

## Learning with Music

- [Soma Basu](#)



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INSPIRING: Piano artiste Anil Srinivasan. Photo: S.S. Kumar

*At an INTACH programme, Anil Srinivasan impacted young minds by playing not just popular music on his piano but interpreting it variedly through improvisations and combinations.*

His nimble fingers danced effortlessly on the keyboard and the audience clapped hard hearing the familiar Ilaiyaraaja and G V Prakash songs. Then he played the famous nursery rhyme “*Twinkle twinkle little star*” and the universally popular “*Happy Birthday to you*” song. The audience nodded in acknowledgement but fell silent when he asked the name of the composers.

And he went on to share the story. The Happy Birthday song was penned by the Hill sisters 225 years ago. Both were maths teachers and apparently wrote the song on-the-spot to quieten and discipline a class of 30 boys. And 275 years ago in Austria, when a 12-year-old boy was blindfolded and made to sit in a room with a pen and paper, he composed “*twinkle twinkle*” and gave 32 variations of tune in less than 45 minutes. This extraordinary genius grew up to be Mozart.

“In every nook and corner, these songs are known. That is the power of music,” he said as the audience cheered.

The well known Western classical pianist Anil Srinivasan had his listeners spellbound in spite of a serious sounding lecture topic – “Music and its nuance for youngsters”. To a packed auditorium of college students brought together by the INTACH Madurai Chapter inside the Thiagarajar College on Friday evening, he gave a crisp and powerfully engaging talk to make them understand that music is not just a form of art to entertain people and relax their minds.

“It is a science,” he emphasised, “with the power of inter-connecting subjects, creating ideas and innovating things.” How?

Anil Srinivasan made the evening melodious and musically simpler by drawing parallels between different tunes and combining different musical notes on the key board.

“Music has humungous repertoire but with absolute concepts, he said, adding that “it has the power to convert relative to absolute and vice-versa”, and played the *Vandemataram* song as an example of absolutism in patriotism. And then he mixed different musical notes to drive home the point that how easy it was to combine ideas through music.

The audience not only enjoyed good music but also learnt how themes and variations as a concept are vital to music also because music is essentially an “intelligence construct”. “It is not just important how you perform,” said Anil, “but important to understand music as a constructive concept and how it can be inter-linked with different disciplines.” Much to the delight of his audience he interspersed his talk combining variations of popular Tamil songs with the birthday and twinkle twinkle song, to underline that the idea of inter-connecting various things happens easily and only through music. He shared stories of Einstein, Bach, Abdul Kalam and even housewives drawing kolams to explain that there is architecture, science, mathematics and more in music and how students can learn different subjects through the language of music.

In fact, in Melbourne University in Australia, music has been introduced as a compulsory subject in the School of Science and not Arts, he informed.

For Anil, as a musician he feels it is his responsibility to take the listener to a state of enlightenment which music is capable of creating. In his opinion, it is achieved through the three creative templates – additive, reductive and replacement -- that music offers. He explained how Indian classical music had lent itself to different compositions across the world. The best example he gave by playing *My heart will go on* from the movie *Titanic* and smoothly switched to the *Mankatha* theme song displaying the striking similarities and calling it *Mankatha Titanic!*

The audience was participative as Anil was rightly able to convince how music is a true experience of multiple things and can be an effective classroom teaching tool as well.

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