

Rahman extravaganza for charity

WHEN STEVE WAUGH (like Dominique Lapierre before him), humanely adopted the cause of the 300-odd children of Udayan, he blazed a trail that would inspire many to follow.

Seven years later, Melbourne based Charindaa (Charities through Indian Arts in Australia) hopes to raise the profile of the very same Barrackpore (West Bengal) organisation founded by James Stevens.

Its debut fundraiser for 2005 has roped in Bollywood's biggest singing sensations to perform live in Sydney and Melbourne. AR Rahman, Hariharan, Chitra, Sadhana Sargam, Shankar Mahadevan, Alka Yagnik, Blaaze, Madhushree and Kailesh Kher - the list goes on.

"The 30 odd volunteers in Melbourne and an equally strong contingent in Sydney have put in a lot," said event organiser Dr Mohan Krishnamoorthy. "We really want the blockbuster show to be a thumping success. If Steve Waugh could empathise with the leprosy victims of India, we as Indians should be motivated to do better."

This perhaps is the guiding force behind Charindaa.

And in what is to be a first, the live musical journey will include latest virtual reality screen projection tools to achieve a three dimensional effect.

Explaining the virtual reality concept, Mohan told *Indian Link* that a specially imported screen would beam live images of the artistes as they perform on the centre stage. "This will create an illusion of proximity, bringing the audience closer to almost touch and feel their favourite stars."



The landmark concert is not only AR Rahman's first visit down under, but a maiden virtual tour as well.

Having himself experimented with every aspect of music, breaking many rules, conventions and barriers and charting virgin territories along the way, Rahman (nee Dileep Kumar), is undoubtedly the best thing that happened to the modern Indian music industry.

But the path to success has not been an easy one. Facing many personal tragedies, the former student of Padma Seshadri (Chennai) started out at the age of nine, as a keyboard artist under the maestro Ilayaraja. It was during his brief but eventful stint in the advertising industry as jingle composer that Rahman not only tasted success, but also met many of his future colleagues, including Sivamani, Ranjit Barot,

Zakir Hussain and Leslie Lewis. He went on to get a formal western music degree from Trinity College.

He got his first big break into films when he met Mani Ratnam. The rest is history. Roja was a phenomenal success. Many more followed - *Gentleman*, *Pudhiya Mugam*, *Bombay*, *Duet*, *Kandukonein*, list will go on.

Rahman has to his credit several non *filmi* albums, including the chart-breaking *Vande Mataram*, which celebrates fifty years of Indian independence.

The beauty of his music is that each track explores new realms, mixing and borrowing freely from Carnatic, Hindustani, Western, pop and funk and making it all work as one harmonious and memorable formula.

Rahman has also lent his voice to many of his musical creations, the eternal favourite being *Humma Humma*. He has collaborated with number of leading artistes, like L Subramaniam, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and more recently Andrew Lloyd Webber to name a few.

Defying all typecasts, his genre of music is as fresh and timeless in its appeal, after all these years. For Allah Rakha Rahman, music is a spiritual experience, born only of a completely uncluttered mind.

To experience him live in Australia is indeed a rare privilege and the fact that we are helping underprivileged children in India help themselves, in the process, is doubly satisfying.

Usha Arvind

Little keepers of Indian Culture

LAST YEAR when David Pal visited his ailing mother in the USA, she asked him to promise her that he would help his community by opening a school of music for children in Melbourne. David's argument that he was not really into music resulted in another command - that all service provided in that school would be free. David acceded. That night she passed away.

David returned home, discovered similar-minded musicians in Satish Gena, who teaches the Harmonium and the India trained Ajit Nimkar for Tabla, and on May 14 2004 laid the foundation of Satyam Sivam School of Music, in which all services to children of all ages are provided free.

Why May 14? For it was on this very day one hundred twenty-six years ago, the first Indian labourer had landed on the island of Fiji, the island they lovingly refer to as the Happiest Island on Earth, where Indian culture is practiced, with as much, if not more, passion and intensity as in the mainland. It was, incidentally, May 14 1997 the coup had taken place in Fiji.

The first anniversary of the inception of the school this year began when Sarah Tuck, 6, garlanded Dale Wilson, MP, a regular visitor to most Indian



community functions held in Southeast Melbourne suburbs. Wilson employed exhilarating words for the insight the organisers and students have shown in arranging the function. He also promised to recommend the school for a Government grant. Dr. Hemant Chaudhry, a Cardiologist from Ballarat and a Patron, bestowed a scintillating prologue to the evening.

Then began a thrilling evening of children, teens, adults and seniors, individually or as a choir, exhibiting the skills they have gathered in the last twelve-months, especially the Tabla, in practice only for the last three months, to captivate two hundred odd spectators' hearts present, to hearten the continuance of Indian culture. Mostly *Bhajans*, the evening was expectantly and pleasantly episodic with appropriately attired and charming Anjali Kumar, 12, trained by the Kiwi

Maestro Manga Surendra and Australian Sujata, presenting a breathtaking Bharat Natyam on recorded music. Shelaja, 12, who dared to encroach into the male dominated world of Tabla players, gave an equally thrilling Tabla recital on live song by Smt. Gena. The collective Tabla recital by six students, 6 to 12, harmonizing a rhapsody on Six-Taal and Eight-Taal respectively was as much appreciated by clapping spectators as was a duo dance on fast recorded music by Rashmi Singh and Anushka Acharya, both 13. Those detecting rough edges here and there may like to take refuge in the fact that these are innocent, not adulterated by adulthood little children, spirited and willing first-timers-on-stage-contributors, from this age are vigorously involved in the prolongation of an Indian art form.

The evening though was stolen by Ray



Pal, 13, the co-MC, who in his naturally baffled early-teen purity uninhibitedly described 'Mistry', a child performers last name, with 'his last name is Mystery to me' and he is 'a bit worn-out and wonky', 'this light is irritating me', and 'I am back' annotations to the utter delight of applauding audience.

Vegetarian dinner served was both delicious and aplenty, and *Tarbooz* and *Kharbooz* as dessert was a welcome surprise. Tea and coffee galore complemented the cold Melbourne evening.

On May 13 this year, David Pal was awarded the Volunteer of the Year Award for Community Service by the City of Casey. David has been running a community centre for the last seventeen years, two music schools, coaches cricket to juniors, is a Hindi program radio commentator on a Council owned station, and captains the forty-four member Fijian Golf Club of Victoria. In observance of the fabled meekness characteristically imbedded in deeper Indians, no mention of this award was aired to the audience either by David or any other official during the three hours we were there.

George Thakur