

# ENCORE

YEARS OF MUSIC

MEHLI MEHTA  
MUSIC  
FOUNDATION

The names appear in the text according to popular usage at the time under discussion.

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# ENCORE

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YEARS OF MUSIC

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MUSIC  
EDUCATION

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# PROLOGUE

**M**y journey with the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation (MMMF) is the stuff that dreams are made of! In 1994, with a small group of friends, we organised five spectacular concerts with Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra across Bombay and Delhi. The fun and excitement we experienced working together led to the establishment of a foundation in Mehli Mehta's name in 1995 to spread an awareness of Western classical music and to honour his legacy. This core group has expanded over the years and today, we are a formidable team with an undeniable presence in Mumbai's cultural landscape.

A flood of memories brings back the intervening years and the many successes we have had. The MMMF has presented over 40 concerts with Zubin Mehta conducting some of the finest orchestras in the world. These include multiple visits of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Australian World Orchestra. Apart from these concerts, we have enriched the cultural life of Mumbai, presenting more

than 300 recitals, chamber music concerts and lectures with a galaxy of international soloists and ensembles.

The Sangat Chamber Music Festival gave Mumbai its first taste of the greatest works of chamber music ever written. First performed in December 1996, Harvey and Ralph de Souza—talented musicians and Bombay boys—took the festival to astonishing heights. We nostalgically recall the amazing performances (almost 90 concerts held over two decades) from the classical, romantic, modern and contemporary repertoire, and, above all, the camaraderie, the bridge games between rehearsals, the parties, the dinners at Mumbai's famous seafood restaurants, the inevitable stomach ailments, shopping for concert outfits that were magically stitched in 24 hours at Colaba's boutiques, and the warm friendships that continue over years. Scores of music students came to rehearsals, met with the musicians and asked for lessons. This was when we realised the desperate need for a music school in Mumbai, and we were determined to address this.

The proceeds from the concerts of Zubin Mehta and the orchestras he brought to Mumbai, along with the donations from generous friends and donors, enabled us to acquire our first premises at Banoo Mansions, Kemps Corner. Later, we rented additional spaces and teaching studios which were equipped with pianos, violins, cellos and violas to cater to our growing needs. Beginning with a mere nine students, the past 30 years have seen thousands of students, including children from low-income communities, passing through our doors.

Globalisation inevitably affected cultural values, tastes, and aspirations among the Indian public; there is a realisation that music transcends national boundaries, paving the way for a new generation of students and listeners. Indian musicians, like the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans, could claim a place in this arena. Many of the students who have graduated from the Foundation have moved on to pursue careers in music. They write to us of the new horizons that are now open to them as a result of the training they received at the MMMF. These young musicians carry the torch that Mehli Mehta lit 90 years ago.

Being at the helm of the Foundation has been a huge responsibility and commitment, but an immensely rewarding adventure. We have had standing ovations, recognition from music organisations and artists worldwide, and grateful students and parents.



Of course, there have been challenges, frustrations and moments of crisis too. Zubin's contribution to the musical life of Mumbai is immeasurable. To demonstrate our thanks and appreciation, the Foundation is honouring him with a new concert series titled 'Zubin Mehta Celebrity Concert' which was launched in November 2024 with a recital by the incomparable violinist Midori.

Our steadfast trustees have given us generous donations, pro bono legal advice and connected us with influential persons in the corporate world as well as in the government. Special thanks to our consistent donors, sponsors, patron members and friends who believe in our cause. As for my fabulous colleagues in the Executive Committee—what can I say? They have cheered me through the rollercoaster ride, silently helping to put together hundreds of concerts, have advised, argued, sold concert tickets in 40°C heat and from a sentry booth outside a South Mumbai college without complaining and with utmost professionalism! Their friendship has kept me bolstered for 30 years. Finally, a million thanks to the dedicated volunteers on our education programme who are super-efficient and caring, our loyal office staff, our inspirational teachers, supportive parents and wonderful children who have made the Foundation a home away from home.

The journey continues...every time I pass a beautiful but derelict building in South Mumbai owned by a Parsi trust, I stop, look at it and wistfully think, "Wouldn't it be the perfect place for a music conservatory?" I will continue to dream and believe it can happen.

**MEHROO JEEJEEBHOY**  
*Founder Trustee*

The tireless work of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation over the past 30 years has undoubtedly spread not only my father's name, but also his hope and dream that there will be opportunities to appreciate, play and study Western classical music in Mumbai.

During these three decades, countless children have been trained in instrumental lessons and participated in the Foundation's five choirs. The Sangat Chamber Music Festival was a landmark in Mumbai's music calendar for 19 years and brought together renowned Indian and international artists. Recitals by both Indian and international musicians were encouraged, sponsored and presented by the MMMF.

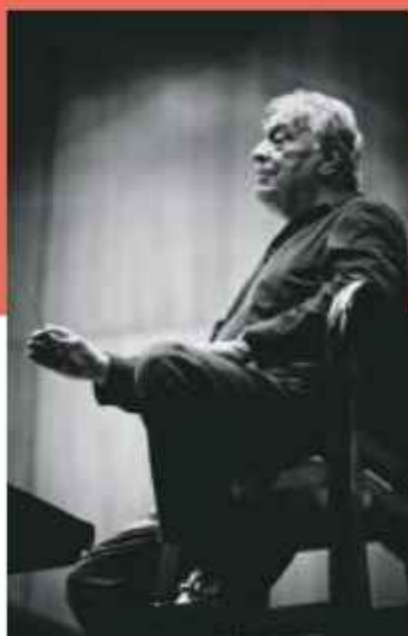
I very much hope that I too have contributed to the cultural life of the city and helped the Foundation by conducting concerts with well-known international orchestras including the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bavarian State Orchestra, Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and so many more. The MMMF has undoubtedly become a cultural heavyweight in Mumbai, and I have witnessed its growth with pride and delight.

The organisation and presentation of over 40 concerts with international orchestras, by the Foundation's small group of women volunteers was always highly professional and very successful. Our visits were characterised by the warmth and generous hospitality of the team at MMMF. I hear again and again from many of these world-class musicians and soloists that their concerts and experiences in India have been unforgettable.

I hope that my father's dream of establishing a love and learning of Western classical music in India will continue to be realised and that it will have an impact on and touch many people for a long time. The work of the MMMF is indispensable for this to happen, and I thank Mehroo Jeejeebhoy and her entire team for their wonderful, unstoppable work. I am convinced that the MMMF has sown a seed that will bloom into many trees for decades to come.

ZUBIN MEHTA







All in the Family: Zubin, Mehli,  
Mervon and Zarin Mehta

My Dear Mehroo,

It is hard to believe that it has already been 30 years during which hundreds of young Indians have benefited from the vision of my father, to establish Western classical music in India. Words cannot begin to express the gratitude of our family—to the Foundation and its many, many volunteers who have honoured his legacy.

**I emphasise that your creativity, dedication and tenacity have been instrumental to the success of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation and its work.**

This is especially relevant today with the recent news of the demise of my father's other great passion and achievement, the American Youth Symphony.

To quote one of my father's favourite admonitions, "*Onward and upward.*"

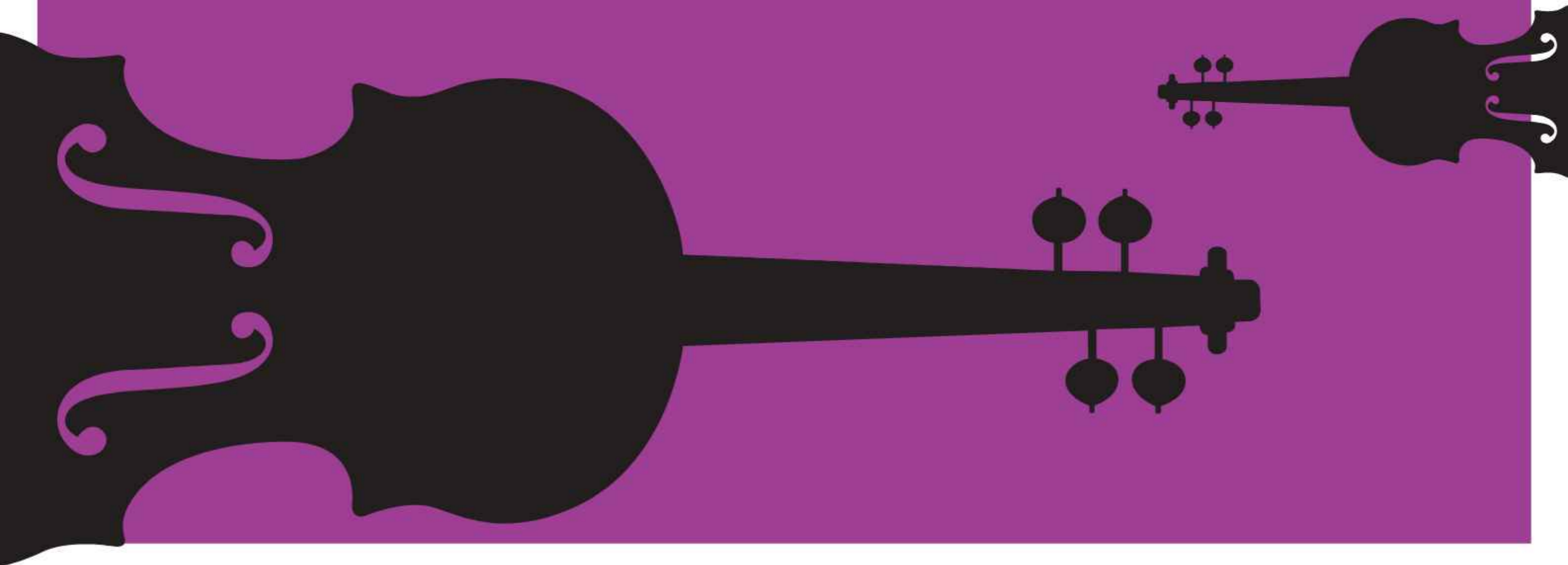
With good wishes to all,

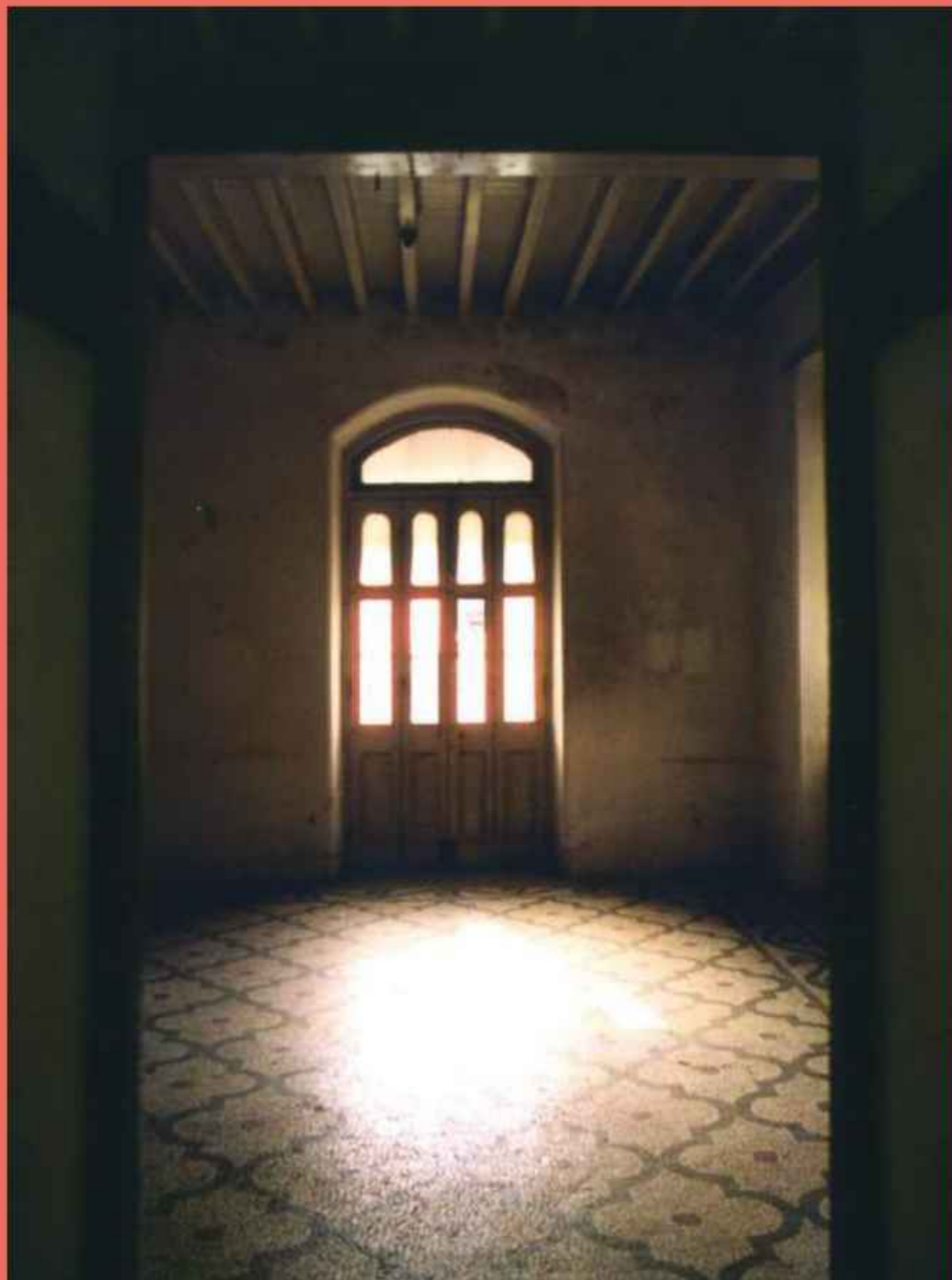
ZARIN MEHTA

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# HISTORY

Small  
Beginnings





The Banoo Mansions premises before restoration

## There are two ways to find the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation in Mumbai.

**Option One:** Use Google Maps. Make your way to Kemps Corner and look around till you see an old building standing aloof from the traffic and chaos. Then head into Banoo Mansion, with its stucco flowers and unexpected cupolas; consult with a security guard and climb the twenty wooden steps to the first-floor premises of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation.

**Option Two:** Follow the music.

The gallop of notes as the viola runs through 'Hunter's Chorus'. The screechy scales executed by a six-year-old who is just getting to know her quarter-size violin.

The magic of young voices coming together in the 'Hymn of the Traveller' from the Rigveda or in 'Everybody Wants to be a Cat' from *The Aristocats*. The interplay of violin and piano as they whirl their way through Spinning Wheel.

The sublime beauty of Midori's violin, the flamboyance of Lang Lang's piano, the vibrancy of Placido Domingo's voice, the drama of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Of the two options, the second is both more fun and fitting. After all, on a regular map of Mumbai, the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation is a mere dot—two modest apartments in an old building. On the music map of the city, however, this little organisation occupies a disproportionately large and significant place.

*"Under the auspices of the Foundation, Bombay came to be treated to great music and great orchestras which otherwise many in the city would never have seen or heard,"* Iqbal Chagla, who was a trustee for 30 years, once said. Adds Pratapaditya Pal, a patron member, *"It has been a great pleasure and honour to be associated with the Foundation and to see how it has developed into a major Western classical music institution in India."*

Over 30 years, the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation has presented more than 40 concerts during which Zubin Mehta has conducted

great world orchestras in Mumbai and Delhi. It has also brought a rich array of chamber music to the city and organised over 300 solo recitals, concerts and lectures by international stars.

Moreover, thousands of children have climbed those twenty wooden steps to learn the art of listening and performing. To master string instruments and the piano. And to engage with Western classical music in various ways.

In keeping with its central belief—Beyond Boundaries—the Foundation has brought together international musicians, students and music lovers. *“The Foundation builds friendships way beyond just learning to play an instrument,”* says Bernhard Steinruecke, a patron member who has been a part of the MMMF journey since 1994. *“It brings together partners for life...”*

Indeed, the story of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation is not just about a brick-and-mortar organisation but about horsehair, rosin dust and friendships across continents. It is not just about grand concertos but about the calluses that go into every performance. It is not just about velvet evenings but about the battles unfolding backstage—the tussles with obdurate bureaucrats, the cancelled flights and unseasonal rain, the unpredictable attacks of Bombay Belly and the even more unpredictable rules produced by customs officials.

It is also a story that illustrates the maxim, “Small beginnings make great endings”. In this particular case, the small beginning was a social encounter during an orchestra rehearsal in Tel Aviv in 1994.

Zubin Mehta had long hoped to perform in India with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, of which he is the Music Director for Life. When India established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, his dream started to feel achievable—but it was two years later that it turned into a five-concert reality.

