

**Indian Music, Cross Cultural  
Collaboration and Creative  
Approaches to Music Making; India.**

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**FINZI TRUST SCHOLARSHIP  
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## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

I am a professional flautist, composer and amateur whose main interest lies in creative music making, improvisation and collaborative work across art forms and cultures.

My aim in this project is to explore cross-cultural music practice across Western and Indian classical traditions and to examine how cross-cultural music practice can be applied in community settings in India. The project will be practice based research undertaken through the following 3 phases in India:

1. Studying Indian classical music and the cultural tradition it lies within in India. In particular exploring melodic and rhythmic structure in Indian classical music through instrumental lessons. In addition to deepening my musical knowledge and understanding of Indian classical music, I aim to explore how pedagogical methods and the philosophy of music in India can inform my teaching and creative music making in community and educational contexts within the UK.

2. Exploration of cross-cultural practice with Indian musicians in India. In recent years a great number of Indian musicians have been exploring the cross-fertilisation of music from the West with their own classical tradition. I aim to work with musicians there to explore this cross-fertilisation for myself and to examine how this approach to music making could be used in creative and educational context in schools/communities in India and as part of my work in the UK.

3. Delivery of creative music project in school/community setting in India. Creative music making in schools/community contexts has yet to be explored in India despite innovative and creative approaches to new music by professional musicians there. I aim to combine both Western and Eastern approaches to creative music making and teaching by delivering a project in India involving local Indian school children. Through this process I will assess how successful these new approaches to creative workshop practice are in India and think about how they could be applied within multi-cultural communities in the UK.

I am passionate about developing new approaches to cross-cultural and cross-arts collaborative work in community and education contexts and believe that through this project I will gain not only a deeper understanding of Indian classical music and approaches to learning this music, but also gain new skills that will inform my work running cross-cultural projects in the UK.

## **FINAL SCHEDULE**

**October 4<sup>th</sup> 2008:** Arrived in Mumbai and took 4 days to recover from the journey, organise accommodation and music lessons.

**October 8<sup>th</sup> 2008:** Sitar and Singing lessons begin at Ajivasan Music Academy, Juhu.

**October 20<sup>th</sup> 2008:** Bansuri lessons begin with Jay Thakkar.

**October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008:** Taster sessions at Shishuvan School to meet staff and students.

**November 1<sup>st</sup> 2008:** One week composing and planning with Indian musicians and Shishuvan music teacher.

**November 19<sup>th</sup> 2008:** Music project begins at Shishuvan School, Mumbai

**November 26<sup>th</sup> 2008:** Terror attacks in Mumbai. All schools and work places closed. Advised to stay indoors for 4 days.

**November 28<sup>th</sup> 2008:** Shishuvan school project performance cancelled due to school closure.

**January 28<sup>th</sup> 2009:** Shishuvan school project recommences working towards Shishuvan Annual day concert.

**February 7<sup>th</sup> 2009:** Shishuvan School project performance.

## **Phase 1: Studying Indian classical music and the cultural tradition it lies within**

My interest in Indian Classical music started around 1999 when I began listening to recordings of the celebrated Indian flautist Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia. Fascinated by his sound and the improvisatory quality of the music, I began to listen more and more to Indian classical music and this led me to perform a transcribed raga with tabla and guitar in my Masters performance recital at the Royal Northern College of Music. Two years later I had the opportunity to spend three weeks travelling in North India where I stayed with the Indian classical violinist Sharat Shrivastava in Delhi. There I was able to see first hand the guru-shishya (teacher-student) between Sharat and his student who lived with him and his family. The music tradition had been passed to Sharat by his own guru who was his grandfather and now he was passing the tradition on to the next generation. The experience of staying with Sharat over those few days and learning more about how Indian classical music through conversations with him inspired me to learn more about Indian music for myself and to explore the possibilities of collaboration with Indian musicians.

My aim in this project supported by the Finzi Scholarship Trust was to study the bansuri (Indian flute) because of my background as a western flautist and also the tabla to help me understand better the rhythmic structure behind Indian music. As I started to develop my plans for the project, however, I discovered that the majority of Indian musicians I spoke to began their music studies learning vocal music to grasp the basics of music regardless of whether they developed as a singer or instrumentalist. I decided that this would be a very useful way for me to start my training also so I approached the Ajivasan Music Academy directed by the acclaimed singer Suresh Wadkar, one of the Indian film industry's leading playback singers, for vocal lessons and training in the theory of Indian Classical music. This proved to be an important decision for me because it led me to study with Prem Vasant, director at the Ajivasan Music Academy and sitar player, who proved to be an invaluable help to me with my music studies in India. On Prem's advice I decided that the best approach for me to learn more about the history and theory of music was to have lessons with her on the sitar so she could teach me the history, theory and practice of music through the instrument. In this way I began my studies in Indian classical music as a vocalist and on the sitar. To fulfil my wish of transferring my flute playing skills to the bansuri I decided to take private lessons with a former student of Hariprasad Chaurasia called Jay Thakkar. Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia's own gurukul is in Mumbai itself but it is a requirement of his classes that you must have a basic level of ability on the instrument and understanding of Indian music before you can learn with him.

During my time in Mumbai I was able to learn through different means including one to one individual lessons and also through experiencing the daily vocal masterclasses taken by Suresh Wadkar at Ajivasan Music Academy. In addition I was also to sit in on some of the weekly classes that the public attend at the Music Academy.

I was interested in studying at Ajivasan Music Academy after meeting Suresh Wadkar, his wife Padma and Prem Vasant on a previous visit to Mumbai in August 2008. They are not only dedicated to the development of young artists but also believe in a holistic approach to music and music education and have an open minded attitude to how musical styles and genres can learn from one another. The school's philosophy developed from the founder and celebrated musician Acharya Jilal Vasant who was both Suresh Wadkar's guru and Prem Vasant's father. He founded a music school in 1932 called Vasant Sangeet Vidyalaya under the patronage of Smt. Rameshwari Nehru in Srinagar to train children scientifically in Indian classical music. This school was the beginning of the Ajivasan Music Academy today and in fact the word Ajivasan derives from the first letters of the words "**A**charya **J**ilal **V**asant **S**angeet **N**iketan".

