

 NCPA

FEBRUARY 2021

# ON Stage<sup>®</sup>

VOLUME 10 • ISSUE 7



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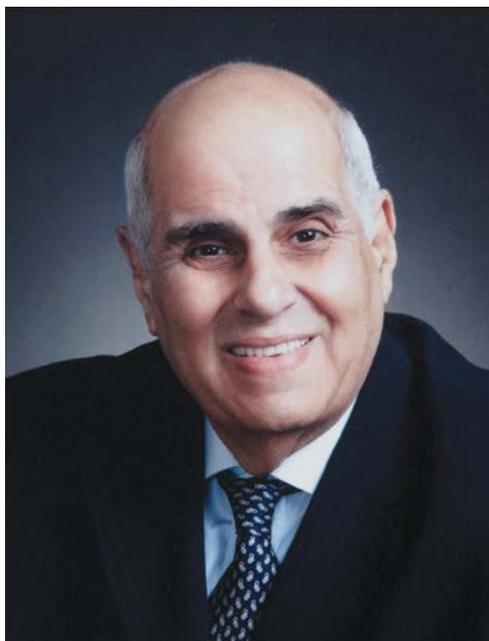
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# Chairman's Note



While the return of audience to live performance is expected to revive in India gradually, the possibly restrictive manner in which it would happen must be recognised. The joy of sharing live performances together with family, friends and fellow performing art lovers will be constrained due to conditions which are necessary to follow. At present, the reduction in audience size by 50 per cent itself will give our theatres an unusual look.

While I am expected to show an optimistic view, I believe the way forward would be to mould these events into festive occasions as far as the restrictions will allow. Here, our centre lends itself to splendid opportunities. Imaginative use of our facilities of open-air spaces for suitable performances and a hopefully refurbished restaurant and café is what should engage us. The difference somewhat from our normal fare will be the name of the game. This does not mean that we will stray from the path of offering the best form of classical and contemporary performances, but will suitably adapt them.

Our educational activities, workshops and related talks will assume priority. The NCPA is uniquely placed to scour India for the best talent available in all its genres and we have already started.

Elsewhere, an individual institution does not have to fend for itself as far as financial and other support is concerned. However, sadly, this support to an important aspect of Indian cultural life is missing. The huge support given in Europe to the performing arts is staggering, with the latest £1.57 billion given by the U.K. to its cultural organisations. Germany is among the leading nations in this type of assistance. Beyond this, states receive support for local opera houses, symphony orchestras, dance groups and theatres.

However, there is a glimmer of hope in this situation. It appears that the Government of Andhra Pradesh has been given a remit to start a performing arts centre with a generous grant.

I believe that, apart from the Management, all the stakeholders in the NCPA, whether they are Council Members, lifetime members, patrons, members of the SOI, etc., should make a serious effort towards fundraising. There are several avenues which can be discussed with us. When people come forward, I would be the first to call a meeting of those seriously wishing to contribute, soon after we are able to reasonably return to our workplace.

The spaces in Mumbai, like the bandstands, the facilities available with our Armed Forces, the various beautiful heritage sites such as the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya are wonderful venues to start a series of events perhaps called Mumbai Heritage Events. While we will work at this ourselves, the vast talent available among our associates will surely come forward with ideas and manner of execution.

In the meanwhile, I am looking forward to welcoming you back to our performances in February.

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

**Khushroo N. Suntook**

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Khushroo N. Suntook

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It is not an exaggeration to say that the year gone by was challenging in unprecedented ways. Especially when it came to relationships. More so, when it came to romantic ones. As the NCPA cautiously begins programming across genres this month, the third edition of Letters of Love by Readings in the Shed brings together a collection of much-needed stories of real-world love that defied the odds in inspiring ways. By Himali Kothari

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## Letter to the Editor:

*I was interested to read Anil Dharker's fascinating article on age and creativity in January's ON Stage. It reminded me of when I was C.E.O. of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Music Director, Simon Rattle, and I were planning our first tour to Japan in the mid 1980s.*

*We offered Mahler's First Symphony as one of the major works in the tour repertoire. The Japanese kept coming back to me asking us if we could perform No. 7 or No. 9 rather than No. 1. After many weeks of to-ing and fro-ing it transpired that the Japanese respect for the older generation led them to assume that as composers got older the quality of their work improved and that a later composition must, therefore, be better than an earlier one!*

*Eventually, they agreed to No. 1 and I'm sure the sophisticated Japanese no longer judge quality simply by age.*

— Edward Smith

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# Reflections

The new normal. **By Anil Dharker**

Shakespeare's Globe in London, a major theatre and tourist attraction, announced in June last year that it would permanently shut down unless it received a large government handout. The British theatre industry as a whole asked for a £100 million per month bailout. The U.K. government responded to this and similar appeals from orchestras, museums and cinemas by announcing a £1.57 billion rescue package for arts and culture. In India, we have not even discussed the possibility of such relief, probably because we already know the response. Arts and culture in our country have to stand on their own wobbly feet.

Through ten months of the lockdown, all art forms have had to reinvent themselves. This is most difficult for theatre and classical music: when you film theatre, it is no longer a play you are seeing, but cinema, and that means competing with a monster medium. A World Economic Forum study found that global box office revenues for movies in 2019 reached a record \$42 billion. And that is without the considerable revenues which come from spin-offs like video games, toys, books and theme parks. How can theatre ever compete with that?

Western classical music faces a similar dilemma: can listening to the Symphony Orchestra of India in your home on YouTube come anywhere close to the experience of being in the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre? Indian classical music also has a problem: it works as a highly interactive exchange between artistes and audience; without that, it's like listening to All India Radio.

In this scenario, different ways are being devised to deal with the new normal. The Berliner Ensemble, a German theatre company, drastically reduced its seats to ensure social distancing, cutting down a 700-seater auditorium to just 200. They dispensed with the interval to avoid overcrowding and kept doors open through the performance for air circulation. The plays that were staged had minimal characters and no kissing.

London's Royal Opera House did concerts without a live audience, then



broadcast them. But even that could not last long because of the danger of aerosol infection for the singers. So OperaVision, an organisation supported by the E.U.'s 'Creative Europe' programme, offered live streaming of recordings of favourite performances of 29 leading opera houses from 17 countries.

The U.K.'s National Theatre could no longer screen their filmed plays to ticket-paying audiences in theatres, so they live-streamed them to everyone for free, asking for voluntary donations starting from just £10. They also roped in stalwarts like Ian McKellen, Helen Mirren, Simon Callow, Julie Walters and Simon Russell Beale to conduct online quizzes to attract audiences. However attractive this might be, it could not go on forever, and even the National Theatre soon ran out of recorded plays they could live-stream.

Not everything is bleak however: the technology of fully immersive exhibitions made virtual reality tours of museums and art galleries a possibility. One of the first to do so was the Museu de Arte de São Paulo—now how many of us were likely to go to Brazil to see it? But now we could, sitting in our living rooms, as we could also visit the British Museum in London, the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam, the Guggenheim in New York, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the Uffizi Galleries in Florence and very many more.

Cinema found it the easiest to adapt because streaming of content through platforms like Netflix provided a viable alternative when cinema theatres were locked down. In fact, Warner Bros. is going

to make its new movies in 2021 available on HBO Max (which it owns) on the same day as the U.S. release. If this becomes the norm, what will happen to cinema theatres around the world?

A similar situation faces the publishing industry: while

bookstores had to shut down, some permanently, book sales on-line have soared. According to the American Booksellers' Association, there was a 250 per cent increase in sales and a prominent website even reported a 400 per cent spike. When you think about it, this is not really surprising, because the lockdown forced people to get down to reading. And what did they read? The biggest jump in sales was in the areas of self-help, spirituality and cooking.

(A personal note here: Tata Literature Live! The Mumbai Litfest held in November at the NCPA every year had to be online this year. While we missed out on the buzz and excitement of a live festival, we did get a national and international audience which reached a figure of over four million views).

As the NCPA opens its doors again this month and we eagerly await being part of live events, the way audiences engage with art and culture will have changed forever. Wherever possible, online streaming of events will supplement live performances; this will extend to many areas: for example, a Marat Bisengaliev masterclass can include not only budding musicians in Mumbai but all over the country (and even beyond); an NCPA production will not only play to a packed audience at the Experimental, but can also go online to people in Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore and elsewhere.

In other words, the new normal isn't all bad: with human ingenuity combined with technological expertise, we can seize the silver linings behind the dark clouds and slowly begin to brighten our lives. ■

NCPA · SOI symphony orchestra of india

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George Gershwin, DuBose & Dorothy Heyward,  
and Ira Gershwin

## The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess

Opera Screening  
Sung in English with English subtitles

An NCPA-Metropolitan Opera  
(New York) Presentation

Conductor: David Robertson  
Production: James Robinson  
Cast: Angel Blue (Bess),  
Golda Schultz (Clara),  
Latonia Moore (Serena),  
Denyce Graves (Maria),  
Frederick Ballentine (Sportin' Life),  
Eric Owens (Porgy), Alfred Walker (Crown),  
Donovan Singletary (Jake)

10th February 2021 | 5:00 pm  
Godrej Dance Theatre, NCPA

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# THE STAGE IS SET

REOPENING THIS FEBRUARY, THE NCPA IS READY TO WELCOME YOU BACK WITH PERFORMANCES FROM ACROSS GENRES. ALL SAFETY MEASURES IN PLACE, THE RETURN TO THE VIBRANCY OF A PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE WOULD BE A GRADUAL, CAUTIOUS ONE. BUT A BEGINNING HAS BEEN MADE.

**T**he ushering in of 2021 has perhaps been more eagerly awaited than any moment in recent times. A New Year, after all, symbolises new beginnings and we could all do with beginning again with a clean slate, free of trepidation, soaking life in, unmasked. We certainly haven't got there yet, but the numbers seem to be stabilising in this part of the country, however precariously.

It is in these oscillating times that we choose, in Dickensian terms, the epoch of belief over incredulity, the season of light over darkness, the spring of hope over the winter of despair—with wisdom, not foolishness, on our side. After the long, painful silence of our stages, we are reopening the NCPA to live performances. To be organised with complete adherence to the Standard Operating Procedure laid down by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and additional precautionary measures of our own, the performances will be socially distanced, with the theatres functioning at no more than 50 per cent occupancy.

Much of 2020 has been difficult and we are grateful to the Tata Group for their unwavering support. It has also been a period of gestation and the senior team of Western classical music at the NCPA has been vigorously pursuing the planning of its seasons right into 2022. Drawing up the curatorial plan for the coming months has been keeping all our genre heads busy and as the situation improves, connoisseurs of Indian and international music, dance and theatre will have much to look forward to.

Apart from the valiant attempts to return to live performances, which have no real substitute, the near future belongs to creating the best possible platforms for live streaming and quality broadcasting of NCPA's archival and new performances. However, work on this front will be commensurate with the quality of the performances we would like to offer to you in the comfort and safety of your home.

It is often perceived that the NCPA is moving at a slower pace than many other organisations in making its performances available digitally and bringing back live performances. But there is such a wealth of material available that it takes time to choose the best. Our work involves numerous international collaborations and the processing of visas under ever-changing lockdown rules across countries is now a significant logistical challenge. There is also the huge task of organising and using our five theatres safely.

A beginning, however, has been made and here is what the NCPA brings to you this February\*.



SOI Chamber Orchestra, 3rd, Tata Theatre

**WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC**

**SOI Chamber Orchestra**  
featuring **Soul Yatra**  
(Approx. 70 mins)  
**Tata Theatre**  
Wednesday, 3rd – 7.00 pm

**An NCPA Presentation**

The SOI Chamber Orchestra will present a concert of light classics — including Vivaldi's Concerto for four violins, works by Mozart, Tchaikovsky, and more — as well as popular music and jazz standards along with guest artistes Rhys Sebastian (saxophone), Merlin D'Souza (piano), Saurabh Suman (bass), and Jehangir Jehangir (drums).

**Tickets:**  
₹1,000, 750, & 500/- (Plus GST)  
**Box Office: 14th January for Members & 16th January for Public**

**SCREENING**

**The Lehman Trilogy**  
Theatre Screening (210 mins)  
**Godrej Dance Theatre**  
Thursday, 4th – 5.00 pm

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



The Lehman Trilogy, 4th, Godrej Dance Theatre

STEPHANIE BERGERE (THE LEHMAN TRILOGY)

The story of a family and a company that changed the world, told in three parts on a single evening. Academy Award-winner **Sam Mendes** (*Skyfall*, *The Ferryman*) directs **Simon Russell Beale**, **Adam Godley** and **Ben Miles**, who play the Lehman Brothers, their sons and grandsons. On a cold September morning in 1844, a young man from Bavaria stands on a New York dockside, dreaming of a new life in the new world. He is joined by his two brothers and an American epic begins. One hundred and sixty-three years later, the firm they establish—Lehman Brothers—spectacularly collapses into bankruptcy and triggers the largest financial crisis in history. This critically acclaimed and five-time Olivier Award-nominated play features stunning set design from **Es Devlin** (NT Live: *Hamlet*).