*“I had gone with a friend to Israel, and I knew Zubin, so we went to meet him during an orchestra rehearsal in Tel Aviv,”* says Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, founder trustee of the MMMF and an accomplished pianist. *“And he said, ‘It is my dream to bring my orchestra to India. Will you be able to handle it if I bring the whole orchestra?’ And I said ‘Yes, of course’.”*

Mehroo’s response was born, not out of experience but out of

*We are happy to be supporting the MMMF, especially in the area of education for underprivileged children in Western classical music. We fondly remember the very successful house concert that the Foundation organised for us at our beach home in Kashid with a recital by the pianist Kasparas Uinskas and hope to do more of the same!*

**SUGANDHA AND JAI HIREMATH**  
Patron members

ignorance about what lay ahead. *“I was a bit naive, I just thought to myself, why not, why shouldn’t we do it?”* she laughs, adding that it soon became obvious that this was not a venture she could undertake alone. *“I got in touch with my friends, and I said, ‘We’ve got this project, will you help me?’ They all said, ‘But we don’t know anything about music.’ And I said, ‘You don’t have to; we will figure it out together.’”*

*“Mehroo rang up and said, ‘Do you want to come over? We are going to organise a concert?’”* says Zareen Bilimoria, trustee and executive committee member, about that first get-together on the verandah of Mehroo’s Kemp’s Corner home. *“Most of us didn’t know each other then, but over the years we have become close.”*

The group that came together comprised twelve women and one man. Weekly meetings were held in Mehroo’s house, and the committee worked with “a little portable typewriter”. *“We used to send letters and faxes back and forth,”* says Mehroo. *“In those days there was no email or anything like that. It’s a miracle that we put it together.”*

Over the next few months, the group found itself dealing with government departments, security arrangements and bewildering questions. How do we transport a 120-member orchestra between hotel and venue while keeping security in mind? What do we do about the frogs at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Delhi? How does one create enough green rooms in an auditorium that is primarily meant for science conferences?

Daunting though they were, these challenges did not defeat Mehroo and her friends. They created green rooms by building a vast shamiana outside the Homi Bhabha Auditorium and cleaning out the backstage “storage cages”. They employed an Australian company to set up a stage in Brabourne Stadium, which provided acoustics worthy of the musicians on stage. And by hook or by crook they ensured that Zubin Mehta, violinist Itzhak Perlman and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra were able to keep their date with India.

The first of the five concerts was held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in New Delhi on November 27, 1994. And from the moment that Zubin Mehta raised his baton for the national anthem, the 7,000-strong audience was spellbound. The remaining concerts were held in Mumbai, where fans queued up for two nights to get hold of tickets.

*My own introduction to Western music was through compulsory attendance at the chapels in missionary boarding schools in the eastern hill stations of India in the 1940s and early 1950s. If I am not mistaken, there was a symphony orchestra in Calcutta in those days. I do not know when it closed down and so it was a matter of great joy to learn in the 1990s that Bombay was going to keep the tradition of Western classical music alive in India.*

**PRATAPADITYA PAL**  
Patron Member



“

***I remember my visit to Mumbai with Zubin and The Israel Philharmonic [Orchestra]. The audience was so sophisticated, warm and enthusiastic. It was such a pleasure to play for them. I remember being hosted by local classical-music lovers. Such a wonderful, memorable experience. I shall never forget.***

**ITZHAK PERLMAN**  
VIOLINIST

”



**I** met Mehli Mehta in 1984 when he came to conduct the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. My professional career was inspired, guided and shaped by Zubin Mehta. All my years with the orchestra were next to Zubin. Therefore, I was [an] aware and silent partner in building the Foundation.

The orchestra's visits involved giving masterclasses and lessons to the young students. I was present at these classes and saw the promise for MMMF's future. Here we are 30 years later, looking forward to the next 30 years.

**AVI SHOSHANI**

The Secretary General of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra was instrumental in bringing the Orchestra to India and continues to advise and support the Foundation



(above) Itzhak Perlman, Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, Avi Shoshani and Zubin Mehta at the Brabourne Stadium concert in 1994



**The Founding Board of MMMF:**  
Shyam Benegal, Zareen Bilimoria,  
Iqbal Chagla, Zubin Mehta,  
Mehli Mistri, Mehroo Jeejeebhoy  
and Rashmi Poddar

“Zubin returned like a conquering hero,” says Mehroo. The New York Times echoed this when it described the grand finale of the tour: “With a rousing encore of Johann Strauss Sr.’s ‘Radetzky March’ that had a stadium audience of 7,000 people chanting for more, Zubin Mehta put the finishing touch on Saturday night to a long-standing ambition: bringing the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra to India, and better still to Bombay, the hometown Mr. Mehta left 40 years ago to begin his musical career.”

By December 4, the last encore was played, the violins and flutes had been packed away and the musicians had departed. Instead of feeling relief and spending a weekend in bed, Mehroo and her team felt flat and restless. “I remember asking, ‘So now we won’t meet again?’” says Zareen. “We had gotten so used to it.”

Once the dues were paid and commitments were met, it transpired that there was still a respectable balance remaining—and the members of the bus-booking-menu-planning-green-room-erecting team volunteered their services once more.

It was agreed that the money should be used to establish an organisation to promote Western classical music in Mumbai, and it seemed only fitting that the organisation be named after Mehli Mehta. Not just because Zubin Mehta had often wished that “there was something in my father’s name in the city”, but also because of the role that Mehli Mehta had played in the musical life of Mumbai between 1930 and 1955.

On September 27, 1995, a trust deed was signed, and the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation was born “to foster, encourage Music in all its aspects”. The freshly minted foundation announced its

It was in September 1995 that Mehroo Jeejeebhoy took me aback when, at a dinner, she asked whether I would be a trustee of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation, which she had just established for the propagation of Western classical music.

I didn’t know whether she was under some mistaken notion that I had great knowledge of that genre of music, because my preferred genre was jazz, not Western classical. My experience of Western classical was only a passing reference, and when I mentioned this to Mehroo, she said,

*I don’t want somebody that is familiar with Western classical music but someone who will be upright and decisive as a trustee, and I think you fit the bill.*

So I agreed, and there began for me not only the bonhomie of my fellow trustees who were from different walks of life but also a learning experience and the beginning of an appreciation and love for this genre of music.

**IQBAL CHAGLA** — *Trustee till his death in 2025*



Zubin and Nancy Mehta and Mehroo Jeejeebhoy light the ceremonial lamp to inaugurate the Foundation’s first office



(below) Tehmina and Mehli Mehta  
(right) The legendary violinist  
Jascha Heifetz with the Mehta family



presence in the city with a chamber music concert called *Sangat*. “We had no clear plans, and the idea of a music school hadn’t even crossed my mind at that point,” says Mehroo, explaining that in the early years, the Foundation was run out of her house. “There was very little space. The files were piled on top of the cupboards, and we had one part-time secretary.”

The Foundation functioned on pure enthusiasm. This was dampened somewhat when Mehli Mehta—who was then 87 years old and living in Los Angeles—said that he was reluctant to give his name to a small organisation in Mumbai. The violinist and conductor had left Mumbai in 1955 and had little faith in the quality of music that would be performed there.

This scepticism vanished when he received a cassette with a recording of the first *Sangat* concerts. Mehli Mehta was impressed by the high standards and expressed joy that his “*dear hometown had rekindled the flame*” he had lit all those decades ago.

Mehli Mehta’s initial hesitation was an outcome of his own struggle as a classical violinist in the Bombay of the 1930s and 1940s.



(top) Edigio Vergo (cello), Walter Kaufmann (piano) and Mehli Mehta (violin) perform at the Willingdon Gymkhana in pre-Independence Bombay

(above) The Bombay String Quartet with Mehli Mehta, Adrian de Mello, George Lester and Rusi Mody

Unlike the hundreds of students who stream into the music school that bears his name, Mehli Mehta had little access to formal music training while he was growing up. Well before the age of YouTube tutorials and Coursera, he managed to master skills without teacher, curriculum or exams.

Born in a big Parsi family, Mehli Mehta fell in love with the violin as a child. *"My father was a trained accountant, a BCom from Sydenham College and a self-taught violinist,"* Zubin Mehta told *The Times of India* in 2008. *"In the 1920s, when he was in his teens, he heard the great violinist Jascha Heifetz and he was so inspired listening to him that he bought himself a violin and, with a little help from an Italian teacher, he learned to play it."*

Mehli Mehta later visited London, where he trained at the Trinity College of Music before returning to Mumbai, eager to bring Schubert and Beethoven to his city. In the 1930s, Bombay was a city resounding with jazz and swing. *Alam Ara*, India's first sound motion picture had been released in 1931. The talkie featured seven songs, and Bombay got its first taste of Bollywood music.

Undeterred by the fact that there was little happening in the world of Western classical music, Mehli Mehta decided to form his own orchestra. He auditioned the musicians who were performing in the city's restaurants and hotels and established the Bombay Symphony Orchestra in 1935 and the Bombay String Quartet in 1940.

This entailed more than merely playing the violin and learning the art of conducting an orchestra. *"Mehli shed blood and put in thousands of rupees to make music and to make people Western-music conscious,"* his wife Tehmina later recalled. *"He would get up very early in the morning and go to the Christian musicians' koors (residential clubs), make them get up, wait in a taxi or car till each one dressed and went with him to a rehearsal that started at 8 or 8.30 am... When he formed his sextet to play at the Taj Mahal Hotel, Yacht Club and Byculla Club, the group had to dress identically. The other musicians could not afford to pay for special suits. Mehli paid for all of them. And we were by no means millionaires. Because of low attendance at concert performances, we either broke even or more often than not made a loss."*

As soon as World War II ended, Mehli Mehta made his way to New York on a Tata scholarship. He left his two young sons and wife behind but returned to Bombay after relearning the violin.

In many senses, aficionados of Western classical music were blessed with the concerts that Bombay had on offer. Since childhood, I grew up with the names of organisations run by dedicated volunteers who brought the best of the West to Bombay. The Bombay Madrigal Singers Organisation (BMSO) staged full operas and had performances by Wilhelm Kempf, Herbert von Karajan and the Vienna Philharmonic, Igor Oistrakh, and Arthur Rubenstein. There was the Time & Talents Club that staged so many fine concerts and several smaller symphony and chamber orchestras. These kept us happily entertained in the various auditoria, movie theatres and hotel ballrooms where performances were held.

Then there was the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation which came into its own in the 1990s with so many performances by the best talent from the West, including pianists Lang Lang and Yuja Wang. Of course, every few years, we had the privilege of homecoming concerts by Zubin Mehta and some of the most outstanding orchestras that we could have hoped to have play for us. In addition, the Foundation organised many talks and lectures on music in their small salon at Banoo Mansions, which were a delight.

*The annual Sangat Chamber Music Festival saw the arrival of players of Indian origin spending time training the students of the Foundation and in putting on a series of concerts of the highest quality every December.*

Perhaps the most amusing grouse of long-standing local concertgoers is that planning trips to foreign lands is becoming difficult as there is so much music now happening in Mumbai. Finding the gaps among the programmes in the city for visits to concerts abroad then becomes a chore.

**DR. JEHANGIR SORABJEE** — *Doctor of medicine, music lover and photographer*

*I recall so many seminal formative moments. It was a revelation to hear world-class orchestras that Maestro Mehta brought to India. Plus, the Sangat Chamber Music Festival concerts and master classes were an inspiration for young musicians.*

*In 2008, my wife Chryselle and I set up Child's Play India Foundation, a music charity working to empower disadvantaged children through classical music education to the highest possible standard. I am happy to say the MMMF has extended its friendship to us from the start. They have provided teachers at no cost and opened their doors to us for teacher-training courses.*

**DR LUIS DIAS**

Physician, musician, founder and Project Director of Child's Play India Foundation

*"Once again there was music at home," recounted Zubin Mehta. "He opened new horizons for me, including the reading of music scores."*

The highlight of those years was the visit of violinist Yehudi Menuhin in 1952. Menuhin had volunteered to play concerts across India to raise money for victims of the 1951 famine. Mehli Mehta was asked to help with the arrangements and to travel across India with the great violinist.

Menuhin also agreed to accompany the Bombay Symphony Orchestra, and it was during these rehearsals that 15-year-old Zubin got his first taste of conducting.

Nevertheless, Mehli Mehta was realising that Bombay held few opportunities and in 1955 he left the city for good. *"The Orchestra was getting—slowly but surely—into fine shape under the inspired baton of Mehli Mehta,"* wrote *The Times of India* music critic dolefully. *"And now Mehli Mehta is going away."*

Mehli Mehta's first job overseas was as concertmaster of Sir John Barbirolli's Halle Orchestra in the UK, after which he moved to the US and joined the Curtis Quartet as the second violinist. In 1964, he founded the American Youth Symphony Orchestra and remained its conductor for 34 seasons, where he was both feared and loved by his students.

There are many stories about Mehli Mehta's attention to detail, his unwillingness to permit silly mistakes and his exuberance and agitation while conducting. *"My seat in orchestra was directly in front of him, literally under his nose,"* recalled Abhijit Sengupta, who was a part of the American Symphony Orchestra in the 1990s, in an interview with *TimeOut*. *"I'll never forget his wife, Tehmina asking me, 'Abhijit, if he falls off the podium, please promise me you will catch him.'"*

The American Symphony Orchestra flourished under Mehli Mehta, and many of his students went on to join major orchestras around the world. He conducted his last concert at the age of 90, during which he suffered a heart attack.

Of course, Mehli Mehta was as strict with himself as he had always been with his students. Instead of stopping, he continued conducting till the entire work was completed, and only then stepped off the stage to seek medical help.

Given this remarkable story of passion and determination, it is little wonder that Mehli Mehta qualifies as the patron saint of Western classical music in Mumbai.

In the fledgling years, my daughter Amy's appreciation for music was awakened by the training offered at the Foundation, and our family soon became patrons of the Foundation, a relationship that has endured till date. We cannot forget the joy of interacting with Maestro Zubin himself and the opportunity of hearing artists like Daniel Barenboim and Lang Lang.

*Our best wishes go out to this community that has given the children of Mumbai constructive musical appreciation, so important for their cognitive development.*

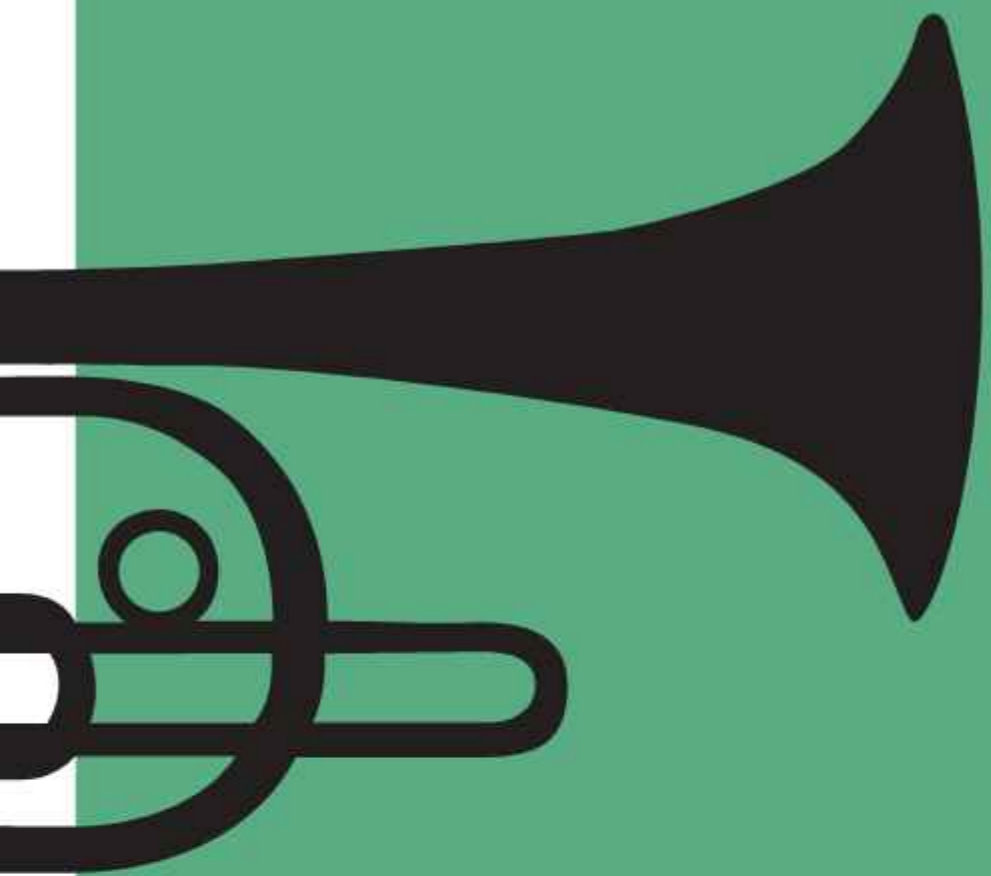
**THE VATCHA FAMILY** — Bai Alamai and Seth Ardeshir Talati and Seth Sarosh B Mody Charity Trust

**Beginning on a High Note:** the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Zubin Mehta performed to a 7000-strong audience at the Brabourne Stadium in 1994



*With all our love & gratitude to administration*  
*Zubin 1994*

*Handwritten signatures and names of donors and patrons, including: Zeli Glass, Salman, P. Shankar, M. DAVIS, Ari Shm, and many others.*

