

ON Stage[®]

VOLUME 11 • ISSUE 2



A Life in Music

Remembering M.S. Subbulakshmi on her 105th birth anniversary

Art and Mankind

The Jamshed Bhabha
Memorial Lecture

Theatre of Cruelty

Antonin Artaud's project
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Chairman's Note



As we go to press, we are delighted to receive the heartening news of a lifetime achievement award from the Andhra Pradesh Photography Akademi to our very own Mukesh Parpiani. Mukesh has been a stalwart at the NCPA and we hope to do a feature on him in a not too distant issue of *ON Stage*.

A very important event last month was the annual lecture on the birthdate of Dr. Jamshed J. Bhabha, 21st August, which was so interestingly presented by our organisation to the world. Dr. Farokh E. Udawadia, as all who are interested in either medicine or music know, is a legendary figure, and the melding of the arts and science is now coming of age.

Not only is music becoming far more science oriented but ice, Antarctica and the Arctic feature more and more in programmes curated around those freezing areas by eminent composers. It might be an interesting source of information for curious music lovers to look up and see for themselves the snowy landscapes of both our north and south regions.

Our regular season will commence soon and we sincerely hope that our *bête noire* lets us function normally. It's time we took this wretched virus on with our own antibodies, since allied with vaccines, we can surely overcome. The important point is to ensure that all of us get vaccinated as early as possible.

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

Khushroo N. Suntook

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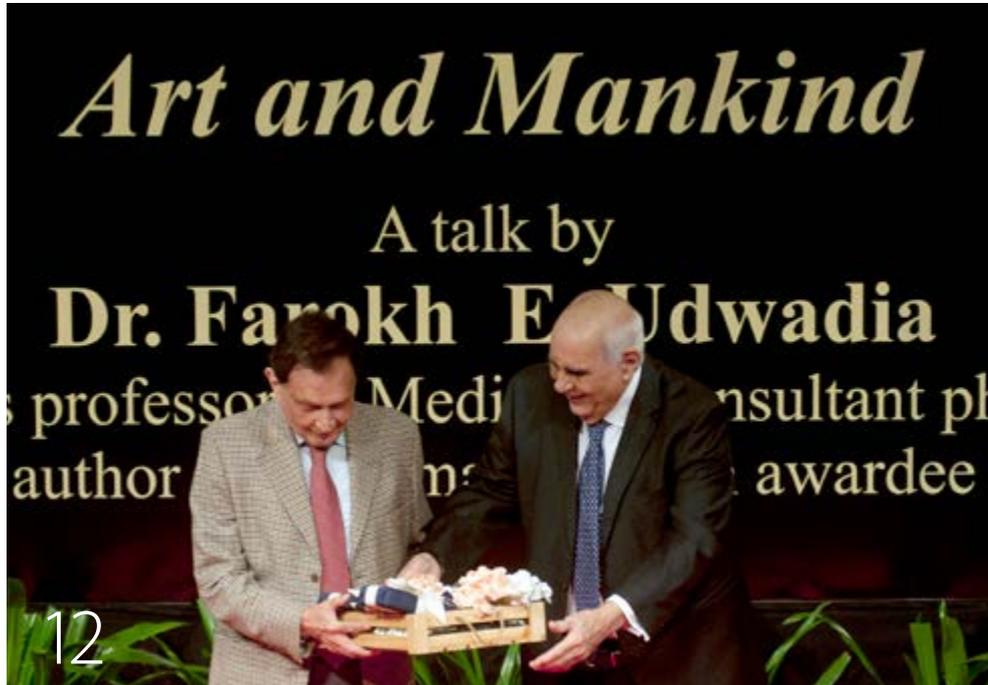
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ON Stage brings you excerpts from the *NCPA Quarterly Journal*, an unsurpassed literary archive that ran from 1972 to 1988 and featured authoritative and wide-ranging articles. The concluding part of a feature by musician and ethnomusicologist *Ashok D. Ranade* on categories of music talks about what demarcates popular music from art music and the two from other categories.

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This Month, That Year

From stellar performances brought to the cognoscenti during the SOI Autumn 2019 season to a multilingual tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, from iconic choreographies presented at the Nakshatra Dance Festival to Jacob Collier's India debut, we bring you some of the more memorable events that were presented at the NCPA in September 2019.

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The Silken Sound of Dissent

From a child prodigy to the Nightingale of India, in her musical journey towards upholding the Carnatic tradition, MS Subbulakshmi broke with several along the way, etching her name on the national consciousness. In the month of her 105th birth anniversary, Kusumita Das retraces the extraordinary path of the legend.

FROM THE COLLECTION OF SMT. RADHA VISWANATHAN, DAUGHTER AND SOLE DISCIPLE OF BHARAT RATNA M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI

MS Subbulakshmi, born as Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi, was a disruptor from the word go. Born into the Devdasi community of temple musicians, in one of the countless side alleys in the temple town of Madurai, music ran in MS's (she was always MS to her listeners) veins; but her gender, and her caste and class were formidable obstacles in her path, in the highly Brahminised, male-dominated universe of Carnatic music. And yet she broke into this conservative, sectarian milieu as a child prodigy at the age of 10 when her first record was released. The voice that made everyone sit up and take notice, eventually grew to captivate the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and even the United Nations, where she became the first Indian classical singer to be invited to perform at a concert. In fact, she could well be called the lady of firsts—she was the first Indian musician to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award (1974) and first musician to be awarded the Bharat Ratna (1988), India's highest civilian honour; besides an assembly line of several other honours and awards. But hers was a life that transcended the lustre of accolades.

In the temple town alleys

Come September 16, the world will celebrate the 105th birth anniversary of this titan of Carnatic music. Born in 1916, MS's musical journey ran parallel to the socio-cultural and political journey of India, and more importantly southern India, in her home state Tamil Nadu. Veteran Indian journalist and biographer T.J.S. George, who has authored *MS Subbulakshmi: The Definitive Biography* (Aleph Book Company; 2016), notes in his book, "(Her) birthplace put her not just in South India, domain of the Dravidian peoples... but in the southern part of South India, home to a particularly sturdy strain of Dravidianism." But as a young MS, or Madurai's Kunjamma, was getting started on her musical journey, under the vigil and guidance of her mother, the socio-cultural fabric of Tamil society was swaying under the winds of change. George quotes literary critic Edward Said in his book: "Music like literature is practised in a social and cultural setting..." The rise of Tamil theatre, and the soaring popularity of the gramophone and the radio in the early 20th century, were hugely instrumental in popularising Carnatic music and the seeds of democratisation of the genre were sowed. MS became one of the classical artistes who were found by the record companies very early on in her career, thereby opening the floodgates to fame. Further dialing up the change was the rise of another all-pervasive medium, the cinema, in the 1930s. And in both theatre and movies, singing was the required talent, not acting, which further cemented MS's position as a most coveted actress in Tamil cinema.

However, for this small temple town girl, the journey from Madurai to Madras was perhaps her longest and most eventful one. Up until the early years of the 20th century, performance music, or the stage in general, was exclusively a male bastion, a fiercely guarded one at that, and the women accepted it as their natural fate—

their talents were not meant to transcend the confines of the temples. "In fact, in temple towns like Madurai, the exploitation of women musicians and dancers was institutionalised in the name of God. The situation was indeed ironical because the protector and patron saint of Indian musicians was female," George writes. MS's mother, Shanmugavadivu tried to dutifully fit into this world. In his book, the author paints a picture of the humble home where MS was born, his words bringing alive the cacophony of the streets outside, retracing the floor plan and even outlining the family photographs that hang on the walls, in the present day.

MS was one of three siblings—she had one brother, Shaktivel and a sister, Vadivambal. Their mother was a veena player at the Madurai Meenakshi temple and their home echoed with footfalls of pupils and musical stalwarts alike, among whom mridangam legend Dakshinamurthy Pillai was a regular. MS's talents were exposed to this crème of Tamil Carnatic music milieu at a tender age. Her mother, however, was a watchful sentinel, who wouldn't allow her daughters to step out of the house on their own. Theirs was a sheltered life,

An ostensibly obedient Subbulakshmi's first act of rebellion came by when she quietly but firmly turned down her mother's proposal of marrying into the royal family of Ramanathapuram

where food was frugal and schooling years limited; MS left school in Class V after being beaten up by a teacher, while her brother went on to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree. Even as creature comforts were lacking in the household, it was music that they lived on. In the early days, their mother didn't formally teach them but MS and her sister "imbibed music through osmosis". The tamburas in the house caught Subbulakshmi's attention and she would pick one up and start tuning it and eventually hum the *swara*; she would experiment with the pitch of her voice and the instrument. And then she would practise singing without the tambura to test her own accuracy. "Those long hours with the tambura gave (her) the *sruiti shuddham*, perfect tuning of voice, for which she was to eventually become famous," writes George.

Shanmugavidu's senses were instantly alerted towards her daughter's extraordinary voice quality; she also noticed how Subbulakshmi would flawlessly reproduce songs she'd hear on the gramophone. While her brother took to the mridangam and her sister followed their mother's path and became a promising veena player, it was Kunjamma who got special attention. When she was all of eight, MS was allowed

One wonders how the young singer from a vulnerable background held her own in a formidable environment and scaled unseen heights to be eventually hailed as the “Queen of Music”

to accompany her mother to her veena concerts and sit on stage and even work as a stage assistant playing the second veena, or being an accompanying voice. A slew of high-profile tutors followed that further honed her talents. Madurai Srinivasa Iyengar was Subbulakshmi's first guru. Shanmugavidu left no stone unturned to promote her precociously talented child. When she was a little over nine, MS sang at a public gathering organised by a cycle shop, which would eventually grow into the giant TVS conglomerate. That's where she was approached by a talent-spotter which eventually led the way to her first HMV record, at the age of 10. She soon began to accompany her mother to perform at weddings out of town—"this was part of the essential ritual of 'exposing' an artiste to the public". Travels with her mother took her to the princely states of Mysore and Travancore and to Tamil royal courts. While the income was very welcome, her mother's higher objective was to acquire the patronage of the affluent class to eventually marry off her daughters to these families, as was custom in the 'entertainment class' of women those days.

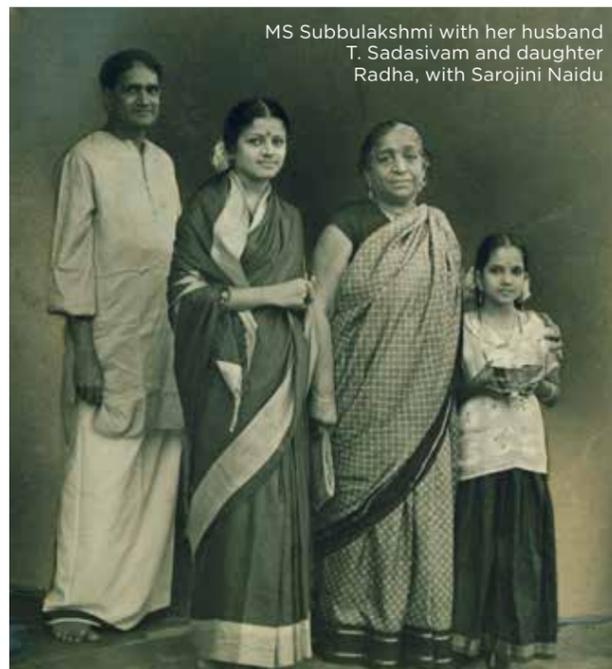
An ostensibly obedient Subbulakshmi's first act of rebellion came by when she quietly but firmly turned down her mother's proposal of marrying into the royal family of Ramanathapuram. George quotes G. Venkatachalam, a doyen of art critics, who had met MS when she was 13, and said about her: "for a girl of thirteen, she had the will of a woman of forty". In the book, George also hints at the seamy side to her childhood. He quotes MS reminiscing about her young days, "in a moment of rare candour in her advanced years". "When I was small, men would only think of how to spoil me..." George writes, "She remembered 'seeing it all and getting frightened about it'...She mentally recorded all her experiences and found a way to resist her mother's well-intentioned plans to 'settle her' in a raja's palace". In due course, she would ascertain this independence once again, to run away from home to seek protection from a man, who would change the course of her life and her career.