The Ajivasan Gurukul currently houses around 5 students who live and study at there receiving their professional training in music from Suresh Wadkar. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to stay at the gurukul for the first phase of my project alongside the students. In this way I was able to witness first hand the traditional method of learning Indian Classical music through guru-shishya-parampara.

The guru-shishya method is the way Indian music was passed on for generations although in India today there are now many different ways people learn music due to modern living and other commitments in people's lives. The method was based on a very focussed relationship between teacher and student. The music expert or guru would be approached by a student wishing to study with him. To be accepted by the guru was often a great challenge as the guru would only accept students he believed were worth teaching. Often the student would come to the guru's house regularly to request lessons until the guru no longer refused. Merely by the guru not refusing the student coming to his house would indicate that he had accepted him into the learning process. From that point the student would live with the guru and his family in sitting with him every day to learn and also attending to his needs. This relationship would continue for around 15 years as the guru passed on their knowledge to their student and took care of all aspects of their education. Very often life for the student would be hard as the guru's frequently lived in very basic circumstances and could also be strict with their students. Traditionally this relationship occurred within the family structure from father to son or uncle to nephew. Due to the changes in modern life, however, the tradition within families is being lost as the children of musicians choose to follow different career paths. Since a guru's most important wish is that they pass on their tradition to someone, they now also

take on other students who come to live with them and learn in the guru-shisha tradition. Sharat in Delhi has such a student but in the future he may also teach his son Ragav if he is interested. Sometimes the guru may decide to focus on one of their best students and put much of their energy into them as in the case of Suresh Wadkar who was regarded almost as a son by his guru.

These days being a musician in India is often regarded as something extra that people will do in their spare time and music is not widely accepted as a profession in itself unless you are one of the top players in the country. Very often if a child wants to pursue a career in music their family will ask them to get a degree in another subject area as well to have a career to fall back on. Due to this situation the way people learn music in India nowadays is changing, particularly with the emergence of music schools where students can pay for weekly lessons. In addition to its role as a gurukul to train young musicians, Ajivasan Music Academy also runs weekly classes in singing, sitar, tabla and dance. Having attended some of these classes I have been amazed at how popular the classes are and the diversity of students who attend them from very young children to adults who attend the classes after work. At Ajivasan they teach a graded yearly system where the students work through theory and practical pieces. They have 6 levels of training and on completion of the 6<sup>th</sup> year attain the equivalent level as a Bachelors degree in music. Consequently the make up of the classes is predictably diverse. The number of adults wanting to learn music is very high in Mumbai so in a commercial sense, this new form of music learning is extremely profitable. The system of learning music at Ajivasan also transcends from Suresh to the gurukul students who teach the members of the public paying for lessons. This takes me on to the gurukul students at Ajivasan. I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to stay at the gurukul and witness first hand how the system works.

Students come from all parts in India and abroad to study with Suresh Wadkar. They are auditioned and if accepted come to live at Ajivasan where they undergo daily intense training. At 6am they begin their singing practice or "riaz". The reason for the early start is because your body is at its most relaxed at that time and it takes extra effort to sing which helps your practice later in the day. Their practice begins with long notes sung to the word "om". Traditionally this is due to religious reasons referring to god, but there are also practical reasons too. Using the word "Om" is a good way of warming up the body and voice gently. It gives the body time to adjust to deep breathing as the whole body works together to find itself for the day ahead. There is also a meditative aspect to this helping to focus the mind on the day ahead. The other aspect to this early morning riaz is that it is at sunrise so they begin when it is still dark and when they finish the day has begun. Following riaz they are then required to clean their room and wash in preparation for breakfast. Breakfast is at 8 and following this they have some time on their own to prepare for their morning masterclass which runs from around 9.30 to 12.30. During these classes, Suresh will work on a particular raag starting

with long notes and onto the different sections of the raag. The students learn aurally to develop their ear and memorising skills and the class progresses with them imitating his phrases. He will then ask them to repeat phrases as necessary to ensure that they are understanding. In this way they begin to absorb his particular style of singing and are able to not only imitate exactly the phrases he does but also improvise in a similar style with his method of ornamentation and inflections in the sound. After class the students have lunch then have time in the afternoon either to attend a college class or continue with their own personal practice until their next sitting with Suresh in the evening where they may continue on to a different raag. These students also follow a form of syllabus with the yearly exams and have theory and songs that they must learn before they progress.

What are the commonalities between Indian and western classical music and how can they learn from one another? I have noticed many common features. For instance, the focus that the students must have on their learning processes throughout their daily lives. Students studying western music begin from a very early in the morning to practice and plan their days around their practice schedule moving from tone exercises to technical exercises and repertoire. To a certain extent this is also what the gurukul students are learning. The difference is that all of the training the gurukul students receive is aurally and contains improvisation from the beginning even in it's most basic form through ornamenting notes. In this way it could be more comparable with western baroque music where musicians learn ornamentation and elements of improvisation throughout their training.

Life at the gurukul is not without it's hardships for the students. There are very strict rules about them not being allowed to leave the building without permission, very limited opportunities for them to visit their families and a very strict regime that is followed closely by the head of the school. Prem Vasant who is in charge of their care and training at Ajivasan explained the reasoning behind this.

