

Forecast: Mainly clear sky in city and suburbs. Maximum & minimum temperatures likely to be around 32°C and 17°C respectively.

TIMES CITY

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SUNRISE
Sunday: 07:11 hrs

SUNSET
Saturday: 18:10 hrs

Relative humidity:
Colaba
55%
Santacruz
58%

FOR LIVE UPDATE

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CODE



Lang Lang night with orchestra that survived Belgrade bombing

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TOI Archives



POSTER BOY: Lang Lang rehearsing at TIFR in March 2009 during his first visit to India. He plays with the Belgrade Philharmonic at NCPA on Jan 16

One of the world's most celebrated pianists will perform one of the repertoire's most majestic works in Mumbai on Jan 16. As with Lang Lang's last performance in the city 16 years ago, the concert sold out within hours of the box office opening. Back then, the anticipation was for a wunderkind feted for his showmanship as well as his rags-to-riches backstory. But this time, it is for a mature artist who has earned his spurs the hard way — through critical acclaim.

On Jan 16 at the NCPA, the globetrotting Lang Lang, who has steadfastly retained his Chinese citizenship, will perform Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, 'Emperor', with Zubin Mehta conducting the Bel-

grade Philharmonic Orchestra. Adding to the illustrious lineup, acclaimed violinist Pinchas Zukerman will perform Mozart's Fifth Violin Concerto the previous evening. This will be Lang Lang's second visit and Zukerman's

third to the city (indeed, the country). The violinist, who is also a highly respected violist, was last here 10 years ago.

"We will perform in India for the first time in our over-100-year history," a representative of the orchestra said. "We

share a special bond with Mehta as it was with us that he had his first professional opportunity in 1958 (almost immediately after he won the Liverpool International Conducting Competition that set him on his career path)."

It is difficult to imagine now, but back then the conductor was a figure of mythic aura. Always a man — indeed, a white man — he wielded enormous power: Toscanini, Furtwaengler, Karajan... Mehta was the first non-white conductor to rival their fame and stature. Today, the profession is open to all, including women. What Mehta did for conducting, Lang Lang did for the piano, becoming the first non-white classical pianist to achieve global superstardom. The intellectually rigorous world of classical piano, like chess, was once dominated by

somewhat ascetic and reclusive Russian men — Richter, Gilels, Berman — with the great Sokolov as a living example — though has since expanded to embrace musicians in all their diversity. But few pack in as big a punch as Lang Lang. He began playing piano at three, gained fame as a teen, bridges Eastern and Western culture, collaborates with luxury brands, designs limited-edition watches and performs for audiences ranging from children to world leaders.

The convergence of artists who broke old confines is not the only special aspect of the Jan 15-16 concerts, which also mark milestones. "As Zubin enters his 90th year, it feels especially meaningful for us to begin these celebrations in Mumbai, where his journey began," says Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, founder-trustee of the

Mehli Mehta Music Foundation (MMMMF), which is presenting the concerts, capping its 30th-anniversary year. MMMF has presented Indian audiences with some of the world's great orchestras, including the Vienna Philharmonic, as well as a long line of Western classical legends — all of whom have always waived their hefty fees. "Also, a small but important piece of history is being written, as the Belgrade Philharmonic makes its debut in India."

The orchestra, once the preeminent ensemble of a united Yugoslavia, has lived through tumultuous times: the fracturing of the country after the fall of Communism, fratricidal war and the 1999 NATO bombing of Belgrade, one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities (the air strikes were courageously

condemned on moral grounds by then-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee). Like the besieged Leningrad Philharmonic during World War II, the Belgrade Philharmonic became a symbol of cultural resistance during those dark days. It is thus fitting that the two other main works of the Mumbai concerts will be performed by the resilient Belgraders: Beethoven's monumental Third Symphony and his electrifying Seventh Symphony. While the Third was inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, the Seventh, pulsating with rhythmic energy, can be understood as an affirmation of life, of collective vitality. As Jeejeebhoy says, presenting Lang Lang, Zukerman, Mehta and the Belgrade Philharmonic "is our way of marking the beginning of a very special year".