From Madurai to Madras

After capturing the royal courts with her talent, MS went on to win Madras too—the Madras Music Academy was seen as the 'Vatican council' of Carnatic music and it was crucial for any artiste to make their

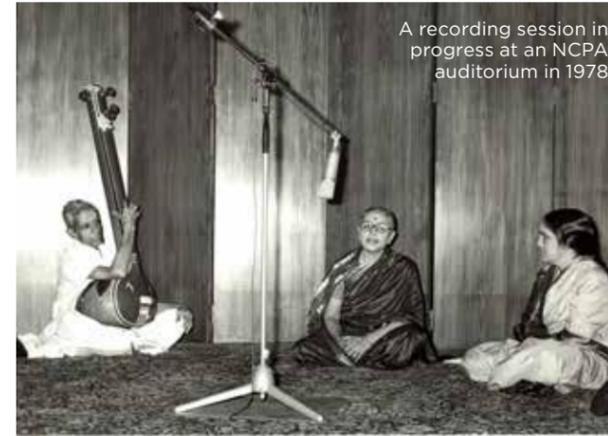
mark here. Following a series of triumphant concerts in Madras, she was invited by the Madras Music Academy in a historic move—MS became the first woman and the youngest performer within those hallowed walls. By now she had become a musical star in her own right, even as she took on her new role as the sole breadwinner of the family—at seventeen, MS was materialising almost all her mother's dreams. Almost. As the family began renting a house in Madras, the press took a natural interest in her. When she was unveiled to the public gaze by the most popular local magazine, her life and her personality began to change in ways no one had anticipated, least of all, her mother.

The decade that followed could well have been the most tumultuous MS had ever witnessed. Everything changed with the entry of Tyagaraja Sadasivam in her life, who she eventually married, after a long period of strife and scandal and controversy and police cases. The talent-spotter and fierce hustler Sadasivam got MS her first break in the movies, with *Sevasadanam* (1938). While this was a level of success her mother had never dreamt of, her darling Kunjamma's association with the not-so-respectable world of cinema was not a reality Shanmugavidu could reconcile with. Her efforts to extricate MS out of this world remained relentless as the fissures between Madurai and Madras grew. Eventually, when MS ran away from home, to save herself from moving in with a Chettiar her mother found for her, and took shelter in the already-married Sadasivam's home, she cut the umbilical cord a final time. That period in her life was controversies galore which ran parallel to her stardom in Tamil cinema. It makes one wonder, how the very young singer from a vulnerable background, held her own in a formidable environment and scaled unseen heights in her music to be eventually hailed as the "queen of music" by none other than Pandit Nehru and, christened the "Nightingale of India" by Sarojini Naidu.



MS Subbulakshmi with her husband T. Sadasivam and daughter Radha, with Sarojini Naidu

FROM THE COLLECTION OF SMT. RADHA VISWANATHAN, DAUGHTER AND SOLE DISCIPLE OF BHARAT RATNA M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI



A recording session in progress at an NCPA auditorium in 1978

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A life so extraordinary, it's hard to pin down who MS really was. Was she the 13-year-old strong-willed girl who turned down a royal proposal, or was she the 20-something who turned to a married man to divorce herself from her Devdasi roots? Was she the 17-year-old cinema superstar or the sagacious Brahmin Iyer wife clad in crisp dyed saris who went on to become the musical voice in the independence movement, invited by Mahatma Gandhi to croon 'Raghupati Raghav' and 'Vaishnava Jana to'? MS Subbulakshmi's persona is perhaps as complex and intricate as the notes in the ragas she mastered in her lifetime. Hers is a one-of-a-kind blend of exceptional talent and undefeated will power that took her from the narrow temple town alleys of Madurai to the celebrated concert stage, making her not only a universal ambassador of Carnatic music but also a humanitarian and a national icon.

Controversial as her life was, hers is not a journey to be understood, but to be admired. The "Aathuwan Sur" in Kishori Amonkar's words, MS's music was transcendental in every way. Perhaps Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam summed up her story the best: "You were born in music, lived with music and now forever you are merged with divine music". ■



Bharat Ratna MS Subbulakshmi sings at the United Nations General Assembly on 23rd October, 1966 on the occasion of United Nations Day. She is accompanied by her daughter Radha Viswanathan on vocals, VV Subrahmanyam on the violin, TK Murthy on the mridangam, Vikku Vinayakram on the ghatam and her daughter Vijaya Rajendran on the tambura.

FROM THE COLLECTION OF SMT. RADHA VISWANATHAN, DAUGHTER AND SOLE DISCIPLE OF BHARAT RATNA M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI



MS Subbulakshmi seen with Kesarbai Kerkar

MS at the NCPA

The doyen of Carnatic music was among the 19 luminaries from diverse fields to grace the NCPA's first Board of Advisors. One of the first programmes with which the NCPA was closely associated was a recital by MS Subbulakshmi, arranged in July 1969, for the purpose of instituting the Kesarbai Kerkar Scholarship Fund for young and talented musicians. It was a generous gesture—a stalwart of the Carnatic school performing free of charge with a view to promoting the development of Hindustani classical music and in aid of a scholarship fund established to commemorate a great exponent of Hindustani music.

Through the years, the dulcet tones of MS flowed through the theatres of the NCPA during many a memorable recital as well as for the organisation's archival recording project. In 2015, 10 years after her death, a heritage album featuring 16 exclusive recordings of ragas and bhajans from 1978, spanning over two and a half hours, was released under the 'Masterworks from the NCPA Archives' imprint by Sony Music and the NCPA. Not meant for dissemination originally, the recordings were released after obtaining necessary permissions.

Poetry in Prose

The inseparability of art and human existence, the civilising impact of the visual and performing arts, and the humaneness that they nurture were themes Dr. Farokh E. Udawadia addressed with great eloquence and erudition, sprinkling them with poetic interludes, at the 2021 edition of The Jamshed Bhabha Memorial Lectures. We bring you excerpts from the online broadcast of the lecture that continues to garner thousands of views.

On Dr. Jamshed J. Bhabha

Jamshed Bhabha was both, a patient and a friend. He was a warm, gentle person; a joy to be with. He was a visionary. To start with, there was nothing—if I may say so, nothingness—except the waves of the Arabian Sea lapping the shores of this island city at Nariman Point, particularly, and then his dream slowly began to be realised. Land was reclaimed from the sea and it was on this land that you see this beautiful structure. Now, this centre propagates art for one thing, performs arts for another. Equally important is the fact that it has



Dr. Farokh E. Udawadia addressed an array of themes



Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook gave the opening remarks

preserved our national heritage. So, you have a visionary whose vision comes true, a dreamer who dreams, and who lived his dreams.

On Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook

Jamshed Bhabha passed his mantle over to Khushroo Suntook, who has expanded the scope and vista of this national centre. The Symphony Orchestra of India was his brainchild and it has done so well. His remarkable connections with musicians in the West have been responsible for allowing the SOI to perform at places outside this country.

Amazingly, he has also streamlined the management. He has managed to get a huge collection of long-playing records and also a collection of about 10,000 books with a very good library that this centre possesses. So, there you have it—the centre going from one height to the other. If Jamshed Bhabha is not in the Valhalla of musicians, he might perhaps be looking down upon us and smiling to see that this good centre has progressed markedly under the tutelage of his friend and protégé, Khushroo Suntook.

On art and mankind

I would like to introduce this subject with a little bit of artistic fervour. Art is the breath, smiles and tears of all mankind. Once life began to ascend the evolutionary ladder that made it human, art was born. One often hears, sometimes in the same breath, the use of the words ‘art’ and ‘culture’. Culture is a way of living of a society, people, a country. There can be no culture without art. Art is the heartbeat of a culture. What is more, it can transcend the boundaries of a particular culture. It is, therefore, a great communicator [that] brings people together. It builds bridges across countries...sometimes, over troubled waters.



Noted lawyer, urban conservationist and NCPA council member Shirin Bharucha delivered the vote of thanks



Pallavi Sahney Sharma, Chief Executive-PR, Marketing, Events, NCPA, conducted the programme

Art is not only important but very valuable for mankind. It opens a window to the outer world—don’t forget, art and science are the twin pillars that have marked the ascent of man from early history to the present times. In fact, it is the balance between art and science that will determine the future of man and our civilisation. More importantly, art is the window to the inner world of man. It enriches his feelings, senses, sensibilities. It cultivates his aesthetic sense, and in doing so, it moulds you into a better, more civilised human being.

On preserving our heritage

We are a civilisation that goes back to 5,000 years. The cultural heritage of this country is second to none. This heritage should be passionately preserved. For this to happen, we need support from the powers that be but also from people within this country. It is important that people are aware of the importance of art, participate in art, attend functions showing art. But there is a strange apathy. Look at the number of people visiting museums in London and New York, and [those] in this part of the world. I am reminded of Dante’s great work, *The Divine Comedy*. He said, ‘It was at school that I learnt, Oh! Dante, to tread the path that was to lead me here’. I am going to take this out of context. It is at school that we must start teaching our children the importance and value of art.

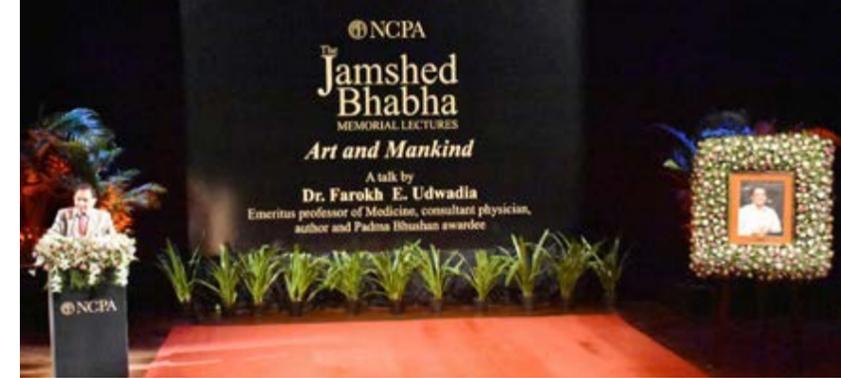
On literature and the arts

You stand before a great canvas. You forget the humdrum of your usual existence. You are wrapped in a world of colour and imagination. You look at the colours, the harmony, or not, you try and find out what the artist means to say. You explore the canvas and without being aware, you are exploring yourself. You know yourself better.

We have a treasure trove of literature. Literature makes you feel the resilience of the spirit of man. It indirectly tells you there is a divine spark in every human heart. It tells you the force of destiny that rules the lives of many men and women. Also, the forces of good and evil in the outside world are often mirrored in all of us humans.

Let me now go on to poetry. It is the most evocative of the arts, only next to music. Poetry is a song of chosen words. Rather than speak of poetry, I give you an interlude where I will recite some poetry. Let’s take love. I’ve chosen parts of a love sonnet by Pablo Neruda. It loses a lot of its beauty in translation. I’ve chosen it because it has an imagery that I have never seen in English poetry:

*I love you as certain dark things are to be loved
In secret, between the shadow and the soul
I love you as the blooming plant that never blooms
But has within it, the scent of hidden flowers
I love you not knowing how, or where, or when
I love you because I do not know any other way than this
That you do not exist nor do I
So close, that your hand on my chest is mine
So close, that your eyes close as I fall asleep*



Another verse by [Auden] beautifully applies to the situation we are in today, the curse of this pandemic:

*With the farming of a verse, make a vineyard of the curse;
In the deserts of the heart, let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days, teach the free man how to praise.*

I am thinking of the Italians who leaned out of their windows singing and playing to help their neighbours in distress.

Let me dwell on music. Music is an inborn entity, a feature of the human psyche. It is rooted deep in human nature and is the fundamental attribute and activity of the human species. More people in this world hear music than at any time before—on your computer, in temples and churches, subways, small salons and large auditoriums. You sing music, hum, whistle music. Verily, the world is filled with the sound of music. From the beginning of time, there is no culture that lacks music.

On creative art

Great art stems from creativity. Creativity doesn’t arise from nothingness. [It] rises from the experiences that an artist has in his life. It is these cumulative experiences buried deep down in his subconscious state that is the source of artistic creativity but we all, as we grow older, have many experiences. Why are we not artists? The artist looks at the world differently. He thinks deeply, feels intensely, imagines vividly. It is feeling rather than intellect that makes him transform these experiences and transcribe reality to reach a point beyond it.