"I need to know each and every minute of my students. If they want to go out they have to ask me, even if they have to go the ATM or one of the stores to pick up something. The only reason is that I have young kids who are staying here and they are vulnerable and very easy to be influenced by the outside world. Bombay is a good place as well as a very, very dirty place. I must know as a mother wants to know what the child is doing and that makes it a gurukul. You are part of the family. I would like to know what is happening to you for your good and the good of the family, both families, because I am answerable. I try my level best to protect them and then also make a programme for them or timetable that they, for example, have to start their practice at 6 in the morning. Whether they can see me or not I can hear them, and if ever there is one voice less I want to know why. Again these regimes, these disciplinary actions are only for their good so I know where their progress is. If I am not happy with the progress in 6 months time I can send them back. I don't want to take them for granted"

All of the students I interviewed at the school accepted this regime as part of their experience and preferred the focussed atmosphere of the gurukul to the way they learnt at home. They also gained inspiration from hearing their fellow students practicing so the sense of motivation is always there. With so few distractions they feel that they are able to advance at a much quicker pace and so, accept the restrictions without problem. This kind of life is not for every young musician, however, and while I was there I met a 16 year old girl who found the way they lived very difficult because of the lack of contact with their families and the restrictions on going out etc. She decided finally that the whole experience was too difficult for her and chose to leave and study at another school .

Although life as a student in the gurukul can be strict and quite basic, it is very removed from how a student in a traditional guru-shishya relationship would have lived. Prem Vasant explained.

“we didn’t have many schools so we needed to depend upon the guru, a stalwart or professional. Whenever he felt that he could take you up for your training it was also required that you leave your parent’s house and come and stay with him. Maybe the reason was the distances. The other reason is that once you are under the training of the guru he does not want your attention to be divided. Guru means someone who is an expert, the master, so the master took care of the child not only to train them in the subject but also to take care of his upbringing. The gurus played the role of the residential schools. The only thing was that many gurus did not charge much. Just that you were allowed to come and learn was a very big fee because you were cut off totally from your family. But you lived there as a member of the family and as the gurus were not very well off you literally lived in poverty with basic minimum requirements with food and a place to sleep while looking after your guru. Sometimes people took it too far but that’s how it goes. It’s accepted. You are almost like a slave, only then he accepts you, you have to prove your worth. If you have to put in some hard work you will always remember what you have done. You have to prove yourself that you are worth teaching. You are a member of the family. You live like one. You share the joys and the sorrows of the family. You are part of them. That also gives you the facility to share the culture of the guru and means whatever the family of the guru is doing, you will do the same.”

There are, of course, other gurukuls that have intensive training for the students. One of these is Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia’s Brindavan also based in Mumbai. In a meeting with Hariprasad Chaurasia he explained to me that they would take in students from villages in the countryside where the family may not have much money. The students do not pay for their training with him but will live at the gurukul throughout their training until such time that they are ready to leave and make their living through music. In this way, his gurukul keeps watch on their students very carefully and is fully aware of the

time and training they have put into their students. This is contrast to Ajivasan where the students pay a stipend every year for their training.

My bansuri teacher Jay Thakkar studied at Hariprasad Chaurasia's Brindavan Gurukul and explained their way of learning there as follows:

"The pre-requisite for learning with Hariji are that you should have your basics clear to the extent that in the most basic raags or the most widely practiced raags, things like Bhupali or Yemen, Bhairiv or Bhairivi. In these raags you should know the notes well enough to be able to identify them when they are played. On any given day there will be between 5 and 25 to 30 students in the class. He will start with the scale of a particular raag. We will go up and down the scale of the raag. It may be a straight scale, it may be a complex scale. After which we would start alap with long notes in the bass registers. And all the time he would play a phrase and you would repeat. If he's not happy with how you play a phrase he will play it once, twice, thrice. If you cannot play it the third time he will keep moving ahead. After which he will go to the jod and the jhala part of it. The jod is the same alap but with a beat or a pulse which culminates in the jhala which is a rapid and more complex form of jod with fast taans. After which if there is a tabla player in the class on that given day then he will take a composition in the same raag or a different raag. Until the alap, jor and jhala, all the students are playing together but when the tabla plays he starts with the basic lines of the composition and he asks each of us to improvise an alap to show his or her own thoughts about the composition and the raag through the improvisation. Then it comes back to him and we all play together. We take it to a slightly faster tempo, he improvises and then he asks all of us to improvise one after another and then at the end of it we all play the composition together a few times just to memorise it better and that is where the class ends. Each class lasts for about 2 to 2 and half hours non-stop. This is the normal format in which he conducts masterclasses."

Jay Thakkar also followed this structure in my bansuri lessons. We would start with long notes to consolidate breathing, tuning with the electric tampura and to internalise the mood of the raag. Initially I was surprised at how long we would spend on this section of the practice as I was eager to be learning phrases and slides etc. As the lessons continued, however, I began to understand how important it was to establish the correct relationship between the tampura (fundamental note and drone) with the notes of the scale. It is this relationship that determines the flavour and the mood of the raag. Once the long notes had been established Jay would begin to play short phrases that I would copy, repeating until they started to sound correct. Each raag has it's own distinctive phrases almost like a leitmotiv that would return throughout so at this stage it was to help me consolidate these phrases. Jay would say very little through this whole process and sometimes I found it quite exhausting to play continuously for often 2 or more hours. Physically the bansuri is also quite demanding as the stretch for the fingers is wide and your hands need some time to adjust to this position. I found the

holding of the bansuri particularly difficult and painful so it took me some time to accomplish a relaxed posture on the instrument. Gradually through the lessons we would develop by working on one raag and moving through the various sections of the raag from the alap to the jor. On the bansuri, due to the physical constraints I had at the time, I did not advance as far as the jhala but this is something I am now working at on my own.

My training at Ajivasan took different forms. My vocal training took me initially through warm ups and alankars which are technical patterns that you learn to develop technique and style. These vocal lessons were conducted on a one to one basis with Geetika, a gurukul student. Geetika is 22 but has been learning at Ajivasan since she was 14. As Prem explained to me, the approach that Ajivasan is to encourage the students to teach as soon as they are able. In this way their learning is solidified and they are encouraged to discover more as their own students ask them questions that push their knowledge boundaries. Through my vocal lessons I was able to learn four different raags and make a start on writing my own Sargams which are short improvisatory passages that occur between repeated melodic phrases in the raag structure.

