

## The Gift of Music. - Zane Dalal

Most of the world's great cities are home to a symphony orchestra. In every case, without exception – each one of these orchestral institutions has established an educational mandate to enrich the community it serves, and to preserve its own legacy in the minds and ears of future generations.

For many years, orchestras across the globe have embarked on ambitious programmes to encourage children. In Chicago a high tech visitors center houses an interactive musical playground for children who are bussed in from the suburbs. In Berlin, the reach of the famous Philharmonic has transformed the lives of younger generations by programmes designed to foster excitement about not just orchestral music, but all music. The concept of the visiting international orchestra establishing a residency— whether in Osaka or Sardinia or Seoul or Caracas brings music to a boundless group of young people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to witness and engage in an art form we all know and recognize as being invaluable.

In times of economic stress, - and sometimes during times of economic growth – inexplicably stupid and shortsighted actions have cut music from class rooms, cut artistic endeavor and the creative spirit from the growth and learning process – and fueled the stunted growth of generation after generation – who only when growing much older try to return some semblance of the creative spirit to their battered souls.

The founding of the Symphony Orchestra of India in August 2006 was a momentous occasion for Mumbai, and the nation. I think the facts are beyond contestation. Almost immediately, by the end of 2007 – on the urging of our Music Director, Marat Bisengaliev and strongly endorsed by NCPA Chairman, Khushroo Suntook – the SOI/NCPA began its educational initiative in bringing the Suzuki Violin method to young children. It was established that the NCPA would bring this **GIFT OF MUSIC** to children at a hugely reduced cost to participants, which included subsidizing the cost of the instrument as well.

In 2007 I met with Sir Dinshaw Petit and Principal Balakrishnan of the Avabai Petit School, in Bandra. We tentatively put forward a pilot programme that would include 35 children. A few years later, we have several schools participating and numbers that exceed 280. The process has not been without its difficulties, - but the importance of the programme far outweigh the fixable challenges that confront us from time to time. The post war process established by Shin'ichi Suzuki worked well for Japan. The El Sistema programme in Venezuela, funded in millions by the government and 36 years in operation – has only in the last five years shown its success to the world, by way of the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra. India has no less talent – and in time with perseverance our children will also achieve great things.

What is certain is what we have already seen in the sparkling eyes and joyous faces of the children enrolled in our programme: The children have improved hand/eye coordination; Their ambidextrous growth potential is challenged; Their left brain/right brain functions are sparked: Their physical posture is improved; They establish an individual confidence that comes with learning an instrument; and above all they are inducted into a love for music which will resonate within their lives – and the lives of their children- whether or not they continue to play an instrument. We continue to involve the extended

children's group in several educational activities, workshops and visits to the NCPA in which they have shown tremendous eagerness to learn.

The NCPA has also embarked on a special school for gifted children – which will provide India with its very first music conservatory. Modeled on tried and tested Russian methods, the school provides superior teaching to very young talented students. Though not exclusively, the whole pool of Suzuki children serve as a spring board to this new school. The new school – in due course – will provide a group of talented Indian musicians who would be able to play at the required international standard of the Symphony Orchestra of India. The NCPA and the SOI continue to provide educational initiatives for the young and as we grow so will the commitment to bring to as many children as possible – **THE GIFT OF MUSIC.**

***Zane Dalal is Resident Conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of India – and is part of the management team at the NCPA and the SOI. He is committed to bringing the joys of music to wider audiences and is a frequent lecturer at the NCPA.***