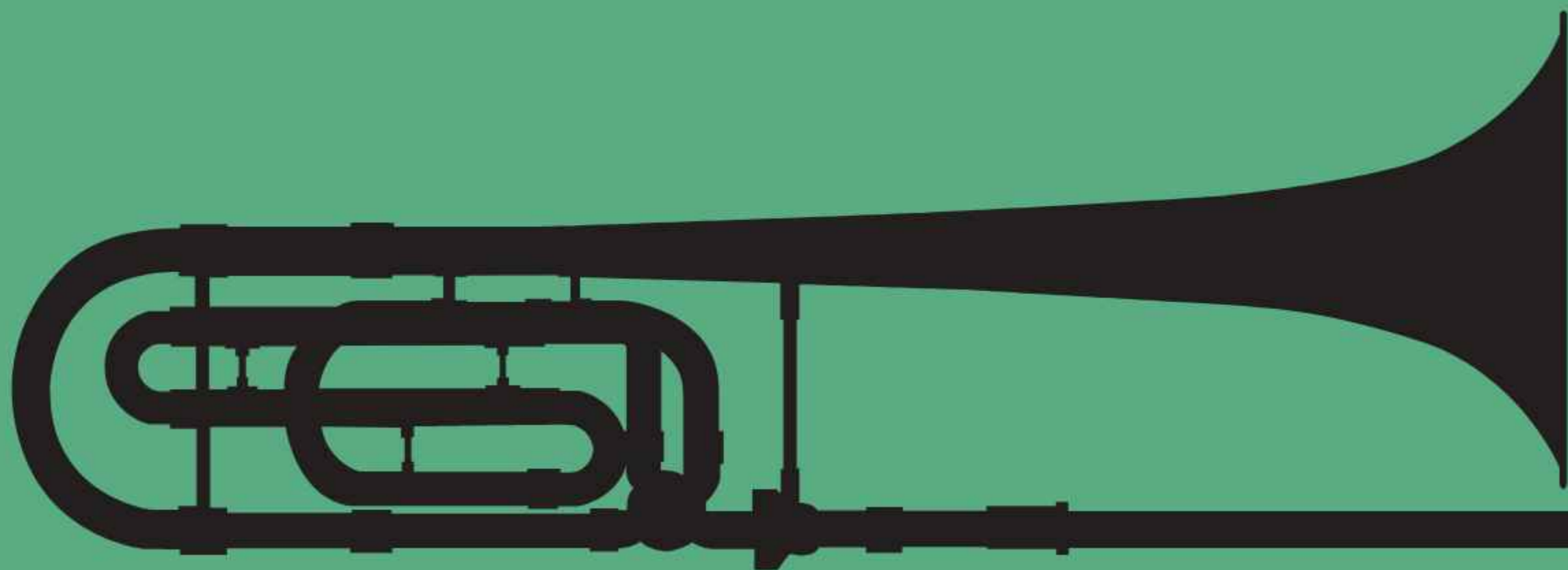


2



SANGAT

A  
Coming  
Together





**A Season of Smiles:** Inon Barnatan (piano), Jennifer Gilbert (violin) and Eric Kim (cello) perform at Sangat

**B**rahm's Clarinet Trio. Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings. And bacteria-laced bhel puri. These were some of the ingredients that went into Sangat, Mumbai's first chamber music festival, that took place between 1996 and 2014.

Sangat was a unique addition to the Western classical music scene, and brought incredible musicians and concerts to Mumbai every December. Sparkling though these performances were, it was the goings-on behind the stage that were even more significant. Over two hectic weeks, the visiting musicians worked intensively with local musicians. They conducted classes for music teachers and students—and managed to both instruct and inspire.

Even today, over ten years after the curtain went down on the festival, Sangat's impact is still evident. Those long-ago masterclasses were the forerunners for the impressive music education programme that the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation runs today. The Colaba Causeway shop-athons and post-concert parties forged friendships across continents. And by demonstrating that there was an enthusiastic audience, Sangat enabled the burgeoning of Western classical music in Mumbai.

*"Sangat, for me, was the most memorable annual event in our musical calendar,"* enthuses Zareen Bilimoria, about the happy chaos that ensued every winter when musicians from around the world made their way to Mumbai. *"Those were exciting times as we lost ourselves in days of endless music-making."*

Sangat was conceived soon after the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation was established in 1995. The Foundation wanted to make its presence felt in the city but lacked the funds to splash on huge concerts. Which was when Mehroo Jeejeebhoy came up with her brainwave—a chamber music festival that would largely feature Indian musicians working abroad.

Nostalgia, emotional blackmail and promises of Parsi Dairy dahi were employed to coax the unsuspecting musicians. *"Many decades ago, whilst enjoying a typically delicious lunch in Mumbai, our dearest friend Mehroo Jeejeebhoy cajoled my brother Ralph and myself to start a Western classical music festival in the city,"* recalls Harvey de Souza, violinist and co-director of the Sangat Chamber Music Festival. *"With her affectionately scolding tone, she pointed out that while we regularly returned to Mumbai to visit family and friends, and eagerly add inches to our waistlines, we didn't express equal enthusiasm for the musical*

life of Mumbai! Her most persuasive argument was that growing up, we had benefitted from the steady stream of concerts at the Patkar Hall (and the delicious chutney sandwiches, washed down by a cool bottle of Mangola)."

The idea caught the imagination of the de Souza brothers—as well as of others like pianist Marialena Fernandes, singer Patricia Rozario and violinist Indira Koch. As pianist Fali Pavri, who describes himself as a homing pigeon, once remarked, "Even though it's difficult to get away, playing for a home audience makes it worthwhile. I go back feeling nourished in some way."

Once the musicians acquiesced, the other pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Air India agreed to sponsor the tickets. Tata Theatre and rooms at the YMCA were booked. Nira Benegal, an MMMF committee member, approached her friend, the writer Shama Zaidi, for an appropriate name for the new festival.

Zaidi suggested Sangat, a Hindi word that means "a coming together".

The name proved prophetic. In December 1996, the invited musicians arrived in Mumbai. Local musicians—members of the Bombay Chamber Orchestra, musicians who played for Bollywood, senior students—auditioned. A chamber orchestra was put together.

The Maharaja of Melody: an Air India hoarding welcomes Sangat to the city



Behind the Scenes: parties and picnics, friendship and fabulous food

# GLIMPSES OF SANGAT



*(above)* Jagdish Mistry and Patricia Rozario

*(right)* Dan Zhu, Katerina Nazarova, Olga Kern, Mikhail Istomin, Manabu Suzuki



*(left)* Dan Zhu, Jim Ross, Olga Kern

*(below)* Mia Cooper, Silvia Simionescu, Wolfgang Schmidt



Jennifer Orchard, Indira Koch,  
Silvia Simionescu, Fiona Bonds,  
William Schofield, Eric Kim



Marialena Fernandes, Fali Pavri,  
Pallavi Mahidhara, Wolfgang  
Schmidt, Naomi Boole-Masterson



*I honestly cannot believe that 30 years have passed since Mehroo Jeejeebhoy first floated the idea of starting a music foundation in Mumbai in honour of Mehli Mehta. I was privileged to be closely involved with helping the Foundation find teachers, many of whom have been associated with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland where I work. It was also my great pleasure to be part of the Sangat Chamber Music Festival for many years. Sangat was always a highlight of my musical calendar, a chance to meet up with so many friends, several of whom came from the same background as me, having begun their musical studies in India and then*

*settled abroad. It felt so satisfying to be able to return and share our music with the community we loved. One of my fondest memories of all those years coming to Sangat is the absolutely delicious lunches that the kind ladies at the Foundation provided for all of us!*

*I have been deeply touched by the great work that the Foundation has been doing over the years and the thousands of children that have benefitted from it. Whenever I am in Mumbai, I always plan a visit to Banoo Mansions to hear and work with some of the young musicians that it nurtures.*

**FALI PAVRI**  
Pianist



Jimmy Lim, Jennifer Gilbert,  
Eric Kim, Garfield Jackson,  
Karla Maria Rodrigues

After ten days of intensive rehearsals, it was time to perform—and to find answers to the critical questions: Would chamber music manage to fill a theatre in Mumbai? Would the audiences that queued up for tickets to Zubin Mehta's concerts land up for less hyped performances?

The big day arrived. As the Tata Theatre resounded with the joyful cacophony of instruments being tuned, the organisers breathed a sigh of relief. The theatre was full of people and happy anticipation.

The concert unfolded. The performers received a standing ovation. And a tradition was born.

For 19 Decembers, Sangat took place with metronomic regularity. *"From the very beginning there has been a fantastic interaction between the visiting musicians and the local musicians and the students,"* Harvey de Souza stated in 2006, recalling that during first few editions of Sangat, the lessons and classes would take place in any available corner in the corridors, hallways and gardens of the NCPA.



Ulrich Poschner, Yael Lalande,  
Shani Diluka, Silvia Simionescu,  
William Schofield

Though free and often impromptu, those lessons had a huge impact on western classical musicians in Mumbai. *"I eagerly looked forward to December each year. I used to come with all four of my instruments—violin, viola, cello and double bass. Harvey and Ralph de Souza and Carla Rodrigues were my string teachers; Howard Penny and Wolfgang Schmidt inspired my cello playing; and Lynda Houghton, my double bass teacher,"* says Lavine Da Costa, a former violin teacher with the MMMF. Adds Gopal Chakravarthy, who taught the violin at the MMMF between 2007 and 2023, *"My first interaction with the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation was when I did a few classes with the visiting musicians during Sangat."*

In 2001, the Foundation acquired a small apartment in Banoo Mansion and workshops for children and adults were held in the new premises. *"We wanted people who have the knowledge to be able to share it,"* says Mehroo. *"Our education programme got a huge fillip from Sangat, when all these great musicians would come and conduct free masterclasses."*

The fact that the core team returned year after year gave Sangat a sense of continuity. While the new invitees gave each season



Harvey de Souza, Marc Neikrug,  
Ralph de Souza, Eric Kim

The Sangat Festival was blessed with an incredible array of musicians from all over the world, sharing their talents and musicianship with the extraordinarily supportive Mumbai audience.

*Without doubt, the single-most unique aspect of the Sangat Festival was the wonderful relationships formed with everyone involved, creating a real sense of family. For this alone, I feel incredibly privileged to have been part of it.*

**HARVEY DE SOUZA —**  
*Violinist and co-director of the Sangat Chamber Music Festival*

(top) Ralph de Souza

(bottom) Harvey de Souza



a unique flavour. That rehearsals were announced by the newspapers—for example, “Rehearsals for the Dvorak String Quartet are open to the public from 2.30 to 5 pm today”—and serve as a reminder of the role that Sangat played in the cultural life of Mumbai.

Sangat, though, was not just about rehearsals and concerts. It was equally about parties and pashmina shawls, jaunts to Trishna and the Elephanta Caves, finding babysitters for a violinist who had flown in with her little children. *“Our lunch breaks were spent outdoors under umbrellas in the winter sun, enjoying biryani, jalebis, gulab jamuns, and the famous Parsi Dairy Farm dahi in earthenware bowls. Stories were shared, there was laughter, a game of bridge here, a sunbather there,”* says Zareen, recounting the tale of the Chowpatty excursion during which the musicians sampled beachside bhel... with unfortunate results.

*“That didn’t end very well, with many in physical distress the next day. The bassoonist had to leave the concert midway through a piece. But the cellist, Howard Penny, picked up his part and filled in, continuing as though nothing happened. The viola played the cello, the violin the viola, the cello the double base! The concert went on without a hitch and the audience applauded without spotting the difference.”*

Despite its success, though, Sangat was becoming increasingly difficult to organise. Sponsorships were drying up. Theatres and rehearsal spaces were expensive. The musicians’ accommodation was upgraded from the YMCA to the CCI and then to the Taj. Also, as more Western classical music made its way to the city, Sangat became one of numerous Western classical music events.

In 2015, the Foundation took the pragmatic but heartbreaking decision to discontinue the chamber music festival and use the money to bolster its music education programme. Nevertheless, an entire decade after the last season, the memories, music and magic linger on.



“

*My many visits for the Sangat Festival were always such musical highlights. We had extraordinary musicians from all over the world with some added personal challenges, including slipping seamlessly on stage to sight-read the bassoon part of the last two movements of the Schubert octet in the concert, when the actual bassoonist was suddenly taken a bit poorly. I also sang (in the loosest terms!) the ‘Queen of the Night’ aria for a very private audience and coordinated a Bollywood dance routine that evening.*

*Being immersed in the life of the city was such a privilege. From a personal tour of the Elephanta Island, to a private presentation of Indian classical music and dance with amazing performers, to being invited to a music recording session at the Bollywood studios, to being welcomed into peoples’ homes—the warmest and most enriching memories for a lifetime!*

HOWARD PENNY  
CELLIST

”



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Jennifer Gilbert, Harvey de Souza,  
Emi Ohi Resnick, Ulrich Poschner,  
Robert Smissen, Carla Rodrigues,  
Raman Ramakrishnan,  
Johannes Moser



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Harvey de Souza, Marc Neikrug,  
Manabu Suzuki, Raman Ramakrishnan

VIOLIN

Ken Aiso  
 Enrico Alvares  
 Adele Anthony  
 Farhad Billimoria  
 Simon Blendis  
 Maria Cooper  
 Mia Cooper  
 Ellen de Pasquale  
 Harvey de Souza  
 Sigrun Edvaldsdottir  
 Julia Fischer  
 Katharine Gowers  
 So Jin Kim  
 Tamiko Kobayashi  
 Indira Koch  
 Yael Lalande  
 Genevieve Laurenceau  
 Julian Leaper  
 Cho Liang Lin  
 Gabrielle Lester  
 Maya Magub  
 Anthony Marwood  
 Catherine Menneson  
 Jennifer Michiko Gilbert  
 Jagdish Mistry  
 Priya Mitchell  
 Katerina Nazarova  
 Emi Ohi Resnick

Jennifer Orchard  
 Keith Pasco  
 Helen Paterson  
 Ulrich Poschner  
 Jason Posnock  
 Helena Rathbone  
 Ivo Sedlacek  
 Gil Shaham  
 Maya Shankar  
 Jacqueline Shave  
 Semmy Stahlhammer  
 Axel Strauss  
 Andrew Watkinson  
 Carolin Widmann  
 Dan Zhu

VIOLA

Fiona Bonds  
 Catherine Bradshaw  
 Ralph de Souza  
 Alan Gilbert  
 Annette Isserlis  
 Garfield Jackson  
 Vivek Kamath  
 Carla Maria Rodrigues  
 Jean-Pascal Oswald  
 Keith Pascoe  
 Igor Polesitsky  
 Melissa Reardon

Abhijit Sengupta  
 Silvia Simionescu  
 Robert Smissen  
 Anne Soren  
 Manabu Suzuki

CELLO

Naomi Boole-Masterson  
 Rowena Calvert  
 Julia Cleworth  
 Caroline Dale  
 Evan Drachman  
 Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt  
 Timothy Gill  
 Nicolas Hartmann  
 Timothy Hugh  
 Mikhail Istomin  
 Xenia Jankovic  
 Eric Kim  
 Joely Koos  
 Florian Lauridon  
 Robert Max  
 Alisha Mody  
 Simon Morris  
 Johannes Moser  
 Stephen Orton  
 Howard Penny  
 Jerome Pernoo  
 Raman Ramakrishnan

Christoph Richter  
 William Schofield  
 Anjali Tanna  
 Bjorg Vaernes  
 Johan van Iersel  
 David Waterman  
 Kajsa William-Olsson

DOUBLE BASS

Lynda Houghton

FLUTE

Dilshad Billimoria

OBOE

Ruth Contractor

CLARINET

Matthew Hunt  
 Nina Jansen  
 Andrew Marriner

BASSOON

Fiona Bryan

HORN

Jim Ross  
 Stephen Stirling

TRUMPET

Nicholas Martin

HARP

Skaila Kanga

GUITAR

Alexander-Sergei Ramirez

PIANO

Sheila Arnold  
 Suzanna Artzt  
 Inon Barnatan  
 Shani Diluka  
 Marialena Fernandes  
 Olga Kern  
 Pallavi Mahidhara  
 Pervez Mody  
 Paul Stewart  
 Marc Neikrug  
 Fali Pavri  
 Mark Troop

VOICE

Raymond Armstrong  
 Nigel Brookes  
 Deirdre Lobo  
 Patricia Rozario  
 Lisa Tyrrell  
 Sorab Wadia

COMPOSERS

Sandeep Bhagwati  
 Vanraj Bhatia  
 Alex Heffes

CHOIR

Paranjoti Chorus  
 Singing Tree Choir

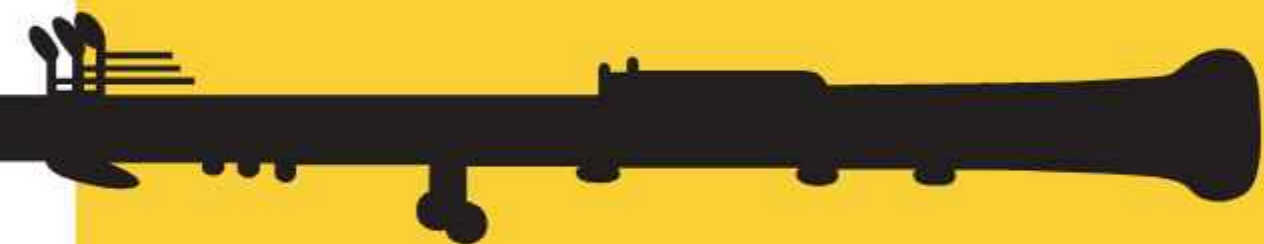
ARTISTIC DIRECTION

Harvey de Souza  
 Ralph de Souza  
 Mehroo Jeejeebhoy

3

# ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

Of Broken Strings,  
Thunderstorms  
and Standing Ovarions



Every Zubin Mehta concert in India comes with its lore. Tales about the dazzling musicians who travel to Mumbai with the Maestro. About the chilli powder that he carries in a little silver box and sprinkles on bland fare even in the fanciest restaurant. About his visits to his old neighbourhood in Cuffe Parade.

