

“Music is the birthright of every child”

Interview with Saskia De Haas Rao, Co-Founder Sangeet4All



What gave you the idea of starting Sangeet4All?

I grew up in a musical family, chose to pursue it as a profession, and married a stellar musician too. We've learnt so much through music – everything I would say. We also saw our son respond so positively to the music that he was surrounded by. We feel that every child should enjoy and be enriched by music in their lives.

But, is music really for every child or is it a special talent?

The idea that music is only for the one's with a special talent for music is a very incorrect one. Music is fundamental to every individual as well as a society – go back down the ages or look at tribal societies even today – the entire community sings and dances just like everyone talks and communicates. Yes, some may have a special attraction to spend more time pursuing music or dance, just like writers - everyone learns language – not everyone goes on to become a journalist, poet or writer! Or take math and science – not everyone becomes a mathematician or scientist, but, everyone studies it to understand the basics.

So, you're saying music learning should be as fundamental for children as language and math and other subjects?

Yes, that is exactly what we are saying. Every child responds instinctively to music, and studies have consistently shown the positive effect music learning has on the brain which exponentially benefits the physical and intellectual health of children.

In addition, listening to, appreciating and learning music keeps the children connected to their roots, their culture – it makes them linked and secured to their land and their ancestors.

For this you developed a school curriculum?

Indeed. My husband Shubendhra Rao, who started learning sitar from Pt. Ravi Shankar at the age of 3, and I strongly felt that there could be a more holistic, broader and yet, deeper way for children and music teachers to connect in schools.

I first plunged myself in researching music in India which has such a long, continuous and incredibly rich tradition. Then, based on that and our practical experiences as world travelled musicians and with raising our son Ishan, we developed a curriculum for schools in India.

In addition, we trained teachers and continue to do so, for making music accessible and to be enjoyed by every child in school.

'Joy in music' is something you stress a lot on ...?

Yes, that's very, very important. That's actually the biggest shift that we want to encourage: that music is not difficult, it is not only for some, it is not only for individual teaching

How do you see this going forward?

Many schools have expressed interest and have begun to take teacher training workshops with us. It is a joint movement, I think, in which schools, parents, governments, music practitioners, all have together to make sure that quality music reaches every child. It's healthy for each child, as well as the society as a whole.

“Teach children mathematics, philosophy and music, but most of all music because the patterns in music are the key to all learning.”

Plato, ancient Greek philosopher



“If music be the food of love, read on...”



Highly informative & attractive books, games and a musical kit developed by Maestro Saskia De Haas Rao - must-have for children between the ages of 3 and 18 that also make fun, useful gifts

Swartarang 1 & 2: a color-coded music book together with the Sangeet4All patented instrument Swartarang, helps young children develop reading skills, fine motor skills, hand/eye coordination, and creativity.

Bansi: a color-coded music book together with the Sangeet4All bamboo flute helps young children develop reading skills, fine motor skills, hand/eye coordination, and creativity.

Ukulele 1 & 2: the instrument teaches children how to play 3 ragas on the ukulele; how to strum various talas, and simple chords.

Dhwani: builds a relation with sound and voice training. Children build basic musical concepts that last a lifetime. The simple songs, stories about Indian music heritage and activities can be done with children of any age.

Raga & Tala: knowledge and relation building with 5 ragas and 5 talas. Singing the ragas in new, child friendly compositions that are still classical and learning about the different character and feeling that ragas evoke.

Desi: introduces children to some musical folk traditions of India. Travel with Urvashi, Azim and Surya through India and learn songs, dances, rhythm and instruments from different regions of India.

Duniya: takes children through some musical traditions around the world with Urvashi, Azim and Surya to learn songs, dances,

rhythm and instruments from different continents. Learn staff notation, Blues chords, Djembe playing and about Chinese instruments. Meet up close and personal with 4 famous artists when they were children.

Shāstra: a wondrous journey through the musical history of India all the way from the origin of music upto recent times. The word Shāstra means science; Sangeet shāstra means the science of music, and Shāstriya sangeet means the classical music tradition of India. This term refers to the music that is based on the documented music history of India. This book is ‘a’ history of Indian music and not ‘the’ history of Indian music, since a subject as extensive as Indian music history can never be the perspective of one chronicler, but can only be a combined effort of many.

Vadya: knowledge and interaction with musical instruments through the story of Tara the Sitar and her family and friends in the country of Vadya. The child will personally meet 27 of India's musical instruments.

Music Quartet: A matching game for confident readers about different musical families. It goes well with the book Vadya.

Match 2 pictures: this memory game of musical instruments is loved by young children. It goes well with the book Vadya

Tala Chakra: a selection of small Indian educational percussion instruments. An individual set includes a shaker, strike manjeera, shaking Ghungroo.



Why do Jamaicans run so fast?