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

**Tickets: ₹400/-**  
**Box Office: 14th January for Members & 16th January for Public**

**THEATRE**

**Mohan's Masala**  
English Play (100 mins)  
**Tata Theatre**  
Sunday, 7th – 7.00 pm

**An NCPA Presentation in collaboration with Ideas Unlimited Production**

*Mohan's Masala* brings to life the lost world of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, through which we discover that a lot



Mohan's Masala, 7th, Tata Theatre

of the Mahatma's lessons were taught by these lost memories of ordinary life. Join Mohania as he takes you through his life journey. Let us understand what makes an ordinary soul into a spirit that is an inspiration to the entire world. What transformed a shy timid boy into a world-renowned leader? How did Mohan's life experiences shape the value system and morality of Mahatma? Trace Mohan's journey from Porbandar to South Africa, from ordinary to extraordinary, from fear to fearlessness. This minimalistic play brings to life the untold story of Mohandas, told simply yet brilliantly, making it into an experience to be cherished.

Directed by **Manoj Shah**  
Written by **Ishan Doshi**  
Singer: **Parthiv Gohil**  
Music: **Kanhaiya**  
Stage art: **Atul Dodiya**  
Production: **Janam Shah & Manali Bhavsar**  
Performed by **Pratik Gandhi**

**Tickets:**  
₹900, 750, 600 & 375/- (Members)  
₹1,200, 1,000, 800 & 500/- (Public) (Inclusive of GST)  
**Box Office: 14th January for Members & 16th January for Public**

**SCREENING**

**The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess**  
Opera Screening (195 mins)  
Sung in English with English Subtitles



The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess, 10th, Godrej Dance Theatre

**Godrej Dance Theatre**  
Wednesday, 10th – 5.00 pm

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

The dazzling new production of Gershwin's great American opera—called 'splendid' and 'gripping' by *The New York Times*—is the Met's biggest crowd-pleasing hit of the season, with a superlative cast led by **Eric Owens** and **Angel Blue** in the title roles. *The Washington Post* calls it "a Porgy and Bess is set in Catfish Row, a dockside area of Charleston, in about 1930. The plot depicts the story of Porgy, a disabled black street beggar living in the slums of Charleston, and Bess who wants to turn away from her former life as a prostitute and addict. Following a murder, Bess's abusive partner Crown flees, leaving her to deal with a disapproving community. Porgy and Bess develop an unlikely relationship and Bess finally finds acceptance on Catfish Row—until a hurricane and return of Crown change everything.

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

**Tickets: ₹500/-**  
₹250/- (only for students on production of valid ID cards)  
**Box Office: 26th January for Members & 29th January for Public**

**SCREENING**

**The Red Shoes**  
Ballet Screening (97 mins)  
**Godrej Dance Theatre**  
Thursday, 11th – 6.00 pm

**An NCPA - More2Screen Presentation**

**Matthew Bourne's** gorgeous take on the film classic comes to cinemas for the first time. Winner of two Olivier Awards, *The Red Shoes* is a tale of obsession, possession and one girl's dream to be the greatest dancer in the world. Victoria Page lives to dance but her ambitions become a battleground between the two men who inspire her passion. Bourne's magical adaptation of the classic Powell and Pressburger film is set to the achingly romantic music of golden-age Hollywood composer **Bernard Herrmann**.

Directed & Choreographed by **Matthew Bourne**



The Red Shoes, 11th, Godrej Dance Theatre

Orchestrations by **Terry Davies**  
Music by **Bernard Herrmann**  
Cast: **Ashley Shaw, Adam Cooper & Dominic North**.

**Tickets: ₹400/-**  
**Box Office: 14th January for Members & 16th January for Public**

**INDIAN MUSIC**

**CITI-NCPA Promising Artistes Series**  
**Krushna Salunke (pakhawaj)**  
**Aparajita Chakraborty (dhrupad)**  
(Approx. 75 mins)  
**Experimental Theatre**  
Friday, 12th – 6.30 pm



Krushna Salunke, 12th, Experimental Theatre

**Krushna Salunke** is being trained by Suresh Talwalkar under the 'Citi-NCPA Support to Gurus' CSR initiative. He took initial training in the art of playing the pakhawaj from Vishnupanth Londhe for five years. Later, on his guru's advice, he started taking lessons from Talwalkar. He has presented solo and accompanying performances across the country, including India International Centre and the NCPA, among others. His performances have won him several awards and scholarships, including Pandit Bhimsen Joshi scholarship, All India Radio music competition award.

**Aparajita Chakraborty** is the Citi-NCPA Scholarship winner 2019-20.



Aparajita Chakraborty, 12th, Experimental Theatre

She has been learning *dhruwad* from the Gundecha brothers. She has also trained with Rajyashree Ghosh (*khayal*), Susobhon Chandra (*khayal*), Debarati Som (Rabindrasangeet) and Piyali Mukherjee (Rabindrasangeet). Apart from winning the Citi-NCPA Scholarship, Chakraborty has also won a National Scholarship in Music (Rabindrasangeet). She has completed her Master's in Music from Rabindra Bharati University and has performed on stages across the country.

**Admission for Members on a first-come-first-served basis. NCPA Members will get preferential seating till 6.20 pm.**

### INTERNATIONAL MUSIC

#### The Golden Years

Featuring **Darren Das, Giselle Pinto & The Sixth Sense** (Approx. 100 mins)  
Experimental Theatre  
Saturday, 13th – 7.00 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation

Bringing you music of the 1960s, 70s and 80s or what can be called The Golden Years of Music, are **Darren Das, Giselle Pinto** and **The Sixth Sense**. This evening has been carefully crafted to take you down memory lane, to stir your souls into reminiscing about the good old days when music touched both our hearts and

our lives. Timeless lyrics and everlasting tunes that resulted in meaningful songs were the hallmark of that era. The genres being covered this evening will include pop, jazz, swing and rock 'n' roll. You will be enticed by the music of the greats of yesteryears, like Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Tom Jones, Connie Francis, Sir Cliff Richard, Engelbert Humperdinck, Roberta Flack, Lynn Anderson, Dean Martin, Louis Armstrong, Doris Day, Neil Diamond, Elvis Presley and Nancy Sinatra. This will be an evening made unforgettable by the rich baritone of Das and the very versatile Pinto along with the band, aptly named The Sixth Sense, as they create a special dimension and dynamic to the music we grew up listening to, and love.

**Tickets: ₹500/-**  
**Box Office: 14th January for Members & 16th January for Public**

### THEATRE

#### Readings in the Shed

Chapter XXI: Letters of Love  
English (75 mins)  
Experimental Theatre  
Sunday, 14th – 7.00 pm

#### An NCPA Off-Stage Presentation

The year 2020 was a year which challenged relationships. Some had to overcome the distances that kept them apart. Some struggled to ensure

that proximity did not drive a wedge between them. Love was put to the test. But, love is no stranger to tests. This Valentine's Day, in the third edition of *Letters of Love*, Readings in the Shed presents love stories that fought to defy the odds in the pursuit of a forever after.

Directed by **Nikhil Katara**  
Cast: **Asmit Pathare & Kyla D'souza**  
Creative Editor: **Himali Kothari**

**Suggested Age: 16+**

**Tickets:**  
**₹270/- (Members)**  
**₹300/- (Public)**  
**Box Office: 14th January for Members & 16th January for Public**

### FILM

#### Short Film Corner

Short Film Screenings  
Godrej Dance Theatre  
Thursday, 18th – 7.00 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation in collaboration with White Wall Screenings

There are so many wonderful short films being made in India, with auteurs at work in their own regions, and bold, new voices who are experimenting with form and technique. Short Film Corner hopes to connect movie lovers with these films and also open up dialogue with filmmakers, who in turn, get a chance to connect with their audiences. White Wall Screenings (WWS) was founded in 2017 as a community to facilitate a conversation between short filmmakers and film connoisseurs. WWS has successfully showcased more than 300 short films and also continues to conduct workshops, masterclasses and conversations around filmmaking and films.

#### Good Morning Mumbai! Hindi/Marathi Animation Film (13 mins)

The story is about a slum tenant who sets out to do his morning duties when a series of unfortunate events causes a minor upheaval in his day. He finds a way out and accomplishes his goal but this, in turn, seeds another problem for a different group of people. The film depicts the basic problems caused by urban growth, such as lack of space



Good Morning Mumbai!, 18th, Godrej Dance Theatre

and infrastructure, sanitation problems, pollution, population density and their relationship with each other.

Directed by **Rajesh Thakare & Troy Vasanth**

#### Grill

Silent Film (21 mins)

A homeless man spends his nights on a road across the hoarding of an upcoming plush apartment scheme. His aspiration for a home is realised when he accidentally discovers that the grill of a



Grill, 18th, Godrej Dance Theatre

nearby apartment is broken. This broken grill allows him access to the house of a girl who works night shifts. The nights he spends in the girl's house are a far cry from the harsh nights spent on the road. He begins to fall in love with the house and this growing love makes him take many risks.

Directed by **Pratik Rajen Kothari**

#### Mummy

Hindi Film (17 mins)

Zena carefully narrates the daily routine of



Mummy, 18th, Godrej Dance Theatre

her 60-year-old son with mental disability through a letter she writes. But when a new day begins without her, the routine goes out of whack without anyone to ensure that it is followed.

Directed, Written & Produced by **Aditi J. Mody**

The film screenings will be followed by a post-film discussion.

**Admission on a first-come-first-served basis. NCPA Members will get preferential seating till 6.50 pm.**

### DANCE

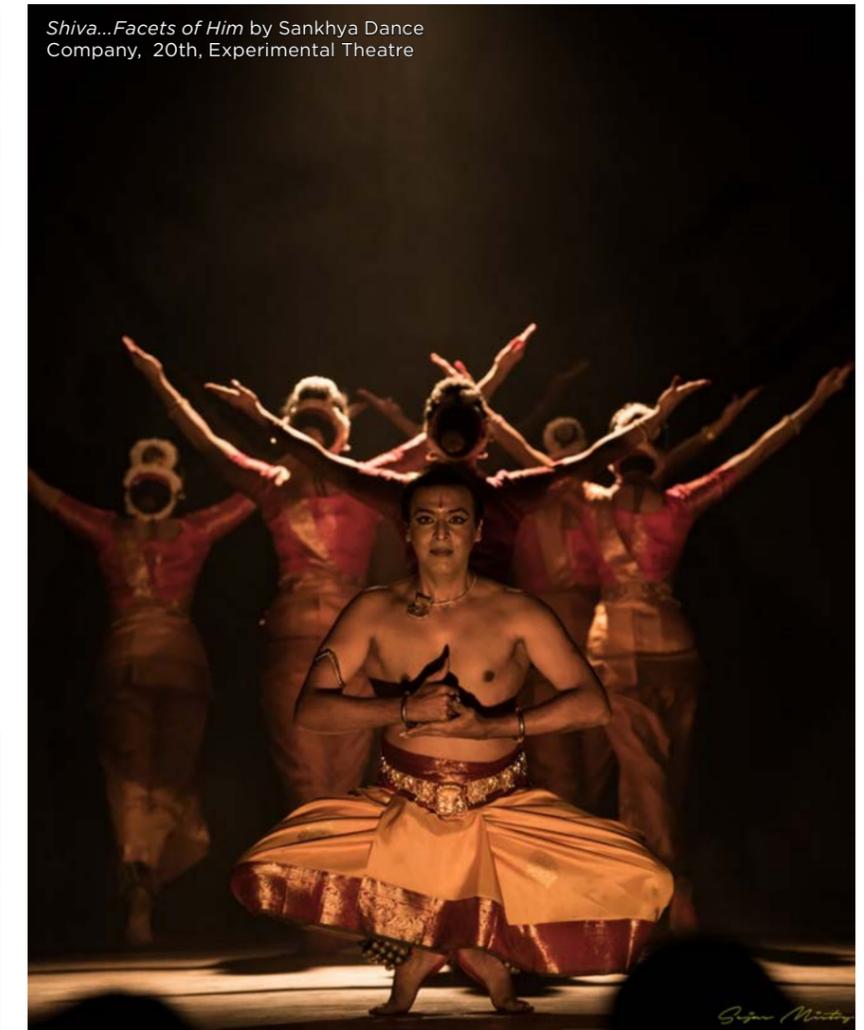
#### Shiva... Facets of Him

by **Vaibhav Arekar & Sankhya Dance Company**  
(Approx. 90 mins)  
Experimental Theatre  
Saturday, 20th – 6.30 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation

With multiple choreographies woven together, *Shiva* interprets the male and female entities in the universe within the all-encompassing Shiva. He is *nirguna-niraakara* (formless) but, of course for the mortals, he is perceived as *saguna-saakaar* (one with a form). He is worshipped as Ardhanarishwara (Shiva-Parvati) and Hari-Hara (Shiva-Vishnu)—the only god who merges his identity for the concept of dual-principle godhead. His consort is the supreme, untameable, universal energy, Shakti. Durga, the one who is the most splendid manifestation of Devi, contains within her the power of all gods, while Nataraj, the cosmic dancer, represents the constant bio-dance of life—creation, sustenance and dissolution.

