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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

SINGER **BAND**

T.M. HOFFMAN - PIONEER OF CLASSICAL CROSSOVER

T.M. (Timothy Michael) Hoffman, thoroughly trained in music of the West, India and Japan, has been enchanting music lovers across the globe for more than three decades. Master of many instruments, Tim's love for music is inimitable. Born and raised in the US and having resided in Japan for 26 years and India for six, his knowledge of Indian classical music is incredible, as also is his command over Indian vocal and instrumental music. Tim is an honors graduate of four universities in four countries and his Gurus have moulded him into a fine musician. Fueled by the power of knowledge and love, Tim is not only a performer but also a producer, scholar, writer, translator, NPO director and unabashed activist. Who would have imagined an American introducing two superbly suited Japanese instruments - vertical bamboo flute shakuhachi and 13-stringed koto - into Indian classical music, or his smooth adaptation of Japanese classical poetry in Hindustani vocal music forms and styles? This clearly reflects love for both his adopted cultures.



What led you to choose a career in music?

My father was a singer and my late mother a pianist and hence I was gently nudged into piano studies from the age of four. Later, specialization in music and language sustained my interest through four universities in four different cultures. I was privileged to train under Japan's top Shakuhachi guru, leading authority of Benares Gharana vocal music, Sri Lanka's most prolific guru, famed masters of Indonesia and Korea, etc. With such good breaks to roll with, there was no looking back.

Though you hail from USA, you like Indian Classical. What is it about this music that fascinates you?

A coherent theoretical system in combination with a vast variety of rhythm and melody, all directed toward the individual, unlike the group orientation in Western music - this is what most attracted me. Also, it has been exciting to discover deep affinities between Indian and other Asian music that indicate great possibilities for interaction.

How has your musical journey been so far?

My musical journey could have been less complicated if I had stayed in the USA, or in Japan's top jazz piano club, or at least limited my lifetime excursion to just one other country (Japan or India, rather than both), but that would not have brought 'Japanese hardware and Indian software' together. After weathering countless hidden bumps in the road - including escaping death by inches in Mumbai on the fateful 12th March 1993 - I can only be grateful for every opportunity to move yet another step forward.

You attribute your success to?

Any success is laid at the feet of my triratna of God, Guru & Gharwalli (better half)

How do you feel performing in India? And what do you have to say about the Indian audience?

Performing in India is exciting - alternately exhilarating and perplexing. One must be prepared for anything, and then expect something else! Audiences here are gracious with their time and attention. But the same is waning with diminished appreciation of raga and other unique Indian artistic values in a rush to be globally cosmopolitan.

Why the headband when you perform? Is it your lucky charm?

Frankly, there is only one reason at least where performing in India is concerned - the band keeps my head from exploding! (Laughs out) Really, when external factors threaten to hijack our magic carpet ride through manodharma music (created on the spot during the performance), I feel more secure and can also spare the audience any concern over sanchari bhav (passing state of mind) that may cross my brow. The second reason is more obvious - usually with no time to swipe a comb through my unruly hair before the curtain goes up, at least the headband can keep my hair from 'going Einstein' (all over the place) on stage.

The best compliment you have ever received for your work?

The spontaneous joy expressed by mentally challenged youth during performances and workshops in Japan and India has been most heartwarming.

Who is your favourite musician?

Too many consummate artists of both East and West spring into view, with arms and voices joined together and surrounded by Gandharvas. But, I revere those who discovered music to be more than itself and of most value beyond themselves and their immediate audiences - Pancasikha, DaVinci, Einstein, Sherlock Holmes, Walt Disney.

Life without music would be...

Unimaginable! - music can survive without us, but not vice-versa. But, then perhaps we would learn to hear the anahata nada (unmade sound) that lies within every second of living but is inaudible while we have all this other music around us to enjoy.

Your message to today's generation to take up music ...

Beyond the stage and recording studios, there are many other valuable applications for music and sound of other kinds - enhancing the health profession, social environments, product design etc - and the future will produce more. One should have a solid base though proper musical training and also cultivate an expansive view to discover creative ways to make music work enjoyably for others, while maintaining the spirit of 'play' that we put together with 'music' to define our activity as musicians.

For more information: TM Hoffman's official website - www.ijmea.com

- Komal Todi

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