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Saraswathy Nagarajan

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUGUST 16, 2018 14:30 IST

UPDATED: AUGUST 16, 2018 14:30 IST

The former diplomat speaks about her flights of melody and how it has always have had a special place in her life



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waves as a singer. In an e-mail interview, the former diplomat talks about her flights of melody and how it has always have had a special place in her life.

What has music meant to you and given you during your tenure as a diplomat and now? Is there a difference, if so, what is it?

Music has provided a wonderful soundtrack to my life in general. Different genres of music appeal to me, Indian and Western, classical, folk, musical theatre and popular. I have never limited myself to one style or singer or language. Music speaks a universal language to all of us. I am no exception.

During my professional life as a diplomat, and my life at present, music has always told me that life constantly redeems itself, even during the most difficult and strenuous of times.

For your first album, Peace is My Dream, you turned singer, composer and lyricist. What, in your opinion, is the one that is closest to your heart? How difficult or easy was it?

Poetry – song writing – and song interpretation – that is singing, are both close to my heart. I indulge in both forms because they do not constrain or limit me.

You have spoken about your liking for Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. Are there any Malayalam composers or musicians in your playlist?

I am an avid fan of old Malayalam film songs and the Mappila folk song tradition.

How did you manage to take your music along with you while you were a busy diplomat handling sensitive posts?

It was the easiest thing to take along with me. An iPod or an iPad with headphones and with music stored inside, became my travelling companion wherever I went. I also carried my songbooks. But I found very little time to indulge in my passion for music as the demands of my profession took up most of my time.

It was during your stint in Sri Lanka that you began performing on stage. What motivated you to take up singing once again and also begin performing on stage?

I did not perform on stage in Sri Lanka during my tenure as High Commissioner. But I had given a few performances in New Delhi before I went to Sri Lanka on my assignment. I was



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Your advice on up to closet singers..

Don't be shy! There is music within each and every one of us.

Who are your favourite singers now?

It really depends on the song. I like ghazal singers like Farida Khanum, and western singers like Leonard Cohen, and Marilyn Horne.

Would you agree that social media has made it much easier for budding singers to be heard more easily and make a mark?

It has certainly made the world much flatter! Everybody who has access to the new technologies of uploading and posting a message or song can be heard around the world. It has completely revolutionised the music scene. Budding singers with talent have enormous scope to be heard in the process. One has only to see the Bollywood movie *Secret Superstar* to understand this.

Would you give us a sneak-peek of what you would be singing in Thiruvananthapuram?

It will be an offering of my favourite songs. Songs from India and from around the world. I hope the audience will be happy!

Short takes

Writing about herself in a chapter of the book *30 Women In Power*, which has been posted on her website, she recalls her growing-up years as the eldest of three sisters and how her parents fostered her dreams and helped her turn them into reality. Beginning with a poem *Weaponed Woman* by Gwendolyn Brooks, an African American woman poet, Nirupama writes that the poet's words "represent the radical yet non-violent struggles of women against patriarchal patterns of power, whether familial, political, economic or cultural, the world over."

...I would define my life as a struggle, too- a struggle to build an identity for myself as an independent, professional woman who wanted to break free of the stereotypes that define feminine lives, especially in societies like ours. It was essentially a world dominated by men, and patriarchal attitudes prevailed in the Foreign Service as they did in every sphere of life at that time.



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On Song

Nirupama will be performing in the city today under the auspices of Trivandrum Centre for Performing Arts. 'Gitanajli, an offering of song will have Nirupama Rao on the vocals, Soundarie David Rodrigo on the piano and Neranjan de Silva on the keyboard. After the concert, Nirupama Rao and former Ambassador T.P. Sreenivasan will be in conversation. The event is at Hycinth by Sparsa, at 7 pm.

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Printable version | Sep 8, 2018 6:09:14 AM |

<https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/nirupama-menon-raos-new-role-as-a-singer/article24703759.ece>

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