**Tickets:**  
**₹180/- (Members)**  
**₹200/- (Public)**  
**Box Office: 26th January for Members & 29th January for Public**



Shiva...Facets of Him by Sankhya Dance Company, 20th, Experimental Theatre

## WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC

### SOI Chamber Orchestra

(Approx. 70 mins)

Tata Theatre

Sunday, 21st – 5.00 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation

The SOI Chamber Orchestra presents a programme of beloved classics featuring soloists from the Symphony Orchestra of India. Please visit [ncpamumbai.com](http://ncpamumbai.com) for complete programme details.

#### Tickets:

₹1,000, 750, & 500/- (Plus GST)

Box Office: 26th January for Members & 29th January for Public

## FILM

### Reality Check

Documentary Film Screening

Godrej Dance Theatre

Tuesday, 23rd – 7.00 pm

#### An NCPA Presentation in collaboration with Cinema Collective

This year, the NCPA revives the Reality Check film series, which was started in 2014, to promote and encourage documentary filmmakers in India, whose work reflects life and culture in the country today in a provocative blend of creativity and integrity.

### Displacement & Resilience: women live for a new day



*Displacement & Resilience women live for a new day, 23rd, Godrej Dance Theatre*

Film in Arabic, Hindi, English, Tagalog and a few other languages Subtitled in English (60 mins)

This will be a Mumbai Premiere of the film

*Displacement & Resilience: women live for a new day* engages viewers with the experiences of women refugees. This documentary was conceived as a collaboration of women directors based in different countries by its producers, the International Association of Women in Radio and Television or IAWRT, a global organisation of professional women working in media.

The subject was proposed by Chandita Mukherjee, who helmed the production as Executive Producer for the IAWRT. Six collaborating women directors contributed stories about conflict, migration and the experience of exile: Erika Rae Cruz, on displaced indigenous people in Philippines; Archana Kapoor & Chandita Mukherjee on Rohingyas from Myanmar in India; Afrah Shafiq on Tibetans in India; Khedija Lemkecher on Syrians in Tunisia; and Eva Anandi Brownstein on Syrians in Canada.

Their stories have been woven together to create a multi-layered viewing experience on the global refugee crisis. Combining principal photography with interviews, archival footage, graphics and mixed media, the film presents an overview of particular issues bringing out similarities in the lives of women refugees, exiled and displaced for a variety of reasons.

The film screenings will be followed by a post-film discussion.

Admission on a first-come-first-served basis. NCPA Members will get preferential seating till 6.50 pm.

## SCREENING

### Cyrano de Bergerac

By Edmond Rostand

Theatre Screening

(Approx. 180 mins)

Godrej Dance Theatre

Thursday, 25th – 6.00 pm

An NCPA-National Theatre Live (London) Presentation

In a new version by **Martin Crimp**, directed by **Jamie Lloyd**, charismatic swordsman and brilliant poet, Cyrano de Bergerac is in love with his beautiful cousin Roxane, who is



*Cyrano de Bergerac, 25th, Godrej Dance Theatre*

unaware of his feelings. His one curse in life, he feels, is his large nose and although it may have been a forming influence in his razor-sharp wit, he believes that Roxane will reject him because of it. When the handsome but unpoetic Christian falls for Roxane, he asks Cyrano to help him win her heart. *Cyrano de Bergerac* can be

delivered as an allegory of inner and outer beauty.

Tickets: ₹400/-

Box Office: 26th January for Members & 29th January for Public

## INTERNATIONAL MUSIC

### Yesterday Once More...

(Approx. 100 mins)

Experimental Theatre

Friday, 26th – 7.00 pm

An NCPA Presentation

Sonia Saigal, vocals

Harmeet Manseta, keys/piano

Beven Fonseca, piano

Sanjeev Aguiar, guitar

Kenneth Rebello, bass

Lindsay Dmello, drums

"Yesterday Once More", as the name suggests, is a walk down memory lane as

we remember the hits we grew up with, the songs we fell in love with, and the melodies that bring to our hearts a sense of nostalgia. Come join us as we take you on a journey through the Golden Age of pop music. Featuring songs by The Carpenters, Barbra Streisand, Dionne Warwick, amongst others, this eclectic set of musicians is bound to leave you wanting more.

Tickets: ₹500/-

Box Office: 14th January for Members & 16th January for Public

## THEATRE

### Massage

Hindi Play (120 mins)

Experimental Theatre

Saturday, 27th – 7.00 pm

An NCPA Presentation in collaboration with Pratik Arts Theatre



*Sonia Saigal, 26th, Experimental Theatre*



*Massage, 27th, Experimental Theatre*

*Massage* is a story of Happy Singh who comes to the city of dreams with a goal to become an actor. Instead of working as a struggling actor, he becomes the fourth assistant director to filmmaker Kohli whose forte is masala movies. With no pay and surviving on minimum transport allowance, Happy meets various people becoming the fodder for some very interesting stories; be it the quintessential Punjabi director, the heroine, or the heroine's mother who almost molests him. Seeing that his life is going nowhere, he quits on a whim and becomes a gym instructor, meeting women from different walks of life. The next adventure in his life starts when he becomes a famous masseur.

Writer: **Vijay Tendulkar**

Translation: **Vasudha Sahastrabudhe**

Directed by **Harbansh Singh**

Music: **Kuldip Singh**

Adapted, produced & performed by **Rakesh Bedi**

Tickets:

₹450/- (Members)

₹500/- (Public)

Box Office: 26th January for Members & 29th January for Public ■

Members receive a 10% discount on all tickets. Please note, dear reader, all events are subject to change in response to the dynamic Covid-19 situation.

# Your Safety First

As the NCPA reopens with a calendar dotted with presentations from across genres, our safety measures have been planned right down to the last detail, so you can soak in the magic of live performances once again without a worry.



**To ensure your safe return to the NCPA,** protocols have been designed for every step of the way, in adherence to the rules laid down by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and our own additional precautionary measures.

## Occupancy:

All venues will operate at no more than 50 per cent occupancy, with alternate seating.

## Ticketing:

E-tickets will be issued to avoid physical handling of tickets. Kindly visit [www.ncpamumbai.com](http://www.ncpamumbai.com) for easy booking of tickets. Should you wish to come to the NCPA to purchase your tickets, please email us at [boxoffice@ncpamumbai.com](mailto:boxoffice@ncpamumbai.com) or [bookings@ncpamumbai.com](mailto:bookings@ncpamumbai.com) so we can make arrangements for your safe visit. Tickets purchased at the NCPA box office too will be issued in an e-version to keep the process paperless.

## Prior intimation:

An SMS will be sent to you with protocols for every show you wish to attend, including entry and exit points for the performance.

## Entry:

In addition to compulsory and proper use of masks, sanitisation, and physical distancing in the premises as well as the theatres, the audience, artistes and staff will go through temperature and oxygen-level checks upon entry.

## Interval:

Measures have been put in place for adequate physical distancing during intervals and safe consumption of refreshments.

## Venue safety:

Hygiene has always been a priority at the NCPA. All theatres, green rooms and washrooms are frequently deep-cleaned and sanitised. ■

**THE  
GOLDEN  
YEARS**

FEATURING  
**DARREN DAS,  
GISELLE PINTO  
AND THE SIXTH SENSE**



**13TH FEBRUARY 2021 | 7:00 PM  
EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE, NCPA**

Box office: 66223724/54  
[www.ncpamumbai.com](http://www.ncpamumbai.com)

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ONCE MORE**

SONGS BY THE  
CARPENTERS, BARBRA STREISAND,  
DIONNE WARWICK, AND OTHERS

FEATURING  
**SONIA SAIGAL** VOCALS  
**HARMEET MANSETA** PIANO/KEYS  
**BEVEN FONSECA** PIANO/KEYS  
**SANJEEV AGUIAR** GUITAR  
**KENNETH REBELLO** BASS  
**LINDSAY DMELLO** DRUMS

**26TH FEBRUARY 2021 | 7:00 PM  
EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE, NCPA**

BOX OFFICE: 66223724/54  
[WWW.NCPAMUMBAI.COM](http://WWW.NCPAMUMBAI.COM)

 **FURTADOS**  
because you love music



Marat Bisengaliev conducts the SOI Academy Orchestra



Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook with Bisengaliev

**“We wanted to develop a system that would utilise the fine talent and high calibre of our orchestral players so students played and learnt under the best”**

# Melodic Dividends

**With its young players blossoming and winning regularly in international competitions, the SOI Music Academy is on a steady path to fulfil its raison d'être—to give India its very own Western classical music ensemble on a par with European ensembles. The brilliant performance of the students in the Newport Virtuosi International Online Music Competition is the latest affirmation of the strides being made.**

**By Snigdha Hasan**

**O**ver 15 years ago, when the long-cherished dream of forming India's first professional orchestra was taking shape at the NCPA, Chairman Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook had a pertinent question to ask Marat Bisengaliev. “What about the inclusion of Indian musicians in the orchestra?” “If they pass my test,” replied the violin virtuoso with whom Mr. Suntook co-founded the Symphony Orchestra of

India (SOI). Several auditions yielded a handful of local players who could meet the standards Bisengaliev had set for the SOI. Even as the orchestra flourished, the limited Indian presence in it continued to gnaw at the co-founders until they found a solution that sought to not just eventually resolve the said problem but enrich the Western classical music tradition in India. Intense work began in the direction and the SOI Music Academy was established in 2012 to nurture young talent in classical music through the stringent

and universally recognised Russian Conservatoire method, with musicians from the orchestra, themselves trained in the method, imparting the education. “We wanted to develop a system that would utilise the fine talent and high calibre of our orchestral players so students played and learnt under the best,” elaborates Mr. Suntook, providing an interesting analogy for the multiple nationalities that make up the SOI and therefore, the teaching fraternity at the academy. “It is like the IPL. Once the teams were mixed up with players from around the world, we did brilliantly. We don't know who learnt from whom. Our young players too are blossoming, playing at a high level, even along with the SOI on certain occasions. When they participate in competitions, they emerge encrusted with high honours. This is a tribute to our teachers.”

## Result-oriented education

Continuing the sports analogy, Bisengaliev likens his work to that of a top football team coach. “All these years, my efforts have been concentrated on roping in high-quality orchestral players who also have a great talent for teaching. It is a challenge, of course, but perfecting the team is an endless process,” he avers before moving on to expatiate on the holistic music education that the students receive. “The Russian Conservatoire method was founded in the 19th century in St. Petersburg and has been the academic tradition in many reputed institutions the world over. At the NCPA, the method goes hand in hand with the use of modern technology,” he says.

The secret of the success of the method, Bisengaliev adds, lies in the quality and frequency of lessons. “The system does not treat music education as commerce. It does not differentiate among teachers on the basis of the number of students under their tutelage. At the academy, too, my focus has been on quality, ensuring that each teacher has no more than five students under him/her so that sufficient time can be devoted to every individual. It is wonderful that Khushroo allows us this luxury. Under such a conducive environment, the system always delivers results.”

The numerous awards the students of the SOI Music Academy have consistently won in international

competitions they are encouraged to participate in are a testament to the work that goes into this advanced level of music training, previously not available in India. The latest feather in the cap is their laudable performance in the Newport Virtuosi International Online Music Competition, where the students placed in practically every category they participated in. “Our efforts are being vindicated,” says Bisengaliev. “This is only the very beginning.”

## Pillars of the academy

Serious music education begins early and on most afternoons, young children who come to the NCPA after school can be seen scurrying across the premises in uniform with their instruments in tow. Rigorous lessons at the academy include substantial one-to-one tuition on the student's primary instrument as well as second-study piano lessons, music history, music theory, group-singing teaching via the Solfeggio method, training in orchestral playing and chamber music.

Attention to the individual that Bisengaliev speaks of reflects in the way teachers adapt their lessons to suit the students' needs. “Nyla has been studying with me for the last seven years. When she first came, and for some years after that as well, she was physically small-built and so I had to prepare a slightly different, but by no means an easier, repertoire to suit her hands. Of late however, she is growing well and will make a name for herself in music,” says Aida Bisengalieva, pianist and teacher at the academy, about Nyla Bajaj who placed third in Category 3 in the competition.

Another student who promises to make a name for herself is Aliza Jetha who won the first prize in her category in viola, earning accolades for her rendition of Hummel's *Fantasie* for viola and Ravel's *Pavane*. “She has been studying the viola at the academy since January 2014 and will graduate this year. A very hard-working student, music runs in her family. Her sister Samia has been a student of the piano at the academy,” says Osman Yarullin, viola player and teacher at the academy. Nisha Karnavat, who has been learning the violin under him, finished third in her category. “They are very talented and they are only growing from year



Sangeeta Jokhakar



Gulzara Shakir with student



Nisha Karnavat (top row, right) in performance



Vivaan Verma



Aliza Jetha



Nisha Ramakrishnan



Olga Lyapina with students Maira Noor Singh (left) and Nyra Jain



Tanvi Chakravarty



Osman Yarullin at a rehearsal



Sumer Murthy



Aida Bisengalieva with students Samvir Sujan and Nyla Bajaj on the extreme right



Naima Ramakrishnan



Naima Ramakrishnan performs as a soloist with her teacher Yulia Gallyamova (extreme right) in the chamber orchestra

to year," Yarullin speaks fondly of the students.

