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## While his guitar gently sings



The Hindu

Martin van Hees at the concert. Photo: M. Karunakaran

### **Dutch musician Martin van Hees' classical guitar concert showcased the poetry and rich timbre of the Masters**

So soft-spoken an instrument, the voice of Martin van Hees' classical guitar threatened to get lost in the rustle of the breeze, the chirp of the cicadas, the hiss of a bottle of cola being opened and the crackle of a biscuit wrapper.

But thankfully, at St. Christopher's College of Education where Hees performed at a candle-lit hall to a small and intimate audience last weekend, it was the sheer poetry of his performance and the rounded resonance of his guitar that held sway.

Hees, in the country as part of the Classical Guitar Project that aims to bring western classical music to an Indian audience with workshops, master classes and concerts (this one was organised by the Chennai Western Music Association), graduated from the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague under the guidance of Enno Voorhorst. He has won awards and acclaim as a soloist and as a chamber musician performing with violinists, guitarists, vocalists, pianists and pop musicians.

Hees came to the great classical Masters by way of the king of rock and roll, Elvis Presley, whose music he chanced upon very early in life. But it was through the compositions of Bach, Tarrega, Turina, Mangore, Villa-Lobos and Satie that he made a name for himself in Europe (at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw) and struck a chord with the audience that night in Chennai.

Drawing on the inimitable delicate sounds of his instrument, Hees introduced his repertoire, emphasising that the guitar's lyrical and warm sounds and the stories they tell are best heard in tranquil surroundings.

And so, it was as a storyteller that Hees performed each of his pieces. He began with J.S. Bach's 'Chaconne' (BWV1004), intended as an epitaph for Bach's first wife, Maria Barbara, playing the elegiac composition with eloquence. Hees navigated through the abstract masterpiece in a whirl of melody and counterpoint.

The next piece was the classical guitar standard, 'Capricho Arabe', by Spanish Romantic composer Francisco Tarrega. The composer is probably better known for his 'Gran Vals', a phrase from a solo guitar composition that found fame and instant recall as the iconic Nokia ringtone. But Hees delved deep into the composer's other beautiful creation that is clearly inspired by Tarrega's brief dalliance with gypsy life. His boundless reading of the filigreed opening bars suggests the sounds of the oud, the sands of the desert and a romance by the campfire.

Joaquin Turina's 'Sonata' (Op. 61), which the composer dedicated to one of the greatest guitarists of all time, Andres Segovia, moves from being rhythmic and strident in the first movement to slow and lyrical in the second, finishing off with a fast play of fingers in the third. Hees played Turina's longest composition for the guitar with practised ease, his fingering precise even in the faster outer movements.

The works of three other composers — A.B. Mangore ('Choro de Saudade', 'Julia Florida' and 'Waltz Op. 8, No. 4'), Heitor Villa Lobos ('Etude No. 11', 'Cadenza', 'Etude No. 12') and Erik Satie ('Gnossienne No. 1') were rendered with generous ornamentation and clarity.

That evening the music sang from Hees' heart as much as it did from his strings — songs so lyrical and warm that they told their stories so well.