The connection between music & sport



Few countries in the world pack such a confounding diversity of superlative, if not audacious global distinctions, in such a relatively small place. Jamaica is one of them.

Among our many achievements, most notable is perhaps our legacy of excellence in sport; cricket, football, swimming and even bob-sled. Jamaica, is in fact the first tropical

country ever to compete in the Winter Olympics (What? No snow? No problem!).

It is our performance on the track, however, that is truly astounding. Throughout the course of the modern era of global competition, Jamaica has won over one third of the total medals to be won! The only country to have won more medals is the USA, and a number of those medallists are either Jamaican born or of Jamaican parents.

How exactly does little Jamaica, more than 130 times smaller than the USA, pull off such a feat? How is it that Jamaica is home to the greatest male and female sprinters of all time (Usain Bolt – 100m, 200m, Asafa Powell – 100m, Shelly Ann Fraser Pryce – 100m, and Shericka Jackson – 200m)? What accounts for this phenomenal success? Why do Jamaicans run so fast?

As is the case with most things in life, there is no single explanation, no single factor. Our success is derived from a complex combination of tangible and intangible factors and circumstances born out of our history that include; genetics, conditioning, nutrition, topography, technical expertise, and our culture. The cultural aspect, which I will focus on here, is the most intangible and to some extent the most surprising.

Cultural Superpower

Jamaican culture is what many identify as a Global Superpower. This is manifested by the impact that Reggae Music has had on the world. Reggae is just one of over 14 genres of music originating from our little rock and not surprisingly Jamaica is actually listed as the most musical country on the planet based on per capita output.

Where there is music, there is dance and we take our dancing very seriously.

Dancehall, a popular culture offshoot of Reggae is where this is most evident. Every week a new dance emerges from the Dancehall scene. Some of these you will see performed by Bolt or his team mates at the end of the race to celebrate a win. I have even spotted dancehall moves in Bollywood sequences and many of the TikTok viral videos have moves cribbed straight out of Kingston.

How exactly does dancing produce world record breaking performances? Once you have amalgamated all of the other factors, dancing is the “coup de grace”, the finishing touch. The effect of hours of rigorous dancing is three-fold:

- i) It builds the fine muscle and keeps you in shape (ever tried to do a Zumba class?)
- ii) It develops coordination, you have to maintain a very keen sense of coordination to catch and execute the latest moves, and it is that coordination that greatly enhances the cadence of a runner
- iii) Dancing makes you flexible and limber as well as induces calm.

All of these are critical success factors for sprinting, especially the last one. It may seem contradictory, but in order to exert maximum power/force while running, the body has to be relaxed and being a good dancer definitely helps with this.

Indomitable Spirit

It would remiss of me to not mention the factor of our Indomitable spirit, it is a real part of who we are as a people and our collective experience of history through slavery and emancipation, colonization and independence. Jamaica in its brief history has lived through some very dark periods of hardship and struggle, yet we have always held a certain optimism anchored in our faith and the belief that we shall overcome. We often say in Jamaican; “we likkle but we tallawah”- we are small but powerful. As a people, we believe that no matter how high the odds are stacked against us, we will conquer, we will earn the right to be on top. This is at the core of every aspiring athlete, a self-belief, a stick-to-itiveness, an against all odds approach. It is perhaps best captured in the motto of a prominent Jamaican boy's high school, Kingston College – “*fortis cadere, cedere non potest*” – “The brave may fall, but never yield.

The views and theories in this article are based in part:

- i) On the research of two highly regarded experts who have published extensively on the subject - The Honourable Orlando Patterson OM, a prominent Jamaican historical and cultural sociologist, currently serving as the John Cowles Chair of Sociology at Harvard University and Arnold Bertram, Jamaican historian, author and former cabinet minister
- ii) My own personal experience as a former 100m and 200m specialist – clearly I didn't dance as much as I should have!

H.E. Jason Hall is the first resident High Commissioner of Jamaica to India based in New Delhi. Before becoming a diplomat, he was an elite athlete competing internationally in track, rugby, football and squash.

Music Review

When Brazil met India

I was very excited to watch the recital! I had already really enjoyed cello Maestro Saskia De Haas Rao and sitar Pandit Shubhendra Rao perform before, and was looking forward to see their 18-year old son Ishan Rao join them this time on the piano.

Cello, sitar and piano together – what an aural feast, and a challenge to blend together!

The performance supported by the Brazilian embassy was inspired by the work of one of the country's most celebrated composers – Heitor Villa-Lobos – who I read up on first.

Villa-Lobos was born in the capital city of Brazil Rio de Janeiro and lived there and Europe between 1887 – 1959. He played the cello and classical guitar; he also composed and conducted. I found it fascinating and sad that Villa-Lobos played music with cinema and theatre orchestras at the really early age of 12 years to earn money!