Not being a vocalist it was interesting for me to develop my vocal skills in this context because of the very strong relationship between singing and playing the flute. Due to my initial physical difficulties playing the bansuri, learning the raags, phrase structures and improvisation vocally was extremely useful. Many of the exercises we did were very close to ones I had used whilst training on the flute but since the learning was done through aural means my ear really developed through this process and I was able to internalise melodies quicker. Through bhajans and other vocal compositions I was also able to learn more about the Indian culture and language as many of the songs refer to particular Gods or spiritual texts. One of the most difficult aspects of learning the vocal style was learning how to sing with a different tone quality. In Indian singing, the vocalists use a slightly more dense, nasal sound that is even throughout all registers. In western singing we use different means of expression and tend to sing with a more open throat. This was an area I had to develop through my lessons.

My sitar lessons with Prem was a completely different experience for me where I learned far more than the techniques of playing. Having been taught music by her father and guru, Prem chose to study English and German at university and for many years taught German in schools and colleges including the Goethe institute. She has now moved back to music full time, manages Ajivasan and is writing a book on music soon to be published. Through my lessons with her she was able to give me an insight into many aspects of music because of her own immersion in music by her father. Not only was her father a great musician and teacher but he also realised the need to develop research into Indian classical music to preserve the tradition.

In many ways Indian Classical Music and light music are facing the same issues the west has in terms of teaching approaches and methods of passing on the tradition and I can see many parallels between how we learn Western Classical Music and the way they learn in India. Firstly, the tradition requires an extremely focussed period of training with one guru in order for them to fully encompass a particular style of playing. This training now comes in different forms including one to one lessons, exam structures and classes but still works on the principle of learning aurally with only the use of notation as a supporting structure. There has also been a change to a more commercial means of teaching which has meant that large numbers of the community are now keen to pay for lessons and young musicians training to be professionals feel they have more of a right of their training. There are very few Universities that offer music courses and many young musicians will have trained in another field as well as their music so they have another skill to fall back on. This is generally encouraged by their parents unless they come from a musical family. To make a living as a musician in India is very hard and nowadays young musicians have to demonstrate not only a huge talent in performance but also strong skills in entrepreneurship.

## **Phase 2: Exploration of cross-cultural practice with local Indian musicians in India**

Throughout my time in this project at the heart of what I aimed to achieve was a better understanding of Indian Classical music and to be able collaborate with Indian classical musicians more effectively. In the first couple of weeks of being in Mumbai I was fortunate to meet a couple of young professional musicians and a school music teacher who were interested in collaborating with me to write a new composition and to take this composition into a school to develop it creatively with a class of children. I met these musicians through a workshop I was leading with musicians who were part of the British Council Project "Different Strokes". The musicians I worked with on this project were Anuraag Dhoundeyal and Ambresh Shroff. Anuraag is a Hindustani Classical vocalist who comes from a musical family of professors. He has a strong base in Indian Classical music but also listens widely to many genres of music and has a good understanding of how to relate Indian classical music concepts into western terms. Ambresh is a young singer and composer who has been singing professionally since a young age after being taken as a disciple by the music composer Kalyanji. Sushil Vishran is a music teacher at Shishuvan school. Sushil started his music training quite late in life at the age of 18 but subsequently trained in vocals and tabla. He now has a busy schedule teaching music in the week and performing and arranging music for functions and events at the weekends.

My first meeting was first of all with Sushil to discuss with him what he would like to gain from a collaborative project and to initiate starting points for some musical ideas. In this first session Sushil sang me the song he had been teaching the children. This song, called "Sa Pa Pa" was in an unusual melodic structure because it did not stay in just one raag but had a combination of two raags or scales. Sushil had been trying to express to the children the meaning behind the song which was reflected in the rhythmic structure of the piece. The music began in a steady 3/4 pulse that then moved into a phrase with more movement both in the melody and in the rhythm. He explained to the children that the beginning of the song had quite a lazy feel as if you were feeling lazy or lethargic. Suddenly it moves into a much livelier idea which is almost like you have made a decision to do something positive and move on.

Previous to this meeting I had spoken to the head teacher at Shishuvan school about possible themes or ideas for the concert. The children we were going to work with had been studying the theme of oppression and protest. Out of these ideas I decided to focus on the theme of Change for this project which could incorporate ideas about how to make positive changes in the world around us.

The first meeting of our group of musicians was an opportunity for me to explain the project and to make a start on writing a new composition that would be performed to the children in the school and ideas from it developed.

We began by improvising riffs or repeated patterns layered on top of one other to get a sense of how we each play. Anuraag sang, Ambresh played the keyboard, Sushil played tabla and I was on the flute. We worked on this process a few times to get used to the ensemble and also each tried improvising around a particular raag. I introduced to them a rhythmic pattern in 7 and we then set about deciding on a raag to work around. It was decided that we would use Raag Jog which is a scale very similar to the western blues scale. Taking this as the starting point Anuraag found a melody in 7 that worked over the rhythmic pattern I had taught them and Ambresh found chords to harmonise this melody. In keeping with the Indian Classical tradition we had the idea of presenting this melody first of all in the slower speed and then doing the double speed version of exactly the same melody which is a technique that is used in the raga structure. We wanted to reflect the idea of a change of emotions pitches and rhythm so decided to start from a very improvisatory feel in the music with the instruments playing quite independently to music that was more structured and tightly arranged. For this purpose I wrote a short rhythmic melody that had an almost Balkan feel to it and we arranged this over an Indian rhythmic cycle. This section was tightly structured with harmonies worked out gradually entering over an organised structure and led into the fast version of the original theme. The result was a new piece that had a slow exploratory feel to it at the beginning which leads into the first statement of the melody by Anuraag on vocals. I took over the melody and gradually we played it together leading into a faster section heralded by a short rhythmic motif. The faster section presented the melody interspersed with short improvised sections reflective of the sargams and taans in Indian Classical music. This was arranged harmonically and orchestration wise in a western style and built to a crescendo with the return of the original melody at a faster tempo.