While children between the ages of six and twelve can apply to the academy, Bisengalieva points out a worthy exception. "Tanvi came to me four years ago at the age of 13. Her interest in joining us was kindled when she attended a concert by the students of our academy. Although she was older than the usual age of entry, we bent the rules after seeing the seriousness of purpose in her eyes and manner. I am happy to say that her improvement by leaps and bounds during these four years has justified our decision to accept her." Tanvi Chakravarty finished third in Category 5 in the Newport competition and won the second prize in an important competition held last year in Dubai. Samvir Sujan, another of Bisengalieva's pupils, has been studying with her for the last five years and has a "genuine feel for the piano". He finished third in Category 3.

Violinist and teacher Gulzara Shakir recalls Sangeeta Jokhakar's journey at the academy, who placed second in the competition. "She joined us after a gap following her training in the Suzuki method and was facing a challenge of stiff hands but she soon transformed into a leading student who amazes me with her fearlessness on stage." Sumer Murthy's progress at the academy and success in the competition—he finished second in his category for violin—is an example in what industriousness and discipline can yield. "Sumer has been with us since 2014 and will graduate this year. He never misses his classes, has an excellent memory, is very well organised and as a result, has progressed rapidly," says Shakir.

Nothing compares with tactile one-on-one teaching and coming together to rehearse and perform as the SOI Academy Orchestra, but the virtual lessons that the academy made a swift shift to early on during the lockdown have paved the way for inventive ways of teaching with no compromise on the number of lessons per week. In fact, if at all, the duration of classes has only increased, Bisengalieva observes. Vivaan Verma, one of Shakir's younger

**“My focus has been on quality, ensuring that each teacher has no more than five students under him her so that sufficient time can be devoted to every individual, and it is wonderful that Khushroo allows us this luxury”**

students, found it easier to adapt to the virtual classroom. "He is a small boy, a beginner with no previous experience of participating in competitions. But his smooth transition to online learning played a role in his success in the competition where he won the second prize," she points out.

Olga Lyapina, violinist and teacher at the academy, cites another unforeseen advantage of online lessons. "Earlier, the students would have live piano as accompaniment during rehearsals. But with that not possible anymore, they play to piano recordings and for that they are learning to listen more carefully." Lyapina's students, Nyra Jain and Maira Noor Singh, whom she has taught as little kids and seen them blossom into budding violinists, placed second and third respectively in the competition. Yulia Gallyamova has been teaching Naima Ramakrishnan to play the cello since she was seven and a half years old. Never one to shy away from putting in hours of practice, she



Mr. Suntook with the students and teachers of the SOI Music Academy

won the second prize in the competition. Gallyamova enumerates another interesting advantage of the online set-up. “Because the students need to video-record themselves playing, Naima was able to see herself perform which provided an important perspective.”

The video recording that both Gallyamova and Lyapina mention, and which may take hours, is often executed by parents who are an integral part of the learning process. Their support and understanding goes a long way in ensuring that children practise every day while juggling their schoolwork and that they are able to dedicate the kind of time the academy demands of the students. It is for this reason, explains Bisengaliev, that when children audition for the academy, the parents are interviewed as well. This sense of commitment can be witnessed during examinations at the academy when parents wait anxiously in the Little Theatre foyer as their budding musicians play “The Buccaneer” or Goltermann Capriccio. The family project that an education in music can be, unfolds through another interesting story at the academy. Naima’s twin sister Nisha is learning the piano while their older sister Aaliya is learning to play the violin. Nisha won the third prize in the competition.

## The way forward

Success in competitions is only one example of the assiduity of all involved in the SOI Music Academy. “I am particularly proud of the students’ orchestra and the precision they have achieved,” says Bisengaliev. “It is gratifying to see their level of playing when they perform alongside the SOI,” Mr. Suntook concurs. Bisengaliev points out that the academy encourages a higher number of rehearsals than many other music

schools. While most schools aim at nurturing soloists, the academy also looks at students from the point of view of an ensemble.

At the moment, it is not easy for the teachers to tell which of their students would forge a career in music. They, of course, have many more years of learning ahead of them and as Lyapina puts it, “This is a profession where you never stop practising.” But whether or not they choose to become professional musicians, one thing is certain. “They have a solid foundation on which they can build a career if they so wish, or teach, or even just pursue music as a hobby. It is also certain that music will enrich their lives emotionally and spiritually in ways that nothing else can,” says Bisengalieva. Gallyamova hopes the students join an orchestra and if they do, this is what she has to say as a cellist in the Symphony Orchestra of India. “There is never a dull moment in the life of an orchestral player, which involves meeting new musicians and playing under the baton of new conductors. I am really lucky to be able to do work that I love every day.”

Given the family-like atmosphere in which students learn, it is not that difficult to tell though that many of them are considering the prospects of being a part of the SOI, Bisengaliev mentions. “Our investment is paying off. At last, Mumbai will have an ensemble on a par with European ensembles,” says Mr. Suntook. Looking at the shape of things to come, the story of the formation of the Symphony Orchestra of India then would not just be that of it being India’s first professional orchestra but also one that created a system to hone young artistes and provide a platform to them, paving the way for nurturing the Western classical music tradition in India. ■

## The winners

### STRINGS

#### Category 1

##### Violin

Vivaan Verma - 2nd place (Teacher: Gulzara Shakir)

#### Category 3

##### Violin

Sumer Murthy - 2nd place (Teacher: Gulzara Shakir)

Nisha Karnavat - 3rd place (Teacher: Osman Yarullin)

#### Category 4

##### Cello

Naima Ramakrishnan - 2nd place (Teacher: Yulia Gallyamova)

##### Viola

Aliza Jetha - 1st place (Teacher: Osman Yarullin)

##### Violin

Sangeeta Jokhakar - 2nd place (Teacher: Gulzara Shakir)

Nyra Jain - 2nd place (Teacher: Olga Lyapina)

Maira Noor Singh - 3rd place (Teacher: Olga Lyapina)

### PIANO

#### Category 3\*

Nyla Bajaj - 3rd place

Samvir Sujan - 3rd place

#### Category 4

Nisha Ramakrishnan - 3rd place

#### Category 5

Tanvi Chakravarty - 3rd place

\*All students taught by Aida Bisengalieva



# THE LEHMAN TRILOGY

THEATRE SCREENING

AN NCPA-NATIONAL THEATRE LIVE (LONDON) PRESENTATION

ADAPTED BY BEN POWER | WRITTEN BY STEFANO MASSINI | DIRECTED BY SAM MENDES

4TH FEBRUARY 2021 | 5:00 PM | GODREJ DANCE THEATRE, NCPA



BOX OFFICE: 66223724/54 | WWW.NCPAMUMBAI.COM



NCPA IN COLLABORATION WITH MORE2SCREEN PRESENTS

A NEW ADVENTURES PRODUCTION

MATTHEW BOURNE'S

# The Red Shoes

BALLET SCREENING

BASED ON THE FILM BY MICHAEL POWELL AND EMERIC PRESSBURGER  
MUSIC BY BERNARD HERRMANN

11TH FEBRUARY 2021 | 6:00 PM  
GODREJ DANCE THEATRE, NCPA



BOX OFFICE: 66223724/54 | WWW.NCPAMUMBAI.COM



NEW/ADVENTURES

# CYRANO DE BERGERAC

THEATRE SCREENING

BY EDMOND ROSTAND  
IN A NEW VERSION BY MARTIN CRIMP  
DIRECTED BY JAMIE LLOYD

25TH FEBRUARY 2021 | 6:00 PM  
GODREJ DANCE THEATRE, NCPA



BOX OFFICE: 66223724/54 | WWW.NCPAMUMBAI.COM



# ETERNAL EPISTLES

It is not an exaggeration to say that the year gone by was challenging in unprecedented ways. Especially when it came to relationships. More so, when it came to romantic ones. As the NCPA cautiously begins programming across genres this month, the third edition of Letters of Love by Readings in the Shed brings together a collection of much-needed stories of real-world love that defied the odds in inspiring ways.

By **Himali Kothari**



'Love Letter (Kesobumi)' by Kajita Hanko

“All shows this evening onwards have been cancelled,” said the security guard at the NCPA as we wrapped up after a matinee performance and trooped out. Messages had been coming in for the past couple of hours. Will the weekend shows at other theatres run? Will they be cancelled? The show must go on, some muttered in defiance, or perhaps desperation. But it was not to be. Within a few hours, the official

mandate was out—theatres had to be shut. The dreaded virus that had been restricted to the news had burst out, mingling into the salty Mumbai air.

That day, when we walked out through the wrought iron gates of the NCPA, it had not occurred to us that this lockdown on performances was not going to be a matter of weeks or even months. That it would almost be a year before the gates would be wheeled back open to players and audience. But, considering the upheaval that the world has undergone, we have to pinch ourselves to believe that we are gearing up to be back on the stage at the NCPA—back with the third edition of Letters of Love.

## The pursuit of love

Is it fate? Is it serendipity? Have the stars of star-crossed lovers from eternity conspired to make it happen? Or is it the power of love that multiple quotes proclaim as something indisputable? But why tempt providence with these questions? The sanitised seats await their occupants. The stage is set. And the players are in the wings, on cue to burst on to the stage.

The 2021 edition of Letters of Love by Readings in the Shed brings into the limelight real-life love stories that fought to defy the odds in the pursuit of a forever after. Some made it. Some changed direction. Some stumbled and fell by the wayside. Irrespective, love was victorious as each couple spun their unique love story, one that had remained unheard.

The stories that we bring to the NCPA Experimental Theatre on 14th February are not ones born out of the folds and crevices of the writers' imagination, they played out for real in the eras gone by. The lovers are characters you will recognise. Personalities acknowledged and awarded for their contribution to literature, science, art or society. Names famed for their knowledge, aptitude and genius. But when it came to love, they were brought to their knees. They were rendered vulnerable and even foolish, much like you and I.

**Personalities  
acknowledged and  
awarded for their  
contribution to  
literature, science, art  
or society were brought  
to their knees when it  
came to love**

## Marianne Ihlen



### Lost and found

In the first edition of Letters of Love in 2019, we brought to you Albert Einstein, the genius whose brain was preserved for scientific research. A corner of that brain, though, which derived  $E = mc^2$ , also coined this saucy verse to a girlfriend:

*Oh my! That Johnnie boy!  
So crazy with desire,  
While thinking of his Dollie,  
His pillow catches fire.*

Then there was Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. Both writers were married, but that could not stop the strings of attraction that pulled the women to each other. After her first meeting with Woolf, Sackville-West confessed in a letter to her husband:

*Darling, I have quite lost my heart.* In the end though, when Woolf killed herself, she professed her love to the one true love of her life who had stood by her side through her illness and her multiple affairs. In her last letter, she wrote to her husband: *I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.*

As we dug deeper for more love stories, one that moved us most was a relatively unknown couple. Theirs was a story that met a fate similar to others of that time, the time of the First World War. In love and engaged, Vera and Roland were waiting for the end of the war to start a life together. But it was not to be. Vera started her last letter to Roland with this line: *I am sending this in case it should have a chance of reaching you as a last word before all*

*communication between us is cut off.* Did it reach him? Did he read it before he was shot dead by a sniper as he guarded the Allied borders? Vera would never know.

### Letters of note

The love stories that we had discovered through the letters of the protagonists in 2019 were just the tip of the cascading pile of amorous communication conserved over decades, centuries even. Men and women had professed their love through letters transported by carrier pigeons, telegrams, poetry, songs and more.

We discovered that songwriter Leonard Cohen serenaded the love of his life through his songs much after they decided to go their separate ways.

And they wrote to each other right till the very end. We discovered that language and distance was no obstacle where true love was concerned. Argentinian writer Victoria Ocampo was a young girl when she read Tagore's *Gitanjali* in its Spanish translation. It was a true fangirl moment for her to meet him in Buenos Aires and as fate would have it, they ended up spending many weeks together. But that was it. The rest of their love story unfurled through letters and poetic dedications.

