



Big on Bhendi bazaar

How is classical music associated with this market place? Find out at a concert this week

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The ICCR and the NCPA will hold a concert on Friday in which Meenaxi Mukherjee, senior exponent of the Bhendi Bazaar gharana and Shila Mehta, a noted Kathak exponent will be featured. Many music lovers also find the name Bhendi Bazaar a bit odd. What does it have to do with an elitist art form like Hindustani classical music, people wonder. It is actually a mispronunciation of the English words Behind the Bazaar. In south Mumbai, the practitioners of this style of vocal music lived in an area which was right behind the bazaar or the market place. Hence the name.

The style is known for its endless attempts at note combinations through permutations. "Sargam or note name singing is also a major attribute of this style," says Dr Suhasini Koratkar, a recognized theoretician and a practitioner of the style.

She sings in a slightly high-pitched voice and sometimes there is an element of aggression in her music. There was a time when she sounded exactly like Parveen Sultana. Now she has found her own idiom and has become more mature in her approach to music. Her *Miyan Ki Malhar* sung last year at a concert was rendered with a steadfast adherence to the ragaroompa.

Kathak exponent Shila Mehta has had training in other dance forms like Bharatnatyam and Manipuri. As a

Kathak dancer, she has learned from reputed gurus like Vijay Shankar, Chitresh Das and Birju Maharaj, the reigning Emperor of Kathak. "After learning other dance forms, I thought that Kathak was best suited to my kind of expression," she says.

Shila Mehta has also learned from the famous tabla exponent Suresh Talwalkar. Talwalkar's mastery of rhythm makes him an ideal guru for a Kathak dancer. "In the pure dance part of Kathak, the minutest division of the rhythmic cycle assumes a lot of importance. As a dancer, I get many insights into the dynamics of rhythm by training under Sureshji," says Shila Mehta.

Shila Mehta runs the dance institute Nupur Zankar in Kandivali East. It seeks to propagate traditional dance and music. Shila Mehta has also done research on the Charan folk form from Gujarat. Her attempt is to analyse it in the context of the classical style like the Kathak. She has also collaborated with flamenco and jazz artistes in the West. The ICCR Horizon series concert offers an opportunity of witness such diverse talents.

Catch the concert at NCPA on
April 22 at 6.30 pm. Call 2283 3737

Shila Mehta