Concluding notes

What does art do for mankind? It makes a human being more human, adds humaneness to his humanity. It makes you more loving, forgiving, empathic and above all, more caring. Of course, you care for yourself, your family. But would you dare say that you care for mankind? What a Utopian dream! But man loves to dream. I shall let this mystic poet speak for me:

*Every man’s death diminishes me
For I am concerned with mankind
So send not to ask for whom the bell tolls
It tolls for thee.*

—Transcribed by Roshan Dastoor

The lecture is available on the [YouTube channel](#) and [Facebook page](#) of the NCPA. It had received 10,000 views at the time of going to press.

JOSEPH SZIGETI: THE ARISTOCRAT AMONG VIOLINISTS

An exponent of the classical tradition and champion of contemporary music, the Hungarian-born musician's oeuvre bears the stamp of his individuality and formidable technique.

By **Cavas Bilimoria**

By the mid 1920s it seemed as if the zenith in bewitching sound, charm, elegance, suavity and virtuosity spearheaded by Ysaye and refined by Kreisler, Elman and Heifetz had been attained. Yet, there was a fascinating “outsider” who did not fit into this category and appealed to audiences that rejected the Kreisler-Elman-Heifetz criteria as the ultimate experience in violinistic art. This outsider was Joseph Szigeti, born in Budapest on 5th September, 1892, in a small Carpathian town called Miramosziget (hence the name Szigeti).

Born in a family of musicians, it was his uncle Bernat who started him on the violin at the age of seven. Sensing his great aptitude for the instrument, his father enrolled him in a private conservatoire under an unnamed teacher where he was taught the “Close to the body, book under the arm” method of bowing, an archaic and highly detrimental method, vestiges of which remained throughout his career. But such was his innate genius that despite this mediocre training, when he auditioned for acceptance at the state music academy, Jenő Hubay, the director, admitted him directly into his own class. Hubay, though purportedly a pupil of Joseph Joachim, had been powerfully influenced by the Belgian virtuoso Henri Vieuxtemps (Ysaye’s teacher) whom he revered. It was in this milieu of the Romantic Belgian school virtuosity that the young Szigeti’s musicality was formed.

Szigeti’s Berlin debut took place at the age of 13. The programme was:

Ernst: Violin Concerto in F sharp minor
Bach: “Chaconne” from *Partita No. 2* and Prelude from *Partita No. 3* for solo violin
Paganini: “Le Streghe” (The Witches’ Dance)

An arduous journey

In addition to this, his repertoire at that time was woefully limited and consisted of Wieniawski’s second Violin Concerto, Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, Viotti’s Concerto No.22, Tartini’s *Devil’s Trill Sonata* and a few showpieces by Paganini, Sarasate, Hubay and Wieniawski. What the repertoire lacked while he was in Hubay’s class were concertos by Brahms and Bach, and sonatas by Beethoven, Mozart, Handel and Franck.

Szigeti was not destined for meteoric youthful fame as were Elman, Heifetz and Menuhin. His road to international renown was long and laborious. The lofty qualities in his playing that won him eminence in later years cannot be attributed to his teacher Hubay. The game changer was his contact and life-long friendship with Ferruccio Busoni, a superlative all-round musician. From that point on began his slow, arduous maturing process which in later years was to induce many observers to consider him “the greatest musician among violinists”. He now had the opportunity to hear and bask in the wondrous glow kindled by Ysaye, Kreisler, Elman, Busoni, and the conductors Arthur Nikish, Sir Hamilton Harty and Sir Henry Wood. Ysaye dedicated the first of the six sonatas he had composed for solo violin to Szigeti.

Szigeti knew who and what he was. He did not attempt to compete with Kreisler, Heifetz, Menuhin or Milstein on their home turf. His strength was that he was different, and a sizeable potential audience was waiting for just such a violinist to appear. He knew his strengths and weaknesses and concentrated on those masterworks of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms where he felt he could offer insights which were as individual as they were musically provocative. He also championed contemporary music. In his recitals, he included Dvořák’s E minor and G minor *Slavonic*



SAMPLE RECORDINGS

This writer is fortunate to have a few of Szigeti's recordings which deserve more recognition than what is given to them.

Prokofiev: Concerto No. 1 in D major (Beecham/London Philharmonic 1935)

Beethoven: Violin Concerto (Bruno Walter/British Symphony Orchestra 1932)

Beethoven: Complete violin/piano sonatas (with Claudio Arrau)

Mozart: Violin Concerto No.4 in D, K218 (Beecham/London Philharmonic 1934)

Brahms: Violin Concerto (Sir Hamilton Harty/Halle Orchestra 1928)

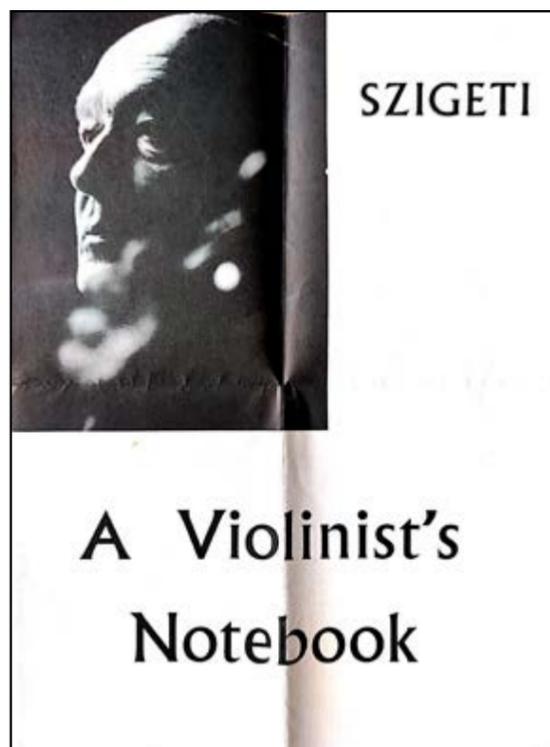
Bloch: Violin Concerto in A minor, dedicated to and written for Szigeti

Handel: Sonata No. 4 in D, Op.1 No. 13 (Nikita Magaloff pianist) 1937

Bach: Solo Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 and 3 (1931)

Bartók: Romanian Folk Dances (Bartók himself at the piano)

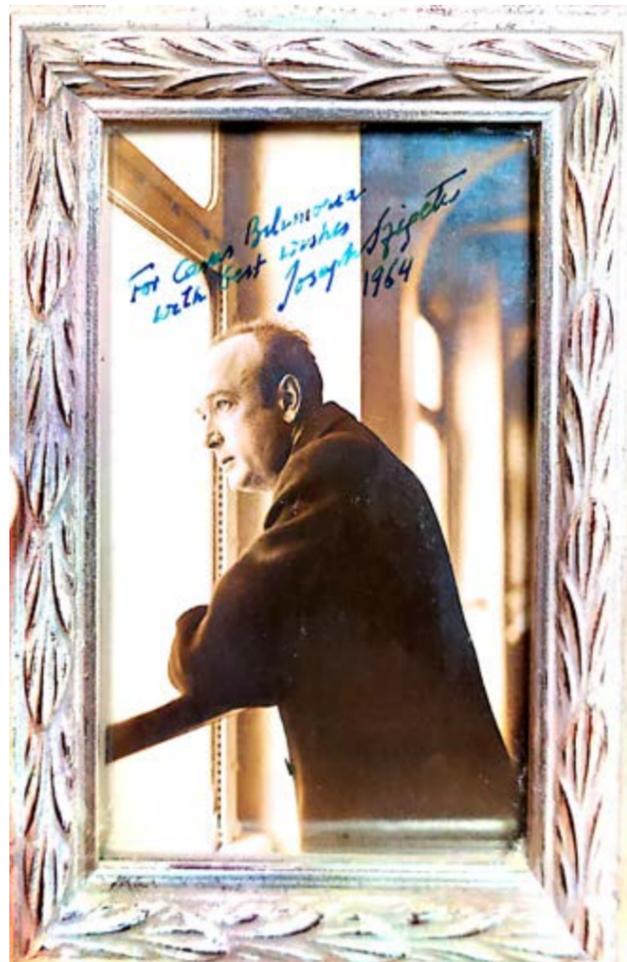
Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto (Beecham/London Philharmonic 1933)



Dances (Kreisler arrangements), Kreisler originals, Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances* (which he recorded with Bartók himself at the piano), his own difficult arrangement of Scriabin's "Etude in Thirds" and Paganini's ninth and twenty-fourth caprices.

Szigeti the violinist

His left-hand technique was formidable and comprehensive. His tone was soft-grained in texture



A signed photograph of the violinist, and his notebook from the author's personal collection

and his vibrato, medium in speed. He did not produce an ear-titillating sound nor could he climax or conclude his runs with high voltage vibrancy. But in his prime he could negotiate the most awkward passages in the Brahms concerto with ease and precision and his intonation, always impeccable.

His bow arm, though schooled in that archaic way described earlier, drew a large and resonant tone. At times, his loud passages could be scratchy and his spiccatos, bowed very close to the bridge, were inclined to lose some clarity. But, as if to compensate for these shortcomings, he could produce delicate staccato passages and a variety of piquant, crisp bow strokes which added marvellous diversity in, for example, segments of the first movement of Beethoven's concerto, much like Kreisler.

At no time did he sacrifice his own musical ideas to some strange philosophy of carrying out the composer's intentions, but rather, created a wondrous fusion of the style, rhythmic pulse of the composer's era and ethos with his own temperament and intelligence. He was a master of musical propulsion as well as genuine spiritual repose, not to be confused with the "repose" of some current artistes which consists of stopping their vibrato,

CAVAS BELIMORIA

MUSICAL INTERVENTION

In his illuminating blog published in September 2015, Zane Dalal, Associate Music Director of the Symphony Orchestra of India, put forward a hypothesis drawing fascinating numerical connections between Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* and his battle with leukemia at the time of writing it. The blog came on the heels of the SOI's performance of the work conducted by Dalal on 26th September, 2015 Bartók's 70th death anniversary. It also features the well-known story behind the concerto's commission in which Szigeti had an instrumental role to play, written in Dalal's inimitable style:

When placing a score on review in the months prior to a performance, one searches for the strength of the piece—that performers might derive that strength in playing and then transmit that strength to the listener. We owe the composer that process... that much at least! After the usual memory of great structural moments and caveats from previous performances had sunk into my processes, I began to search for more—taken forward by the story of the commission that everyone knows so well. In brief, Bartók had left for the United States in 1940, strongly opposed to the fascism that was sweeping through Europe.



Béla Bartók (seen here) had collaborated with Szigeti on many occasions. This lifelong friendship led to Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* in the most trying circumstances.

Koussevitsky—Music Director of the Boston Symphony—and asked if he might help, which he did, offering Bartók a cheque for one thousand dollars (c. \$13,000/- inflation adjusted) at his hospital bedside to write a grand piece for orchestra. And so we have the *Concerto for Orchestra*.

He had cancelled all engagements in Germany in protest of the Nazi regime and found his way to New York. He brought with him the beginnings of his struggle with cancer, which had started as a pain in the shoulder and remained misdiagnosed even after medical consultation. Bartók—the great pianist—could not find teaching assignments leave alone concert performances and by 1943 found himself in a hospital bed struggling with death—and almost certain to give way to illness or depression or both. If this had occurred, Bartók's last piece would have been his sixth quartet written in Budapest in 1939, we would not have known his great concerto for orchestra, the third piano concerto or the relevant sketches for the great viola concerto. He would also have left less of a mark on the standard concert repertoire and it is entirely possible that I would not be writing this blog or offering remembrance as I did last night. At any rate, the great violinist Szigeti—with whom Bartók had collaborated on many occasions—joined in a pact with compatriot Fritz Reiner to save the moment as best they knew how. They approached Dr. Serge



CAVAS BELIMORIA

playing with bone-dry barely audible sound, and rolling their eyes heavenwards as if in private communion with the deity.

Szigeti was one of the first classical violinists to join forces with a leading jazz musician. In a 1939 Carnegie Hall recital, he and Benny Goodman gave the premiere of Bartók's *Contrasts* for clarinet, violin and piano. It was later recorded with the composer at the piano.

Historically, Szigeti must be credited with exerting a powerful influence on the type of violin programmes prevalent today. As an artiste, he cannot be included among those who insist upon subjugation of one's personality to the dictates of the so-called composer's intentions.