We met together daily for a week to work out the ideas, develop the music and to think about how we would present the ideas to the children. Sushil was keen that we emphasize the harmonic aspect of the music because this was an area that the children had very little knowledge of. Generally in Indian classical music there is no harmony and the music is developed purely through the melodic structure and its relationship to the drone. In addition to the children being inspired by our performance he was keen that they understand exactly how we constructed the piece in order to lay the foundation for the children writing their own music.

Throughout this whole process of collaboration I found my studies in Indian classical music had informed me greatly to the point where I had a much deeper understanding and awareness of the possibilities of what we explore in the music. My understanding of the rhythmic structures and motifs such as tihai's really helped me to quickly pick up what they were trying to introduce

to me and in turn I could see where they were coming from and introduce something new from my part. What became very clear in this process is that a clear understanding of each tradition is essential for an innovative collaboration to break new ground and try something new. While I still feel that my understanding of Indian Classical music is still at a very basic level, I do feel I have made strong inroads into developing my understanding of it and also understanding the Indian musician's approach to collaboration.

Fusion is a hugely popular concept in India at the moment and in the way people describe it, is thought of almost as a genre in its own right. This is partly because some bands have taken quite a formulaic approach to fusion as my bansuri teacher Jay Thakkar explained.

"A standard fusion concert would consist of one Indian classical musician, one musician from the film industry and one western musician (not a western classical musician because a western classical musician would never do something like that). They get together, the Indian guy will try to make a tune in a particular raag and then he will do the rhythmic distribution of that melody in a way that sounds western of which he has a very vague idea. Only a certain rhythmic pattern, he will think that this is western, this has a western touch. If you ask him, he won't be able to explain what a western touch means because for that you need to listen to a bit of western music. Western classical music and a little bit of contemporary western. But no, they don't do that. They'll just take a raag, do a random distortion and they'll call it a fusion melody and then keep continuing in the way they do in Indian classical. The bharat (bharat means progressions). They'll keep having the progressions the way they have it in Indian classical music and the film industry guy will just take some samples from the recordings he has done and try to adapt to this. So it's a very confused hotch pot of things pieced together. It's totally lacking in aesthetics and taste. The genre is a very ambiguous one. There is no definite form of music that comes out of this kind of a fusion. For that they actually have to sit down for weeks and months together and work on the form. "I respect your music, you respect my music, let's keep it aside for the moment and try something new." One has to actually get out of one's patterns. To break the pattern and arrive at something which is neither this nor that, but good. Then we work on it and build it even more. That is what is required. Not an on the spot jam session. In most of the fusion concerts the artists haven't even spent time together once before the concert. They just talk over the phone, oh we'll take up this raag, we'll take up this kind of a beat at this tempo and we'll give it this treatment. It doesn't happen over the phone. Rehearsals do not happen over the phone, they happen in a common space where you are working for hours."

Many of the top performing artists in the country are also doing their own fusion some on a more superficial level and some with longer term projects. Zakir Hussain is one such musician who has collaborated with a whole host of musicians from around the world. His virtuosic tabla playing can adapt to any

musical genre and in fusion the concerts I saw him play, much of the performance is based on the skill and agility of each performer rather than the compositional skills in the music they are making. This "jamming" approach is sometimes hit or miss with some really fabulous performances developing in this way and some very ordinary ones. There have also been some musical ideas that have been developed in recent years and are frequently used partly in response to the audiences. These include juggelbandi's which are musical conversations between instruments and also the idea of every performance finishing with a virtuosic flourish from each instrumentalist. While these techniques are used throughout the world with audiences enjoying the thrill of the event, they have little value in developing exciting new approaches to collaboration.

During this project I also had the opportunity to perform with a fusion band called "Fuzik" who comprised of tabla, sitar, carnatic vocalist (south Indian style), drum kit and keyboard. Through this performance project I was able to build upon my experiences with Anuraag, Ambresh and Sushil and also was able to understand more fully how fusion ensembles often rehearse and develop their material. In this ensemble there was an equal distribution of music leadership between the carnatic vocalist, sitar player and tabla player. Each of them brought compositions to the group and the other players contributed to arranging and developing these pieces. My role in this project was primarily to be an additional colour in the ensemble, to harmonise with the sitar and take solos when required. The experience of being in this ensemble was very interesting for me as it gave me an insight into how Indian classical musicians work because the music was primarily Indian classical slightly westernised with harmonies and drum kit. Much of the music on first hearing was extremely complex with multitudes of cross-rhythms and virtuosic solos. As I began to listen further, however, I could hear that there were many set rhythmic structures that are used frequently in Indian music and so all of the musicians could very quickly fall into these structures and predict when the next section would appear and how to solo over these rhythms etc.

All of these experiences helped me when developing our music further in the Shishuvan School.

### **Phase 3: Delivery of creative music project in school/community setting in India**

The final stage of my project was delivered in Shishuvan School in the Dadar area of Mumbai. I was given a contact for Shishuvan School through the British Council, India. In order to develop my work in educational contexts I was interested in working with a school who had an open minded approach to creativity and who would be interested in working in partnership with me for the duration of the project. I couldn't have met a better school for this purpose. Shishuvan is a forward thinking educational establishment which takes students from the nursery level to Year 7. Only 7 years old, it runs on the philosophy of developing all aspects of the student and puts a strong emphasis on allowing the children to develop as individuals. Consequently they were very supportive of working with me and gave me a great deal of support throughout the project. Sushil Vishran was also very keen to collaborate with me to develop his skills in creative music making so gave up a great deal of his spare time to work with me closely with me throughout the project.

