



(From left): SOI musicians Averell DeSouza, Prabhat Kishore and Deon D'Souza (in red) with Dr. Luis Dias (centre) and the participants

With the World on a String

A weeklong music camp, conducted on the initiative of the Symphony Orchestra of India and Child's Play India Foundation, presented a golden opportunity for young violin and viola players in Goa to interact with and learn about chamber music from the SOI's string musicians.

By Beverly Pereira

On a late summer's day in May this year, a group of 11 budding musicians were immersed in plucking and bowing their violins and violas. Ranging from eight to 18 years, they were a part of a weeklong music camp organised on the initiative of the Symphony Orchestra of India (SOI) and Child's Play India Foundation (CPIF) in Panjim, Goa. Three string musicians from the SOI travelled from Mumbai to Goa for the violin- and viola-intensive camp that drew in participants from various corners of the coastal state. The camp involved individual lessons as well as coaching in duos, trios and quartets for chamber music, and interactive music appreciation sessions.

The country's first and only professional orchestra,

founded by NCPA Chairman Mr. Khushroo N. Suntook and violin virtuoso Marat Bisengaliev, who serves as the Music Director, the SOI places great emphasis on education and outreach work. Chief amongst the orchestra's educational initiatives is the SOI Music Academy, which brings a professional level of teaching, previously not available in India, to gifted young musicians, with the aim of growing the number of Indian musicians in the SOI in the future.

Many of the SOI musicians are also teachers, working to develop the musical potential amongst young people in India. The orchestra has crafted a music programme for underprivileged children that not only brings them all the positives cues that exposure to music provides but also gives the orchestra an opportunity to scout for that rare talent that might emerge from any one of these groups. It is under this programme that the collaboration with CPIF came about. Led by Dr. Luis Dias, CPIF was established in 2009 as a registered music education trust to instil positive values and provide social empowerment to India's disadvantaged children through imparting classical music lessons. Today, CPIF teaches violin, viola, cello, recorder, transverse flute and piano to around 60 children across three locations in Goa. Besides a choir project of an additional 40 children, the foundation also started the Camerata Child's Play India orchestra of senior students, teachers and local musicians, and the Junior Camerata Child's Play made up of younger students.

Dr. Dias, Founder and Project Director of CPIF, is a fourth-generation doctor who first practised in India for a decade and then in the U.K. for another. He is also a musician, having trained on the violin since the age of five. Years of practice, exploration and exposure led him to question why his own country was not producing more professional musicians trained in Western classical music. Then, the idea to make accessible an education in Western classical music to people of all socio-economic backgrounds was



born after he had attended concerts at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 2007 that presented two exceptional orchestras comprising underprivileged children from South Africa and Venezuela. A year later, the doctor gave up his career in the U.K. and returned to Goa with his wife to work towards bringing that idea to life.

"Like so many Goan Catholic children of my generation, I had violin lessons very early in life, and like many of my generation, music education was linked to the church. I also came from a background where Western classical music was loved. If I had had the access to the training that the SOI Music Academy imparts today and that SOI musicians get as part of their on-the-job training, I have no doubt I would have pursued music instead of medicine. This is what I want to help future generations of India's children receive, across the socio-economic spectrum, regardless of their parents' income," he says.

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The first of its kind

Ever since the trust was founded, Dr. Dias had stayed in touch with the NCPA and the SOI, looking for ways in which the two could collaborate. "The musicians of the SOI embody many things. They stand for professionalism and the pursuit of excellence in music, particularly in ensemble music-making. This makes them powerful role models for our children to aspire to," he says, adding that discussions about the possible ways of working together started during the pandemic.

The music camp that ran from 8th to 18th May at the CPIF premises in Goa's capital city was open to young participants from disadvantaged as well as privileged backgrounds. They were selected via an audition process to assess their ability to sight-read music and to be able to play to a basic to intermediate level. There were, of course, many more youth from Goa and even Bengaluru who were keen to be a part of the camp. But space constraints and keenness on the part of the SOI faculty and CPIF to offer each participant focused attention did not permit a group larger than eleven.