His art radiated his own humanism and no violinist ever played with more integrity. ■

The writer is indebted to Zane Dalal for his permission to republish excerpts from his blog, www.zanedalal.com/blog

Best Foot Forward

The grace and rhythm Western dancers portray have a lot to do with their shoes. With each style requiring a specific form of footwear, performers know their choices can make or break a performance.
By Sandip Soparrkar



Sandip Soparrkar, well-known Latin and ballroom dancer and choreographer, in performance

The dance floor is a sacred space. Each time a dancer steps on stage, be it for a performance or a rehearsal, he or she prays to the divine power of the dance floor. Artistes who perform Indian classical or folk art never wear shoes on the holy floor, while for Western dancers footwear is integral to their costume. This has often been a bone of contention among dancers who practise different art forms.

You may wonder, "Are dance shoes that important?" or "Do I have to wear shoes while dancing?" or "Do I really have to spend money on dance shoes when I have other shoes?" What ghungroos are to a classical dancer, specially designed, handcrafted shoes are to their fellow Western dancers. So, wearing shoes on the dance floor is in no way disrespecting the stage or any tradition; it's a matter of what each dance form stands for and deems mandatory for its ensemble.

Why wear dancing shoes?

A pair of properly fitted dance shoes are as essential to dance as a hoop is to basketball or a helmet is to cricket. Dance floors are often made of wood or cement, and it is good to wear dancing shoes that support just enough friction between the floor and the soles. Although it is possible to dance in regular street shoes, once you purchase dancing shoes or have them custom-made, you will never go back. The right dance shoes will give you the right amount of traction to move around the floor and practise your skills without having to think about your shoes. They have thinner soles than a normal pair and often a steel shank for support, the shoe material is flexible and lightweight to allow the dancer to glide smoothly on the floor.

What is so special about them?

The beauty of dance shoes is in their lightness, flexibility and the comfort that the fine materials provide for the feet. The sole is thin enough to feel the floor but padded enough to make hours of dancing enjoyable and pain-free. When you advance to a higher level of dance technique, it is easier to appreciate what it means to become connected



Dutch folk dancers wear wooden clogs. The shoes are designed in way that allows the performers to create a rhythm during the dance



A flamenco dancer's ensemble is incomplete without the right pair of shoes. It has to be made from the right materials and produce the right sound quality

The beauty of dance shoes is in their lightness, flexibility and the comfort the materials provide for the feet

to the floor. This connection cannot be achieved without proper shoes.

What are their various types?

Dancing shoes often have a suede, leather or rubber base, depending on the form of dance being practised, and they can range from anything between ₹1,000 and ₹15,000.

Suede sole shoes - Ballet shoes, Ballroom shoes, Latin shoes, Jazz shoes

Leather sole shoes - Tap shoes, Flamenco shoes

Rubber sole shoes - Street dance shoes, Hip Hop shoes

Other international folk dances have their respective shoes too. To name a few, there are clogs (wooden shoes) in Belgium and Denmark, sabot in France and Germany, klompen in the Netherlands and Sweden, bast (made from tree bark) in Norway, Ukraine and Belarus, lapti in Russia, pointy boots in Mexico and Texas (USA), Sámi shoes (made from reindeer hide) in Finland, tsarouchi in Greece, tshogham (embroidered boots) in Bhutan, khussa in Pakistan, and tabi boots in Japan.



Pointe shoes are used by ballet dancers. They are designed to give the dancers flexibility and balance



The tone created by tap shoes depends on the weight and surface shape of the metal taps fixed

How are dancing shoes worshipped?

Western dancers consider their dance shoes to be sacred. It is believed that before putting on the shoes, the dancer has to clean them, just as is done with a pooja thali. Dance shoes are only meant for the floor and are never to be worn outside, so they are touched to the forehead with humility. The body of the shoe is considered to be a blessing of ancestors, family and friends. The shoelace, strap or zip represent the teachings of the guru, which tie the dedication together and take the performance to a different level. One has to experience this divine process to believe it.

How to buy a perfect pair of dancing shoes?

When purchasing dancing shoes, look for a snug and comfortable fit. Tight shoes can cause blisters, and ill-fitting ones can affect your performance.

Every dance form needs different kinds of shoes. I recommend standard heel shoes—small and thin for ballroom dances like the waltz, quickstep, tango and the foxtrot. Cha-cha-cha, jive, samba and salsa are best complemented with footwear that have broader and bigger heels as that enhances the hip movement of Latin dancers and helps them make swift twirls and display graceful footwork. Then we have jazz shoes for jazz and contemporary dancers, ballet shoes for ballet, and character shoes for other Western dances. To make the right pick, it is best to ask your dance teacher about shoes that are best suited for the dance style.

What colour should the shoes be?

Colours are an important aspect of dance footwear. If we were to take the case of the tango, which is a dramatic dance form, a combination of black and white or red shoes will enhance the effect. For Latin American dances, the standard black shoes for men is most common in leather or patent leather, and for women it is dainty silver, golden and skin shoes. The women have been experimenting with colours like shimmer, pink, yellow, green, and floral print but these choices are mostly made by performers and not students. For ballet, skin-coloured shoes are preferred so that when they go on en pointe, the legs look long and well extended.

Western dancers consider their dance shoes to be sacred. The shoes are never to be worn outside, and are touched to the forehead with humility

Jameel Shah, director of Shah Shoes, an Indian company that has perfected the art of making dance shoes, says, “Making dance shoes is not my profession, it is a passion. Each shoe is a piece of art, especially handcrafted to fit the dancer’s feet. A perfect dance shoe can be folded in any direction. It takes the shape of the foot unlike normal shoes and this is the essence of dancing shoes. They are comfortable and do not restrict the movement of the feet. Whether you are on your heels or on your toes, it supports you throughout; the cushioning supports the knees and the ankles, avoiding injuries.”

Every dance form, be it Indian, Western, classical or folk, martial or ritual, spiritual or entertaining, has its own dignity and it should be given the respect it deserves. We dancers belong to one divine family, and that love and respect should prevail at all times. ■

CARING FOR YOUR DANCE SHOES

1. *Brush your shoe regularly, from top and sole.*
2. *Use a wire-bristle shoe brush for the soles.*
3. *Polish your shoes before and after use.*
4. *Do not wear your dance shoes outdoors. They are only to be used on the dance floor.*
5. *Keep your shoes in a cloth bag to allow them to breathe.*
6. *Air your shoes once or twice a week, and more during the rainy season to prevent fungus.*
7. *Unpack and pack your shoes carefully at all times.*



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Remembering Danish Siddiqui

The tragic death of the award-winning, widely published photojournalist is being mourned by the fraternity and beyond. **K. Madhavan Pillai** reflects on the price of portraying the truth.



A man works inside a cotton factory in Mumbai, 4th June 2010. India is the second-biggest producer, consumer and exporter of cotton and about sixty percent of the current season shipments went to China, the biggest consumer. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui

family, friends, classmates, colleagues, photojournalists, photographers and students.

For those who knew him, this was tragic, heartbreaking, and unacceptable. He was a fellow photographer, a photojournalist. He was just 38. Ask any good photojournalist what the job entails, and they will tell you that it is a commitment unlike any other. But he also leaves a young family behind. On the day the news hit us, a lot of us felt numb and in denial.

As a photographer, he captured reality without a self-aggrandising moralistic stance, with an unusual dedication to the job. Over the span of his career, he photographed conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the agitations in Hong Kong, and numerous assignments across India, from festivals to protests.

The news we received on 16th July 2021 was shocking and shattering. Danish Siddiqui, Reuters' Chief Photographer in India, had lost his life in the line of duty. He was with Afghan security forces in southern Kandahar, documenting the country's fight against the Taliban, when he was killed. Reuters first broke the news, citing an Afghan commander. Afghan forces had been fighting to retake the main market area of Spin Boldak when Siddiqui was killed in what was described as Taliban crossfire. It was a lot later that we got to know that it was not crossfire, but a grotesque, horrifying execution by the Taliban—one that goes beyond any form of humanity, or inhumanity. He was brought back to India, and laid to rest at the Jamia Millia Islamia graveyard in New Delhi, on 18th July, 2021, a Sunday, amidst a sea of mourners—



An exhausted Rohingya refugee woman touches the shore after crossing the Bangladesh-Myanmar border by boat through the Bay of Bengal, in Shah Porir Dwip, Bangladesh, 11th September 2017. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui



A health worker reacts before the burial of a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officer who died from Covid-19, at a graveyard in New Delhi, India, 29th April 2020. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui



People wait to cremate victims who died due to Covid-19, at a crematorium ground in New Delhi, 23rd April 2021. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui



FILE PHOTO: A protester wearing a Guy Fawkes mask waves a flag during a Human Rights Day march, organised by the Civil Human Right Front, in Hong Kong, China, 8th December 2019. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui

Danish was part of a Reuters team that won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, for work about the Rohingya refugees who were fleeing Myanmar. More recently, he produced some of the world's most-viewed images of India's farmer protests, and memorably, of the Covid-19 crises. Of funeral pyres against a darkened city. He faced criticism, often from sections of the intelligentsia. But Danish stood firm. What he photographed was also, undeniably, the truth, one way or the other. And some truths are inconvenient and disturbing.

Photojournalism is one of those professions and identities worn on the sleeve, with a sort of hidden pride. "I don't want to break the trust



A member of the Afghan Special Forces drives a Humvee during a combat mission against Taliban, in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, 11th July 2021. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui

of the people who treat me as their representative, to record their history. In the end, I am a historian. I record what I see," Danish had said. It requires unusual courage of conviction, clarity of intent, desire for truth, and a joy for the job to be a good photojournalist.

Danish Siddiqui paid the price. And we paid the price. And often, I can't help but think that the price for truth is so incredibly high. Losing Danish is a loss to the world of photojournalism and to Indian photography.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his family. ■

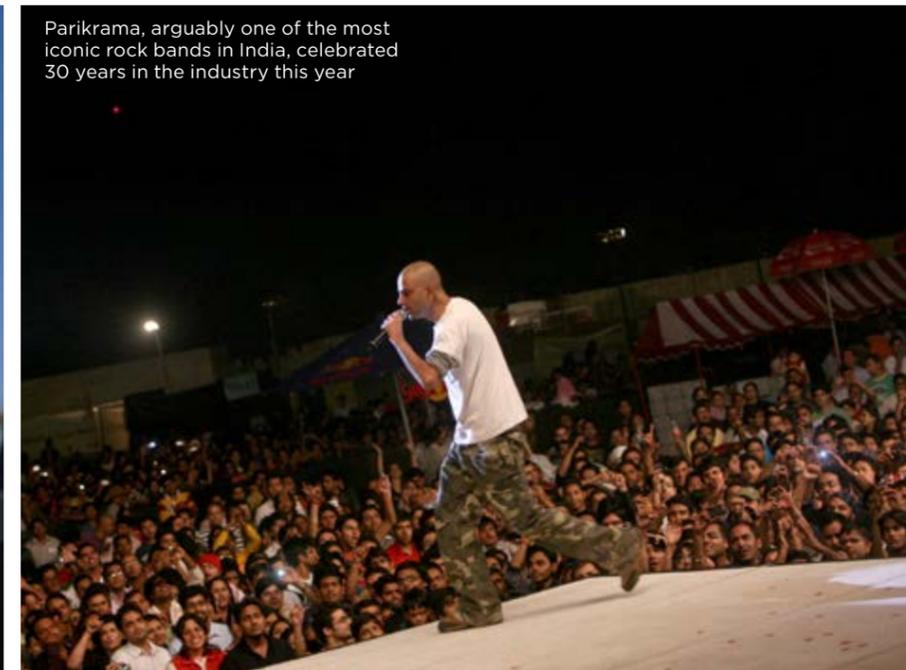
The writer is Chief Editor, Better Photography.



Indian Ocean is known for its fusion of Indian folk and classical traditions with rock and jazz



Prateek Kuhad is a well-known name in the indie scene



Parikrama, arguably one of the most iconic rock bands in India, celebrated 30 years in the industry this year

The Beat of Your Own Drum

Though not an easy climb, the indie music scene was witnessing a rise in popularity among audiences. However, the pandemic that spared no industry has forced artistes to reinvent and adapt to keep the momentum going.

By Narendra Kusnur

When the lockdown was announced in March last year, one expected a slowdown in independent releases. Interestingly, that didn't happen. On the contrary, there was a spurt in singles and EPs, with many artistes choosing to do things on their own instead of relying on record labels. With Hindi film music not producing anything substantial, the industry feeling was that 'indie' music was here to dominate.