There are stories about his love for the city of his birth. (*"Landing in Mumbai,"* he has often said, *"gives me goosepimples."*)

Of the traditional Parsi dinner that the MMMF always hosts for the members of the orchestra at the Jeejeebhoy Dadabhoy Agiary (complete with patra ni machi, mutton pulao, lagan nu custard and a round of applause for Tanaz Godiwalla, the indisputable queen of Parsi cuisine).

And of his concerts that seem to get sold out even before the counter opens. (*"Schubert is suddenly hotter than October,"* Nina Martyris wrote in *The Times of India* in 2001. *"Last week chauffeurs and peons were dispatched to camp outside the Jamshed Bhabha Opera House all night to get those coveted tickets, the Mehli Mehta Committee was swamped with supplicatory calls, sponsors unplugged their phones. Every string, musical or otherwise, was pulled, mostly to no avail. As the queues got longer, so did the faces."*)

Given that Zubin Mehta has returned regularly to India since 1995, the "fabulous ladies at the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation" have dozens of anecdotes to share. Here are some of the highlights, lowlights and most-anxious-moment-of-the-tour-lights:

**The Two Masters:** No visit to Mumbai is complete without the traditional Parsi dinner held at the Colaba Agiary and catered by master chef Tanaz Godiwalla

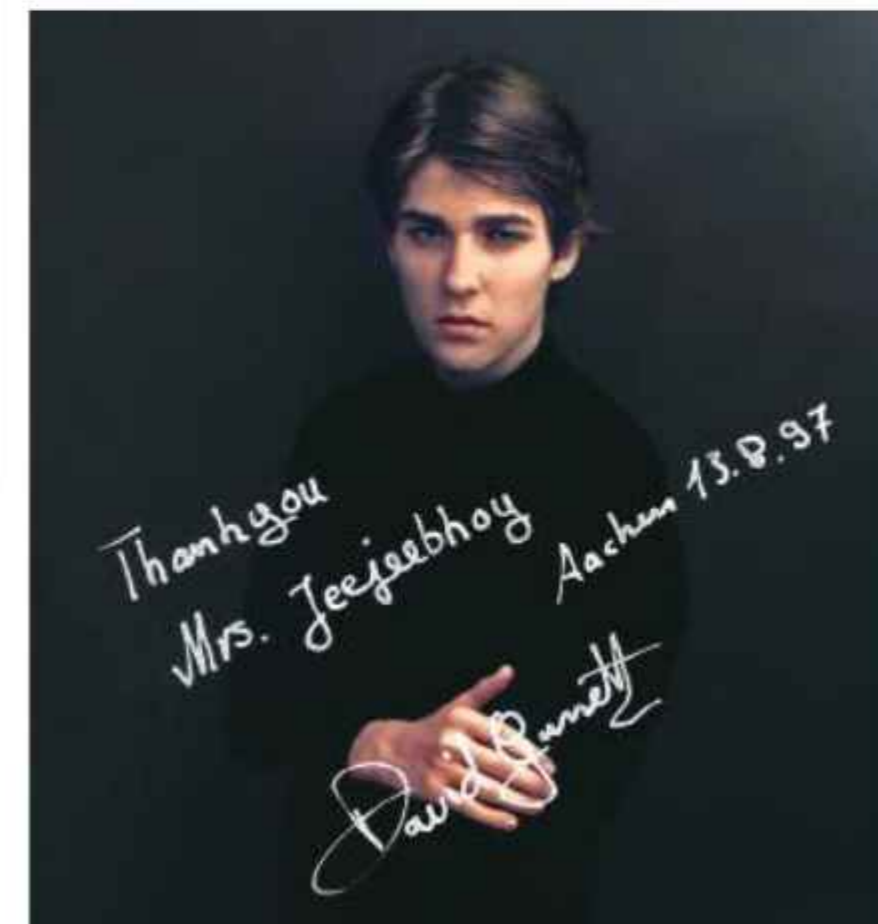


India was celebrating 50 years of Independence and Zubin Mehta joined in with zest—and with the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra. The Delhi concert took place in the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex and the Foundation had to deal with poor acoustics, omnipresent pigeons, crackling walkie-talkies and noisy VVIPs entering and exiting the venue throughout the performance. *"But none of this prepared us for what was to happen the next morning when we were to depart with the Orchestra for Mumbai,"* says Rashmi Poddar, Trustee and MMMF committee member, adding that the group had already boarded the aircraft when the captain announced that all flights had been suspended due to an Air Controllers' strike.

*"The Mumbai concert was the next day, and tickets had been sold out. For 36 hours we waited, tense and apprehensive. And then the gods—and Nusli Wadia—intervened! The Mumbai concert was rescheduled for the following day and the Orchestra, their instruments and we were given priority on the first flight out of Delhi. All landed and sped to the Colaba Agiary for the traditional Parsi bhonu that Zubin hosted for the Orchestra. We will never forget this adventure!"*



Violinist David Garrett, one of the first students to study under celebrated Israeli-American violinist Itzhak Perlman at the Juilliard School in New York, was only 17-years-old when he performed in Mumbai and Delhi with the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra. Today, he is a superstar, having pioneered a new genre of crossover music in which he combines virtuoso violin music with current pop music



The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Zubin Mehta make time for a group photo in between rehearsals at The Jamshed Bhabha Theatre

2001

Four years later, Zubin Mehta returned with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and a glorious programme that included Symphonic Suite: Scheherazade, Opus 35 by Rimsky Korsakov and Rosamunde by Schubert. While the city was bemoaning the lack of tickets for his concerts, Zubin Mehta made his way to Banoo Mansion to light a lamp at the spanking new premises of the Foundation. "School is too big a word to use at the moment," he said of the single apartment that the Foundation had acquired. "But this is just the beginning."

The developments of the next two decades proved him right.



2005

Zubin Mehta returned to Mumbai to raise money for the Tsunami Relief Fund and brought with him the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Orchestra. With them came the legendary cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich, who was happy to perform in the city in memory of his old friend Mehli Mehta. Mumbaiers were fortunate to attend one of the last concerts played by the great Rostropovich, and his rendition of Dvorak's Cello Concerto received a rapturous ovation. Few knew, however, that the Indian Embassy in Paris had almost nixed this magical moment.

When Rostropovich applied for an Indian visa, he was told that besides the invitation from the MMMF, he would need a letter from the Monaco government (as he had a Monaco passport). Zubin Mehta personally called the Embassy to sort out the problem and Rostropovich also wrote a letter of protest. *"I make a letter in which I said I am not a terrorist, that I have 46 decorations and 52 honorary doctorates,"* he later recounted. *"I said I was bringing a cello, not a gun."*

Rostropovich and his cello (not gun) made it to India and the Foundation was more than happy to fulfil his request for a bowl of homemade borscht, dark chocolate and clothes hangers covered in satin.

Legendary cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and Zubin Mehta shared a longstanding friendship, which made the 2005 concert an emotional event



*I clearly remember sitting in the backseat with Mstislav Rostropovich, both of us talking about how we admired the work Zubin has been doing to bring [Western] classical music closer to this astounding country. To see the sparkle in the eyes of the people there—who seemed truly overwhelmed by Zubin's generosity, not only in his music making, but also as an attaché of culture—reminded me of how he took me on when I was a musician in my teenage years. Just as he uncovered a world of the purest artistic intent to me, he does the same for the people in India. I was fortunate enough to have met his father and felt his aura of benevolence, which Zubin has taken over in every part of his spirit.*

**JULIAN RACHLIN**

Violinist and Music Director of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, who performed as a soloist during the 2005 tour

2008

*My first meeting with the MMMF was to organise a dinner in honour of Maestro Zubin Mehta and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. The brief was simple—make it a very special evening. For 12 years I had the privilege to work closely with Mehroo Jeejeebhoy and the Executive Committee or, as I can call them, 'The Fabulous Ladies at the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation'.*

**BIRGIT ZORNIGER**

Former Deputy General Manager at The Taj Mahal Palace, which has hosted innumerable musicians and supported the MMMF in numerous ways

Mehli Mehta passed away in 2002 at the age of 94. Six years later, Zubin Mehta decided to celebrate his father's birth centenary with a sumptuous series of concerts in Mumbai—both at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre and at the Brabourne Stadium. Determined to make these memorable, he invited the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and an array of handpicked soloists: pianist Daniel Barenboim, violinist Pinchas Zukerman, cellist Amanda Forsyth, soprano Barbara Frittoli and tenor Plácido Domingo. In fact, Barbara Frittoli cancelled a performance in Vienna so that she could make it to Mumbai, where she sang and waltzed in a gold-and-red sari bought from Roop Kala.

Given the scale of the centenary concerts, the arrangements were necessarily complex. The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra always travelled with its own security—comprising shadowy individuals who booked their own rooms and refused to identify themselves but were always close at hand. Meanwhile, Daniel Barenboim was vulnerable because his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which spread the message of co-existence, had angered the Israeli right-wing. Barenboim had just been assaulted in Jerusalem and needed separate security arrangements. "He used to always travel in a car on his own," says Mehroo, "and they were all sitting with rifles driving around Bombay."

By this point, the Foundation was 13 years and several crises old, so no one was surprised when calamity struck. On the night before Daniel Barenboim's performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3, the Steinway developed problems. Investigations revealed that it needed a new string and key leads. Unlike in Europe, where Steinway would have replaced the parts almost immediately, in Mumbai there was no readymade solution.

The Foundation turned to Mumbai's foremost piano tuners and repairers.

Messrs Mistry rose to the occasion. They manufactured the parts overnight and ensured that the piano was in perfect shape the next morning.

Then on the day of his concert, Plácido Domingo phoned Zubin Mehta and announced that he had lost his voice and doubted that he could sing that night. "Nerves," exclaims Mehroo. "Imagine even the great artists get the jitters."



(above) **Lady in Red:** Italian soprano Barbara Frittoli stole hearts when she performed in a shimmering sari

(right) **Making a Mark:** The Department of Posts unveiled a First Day Cover in recognition of Mehli Mehta's contribution to Western classical music



**A Raincoat in Time:** Although the weather threatened to play spoilsport during the open-air concert, the 5000 raincoats organised by the Foundation saved the day

As if this was not excitement enough, the heavens decided to contribute to the proceedings. *"My team and I were responsible for light and sound at the 2008 open-air concert," recounts Norman Patocka, who was the production head. "All arrangements were set in place and our 'control room' with consoles, amplifiers and mixers was open to the sky. The concert started, creating a special magic with Zubin conducting. Suddenly, dark clouds appeared, and it began to rain! We ran around looking for shelter for our equipment and fortunately found a big tarpaulin sheet to cover it with. 'Are they going on?' we cried to our soaking wet colleagues. For sure they were. Zubin, defying the rain gods, continued conducting, bringing a fantastic concert to a terrific end!"*

But what of the audience? Team MMMF had already anticipated this eventuality. Committee Member Pheroza Godrej had organised 5,000 disposable raincoats to be distributed by volunteers in case it rained. As a result, every member of the audience enjoyed the concert unhindered.

Except, perhaps, Roda Ahluwalia. The MMMF committee member was responsible for escorting Plácido Domingo to the Brabourne Stadium and felt compelled to engage the great singer in conversation. *"Every question or comment I made was met with stony silence," she says. "I later discovered that Plácido NEVER speaks before a performance. What a relief to hear that he was only trying to save his voice!"*



(above and right) **Cops and Musicians:** the Mumbai police briefing the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra about security arrangements



**Play on, without fears:** An inspector takes Zubin Mehta's position, waxes the tuxedo, to assure the members of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, rehearsing at NCPA on Tuesday, that adequate security was being provided by Mumbai police. Mehta graciously stepped aside from the pedestal to make way for the cop in the middle of the rehearsal. —*Agan Prasad Datta*



*A* manda and I will never forget our time in Mumbai. The Mehli Mehta Music Foundation is a wonderful organisation and it was a pleasure performing to help raise money for a school of music. It was a profound tribute to your father—one he would be proud of. I hope your dream comes to fruition and that the next generation will have the opportunity of studying and performing music in India.

PINCHAS ZUKERMAN  
& AMANDA FORSYTH

*I admire the relations between the two brothers and their immense love for their parents. This is why I was particularly touched when Zubin invited me to participate in a special concert in Mumbai in 2008 to benefit the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation, with the aim of developing a school there for teaching Western classical music. I wish the Foundation and the school much success.*

**PLACIDO DOMINGO**  
Opera singer

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Plácido Domingo and Barbara Frittoli waltzing on stage



*The Mehli Mehta Music Foundation has been instrumental in supporting Zubin's mission to bring music to India. Having experienced the warmth and enthusiasm of Indian audiences, I very much hope that the Foundation will continue to grow and that the school of music in Mehli's name will develop into a major music education institution in the whole of the country.*

**DANIEL BARENBOIM**  
Pianist and conductor



Zubin Mehta and Daniel Barenboim rehearsing for Barenboim's unforgettable performance of Beethoven's 'Piano Concerto No. 3'

RECITAL BY  
VIRTUOSO CHINESE PIANIST  
**LANG LANG**

Thursday March 12 at 7 pm  
Homi Bhabha Auditorium  
TIFR, Colaba

*"the hottest artist on the classical  
music planet" - New York Times*



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Tickets - Rs. 4000, 3000, 2000, 1000 and 500  
Available at the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation,  
B-2 Banor Mansions, Cumballa Hill Road, Mumbai 400026  
10 am to 3 pm  
[www.mmmfindia.org](http://www.mmmfindia.org)

2009

Performing in Mumbai with the Vienna Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta was a truly unforgettable experience. The warmth and passion of the people, the rich cultural heritage of the city, and the incredible work of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation left a lasting impression on me. Music has the power to connect us all, and it was an honor to be part of such a meaningful cause that not only celebrates the art of music but also supports the future of young musicians.

*I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support of the Mehta family in my career, and I consider Zubin Mehta to be one of the most respected conductors I have ever had the privilege of working with. My time in Mumbai will always be a cherished chapter of my journey.*

**LANG LANG — Pianist**

This was the year of Lang Lang. Although Zubin Mehta and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra are beloved in Mumbai, during this tour it was the master of the flying keys who grabbed both headlines and hearts.

Lang Lang returned the compliment. "I thought Indians don't listen much to Western classical music," he later told Forbes. "But the audience in Mumbai was thoroughly professional... In China, people talk. I was playing in Boston recently and cell phones were ringing! But here the cell phones were off and there was 100 per cent concentration. I'd love to come back."

2011

When it transpired that one of Zubin Mehta's performances with the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino was clashing with the India-Pakistan cricket World Cup finals, the Maestro worried that his audience would choose cricket over concertos.

Mumbai proved him wrong. The 1100-seater Jamshed Bhabha Theatre was full. Being an ardent cricket fan himself, Zubin Mehta helped the delighted audience keep track of the match by indicating the fall of each wicket between pieces.



Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino narrowly escaped the tsunami in Japan and made it to Mumbai, so that the city could enjoy tenor Fabio Sartori sing Puccini and Verdi arias

2013

It is impossible to forget the image on our TV screen: Zubin Mehta conducting the Bavarian State Orchestra in the serene environs of Shalimar Bagh in Srinagar, even as violence erupted beyond the walls of the Mughal Garden. "I didn't choose Kashmir, Kashmir chose me," Zubin Mehta said, explaining his conviction that music brings about healing and connections. "Music is the message of peace; music only brings peace."

Even as the debate over the Kashmir concert raged on, there were quieter attempts at building bridges. Midori, the much-admired violinist, spent a day with the students of the Happy Home and School for the Blind. She played short passages of music in the various classrooms, sitting on the floor and helping the children to feel the bow and strings of her very precious violin. Then she performed a brief concert for the entire school before she raced to conduct masterclasses for the MMMF students. "Later, she asked to rest and then shower before leaving for her own performance with Zubin and the Bavarian State Orchestra," says Khursheed Lam, a committee member who spent that remarkable day with the violinist. "Her idea of rest? A brief shut-eye on the carpet of Room No. 2 at Banoo Mansion!"

