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The Sound of Nirvana's Music

A Conversation exploring Lorraine Fiona Aloysius' Journey to Bring Music to Nirvana

Despite her family not being professional musicians, Lorraine Fiona Aloysius was raised in the midst of music. With her grandfather playing the violin alongside practicing medicine in Africa, to her mother's brothers playing musical instruments, Lorraine's own mother - Helen D'Cruz (a popular singer in the Konkani circuit) inspired her to take up Western music from a young age. Lorraine first started with playing the Piano at the age of 8, and has since then moved onto teaching, sending thousands of students for exams conducted by world renowned institutions such as Trinity Guildhall/Trinity College London, Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, U.K., London College of Music, U.K., and RockSchool, U.K. Lorraine herself is a Licentiate of the Trinity College London (Piano-forte), a recipient of the 2012 'Karmaveer Puraskar' by the iCONGO (International Confederation of Non-Government Organisations), and is currently the CKO and the Creative Director of Lorraine Music Academy.

Sitting down with Shilpa Sonal, Lorraine Aloysius maps her journey from Mumbai to Gurgaon over the past 20 years, and delves into what the future has to hold for her Academy. She was also joined in conversation by Lorraine's husband, Aubrey Aloysius.

How did you get into music and why?

I come from a musical background. My mother was an All-India Radio singer, and she's probably more famous than me [laughs]. The Catholic community knows her, everyone in Goa, Mangalore, and across the globe among the Indian Diaspora would know my mother - Helen D'Cruz. My mother cut an HMV record with the famous Bollywood Singer Hemant Kumar in the Konkani language. My mother's family learnt Western music, but she couldn't learn as her father passed away when she was very young and it was very expensive. But because of that she always wanted us to learn. Western music can be written out and played exactly as per the composer's wish and hence is very easy to practice. Indian music, though very advanced and more improvisatory, needs a Guru to be sitting with you for every session

of learning. I started learning informally with my mother, both Indian and Western Music. She has an excellent ear, and she would just sing a tune and I would pick it up and she would say, this is right, that's right. Even though she didn't play the Piano, she taught me a lot of Music. She has influenced me a lot, and



continues to do so even today.

What role should parents play today then?

I think parents do their best trying to be non-judgmental but they end up being judgmental. I think basic music education should be accessible to everyone, and there's a lot of evidence that music makes you do very well in academics. So that's one reason why music should be encouraged, especially the Classical forms. When I meet adults, often they feel bad that they did not have the opportunity to learn or they gave it up because teachers discouraged them, or were strict, or they made too many mistakes, or they weren't as "talented" as those around them. So many times, people tell me - 'no I can't sing - because my teacher in school never picks me, she says no you're not in the choir, you're not in the band.' That is not correct, if we are human, we can sing. You can train your voice and you can train your ear. So, I believe music is for all.

Why did you start your academy in Gurgaon?

We had a business we were running and we had to take a break since we could not deal with the corruption that we encountered as we were growing. We pondered over our existing pool of talents between Aubrey and me, and in that process, we were led to focus on Music Education. I had a talent in music, but Aubrey

didn't want me to teach just a single student. He said only if you want to teach a million students, should you start teaching one. So, he was the visionary behind the company and behind setting up the Lorraine Music Academy. Today, we have taught more than 10,000 students. We are on our journey to teach the next Million, and beyond.

So, what brought you to Nirvana?

We were originally in DLF Phase-4. But being in Nirvana gave us a lot of visibility, and proximity to people who realized the value of the Piano and getting into music being available to them at their doorstep. We opened in Courtyard, we were in Birch Court, and we had two centers in DLF Phase IV. But the Nirvana community was very forward thinking from the start, and realized the importance of musical education for their children. Our first set of students from Nirvana in 2010 such as Dhruv Malhotra, Ishika, Yash, Niharika, Shambhavi, Shatakshi set the tone for us from the start - with Dhruv Malhotra going on to be the first student at the Lorraine Music Academy to complete Grade-8 at the age of 12/13. We had a lot of students who not only did very well in music, but also academically. But now we have no physical centers, we are absolutely online. We will get into a hybrid model in the near future.

How does this online teaching work for Music?

Lorraine: In the present, we have employed people who come online and they teach all the instruments. We do instruments, like the Piano, Guitar, Violin, Drums, Ukelele, and Singing - everything is possible online. We have a few offline interactions also, but we have students from all over the world - USA, Canada, Netherlands, London, Dubai, Kuwait, Singapore, Vietnam, Australia. And these are students not just doing Grade 1 or 2 in music, but also those in colleges in London who come for specialized courses to us.

Aubrey: Unfortunately, today's generation spends a lot of time staring at a screen. So, if you want to take them away from the screen, it's very important to involve them in an activity which involves the brain and the hands. The

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Lorraine Music Academy addresses that while building the interest of the child, even with online teaching. We offer a lot of audio-based learning, and video-based learning, which is similar to reading a book on kindle. This mode works because good teachers' access is limited, and going digital helps us scale up across India and the World. So, we "digitized" Lorraine, and we got into AI and Machine Learning, and are now getting to be a future ready Music Education Technology enterprise. We are still a future-ready work-in-progress enterprise with evolving technology.

Is the focus of Lorraine Music Academy only Western music?

Aubrey: Music is a language. Within that comes what genre, what format. So, we teach music in that manner as a language. It doesn't matter whether it's Carnatic or Hindustani or Western or Eastern. We have taught Bollywood music, we have taught Carnatic songs, we have taught Hindustani songs, we have taught bhajans, we have taught hymns, we have taught Christmas carols, we have taught Enka - that is Japanese music, we have had Japanese singers here along with musicians from across the Globe. The way we teach music is to ensure that any child who learns music with us can play any instrument in the future because the foundations are built in a particular way, and then can play any format of music, whether Western, Eastern, Indian, Hindustani or Carnatic. We choose to teach in a particular script like a language which is Western notation because that's the easiest and that builds the foundations of music best.

What is your dream going forward?

My dream is that every home in Nirvana learns music. Many parents feel that their children have less time when they're in the 10th or 12th grade. But I disagree, they learn to manage - they memorize better, they concentrate better, they regulate their emotions better and it's a stress buster. Mental health is very important, and they're so stressed out - and music can just charge you up in such a way and give you a lot of balance.

So, what do you want to start now, next for the Nirvana community?

We are going to open up singing for everybody. They can come and sing, I'm just

going to announce it. We're going to start community choirs in Nirvana. This will be a combination of online and offline. We would like to introduce music to those who are probably hesitating or not coming forward, like I said every house in Nirvana should learn music - whether Western or Indian or anything. We do Indian music and Western music. And we have so much talent in Nirvana. Not just our students, but even adults and senior citizens. But they need to know that music requires commitment. We can only teach those who are committed. It's not like you come for one month and you stop and then come for one month. We only have long term programs. Our programs are very affordable. Because it may be long term but overall, it's a fraction of what you eventually gain.