Then there was Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Together and apart. Friends. Lovers. In relationships with others. Companions to each other. In life, neither defined their equation. But when Beauvoir died, she was buried in the same tomb as Sartre, and all questions were laid to rest in peace. And then there was physicist Richard Feynman. His belief that science could solve every problem

**The love stories that we discovered were just the tip of the cascading pile of amorous communication that had been conserved over decades, centuries even**

had earned him the moniker, The Great Explainer. He married his college sweetheart while she was suffering from a terminal disease. And 500 days after she died, he wrote a final letter to her. Why? He could not explain it either. And perhaps that is why he ended the letter with these words: *P.S. Please excuse my not mailing this—but I don't know your new address.*

The third edition of Letters of Love is a special one. It comes on the back of a time that we are struggling to make sense of. Ever so often, we stop in our tracks, look back at the months that have rolled past and ask ourselves, is this for real? We have been struggling to make sense of concepts that are alien to us. This is the time when we need to believe in the good power of the unknown. And what could be more unknown than love? As, Margaret Atwood says, in her poem 'Variations on the Word Love': *This word is not enough, but it will have to do...* ■

.....  
*Himali Kothari is Creative Editor, Readings in the Shed. Chapter XXI: Letters of Love will be presented on 14th February at the Experimental Theatre.*

# A DELICATE IDIOM

*Dhrupad*, considered to be among the most ancient styles of Hindustani classical music, has remained unchanged and true to its original form over the centuries. The nature of *dhrupad* music is spiritual—seeking not to entertain, but to induce feelings of peace and contemplation in the listener. We try to uncover its history and the reason behind its dwindling popularity.

By Meena Banerjee

**D***hrupad* is widely accepted as one of the most ancient styles of Hindustani classical music. Some scholars say it has its roots in the Samaveda (1500-1000 BC) when two streams of music prevailed: *paramparik* (traditional) and *laukik* (worldly, common). As a mode of *sadhana*, the former aimed at *adrishta phal* (unseen divine results) of Gandharva Vidya or celestial arts. *Laukik* music had entertainment as its obvious *drishta phal* or finite result. Music historians believe that *dhrupad* was at its peak during the reign of Raja Mansingh Tomar of Gwalior (1486-1516). Later, it was widely disseminated by Swami Haridas, Miyan Tansen and his descendants belonging to the Senia *gharana*.

## An intricate evolution

Though the basic nature of *dhrupad* remained spiritual—seeking not to entertain, but to induce feelings of peace and contemplation in the listener—its journey from temples to royal courts brought about considerable changes in its original form. The word is probably derived from *dhrupapada*, a word that conjoins *dhruva* (static like the Pole Star) and *pada* (verse). According to Bharata's *Natyashastra*, *dhruva* was a musical composition used in dramas. It also refers to the refrain of a song, like Jayadeva's *ashtapadis*. *Dhruva* is also known as one of the several varieties of *prabandha*, or well-bound compositions, which had a linear flow like a novel. Although *prabandha* is believed to be the precursor of *dhrupapada*, the linear flow transformed into cyclical movement around *sam* (the first beat of the tala).

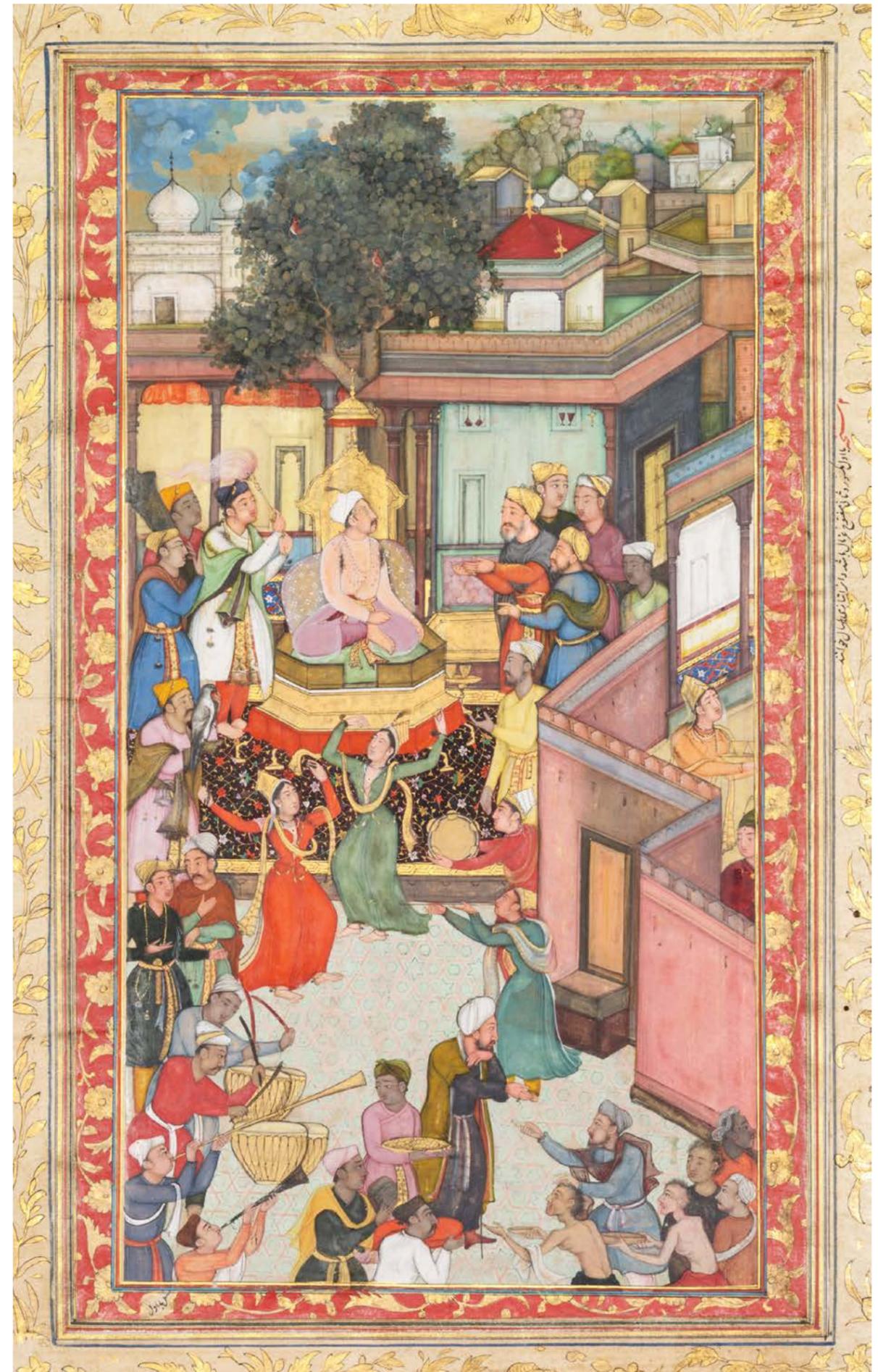
Inspired by the ancient musical forms of Ragalapti and Rupakalapti, *dhrupapada* had two segments: *alap* (raga elaboration) and *pada* (delineation of

verses or composition to the accompaniment of *pakhavaj*). Each of these two separate presentations sported four segments: *udagraha*, *melapak*, *dhruva* and *sanchari*. These are now known as *sthayi*, *antara*, *sanchari* and *abhog*. There were *alap* specialists and there were musicians who would sing the *chatuspadi* (string of four *padas*) compositions with only a few ascribed ornamentations. Gradually, the *alap* and composition singing became an integral part of a total *dhrupad* rendition. During this journey, *dhrupad* had entered Mughul royal courts and the *padas* now sang praises of the rulers and ventured to entertain, like any other *laukik* form of music.

Despite all of this, in all traditional Indian creative endeavours, there has been a hidden agenda, which is to transform its practitioner as well as its consumer. The Indian tradition of learning always vacillated between an allegorical form and its abstract formlessness. This philosophy believed that finite forms are meant to rise above their confines to be able to merge with the infinite. This enabled scholars to interpret words, even syllables with their intrinsic tone, according to their individual perception and proficiency. That is how *dhrupad baanees* came to the fore. Apparently, this concept of *baanees* existed even before Tansen. Later, several *gharanas* emerged that remained focused on one or two or all four *baanees*. One such school is the Bettiah *gharana*, in which the beauty of all four *baanees* plays a major role.

## Sadhana and sahitya

*Dhrupad*, with all its richness, is carefully nurtured under the Citi Support to Gurus programme of the NCPA. The gurus, Falguni Mitra (Kolkata) and Uday Bhawalkar (Pune), impart training to three disciples each. According to Mitra, who



It is believed that the golden age of *dhrupad* continued in the reign of Akbar, shown here on the throne in Painting 126 from Akbar-nama of Abu'l Fazl (c. 1602-3), attributed to Dharam Das, completed a few years before the emperor's death

hails from the Bettiah *gharana* but follows the *alapchari* of Nasiruddin Khan Dagar, the basics of all Hindustani classical genres are the same. “I am very particular regarding natural voice-throw. Proper modulation is needed for effective low and upper registers but should be free of falsetto. On certain days, if I am not able to go beyond upper *rishabh*, I control and edit the elaboration accordingly. Compared to *khayal*, *dhrupad* is more constrained whereas its raga delineation, based on Merukhand patterns, is much more detailed and intricate,” he says.

A repository of numerous *dhrupad* compositions with four segments (*sthaayi*, *antara*, *sanchari* and *abhog*), Mitra lays great emphasis on lyrics. “*Sahitya* is very important,” he reiterates, “I make my students recite the verses before singing. This, I feel, helps them understand the emotions of the composer. Innumerable compositions display countless varieties of mood apart from illuminating the raga’s character. The grammatical exercise of rhythmic variations in the form of *dugun*, *tigun*, etc. come as components that help to create the sentiment or *rasa*. Unless this is achieved, the rhythm-play cannot rise to the level of musicality. Besides, all compositions do not allow rhythmic divisions (*baant*) either. *Layakari* needs very careful handling because raga Bilaskhani cannot be treated like Kafi or Pilu. One has to honour the sentiment of the raga.”

These sentiments are also shared by Bhawalkar, the popular exponent of Dagar *gharana*. However, for him, a pleasant voice is the most important tool for *dhrupad* singing, “because you are expected to wade through the sea of melody with the help of the tanpura and your voice only,” he cautions. “As such, early morning *kharaj sadhana* is perennial. This simple exercise has many far-reaching effects. All said and done, *dhrupad* is a very solemn style of *gayaki*. It demands deep introspection of *swaras* which is facilitated by deep concentration. *Kharaj sadhana* gives this *ekaagrata*. It also enhances breath control and weight of the voice. Regular practice of *mandra* helps in upper reaches. Moreover, one learns to see between the notes as well. Gradually, one understands the delicate difference between the *gandhaars* of Bageshri and Abhogi.”

## Mastering *dhrupad*

Bhawalkar’s teaching methodology focuses on key phrases of ragas, set patterns of syllables and note combinations, specific use of glides (*meend*, *lahar*) and oscillation (*andolan*, *gamak*). All this systemises the herculean task of raga elaboration in *sampoorna* alap which, according to him, is aesthetically the most challenging part of *dhrupad* singing. Unlike Mitra, he sings *dwipadi* compositions (having *sthai* and *antara* only).

But both Mitra and Bhawalkar agree that the alap part of *dhrupad* singing, replete with *sthaayi*, *antrara*, *sanchari* and *abhog*, and in varied tempi, is almost intangible and, therefore, takes more time to master. “One cannot write any static form, because nothing is premeditated,” says Bhawalkar. “Everything is innovative. It, therefore, needs more time to be absorbed. Our pada-singing too is *upaj*-based wherein the intrinsic moods of the lyrics reign supreme.”

The masters also agree that *dhrupad* can have different subjects: spiritual, seasonal, nature-based, *raja-stuti*, etc. *Dhamar* is essentially based on Holi, the season of colours and its gaiety. *Dhamar* is a form and tala as well, and its sentiment is zestful. That is why this form is also known as *Hori-dhamar*. It offers lots of merriment and allows free *layakari*. Not so in *dhrupad*. It is perhaps this solemn nature of the vocal style, sung with limited musical accompaniments and with little room for ornamentation, which draws fewer practitioners to learn and pursue *dhrupad* today—a situation the NCPA is working towards changing. As compared to other genres, a

higher age limit has been set for applicants aiming to pursue training in *dhrupad* under the NCPA-Citi Scholarship scheme in order to encourage more artistes to take it up. That these efforts have been made in the right direction and that this rich, primordial, almost meditative form of musical expression will always have its share of practitioners will find vindication in a concert this month. As Krushna Salunke and Aparajita Chakraborty take the stage under the Citi-NCPA Promising Artiste Series, the Experimental Theatre will reverberate with the rhythmic beats of the pakhavaj and soulful *dhrupad* renditions in the first Hindustani classical music concert at the NCPA after ten months of pandemic-induced silence. ■

“  
A pleasant voice  
is the most  
important tool  
for *dhrupad*  
singing  
because you  
are expected to  
wade through  
the sea of  
melody with  
the help of the  
tanpura and  
your voice only”  
”

 NCPA | 

# PROMISING ARTISTES SERIES

KRUSHNA SALUNKE  
PAKHAWAJ

APARAJITA CHAKRABORTY  
DHRUPAD

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 NCPA

# Shiva

FACETS OF HIM

BY  
VAIBHAV AREKAR &  
SANKHYA DANCE COMPANY

20TH FEBRUARY 2021 | 6:30 PM  
EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE, NCPA

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# Divinity Retold

As part of a series on artistes' reflections on dance productions they have presented at the NCPA, **Ananda Shankar Jayant** discusses the innate passion that inspired the critically acclaimed *Tales from the Bull and the Tiger*.