*The visits to Mumbai with Zubin and the collaboration with Mehroo and her fantastic team were always a highlight in my 35-year-long career as a tour manager. I am so grateful for this time spent together—I still have my sari and my little elephant as a souvenir.*

**BRITTA MEISSNER**

Tour manager of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bavarian State Orchestra and Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

The Bavarian State Orchestra performed at the magical Shalimar Bagh in Srinagar, a gesture which underlined Zubin Mehta's conviction that music is capable of bringing peace





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Internationally acclaimed violinist Midori's career is inextricably tied to her humanitarian projects, which include music education for children with special needs and children from socio-economically disadvantaged communities



India and Australia have always bonded over cricket, so it made perfect sense that the sport should figure when the Australian World Orchestra visited India with Zubin Mehta. Soprano Greta Bradman—granddaughter of the great batsman, Don Bradman—was invited to sing with the Orchestra. There was also an attempt to bring the Indian and Australian cricketers on stage to perform Haydn's 'Toy Symphony'. The Indian cricketers demurred, so then the MMMF students performed in their place.

During their stay in Mumbai, the Australians interacted with children in municipal schools and conducted masterclasses for MMMF students. *"We were particularly touched at the surprise concert organised by the students,"* remembers Alex Briger, Music and Artistic Director of the Australian World Orchestra. *"How touched we were when they stood up and played the Australian national anthem followed by the Indian anthem. It was truly unforgettable and brought tears to everyone's eyes."*

*(below)* **A Proud Moment:** the Foundation's students performing with the Australian World Orchestra

*(opposite)* **Hitting a Sixer:** Don Bradman's granddaughter Greta Bradman performed operatic arias with the orchestra, much to the delight of Mumbai's cricket-loving audience

The students belonged to the St Stephen's School, part of the Foundation's outreach programme—and their performance reinforced the MMMF's belief that music cuts across boundaries of country, class and religion.

Three years later in 2018, the Australia World Orchestra returned and invited three MMMF violin students to play a Vivaldi Concerto with the orchestra. For the Foundation it was truly a high point.





**Tiny Twelfth Men:** When the Indian cricket team proved unwilling to perform Haydn's 'Toy Symphony' with the Australian World Orchestra, the Foundation's students stepped in with verve



The AWO go Indian, wearing bandhni turbans and scarves

2016

"Zubin Mehta to return to city on 80th birthday", the newspapers announced, before revealing the treat in store for the city. The famed Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli would be performing with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra at this very special concert.

While Mumbaikars held their breath and hoped that they could lay their hands on tickets, the committee members of the MMMF held their breath for other reasons. This time around, the requirements were even more daunting than usual, as Bocelli had his own technical and management team. When Bocelli disembarked from his private jet, however, he was gentle and soft-spoken and had only one request: that a keyboard was always available wherever he went.

No season, however, could be entirely free of hiccups. The concert featuring the Russian pianist Denis Matsuev was to be telecast



When the news broke in Mumbai about a stadium concert with Andrea Bocelli, there was an unprecedented buzz in the city. (above) Andrea Bocelli and Maria Katzarava rehearsing with Zubin Mehta at the Brabourne Stadium

(overleaf) Outstanding Russian pianist Denis Matsuev performing Tchaikovsky's piano concerto

live to cities in Europe. Everything was set up to record the first rehearsal, when it transpired that the piano tuner had a medical emergency and could not come in to tune the piano for the first recording.

This meant that a high-quality concert recording was essential for the perfect telecast. While Doordarshan supplied its van, it refused to provide the high definition telecast which was necessary for Europe. Eventually, filmmaker Shyam Benegal, who was an MMMF trustee, contacted the Information and Broadcasting Ministry and managed to wangle out permission for the all-important high-definition telecast.





**Cake and Laughter:** Chef Jeff Thickman emerged from the shadows to give Zubin Mehta a surprise on the Maestro's 80th birthday

*I went to Mumbai as an undercover chef to bake a cake for Mr Mehta's 80th birthday. It was to be a surprise for Zubin, and I stealthily manoeuvred the hallways of the Taj Mahal Palace hotel to avoid anyone's notice. It was not easy. At one point, I had to slip into a jewellery store to dodge Nancy and Zubin who were browsing the hotel's many shops. And just when I thought I could return to the safety of my room, I saw members of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra wandering in the lobby. I took a deep breath and a sharp turn, when boom, my body violently collided with Pinchas Zukerman, who grabbed my arm and shouted, 'Jeff!'—announcing my presence to the entire lobby!*

*It is not easy to keep a secret in India. But this time, the secret was contained, and at the gala dinner, Mr Mehta was truly surprised seeing me and the chocolate cake.*

**JEFF THICKMAN**  
Private Chef

Later, the Foundation received two messages of appreciation. The first was from Bocelli, who wrote a letter after he wrapped up his five-country tour. *"The tour that started in your wonderful city is about to end. In the meantime, my last human and professional adventure, that is also going to end, has taken me to five different countries of the East... The most vivid image I will take back home is the one I have lived as soon as I landed in Mumbai: the concert that saw me not on stage but under the stage, to attend the performance of the orchestra and choir of the MMMF.*

*The multi-ethnic army of young musicians that you have trained is extraordinary indeed. The enthusiasm you have transfused in them has become a part of their character.*

*When I listened to 'Lascia ch'io pianga' in Italian, I was deeply moved... not to mention the instrumentalists that I remember in the Arabian Dance from 'The Nutcracker', in the 'Radetzky March' and in other pages from a repertoire brimming with enthusiasm and quality.*

*On the Island of Haiti we have a children's choir, a new musical project of the 'Andrea Bocelli Foundation'. To attend your event has been for us like learning from an elder brother, and in his doing, find motivations and advice.*

*In saying goodbye to you, and stating my real devotion to Mehli Mehta, I would like to express my congratulations for bringing forward this exceptional initiative.*

*The concert has given Veronica and me great joy—our first encounter with India has been enthusiastic. I am aware of the many problems that still afflict your marvellous country, but the existence of a foundation like yours makes me feel confident. I am reminded of what Dostoevsky wrote: 'Beauty will save the world!'*

The second letter was from Zubin Mehta. In it, he perfectly described the superpowers of the MMMF team: *"My dearest, adorable ladies of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation—there are really no words to thank you enough for your incredible efforts to make this mad musical circus come to fruition. Yet any time I see one of you backstage or at a dinner, you seem so collected and in complete control that nobody would realise what you have achieved. I will wear the cuff links you gave me with pride and great happiness at tonight's concert. Your dedication and love for what you are doing will inspire me all the more."*

2017  
ONWARDS

Dan Zhu (violin), Kun-Woo Paik (piano) and Henri Demarquette (cello)

Zubin Mehta and his star-studded concerts have helped put Mumbai on the Western classical music map of the world. But it is the invariable hospitality and home-cooked meals with which the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation greets visiting musicians that have built lasting friendships. *"Music is the universal dialogue and expression with which we can connect our mutual humanity and emotion in the most profound level,"* remarked Dan Zhu, the gifted Chinese violinist who has performed several times for the Foundation. *"I felt this from my very first concert visit in Mumbai and sharing masterclasses with the students and faculty of the MMMF."*

The growing goodwill has brought many stellar musicians to Mumbai over the decades. In 2010, Furtados, the iconic music shop, gave Mumbai its first new Steinway Concert Grand Piano. Once the piano arrived, Anthony Gomes, the director of the Furtados Group of Companies, asked the Foundation to invite an artist to inaugurate the new instrument. Yuja Wang, the pianist whom Mehroo describes as "an explosion on the international scene", miraculously agreed.

When she arrived in Mumbai, Wang combatted jetlag with a 20-minute nap, bananas and dark chocolate, and then headed to Tata Theatre to enthral the audience. "After the tumultuous audience response and several encores later, she told me that she loved our piano so much, she wished she could take it with her when she left Mumbai," says Gomes.

The piano stayed in Mumbai, of course. As did the appreciation for Western classical music.



MEHLI MEHTA  
MUSIC  
FOUNDATION

present *Yuja Wang*

supported by

FURTADOS

Piano Recital

Sunday, 17th April, 2011  
at 7:00 pm

The Tata Theatre  
NCPA, Mumbai

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The programme will include works by Rachmaninov, Schubert, Scriabin, Mussorgsky, Mendelssohn and Saint Saëns, and will showcase the launch of the new Steinway Model D Concert Grand Piano acquired by Furtados for use in concerts and events in the city of Mumbai and in Western India.

Tickets: Rs 1000, Rs 750 and Rs 500  
Box Office at the NCPA  
For Members of the NCPA and the MMMF:  
From Friday, 1st April, 2011  
For Public: From Monday, 4th April, 2011

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ROLEX



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The Amatis Trio

The city had a calendar packed with Western classical music stars and sonatas when Covid imposed its prolonged and deathly silence.

Since 2023, however, fabulous pianists like Alexander Ullman and ensembles like the Amatis Trio started making their way back to Mumbai. In 2024, the glamorous Olga Kern enthralled the city, both with her designer gowns and her Gershwin Preludes.

In November 2024, the Foundation held its first concert in the Zubin Mehta Celebrity Concert Series. Midori arrived at 5 am, went to visit the Elephanta Caves, returned to conduct masterclasses for students, headed for a quick rehearsal before mesmerising the audience in the evening.

The second concert of the series featured the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra and an inevitable visa snafu. Cellist Nicolas Alstaedt was denied a visa. He reapplied. Strings were pulled and calls were made. The visa arrived just hours before his flight—and the grateful ladies of the Foundation breathed one more sigh of relief.



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Alexander Ullmann

Zubin Mehta, too, returned in 2023, 2024 and 2025 to lead the Symphony Orchestra of India in series of sparkling concerts. August 2024 saw an all-Strauss programme featuring both Johann II and Richard. No season is complete without a few panic attacks. This time around, Krassimira Stoyanova, the soprano, fell ill at the very last minute. Her replacement, Angel Blue, arrived on the morning of the concert and gave Mumbai a memorable performance—especially noteworthy because she had never performed Strauss' 'Four Last Songs' before.

The Spring 2025 series contributed another proud moment to the MMMF story when the Singing Tree choir performed 'Choeur Des Gamins' from Carmen with the orchestra.

Meanwhile, plans are in place for 2026. Zubin Mehta hopes to celebrate his 90th birthday in Mumbai next year with a concert involving the Australian World Orchestra. If all goes according to plan, the story of Mehli Mehta, Zubin Mehta and Western classical music in Mumbai will truly come a full circle.



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*(above)* Giuseppe Andolaro

*(right)* Gabriele Strata

*(opposite top)* Elia Cecino

*(opposite bottom)* Ilya Rashkovsky

*(overleaf)* Zubin Mehta with the  
Symphony Orchestra of India





*(left)* American soprano Angel Blue rehearsing with the Symphony Orchestra of India in 2024

*(above)* Soprano Chen Reiss performing with the SOI in 2024



Midori



Olga Kern



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Julia Muzychenko-Greenhalgh with  
Ilya Rashkovsky in 2025



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German-French cellist Nicolas  
Altstaedt performed in Mumbai  
with the Verbier Festival Chamber  
Orchestra in 2025

**SOLOISTS  
WITH  
ORCHESTRA**

Daniel Barenboim, Piano  
 Andrea Bocelli, Tenor  
 Greta Bradman, Soprano  
 Sarah Chang, Violin  
 Daniel Dodds, Violin  
 Plácido Domingo, Tenor  
 Amanda Forsyth, Cello  
 Barbara Frittoli, Soprano  
 David Garrett, Violin  
 Maria Katzarava, Soprano  
 Lang Lang, Piano  
 Tobias Lea, Viola  
 Denis Matsuev, Piano  
 Caroline Meng, Soprano  
 Midori, Violin  
 Andreas Ottl, Trumpet  
 Itzhak Perlman, Violin  
 Julian Rachlin, Violin  
 Mstislav Rostropovich, Cello  
 Fabio Sartori, Tenor  
 Gil Shaham, Violin  
 Arabella Steinbacher, Violin  
 Pinchas Zukerman, Violin

**PIANISTS**

Victoria Aja  
 Giuseppe Andaloro  
 Elia Cecino  
 Weiyin Chen  
 Julian Clef  
 Shani Diluka  
 Milen Earath  
 Ludovico Einaudi  
 Mathieu Gaudet  
 Alexei Grynyuk  
 Sofya Gulyak  
 Adam Heron  
 Olga Kern  
 Jinsang Lee  
 James Lisney  
 Pallavi Mahidhara  
 Luka Okros  
 Ilya Rashkovskiy  
 Pascal Roge  
 Paul Stewart  
 Gabriele Strata  
 Natasha Tadson  
 Kasparas Uinskas  
 Alexander Ullman  
 Lukáš Vondráček  
 Yuja Wang

**VIOLIN | PIANO DUOS**

Stella Chen, Violin | Borris  
 Kusnezow, Piano  
 Friedemann Eichhorn, Violin |  
 Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, Piano  
 Savitri Grier, Violin | Tom Poster,  
 Piano  
 Mayuko Kamio, Violin | Paul  
 Stewart, Piano  
 Ji Young Lim, Violin | Jong-Hai Park,  
 Piano  
 Alberto Lysy, Violin | Mehroo  
 Jeejeebhoy, Piano  
 Ajay Mallya, Violin | Milen Earath,  
 Piano  
 Midori, Violin | Ieva Jokubaviciute,  
 Piano  
 Domenico Nordio, Violin | Simonetta  
 Tancredi, Piano  
 Hadar Rimon, Violin | Natasha  
 Tadson, Piano  
 Aisha Syed-D'Oleo, Violin | MMMF  
 String Ensemble  
 Dan Zhu, Violin | Oliver Triendl,  
 Piano  
 Dan Zhu, Violin | Paavali  
 Jumppanen, Piano  
 Pinchas Zukerman | Tatiana  
 Goncharova

**CELLO | PIANO DUOS**

Victor Julien-Laferrière, Cello |  
 Guillaume Bellom, Piano  
 Francesca Villa, Cello | Francesco  
 Pennarola, Piano

**TRIOS**

Amatis Trio—Lea Hausmann, Violin  
 | Samuel Shepherd, Cello | Mengjie  
 Han, Piano  
 Amaya Trio—Batia Murvitz,  
 Piano | Lea Tuuri, Violin | Lauri  
 Rantamoijanen, Cello  
 Busch Trio—Mathieu van Bellen,  
 Violin | Omri Epstein, Piano | Ori  
 Epstein, Cello  
 Sara Michieletto, Violin | Marialuisa  
 Pappalardo, Piano | Vyas Vijaydutt,  
 Tabla

**SINGERS**

Diana Damrau, Soprano | Stephan  
 Matthias Lademann, Piano  
 Bruce Ford, Tenor | David Harper,  
 Piano  
 Sumi Hwang, Soprano | Jodie Devos,  
 Soprano | Daniel Thonnard, Piano  
 Ann-Katrin Naidu, Soprano |  
 Pauliina Tukiainen, Piano  
 Julia Muzychenko-Greenlagh,  
 Soprano | Ilya Rashkovskiy, Piano



4

# MUSIC EDUCATION

*“Inshallah, we will build a school here  
in my father’s name.  
There is a great potential here.”*





**Take Me to the Church:** The Singing Tree choir at Afghan Church in Mumbai

In the large, airy room in a building in Breach Candy, a class is underway. Two teachers are sitting cross-legged in a circle with nine children. One of them hums as the four-year-olds listen. Some with rapt attention, and others with wriggles and squirms.

*"So mysterious,"* a little voice pipes up. In a minute, though, things are less mysterious.

*"Harry Hare,"* another little voice cries. *"It's Harry Hare."*

The teacher stops humming and agrees that the song is, indeed, Harry Hare. After which 11 voices burst out, and 22 hands keep the beat by tapping on knees.

*Harry Hare is in a hurry  
Full of care and full of worry  
Harry Hare is late for tea  
What a hungry hare is he*

Next, the students of Discover Music 4 lie down in a circle while piano music floats into the room. After which it's time for goodbyes.

*"Goodbye Amara,"* sings the teacher.

*"Goodbye Megan,"* replies Amara, maintaining the tune.

*"Goodbye Tanay."*

*"Goodbye Megan."*

Once all the children have sung their goodbyes, Megan nods approvingly. All the children—even the boy who is halfway into a somersault—are in perfect tune.

This is not surprising. Although they are only four, many of these students are already maraca-shaking veterans who have been making their way to the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation since they were barely a year old. And even as they sing about frogs and feelings, they have been unconsciously imbibing the rules of music.

