

Musical notes from Mehrangarh

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A three-day festival in Jodhpur will celebrate classical music traditions



A still from an earlier concert held at Mehrangarh. PIC/Neil Greentree

Considered one of the most formidable and grand forts of Rajasthan, Mehrangarh is also famous for playing host to some of the biggest music festivals held in the state. Last year due to the pandemic the state's tourism suffered a major setback and most artists whose primary source of income was their live performances also found themselves out of work. After waiting for the COVID-19 situation to improve considerably and for restrictions on gatherings to be lifted, Raaga Science, a Jodhpur-based organisation that works for musicians, decided to organise a festival that would help lift the spirits of the city and its artistes.

Nawab Khan

“It's not only the artists in Rajasthan, musicians all over India have faced a similar plight in the last year. While folk musicians are still getting to perform at weddings and other small gatherings, it's the classical concerts that have been hit the most. The audience for classical music has also been dwindling in Jodhpur. This made us decide to focus completely on classical music for this festival,” says Nawab Khan, founder, Raaga Science. “It was a tough task since we had no sponsors. A few friends helped us and the Mehrangarh Museum Trust gave us the prestigious venue. The festival has been co-organised by Swar Sudha Jodhpur and supported by Theater amfaden Stuttgart, and Ustad Allah Rakha Khan Institute Mumbai. We decided against having a ticketed event to encourage participation,” he adds.

The theme of the Raaga Festival is evolution of music and one can expect a wide range of music, from sacred bhajans to Dhrupad, Khayal, and modern-day improvisations. Slated for March 11 to 13, the festival will see performances from 25 artists from all over India. The event will also include music workshops, lecture demonstrations and live music meditation sessions. The morning concerts will be held at the serene Jaswant Thada, a marble memorial built in memory of Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur, while the evening concerts will be held at the fort. The line-up includes performances by Ustad Fazal Qureshi – tabla, Pt. Vijay Ghate – tabla, Purbayan Chatterjee - sitar, Rageshri Das - vocals, Gayatri Ashokan - vocals, Pandit Atulkumar Upadhye – violin, Dilshad Khan – sarangi, Rahul Deshpande – vocals, Sridhar Parthasarathy – mridangam, Naveen Sharma - dholak, Zakir Khan - khartaal, Vivek Sonar – flute, Ayan Khan – sarangi and Naved Khan – santoor, among others.

Keeping the COVID-19 situation in mind, the festival will be held across six stages seating a total of 200 people. “The fort is so large that it is easy for the audience to maintain distance and still enjoy the performances. We are also organising COVID-19 tests for the artistes as well,” says Khan. According to the COVID-19 Data Repository by the Johns Hopkins University, as of today, the COVID-19 numbers in Rajasthan are less than 10 per cent compared to that of Maharashtra's.

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