

November 12, 2012

Rhythm and blues



The Hindu

Dr. T.V. Gopalakrishnan. Photo: Shiv Kumar Pushpakar



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Swiss Jazz trio, Vein. Photo: Special Arrangement



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German Jazz group, DeciBells. Photo: Special Arrangement

‘Confluence’ aims to connect different musical genres and cultures

Date: November 18

Venue: The Music Academy

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Percussion lies at the heart of every genre of music. It’s also where its deepest adjustments are made. Beat, rhythm and improvisation have developed their own identities in Carnatic, Western classical and Jazz traditions. At *The Hindu* Friday Review November Fest’s concert ‘Confluence’, renowned vocalist, violinist and mridangist T.V. Gopalakrishnan strikes a chord with German classical percussion band DeciBells, headed by his student Siegfried Kutterer, and Swiss jazz trio Vein. Each of the seven pieces in the concert was composed by TVG, as he is popularly known, especially for November Fest.

TVG has helped widen the language of Indian classical music. Awarded the Padma Bhushan this year, he hails from a family of musicians — his father was court musician to the Cochin royal family. He had his mridangam arangetram at the Cochin palace when he was six and was tutored by the legendary Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar. For many years now, TVG has worked towards an East-West dialogue in music, having first made a connect with George Harrison of Beatles fame. He has since taught many students who have gone on to define new boundaries in music.

At the fest, he will be accompanied by Devie Neithiyar (vocal), S. Varadarajan (violin), G. Ramanathan (saxophone), Biju Paulose (keyboards) and Radhakrishnan (ghatam).

The Basel-based DeciBells consists of Siegfried Kutterer, once part of the Basel Symphony Orchestra, and Szilard Buti and Domenico Melchiorre. Vein, also based in Basel, comprises Florian Arbenz (percussion), Michael Arbenz (piano) and Thomas Lahns (double bass). Florian has received the European Award for Culture for his work in jazz and classical music. Michael has performed across Europe and Lahns has done commendable work in jazz.

The three groups come together to perform music that is harmonically sophisticated, graceful in swing and heady on percussion. And despite the complex musical equations, they seem to have a common denominator — a rhythm divine.

The 90-minute concert is brought to you by Pro Helvetia-Swiss Arts Council and Goethe-Institut.

Q&A

T.V. Gopalakrishnan

How did this collaboration come about?

I have met with many musicians on my travels across Europe. With Siegfried Kutterer, my student, I have played in concerts that have showcased Indian classical music and jazz.

How do you select the music for a concert of this sort?

Though the concert will feature music that melds genres, it is not fusion. Rather, it is an integration of sounds drawn from various traditions. The first part of our composition always deals with the melody, so this gives the musicians a chance to exhibit the music of their genre.

DeciBells

Siegfried, what influenced you to learn Eastern forms of percussion?

Ever since I started learning music, I was fortunate enough to be exposed to music from outside Europe. I was fascinated by the richness of rhythms, the sounds of various percussion instruments and compositional concepts of music from the East. At a percussion festival, I got to know T.V. Gopalakrishnan and his music. I was so impressed that I studied Carnatic music with him for years; since then, it has had a great influence on my compositions.

Which musician has the biggest influence on your band?

T.V. Gopalakrishnan, of course!

What has it been like sharing stage with a veteran percussionist like TVG?

TVG is one of the most brilliant musicians with whom I've played. This concert is a wonderful opportunity to combine our compositional ideas. Another aspect is that my musicians, all of whom are a generation younger and coming to India for the first time, will be introduced by TVG to the Indian music culture. I am convinced that this is a unique opportunity and it will have a great influence on their lives.

Vein

You'll play a lot of old melodies such as Gershwin's 'Porgy and Bess'. What draws you'll to the early years of jazz?

For us, it is important to know and understand the tradition of jazz. If you know the roots, you can go on and create new music. George Gershwin is one of the most important composers in the jazz tradition; his pieces were played and recorded by many jazz musicians in different ways. We see ourselves as part of this tradition and try to add something different and new.

How much of folk tradition finds a place in your compositions?

Folk tradition finds a place in our music in a very natural way — especially Swiss folk music. We have also some arrangements of Swiss folk songs. This collaboration with Indian musicians has been very different from what we have worked on so far. We are very excited.

Apart from music what other interests do you'll have as a young trio?

We all follow sports. We like soccer and skiing and we are big fans of tennis star Roger Federer who comes from our city. We're also very interested in the culture, history, people and food of the countries we travel to and, therefore, look forward to exploring India!