*"We believe that every child is musical,"* says Farahanaaz Dastur, Honorary Director of the MMMF education programme,

# MMMFS STUDENTS AT WORK AND PLAY





*You have made the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation a great centre for music in India, but for me personally, it is a very special place filled with joy, dedication, passion and inspiration.*

*I wish you continuing energy like Mehli Mehta had, and many, many more years filled with joyful music. Bravi!*

**NATALIA RITZKOWSKY**

Executive Assistant to Zubin Mehta

emphasising the importance of early exposure to music. *"The brain is a sponge between the ages of zero and six, and it is ready to accept any information or sound. As the name suggests, the purpose of the Discover Music classes is to discover music in an age-appropriate manner. Over the six Discover Music levels, children become familiar with important music concepts."*

Discover Music is central to the Foundation and is the bedrock upon which the other programmes are built. Moreover, it is also the first chapter in MMMF's music education story.

In its early years, the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation did not see itself as a school of music. The classes that the visiting musicians gave to local musicians and students during the annual Sangat festival were impromptu and informal. But the insatiable demand for these lessons—often conducted in corridors and lawns—demonstrated that there was a definite need for a structured and professionally-run programme that taught Western classical music.

Then in 2001, two things happened.

First, the MMMF had moved into its new home in Banoo Mansion.

The Foundation painstakingly restored the original wooden doors and window frames as well as the mosaic flooring that lay underneath. "Friends donated furniture and music scores," says Mehroo. "And with a skeletal staff of three, we were ready to open our doors to anyone and everyone who loved music."

Second, an idea was born.

"I remember with great clarity walking into Banoo Mansion through the newly polished door," says Shalini Lalkaka, sister of Ralph and Harvey de Souza, who were the co-directors of Sangat. "Mehroo Jeejeebhoy sat at a round carved Parsi-style table. She greeted me with a warm hug, and I got straight to the point, 'When do the singing classes start?' Mehroo paused a minute and said, 'Okay Shalini, why don't you begin something?'"

Shalini Lalkaka had many reasons to say "no". She had two young sons, was busy running her mother's beauty salon, and had no teaching experience. But she was so keen to share her love for music that she ended up saying "yes".

The first Discover Music class had nine students—and from that modest beginning, a music school was born.

Discover Music helped children to imbibe the basic elements of music—like pulse and pitch, crotchets and quavers—through interactive songs and games. Soon after the programme was introduced, two educators from Germany wrote to the Foundation and offered to stage musicals with children in Mumbai. MMMF students apart, children from schools across the city thronged to participate in those flamboyant, colourful productions—and over those whirlwind years, the Foundation became a visible presence in South Mumbai.

In no time at all, Discover Music had expanded to 150 children. The programme became so popular that eager parents queued up at the crack of dawn on Registration Day to ensure a spot for their child. "In 2016, we unsuccessfully tried to register our daughter Ahana for the Discover Music programme, even though we reached the office just a little past 9 am," says Geeta Pupala, whose daughter Ahana now learns the piano and sings in the choir.

Meanwhile, in 2004, a London musician named Sophie Rivlin arrived in Mumbai and began to prepare students for a choral concert—and, in the process, laid the ground for the choir programme. Next came classes in piano, violin, cello and eventually voice.

More children arrived, more teachers were employed and a few years later, the Foundation managed to buy the adjacent apartment in Banoo Mansion. "At that point we didn't have a plan," says Mehroo. "The programme grew organically and flourished."

Years later, the Foundation found out that Mehli Mehta used to rehearse in Banoo Mansion. Given the ease with which the music programme established itself, it's tempting to imagine that it was meant to be. That the lofty rooms had been waiting to be filled with arpeggios, slow bows and 'Claire de Lune'. That the past was guiding the present.

In his essay for *Applause*—a book brought out by the Foundation in 2011—the critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha described Mehli Mehta's "house of music" in Cuffe Parade. "String quartets and rehearsals were held most evenings on the front verandah: the intense study of scores was imported to the young Zubin in the inner chambers of the old bungalow;

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(overleaf) The Singing Tree Choir in concert



Salome Rebello, one of the founding conductors of The Singing Tree choir, conducting the choir and string ensemble

*the entire family sat around the gramophone listening repeatedly to recordings old and new, of Toscanini, Stokowski, Heifetz, Furtwangler, Rubinstein,” Bhabha wrote, adding that there is a “something of this familial atmosphere” in the MMMF premises as well.*

*“As you walk through the corridors you hear a medley of musical sounds pouring out of rooms that line the central passageway. Pupils of different ages, at different stages, working hard under the eye of dedicated teachers brought back to me that ground-floor flat in Cuffe Parade where Big Mehta and Mehta Junior (as the great trumpeter Wynton Marsalis once called them) lived and worked together in pursuit of a common dream.”*

The “house of music” in Banoo Mansion caught the imagination of the city. Parents flocked to the Foundation to add their children’s names to impossibly long waitlists—and hoped that they would soon get that I-have-some-good-news-for-you call from Jennie. Lives and carpools were rearranged around “violin class” and “junior choir”.

*“The MMMF was then the only recognised place in the city for learning Western classical music,” says “Gopal, who as a youngster struggled for years to find a violin teacher for himself. Agrees Salome Rebello, who has taught on and off at the Foundation since 2004, “It played a very important role in Mumbai because there wasn’t much going on in Western classical music back then.”*

Salome, who was a 17-year-old college student when she started helping with the Discover Music programme, eventually took over the fledgling choir. “There were about 20 children when I joined in 2004,” she recalls. “By the time I left the MMMF in 2008 to study music in Jerusalem, the choir had grown to 75 children.”

Over the following years, the choir witnessed an explosion, not just in numbers but in exposure and expertise. Thanks to Zubin Mehta, teachers from the Orfeó Català, a choral society in Barcelona, started visiting Mumbai to train the MMMF choir for its annual concerts. “The first year we had five teachers from this music school, and they really gave a huge boost to our choir programme,” says Mehroo. “For the first time they were teaching children how to sing, not just shout. And the training they gave them, the love, if you saw them teaching you would be riveted.”



Teachers of the Palau de la Música, Barcelona and The Singing Tree choir take a bow after a thrilling performance to a packed auditorium



# SINGING TREE CONCERTS OVER THE YEARS





*"Group by group, rehearsing non-stop with several demands on my part, and they always responded with that big sincere smile," says Elisenda Carresco I Ribot, remembering the "brutal intensity" of the rehearsals as she prepared 360 children to perform a repertoire that included German, Brazilian, and Catalan songs, as well as works by Mozart, Holdstock and Rodriguez. "I dare to say that the essence of a child when he learns, when he sings, is the same all over the world: sincere emotion emerges and we all, with our soul, grow a little inside."*

Today, 161 students are spread across the five Singing Tree choirs. Besides the wonderful annual concerts, the choirs also perform at events around the city and have a legion of fans.

The Discover Music programme is now divided into six levels and the 175 students range from eight months to six years. At the same

time, 31 children learn the piano. Another 27 learn the violin, viola and cello—many of whom are part of the junior and senior string ensembles.

Given the number of students and classes, the Foundation has had to look beyond Banoo Mansion for space. It now also rents an apartment in Hormuz Mansions in Breach Candy, and has a total of ten teaching studios, a mini concert hall and a collection of pianos.

Endearingly enough, each piano comes with its own personality and story. There is, for example, the Yamaha Concert Grand that was gifted by a concert hall in Tokyo but was held up at the docks. Customs demanded 120 per cent duty and, although the Foundation explained that the piano was a gift, the authorities refused to relent. It was only when the story appeared in the press that the Foreign Ministry intervened.





(above) Our Steinway Grand waiting to be unveiled

(opposite) Georgian-British pianist Luka Okros rehearsing in Mumbai's Royal Opera House before the concert to inaugurate the Steinway Grand that was bought through the 88 Keys funding initiative

Then there is the Steinway Grand that was bought after Anthony Gomes of Furtados suggested a unique crowdfunding scheme which involved "selling" the 88 keys. "A lot of our students' parents bought keys," says Mehroo. "I bought Middle C, which was the most expensive. The piano is now at Hormuz Mansion, and we use it for our in-house concerts."

Perhaps the biggest change, however, is the shift from hobby to discipline.

The MMMF music programme today is way more structured and exacting than it was in its early avatar. No longer is learning an instrument a mere one-class-a-week commitment. Those who want to study the piano or a string instrument have to go in twice a week for their instrument, and also sing in the choir and study music theory. "Theory is taught in groups, which is important because it is the only place that allows cross instrument interaction and gives the students a sense of belonging to the wider organisation," says Farahanaaz, adding that when the students turn 13 and academic pressures increase, the programme allows for greater flexibility. "Even though it becomes optional, we have many students who continue to attend the choir through Std 9 and 10, even through college."





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88 keys Programme

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Katharina Prietzel	Nandini and Rani Bideri
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Katharina Prietzel	Dr. Prapaditya Rai
Katharina Prietzel	Dr. Prapaditya Rai
Katharina Prietzel	Sydele Gonzalez
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Bernhard Steynicke	Anika & Anand Shah
Aravinda Norton	Monsiys
	Aravinda Norton
	Cyrus Rajar Shroff
Pharosa Gudhej	Bernhard Steynicke
Ratika Gudhej	Curt Cyrus Shroff
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	Zaina Vithandani
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Cyrus Gupte	Mehroo Jeejethby
Zoran Mehta	Zareen Bilimoria
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3 Pat Doration	Vidya Gombha
	Nihal & Anika Swadi
	Palavi and Ansh Swadi
Sunvor & Ritesh Hirwani	Somvir & Pooja Hirwani
Sugandha Hirwani	Jai Hirwani
Lyna Shroff	Neeta Bhandari
Za Mody	Kranya Kulkarni
Za Mody	Sophie & Family
	Sophie & Family
MD Education	MD Education
MD Education	MD Education
	Banyan Tree Bank
Mrs. Rati Forbes	Najma Shah
In memory of Leslin Tarbe	In memory of Leslin Tarbe
In memory of Leslin Tarbe	In memory of Leslin Tarbe
In memory of Leslin Tarbe	In memory of Leslin Tarbe
In memory of Leslin Tarbe	In memory of Leslin Tarbe
In memory of Leslin Tarbe	In memory of Leslin Tarbe
In memory of Leslin Tarbe	Aadya & Agastya Shroff
	Klara Bird



The collaboration with Belgium's prestigious Musica Mundi School has given the opportunity to several MMMF students to participate in the extraordinary Summer Music Festival

This overhaul—which initially rattled old-time parents and students—was the outcome of a conversation that Farahanaaz overheard in 2014. *“The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra was in Mumbai and was working with one of our ensembles,” she says. “One of the players asked the student sitting next to him about his favourite composer.”*

The boy fumbled for an answer and at that moment, Farahanaaz realised that change was necessary. *“Our students had no context or mindfulness. Learning music is much more than coming in once a week. It is much more than just another evening class, something to put on your resume.”*

The increased rigour has paid off in terms of greater opportunities. Over the years, MMMF students have had the chance to attend the Musica Mundi course and festival in Belgium, which has expanded their world in a multitude of ways. *“By putting these already highly gifted students in direct contact with other young talents from the world, and with some of today's greatest pedagogues and artists, the impact on their lives is immeasurable,”* says Hagit Kerbel, co-founder of the festival. Adds Shruti Bhansali, whose daughter Aisha learns the violin and attended the course in 2023, *“She heard the artists-in-residence—Maxim Vengerov, Mischa Maisky and Grigory Sokolov. She also got to interact with amazing teachers and young musicians from across the world. It was an immensely enriching and memorable experience.”*



In 2014, MMMF students were invited to perform with Japanese music students in the Takasaki Music Festival and the Namaste India Festival in Tokyo and with the Wagner Society Orchestra in Yokohama. As they experimented with Japanese cuisine and interacted with their Japanese peers, it was apparent that the Foundation had again succeeded in stepping “beyond boundaries”.

Then there was the time that the MMMF students performed for the Queen of Belgium, who was in India for a state visit. And the time when the choir visited A. R. Rahman's KM Music Conservatory in Chennai—where they enjoyed not just the excitement of performing on a new stage, but also a biryani dinner cooked by Rahman's personal chef. *“I fondly remember the trip to Chennai with the children,”* says Mariano Fernandez Blanco of the Orfeo Català. *“It was a great day and on the bus ride back to the airport after the concert, everyone was cheering and singing after a job well done.”*

More than the tangible achievements, however, it is the intangible achievements that the Foundation celebrates: That the teachers shifted so nimbly to an online format during Covid. That so many children remained focused and motivated through those difficult years. That a large number of students stay in the programme all the way through college—and that those who study abroad often return to sing with the choir during their vacations in Mumbai.

And, most of all, that their students fall in love with music.



(above) The Singing Tree choir during a visit to Chennai to perform at the KM Music Conservatory, founded by A R Rahman

(right) Students of the Foundation were invited to perform with young Japanese music students in the Takasaki Music Festival and the Namaste India Festival in Tokyo in 2014. 20 young musicians travelled to Japan with their violin teachers Mika Nishimura and Gopal Chakravartty and performed with the Wagner Society Orchestra. Seen here with the Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, Indian Ambassador to Japan



The Foundation was honoured to welcome Her Majesty Queen Mathilde of Belgium when she expressed her wish to meet our students during her state visit to India in 2017. The Queen is well-known in her own country for her patronage of the arts, especially music. The students put up a short performance and to our utter delight, she sat around a table afterwards, interacting with the students and teachers over a cup of coffee and snacks, while her ladies-in-waiting, the press, and security staff waited patiently, crowding the rooms of our premises to capacity

*"There's a lot of joy that children get from making music with others," says Salome. Agrees Farahanaaz, "We don't necessarily want to make our students into professional musicians, but we do want music to be with them for life. And in that I think we have succeeded."*



Zubin and Nancy Mehta and Mehroo Jeejeebhoy with the string ensemble

# TEACHERS

**TANUSHREE DEB**

*Piano teacher*

In the year 2007, I realised my dream of being in a place where I would feel free, and my hopes and dreams would come alive. It is now almost 17 years that I have been teaching at the Foundation and what I have learned and experienced is hard to put into words. Teaching has been the joy of my life. My students have been my greatest teachers, my lifelong friends, but my heartfelt gratitude will always be there for Mehroo who brought me into the fold, giving me the freedom to spread my wings and follow my dream.

\*\*\*

**MAGDALENA SAS**

*Cello teacher who started the cello programme at the MMMF*

When I joined the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation as a cello teacher, I didn't know it would be the most inspiring and transformative experience of my life. A favourite memory is seeing my students on stage performing for Maestro Zubin Mehta's 80th birthday celebration with musicians from the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

\*\*\*

**BAKYTA AKIBAeva**

*Violin and viola teacher from Kyrgyzstan*

Many years ago, when I was working at the NCPA, my first acquaintance with the MMMF was through their Sangat festival, opening up a whole new world for me. When I later joined the Foundation, I met the people of this world—students, parents, teachers... even the interiors at the Foundation reflected the inner world of its inhabitants: large cabinets filled with books and instruments. Looking back, I am so happy that fate brought me to this organisation run by wise Parsi women and their practical ability to go through difficult times with patience and a smile.

\*\*\*

**BINAIFER KAVARANA**

*Piano teacher*

One thing I have learnt in my 13 years at the Foundation is that there are no shortcuts when it comes to quality. During my early training, I learnt how education could be imparted to a child in a friendly, enjoyable, yet profound manner.



Sam Shepherd, cellist from the Amatis Piano Trio, giving a master class



Pianist Ozgur Aydin giving a master class

**GOPAL CHAKRAVARTHY**

*Violin teacher who was at the MMMF for 16 years*

My 16-year-long association with the MMMF as a music teacher has been extremely satisfying and memorable. I started the first string ensemble and seeing them perform for Maestro Zubin Mehta made the teachers, students and myself really proud of our accomplishments. It was an honour to take the same string ensemble to Japan, too.

\*\*\*

**TATYANA DICHENKO**

*Piano teacher*

The MMMF played a life-changing role for me; it was, after all, the organisation which brought me to India from Russia. One of my oldest friends used to say that the Foundation was a pillow for me—they took very good care of me, and I felt comfortable in terms of practical life. I appreciated this many years later when I was no longer teaching there.

\*\*\*

**KERSI GAZDAR**

*Violin teacher*

I cherish my teaching experience at the Foundation. The aesthetically done up interiors—spotlessly clean and exuding an old-world charm—were stocked with music and pianos, creating quite the perfect ambience to study and make music. I will never forget the time when the violinist Nicola Benedetti visited the Foundation to hear the String Ensemble, and generously offered to let me hold her precious Stradivarius violin!

\*\*\*

**RJA MASTER**

*Discover Music teacher*

The wooden doors of the MMMF holds a special place in my heart, where countless singing and practice sessions continue to fill the air with music and camaraderie. One of the most cherished moments of my life was singing in the choir for Maestro Zubin Mehta. The MMMF's mentorship has shaped me not only as a musician, but as a person too. I am filled with pride to return to my alma mater and second home as a faculty member of the Discover Music programme.

\*\*\*

**EMMA TILLU**

*Piano teacher*

I was born and raised in the northern part of Sweden, where I studied music in a beautiful environment, building an identity as a musician. But it was love that eventually brought me to Mumbai. I married an Indian man and found myself settling in a place I never imagined I'd live in. I started working at the MMMF, and many things felt as they did in my hometown—a place for sharing music and possibilities, a school of dedicated teachers with high standards. I'm so happy to teach here!