He spent a lot of time listening to, imbibing and playing music with street and native musicians, which in Brazil is very rich as it has influences from Africa, indigenous groups and Europe. I think his music has an amazing mix of classical, folk and jazz music. The experimental trio of the De Haas Rao family members, who also are very committed to contemporising classical music, seemed ideal to interpret and improvise Villa-Lobos works.

The Deshmukh Hall at the IIC with a seating capacity of 230 where the concert took place was full – with a wide range of audience members – embassy officials and music aficionados.

The concert began with a rich, evocative duet played by Maestro De Haas and Pandit Rao -Preludio from Bachianas Brasileiras No. 4 and Raga Mishra Bhairavi. Prelude means beginning, so it was appropriate as the first piece as well as set a mood of reflection. I read later that it was composed for a string orchestra and is still played popularly. The addition of Raga Bhairav Mishra was also apt as this particular Raga is often chosen to begin concerts.

The play and enjoyment between the sitar and cello was infectious and was felt by the audience, too.

Then Ishan went on to play Choros 1 which was originally written for the guitar by Villas-Lobos. I found this particularly interesting because though both instruments are string, they have distinctively different sounds. The composition is a very lively one juxtaposing many staccatos and melodies with unexpected sharps and fast melodies.

Then the three instruments played together in a complex rendition of the Samba Classico that has a moody movement with overlapping notes and one of the most recognisable sounds I think from south America. Almost to maintain a wonderful balance, the trio played folk melodies from India, which included a Bollywood song – 'Humey tumse pyaar kitna,' which I could see many Indian heads in the audience swaying to!

The 'Toccata: o trenzinho do Caipira' or 'The Peasant's Little Train' was great fun that was linked to the Rajdhani train. It was very rhythmic and playful and we could get a cheerful sense of the train moving fast and slow.

The final piece was meditative and reflective, and combined with Raga Kafi which is an evening raga, was a fitting conclusion to an amazing performance.

I must also mention the excellent accompaniment of Shabaaz Khan on the tabla that provided beat and rhythm, varying pace

and mood as the composition required; and his fingers moved like lightning on the gajara and syahi (the skin) of the tabla.

It was a riveting performance which kept you engaged with its unpredictable change in mood, pace and tempo.

It inspired me to keep practising my own music and to keep listening.

By Tictac Sekhri, Grade IX, Modern School, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi

Write your review and send it to us on admin@sangeet4all.com

Know your musical instrument

The Sitar

In the Indian classical music tradition of the Natya Shastra, musical instruments can be classified into four groups: Tat, Sushir, Awanadh and Ghan. The sitar falls in the Tat vadya category.

Sometimes we imagine the invention of a new instrument as a moment in time, but this is usually not accurate. The development of the sitar was a very gradual process and people have different opinions on when the development started.

Some say the sitar evolved from a type of ancient veena of over 2,000 years ago; others claim it came from the Persian instruments Tanbur and Sehtar in the 16th century; yet others say it was an invention of Amir Khusrau in the 12th century.

If we put all these pieces of the puzzle together, we understand that the Sitar was created by merging Indian string instruments with Persian influences.

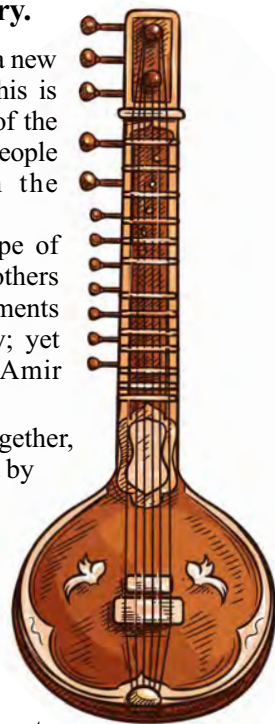
The biggest impact on the development of the sitar was the Indian Rudra Veena of the Beenkars, the Persian Tanbur and the Persian Sehtar, which means three strings.

A relative of Nia'mat Khan, one of the most influential musicians in the development of Khyal, was named Khusrau Khan and is credited as the first performer of the sitar.

Many believe that the creator of the Sitar is the 12th century Amir Khusrau. Perhaps the similarity in names between Amir Khusrau and Khusrau Khan caused the confusion about who invented the Sitar!

The Sitar is played with a plectrum attached to the index finger. The Sitar can have a bass string, linking it closely to the Beenkar tradition. Pandit Ravi Shankar and Pandit Nikhil Banerjee played this type of sitar.

The smaller version of the sitar does not have a bass string and is more oriented towards Khyal lyricism. Ustad Vilayat Khan popularised this type of sitar.



From the book 'Shastra' by Saskia De Haas Rao

Sangeet4All developed for Nursery up to Grade 12, serves schools and families throughout India by providing a music curriculum grounded in Indian classical music with a global outlook. The day a child starts school, s/he should experience the joy of music in their lives.

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