

## **RENEWING THE JOY OF MUSIC**

*Conductor Zane Dalal shares his personal perspectives on the forthcoming February 2013 Season at the Symphony Orchestra of India.*

I am, once more, delighted to have the opportunity to write for ON STAGE. Not just because it is a fine publication that allows members of the NCPA and the SOI a very special inside look at the offerings of the NCPA; and not just because its informative articles on several diverse subjects give our local aspirations and achievements an international styling; but also because the publishers let me write on any subject of my choosing, which is very nice of them. It is also a great delight to write for ON STAGE because I am able to give a first hand report of the great work undertaken by the NCPA and its leadership. A Performing Arts Centre does not operate itself automatically, especially one which has sought in recent years to exponentially expand its offerings.

As I have had cause to repeat on many occasions, not only has the NCPA succeeded in immeasurably enriching the lives of its patrons and increasing the opportunities for the community it serves, our indefatigable chairman has many more “irons in the fire”, firmly believing that we can and will achieve an international profile worthy of a great city. There is proof of this all around us, in the deft stewardship of a great many projects, many of which, we duly recognize, have been added anew in the last five years. As we all know, our Symphony Orchestra of India is one such grand design that owes its very existence to the NCPA. My own joyous involvement at the NCPA these last five years owes a debt of gratitude to this vision, and as I’m now charged with leading the SOI through the entire forthcoming February season, these thoughts remain foremost in my mind. It is fortuitous that I am able to write for the January issue that precedes it.

It will come as no surprise to ON STAGE readers that performing artistes wish one great thing of their audiences – and they wish it in an overwhelming way. We wish that our audiences will be as inspired, enthused and charged as we are in performance, and will share in our music making as an intensely united

experience. Most of the time, when this happens, it happens naturally – and we are very grateful that it does. Who attending a concert of the late and great Sviatoslav Richter would not marvel at the intrinsic musicality, sheer technique (until I heard him, I accepted the boundaries established by Gilels and Arrau ) and the inescapable fact that all who witnessed it (a packed Festival Hall, London) were some how under a trance. This was an intensely united experience. A similarly rich experience is evident in the performances of some of our notable Indian Guru's whose spell over the audience is none the less.

I have the proud and enviable task of leading the Symphony Orchestra of India through an entire season of music and a short tour. My instincts call to bear every moment I can remember or imagine about the music ahead of us – and in my personal preparation I remember very fondly certain works on the programme and hope that I might share with you now, those personal perspectives that I have developed over time.

As featured exclusively in our first concert this season, Beethoven is the great equalizer for musicians. Aside from actually studying and performing, the great experience of musicians is in the listening – a definitive 'drip-drip- drip' of ideas from the first time you hear a piece. In my case, Furtwangler and Klemperer not withstanding, my experience of Beethoven is coloured by the great music making of two slightly more recent gentlemen. No one will deny that when Karajan took over the Berlin Philharmonic, it was because of his amazing ability to rehearse and conjure a gloriously balanced sound. Very soon, the orchestra's reputation was internationally established because of this relentless pursuit of perfect sound – and as some readers will remember fondly, he didn't just pursue it, he often achieved it. I am constantly fascinated by the warm richness of sound – which is the starting point from which the music might break forth. No one will deny the visceral energy and rhythmic power and renewable excitement that is inherent in Beethoven's writing. Carlos Kleiber brought new depth and meaning to visceral energy, rhythmic power and renewable excitement– also through painstaking rehearsal. In my opinion, the ideal Beethoven sound is perhaps a combination of the Karajan/Kleiber magic. The Fourth and the Seventh symphonies are well paired on the same evening, and the *Coriolan*

overture is the logical addition, since it was premiered with the Fourth symphony at the same concert, in March of 1807. Beethoven remains the mainstay of the repertoire and I am delighted to be working this repertoire with the SOI.

