶ Complimentary copy of **ON Stage** (NCPA's monthly magazine) at your doorstep
- ▶ Free access to the NCPA Library and the Stuart Liff library
- ▶ Exclusive access to the Members' Bar
- ▶ Exclusive offers on our brand partners

Cheques for both NCPA and SOI should be drawn in favour of 'National Centre for the Performing Arts' and submitted along with a stamp sized photograph to:

The Membership Department, Tata Theatre, NCPA, NCPA Marg, Nariman Point, Mumbai 400 021.

Email: [membership@ncpamumbai.com](mailto:membership@ncpamumbai.com)  
Tel.: 66223719

\*\* GST of 18% (9% CGST & 9% SGST) is applicable on fees for all membership categories (for NCPA & SOI) from July 1, 2017.

# STAY ENGAGED

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# Events at a glance

Oct-Nov 2021

 THEATRE	 INTERNATIONAL MUSIC	 DANCE	 FILMS / SCREENINGS
 INDIAN MUSIC	 WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC	 MULTI ARTS & PRESENTATIONS	 PHOTOGRAPHY & EXHIBITION

Day	Date	Time	Event	Venue
Fri	29th Oct	7.00 pm	Eka Lagnachi Pudhchi Gosht Marathi Play	TATA THEATRE
Sat	30th Oct	6.30 pm	Blast from the Past With Louiz Banks	TATA THEATRE
Sun	31st Oct	5.00 pm	SOI Chamber Orchestra Marat Bisengaliev, conductor	TATA THEATRE
Fri	12th Nov	6.30 pm	Hindustani Vocal Music Recital by Rashid Khan	TATA THEATRE
Sat	13th Nov	5.00 pm	Bharatanatyam by Rama Vaidyanathan and Kuchipudi by Mallika Sarabhai	TATA THEATRE
Sun	14th Nov	5.00 pm	SOI Chamber Orchestra Marat Bisengaliev, conductor & violin Entirely Elgar	TATA THEATRE
Wed	17th Nov	5.00 pm	The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess Opera Screening Sung in English with English Subtitles	Godrej dance theatre
Thu	18th Nov	6.30 pm	Catalyst An evening celebrating choreographies born during lockdown Bharatanatyam by Anand Sachitanandan & Jayalakshmi, Kathak by Pooja Pant Dance Company and Mohiniattam by Sujatha Nair	Es THEATRE
Wed	24th Nov	5.00 pm	The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time Theatre Screening	Godrej dance theatre
Thu	25th Nov	6.00 pm	Boris Godunov by Modest Mussorgsky Opera Screening	Godrej dance theatre
Sat	27th Nov	7.00 pm	Retromagic	TATA THEATRE



**National Centre for the Performing Arts**  
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