**I**ndian dancers have Him in their heart, seek His blessings, and will ascend the stage only if He is alongside. We place Him at the core of our being, seeking His benediction, in life and in dance. His blessings have written the script of five decades of my life in dance and the four decades of Shankarananda Kalakshetra—through 25 path-breaking dance productions, dancing across five continents, and training a multitude of students. My years of yearning to encapsulate Him in a dance production led to *Tales from the Bull and the Tiger*—Nandi and Simha, the Bull and the Tiger, *vahanas* of Shiva and Parvati, telling us tales about Him and Her. That is how an idea began to take shape.

## In preparation

Centuries of philosophy, poetry and music, in almost every Indian language, have sought to capture a glimpse of Shiva and Parvati. I spent almost two years reading books on Shiva after which, I was able to decide the stories I wanted to showcase. The process of selecting appropriate

scripts from Sanskrit and Tamil writings was a long one. Equally long discussions with my musician—Sathiraju Venumadhav—ensued.

The question foremost in my mind was: what stories would Nandi and Simha choose to tell?

**I spent almost two years reading books on Shiva after which, I was able to decide the stories I wanted to showcase**

The story of the celestial wedding of Shiva and Parvati? The poetic descriptions of their exquisite physical form—their *saguna rupam* or will we see their esoteric form—their *nirguna rupam*? Will they talk of Her as the Mother Goddess, the Divine Feminine, as She resides in the Sri Chakra, or will they eulogise His *linga rupam*—the esoteric, formless form that quelled the arrogance and ignorance of even Brahma and Vishnu? Will they take us to Kailasa and watch the universe dance with Him?

Eventually, a carefully selected collection of poetry and music, from the plethora of Sanskrit and

Tamil writings and compositions on Shiva, began to form the spine of *Tales from the Bull and the Tiger*, with a musical soundscape by Venumadhav, while weaving the production together were *jathis* by I.V. Renuka Prasad.





### In action

With the scratch music coming in, we began choreography and daily rehearsals in April, right up till the premiere on 4th August 2018. We brought in interesting layers to introduce the characters—a crisp Mayura Alarippu, with peacocks awaiting Shanmukha, Mushika dancing with Ganesha and specially created movements for Nandi and Simha to bring out their unique characteristics. We repositioned the Ardhanariswara *stotram*, having Shiva and Parvati describe each other in an elaborate dance scene and abstracting the presentation of the *nirguna rupam*.

I imagined the last scene as the universe dancing with Shiva, and that eventually became one of the most loved scenes. Through it all, we maintained the storytelling and the dynamic of the divine family, with little vignettes of everyday family life. I was keen to use digital design and cutting-edge lights, as they can embellish a production in a controlled manner. Lights by Gyandev Singh and digital design by Gunjan Ashtaputre added the much-needed subtle visual elements, and took the viewer into a *bhakti*-laden world.

For costume design, I went to my favourite designer, Ganesh Nallari, who created the most beautiful

costumes. The material was from Telangana—Andhra weaves from Narayanpet, Uppada, Pochampalli, Gadwal, etc. We also had specially designed jewellery by Deepa Krishnamachari, with the rudraksh as the central motif. To make the connection between

scenes, we had succinct English narration by Jayant Dwarkanath that achieved this aim in a simple yet modern way. The production was performed by a vibrant ensemble cast of 23 dancers, with the brilliant Mithun Shyam, from Bengaluru, as guest artiste in the lead along with me.

### In performance

*Tales from the Bull and the Tiger* travelled across India, from the NCPA to Chennai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Raipur, etc., receiving standing ovations for the way in which primordial stories were brought to life through the idiom of dance. A performance in Malaysia has been put on hold due to the ongoing pandemic. We are all eagerly waiting to be back at rehearsals, and present our productions again.

Dance scholar and critic, the late Sunil Kothari, called it a 'riveting production'. *The Hans India* called it 'visually stunning'. While rave reviews from renowned scholars were great

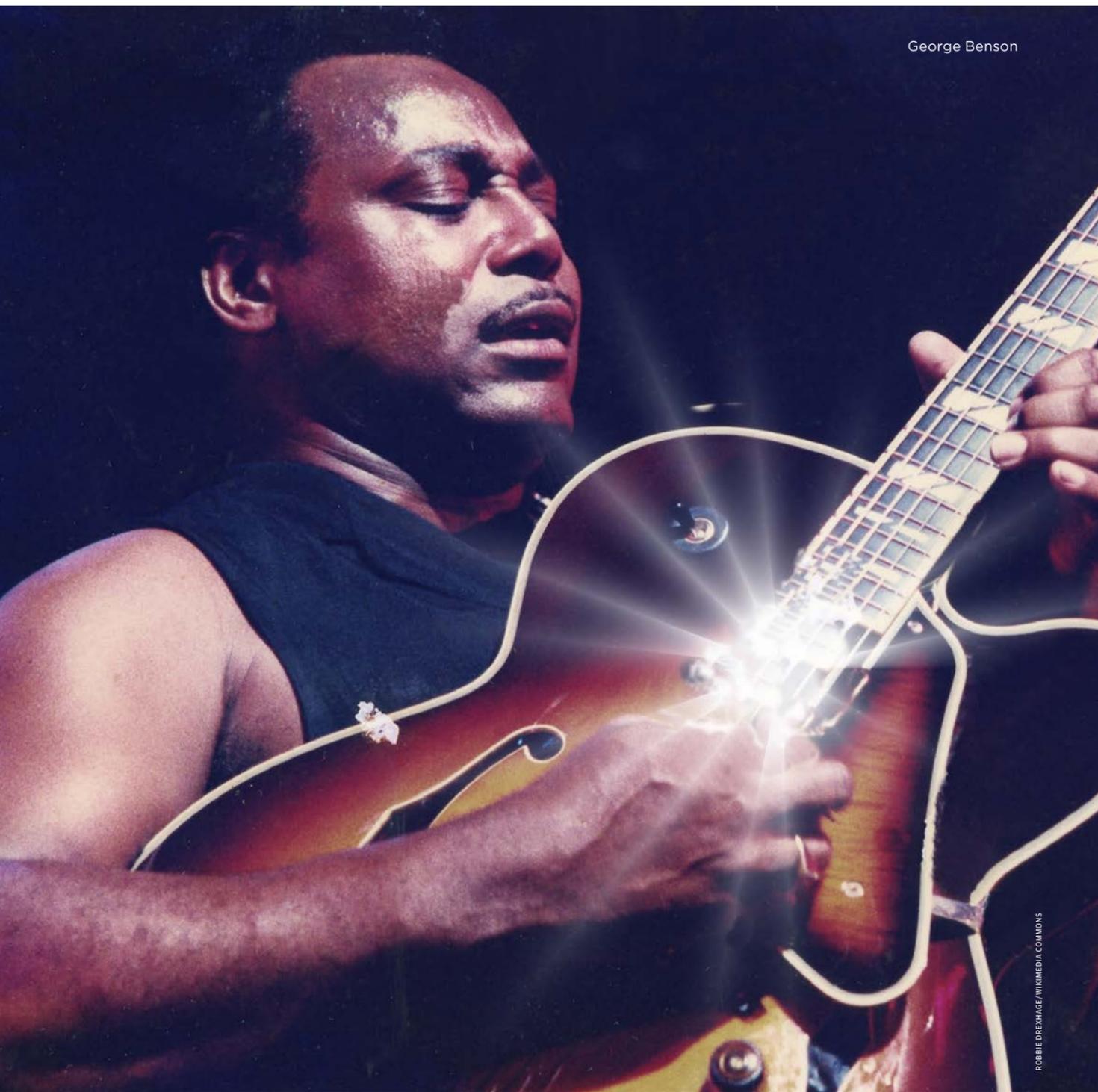
**We brought in a crisp Mayura Alarippu, with peacocks awaiting Shanmukha, Mushika dancing with Ganesha and specially created movements for Nandi and Simha, to bring out their unique characteristics**



to read, it was most heartening to hear from young audience members. A young student, after watching the premiere in 2018, wrote to us saying: As an aspiring dancer, I was mind-blown by the masterful strategy that went into conceptualising this production, moved by the performance, and hope to develop such a depth of thought and attention to detail as I grow. Meanwhile, I hope to have the opportunity to experience the magic you create on stage again and again.

Through the idiom of poetry, verse, melody, through the rhythm of timeless music and through the architectonic beauty and grammar of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi, *Tales from the Bull and the Tiger* brought together sacred and esoteric symbology, festivity and fervour, while weaving strands through an ancient cultural inheritance. That we were able to convey the grandeur of this mythical world on stage was, perhaps, a blessing from Him and Her. ■





George Benson

ROBBIE DREXHAGE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

# Smooth Operators

*Denounced by puritans, loved by novitiates and treated with indifference by everyone in between, the more commercial forms of jazz—smooth and crossover, among others—need to be given their due for bringing a wider audience to a form that was slowly going out of vogue.*

BY NARENDRA KUSNUR



Chuck Mangione



Al Jarreau



Grover Washington, Jr.



Spyro Gyra



Kenny G

The 1970s were in full swing, and rock and pop dominated international public taste. Jazz, which was popular till a decade ago, had slowed down, and efforts were being made to attract more listeners to the genre.

The first step was by fusing rock and jazz, and artistes like trumpeter-bandleader Miles Davis, guitarists Larry Coryell and John McLaughlin, violinist Jean-Luc Ponty and the groups Weather Report and Return To Forever spearheaded this sound.

Jazz-rock fusion was not enough, though. By the mid-70s, more people were listening to pop, soul and rhythm and blues (R&B). The disco movement was setting in and jazz took a back seat. Soon, musicians began toying with ideas to make jazz more accessible. Instead of the energy, virtuosity and improvisation that the jazz-rock fusion provided, the idea was to come up with something more melodious, ear-friendly and relaxing in nature. Basically, they wanted pop tunes played with jazz instruments.

Though this style did not have a name, the roots of 'smooth jazz' lie here. Alternately, the term 'pop-jazz' was used, and later, 'crossover jazz' became trendy. Though all three monikers loosely implied a similar genre, musicologists cited some differences. According to one theory, pop-jazz was essentially a mix of pop and jazz, whereas smooth jazz had the addition of R&B. Crossover jazz was more diverse, and included other styles like soul, funk and dance music, or even world music. Sometimes, these names would be interchanged, depending on the moods of record labels. The first successful project involving smooth jazz was saxophonist John Klemmer's 1975 album *Touch*, featuring pianist Dave Grusin and guitarist Larry

Carlton. The following year, guitarist George Benson released the well-received record *Breezin'*, which topped the Billboard pop, R&B and jazz album charts. The title track, written by Bobby Womack, and 'This Masquerade', penned by Leon Russell, were huge hits, and in 1979, Benson's version of 'On Broadway' even attracted dance music followers after it was used in the film *All That Jazz*.

## Hits galore

Though saxophonist Kenny G. later attracted flak for being too bland, this form had many takers. Whether it was pop-jazz, smooth jazz or crossover jazz, the effort was two-fold: to widen the reach of jazz, and to make it commercially viable. And though Klemmer and Benson were credited as pioneering artistes, musicologists suddenly talked of earlier attempts to simplify jazz.

One example was the amalgam of Brazilian bossa nova music and jazz in the mid-1960s, which even attracted saxophonist Stan Getz and guitarist Charlie Byrd. The compositions of Antônio Carlos Jobim, including 'The Girl From Ipanema', 'Corcovado' and 'Desafinado', had become pop standards in their own right. There were also the Jazz Crusaders, led by pianist Joe Sample, who blended jazz and funk to create a mass-friendly sound. But even though they fit the requirements of crossover jazz, they existed at a time when these terms had not been invented.

Pop, smooth and crossover jazz had a specific audience that wanted to listen to music as a form of relaxation, instead of getting into the nuances of earlier jazz styles like bebop and hard bop. Besides Benson, one person who took it forward was American flugelhorn player Chuck Mangione, who had huge hits

MARINA CHAVEZ (JARREAU); ANTHONY BARROZA/GETTY IMAGES (WASHINGTON, JR.); JOHAN BROBERG/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (SPYRO GYRA); SHUTTERSTOCK (KENNY G)

like 'Feels So Good' in 1977 and 'Children Of Sanchez' the following year.

American group Spyro Gyra came up with a massive hit in the 1979 album *Morning Dance*. The title track had a catchy tune, which was simple and romantic. In an interview to this writer on his 2003 visit to Mumbai, the group's saxophonist and co-founder Jay Beckenstein said, "We were aware of others blending pop melodies with jazz flavours, but we didn't make a conscious effort to do that. We just had this basic alto saxophone tune, and played some keyboards, marimbas, congas and steel drums around that. The tune clicked, and became a must at all our shows." Needless to say, the band's show at the St. Andrew's Auditorium, Mumbai, that year was a huge success.

## Crossing over

By the early 1980s, many jazz musicians had switched to this route, and the term smooth jazz was used more often. The popular names included saxophonists Grover Washington, Jr. and David Sanborn, trumpeter Herp Albert and pianist Bob James. Though singers-songwriters Sade Adu and Anita Baker sang a variety of styles, they used smooth jazz influences regularly.

