



# Lessons at the house of music

What a great jazz brunch, with two of the world's finest pianists, several Grammy's between them, a sitar titan, a fantastic lady drummer and new generation members from the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz (TMIJ) giving us high quality music mid morning. And all this, gratis. Gods were magnanimous.

The setting at Pandit Ravi Shankar's Institute for the Performing Arts was chilled out and clean smelling organic, as its students, with American Centre staff gathered around on the floor, or wherever else they could get their 'booties' plonked. And then the students of TMIJ, took the double bass, horn, guitar and vocals, to serenade us with a song involving the words 'squeeze me'. It seemed ideal, for this was still Valentine's Day, with heart-exchanges, irrespective of Men Wearing Pink Chaddies Who Shall Not Be Named.

Herbie Hancock, in a grey, paisley kind of shirt, hugging a friendly paunch balanced on grey pants, took his seat at the shiny black Steinway piano. Fellow pianist George Duke, who had played with Hancock in Delhi about two years back, joined him on a Yamaha Motif keyboard. The TMIJ guys came on too, (sorry, we didn't get their names only James Genus on double bass), with a raga drummer, Terri Lynne Carrington, who also has a Grammy nomination behind her. A very frail looking Pandit Ravi Shankar watched from the side with his perky wife Sukanya, as the group began to play *Chameleon*. It was a pretty straight, funky tune that had a lot of

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

heads nodding in time.

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 jazz artists like the late Stanley Clarke and Miles Davies, his repertoire extends outside US, to projects involving Japanese musicians, amongst others. He recently partnered "with a singer called Grace Dekka from Cameroon and another musician from Russia." And as he said, after returning home to his studio, following tours in Singapore, "there is the possibility of Indian collaboration."

Duke, a burly man with a happy smiley face, who has his own label, Big Piano Music (on Universal's Heads Up), is also nursing ideas, "of introducing the big band sound in my next work or projects with Brazilian musicians. I have been successful with it before."

Before they started to play and Hancock was tinkering with piano keys,



Duke reluctantly filled in gap time, talking briefly about how "jazz is like a sponge, and took music from everywhere. Taking a melody or an idea and phrase and turning it around." He said offside later, "I tend 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-banger'. Which is no help to someone reading print!

But all the musicians got to contribute bits of expression, after which Panditji came on with two of his students, Vinod and Parimaru, on sitar and tabla. There was an interaction period

with the visitors. Sporting of both sides, since they are all stalwarts. For a moment Hancock seemed taken aback when Panditji said, "Ask me questions." Then he posed, "How many strings does a sitar have?" And was told there are four, and one main one. Panditji also talked about vocal styles like *dhrupad* and *dhamar* and the *ragas*. While explaining the *teen-taal*, he said there were 16 beats in one rhythm cycle and as he demonstrated this, his eyes filled with a pain, barely concealing his poor health. His hands had been hurt, or he would, he said, have played for them.

Panditji is holding a concert on March 1 at Nehru Park. Despite being unwell, he gave a vocal delivery, holding his breath in. And though effort showed, the grace he gave it was moving. "Cute," said a student, watching his eyes light up childlike. The music exercise went on, then Panditji plinked *Ragupathi Raghu* 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 e-mail exchange with AR Rahman, but that nothing came from it, due to busy schedules. Today's show features Ustad Zakir Hussain and Chaka Khan. After a similar one in Mumbai, on Feb 19, Hussain, Hancock, Anoushka Shankar and other Indian musicians will record for an album Hancock said will be set around verses by German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke. His countryman, philosopher, Martin Heidegger described Rilke as the highest kind of a thinker. His poetry touches upon anxieties of communicating with the 'ineffable', those aspects of existence difficult to describe. Hancock hoped the Indian project becomes "a tapestry of dreams based on our bond as humans from the same common ancestor in Africa."

He added, "What I'm conscious of now, is 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. To my wife I'm a husband, not a musician. I face a world with many problems, and what we see in the near economic future is that what we do affects everyone. I'd like to use that as the root to make records. Biggest problem is the environment." A bit self consciously he revealed that his wife is involved in a conservation project regarding the Peruvian rain forests. "I'm putting in the money of course."

Watch The *Living Dream* concert at Siri Fort today at 7.30 pm in the presence of Martin Luther King III photos Shivali Pandey