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JAYASHREE ARUNACHALAM



Calling the tune: Salil Bhatt Photo: Arunangsu Roy Chowdhury

Google him and the diversity will stun you: creator of the Satvik veena, his award-winning father, his collaborations with world musicians including Canadian musician Doug Cox – “the Mississippi meets the Ganges”, as one person put it – and his faultless performances in the most sought-after centres in the world, including the Smithsonian museum and the Epcor Centre in Calgary.

Musician Salil Bhatt might be most well-known for his father – Vishwa Mohan Bhatt is a slide guitar player who won a Grammy in 1994 – but he doesn’t see that stopping his own musical journey. “One day, I want him to be introduced as my father, and not the other way around,” he laughs.

Salil has already made his mark as a master of his father’s Mohan veena, and his own hybrid of it called the Satvik veena, named after his son, and has played to exalted international audiences. “The best moment was when I performed in Iceland for the Prime Minister and his parliament,” he says. “Dr. Abdul Kalam was also there and when he saw my veena, he held it like a child holds a new toy, being a veena maestro himself. It was a milestone.”

Ask him what he thinks of Hyderabad and he looks smug. The city isn’t unfamiliar to him. “I have family ties in Telangana, dating to three-and-a-half centuries ago,” Salil says. “Hyderabad as a city has the power and capacity to sustain good music. It’s one of the two hubs in the south along with Bangalore which encourages Hindustani.”

Salil rattles off the different genres that he’s experimented with, including blues, gospel, jazz, rock, funk, and country rock. “I like the term world music, and I think Indian music also qualifies as world music,” he says. “I love foreign collaborations simply because it’s a chance to do something you don’t know. It’s enriching.”

His future is also littered with prizes and possibilities. “My album Slide to Freedom earned a pre-Grammy nomination last year, and I’m waiting for this year’s announcements too, which will be at the end of January,” Salil says. “There’s also a huge London show coming up which will be attended by the Queen.”

Salil says living out of a suitcase can be frustrating because you “lose satisfaction for the smaller things”. However, he adds, “Music never dies. This is what I’ve chosen.”

Keywords: [Salil Bhatt](#), [Vishwa Mohan Bhatt](#), [Slide to Freedom](#), [satvik veena](#), [Hindustani](#)