Things are not as rosy as they seem, though. During this period, new singles have come and gone, with only temporary success. According to industry observers, too much clutter and a lack of focused promotion have affected the way independent music has performed in India. There is plenty of talent, and there are many big names like Divine, Badshah, Parvaaz, Prateek Kuhad, MIDival Punditz, Nucleya and Ritviz, to name a few. But none of them has reached the star status of the 1990s Indipop artistes like Alisha Chinai, Daler Mehndi, Colonial

Cousins and Lucky Ali. Though many songs have been liked, only a few like Kuhad's 'Kasoor', Pratibha Singh Baghel's 'Bole Naina' and Vineet Singh Hukmani's 'Jab the World' created a mass impact over the past year.

Despite the challenges, indie music is a much talked-about genre in the country today. Singers and composers wanted to be a part of the Bollywood scene a decade ago; today they know they have a viable alternative. Though different indie artistes have different styles and sounds, they differ from the mainstream Bollywood sound that has ruled Indian airwaves for years. And the fad isn't restricted to India—even Indians settled abroad have released songs at regular intervals.

On the rise

To understand where indie music stands in the current scenario, it is important to know what it comprises and track its evolution over the last 15 years or so. The term 'indie' began to be used around 2005 when artistes

started producing and distributing music on their own. Those days, with sales of physical music formats like CDs and DVDs dropping, record labels had become selective about who to sign. In some cases, musicians funded their own albums but relied on big labels for distribution. They even put out songs on the Internet — this was either at a price, or for free, as in the case of Delhi rock band Parikrama.

For many artistes, live music became a good avenue for exposure and income. Over the next few years, many concert venues sprung up, and festivals were organised. In 2007, the Blue Frog live venue opened in Lower Parel, Mumbai, and this gave artistes a chance to showcase their talent to newer audiences. Hard Rock Café in the city catered to live rock events.

By 2010, there seemed to be enough potential to launch a music festival, and the NH7 Weekender was thus started, showcasing both Indian and international acts. On the television front, MTV Coke Studio and The Dewarists gave opportunities to both known and up-and-coming artistes, and in 2014, MTV launched its Indies channel. Radio was a bit slow in comparison, though Radio City had an online indie music site 'Radio City Freedom' and its awards event, and Red FM later introduced a dedicated segment 'Red Indies'. Platforms like the Global Indian Music Awards (GIMA), and more recently, The Indies awards and the Gigital India singer-songwriter awards have recognised talent in the genre.

Defining roles

While all this was happening, there was no clarity about what constituted indie music in India. Though it originated from the definition used in the West—of artistes producing music independently or in part-association with record labels—in India, it started meaning anything that was not film, not mainstream and not classical.

In the West, there were specific categorisations

For many indie artistes, live music became a good avenue for exposure and income. Many concert venues sprung up, and festivals were organised

based on the sound. For instance, indie-rock consisted of bands like the Buzzcocks, Radiohead, Death Cab for Cutie, Kings of Leon and The Strokes. Likewise, there were indie-metal and indie-pop bands (not to be confused with our Indipop). Artistes thus started producing independently but were taken by the big labels once they were established.

Indian indie, in contrast, comprised a mishmash of various genres, from Punjabi to Indi-folk to jazz to rock to desi hip-hop to Indian electronica. The songs could be in Hindi, English or traditional dialect. Even bands that had worked with established labels—like Indus Creed, Indian Ocean and Advaita—were clubbed under 'indie'.

There was also this debate about how indie was different from 1990s Indipop. According to industry observers, Indipop was a concerted effort by the music industry to promote non-film talent as an alternative to Bollywood music. Initially, Magnasound and BMG-Crescendo spearheaded this effort. Later, Saregama India (HMV), Universal, Sony Music, T-Series, Tips Industries and Venus Records joined the fray. When Times Music started operations in 1998, its two priorities were remixes and non-film Indipop, besides devotional music.



With events like Ziro and Sunburn, the live music scene was seeing a rise in popularity

Unlike Indipop, indie music was not backed by labels, but meant to be created by the artistes themselves. There was a lack of clarity here as well. Universal Music formed its VYRL Originals division to promote non-film music, and helped set up Mass Appeal India for desi hip-hop. Similarly, Sony teamed up with management company Kwan to create Big Bang. However, the general public clubbed their releases under indie. Likewise, T-Series and Zee Music produce non-film music, but are often bracketed under the indie umbrella.

With the times

With time, other trends emerged within the indie music space. Like with other genres, a lot of music is now consumed on streaming platforms or YouTube and other short video apps. Music is easily available on mobile phones or laptops. Audiences are constantly discovering new songs through playlists. In fact, before any new release, artistes pay a great deal of attention to how their song could make it to the playlists. The reliance on TV appearances has gone down.

Secondly, social media has become an important avenue for promotion. Due to the lockdown, musicians had to rely on animation videos or put together videos recorded at different locations, and load them on YouTube. These videos and audio links

from streaming platforms are forwarded in chains on Facebook and WhatsApp.

Before Covid-19, the live scenario had picked up with events like NH7 Weekender, Magnetic Fields, Sofar Sounds and Sulafest attracting independent music. For its part, the National Centre for the Performing Arts started Band Baja, a series involving collaborations of young artistes. Some festivals like Sunburn, Submerge, Vh1 Supersonic, Ziro, and Kasauli Rhythm N' Blues festival catered to specific genres. In Mumbai, while venues like Blue Frog, Hard Rock Café Worli and The Quarter near Chowpatty shut down, others like AntiSocial in Lower Parel and Hard Rock in Andheri promoted independent music.

The lockdown changed everything. With live music coming to a standstill, artistes began making online appearances. Suddenly, there was a spurt in the release of singles. Film musicians like Shreya Ghoshal, Arijit Singh and Sunidhi Chauhan began releasing songs on their own, with Singh forming his own label, as did Salim and Sulaiman Merchant, and music director Amit Trivedi. Newer outfits like Sufiscore, Springboard Records and TM Music focused on independent music.

Besides artistes well known in indie music circles, like Kuhad, Raghav Meattle, When Chai Met Toast, Pragnya Wakhlu, and Ritviz, who has announced plans to release 22 songs before the year-end, there have been releases from numerous lesser-known names. The net result is that songs come and go. Kuhad, who made waves with his song 'Cold/ Mess'—which also featured in former US President Barack Obama's 2019 playlist—and the fantastic 'Kasoor', sadly failed to create the same impact with 'Shehron Ke Raaz'.

It's the sign of the times, one guesses. With so much out there, lack of live performance opportunities and short public memory, today's independent artistes are finding it hard to sustain the momentum and produce big hits, despite the abundance of talent. At the moment, everyone is just waiting for the live action to resume. One can only hope that this is the lull before the storm. ■

10 songs released during the lockdown

1. Prateek Kuhad - Kasoor
2. Shreya Ghoshal - Muraliya
3. When Chai Met Toast - Break Free
4. Vik Feyago ft Shontelle - Asha, Help India
5. Brite Roy & Ishaan Nigam - O Chand
6. Raghav Meattle - City Life
7. Pratibha Baghel - Bole Naina
8. Vineet Singh Hukmani - Jab We Met
9. Inalab ft Dhruv Sangari - SitaronKeAage
10. Vinay Kaushal ft Siddharth Basrur - Reality Check

Kaleidoscope

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



Behind the walls

A campaign is underway to preserve the Reading prison, which is where Oscar Wilde was incarcerated after being convicted of 'gross indecency'—his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas. He was imprisoned for about 18 months in the late 19th century, and his experiences and the hanging of a fellow inmate gave him the inspiration for the poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Wilde was first sent to a prison in London and then shifted to Reading Gaol—it was said to be an upgrade of sorts but it broke his spirit.

Earlier this year, a £2.6 million bid (\$3.7 million) from the Reading Council, to buy and convert the prison into a museum and arts centre was rejected as too low by the government, which owns the property. The idea to convert the jail into a museum came around with the intentions to transform something bleak to something positive. The campaign is backed by several movie stars and artists, including Reading-born actress Kate Winslet, and Banksy, whose work is said to be seen on one of the prison walls. Campaigners aren't backing down, and are considering other modes of finance to top up the council's bid.

Divine journey

To mark the 700th death anniversary of Italian poet Dante Alighieri, the Uffizi Galleries in Florence have organised an online art exhibition



depicting *Divine Comedy*—the three-part epic poem, divided into Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise—that was written in 1308-21. The digital show, called 'A Riveder Le Stelle' (To rebehold the stars) features rare 16th-century illustrations by Italian Mannerist painter Federico Zuccari, made between 1586 and 1588.

The illustrations entered the Uffizi collection in 1738. With the drawings being fragile, only portions have been shown to public, at two separate events. This is the first time it's being showcased in its entirety. The exhibition can be viewed on www.uffizi.it/en/online-exhibitions-series/to-rebehold-the-stars

An intermission

Opera Australia has cancelled the Sydney and Melbourne seasons of *The Phantom of the Opera* due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Andrew Lloyd Webber's popular musical was originally set to open at the Sydney Opera House in September and the Melbourne Arts Centre in November, but due to the uncertainty caused by the lockdowns and the logistic and rehearsal delays, it seemed impossible for the show to be ready in time.



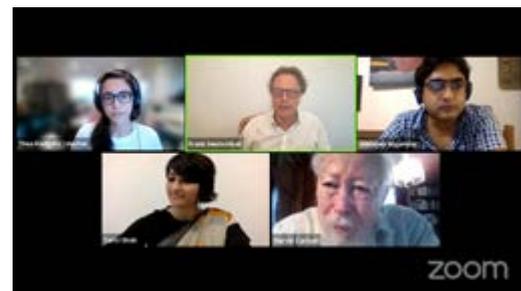
Opera Australia was counting on *Phantom* to make up for the setbacks it faced last year and to drag it out of its financial difficulties. "It's a shocking situation," artistic director of the company Lyndon Terracini said. "In all sorts of ways, it is worse than it was last year." Lloyd Webber had hinted at the production being cancelled, when he announced in July that the first two nights of his production of *Cinderella*

were cancelled. "Theatre is now on its knees," he said. "There is no way forward."

The Phantom of the Opera is expected to be showcased in 2022, and Opera Australia has said that all affected ticket holders will be contacted once the schedule is out.

Power of words

A HowlRound for India, a 24-hour marathon of Covid-19 talks with the global theatre community, was organised by HowlRound, a Boston-based open platform for theatre-makers worldwide, in collaboration with The Martin E. Segal Theatre Centre in July. It had in conversation 14 prominent American writer/directors, about 50 Indian theatre artistes and over 40 artistes from at least 30 countries.



The live readings and talks were done to honour the Indian theatre community for its efforts in facing Covid-19. The aim of the talk was to highlight the severity of Covid-19 in India; to honour the memory of theatre artistes who passed away during this time; to celebrate the contributions by global theatre artistes during the pandemic (especially in India); to get an insight into the social and political situation of the other countries on the roster.

This marathon was the concluding event of the theatre centre's online conversation series, 'The Time of Corona', and was organised by Frank Hentschker, Director of CUNY's Segal Theatre Centre; Abhishek Majumdar, a playwright/director from Bengaluru, and Mumbai-based director/producer Tanvi Shah. The complete schedule as well as the talks can be viewed on <https://howlround.com/> ■

- Aswathi Nair



ABBUS/ACASTRA/ALAMY/STOCK PHOTO

Reality Check

Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty revolved around performances that used sound, movement and gestures to speak to the audience in the most primal and instinctive way. Though his technique faced resistance, it did make an impact world over. By Devanshi Shah

The performing arts have a long history of constantly evolving their methodologies of storytelling. Ranging from the narrative to devices of presentation, the theatre itself is a dynamic space. A consistent attempt has been made by playwrights and dramatists throughout history to tell stories in new ways. One such break from the traditional understanding of theatre was attempted by Antonin Artaud, and it was what he called the 'Theatre of Cruelty'.

A French writer, poet, dramatist, actor and theatre director, Artaud conceptualised his theory by exploring and participating in some of the avant-garde European

Jarry, and Artaud's 'The Manifesto for an Abortive Theatre'. The short-lived theatre produced plays that were raw and dealt with surreal and transgressive themes, and laid the foundation for Artaud's manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty.

