Lessons at the house of music

What a great jazz brunch, with two of the world’s finest pianists, several Grammy awards between them, a sitar player, a fantastic bass drummer and new generation members from the Thilatesh Shankar Institute of Music (TMI) giving us high-quality music from morning. And all this, gratis! Gods were magnificent.

The setting at Pandit Ravi Shankar’s Institute for the Performing Arts was chilling and a setting for an unforgettable morning. The students, with a sense of accomplishment and pride, were gathered around on the floor, whenever they could get their hands on the instruments. And then the students of TMI, dressed in their finest, took to the stage with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Twelve-time Grammy winning jazz pianist, producer and composer Herbie Hancock got a short course in lessons from Pandit Ravi Shankar before today’s Living Dream concert, marking the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr’s visit to India to study the Mahatma. Hancock has an Indian collaboration album coming, using Rilke’s verses, says Shana Maria Verghis.

Duke, who began a notable career with singer Al Jarreau (who also came to Delhi a few years ago), has made several albums with his own band. Apart from his collaboration with fellow pianist George Duke, he’s played with Hancock in Delhi about two years back. His own label, Big Piano Music (on Universal’s Heads Up), is also nurturing ideas. Of introducing the big band sound in his next project, business with Brazilian musicians. I have been successful with it before.

Duke reluctantly filled in gap time, talking briefly about how jazz is like a soup and took music everywhere. Taking a melody or an idea and phrase and turning it around. He said outside later, “I need to ramble a lot.” His fingers did not, as they sailed into the second composition. One Finger Snap that Hancock later described as a ‘spang cluster’. Which is no help to someone reading print!

But all the musicians got to contribute bits of expression, after which Pandit came on with two of his students. Vimal and Parmar, on sitar and tabla. There was an interaction period holding his breath in. And though effort showed, the grace he gave it was marred. “Gentlemen,” said a student, “keep your eyes light up childlike. The music exercise went on, then Pandit played Raga Gauri Shankar on Duke’s keyboard.

Hancock said he had heard about Mumbai’s Blue Frog nightclub and that India’s jazz scene looked promising. He also shared having an email exchange with Ali Fazal, but that nothing came from it. He’s due to perform today. The show features Ustad Zakir Hussain and Ghulam Khan. After a similar one in Mumbai, Feb 19. Hussain, Hancock, Amritesh Shankar and other Indian musicians will record for an album Hancock said will be set around 2015. By German post, Rani Maria Rfel. His countryman, philosopher, Martin Heidegger described Rfel as the “highest kind of thinker.” His poetry nourishes upon assertions of communicating with the “inescapable” those aspects of existence difficult to describe. Hancock hoped the Indian project becomes a tapestry of dreams based on a bond between humans from the same common ancestor in Africa.

He added, “What I’m conscious of now is that I’m a human being first, then a musician. I’m only a musician when I play music.” 24 hours of the day, I’m other things.” Father to my daughter. What do I do? To my wife. I’m a husband, not a musician. I face a world of many problems, and what we see in the near economic future is that what we do affects everyone. I’d like to use that to make the roots of music.”

Watch The Living Dream concert at St. George’s Church on May 1, 9:30 pm in the presence of Martin Luther King III.

photos Shawan Pandey