



History has seen many individuals who have broken barriers across various fields, and that holds true even today. One such example is Mr. Anil Srinivasan, pianist extraordinaire – one of the finest of his times who looks beyond just playing the instrument and to incorporate music into all walks of life!

Anil Srinivasan strongly believes that the performing arts is essential to every individual to express their natural inherent creativity, and that it lends empathy too. The honest way one expresses oneself evokes a natural response from others. Performing arts also has neurological and cognitive benefits says Anil, which improves communication, willingness to try new things, confidence, freedom of expression and many more aspects that helps to nurture the mind.

When asked about his choice of instrument, Anil clarifies, "the piano is a universally accepted ubiquitous instrument, and that it is actually a combination of the santoor and the harp! Both instruments have Asian roots, which travelled West and was adopted in different versions, and finally as the piano of today". Anil clarifies that instruments like

the violin and harmonium do not have Indian roots per se and that many have brought it to India and it has gradually been accepted into the Indian music fold, and Anil says, "Maybe I was the chosen one to bring the piano to India!"

Playing an instrument unfamiliar to the South Indian music afficionados, Anil believes that music is just a medium and that it can be in many forms. Why then be biased towards the instrument as a "western" one rather than enjoy the music and the feelings it evokes! He mentions instances like when a senior musician objected to Anil sitting on a stool to play while the musician was sitting on the floor! Anil strongly feels the need to change perceptions - things like wearing pants while playing Carnatic music on the piano, that the amalgamation of Carnatic and western music is subject to scrutiny, that music should be played to the audience rather than an expression of talent and musical freedom - Anil says he can go on and on about the backlash he has faced in his career!

As a result, Anil Srinivasan says, "I had



to adapt the instrument, that is not necessarily for Indian classical music nuances, special notes or tones, but that has given me the room to play with the piano and go about researching and experimenting, conveying the message and perform too! And all this has to face off the musical, research, psychological and cognitive bias", says Anil. And that gives Anil the formula to live by – consistency and longevity – do what you do with the same quality and passion over a period of time with hard work, and people will accept you for your work. He says he faced objections at every turn – for his instrument, him playing Carnatic music on the piano, him writing, him giving talks and so on, and Anil says he kind of became the gnat that wouldn't go away!

When asked about the availability of pianos to play when he travels for performances, Anil mentioned that he plays a digital piano that Casio has made for him, which is portable, that he uses in India, as good quality pianos are hard to find. He definitely does not have that problem when performing abroad.

Anil feels piano is slowly picking up in India

thanks to curiosity, the feeling of appreciation and the conversion of the ability to play any kind of music on the instrument. He says that he is a musician, more than a performer, and he takes his music on a journey to children, for activism, for social transformation, for teaching, as a tool to improve the mind and attitudes for social binding. Anil says, "As a musician, I am not looking for validation but am taking the heart and art of music to bridge the instrument and traditional music". And it is this very facet that allows him to reinvent himself and bring out different adaptations of music into spheres of life.

Anil acknowledges that he is now in a good space with acceptance of his music, the amazing people he has worked with, the numerous prestigious awards he has been conferred with, and the encouragement he has received all through his career. And he says, "It is thanks to my good fortune that I have not needed to chase after numbers of any sorts, be it performances, or audience, social media likes or choice of concerts." Anil strongly feels musicians should shift the paradigm to their talent and content



rather than following numbers on different platforms. He encourages musicians to upgrade their skills, research and listen to others – about anything! A well rounded perspective gives a better outlook and hence better ability to diversify and experiment.

His collaborations with another leading young Carnatic musician, Sikkil Gurucharan holds a special place for Anil Srinivasan. "It's very rare that you find someone who is on the same wavelength and gets your music", says Anil. "And like in a marriage, it's the chemistry", he points out. Finding joy together in music is what makes this collaboration a unique and enduring one.

Anil Srinivasan's unique venture "Rhapsody", a school-based module that uses music, performing arts and visual arts to teach STEM, has been widely received across 470 schools across South India reaching 377000 students. This has given rise to the Rhapsody Foundation that uses music as a therapy tool, and taking music

to Corporation run schools where talent is identified and given training, for children in difficult situations.

Anil says he loves teaching in college and proudly claims all his classes are fully signed up for! He says he is a fun teacher and that the piano in class definitely helps keep up the energy! Anil hopes to improve his writing in Tamil while continuing to write in English.

The influence and challenges of working in the film industry has given Anil a fresh perspective and respect for music. He says it is a very humbling process where you fit into compositions and work of others playing to a specific audience, which Anil says is a very different approach. "Film songs of Ilayaraja and SPB have shaped our lives and we have all grown up associating songs with stages of our lives and I have huge respect for them as they stay evergreen over decades", he notes.

"SPB has influenced me in a big way about being transparent in all my social causes, and not many know that SPB has raised funds in crores for various causes, and he was very humble about it", points out Anil. The NalandaWay Foundation helps juvenile and delinquent children find their feet through music therapy and Peninsula Studios helps to archive independent classical Indian music. Every year Anil plays a concert in the dark for Gnanadarshan, a home for the visually impaired. Through Rotary, a school was built for children displaced by the Chennai floods. Any way music can help with social improvement, will find Anil involved in some capacity.

Anil thanks his parents for investing in his education which now gives him the bandwidth to diversify into business, philanthropy, teaching, writing, formulating modules for education and social causes through Rotary. And he humbly says, "I don't think I deserve this award but I accept that music is the universal champion", and championing music in Chennai probably gives him the edge.