Similarly, Tchaikovsky has a great resonance with audiences, and also with musicians. We have the great pleasure of presenting not only the Violin Concerto but also the triumphant Fifth Symphony this season. Once again, my personal experiences with both these pieces, leaves me more convinced that warm sonority and richness of playing are ideal. Karajan was asked to record Tchaikovsky with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1939, just at the time he was introduced to the orchestra. This was particularly unusual since Furtwangler had just recorded Tchaikovsky six months earlier. What was remarkable about this reading was not just an understanding of the score, but of the rich sonorities that might convey it. This warm Germanic palette should be coupled with the innately Russian performances of Evgeny Mravinsky from the 1960's. I conducted Tchaikovsky's Fifth for the first time with the late Mehli Mehta's orchestra, the *American Youth Symphony*, -on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1994, in the famous acoustic of Royce Hall, on the UCLA campus in Los Angeles. Three things are most memorable about that evening. Mehli and his wife Tehmi were in the audience and were very supportive. The video recording received a very enthusiastic endorsement from both Zubin Mehta and Daniel Barenboim, whom, I'm still touched- and eternally grateful - took the time to listen to it. Lastly, the concert on January 9<sup>th</sup> was the last orchestral concert to take place in the old hall. As some of you may recall, the great Northridge earthquake of January 17, 1994, cracked the dome of the concert hall, and it went under considerable repair and managed to reopen some years later. As was the case with Carnegie Hall, the repairs and refitting altered the acoustic, so my rendition of Tchaikovsky's Fifth was the last one in the old venue. At any rate, Tchaikovsky's Fifth has been a constant companion ever since. Similarly, the Violin Concerto has been on my ear for many years. This extraordinary piece brings soloists out of the woodwork, as they test their mettle against competing talent and the great performances of yesteryear. I'm delighted and honoured to be sharing the platform with our

great virtuoso Marat Bisengaliev in this piece. I always enjoy our collaborations immensely – and I'm sure this February, no exception, will be a memorable one.

The Piano Concerto No. 1 by Johannes Brahms occupies a very special place in my heart. As a budding pianist, I was, as many readers will appreciate, well on the way to passing all my ABRSM exams. Some time around Grade Six, and during my formative years as a musician at *Charterhouse*, I managed to get to London in 1979/1980 and heard Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1 for the first time. Yuri Egorov performed with the London Philharmonic, and Sir Alexander Gibson conducted. When this piece fell on my ears, there was something of a transformation. I went back to school and insisted with my piano teachers, that I be allowed to learn it. This notion was laughed at, and then seriously discouraged, – until they realized that I was not to be put off. After much wrangling, my piano teacher presented me with the music on the condition that I would put in the hours of practice. We made a pact and I set to work. Through this piece and its learning emerged another sort of technique, another sort of ear and another sort of pianism. I had accomplished something quite bizarre and uncalculated by sheer force of application. Grades 7 and 8 passed with 'distinction', and I don't remember practicing a note for either. Some years later in the United States, conducting the piece with an extraordinary Israeli pianist, Asaf Zohar, I recall a terrific experience. Asaf was also a budding conductor, so we swapped places in rehearsal, to much enthusiasm in the orchestra. I much look forward to working with pianist Benjamin Frith next season on this great work.

The Overture to *Donna Diana* by Emil Nikolaus von Reznicek is something of an anomaly. Though the opera is not performed as often, this wonderful overture is a constant remnant of the excitement with which it was received. All of our audience will enjoy this work, -even if they haven't heard it before. It's the sort of work that is immensely pleasurable the first time, and then delights again and again. I first heard it on the radio, whilst driving many years ago, and remember feeling elated, followed by a near miss with traffic. If you haven't heard this work before, leave it for the live thrill of the performance. However, though it sounds

‘ebullient’ it is extremely challenging for the orchestra and I greatly look forward to working with them on it, though they might not share the sentiment!!

The Triple Concerto for Banjo, Tabla and Double Bass – is our star-studded finale to the season. We have an extraordinary opportunity to do several things with this piece, some of which I hope will happen quite naturally. Our star performers are Béla Fleck on Banjo, Edgar Meyer on Double Bass and Zakir Hussain on Tabla. The caliber of these players is world class and it is fitting that the SOI should perform with them. The work relies on the rhythmic impetus within each performer and provides for the great fusion of Indian Classical Music with Western Jazz. Yet, it is entirely successful in concerto format, unlike other works in the genre. The experience for the orchestra will be memorable, and we will also manage to forge a dynamic relationship with audiences more aligned to this repertoire – and further the reach of the NCPA/SOI in audience development, which is so crucial. As a young orchestra, we stand to achieve great things if our audience takes on a wider base, greater numbers and can yet remain loyal to our local aspirations. Along with the continued support of readers like you, such concerts are the great vehicle by which this can be achieved.

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*Conductor **Zane Dalal** is a frequent contributor to ON STAGE and is committed to the NCPA’s mission of bringing the joys of music to a wider audience.*