

# 'They came out of respect for Zubin'

One of the city's premier musical education institutions, the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation (MMMF) turns 30 on September 27. Ahead of the book launch about its storied legacy, founder-trustee Mehroo Jeejeebhoy speaks about its illustrious past, and why music is critical for the future wellbeing of society. Excerpts from the interview

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Three decades is a long period in the lifetime of any organisation. Could you take us back to the beginning, and how it all started? IT all started with a group of friends. Zubin Mehta had requested me to organise a tour of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in India in 1994, when diplomatic relationships between the two countries reopened. We were not an organisation back then. While the funds raised from the ticket sales of the five concerts were donated to charity, there were some leftover funds that helped us establish the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation.

Zubin Mehta named it after



Andrea Bocelli during his Mumbai visit. PICS COURTESY/MMM FOUNDATION

his father, Mehli Mehta, since he felt indebted to him for his early education. We had no premises or a teaching programme. But it all came together with the Sangat Chamber Music Festival who organised in 1996.

**We read about this key event in the newspapers back then...**

It was the first ever Chamber Music festival in the country. I reached out to invite Indian performers from India, who had stellar careers abroad —

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(From left) Dan Zhu (violin), Kun Woo Paik, Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, and Henri Demarquette (cello); (in circle) Maestro Zubin Mehta



from Jagdish Mistry, Patricia Rosario, Marilena Fernandes, to the D'Souza brothers [Harvey and Ralph].

All of these musicians agreed, and for no fee at all. It was during this period, as we witnessed amateur and young musicians from the city interacting with the musicians, discussing music that we felt a need for an educational institution focused on music.

**What was musical education like in this period?**

We are still lagging far behind in terms of musical education. Currently, we have 40 string students at the Foundation. The other challenge is the lack of musical education in school. In some countries, it is mandatory for every child to receive two hours of musical education every week. I suppose everything from engineering to computers have taken precedence here.

We should have an entire building dedicated to a music school. This is an art that requires investment of time and resources.

**In spite of this, the foundation has done well to host some of the greatest names in Western Classical Music in the city. Could you recall some of the highlights?**

The greatest thrill was to present some of the finest orchestras and artists that visited the city. And it is thanks to Zubin Mehta. He would encourage his friends to visit India, and they were all of the highest calibre — from Mstislav Rostropovich, Itzhak Perlman to Plácido Domingo, among others. In fact, they all came out of friendship and respect for Zubin, and would waive their professional fees.

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## Dear green diary

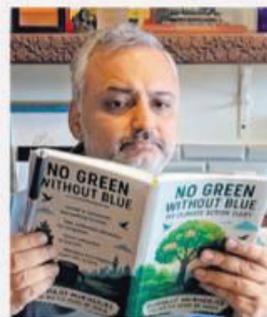
A new handbook-diary by a city-based environmentalist will help Mumbai's youth chart greener plans for 2026

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CITY-BASED environmentalist Subhajt Mukherjee cuts no corners as we patiently await a conversation with him about his new book. "I was planting trees in an open space in Kanjur Marg. The response was overwhelming, and we ended up planting nearly 400 trees," he excuses himself. It's one of those times we don't mind a delay in the Maximum City. Unlike most personal diaries, Mukherjee's newly released My Climate Action Diary hides

no secrets. "It's an 'action' diary, not a 'planning' diary," he clarifies at the outset.

Created with the help of crowdsourced suggestions over three months, the new book is targeted towards young readers. One of the recommendations was to elucidate the often-misunderstood Miyawaki forest concept. The diary features an illustrated layout of an ideal Miyawaki forest, colour coded for convenience. Other sections will introduce readers to calculating one's carbon footprint through digital tools. "Composting and rainwater harvesting are two simple concepts that have far-reaching benefits. I wish more people will take it up using our guide," he shares.



Subhajt Mukherjee reads the Climate Action Diary

The book, as the title suggests, is still a diary at its core. "We've marked important environment-related days throughout the year, the same way most diaries

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A previous plantation drive organised by the environmentalist



An illustrated composting guide. PICS COURTESY/SUBHAJIT MUKHERJEE



A moment from an edition of the Sangat Chamber Music Festival

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We tend to look at these names as mythical, serious legends. How were they in real life?

I was always in great awe of these artistes, but when you meet them they are simple, natural human beings. All of them are highly intelligent and interested in so many things.

For instance, we would attend a concert where Zubin had conducted something profound, and he would be charming and jovial at the dinner after. If I conducted a performance like that, I would not be able to sit down and do small talk.

These anecdotes will add value to the book...

There were so many stories through the years, and we were looking for a way to document some of them. It was not an easy task. We had to cull many. Some stories we just could not put into the book [she laughs].



Mstislav Rostropovich

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highlight public holidays. This will allow readers to make actionable plans for occasions like World Environment Day, World Water Day, World Soil Day, among others," Mukherjee explains. With nearly 300 copies of the diary from the first batch delivered to concerned citizens, a new batch



Plácido Domingo during his performance in Mumbai in 2024

It is an amalgam of many experiences.

Pooja Vir stepped in as publishing adviser, while Shabnam Minwalla authored the book. Fravashi Aga has contributed to the design.