ARTEM KOPYLOV

*Viola teacher*

Cooperation with the Foundation is a very important page in our lives. Our time there will leave an imprint in our hearts forever. We have gained an interesting pedagogical and cultural experience from our stay in India, particularly at the Foundation.

\*\*\*

TAVAN SHAH

*Piano teacher*

My first visit to the MMMF in 2014 left a profound impression on me. I thought how nice it would be to work and practise in the beautiful rooms and play the pianos at the Foundation. Nine years later, I am working at this musical oasis. I definitely do not need to stay away from home somewhere in Europe to pursue, teach and perform Western classical music.

\*\*\*

GULZARA SHAKIR

*Violin teacher*

It's a great pleasure for me to be associated with MMMF. An amazing creative atmosphere, care and respect are the distinguishing features of the Foundation. Here I have met very talented students and am happy to share with them my knowledge and experience.

\*\*\*

SIMONA KAUR SAHNEY

*Former Education Programme Administrative Head*

When the COVID pandemic struck in early 2020, the Foundation faced a novel set of challenges—that of continuing all operations online.

We continued to deliver all classes online and developed ways to manage registrations and payments. The teachers went out of their way to encourage students to keep going despite the circumstances. This spirit of persistence is profound in the musicians, teachers, students and staff of the Foundation.

\*\*\*

RAEL MENDES

*Choir teacher*

My desire to become a teacher evolved into a full-fledged career with the support of the MMMF. I'm grateful for the Foundation's belief in the potential of young educators like myself. As weeks turned into months and years, I encountered countless moments of both challenge and triumph, each offering valuable lessons in adaptability, empathy and intuition. Through it, all the Foundation encouraged creativity and growth, empowering me to explore innovative teaching methods and push the boundaries of conventional education.



A cello lesson in progress

# STUDENTS



The MMMF provided a great environment to build a community of like-minded people as well as friendships I maintain to this day. I gained a deep appreciation of how special it is to make music with others, and this informed my path which has continued as a composer, conductor, and producer.

I completed my undergraduate degree in Composition at the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington. In February 2019, I was very happy to receive a call from Salome Rebello, asking me to compose a piece for the senior and youth choirs to be held later that year. I composed 'The Swan', which went on to be performed at the annual Singing Tree concert in 2022. A year later, it was performed again, and this time, for Maestro Mehta!

I had several incredible opportunities as a student at the MMMF—performing 'La Campanella' with Aisha Syed Castro, a piano / violin sonata for the Queen of Belgium, Bach's Italian Concerto for Zarin Mehta, and a masterclass with Fali Pavri and many other visiting artists. I made countless friends and acquired new family members in my piano teacher Tanusree, Kamal, Farahanaaz and Mrs. Jeejeebhoy. It is one of the things I miss most about Bombay."

RHEA  
PATHAK

The highlight of my time at the Foundation undoubtedly was performing in the Toy Symphony with Maestro Zubin Mehta conducting the Australian World Orchestra. His humility and kindness to a young student like me was unforgettable. At the morning rehearsal, I requested the Maestro for his autograph when he asked me my name. While performing at the concert, he turned to me after the first movement and said, "Well played, Rhea." These words will stay with me forever.

KAHAN  
TARAPOREVALA

I am one of triplets, and we all joined the MMMF as part of the Discover Music programme at the age of three. My sister and I moved on to study the violin, and my brother, the viola. Seven years on, I feel privileged to have taken part in many string and ensemble concerts, including one with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra.

VERA  
BALSARA

PRADYUMNA  
SAPRE

The experience of performing at the NCPA and then in Japan with the MMMF has allowed me to comfortably play in an orchestra. I have recently joined the West London Strings as a violinist. The discipline, patience and ability to maintain composure under pressure that develop with learning an instrument has supported me through my engineering degree.

KARIM  
KHAIRAZ



MILEN  
ERATH

My violin teacher Mika Nishimura ignited in me an ardour for performing. Her guidance breathed new life into our playing, enabling us to express ourselves authentically and passionately.

Now, as a student at Paul McCartney's Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts, as I step onto any stage, I do so with the same ease that was nurtured during my time at the Foundation

SHANAYA  
MENEZES

At my first meeting with Mrs Jeejeebhoy, I was struck by the serene atmosphere at Banoo Mansion despite its busy location. I attended master classes and performed in concerts organised by the Foundation, including a concert for H.M. Queen Mathilde of Belgium.

AATISH  
DHAHAN

For the past 13 years, the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation has been my second home, nurturing my passion for music. Music allows me to let go of everything and focus on something that I love doing. Making music with others has made me a better listener and team player.

Saturday mornings at Banoo Mansions and Thursday evenings at Hormuz Mansion are the highlights of my week even after all these years. A choir of women, bound by an unbeatable energy that, surprisingly, even extended online throughout the isolation of the COVID lockdown. That was a feat few conductors besides the amazing array of teachers at the MMMF could have achieved and sustained. They taught us to listen to each other with respect and consideration, and not just to sing out loud. Qualities that I think have transferred organically to my personal and professional life as a journalist, too.

(Member of the unique MMMF Women's Choir which was established in 2010)

ZIDANE  
MULCHANDANI

My parents enrolled me and my twin sister Zaira when we were four in the Discover Music programme at the MMMF. Within a few months, I was taking piano lessons. This has morphed me into what I believe I am today. Along the way, I have learned valuable life lessons, like the importance of perseverance. The Foundation has been a huge part of my life, quite literally, as I was there six days a week.

MEHER  
MARFATIA

It feels like I've grown up alongside the MMMF—so many memories, but one holds a special place in my heart. When I studied the viola with Artem Sir, he made learning fun. At the end of a good viola session, he would reward us by allowing us to play games on the computer. He wasn't just teaching us; he made learning enjoyable and rewarding.

RIYA  
JHA



# PARENTS

Our son Yash showed a keen inclination to learn the piano. However, it was challenging to bring him to the Foundation four times a week for lessons as we lived far away in Santacruz. On seeing the progress after just a year, we decided to move our residence closer to the Foundation, so that Yash could devote more time to music. He enjoys his music, and appreciates the culture of equality, inclusion and respect at the Foundation. We are convinced that we made the right choice!

—ASHWINI PRABHU

I am witness to the warmth, care and personal attention each child received here. Being part of the choir was a great thrill for Hridhay, especially at concerts. As an engineering student at the University of Toronto, he continues to sing, and fondly remembers Maestro Mehta's words 'Never stop doing what you love...continue singing always.'

—SHILPA TEJURA

It feels just like yesterday when we eagerly stood in line at 7.30 am, hopeful that our son would be accepted as a student. Advay loved singing; when his teacher finished a song, he would enthusiastically exclaim 'again!' This routine became a source of laughter for all of us, including his teacher.

—DEENA BHATIA





It took a miracle for Aaliya to get into the Foundation. Her kindergarten teachers told us that she was musically inclined and urged us to find her a suitable programme. Naturally, we headed straight to the MMME. To our consternation, Aaliya's number on the waitlist was in three digits, and obviously there was no tatkal scheme!

They say miracles come in many forms and ours came in the form of a computer crash. The 'Mummy Network' got busy warning everyone that it was better to re-register, and my wife kept the phone on redial till she got through. Aaliya was at number six on the new waitlist for the piano programme, and we soon found ourselves on the crowded steps of Banoo Mansions. Fast forward a dozen years and Aaliya is today studying music composition at a university in the United States. We will never forget the baby steps (or should we say, baby notes) she took at the MMME.

—VIVEK RAMAKRISHNAN

Banoo Mansions became a second home to Rohan, and his lessons and ensemble concerts became so important to him that he made us cancel family holidays in order to participate. Music lessons have had a tremendous impact on Rohan's life...from the excitement and trepidation on his first day at the Foundation with his very first violin at the age of eight...to the feeling of pride when he could play beautifully at 18 and was headed off to university.

—ESHA BHOJWANI

In her early years of learning the violin, my daughter Aria was awestruck by the performances of her seniors, motivating her to learn more challenging pieces and practice at home without any reminders from me. She had role models who inspired her and a teacher who didn't doubt her, and when she performed, it was a moment to cherish.

—AMBICA TIKU



5



THE  
OUTREACH  
PROGRAMME

Music  
Beyond  
Boundaries





It all began with a tuneless rendition of the national anthem, sung by a group of schoolchildren at Kemp's Corner.

*"Every morning, I would sit by my window and think, 'This is terrible,'"* says Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, who eventually took matters into her own hands. She approached the authorities at the neighbouring St Stephen School and offered free music classes so that the children—most of whom hailed from low-income families—could find their singing voices.

The school agreed. Classes started. Students were taught the fundamentals of music and to sing together. And the MMMF set out on a new journey.

This first step beyond the scrubbed and polished environs of Banoo Mansion was taken in 2001. Over the next two decades, the Foundation ventured into the gullies and bastis of the city. It worked with the teachers of Muktangan, as well as with children who had never had a music class in their life.

At the moment, MMMF teachers sing and clap and laugh with more than 900 children across St Stephen's School, Seva Sadan and municipal schools run by Aseema. *"We are very, very proud of the outreach programme, and for me it is a very emotional subject,"* says Farahanaaz Dastur. *"We have always believed in music for all; music beyond boundaries."*

The outreach programme has brought joy to everyone who is involved.

For the Foundation, it is a chance to take music beyond boundaries and practice meaningful inclusion. Every year, around 40 children from the outreach programme are included in the annual choir concert. At the moment, two children from St Stephen School—once cellist and one violinist—are part of the Foundation's string ensembles. *"On stage,"* says Rohini Basu, who is a voice teacher, a Discover Music teacher and oversees the senior choir at the MMMF, *"you will not be able to tell the difference."*

For the students it is an opportunity to connect with music and beauty, and for many it is the highlight of the school week. Their enthusiasm is apparent from the way they greet their music teachers with cries of *"Didi, you look very beautiful today."* *"The Mehli Mehta Music Foundation has composed and taught us beautiful*



*Music has the power of forming character and so music classes are important. The MMMF has done this for us.*

**RUKHSAR SHAIKH**  
Class 6 student

*music, which encourages me to come to school,” says Irfan Khan, a Class 7 student.*

For the teachers—who have to grapple with language barriers, disciplinary issues and teaching in an uncomfortable, unfamiliar environment—the outreach programme is a source of immense satisfaction. “We provide equal access, so everything that happens in the classes at the Foundation happens in the outreach schools. We never let the children feel less than anyone else. They have enough of that already and we don’t want to add to that sense of lessness,” says Rohini, who was unnerved during the initial outreach classes but now glows when she talks about the programme. “My heart becomes all fuzzy when I see the changes, not just in the children but also in the parents.”

Rohini recalls a time, some years ago, when a group of children from a BMC school were chosen to participate in the annual Singing Tree concert. The parents were unenthusiastic because the concert clashed with the 1.5 day Ganesh Visarjan. The proposal seemed doomed till one father stood up in the meeting and pointed out that it would be unfair to deprive the children of this opportunity. “*Our children will be performing in an AC hall and getting so many the benefits,*” he exclaimed.

His words touched a chord. The children were allowed to participate in that concert—and in all future concerts. “*They really look forward to the concerts and they keep asking us, ‘Didi when will we be called for extra classes on Sunday?’ And the parents are equally enthusiastic,*” says Rohini. “*If the reporting time is 9 am for a concert or rehearsal, the parents land up at 8.30 to make sure that their children don’t miss out.*”

The music classes have done more than boost confidence, language skills and pronunciations. In some cases, they have transformed lives.

*“Learning the violin has been immensely fulfilling. Meeting musicians from around the world, performing with them, attending classes five times a week and practising for concerts... my musical journey has taught me the importance of teamwork and mutual respect,”* says Deepak Dhanak, who started music classes as a timid boy of four or five, because his mother Savita worked at the Foundation.



(opposite top) Violinist Nicola Benedetti and musicians enthral children in a municipal school

(opposite bottom) Children from the Happy Home & School for the Blind perform with the Singing Tree Choir



“

*I was one of the fortunate students who was selected for music training at the Foundation. Starting with the choir, I chose to pursue violin lessons after four years. I thank all my teachers from the bottom of my heart—at the Foundation we are all like a big family.*

**EIRAM SARA SYED**

A FORMER ST STEPHEN STUDENT WHO IS NOW STUDYING ENGINEERING, EIRAM HAS BEEN SINGING IN THE CHOIR FOR THE LAST 12 YEARS AND PLAYS IN THE STRING ENSEMBLE.

”



*Beyond the notes and melodies lies a tapestry of shared experiences. Whether it's the joy of mastering a new song, the thrill of performing on stage, or the sense of belonging fostered within your community, each moment has left an indelible mark on our hearts. Through your Foundation, we've not only honed musical skills but also forged lifelong friendships.*

**DELNAZ MASTER**

Education Director, Aseema,  
Pre-Primary to Class 5

From Discover Music, Deepak graduated to learning the violin and was one of the MMMF students chosen to perform in Japan. This was the 11-year-old's first time on an aeroplane and half his neighbourhood arrived at the airport to wave him off.

Deepak returned with numerous stories and a love for sushi. He went on to perform with the Australian World Orchestra conducted by Zubin Mehta, and as a violin soloist with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra. He is now preparing for his Chartered Accountancy exams.

Deepak's is one of several sunshine stories. *"I have always loved music, especially opera. When I was 10 years old, I discovered the cello through the MMMF. A decision that shaped my life forever,"* says Sumit Gupta, whose musical potential became apparent while he was a student at St Stephen School. As he didn't have a cello at home, he would come to the Foundation almost daily to practice. Today, Sumit studies data sciences, is a part of the MMMF string ensemble and routinely performs at concerts.

It's little wonder, then, that Delnaz Master of Aseema describes the music classes at the municipal schools as "transformative". *"The students—from beginners to choir performers—have found a unique space for self-expression and growth,"* she says. Adds Geeta Subhedar of Aseema, *"The MMMF entered Aseema many moons ago, unlocking the doors to melody and bringing with it a wave of emotions. My heart warms at the sight of a class starting with the hello song, a charming way to initiate each session."*

Geeta, who is the Education Director for the senior classes, tries to make time to attend the occasional music class, with its joyful singing, egg shakers and beat claps. *"It is the perfect stress-relieving haven,"* she says. Concur Farahanaaz, *"When I come out of one of these classes I am always floating on air."*





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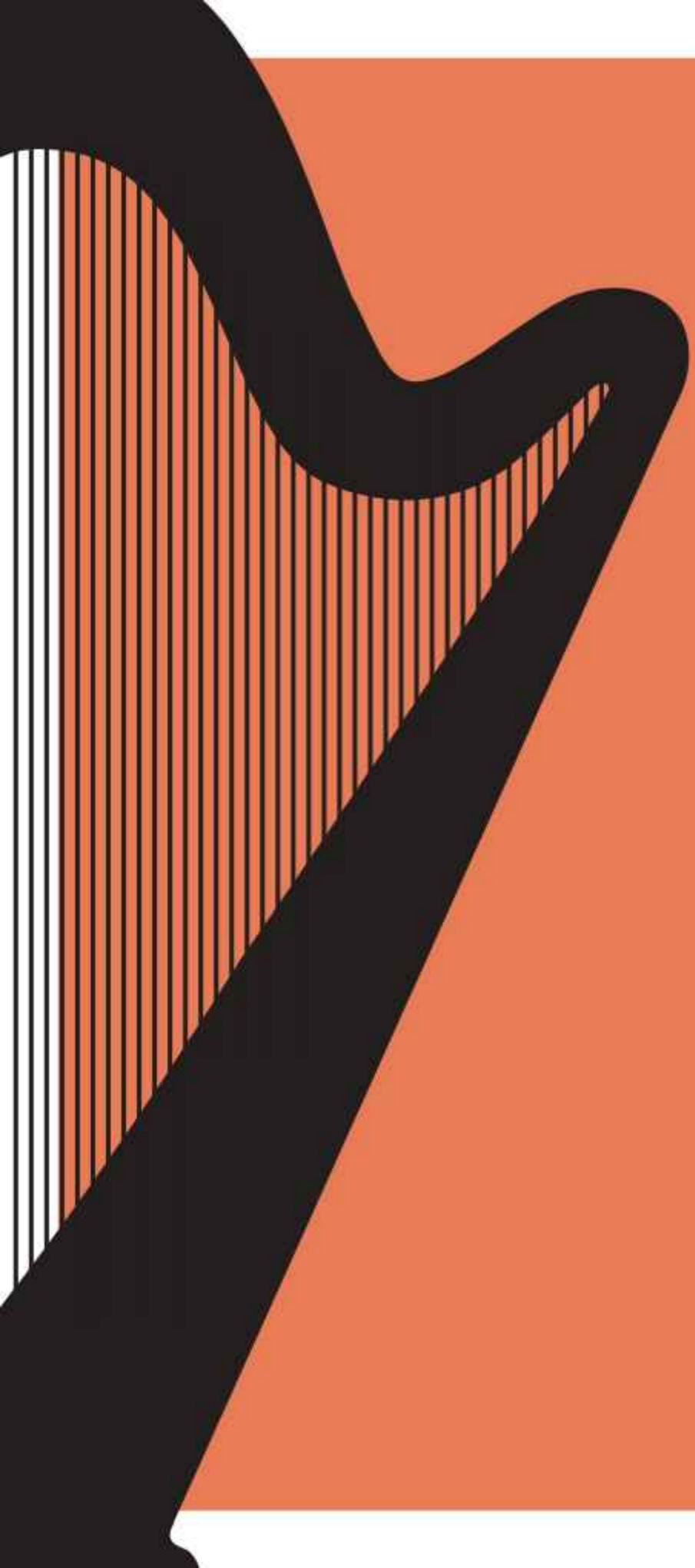
*Our outreach programme and structured syllabus have reached significant heights; our concerts became an important part of Mumbai's cultural calendar. It is very important for young people to listen, to understand how instruments are played, and to enjoy music. At the Foundation, that's what we aim to do.*

*I am especially grateful that our students at Udayachal, the school founded by my parents Naval and Soonu Godrej to benefit the children of the employees, have had the opportunity to learn, sing and perform with the Foundation's choir—an opportunity they would not otherwise have had.*

**SMITA GODREJ CRISHNA**  
COMMITTEE MEMBER

”





6

MUSIC  
THERAPY

The Little Miracles  
of Room No 4



*“Music is a therapy,” Yehudi Menuhin once said. “It is a communication far more powerful than words, far more immediate, far more efficient.”*

The great violinist believed that music possessed the power to heal and help. Decades later, science and medical research proved him right and today music is seen as a powerful aid in both treatment and therapy. Recognising that music contributes greatly to the wellbeing of children with special needs, the Foundation has been offering Music Therapy since 2010.

