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The Indian Musical Experience: Hitting the high notes

DECCAN CHRONICLE | DARSHANA RAMDEV

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Artefact-driven museum, bulit on the idea of creating a lively cultural centre.



□ The projection of Sound Garden

Bengaluru: Back in 2009, renowned Carnatic singer Manasi Prasad was invited to be part of the Indian Music Experience. She was given a one-line brief - "let's set up something to do with music". Nearly eight years later, that has grown into the Indian Music Experience, South Asia's first interactive museum, which takes audiences through the gamut of traditions that comprise Indian music, from Carnatic and Hindustani styles to Bollywood, folk and even the Chutney Music of the Caribbean. A survey conducted by the IME Trust in JP Nagar found residents voting unanimously for a music center on their BDA-allotted civic amenities site.

Spread out over two acres in JP Nagar's Brigade Millennium, IME, a collaboration of the IME Trust and the Brigade Group, is still in its fledgling stage. Even so, the space itself is quite breathtaking in its conception

and design, holding the promise of a truly remarkable musical journey. "There are institutions that offer education, the arts to those who are interested," explained Manasi, IME's Project Director. "But how does one generate a more widespread interest, especially among the youth?"

The IME was built on the idea of creating a vibrant cultural centre, transcending the idea of a mere artefact-driven museum. "Not a single tree has been cut since the time we started," said renowned veena exponent Dr Suma Sudhindra, IME's Outreach Director, who showed me around the museum. "The design is being done by Gallagher & Associates, who designed the Grammy Museum in L.A.," she explained.

One enters through the Sound Garden, a series of art installations that are all 'playable' and meant to acquaint people with the philosophy of sound.

Inside, different sections pay tribute to classical schools, contemporary styles, film music, and folk traditions. Souvenirs from two Bharat Ratnas - Ustad Bismillah Khan's shehnai and topi and Pandit Bhimsen Joshi's jacket and shawl occupy pride of place in an exhibit dedicated to musicians who have won the award.

Getting content together was a humongous task - "When you're doing something that hasn't been done

before, you're starting from scratch in every way," said Dr Suma. Research was one part of it, Manasi explained - "that was easy, because everything is on the internet." Collecting audio-visual content, however, was another ball game - archives are governed by a plethora of Intellectual Property laws. "We have done this in many ways, for instance, the archives of Dr Ali Akbar Khan, the acclaimed sarod exponent, have been obtained from his family, who hold the rights," she added.

The IME, a not-for-profit initiative, is a mammoth undertaking, running up a total cost of `41 crore. About half the target has been met, with the team looking at crowd-funding, donors, CSR and government grants to help raise the remaining Rs 21 crore. After years of relentless effort, they hope to have things ready by the latter half of 2016, said Dr Suma.

The effort is enough to reduce anybody to a bundle of nerves, but Dr Suma, who is the very picture of calm, said with a smile, "We don't even consider the possibility that things could go wrong. Every step has seemed impossible at some point. If we had stopped to doubt ourselves, we would never have made it this far!"

Manasi summed up the IME beautifully, saying, "we want to create an experience that is both international and truly Indian. If the people who walk in, come out feeling inspired, our job is done."

Exhibits

The Sound Garden

One enters the museum through the Sound Garden, designed by Auroville-based foleydesigns and Svaram musical instruments. What looks like a series of art installations explores the philosophy of sound and each exhibit, which is 'playable', produces a different musical note.

Contemporary Expressions Gallery

Inspired by an urban street scene, replete with an autorickshaw you can climb into, this gallery pays tribute to the journey of Indian contemporary music. This features new bands that write about the urban experience, which began with the advent of Western Classical Music. They have come a long way, to music festival dedicated to Indie music. This journey has been traced in the colourful gallery.

Instruments Gallery

This space will house 250 Indian instruments with kiosks that describe the material, their sound and the process of creating them. While instrument-makers were celebrated across India, they are a dying breed today, with only a handful of renowned names in the business.

Stories through Song Gallery

Divided not by geography but subject, the gallery deals with the cornucopia of Indian folk music. These songs celebrate the variety of music that originates from different parts of the country, but are brought together

by the fact that they talk of life and its many aspects. These songs traditionally deal with birth, death, puberty, love and marriage.

Traditions and Transitions

The journey through India's classical traditions - Hindustani and Carnatic. The gallery begins by explaining the fundamentals, which are common to both schools. As you progress, the traditions diversify and branch off on their own.

Crowd funding

Faced with the task of raising Rs 21 crore to complete the museum, Dr Suma Sudhindra, the Outreach Director, says crowd funding and CSR are major components of the fundraising programme. "We also have the Buy a Brick initiative," she explained. Each brick costs Rs 10,000 and donors will have their names permanently installed within the museum, engraved on the brick that they have bought. "We bring potential donors to take a look at the space, to ensure complete transparency for them, too," Dr Sudhindra added.

Anybody who wants to contribute can contact Ambika on 9686602366 or visit www.indianmusicexperience.org

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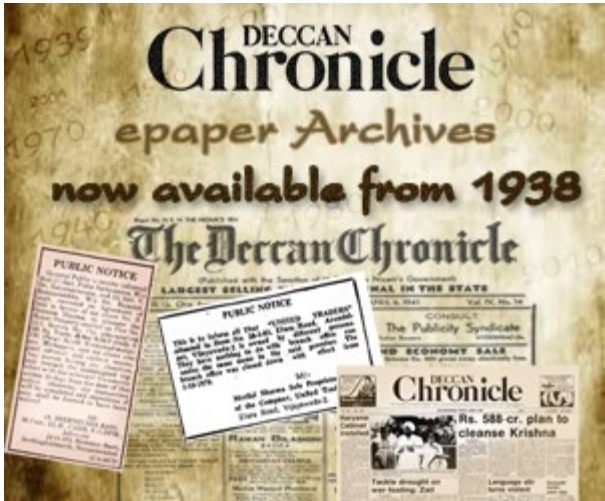

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