Does this set the ball rolling for the future?

We hope that we can move the goalposts further, and increase the number of teachers, train more students, and also encourage younger people to attend more concerts. Music is a very enduring art, and the more you study in depth, the greater the pleasure you gain from it.

But what I would love is for someone to come along and say, 'Here, this is a building for you to run your school from.' [laughs] Today, in a world fractured by wars, we need music more than ever. We need the arts, and music is a very powerful tool.

CALL 2235403076 (for more details on the book)

**The Climate Action Diary highlights actionable plans, sheds light on environment-friendly concepts, and provides a handy calendar to plan future efforts**

is coming fresh off the press as we speak.

"Remember those school diaries that helped you navigate school life — rules, regulations, notes, and remarks? My vision is to make my book a mainstay in the daily routine of Mumbai's promising youth. We've done enough talking and planning. It's time to put it to action," he signs off.

**FREE** LOG ON TO @mission\_green\_mumbai (to place an order)

A colour-coded Miyawaki forest layout from the book

# Sizzling since the Nineties

New Yorker shuttered this week after 45 years. Their much-loved gooey and sizzling brownie with ice cream had created a mini dessert revolution. We tuck into that sweet rewind story

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MOST Mumbai kids from the Nineties have a New Yorker memory. It was one of the first outings as a collegian who drooled over their first taste of Nachos with Creamy Cheese Sauce and Enchiladas. For youngsters with big appetites and less pocket money, the highlight of that meal was the shareable Sizzling Brownie with a dollop of vanilla ice cream garnished with toasted cashew nuts. The server had poured a fudgy chocolate sauce all over it.

September 11 saw the last service at New Yorker, the 45-year-old establishment that is often credited for giving Mumbaikars vegetarian Tex-Mex. While palates evolved and paved the way for better representation of the cuisine, the sizzling brownie with vanilla ice cream and fudge sauce flourished across menus, and continues to be a favourite.

New Yorker owner Ranbir Batra reveals, "My family was inspired while on an overseas trip, when they tasted the hot-and-cold dessert served dramatically on a sizzling plate. They were told it was a des-

sert that didn't move too well. They returned and tweaked the recipe. We created a fudgy sauce; it picked up ever since it appeared on the menu. They borrowed the idea of hot plates from restaurants that served sizzlers." The sizzling brownie became a favourite across age groups.

By the late '90s, Fountain Sizzlers at Fort also began serving it on their menu. Ayush Arora, second-generation owner, says, "It retains its position as a favoured chocolate dessert due to nostalgia, and reminds you of childhood. Everyone from the '90s grew up eating it. We prepare an in-house vanilla brownie ice cream to top it. When the brownie and ice cream mix together you get a hot-cold sizzle on the palate. Once the chocolate sauce solidifies on the sizzling plate, it adds a gooey texture," he adds.

## Cake and cookie

It also led to a brownie revolution in the city. In 1997, chef Manish Khanna started Brownie Point in Bandra and at Alfredo's in Juhu two years later. "Just like our city, patrons prefer their food to have some chataka and drama — so the sizzling brownie with ice cream was a hit. That it was a sharing experience,



The Sizzling Brownie at New Yorker. PIC/SAYYED SAMEER ABEDI



The Vanilla Brownie Ice Cream at Fountain Sizzlers. PIC/SHADAB KHAN



Prachi Goel. FILE PIC



Sucheta Thakur

made it affordable for youngsters too," explains Khanna.

He recalls the difficulty of promoting the brownie. "When I told clients, it was a combination of a cake and a cookie, they were confused. I would urge them to try it. That's how it picked up," says Khanna, who runs the dessert brand Noir along with Brownie Point outlets across the country and Dubai. "The shelf life made it easy to stock and store. A brownie can be stored at room temperature for up to a week. The generous amount of butter and sugar acts as preservatives, allowing this option. It became the perfect gifting option too."

## Brownie bliss

A decade later, in 2007, Prachi Agarwal Goel started the first Brownie Cottage kiosk in Ban-

dra, baking out of her home on a Sunflame cooking range. "New Yorker was the first place I ate a sizzling brownie with ice cream; I doubt anyone else was doing it. It was unique, and was available only at restaurants," recalls Goel.

"My husband has a massive sweet tooth, and always told me the brownies were unique. It's how I began making chocolate brownies. It has stood its ground because it is chocolate — it is gooey, it is easy to make, easy to gift and store due to its shelf life. No icing, no decoration, and yet, it's tempting to bite into. An authentic brownie has its flaky cracks on the top and a gooey centre. Back then, you had to explain to patrons about the idea of a brownie," she adds. The authentic brownie is made with less than five per cent flour while the rest is 45 per cent dark chocolate and butter.

Sucheta Thakur, a loyal patron who lined up outside New Yorker for one last indulgence. "Back in the day, when fancy desserts meant ice cream sundaes, sizzling brownies were VIP desserts. You had to travel all the way from Andheri to Chowpatty to taste it! As kids, we would fight to have the bigger bites, burning our tongue in the process," she reminisces. All we wish for the city is, may the sizzle never fizzle.



Brownies by (right) Manish Khanna

