

One of Delhi's oldest choirs has been spreading smiles and songs over the years. We attend a practice session to see what keeps their music alive

A ROOMFUL OF HAPPY HIGH

The Capital City Minstrels



The main focus is on the joy of singing together, and creating energy that gives us a high for weeks
Carolyn Remy, conductor

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Nothing could have prepared us for the powerful music experience at the rehearsal venue of Capital City Minstrels — one of Delhi's oldest choirs — that will perform in the city throughout this month. After juggling work and battling traffic jams, we reached the location thinking it's going to be just another music event, but 15 minutes into the show and we were taken over by the collective melodies — produced by some 50 people. "I joined this group at a time when my husband had just undergone a bypass

surgery. My daughters were small and I had no one to share things with. I would come here and just scream my heart out during singing. It helped me heal," says Veronica Peris, who has been part of the choir for 10 years. What started over tea and biscuits at the residence of one of the oldest members, Usha Srivastava, metamorphosed into a music movement of sorts in a few years. "When we started,

the choir was classical, we would mostly just sing at embassies. Now, the music is very diverse, with more people connecting every year," Srivastava tells us. While some connect with the group for an emotional outlet and some to seek pleasure, for Tapas Bhardwaj, a visually challenged student of class 12, music has proved a confidence booster. "When I first came here, there were so many people ... and all older than me. I got very scared. But it feels great now. I feel I belong here. The music helps me focus on studies and has boosted my confidence and stage presence," says the youngest member of the choir, his face glowing.

The camaraderie of each member gets evident during small breaks, when the group breaks into gushes of laughter over some musical jokes that only they understand. And then they get back to music mode, monitored carefully by the choir conductor, Carolyn Remy. Remy, who has conducted choir in India and Germany, says there is a sea of difference in the way performances are received in India. "Germans always talk about mistakes during the concert. Even the audience and reporters are very critical. But in India, everyone is so happy and proud after the performance. Even if every

Catchitlive

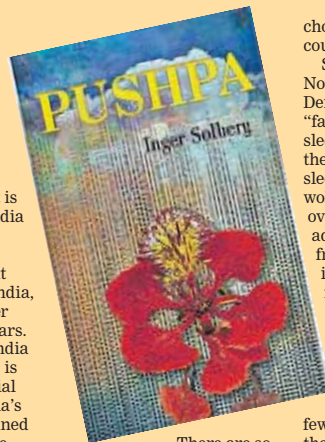
WHAT: Performance by Capital City Minstrels
When: May 3, 6 and 7 and June 6
FOR MORE INFO: Check out the band's Facebook page

tiny bit of breathing is not in the right place, the main focus is on the joy of singing together," she says. This time, a Marathi bhajan, an AR Rahman track from a Tamil film and a Konkani song are all part of the upcoming performance. "India seems to enjoy a mix of different genres in the same concert," Remy says.



'Let's not focus on the negative side of India'

After television journalist Barkha Dutt, who corrected a foreign panelist for stereotyping India on women's safety recently, Danish designer-writer Inger Solberg has said that it is unfair to target only India for rapes. Solberg has come out with her first book, Pushpa, a vibrant account of her life in India, which she has made her home for the past 15 years. Solberg, who loves India and everything Indian, is against the controversial BBC documentary India's Daughter, that was banned from being telecast. She also wrote a Facebook post against the documentary, based on the December 16, 2012, gang-rape incident that shook the country. "The incident was true; but why make the film and send the message that all Indian men are rapists, that their mindset is like this? Because that is not true; because this (rape) happens all over the world," Solberg said. "There are so many nice people, gentlemen here who are willing to help.



chose to settle down in this country," she said. Solberg was born in Norway, but lived in Denmark. She says she had "fallen in love with the sleeping tiger (India). "But the sleeping tiger is not sleeping anymore, it has woken up and has taken over the world", she says, adding that would frequent India in the 90s in connection with her fashion designing. The title of her book comes from the name her Indian boyfriend used to call her by. He was sadly killed in a motorcycle crash a few years ago. "He gave me the name Pushpa. He gave me the encouragement to finish the book. It took me three and a half years to finish writing," Solberg said. "Pushpa is about a divorced woman who comes to India with nothing except willingness to start a life of her own, and show that anything is possible, and that you have to believe in yourself, in your destiny, and you have to believe in the upar wala (God)," she adds.

There are so many good things happening here. So why are they always picking on the negative side? Take the sunshine stories and bring them out," she added. The writer, who chose to settle down in India after a "hard divorce", says she has been fascinated with the country ever since her teenage. "I always dreamed about coming to India. I was fascinated by the culture, Hinduism, about (Mahatma) Gandhi, and

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Back to the British Raj



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Have you been curious about how much India has changed since it got independence? If you are an art enthusiast, this is a great time to be in the Capital, where history and art have come together for an art exhibition, titled An Indian Kaleidoscope.

On display are lithographs and wood engravings dating back to the 18th century pre-independent India. "This exhibition will be a great learning experience. It gives a glimpse into the everyday life of people from that era. It will be interesting for people to observe how the monuments looked over a century ago, before their present state of decay," says Gautam Sabharwal from Pran Foundation that has organised the exhibition. Indian Gods and Goddesses have also been portrayed through a colonial eye. On display are works by British artists such as Solvyn, Mortimer, Menpes and Daniel brothers, William and Thomas Danniell, who had travelled to India to capture its natural beauty, people's way of life and architectural marvels. The earliest works at the exhibition are from mid 1700s and the majority is from the 1800s.

While some works show the mistreatment of Indians by the Britishers, some show



Some artworks from the exhibition

people dressed in traditional attires. About one particular piece of work, that shows Taj Mahal in all its glory, Sabharwal says, "The beauty of the piece is that although Taj Mahal has been put in the background, it still manages to get the viewers' attention." He adds, "I have been

collecting these art pieces for many years now. I bought them from several dealers. In fact, I got some of them in funny ways. Some I bought from kabadiwalas and some were in the boots of scrapped cars." Sabharwal has donated a lot of artwork that belonged to his personal collection.



CATCHITLIVE

WHAT: An Indian Kaleidoscope
On Till: May 17 (Not open on Mondays)
Where: Qutab Minar Roundabout, Mehrauli Road
Timings: 11am to 7pm

Nearest Metro Station: Qutab Minar on the Yellow line