Beyond the name

The name may sound a little deceptive, but Artaud's idea of cruelty was not necessarily about masochism or inducing pain. He identified the word cruelty as an agitation, an expression of breaking a false sense of reality that he believed society was experiencing at the time. The cruelty here was the violent realisation

of reality that he believed theatre could bring about. These productions were seen as a way to shock audiences using gesture, image, sound and lighting. Artaud wrote his first manifesto in 1932 after witnessing a Balinese dance performance at the Paris Colonial Exposition. Enamoured by the animated hand movements and facial expressions of the performers, Artaud was struck by the dynamism between the dancer's movements and the musical score. It is important to note that at this point Artaud assumed the musical score did not contain

words, just sounds. This assumption was contested and disproved; Artaud's orientalist perception of the performance encouraged his desire to break away from the traditional Western theatre. It cemented his belief that language or the spoken word was an insufficient tool to express the subconscious.

Artaud further explored his definition of cruelty in the second iteration of his manifesto on the Theatre of Cruelty, which was published as part of a collection of essays in a book titled *The Theatre and Its Double*, in 1938. The title of the book itself is a reference to Sigmund Freud's characterisation of the double as a representation of the ego. The surrealists often referred to Freud's ideas of psychoanalysis in their work—and their influence, though short-lived, on Artaud's own ideas—specifically as 'The uncanny'. "The 'uncanny,'" Freud explains, "is that form of terror that leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar." (1919)

The most important aspect is that it does not involve any physical or spiritual harm, but rather, is an artistic expression of theatre and life

movements. Caught up in the ecstasy of post-war France, Artaud moved to Paris in the early 1920s with dreams of being a writer. The decade, referred to as the *Années folles*, or the crazy years, saw Paris re-establish itself as a capital of art, music, literature and, more importantly, cinema. With the popularisation of this new medium of storytelling, theatre had to evolve. What happens to the stage when compared with the silver screen? The fascination of the moving pictures captured Artaud's interest as well. From the mid- to late '20s, Artaud worked as an actor and even wrote a number of ideas for films.

During this period, he was associated with the Surrealist group, before being expelled from it in 1926. The main point of dispute, in addition to the surrealists' growing political affiliation, was André Breton's belief that theatre was bourgeois and an anti-revolutionary practice. This ejection led to Artaud, alongside Robert Aron and Roger Vitrac, creating the Théâtre Alfred



Artaud's dramatic *Les Cenci* (1935) is the only known play in which he illustrated his theories.

The connection becomes more evident when you compare it to Artaud's definition of the term cruelty. "Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible. In our present state of degeneration, it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds." (Translated from the French by Mary Caroline Richards)

The manifesto outlines and analyses the impulses and features of a performance, appreciating the expressive values of Eastern dance drama. The Theatre of Cruelty can be summarised in three central features. The most important is the understanding that it does not involve any physical or spiritual harm, but rather, it is an artistic expression of theatre and life. Enacting moments of rigour and necessity or even expressing dreams and parapraxes is where the cruelty steps in. This element of Artaud's manifesto is a reaction to the realism that was prevalent in theatre at the time. In fact, he starts his essay by saying, "We cannot go on prostituting the idea of theatre whose only value is in its excruciating, magical relation to reality and danger."

He believed theatre should draw ideas from individual and collective dreams, or the myths. He allowed taboo imagery to be expressed on stage, including scenes of crime, erotic obsessions, fear, and even cannibalism, as it allowed each spectator to confront the truth of their subconscious mind.

Reimagining theatre

Another key element of Artaud's experiment questioned the rudimentary understanding of 'theatre'. The word theatre brings to mind a performance by a collective of actors, seen by another collective of viewers. Theatre is often used as a means to promote discourse, engage in dialogue and even highlight social change. This was especially true at the time when Artaud conceptualised the Theatre of Cruelty. He believed theatre was not

It was a means of enticing a visceral reaction from the spectators. The idea was to impact the nerves and senses, rather than the intellect

simply a story, but rather a means of enticing a visceral reaction from the spectators. The idea was to impact the nerves and senses, rather than the intellect. He even defined the value of the theatre saying, "It is a question then of making the theatre, in the proper sense of the word, a function; something as localised and as precise as the circulation of the blood in the arteries or the apparently chaotic development of dream images in the brain, and this is to be accomplished by a thorough involvement, a genuine enslavement of the attention."

To make sure the audiences had an immersive experience, he saw to it that they sat in swivel chairs with the performance happening around them.

While Artaud's ideas and concepts were not celebrated during his lifetime, his work influenced numerous dramatists and writers. The appreciation went far beyond theatre, with philosopher Gilles Deleuze referencing Artaud's phrases, and Jacques Derrida having published essays on Artaud, namely *La Parole Soufflée* (1965), and *The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation* (1966).

The absurd and the bizarre visualisation of theatre and cinema today perhaps is heavily indebted to the incongruous experiments of the Theatre of Cruelty that sought to reimagine the idea of theatre as a medium that speaks to the individual's innermost self and in the process, liberates their instinctual energy. ■

Fearless Nadia:

From stuntwoman to feminist icon

With a larger-than-life image that was unlike anything her contemporaries portrayed on-screen, Mary Ann Evans carved a niche for herself in the cinematic tradition of a land far, far away from her own.

By Arwa Mamaji

During her family's move from Perth, Australia, to Bombay, India, little did Mary Ann Evans know that this journey would be one that would rewrite her destiny and change the course of Indian cinema.

In India, she studied ballet under Madam Astrova and based on the advice of a fortune-teller decided to change her name to Nadia. She worked as a theatre artiste in 1930, and in the meantime, mastered cartwheels, juggling whips, swords, guns, and sometimes, punching with her bare hands to set straight anti-social elements. This blonde, blue-eyed ballet dancer caught the eye of filmmaker Jamshed Boman Homi Wadia of Wadia Movietone. In Nadia, he found his feminist icon—someone who could carry a social and political message at a time when no actress was doing that.

A stunt queen is born

The prefix 'Hunterwali' or 'Fearless' is always used when one refers to Nadia. She earned the former name from the 1935 movie *Hunterwali* which was produced by Wadia Movietone and had her essay the titular role. Nadia's stunts and performance were applauded by the audience, and the film, an expensive venture, was a blockbuster. It inspired numerous products that had 'Hunterwali' incorporated in their brand names. The film has a memorable scene where she lifts a man while performing gymnastics, in the middle of a chase. These kinds of action sequences became a regular feature in Nadia's films, which were well received. Nadia went on to become Indian cinema's

earliest and most popular stunt actress.

'Fearless' became synonymous with her name as Wadia made her leap from windows, jump off cliffs, swing from chandeliers, fight atop speeding trains, live among wild lions and lift men and fling them around. She relied on nothing but her talent and skill, without any safety measures or health insurance. Critics also called her 'Fearless' from the point of view that she was considered to be of big build, wore fitted clothes and had no qualms about exposing her body on-screen, unlike other actresses who had a different moral code. Nadia stayed away from conventional roles, both on-screen and in real life, which meant she embraced her unmarried status as part of her personality.

A niche of her own

The 1930s and '40s saw the rise of women-centric characters in film. V. Shantaram's social drama *Kunku* (1937), which featured Shanta Apte in the lead, is about the female protagonist who is forced to marry an elderly man. *Dr. Madhurika* (1935), played by

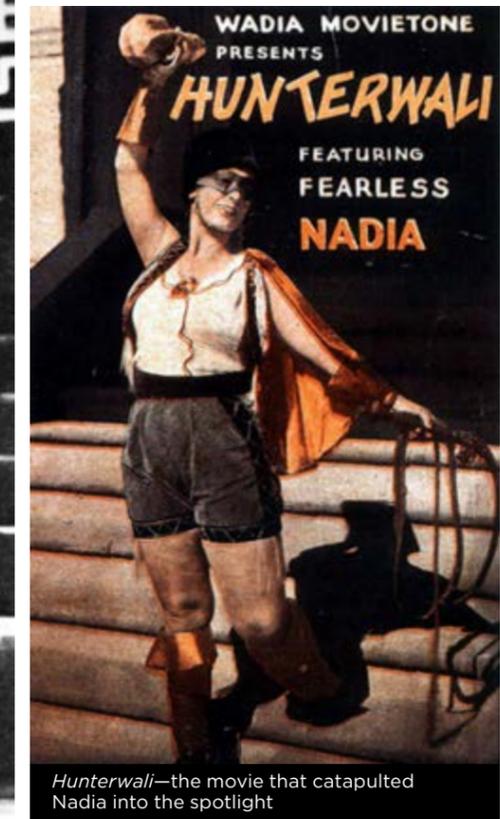
Sabita Devi, is another film about a modern young woman dedicated to her profession who advocates birth control to keep population growth in check. Though Nadia's contemporaries Sulochana, Sabita Devi, Durga Khote and Madhuri (her biggest competition from northern India) did women-centric roles, the general ethos of the period was social change. Nadia's image, however, was different.

Since Nadia was perceived as an outsider, she was not compelled to fit into any mould. The norm back then in society—and on-screen—was for women to

Nadia's image was different in the industry. She earned the 'Fearless' tag for a number of reasons



Nadia defied conventions and changed the way actresses were represented on screen



Hunterwali—the movie that catapulted Nadia into the spotlight



The poster of *Luteru Lalna* (1938), and a still from the movie (top)

quit their job once married if they were to stave off a chaotic life later. In Nadia's films, she is rarely seen getting married. They do not have a romantic angle, and if they do, it ends before the viewer can envisage a liaison.

Commercially successful cinema in India was familiar with only two kinds of exaggerated women tropes: the good, submissive mother, daughter, sister and wife, with scarcely a life to call her own, existing

solely for the male figure in her life. Her counterpart was recognised as vulgar. Dressed in Western clothes, she smoked, drank and, as a rule, died in the end. With Nadia's success in *Hunterwali*, her nonconformist persona was established, and hers is a special case in Indian film history.

Film posters of the 1930s also played their part in retaining, sharpening and enhancing the image of Nadia as an evergreen figure. The foundation of Bollywood poster art was laid in that era under the studio system that employed artists to paint posters and banners. The influence of Art Deco, which represented luxury, glamour, exuberance, and Art Nouveau, was dominant in the '20s through the '40s, and these were later blended with the Indian motif movements from Baroda and Shantiniketan schools at the peak of the Independence movement and beyond.

Bollywood's poster artists proudly signed their name and were as distinctive and well known as any technician in the industry. They were responsible for posturing and positioning the characters based on the brief given to them by producers. Their artistic sensibilities and influence went a long way in creating a distinctive identity not just for the film but also the actor.

DG Pradhan was one such name. Not much is known about him but author Rajesh Devraj in his book *The Art of Bollywood* claims that Pradhan was responsible for painting many film posters for Wadia Movietone. Pradhan, along with his contemporaries including Ghanshyam Desai at Prakash Pictures, created a style far more energetic than the staid art of the 1930s. In the compulsive need to depict every highlight of the film, from the magnificent flying

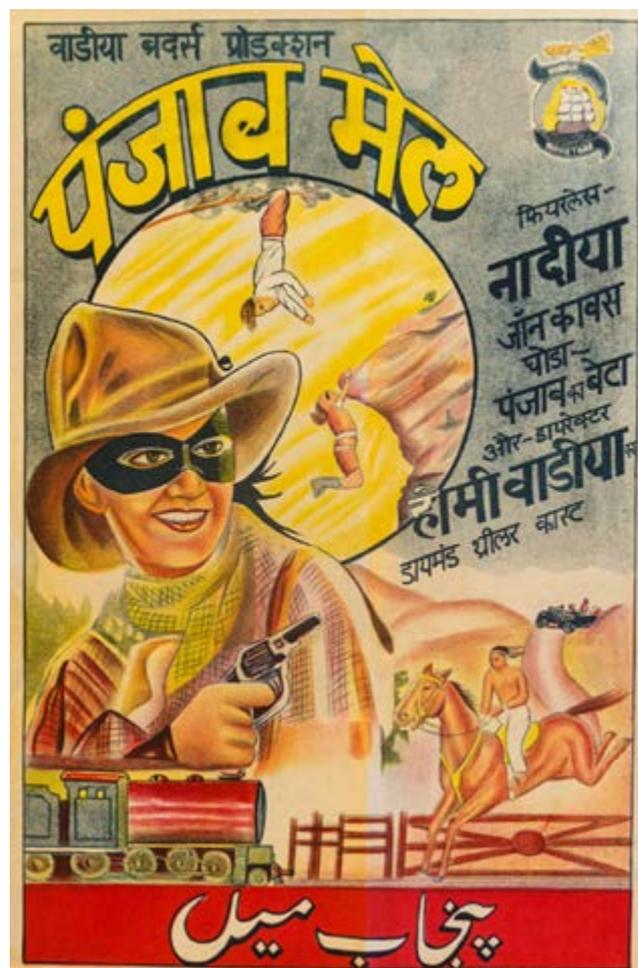
machines to the wonder dog balancing on a barrel, these images were important visual cues that drew in the crowds.