Every Monday, Room No 4 of Banoo Mansion undergoes a transformation. The space is arrayed with shakers and tambourines, drums and cymbals, while Wyomia Goveya sits at the open piano, ready to go wherever the children lead her.

*“Music Therapy is about using music to achieve non-musical goals,” explains Wyomia. “It can be used to increase the attention span and concentration; to improve listening skills; to encourage speech and communication. I believe that children with special needs are able to express themselves better through music, and using music therapeutically empowers them socially, emotionally, psychologically, and physically.”*

Wyomia, who is a homoeopath and pianist, completed her Master’s in Music Therapy in the UK. She started teaching piano at the MMMF in 2009 and when the parents of a child with special needs approached the Foundation a year later, Wyomia stepped in. The sessions had a positive impact, word spread and the MMMF started providing Music Therapy on a regular basis.

*“When we discovered that Kizzy was born with disabilities, we also realised that the one thing she responded to was music,” recalls Khorshed Bharucha, whose daughter began Music Therapy at the MMMF in 2010. “She could recognise Pavarotti’s voice and would attempt to hit the high notes in the arias she loved hearing. Her therapy lessons, where she was taught with patience and skill, heightened her response to music, making it a truly enriching and pleasurable experience for her!”*

Unlike conventional music classes, Music Therapy lacks a fixed structure and curriculum. Lesson plans are created for each child, depending on their needs and abilities. *“When children come in, they are free to explore the room and play any instrument,”* says Wyomia.

*“I listen to what they are doing, improvise on the piano and try to match their mood so that they feel someone is trying to connect with them.”*

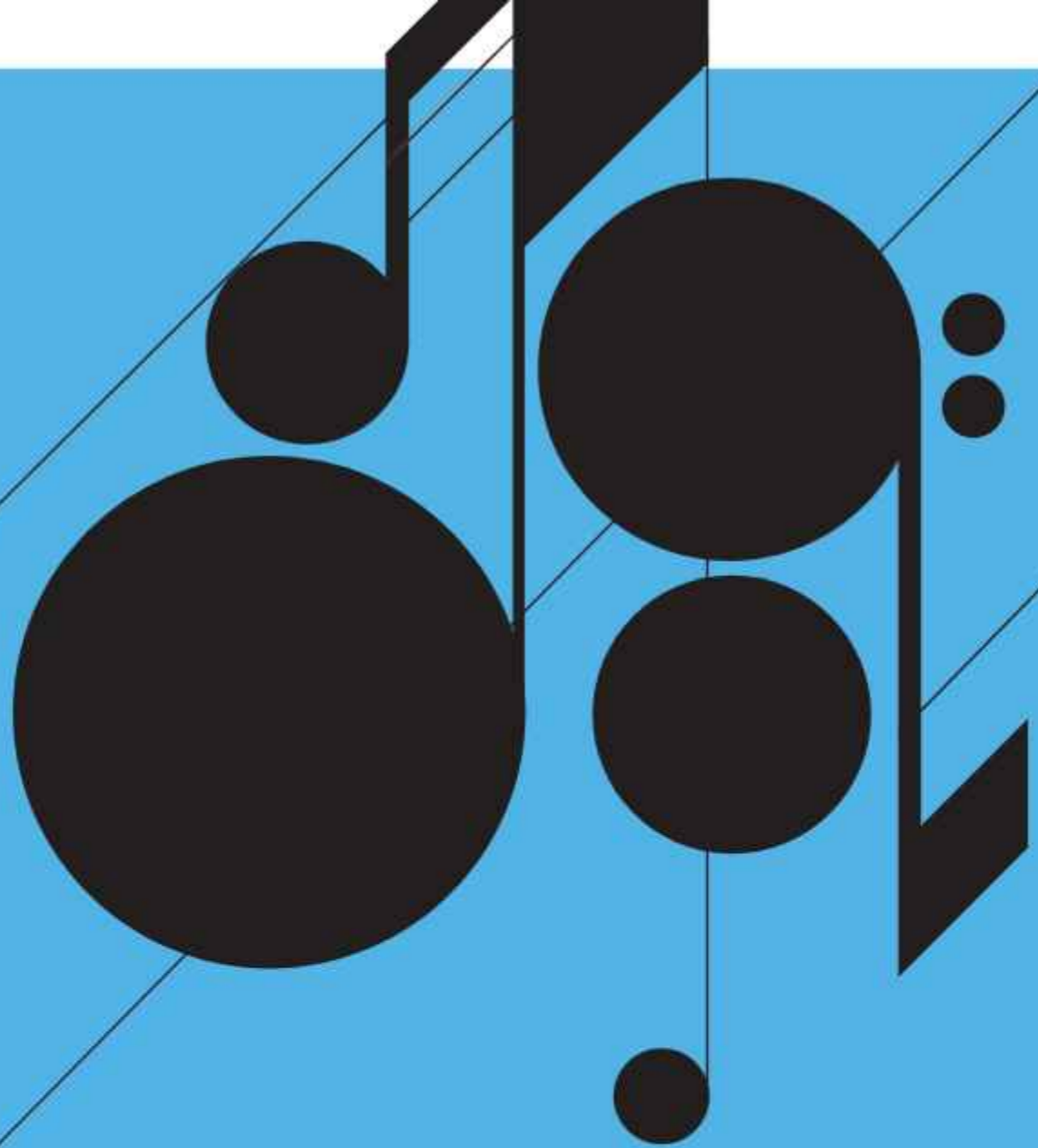
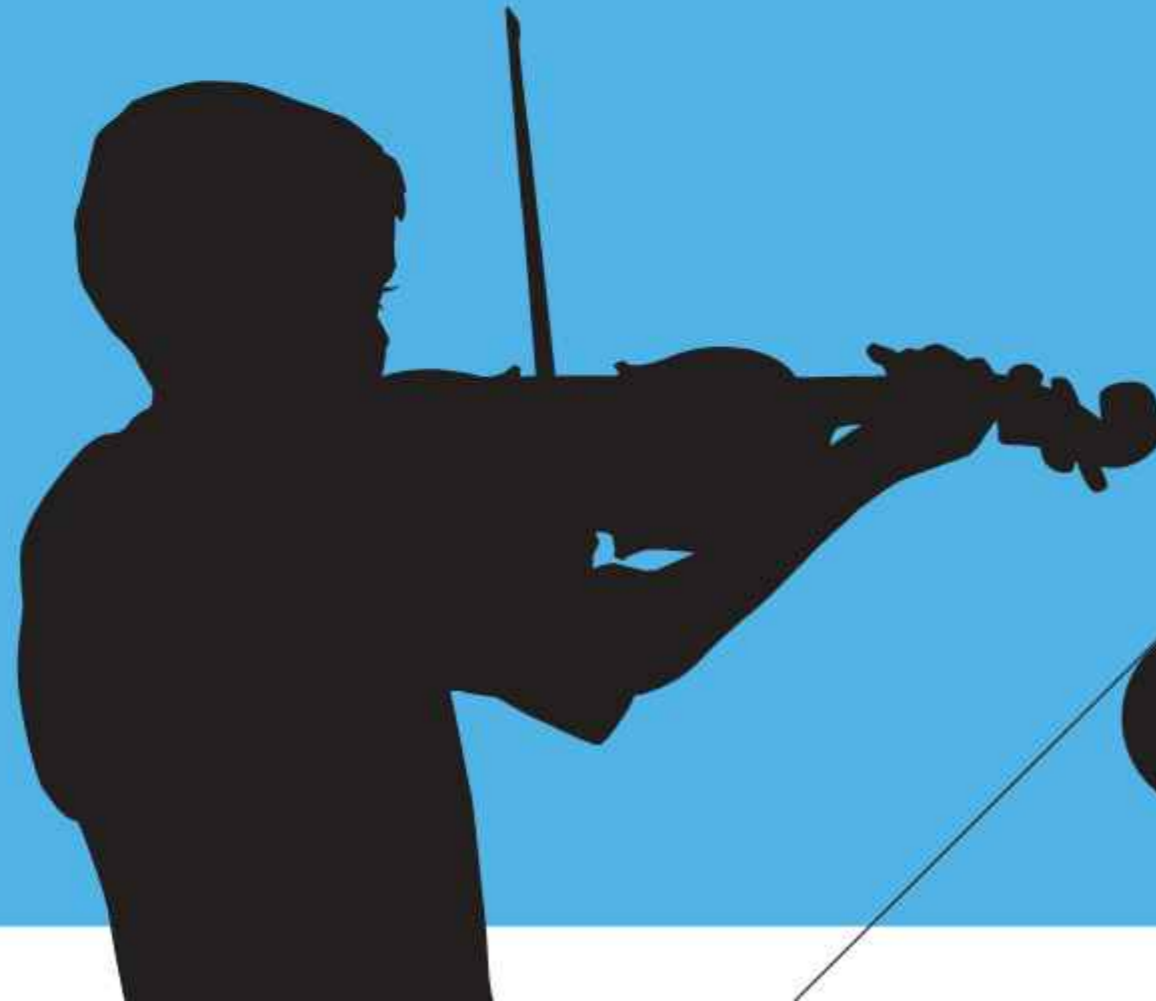
Wyomia cites the example of a 10-year-old boy with autism who is unable to concentrate, communicate or engage in school when overstimulated. *“In music therapy, he began exploring different ways of music-making including playing the drum and cymbal, small percussion instruments, and singing,”* she says, adding that she then started working towards academic goals like counting and concepts like big and small. *“I compose songs to incorporate these goals, and he gradually begins to internalise these concepts.”*

Over the months, the boy started to learn and sing entire songs—and this gave him confidence and a sense of achievement. *“His awareness about the people and things happening around him has increased,”* says his mother. *“His understanding of concepts has gotten better too.”*

Sometimes the changes are imperceptible, at other times they are substantial—but Room No 4 on Mondays is the place for tiny miracles.



# REFLECTIONS



A 30th birthday is, invariably, a moment for reflection. For the MMMF it is a chance to look back with satisfaction at three busy decades of concerts and adventure, students and surprises. It is also a time to take a deep breath and look ahead.

*“Our focus now is education. To continue serving young children and producing good musicians,”* says Mehroo Jeejeebhoy who believes it is important to find the best possible teachers and international opportunities for the MMMF students. Agrees Zareen Bilimoria, *“We see ourselves as a serious school of music.”*

For the music school to grow and prosper, the Foundation is hoping to increase the number of students and instruments, to form its own youth orchestra and to have a team of permanent teachers. For all of this, however, it needs space. *“We would love to have a space of our own and a building for the school of music,”* says Mehroo, admitting that whenever she drives past the old Parsi trust buildings in South Mumbai she makes a wish. *“We are waiting for a philanthropist who can donate a whole building for a school of music.”*

Meanwhile, the Foundation has launched a new series of concerts called The Zubin Mehta Celebrity Concerts, which will bring world-renowned artists and ensembles to perform in Mumbai. The new venture is intended as a tribute to the Maestro, whose support and personal involvement have ensured that the Foundation is flourishing and that some of the world’s greatest soloists and orchestras have performed in Mumbai.

The first concert of the series, which featured Midori, was held in November 2024. *“It is appropriate that the extraordinary violinist Midori, whose career began with Zubin Mehta when she was 11 years old, will perform a recital this evening to launch the Celebrity Concert series,”* stated the programme, adding that future concerts would feature both distinguished performers and rising stars.

The MMMF hopes that these concerts will *“thrill and captivate our audiences and inspire young musicians”*—a goal it has pursued for over 30 years and continues to work towards with determination.

Of course there are challenges. The lack of space and funds. Competition from a slew of new music schools that have ridden on the success of the MMMF education programme. The exorbitant costs of organising concerts. The lack of opportunities in Mumbai for students who want a career within Western classical music.

None of this has, however, dampened the enthusiasm of the committee members. For them, Thursdays remain sacrosanct—and week after week, they meet to plan ways to keep Western classical music alive and well in Mumbai.

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**I started on a Thursday in 1993. A small group of enthusiastic women volunteers with very little experience and one word processor sat around a dining table to organise and present the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra with Maestro Zubin Mehta, in five concerts.**

**When I think about Thursdays, I am amazed at the formidable ‘to-do’ lists we went through for each following concert: writing seat numbers by hand on thousands of tickets, negotiating rates for hundreds of hotel rooms, pleading with officials for government permits and raising funds.**

**When I think about Thursdays, I feel the ‘high’ that accompanied the applause at our concerts; the pride when our students performed in Japan; the satisfaction when children in our outreach programme joined hands and voices with the MMMF choir.**

**When I think about Thursdays, I get a whiff of aromas—of cakes, freshly brewed coffee and poha—welcome distractions at intense meetings!**

**When I think about Thursdays, I wonder how we transformed our ideas and goals into an institution where the lives of hundreds of students have been enriched through music.**

**When I think about Thursdays, I think of the dearest friends I made over these 30 years, and how I continue to look forward to Thursdays.**

**SAKER MISTRI — Committee Member**

# ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Mehli Mehta Music Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation managed by a Board of Trustees, an active Executive Committee, and full office staff. The education activities are supervised by a Director of Education and our faculty consists of 20 dedicated teachers.

## The Executive Committee with Zubin Mehta

(standing, left to right) Feroza Mody, Pheroza Godrej, Gool Mistri, Neeta Bhandari, Khursheed Lam, Anahita Havaladar, Manek Guzder, Smita Godrej-Crishna, Shireen Cama, Monica Vaziralli, Rashna Bilimoria

(seated left to right) Roshan Chagla, Rashmi Poddar, Zareen Bilimoria, Zubin Mehta, Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, Nira Benegal, Saker Mistri





Lovey Fernandes, Priyanka Shah,  
Bakhtavar Pestonji, Mehroo Jeejeebhoy,  
Jennie Khambatta, Kamal Taraporevala,  
Farahanaaz Dastur

Our teachers in concert



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Zubin Mehta  
Zarin Mehta  
Mervon Mehta  
Yusuf Hamied  
Nusli Wadia

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Zareen Bilimoria  
Jamshed Jeejeebhoy  
Mehroo Jeejeebhoy  
Mehli Mistri  
Gautam Patel  
Rashmi Poddar

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Roda Ahluwalia  
Nira Benegal  
Neeta Bhandari  
Rashna Bilimoria  
Zareen Bilimoria  
Shireen Cama  
Roshan Chagla  
Smita Crishna  
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Saker Mistri  
Feroza Mody  
Vera Udwadia  
Monica Vaziralli

#### EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

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Farahanaaz Sohrab Dastur  
Priyanka Pradip Shah  
Kamal Sidhwa Taraporevala

**PHOTO  
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143 (right), 146 (bottom)

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**Courtesy Farrokh Chothia**

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**@Kurush Umrigar**

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**Courtesy Lovey Fernandes**

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**Courtesy Mehli Mehta Music Foundation**

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**Courtesy Musica Mundi School**

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**Courtesy Natalia Ritzkowsky**

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**Courtesy National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA)**

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**Courtesy Noshir Gobhai**

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**@Sooni Taraporevala**

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**Courtesy Vinay Lad**

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**Courtesy Zarin Mehta**

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MEHLI MEHTA  
**MUSIC**  
FOUNDATION