The first couple of times I visited the school were on my own to meet with the children and deliver a short creative workshop with them. One of my immediate observations about the children was that they were very creative but extremely loud. There were two practical reasons for this. Firstly, the noise level of most places in Mumbai is extremely high. There are constantly horns blaring, people shouting, music blasting and inside there are always fans on. All of these things contribute to the fact that people tend to speak louder and in a school setting this is amplified 10 fold because of the excitement of the children. The other reason for the children's noise level was that the philosophy of the school encouraged the children to volunteer their ideas and think for themselves. While this meant they had some wonderful ideas, it also meant that they were very used to shouting out ideas whenever they came into their head and were not very good at listening. In many subjects that involved more individual work like history or science this would most likely not be a problem but unfortunately in a music setting this proves to be quite difficult as it means that the children's listening abilities are undeveloped and for them to learn, for example, one line of a song, it may take three times before they all get it. So this was one of the challenges for me ahead. The other challenge was that the creative approaches to music making e.g. using body percussion, working in groups, suggesting their own rhythms etc. were all very new to them so initially they found some of them difficult. I was working with both year 5 and year 6 students who were between 10 and 12 years old.

In our first workshop session with the full group of musicians we began the workshop with a performance of the new composition. For some of the children this was one of the first times they had heard a live performance and

for some of them they were not quite sure how to react. When they heard the Hindustani vocal sound, for example, some of them giggled because it was so new for them. It became very clear early on that not many of them had heard much music outside the music from Bollywood films so some of them were amazed at how all the instruments worked together as a band. After our performance we broke down our composition into pieces so they could hear how it was put together and they learnt the rhythm in 7 beats, clapping it along with our performance. I was surprised at how new the Indian classical music was to them in addition to the western elements. As I spent more time in Mumbai, however, it became clear that Indian Classical music is not listened to by a wide section of the community. In a similar trend to Western Classical music, in recent times it has been mostly the older people, from the age of the transistor radio before television, who attend classical concerts. Over the last few years, however, with the advent of reality tv shows, more and more young people are starting to become interested in Indian classical music because all of the judges and gurus on these shows emphasise the importance of a strong training in Classical music to help the participants perform well on light songs or film songs.

Following our performance to the children we played some warm up games with them to help them get used to working as a team and also to enable them to get to know us better. From this point I introduced the theme of "Change" to them and we began brainstorming for the project. The children's initial ideas led to them writing songs and raps about things they would like to change about the school and how they could help the environment. We used the raag we performed in our composition as the basis for the song and gradually the music started to emerge from the children after working in groups with one musician leading them. An interesting outcome I discovered was that the children were very used to working in unusual time signatures like 7 or 9 beats to a bar, but they found creating a simple rhythm in 4 beats in the bar extremely difficult. They also found keeping a rhythm going in one group while a different rhythm played on top very difficult. This was because the music that they listen to, primarily film songs, are very often in unusual time signatures and the basics that they learn in music often start with those beats as opposed to 4/4 which is the most common in the west. Collaboratively, this part of the project worked very well because each of us as musicians could contribute their speciality to the process. Anuraag and Ambresh created some great lyrics with the children, I spent time with them harmonising their words and Sushil worked with a group on instruments. Over the course of around 6 workshops we had developed the basis of a performance that had 2 raps, a group song, a body percussion piece, instrumental section and a song the girls wrote and performed by themselves. In the final few days of our rehearsals, however, the terror attacks in Mumbai began and due to school closures we were forced to put the project on hold. Unfortunately I was due to start work on a project for the British Council, India in Kolkata the weekend after the attacks so we were unable to reschedule the performance for the following week.

Shishuvan school and I were very keen that we complete the project after all the hard work the children and musicians had put in so we recommenced the project once I had completed my project for the British Council on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Shishuvan school have a very large scale performance every year for their annual day and they invited me to work with the children again to develop their music into a performance for this event. Fortunately my flight to the UK was not scheduled until the 10<sup>th</sup> February so I was able to complete the final phase of my project over this period.

I worked very intensively with the children in collaboration with Sushil Vishran for the final performance from the 28<sup>th</sup> January to the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009. The music created was a combination of Indian and western elements with tabla accompanying Indian rhythms played on junk instruments and Indian songs intertwined with raps to western beats. The final performance was a great success and had wonderful feedback from the students, staff and parents. Unfortunately for this final stage of the project, Anuraag and Ambresh were unable to participate due to other commitments. The collaborative aspect with Sushil, however, was extremely successful and we learnt a great deal about our respective music traditions through working on this project together.

## **Planning and Preparation**

I began planning for this project over the summer of 2007 and on receiving the exciting news that I had received the scholarship in February 2008, set about consolidating my plans straight away. Despite giving myself 7 months to arrange things from that point, it became clear from the start that it was going to be very difficult to put many of my plans in place until I arrived in India.

I made my initial contacts through my Indian musician friend Sharat Shrivastava who lives in Delhi and he arranged some lessons for me with a bansuri player he knew. He was also confident he could set up the rest of my music contacts when I arrived there. This was one of the principle reasons I decided to go to Delhi in my original project proposal. The main obstacle I had in this project was to find a school or community organisation I could deliver a project with. Through Indian work colleagues in London I had written and tried to make contact with various organisations who work with music/young people or in schools in Delhi. The problem I encountered through all of these contacts, however, was that people were just not getting back to me. This very quickly became one of my main difficulties in setting up the project. As an individual without many direct connections it was very hard to find people to work with. Many people said "when you get here come and meet us and we can work something out". Luckily one of the organisations I had been recommended did return my emails and were very enthusiastic about working with me. They were a youth organisation in Delhi looking to expand their music programme around the time I was planning to be there. I met with this organisation in Dehli in August 2008 and we confirmed that we would work together on the project. On going back to the UK I felt satisfied that I had organised the basics of my project and everything was in place to start at the end of September.

Unfortunately, the youth organisation I met with proved to be quite unreliable and cancelled the project with me at the last minute due to reasons connected to funding. This was a real set back for me as it had all been arranged and I had very little time to put in place new plans.