Nadia's posters exude the presence of a strong, free-spirited woman. Her body language is that of a woman with no inhibitions, ready to take on the world on her terms.

A force to reckon with

Nadia lives on as a feminist icon, her image having been constantly recreated through kitsch and pop art. These representations have become powerful over the years. In 1993, Riyad Vinci Wadia made a documentary called *Fearless: Hunterwali Story*, resurrecting her journey for a whole new audience. After watching the documentary, Dorothee Wenner, a German freelance writer and film curator, wrote a book called *Fearless Nadia - The true story of Bollywood's original stunt queen*, which was subsequently translated into English.

Based on Fearless Nadia's screen image, Bengaluru-based artist N. Pushpamala created 'Phantom Lady' or 'Kismet' (1996-1998), her first 'photo-performance' that comprised 25 black-and-white prints. The series was shot in the film-noir style and starred Pushpamala both as the 'Phantom Lady' as well as the twin sister, The Vamp. The work acquired cult status and has been exhibited all over the world, prompting the artist to create its sequel.



Stone lithograph poster for the 1939 film, *Punjab Mail*



Diamond Queen (1940), directed by Homi Wadia, had some dangerous scenes which Nadia executed fearlessly

At the 2013 Melbourne Film Festival, to mark 100 years of Indian cinema, composer and percussionist Ben Walsh (Tom Tom Crew) fronted a coalition of Australian and Indian musicians who performed an energetic score set to a montage of scenes from *Diamond Queen* (1940), one of Nadia's most famous films. In 2018, Google paid tribute to Fearless Nadia with a doodle created by Bengaluru-based comic illustrator Devaki Neogi.

Film historian P.K. Nair perfectly summed up Fearless Nadia's appeal: "In Nadia, a person had emerged who removed many of the oppressive problems from the world—even if only on-screen. Due to the repressive mood of the country, it was not possible for farmers and workers to become activists themselves in public—you could be thrown into prison for any little thing. Nadia entered the arena on behalf of the masses as an outsider who came out of nothingness and stood up for the issues of the peasants, of those deprived of their rights and fought at their side. Almost effortlessly she eliminated collaborators and corrupt big landowners, precisely the people her viewers would also have liked to remove from the world. Naturally, everyone fell in love with Nadia."

Nadia's films and posters portrayed a woman with dramatic destinies, most of which were far removed from the reality that people in India experienced at that time. When going to watch Fearless Nadia, the audience did not expect a film about the girl next door. The Hunterwali, literally and figuratively, held the whip hand over her audiences. And it is due to this unusual and extravagant image that her legend lives on. ■

Different strokes

ON Stage brings you excerpts from the *NCPA Quarterly Journal*, an unsurpassed literary archive that ran from 1972 to 1988 and featured authoritative and wide-ranging articles. The concluding part of a feature by musician and ethnomusicologist **Ashok D. Ranade** on categories of music talks about what demarcates popular music from art music and the two from other categories.

Popular music is one feature of a subculture known as popular culture. It is, therefore, helpful to define popular culture and prepare the conceptual background for a discussion of this musical category.

'Popular culture is a surficial manifestation of cultural forces operating in a society partially responsive to aesthetic motives. The partial aesthetic responses are chiefly results of three factors: impact of the mass media, repercussions of the changes in patronage, and intermittent as well as interrupted functioning of commercial and religious pressures.'

One more factor needs to be noted before the characteristics of popular music are discussed. It must be remembered that 'popular' is not an aesthetic concept. Along with some other terms such as 'amateur', 'professional' and 'modern',

the term 'popular' has socio-economic, cultural and chronological aspects.

Popular music: Breaking it down

As a consequence, to discuss popular music is to bring in extra musical values and criteria. Considering the fact that a large segment of the total musical reality of any modern society is represented by popular music, it deserves special attention.

- **Universality:** Universality has two aspects—chronological and territorial. Popular music is universal for all practical purposes.

It would be incorrect to assume that it is a special creation of the 20th century. The intensive American study of the category and the phenomenal growth of the mass media—a prominent shaping influence in the category during the century—

have resulted in a tendency to confine the emergence and operation of popular music to present times. However, this is not strictly valid.

The primary cause for the genesis of the category is the simultaneous existence and independent operations of various subcultures in a society. It is obvious that a homogeneous society is purely a theoretical concept. All societies have subcultures operating at various levels and at varying intensities. In other words, social homogeneity and the equality of subcultures are ideals or possibilities only in a *Ramrajya*. In reality, all the subcultures in a society do not take to art music but are more attracted towards folk and popular musical expressions. To conclude, society is characterised by inevitable socio-cultural distinctions leading to musical differentials. The situation in

turn causes a circulation of musical forces, in the process creating the ever-changing category of popular music.

- Popular music is subject both to 'middle-class' influences and to the effects of urbanisation. The fact of being a multi-layered society and the processes of urbanisation are causally related. If 'industrialisation' is not interpreted too technically, it implies recourse to new modes of production and the employment of new means for the purpose. The migration from rural areas to cities for earning one's livelihood and the emergence of a new technology recur so frequently that they can be described as regular historical features of all growing cultures.

- Various factors contribute to a situation where more and more people enjoy leisure hours. They tend to be engaged in hobbies and seem keen to spend time on personality development or enrichment. As a consequence, various disciplines like arts, crafts, etc., are often pursued with motives that are semi-synthetic and semi-commercial. Popular music is one of the products of such a situation. Entertainment, education, the desire for commercial gain and other diverse drives are simultaneously operative in popular art.

- The mass media have a special role to play in relation to popular music and deeply influence its conception, propagation and reception.

- It has often been suggested that when popular music finds roots in any culture, there is a perceptible rise in population. Large-scale redistribution of population on account of migrations is also detected. It has already been pointed out that the lack of homogeneity in a society is a precondition for the emergence of popular music. Population growth becomes a significant factor because a smaller population is likely to be more homogeneous than a sizable populace. The latter tends to inevitable stratification, which in turn gives rise to popular music.

- Various socio-economic and cultural developments contribute to a change in the patronage offered to artists, craftsmen and cultural communicators in general. For example, the source of patronage passes

from princes, zamindars and religious sects, etc., to music conferences and music clubs or circles, broadcasting and television stations, gramophone companies, etc. This is a qualitative shift. There is a noticeable difference in the discerning powers of the audiences created by the new patrons. One of the consequences is that performers feel a need to find the lowest common denominator in music receptivity. On a majority of occasions, this is the reference point around which popular expression tends to range.

- The change in patronage affects popular music almost immediately (which is not the case in folk and art music). The responses of audiences to producers and propagators of popular music allow for a very short time lag. In other words, popular music is a category that perhaps exhibits the greatest synchronisation between supply and demand.

Popular music is a category that perhaps exhibits the greatest synchronisation between supply and demand

- This remarkable near-correspondence of stimulus and response is because popular music is a product of the entertainment industry. Supply and demand, production costs, distribution and sale, market survey and research, etc., build up an entire mechanism related to production rather than creation. In popular musical operations, art and aesthetics are, if needed, nonchalantly relegated to the background. That is why popular music can hardly be understood if its business compulsions are not taken into account.

- In a manner of speaking, the most important motivation for popular music is the satisfaction of the more obvious musical needs of the masses. Art music tries to manipulate the time dimension and thereby win ascendancy over it, and folk music goes around it.

Popular music, on the other hand, deliberately attempts to keep pace with the times. Import, expression, titles, blurbs

and write-ups on disc/cassette recordings, therefore, attain their final shape only after the ruling fashion of the day has been ascertained. This is the reason why popular music may be described as 'journalistic' treatment of musical material.

- Popular music is functional in the sense that it is tied up with a specific mode or fashion which society prefers at a point in time. Fashions have a task to perform: the creation of easily manipulated devices of image-building or image-reinforcement. By their very nature, fashions have to change frequently. To create popular music is to create musical fashions.

- It may appear that popular music is more likely to be musically inferior because a majority of its shaping forces are non-musical. However, this is not so. A heartening feature is that popular music demonstrates a spiral rise in quality. Examination of the musical material reveals that it gives credence to the concept of progress in music. On account of its alertness and proneness to changes, it proceeds from music of lesser quality to one of better quality. Popular music which appears later in time may be superior because its assimilative genius ensures more of acceptable musicality after a reasonable lapse of time.

Art music: What it stands for

- The most significant feature of art (or classical) music is the aesthetic intention of the performers. Here performers are set apart from musicians in the other categories because of their basic 'art' intent. The product, however, does not necessarily enjoy aesthetic validity because of the motivation. What is certain is that one cannot overlook the qualitative difference between the respective motivations of a primitive, folk, popular and art musician. In the field of primitive music, the performer is engaged in playing a role; the folk musician entertains or participates in a collective duty-filled task; the performer in popular music caters to a mass need; and the art musician seeks to establish himself as an artiste according to his own understanding of aesthetic norms or criteria. These may or may not be explicitly verbalised but their existence is beyond doubt.

- Art music is distinguished by the simultaneous operation of two

The Beatles is considered to be the most influential band in popular music history



traditions: scholastic and performing. Of necessity, the former relies on writing and the written text. More importantly, it follows the procedures inherent in every form of codification. Rules, methods and techniques pertaining to music are systematised in accordance with established practices. It is obvious that the scholastic tradition depends on the existing performing tradition for its raw material, but inevitably, the former lags behind the latter. This is because scholastic traditions are equipped to take cognisance only of those items that have consolidated or crystallised in the life pattern of a society. A helpful conceptual parallel for the phenomenon exists in the mutual relationship between grammar and literature in any linguistic tradition.

- Art music necessarily concentrates on select performing aspects such as vocalisation, instrumentation, movement or *abhinaya*. In other words, it displays less of a package character in comparison with musics that belong to other categories. Art music channelises or deliberately isolates modes of expression and cultivates them intensively in order to achieve greater and perceivable effects. This is why art music performances can be easily described as concerts of vocal or instrumental music.

- It is art music which offers scope for 'solo' performances. In no other musical category are the roles of the main and the accompanying performers so clearly defined and differently developed. To isolate the solo element and allow it to shape the entire performance requires a highly differentiated sensibility. To this end, art music formulates aims, methods and techniques specifically leading to the emergence of family traditions, schools, etc., with their own marked personalities.

- In art music, one is confronted with a whole array of musical forms, chiefly based on patterning the general musical elements in specific structures of notes, rhythms, tempi, etc. On the other hand, non-art musical categories abound in forms which owe their existence to non-musical factors such as events in human life cycles, seasonal changes and associated rites and rituals. Forms in art music also evince the existence of a hierarchy based on the degree of technical virtuosity. In other words, certain forms are regarded as more prestigious because of the demands they make on the skill of the performers.



Art music concentrates on select performing aspects such as vocalisation, instrumentation, movement or *abhinaya*. Seen here: Sitar virtuoso Nishat Khan during a recital at the NCPA in February 2015

Art music offers scope for 'solo' performances. In no other musical category are the roles of the main and the accompanying performers so clearly defined and differently developed

On examination, highly musicological criteria are found to have been employed to erect the hierarchy.

- Art music features a highly structured teaching-learning process. As a consequence, *gharanas* come into existence, gurus enjoy an exclusive following, reputations as effective teachers are built up, disciples are initiated with due ceremony and musical pedigrees are traced and treated with respect as well as pride. Methodical curricula come into existence even if they are not necessarily written down; material complementary to teaching-learning, such as anthologies of compositions, notations, codifications are prepared, preserved and often guarded with utmost secrecy.

- Audiences of art music are a class apart on account of their non-participatory contribution. Compared to other musical categories, art music depends for its efficacy on the presence of more organised audiences who are expected to have developed a taste, preparing them to receive the sophisticated impact of art music. Perhaps no other musical category finds it so essential to educate its audiences. Further, the audience is also expected to contribute to the making of a performance by expressing appreciation or disapproval in accordance with established norms forming part of a total cultural pattern. Acquisition of a taste for art music or its appreciation includes learned behaviour, and it is symptomatic that attempts at conducting appreciation courses in this category are well received.