Vocalist Al Jarreau was also considered to be a crossover jazz superstar, and his 1981 album *Breakin' Away* seamlessly blended jazz, pop and R&B. He was called the Acrobat of Scat (a vocal style involving recitation of nonsensical syllables), and on some songs, even used gospel, funk and world music instruments. In an interview with this writer on his 2005 visit to Mumbai, Jarreau said, "I just sing what's written in the composition. It's for the audience to worry about the ingredients."

Though these artistes did well abroad, their popularity in India depended on the local availability of vinyl records, or pre-recorded cassettes picked up on foreign visits. Says audiophile Shantanu Dey, "I got into some of these artistes when I was in my early 20s. In those days, LPs of George Benson and Chuck Mangione were easily available in India. I remember many people had Mangione's album *Love Notes* in their collection."

When pre-recorded cassettes became popular, one could access more smooth jazz and crossover jazz. Atul Churamani, managing director of Turnkey Music & Publishing, talks about his days with CBS and Magnasound. He recalls: "It was very expensive to get the master recordings of big jazz names like Wynton Marsalis. But at CBS, we released smooth jazz albums like *Strawberry Moon* by Grover Washington, Jr. and the response was pretty good. At Magnasound, the albums *Double Vision* by Bob James and David Sanborn and *Spellbound* by Joe Sample sold well. We sold them like any other pop album."

## Hate and love

Guitarists Lee Ritenour and Earl Klugh, pianists George Duke and David Benoit, the groups Yellowjackets and Fourplay, and young trumpeter Candy Duffer were prominent in the 1990s. In the early 2000s, Parisian musician Ludovic Navarre (aka St Germain) broadened the concept of crossover jazz by blending modern jazz with house music.

There were the staunch critics too. Over the years, Kenny G. sold a massive number of records, and his 1992 album *Breathless* crossed a whopping 15 million units. However, many people felt what he created was not jazz but drab elevator music. Guitarist Pat Metheny's tirade against the saxophonist, saying he produced the worst music in human history, went viral. Some described the genre as "jazz... but with less jazz."

Defenders of smooth jazz say it actually introduced them to the more serious artistes. As Dey points out, "I started with Mangione, Washington, Jr. and the like. But

it was because of them that I got into Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk." Adds Churamani, "I think smooth jazz is a good starting point for anyone. I know many people who found the legendary 1950s artistes too complex, but the moment we played Benson or Washington, they related to the sound."

Though the smooth jazz wave died down after the 1990s, it continued on a smaller scale even later. Many labels released compilations of dinner jazz, lounge jazz and chill-out jazz, catering to the same audience segment. Today, streaming platforms contain many

compilations, though most artistes are unknown. For those who want to foray into this territory, that may be a smooth beginning. As they say, it is never too late.

## Defenders of smooth jazz say the genre actually introduced them to the more serious artistes like Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and Thelonius Monk

### ESSENTIAL SMOOTH JAZZ ALBUMS

1. *Touch* by John Klemmer on saxophone, 1975
2. *Breezin'* by George Benson on guitar, 1976
3. *Feels So Good* by Chuck Mangione on flugelhorn, electric piano, 1977
4. *Morning Dance* by Spyro Gyra, 1979
5. *Winelight* by Grover Washington, Jr. on saxophone, 1980
6. *Breakin' Away* by Al Jarreau on vocals, 1981
7. *Double Vision* by Bob James on piano, David Sanborn on saxophone, 1986
8. *Spellbound* by Joe Sample on piano, 1989
9. *Fourplay* by Fourplay, 1991
10. *Breathless* by Kenny G. on saxophone, 1992

# Kaleidoscope

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## A winter celebration

In recent years, Copenhagen has come to be known as the unofficial jazz capital of the world thanks to a young enthusiastic audience and serious government investment that has led to the tremendous success of the Copenhagen Jazz Festival and Winter Jazz. These festivals, organised to celebrate jazz and 'create an environment where jazz can develop and live all year round', is a commitment vital to the survival of an ever-evolving form. The 21st edition of Winter Jazz—the only nationwide festival of its kind that includes hundreds of concerts over several weeks—will include performances by Clarissa Connelly, Oilly Wallace, Jesper Thilo, among many others. For more information, visit [www.jazz.dk](http://www.jazz.dk)

## Worlds apart

Every two years since its first edition in 1998, the Taipei Biennial has consistently showcased diverse perspectives from contemporary Asian and global art. The current edition's theme—You and I don't live on the same planet—highlights the deep division in our world on the question of ecology. Curators Bruno Latour and Martin Guinand point out how 'it is clear that Donald Trump and Greta Thunberg don't live on the same planet.' This divide, instead of bringing the world together, has created a seemingly



insurmountable impasse between climate change sceptics and believers. By showcasing art based on this theme on a large scale, the hope is that it will open dialogue in a way that protests and debates perhaps do not. For more information, visit [www.taipeibiennial.org](http://www.taipeibiennial.org)

## A river runs through it

As Australia nears the end of summer each year, the city of Perth becomes an artistic hotspot when one of the country's most important multi-arts events, the 67-year-old Perth Festival,



comes to life. This year's theme, Bilya (meaning 'river' in Nyungar, a language of the Aboriginal Australian peoples) honours the Noongar people who, the festival reiterates, remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of the country. The 2021 programme includes 18 world premieres and 44 Festival commissions in theatre, dance, literature, music and visual arts. The longest-running arts festival in Australia, the Perth Festival 2021 will be held from 5th to 28th February. For more information, visit [www.perthfestival.com.au](http://www.perthfestival.com.au)

## Premiere league

While the 2020/21 season of the Vienna State Opera, easily one of the world's leading opera houses, was punctuated multiple times due to the ongoing pandemic, this month will finally see the venue light up with planned performances of operas, ballets and concerts every single day. The 2020/21 season has been a hotly anticipated



one, for it promised ten premieres of groundbreaking productions from the best names in the world of opera to be released between September 2020 and June 2021. February will see the premiere of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, a story brimming with violence, passion, love and misunderstandings. For the inaugural performance, to be conducted by Andrés Orozco-Estrada, mezzo-soprano Anita Rachvelishvili will embody the role of Carmen for the first time at the Vienna State Opera. For more information, visit [www.wiener-staatsoper.at/en](http://www.wiener-staatsoper.at/en) ■

- Vipasha Aloukik Pai

# A Life in Dance

*In a year that took away several stalwarts from the world of the performing arts, the dance fraternity suffered an irreparable loss in the passing of Sunil Kothari. Swapnokalpa Dasgupta, Head-Programming (Dance) at the NCPA, remembers the renowned scholar, dance historian and a true lover of the art form.*

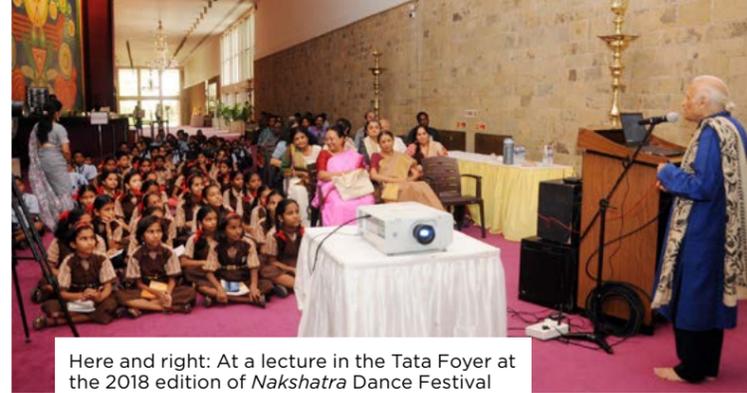
It is somewhat overwhelming to write about someone like Sunil bhai, as renowned scholar and dance historian Sunil Kothari was fondly called. Be it constantly travelling from this part of the globe to the other or his eloquent words that traversed far and wide, Sunil bhai was unstoppable. I first met him years ago at the NCPA. A slim and extremely agile Dr. Kothari walked into our office on the second floor of the Little Theatre at his characteristic brisk pace, like a gush of air. He started off by humbly introducing himself, like he always did, even though we all knew who he was—as does the entire dance fraternity in India. Most young dancers, after all, have had their introduction to Indian classical dance styles by reading the numerous books that he has written.

Sunil bhai was one of those rare personalities who had in-depth knowledge of each dance form that he wrote about without having been a performer of any, even as he had learnt many of them. His constant urge to learn fascinated those around him. He would minutely observe a performance, take notes and on some occasions, give an impromptu commentary to all sitting around him in the auditorium so that they would relish the presentation better. He would often give his own example—of how he, a chartered accountant, had steered his passion for dance towards becoming a full-time educationist and critic—to drive home the message that there was no age to start learning about dance and no age to stop being fascinated by its treasures.

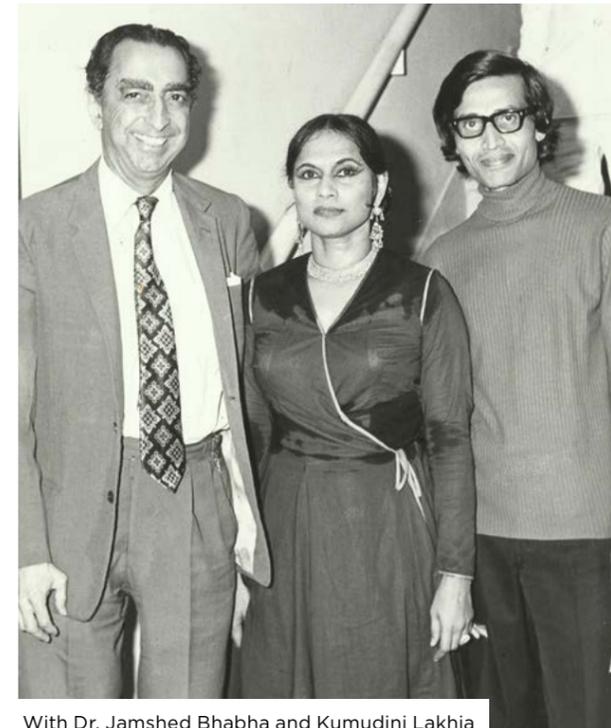
Time and again, he would join us for our dance festivals at the NCPA and invite and encourage his long-time friends to watch our presentations too. He would always advise me to keep searching for new talent and to be open to all styles and forms of dance—an ethos that reflects in his books on nearly all Indian classical dance forms as well as biographies, essays and the various articles that he wrote. A friend of all dances and dancers, he was one of those kind souls who would recommend artistes for performances, awards and recognition based purely on their artistic excellence.

He would share stories of his various pursuits to democratise the dance world. To receive an email from “Sunil Kothari from Cambodia”, or any other wondrous place his passion for dance would take him to, was a delight. He would make it a point to use his emails as a way of introducing people from diverse dance communities to one another, building new bridges in the process. A prolific writer, the stature of the publication in which his articles appeared was of little consequence to Sunil bhai. He started to use Facebook to document his travels with the firm and rare belief that it was the information that mattered, not the medium.

Sunil bhai often spoke of his years of association with the NCPA and how the family of the Jhaveri sisters played an important role in initiating him into the world of dance. It was a lecture-demonstration series here that he witnessed which became a turning point for him and after which he ultimately devoted himself to dance.



Here and right: At a lecture in the Tata Foyer at the 2018 edition of *Nakshatra* Dance Festival



With Dr. Jamshed Bhabha and Kumudini Lakhia



At the *Sattriya* lec-dem conducted in the Stuart Liff Library in November 2013 as part of the *Nakshatra* Dance Festival

in our premises for the NCPA ADD ART Festival in 2019. Sunil bhai was with us throughout the three days of the festival, attending nearly every dance presentation that was curated, gliding from one performance to the other, ever encouraging and ever present.

He would go on to arrange lecture-demonstrations by renowned artistes at the NCPA while several of his books were released in our venues.

About six years ago, the NCPA started conducting lecture-demonstrations for young children in mainstream schools on the eight classical dances of India. One such session, I remember, was at the Byculla Municipal Secondary School. Dressed in dance costumes, my fellow artistes and I were about to start when we saw Sunil bhai enter the hall. He took us by surprise. He had just heard about our endeavour the previous night and there he was, early in the morning, at the school witnessing this session. He removed his shoes like the children had, he clapped, he cheered and guided our young audience to be keen observers. With kids seated all around him, he shared interesting information as they watched the performers demonstrate. At the end, he patted our backs for closely working with children, telling us that this was something he would write about. For us artistes who were part of that session that day, he gifted us one of our most memorable performances presented in front of this renowned scholar, critic and above all, a dance lover. Through his presence that day, he taught us that no audience is unimportant.