In view of this setback I decided to change my project location from Delhi to Mumbai. The reasons for this were as follows:

1. I had met many musicians in Mumbai in August through meetings I had with the British Council, India.
2. Many of these musicians were interested in collaboration and some were school teachers interested in creative projects.
3. I had met the directors of Ajivasan Music Academy and was very interested in their approach to music and music teaching.
4. Many musicians recommended that Mumbai would be a better city to experience music making and collaboration because of the diversity of

- music happening there.
5. I would have the support in kind of the British Council to help with contacts etc.

Fortunately through the contacts I had already made in August, with some help from the British Council and new contacts I made in the first few days of arriving in Mumbai I was able to finalise my plans and get started on the project itself. The only large change I made to my original plan was to decide to only focus on North Indian Classical music. The reasons for this were after strong recommendations from Indian classical musicians who explained that it would be much more beneficial for me to spend more time learning about one tradition and that in the timescale I had, it would be very difficult to do both. I am really thankful for this advice because there were many other factors involved in my trip that meant things took longer to settle there than I had planned. These included finalising accommodation near the music school which was in the suburbs, dealing with jetlag and acclimatising to the weather and environment. The following are just some of my observations on arriving in Mumbai.

### **Weather**

Despite my previous experiences of being in India I was not quite prepared for the heat I encountered on arriving in Mumbai. For the first few days I felt extremely tired and on leaving the hotel would encounter a wall of heat that seemed to encompass my whole body and exhaust it instantly. Even walking to the end of the road seemed like a huge effort so for the first few days and even after that, I confined my activities to calling and emailing people and visiting them for meetings. All my contacts were being drawn upon to try and find a place to stay and get my projects going. No stone was being left unturned. Being constantly hot all the time also affected the way my body was behaving when playing and on many occasions I felt very faint when exerting a normal amount of effort on my instrument. I found the heat difficult in general to cope with particularly over the first month. One mistake I made was taking a room without air conditioning. My memory of the first couple of weeks was more or less a hazy blur where I was regularly lying on the marble floor in my room to keep cool. Unfortunately there seemed to be a problem with the fan. This really affected my thought processes as I had to sleep a great deal for my body to cope. This was quite frustrating for me as I had so many things I wanted to do but physically wasn't able to.

### **Environment**

One of main instant impressions that I had of Mumbai was the crazy traffic. On my first day there I was directed by the hotel to the local tourist office which was only a 5 minute walk away. I walked to the end of the street then was confronted with the chaos that is the Churchgate crossing. Cars speeding in every direction, no one appearing to be following the signals, 5 lanes of traffic with taxi's and motorbikes winding in and out, occasionally a bicycle piled high with some kind of produce. Being a polite Brit I stood and waited for the traffic to stop so I could cross safely. I waited. And waited.

And waited. And as I did so watched how the locals were getting across. Still not really getting the system I followed a large crowd of people crossing the road feeling that safety in numbers was the way to go. It appears that if you are confident and don't step out of your own path that you can make it but it is a bit like a leap of faith. Still haven't quite got used to crossing the roads but am finally getting across them without waiting for an hour every time. Somehow being here starts to make you feel slightly fearless as every time you should really end up having an accident but don't. Well, not yet anyway. The local advice is watch out for the buses as they look like they would ram you down even if they do see you.

### **Trying to contact people**

The difficulty about arranging things in India is that people are quite relaxed about things and seem to feel things will work out in a few days or so. For me, arriving on my own and wanting to get everything up and running quickly, this was quite frustrating but gradually I learned to accept that things had their own sense of order and timing and it would happen eventually. I remember my first time in India when I was in a Delhi travel agent and the man said "so how long are you here for? 1 month or 2 months?". When I said 3 weeks he looked slightly shocked as if to say "why on earth would you come to India for such a short amount of time?". This seems to run true of my experiences here so far. Things take time and there is no sense of rush. In the same way people are relaxed enough to be able to change their schedule at the last minute to do an extra rehearsal or jamming session. Time keeping is also a huge issue. I still haven't quite got used to the concept that when something is planned to start at, for example, 1pm, people will really interpret that as somewhere around 1pm and will start to trickle in half an hour later or an hour later without even acknowledging that it might be a problem. There are legitimate reasons for this. In Mumbai it takes a long time to get anywhere and people tend to live in the suburbs apart from the lucky older families who managed to buy in south Mumbai generations before it became the overpriced area it is today. The local trains are very punctual and are the quickest way to get around but there are other difficulties with these as I will explain later. Apart from the train taxi's get caught in traffic, driving is almost unheard of and motorbikes are quick. I spent a great deal of my time in Mumbai in taxi's enduring the sounds of beeping horns and general chaos that is the traffic there. Noise pollution is present in everyone's lives here. I still haven't quite got used to this aspect of life here. It makes me wonder how a musician's ear changes and adapts to an environment like this. How does it change the way you listen?

### **Mumbaikers**

I have been very pleasantly surprised at how helpful and nice people are in Mumbai. From day one, people I hardly knew were going out of their way to help me find accommodation. Also in daily life if you ask someone in the street the direction they will more often than not actually take you there. This has been the surprising thing about Mumbai. Despite it being a large cosmopolitan city with a crazy traffic situation and quite frankly, too many

people to fit into one city, people are unexpectedly relaxed and friendly. As Suketu Mehta mentions in his book "Maximum City" you just have to look for the hands. He is referring to the trains in Mumbai where, despite the fact you are packed in like sardines, people still have their hands out to help the poor guy who is about to miss it and will pull you in at the last minute despite their discomfort. I have tried to fathom why in a city like this there isn't more road rage and general aggression but it just doesn't seem to be part of the culture in the same way that it is in the UK. The only instance of road rage that I have been witness to so far was one occasion on a journey in a rickshaw where my rickshaw driver made the mistake of voicing his anger about a near bump with a Mercedes full of very large men. The driver took offence and started to punch my rickshaw driver. Although, in actual fact, it was quite ineffectual fighting ☺ A bit like the scene in Bridget Jones where Hugh Grant and Colin Firth are fighting like children. At any rate my rickshaw driver took it rather well (well, he more or less had to due to his rather small demeanor).