- Art music is also characterised by its all-round efforts to combine with other forms to create composite art and art forms. The process appears a little paradoxical in view of the purposeful delinking with other arts in the first place. However, the paradox disappears once the differing motivations are appreciated. The delinking of art music from other manifestations initially takes place so as to enable it to demarcate its area of operation and effectively develop its own special identity. On the other hand, the later efforts to effect a reunion with dance, drama, painting, etc., are designed to enrich the total aesthetic experience. The emergence of ballet, opera, *ragamala* paintings can be traced to this enrichment motive.

- At every level, art music employs abstraction. For example, it diminishes the scope afforded to language and literary manifestations, reduces the importance of topical and functional relationships with rituals and routine life patterns. As a cumulative effect of these measures, it creates its own universe of reference and tries to adhere to a contextual framework of musical elements alone. Therefore, the non-representational, patently arabesque quality of art music is often commented upon, and the qualitative similarity of art music to the world of mathematics is repeatedly averred. Abstraction necessarily means a total dependence on musical parameters for perception of music, and this explains the comparatively confined appeal of art music as music. ■

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR

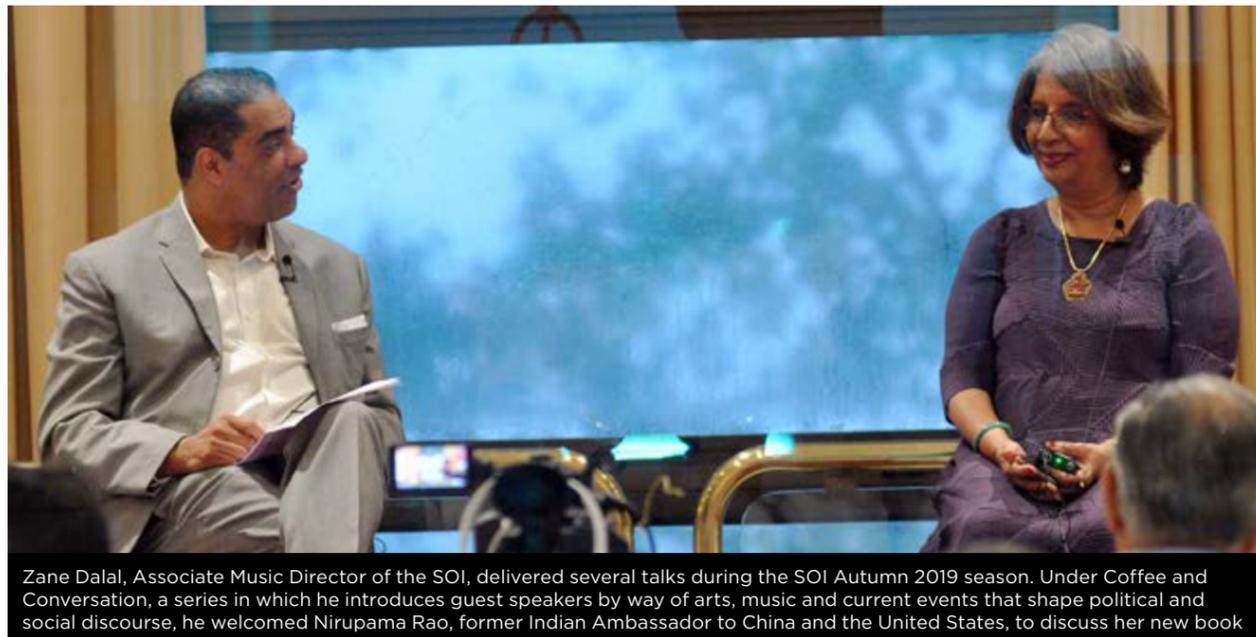
From stellar performances brought to the cognoscenti during the SOI Autumn 2019 season to a multilingual tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, from iconic choreographies presented at the Nakshatra Dance Festival to Jacob Collier's India debut, we bring you some of the more memorable events that were presented at the NCPA in September 2019.



Ratna Pathak Shah performed in *Manto, Ismat ... Haazir Hain*, the second of Motley's series of presentations of Hindustani stories on stage, at the Experimental Theatre



NCPA Chairman and SOI co-founder Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook is deeply involved in planning the orchestra's seasons—from inviting renowned artistes through his wide connections in the musical world to choosing the repertoire. He addressed the audience at the season's opening concert at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre



Zane Dalal, Associate Music Director of the SOI, delivered several talks during the SOI Autumn 2019 season. Under Coffee and Conversation, a series in which he introduces guest speakers by way of arts, music and current events that shape political and social discourse, he welcomed Nirupama Rao, former Indian Ambassador to China and the United States, to discuss her new book



The SOI performed excerpts from *Die Walküre*, *Parsifal*, and *Lohengrin* at the Wagner Gala under the baton of Zane Dalal



The season opened with two concerti for violin, piano and strings by Chausson and Mendelssohn, performed by SOI's Music Director Marat Bisengaliev and Italian pianist Roberto Prosseda



Open rehearsals during which schoolchildren are introduced to the workings of an orchestra are part of the SOI's outreach initiatives. Seen here: An SOI musician interacting with students of the Happy Home and School for the Blind



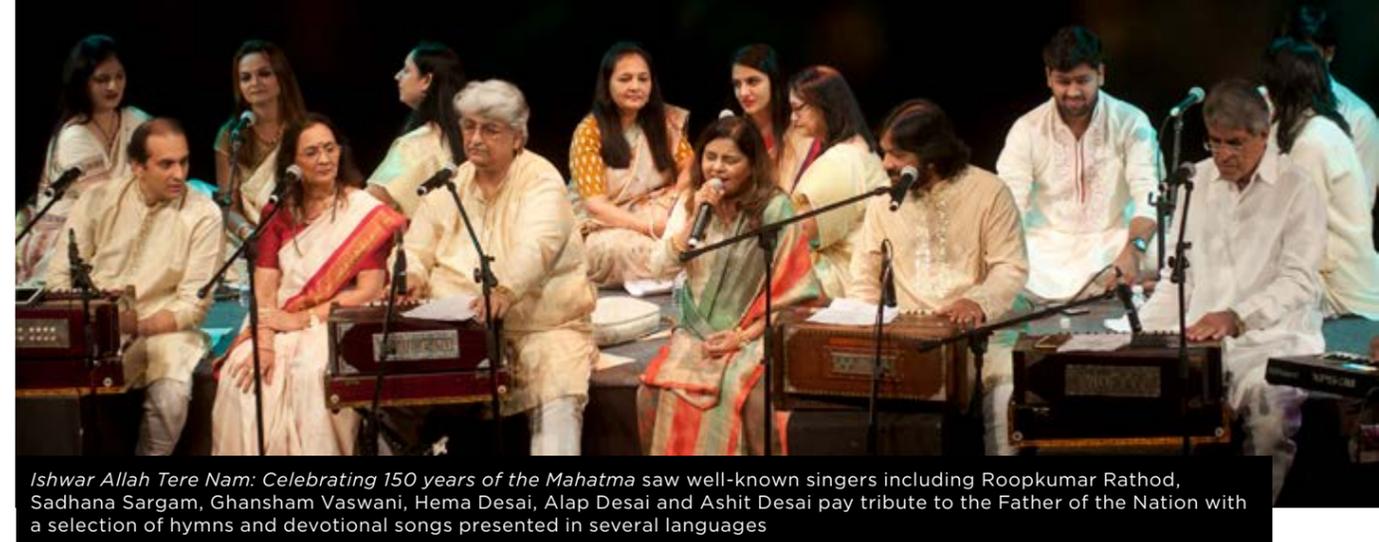
The gala featured New Zealand tenor Simon O'Neill, hailed as 'the Wagnerian tenor of his generation', and soprano Amanda Atlas, known for her dramatic flair and vocal power



Ranjana Gauhar and troupe after the Odissi performance, *Chitrangada*, as part of the Nakshatra Dance Festival



Loy Mendonsa in performance at Mumbai Piano Day held at the Tata Theatre



Ishwar Allah Tere Nam: Celebrating 150 years of the Mahatma saw well-known singers including Roopkumar Rathod, Sadhana Sargam, Ghansham Vaswani, Hema Desai, Alap Desai and Ashit Desai pay tribute to the Father of the Nation with a selection of hymns and devotional songs presented in several languages



The fourth edition of Mumbai Piano Day, curated by the NCPA and Louiz Banks, featured some of the finest pianists and keyboard players in the country and from around the world, covering all genres from jazz to funk to classical. Seen here: Composer Ronnie Monsorate with Sheldon D'Silva



Panchamabhutam, a Bharatanatyam performance by C. V. Chandrasekhar and troupe, was presented at the Nakshatra Dance Festival



Maestro Alexander Lazarev, who has been the chief conductor and artistic director of the Bolshoi Theatre, concluded the season conducting a programme of Khachaturian, Haydn and Tchaikovsky



Irish pianist Barry Douglas, a favourite of Mumbai audiences, performed Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* during a recital at the Tata Theatre



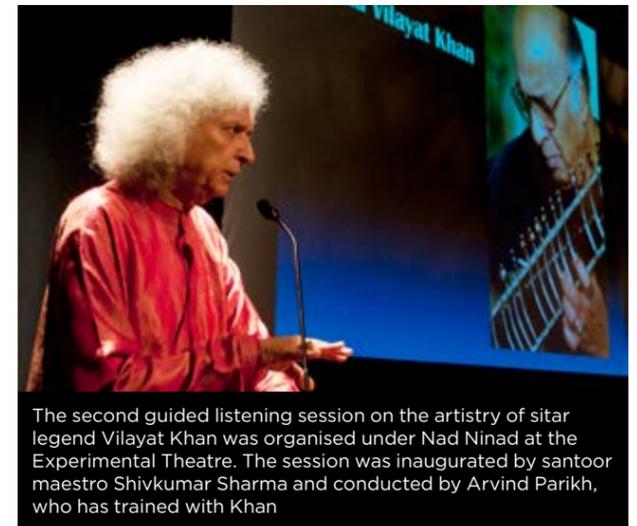
Rajashree Shirke and troupe presented the Kathak performance, *Ravana Mandodari Samvaad*, at the festival



An all-female cast, including (from left) Bhavna Pani, Seema Pahwa, Jaya Virley and Purna Chawla enacted selections from Ismat Chughtai's autobiography and other stories in *Aurat!! Aurat!!!* at the Experimental Theatre



Nine CITI-NCPA Scholars and Shishyas, who have been the beneficiaries of the schemes 'Support to Gurus' and 'Scholarships to Young Musicians' under Citi's longstanding CSR initiatives with the NCPA, showcased their talent in four recitals under Umang, a platform for promising artistes



The second guided listening session on the artistry of sitar legend Vilayat Khan was organised under Nad Ninad at the Experimental Theatre. The session was inaugurated by santoor maestro Shivkumar Sharma and conducted by Arvind Parikh, who has trained with Khan



Celebrating 50 years of the NCPA, the Nakshatra Dance Festival presented iconic productions presented over the past decade as well as new works. The festival featured innovative group choreographies by eminent artistes. Seen here: *Urjaa*, a Bharatanatyam performance, by Sharada and Nandini Ganesan with troupe at the Experimental Theatre



Grammy Award-winning British multi-instrumentalist, singer, arranger, composer and producer Jacob Collier made his India debut at a packed Tata Theatre, bringing the house down



Bare Necessity, an exhibition of works by Mumbai-based photojournalist Sachin Haralkar, highlighted the problem of open defecation in the commercial capital of India. His book of the same title was also released at the inauguration of the exhibition at the Piramal Gallery, in the presence of those directly impacted by a problem that has no place in the 21st century



Pictures from the Nikon Photo Context Exhibition, also in its 50th year in 2019, adorned the walls of the Piramal Gallery



Actor Vivek Madan interacts with an audience member during the staging of the acclaimed play *Every Brilliant Thing*, directed by Quasar Thakore Padamsee



Nazakat (Journey of Kathak through the Silver Screen), by Saswati Sen and troupe, showcased Bollywood choreographies of the Kathak legend Birju Maharaj at the finale of the Nakshatra Dance Festival



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