In his last article for *ON Stage*, he mentions how he would frequently visit our current complex and this deep association continued until the very last time he set foot

In true honour of a life dedicated to dance, Sunil bhai has been awarded with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1995) as well as the Sangeet Natak Akademi Ratna Puraskar (2017), the Padma Shri (2001) and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Dance Critics Association, New York (2011), to name a few. He received his PhD (1977) from Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara, and DLitt (1986) from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. And as a fitting continuation of his academic accomplishments, he would encourage students to delve deeper into their art form not just by practice and performance but also through research. He will be remembered by the dance fraternity for his tremendous contribution to documentation and academic research in the field. He was an encyclopaedia of dance history. He was instrumental in starting the School of Arts and Aesthetics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and also taught in the Dance department of New York University as a Fulbright Professor. He had also held the coveted Uday Shankar Chair at the Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata where he taught for years.

The octogenarian globetrotter flew out into the infinite after contracting the deadly Covid-19 in December 2020, a few days after his birthday, leaving behind a world full of admirers. In every corner of the world where the sound of ghungroos reverberates, we will find Dr. Kothari and we will hear his characteristic laughter resonating in every round of applause for the arts.



Vyjayanti Kashi after a foot painting Kuchipudi performance during Mudra Dance Festival at Tata Theatre Foyer in April 2015 as Sunil Kothari introduces the audience to the unique dance form



At the NCPA ADD ART Festival in 2019



# Toying with Theatre

Originally a 19th-century plaything for children, the toy theatre has enjoyed a sparkling, if intermittent, time in the spotlight. Its fundamental qualities—great art and innovative storytelling—make it the perfect do-it-yourself family project that can be entertaining and educational in equal measure. **By Frédéric Simon**

**T**oy theatre, also called paper theatre and model theatre, is a form of miniature theatre that traces its origins back to the early 19th century in Europe. It can be thought of as a distant cousin of the leather puppets from Indian shadow theatre and other shadow theatre traditions from Indonesia or Turkey. Toy theatres were often printed on paperboard sheets and sold as kits at the concession stands of opera houses, playhouses, or vaudeville theatres. These were assembled at home and performed for family members and guests, sometimes with live musical accompaniment. The form saw a decline in popularity in the late 19th century but has seen a resurgence in recent years among many puppeteers, authors and filmmakers.

## Back to the roots

Toy theatre became popular in bourgeois families in England, France, Spain and Germany in the early part of the 19th century, with parents putting up small shows to entertain their children. Initially, they simply used the silhouettes which were printed on the sheets of theatrical programmes saved as keepsakes. Soon, the editors of these programmes started making entire sets with the decor, the puppet-booth front, and even figures. These were originally black and white but shifted to colourful renditions in the beginning of the 20th century. The practice usually focused on simplified versions of famous plays including the works of Shakespeare and Victor Hugo. Other narrative sources included tales handed down

from oral traditions or from storytellers like Jean de La Fontaine.

A large number of factories would go on to provide this kind of cutting-puppet sets, called *Image d'Épinal*, for more than a hundred years. This tradition however disappeared slowly between the two World Wars, in part due to the growing popularity of cinema. Spain was among the last countries where the toy theatre tradition remained alive till the 1950s.

Some professional theatre companies have kept the legacy of the form alive to date and still stage traditional scripts or contemporary plays for children and adults. Monty Python's Terry Gilliam is known to have used paper theatre in their movies. We can even think of the TV set as a modern-day technical avatar of this domestic family puppet booth.

## Building a toy theatre at home

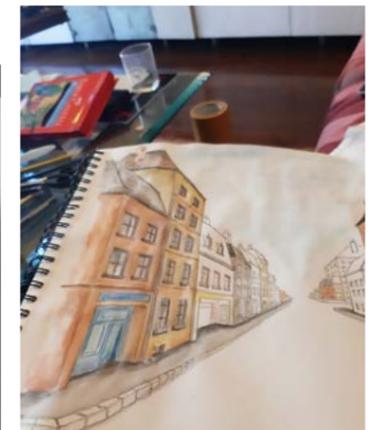
Toy theatres are fairly simple to assemble. All you need is a corrugated cardboard or wooden box. The size can be chosen as per your requirements—anything from a tiny box to something which is the size of a TV set can be used to make a toy theatre.

The puppets or stick figures of course depend on the size of the box. These can be made using thick papers sheets—the kind which can support their weight and stand upright. One can also take cut-outs from magazines to make stick figures by pasting them on sturdier paper. A little fold has to be left at the bottom to ensure that the figures remain upright. A wooden or metal stick can be stuck to these figures to make them move as per the requirements of the script. The performer has to memorise the relevant lines or just read out the story while manipulating the relevant figure to keep the narrative moving forward. All in all, a piece of cake.

## Sparking creativity

Putting up a toy theatre performance is akin to becoming a theatre or Bollywood director. You have to find a good script that will mesmerise your audience, gather the best stick figures that you can find or assemble, and the right backdrop (a fitting landscape or background made using pictures, paintings, or collages). The more ambitious DIYers can also create beautiful red curtains with many folds. As is evident, this allows parents to propose many different physical and creative activities which can be used to keep a child engaged for a long time. Furthermore, you can also use a large part of your

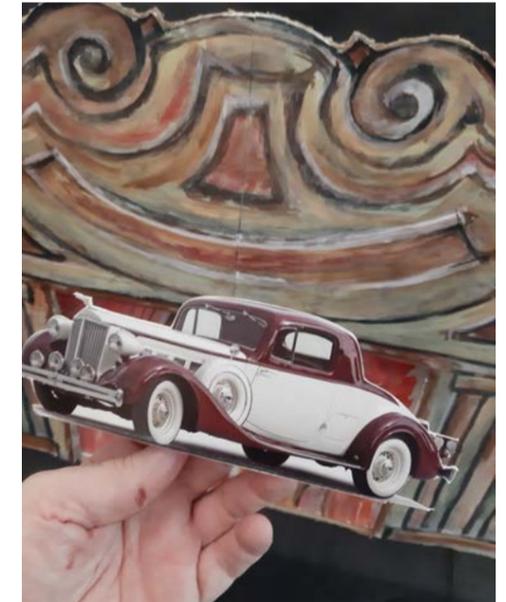
**Some professional theatre companies have kept the legacy of toy theatre alive and still stage traditional scripts or contemporary plays for children and adults**



waste—plastic bottles, magazines, paperboard, packaging, etc.—in creative ways to come up with attractive sets and stick figures.

When the curtain unfurls, you only have two tasks: reading the script and moving the figures in tune with the lines. One can spend hours modulating their voice or memorising their lines. Manipulating the stick figures can also develop motor skills and hand-eye coordination as you have to ensure that any character who isn't 'talking' remains still. One can

Frédéric Simon conducts a toy theatre workshop



even turn their toy theatre into a full-blown production by playing with the lighting, creating a background score using mobile phones, live singing or even ambient noises (wind, sea, animals, city noises, etc.).

Most of all, it offers a unique opportunity for the entire family to come together and work on a mutual project that has no limits. With imagination and a bit of jugaad, toy theatre productions can be very memorable. Not to mention that you can record the performance on your phone to make a beautiful memory.

### Engaging with complex themes

Because toy theatres are easy enough to make, the performer can focus on engaging with the text or the narrative that highlights the desired themes. This can take toy theatre beyond the simplistic bounds of a leisure activity. For example, one could use classical Indian myths or extracts from the Ramayana or Mahabharata to broach larger social issues. Music and poetry have also found a place in toy theatre. In Europe, some of the best scripts of this form include classical theatrical pieces from luminaries like Molière, Corneille, Shakespeare and Goethe, among others. People have also played around with fairy tales and stories from famous novels

to highlight wider issues. An important consideration is the number of characters and sets in the play. If one is putting up a performance alone, then the dialogue takes precedence. On the other hand, performances involving larger groups and bigger puppet booths offer more scope for experimentation.

Currently, I am working on a personal project which involves two different puppetry techniques—realistic 1:2 size puppets and shadow puppets. While toy theatre is not relevant to the project, the story I am working on can be adapted to this form. In the toy theatre version, I would like to see stick figures which resemble Warli drawings—the ‘set’ would be the rusty red of Maharashtrian soil and the stick figures would be white as paper. The setting is a village and the protagonist happens to be a young Koli man who is fighting with his shadow as the latter ‘touched’ a group of Brahmins during a night

**Putting up a toy theatre performance is akin to becoming a theatre or Bollywood director...you have to find a good script that will mesmerise your audience**

of festivities. The man is beaten because of this transgression, blames his shadow for his troubles, and decides to get rid of it. Having got rid of this ‘darkness’, the man goes on to become an actor living under the blinding limelight. But what becomes of his lonely shadow? Will they ever be able to reconcile and live together once again? Perhaps you can help me find the end of this story. ■

*The author, at the time of writing the article, was Executive Director of The Alliance Française of Bombay and in charge of the cultural events in addition to administrative responsibilities. He has conducted several creative writing, theatre and puppet-making workshops over the years. This article was first published in the July 2020 digital issue (Volume 9, Issue 12) of ON Stage.*

# Events at a glance

February 2021

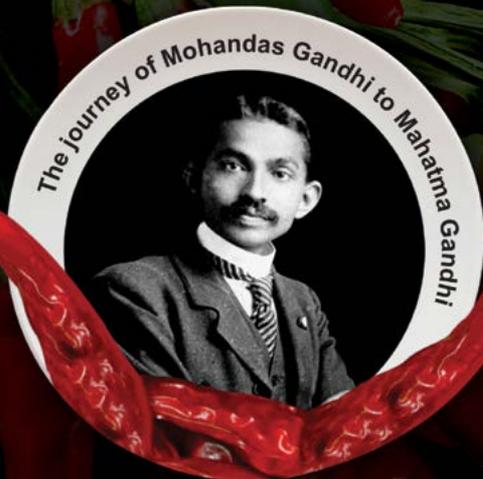
 THEATRE	 INTERNATIONAL MUSIC	 DANCE	 FILMS / SCREENINGS
 INDIAN MUSIC	 WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC	 MULTI ARTS & PRESENTATIONS	 PHOTOGRAPHY & EXHIBITION

Day	Date	Time	Event	Venue
Wed	3rd	7.00 pm	SOI Chamber Orchestra featuring Soul Yatra	TATA THEATRE
Thu	4th	5.00 pm	<i>The Lehman Trilogy</i> Theatre Screening	Godrej dance theatre
Sun	7th	7.00 pm	<i>Mohan's Masala</i> English Play	TATA THEATRE
Wed	10th	5.00 pm	<i>The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess</i> Opera Screening Sung in English with English Subtitles	Godrej dance theatre
Thu	11th	6.00 pm	<i>The Red Shoes</i> Ballet Screening	Godrej dance theatre
Fri	12th	6.30 pm	CITI - NCPA Promising Artistes Series: Krushna Salunke (pakhawaj) Aparajita Chakraborty (dhrupad)	
Sat	13th	7.00 pm	The Golden Years Featuring Darren Das, Giselle Pinto & The Sixth Sense	
Sun	14th	7.00 pm	Readings in the Shed Chapter XXI: Letters of Love	
Thu	18th	7.00 pm	Short Film Corner Short Film Screenings	Godrej dance theatre
Sat	20th	6.30 pm	Shiva... Facets of Him by Vaibhav Arekar & Sankhya Dance Company	
Sun	21st	5.00 pm	SOI Chamber Orchestra	TATA THEATRE
Tue	23rd	7.00 pm	Reality Check Documentary Film Screening	Godrej dance theatre
Thu	25th	6.00 pm	<i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i> By Edmond Rostand Theatre Screening	Godrej dance theatre
Fri	26th	7.00 pm	Yesterday Once More...	
Sat	27th	7.00 pm	<i>Massage</i> Hindi Play	

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An English Play

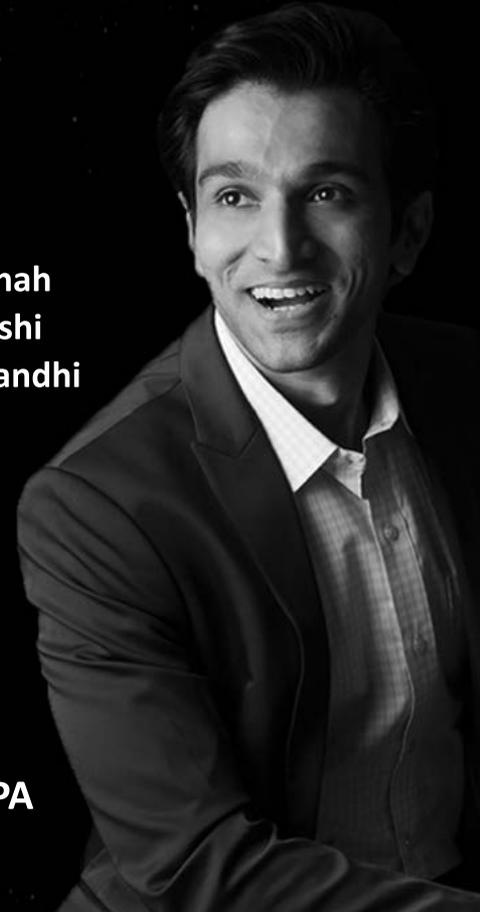
Directed by **Manoj Shah**  
Written by **Ishan Doshi**  
Performed by **Pratik Gandhi**

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