### **Food**

Whilst I am not the type of person who feels they have to try every type of food in a country to fully understand the culture, I do generally enjoy Indian food and eating vegetarian dishes so India has suited me very well. My first week involved eating a great deal of Dal Tadka which was particularly good at the Astoria Hotel where I spent my first few days. In actual fact I haven't yet tried any other Dal Tadka that comes up to scratch in the same way. Other food I have embraced fully are the South Indian dosas which make a great breakfast along with the extremely sugary masala tea or chai. Kings circle has a whole host of these kind of places which are great to put you in a good frame of mind for the day ahead. I have to admit that I don't think I will ever feel like I have got to grips with Indian food. In Mumbai in particular there is such a diversity of food from all over India that you can literally eat a different style or region of food every night. The way people eat is also very different to the UK where we do rely a great deal on fast food. It is extremely refreshing here to have properly cooked meals throughout the day although I do often feel the need for a siesta after a large lunch.

### **Taxis**

My experiences with taxi drivers have been quite varied during my time here. I mention them because one way or another you end up spending quite a large amount of time in taxis and rickshaws. In Mumbai the rickshaws are not allowed south of Bandra so in South Mumbai the taxi drivers rule and there they will try their very best to trick the newly arrived unsuspecting tourists out of 50 or so rupees in their first journey. In general, however, the taxi drivers are quite honest in Mumbai and have never been a problem for me apart from the airport taxi drivers who take their chances. I have changed the way I look at taxi drivers since arriving in Mumbai as many of these men live and work in their car 24 hours a day. Often they are from poorer states like Bihar and very rarely get to see their families. It is a very hard life for them so it is even more refreshing to know that they are also generally an honest bunch in Mumbai.

### **Concert Culture**

One of the fantastic things about being in Mumbai all this time has been the opportunity to see the top players in India performing in their home environment. The atmosphere at Indian Classical concerts in India is so different from seeing them in the UK. Firstly, the audiences really understand the music here so they respond to the players and the players respond to them. The musicians here are very open with their audiences and the audiences treat the top musicians as their idols. The culture here is such that in a concert people are very happy to shout out if they have enjoyed a particular phrase or improvisation and will all count out the beats of the taal on their laps. It is also the norm to go back stage after the concert to meet the artist and have your picture taken with them. The artist is always prepared and happy to do this. This may be partly due to the way concerts are funded which is most commonly through private sponsorship. I was very fortunate to arrive in Mumbai at the start of the concert season and for three months straight there are concerts and festivals most nights of the week.

## **Conclusion**

It feels like a very long time ago since I began my initial plans to come to India to learn about the music and to have a chance to collaborate with the musicians here. I have also gone through a whole range of emotions in making this project happen from my initial elation at being awarded the funding to arranging my plans for Delhi, seeing it fall through at the last minute and then finally everything working out for the best in Mumbai. As a performing musician, composer, collaborator and educator I have gained immeasurably from this project and am already using the skills and experiences I have learnt here in other contexts. It cannot be underestimated how important it is to learn a tradition of music in the environment from which it emerged. I do not feel my experience of learning Indian classical music would have been quite the same had I not had the opportunity to support the lessons with concerts of top artists and the experience of learning in a gurukul and seeing first hand the lineage of the tradition. Another important aspect of this experience for me has also been experiencing modern India in all its forms. Mumbai is a city of contrasts where people live in extreme poverty to extreme luxury. More so than any city I have visited, it is a place where the floor of the city literally never stops moving and there is a permanent buzz of activity. This is reflected in the music scene which although heavily influenced by the commercialised music of the Bollywood film industry, reflects the incredible diversity of music from around India. Through my contact and collaborations with musicians here I have begun to understand the possibilities of collaborative projects with Indian musicians and how this can be applied in education/community contexts. It has also made me assess the extra-musical value of these collaborations and how important they are for reassessing your own training and musical tradition to help you move forward as an artist.

Professionally this experience has already opened many new doors for me with my invitation to lead a project for the British Council, India in collaboration with the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. I now feel confident about my knowledge of Indian music and although still at the beginning of my journey, feel I have new skills and approaches to offer that will impact my work in London and elsewhere. In addition, through this project I feel that I have the skills and experience now to approach other cross-cultural projects confidently and with a clearer sense of purpose.

More than anything my experience in India has helped me grow not only as a musician, collaborator and organiser but it has also helped me to become a more confident person. Arriving in India as a woman on her own to arrange a project out of a few contacts, is not without its difficulties so I have many people to thank and I have made many new friendships that will last long into the future. Finally I would like to thank the Finzi Scholarship Trust for making this project possible and for giving me the opportunity to develop myself and my career in a new direction that would otherwise have not been possible.

## **Lucy Forde: Flautist and Creative Leader**

Flautist, composer and creative leader, Lucy Forde is a freelance musician based in London and Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where she tutors undergraduate and postgraduate students in creative music making. As a creative leader and flautist she has led projects and performed with a large number of orchestras and arts organisations including The Philharmonia Orchestra, The London Philharmonic Orchestra, The Wigmore Hall, The West of England Philharmonic Orchestra, Sinfonia Viva, The Endellion Quartet, Norfolk and Norwich Festival, The New London Chamber Ensemble, Music in Prisons, Music In Hospitals and Create (Arts).

Lucy has a strong interest both in cross-cultural and cross-arts projects and is the Music Director of music and dance ensemble Aranea who integrate live music and dance with electronics. She is also a member of the fusion ensemble Miserlou who perform Balkan and Arabic melodies integrated with contemporary classical harmony. Since October 2008 she has been living in Mumbai, India undertaking research into Indian music, cross-cultural collaboration and creative approaches to music making. In addition to this project she has also been leading a creative music project for the British Council India in Mumbai and Kolkata and has been performing with the fusion group Fuzik and the Bombay Chamber Orchestra.



