

As we jet across the globe, our memories and best experience of international metropolitan life, invariably returns to entertainment. Each city sells us the wonders of life in its unique way, enticing and cajoling us into local culture, cafés, sidewalk restaurants and its unique brand of tourism. Along with this, cities always try to project a defining international character. What defines the international character of London, New York, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Berlin, Chicago, Paris, or any other great global centre may be extremely difficult to quantify. However, all follow a certain trend. When a city is a super-prosperous centre of culture and global commerce for any length of time, there is a modicum of decadence that sets into the society, which is always familiar, always welcome and always defines the international character. A marvelous byproduct of this decadence is an exponential rise in the cultural offerings of that city by way of museums, theatres, galleries of fine art and, of course, orchestras and opera houses. At the height of prosperity London boasted five internationally acclaimed orchestras, Vienna three, Amsterdam four and all supported numerous world class smaller ensembles. There is no denying that fine orchestral institutions are still the defining cultural yardstick. As the megacities of India vie to establish a modern global footprint, there is reason for great optimism in Mumbai.

Mumbai, the bustling financial capital of India, has long had an international standing in matters of culture and national heritage. The days of the Bombay Presidency, likewise, gave the city a 'first among equals' gravitas. Also, for many decades of airline travel, Mumbai represented a logical geographical stopover for the long haul flights connecting Europe to the Far East or Australia, bringing a steady stream of cultural contact to its shores. The National Centre Performing Arts, (NCPA) founded in 1965 to enrich and safeguard the culture of the community has its home at Nariman Point in South Mumbai. This extraordinary campus of world class theatres and venues is well known to Mumbai audiences and is the preeminent performing platform in the country. As such, it is the destination of choice for international artistes and has become the cultural tie to other nations and their performing arts. The NCPA, on many occasions, has found itself at a crucial juncture of service to a great city and has risen to meet the challenge of a new generation. The vision of its late founder, Dr. Jamshed Bhabha and the vision of its current chairman, Mr. Khushroo Suntook have given an artistic governance that allows the international performing arts platform to grow, prosper and become a font of excellence. In the last five years the NCPA has reformed and redefined its precious mission, giving real voice and vibrancy to several areas of artistic excellence. Indian Music, Indian Dance, Indian Theatre, Western Theatre, Photography, many workshops and large educational initiatives are put forward in a way that not only allows our community to witness the artistic excellence, but to be a participant within its framework.

However, one large parameter of artistic excellence – the hallmark definer of the great global capitals – had remained conspicuously absent. There has been an active and highly dynamic amateur force in western music for as long as people can remember, and the local community has warmly embraced it. This has been especially true in the nations of South Asia - who have partially adopted Western music as their own. All of them - without exception – also realized the need for a professional symphony orchestra – as the imprimatur of their global standing.

It is an outstanding question, of course, as to exactly how India compares with its global competitors and what India is prepared to do, beyond the ubiquitous 'photo opportunity'. Specialized centres of excellence - made available to all, which would then lead to waves of home grown natural talent and subsequent cyclic support, are the tried and tested answer. This leads to success the world over, but it requires vision and unflinching belief. Until we wholeheartedly support higher centres of training in all kinds of professions, we will not realize our extraordinary untapped national potential. This national potential is missing in the fine arts, because there are no great art schools. This national potential has been missing in the music profession, because there are no conservatories of advanced learning. This affects the conservation of not only our own national heritage in Indian musical treasure, but also prevents us from giving our younger generations a chance to compete in international forms of music, recognized the world over. There is similarly a deficit in certain sports, athletics and a myriad of other areas of excellence. With the exceptions of professions within business, law and medicine - statistics strongly confirm that our population is under-represented on the world stage. This is clearly not through lack of talent, but through lack of the will to provide for the talent where it may exist.

The Symphony Orchestra of India, founded in August 2007, and resident at the National Centre Performing Arts, Mumbai represents a new and exciting era of music making for Mumbaiers and has finally given the city that cultural 'icing on the cake' that other great cities have enjoyed for years. The fact that the Symphony Orchestra of India has not compromised on its standards and is in the process of 'spreading its wings' has not gone unnoticed by the international music community. Our alliances in the Asian Pacific region, along with our growing number of friends in Europe and the United States are testament to this new age of growth. With the establishment of a professional orchestra the NCPA has also been able to successfully coproduce fine opera productions, with international casting and subsequent international notice. It is also the obligation of a performing institution to give back to the community by way of educational initiatives. The NCPA has started a violin programme for young boys and girls which now provides instruction and an instrument to approximately 250 children. It has also initiated perhaps the first and only conservatoire environment for gifted children, so that the promise and potential of new generations can be realized. Already, good teaching has proved that Indian children are no less talented than any others. This is a good beginning, but only a beginning.

As optimistic as these developments are, we must constantly battle to preserve and promote artistic endeavor, especially in this modern era where engagement is limited to three minutes - and everything is measured in bytes. Societies are judged by the culture they preserve. Cities are judged by the culture they support. Nations prove their global stability and prosperity by projecting cultural excellence. On the banks of the Arabian Sea - where neighbors sometimes lose sight of what might be important in civilized, progressive, democratic society - India has the perfect example of what is possible. There is a rich Indian cultural heritage that completely occupies the national psyche. There is much reason to enrich this heritage with opportunities to witness and engage in international culture and by doing so strengthen the bonds of global humanity. India must answer this call and rise to this challenge, - its youth deserve no less!

Join us this concert season as the Symphony Orchestra of India performs, highlighting the works of Beethoven, Mahler and R. Strauss . To attend concerts and/or support the NCPA and the SOI by becoming a member, contact **(email address)** or go to our website at [www.ncpamumbai.com](http://www.ncpamumbai.com)

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