

“Pianists Corner”

An interview with Pervez Mody, done by Stephen Vaglica at the "Pianists Corner"

Stephen Vaglica sitting with International Pianist and recording Artist Maestro Pervez Mody enjoying a glass of red Valpolicella wine! -
-Pianist to Pianist--

“Pervez.....

1. What got you into music?”

As a child I was extremely quiet and introverted albeit stubborn as hell.....Even as a child who couldn't say much as protest I used to create hell if I didn't get what I wanted. What got this child into music was just chance. My dad and mum being extremely musical (dad played the accordion, mum had a voice like an Italian opera star, infact my sister really inherited all those marvellous voice qualities) made things easy for me. Infact both my brother and sis took piano lessons and reached a certain proficiency.. So I started my lessons at age 4 and came to a teacher who had studied in Vienna who gave me the solid basics. And being very secretly ambitious even as a child I started challenging myself from one piece to another just to see where it took me. After I had learned all that I needed to learn from her well I moved on to my first great teacher at the age of 8 Ms Feroza Dubash Labonne.

2. Who was the most influential person during your early years as a student of piano and why?

Without an iota of doubt the most influential person was my teacher Ms Feroza Dubash Labonne and later Ms Farida Dubash (her mother) These teachers really gave me an unbelievable gift of inspired creative and lofty thoughts. Right from the first lesson I knew something fantastic had happened everything changed the way I played the piano the way I felt like a second birth. For this gift from both of them I am eternally grateful. These teachers could sit hours over just one phrase till you really got it right. The countless extra lessons!!!!!!!!!!!! those fabulous hours as I sat at their famous white dining table and we discussed life music art almost anything!!! Such teachers are rare and I was extremely lucky and still feeling all elated just thinking of those magical hours at their beautiful home!!!!

3. What do you owe your teachers and who really made a difference

Well all my teachers really matter. They all gave me priceless gifts of inspiration and wisdom. Each one inspired me in different ways . After my 2 great Indian teachers I suppose the one who really got me into another league of pianism was my teacher in Russia Ms Margarita Fyodorova!! I started really understanding how things function and also on a very high level of transcendental pianism..She also brought me close to the great composer Alexander Scriabin. She also loved India and had a very special connection to me as her student. But before I end I would also like to mention someone dear to me who influenced my playing tremendously. My great friend colleague, profound musician and stunning virtuoso pianist Mauricio Vallina, gave me tremendous insights and inspiration in so many creative ways. It really changed a lot in my piano playing especially my flexibility and an immense amount of also technical insights too!!!! In Germany I studied with Fanny Solter who taught me a lot about the architecture in the music and very delicate sound. Miguel Proenca taught me so many wonderful ways of sound production. I had some wonderful masterclasses with Sontraud Speidel and Eduardo Hubert too.

4. How important is it to have formal training? Do you believe in early systematic training? What should students absolutely avoid during their early years?

Formal training for the ears is of utmost importance. Also very important according to me is early systematic training in all arts. Hurry is what one should avoid great amount of reflexion time and inspiration goes into making an extraordinary musician

5. What are the common deficiencies and misconceptions in training or technique do you most often find in students of piano? Do you believe that too many pianists sound alike?

Piano playing is art on the highest level. Common deficiencies are a) Problems of sound(due to the technique of banging and not listening) b) no knowledge of rhythm and solfeggio usually dry metronomic boring interpretations and that too with wrong rhythm c) Lack of general knowledge about art literature religion and culture in general. Creates interpretation with bad taste and uncalled for excesses(especially when they try to copy interpretations from a CD which cracks me up everytime))))))))) d) Sounding alike is because they copy from cds!!!

6. Many complain that today's pianists have lost the " culture of sound". That they care more about speed and empty bravura. Do you agree? And if so why do you suppose this is happening?

To be honest nowadays when I go to recital of a pianist I find they are trying to be clinically clean in their playing but the playing is slow and stodgy. Of course there are exceptions but that's my feeling. And when they play real fast it is unclear and muddled. So to learn to play real fast you got to practise in a certain way without resistance and not thump into the piano.....lightness and flexibility are the secret to virtuoso playing also a profound knowledge of the piano action which very few pianists really know about. If you don't know the G spot in the piano keys you will always struggle to play fast. And unfortunately this can only be learnt on a grand piano. An upright doesn't have that action!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



7. Which are the composers that are absolutely necessary to study for a complete development for a concert artist? Can you suggest some specific works?

The composer to be really heard and studied in great depth are J.S Bach L van Beethoven F Chopin C Debussy and from the modern epoch A. Schönberg (I can already see a lot of raised eyebrows) works of Bach sonatas of Beethoven Nocturnes of Chopin Preludes of Debussy and from Schönberg anything dodecaphonic.

8. How important is to expand your repertoire to include contemporary composers? Do you feel that the "greats" of the past are played to death?

Absolutely we all need more contemporary composers in our repertoire sometimes we all get a bit complacent about this very important aspect. But then there are also so many ignored greats of the past too!!!!!!

9. Can you give us your reflections upon music as a career? Specifically, what do you like most about performing and what do you dislike most?

Music as a career is perhaps the most misunderstood of the arts. The whole concept of a career is extremely delicate. Some take it as business, some take it as a vocation, I know that some take it as a last resort too!!!!!! I personally try to take it as way of life as way of creation and also as a way of spreading profound deep vibrations into the universe as a secret message decoded. What I love about the profession is the travel and seeing different people places experiences. What I don't like about the profession is constant practise (As a piano student at the famous Moscow conservatoire I used to read Tolstoy when I practised demanding passages. Later I gave up this nasty habit! But I still read Tolstoy.....)

10. What are your views on competitions and what should teachers and students expect from that experience? Are they the only vehicle to success?

The concept of art goes way beyond all competitions !!!!!!! I am radically opposed to all such methods although I won a few in my youth and childhood..... the way to a musical career is to be a good musician not an athletic ability to play trills and frills(although I have natural ability with my trills.(wicked smile)

11. What do you do to prepare a work new to you for performance and how long does it take?

Well first I learn the work in my head without the piano)))) This is tiresome at times but it sticks well with me.....and its pretty good with details and being exact about all the finer aspects. Once that has been done sit at the piano to play and make the demanding passages work out better. And when everything is going like I think it should then I try to record it and listen as a check. But the real mellowing of a great work of art takes sometimes months and years. Ok I have to admit that I have a very good memory and that makes things pretty easy for the learning process. To learn polyphony one must use nrs pianists will understand what I'm talking about))))

12. Is it normal to feel nervous before playing? How do deal with pre-performance "jitters" and what is your pre-concert routine

Nerves is pretty normal))) Horrendous fear is detrimental. It should be a balance of a healthy anxiousness. I always try to play my programme atleast once completely through on the piano that I am about to perform. That brings down the jitters))) Sadly due to schedule doesn't always work!!!!!! There is also a secret workout in the mind before every performance. But then that has to remain a secret since it is often misunderstood.

13. What was your most memorable performing experience and why?

Without sounding melodramatic the most memorable performing experience in my life was playing for a hearing impaired girl who was my student. That thrilled and inspired grateful face next to me was without comparison to all the bravo calls and all the halls and audiences all the praise from experts colleagues put together. I felt eternally blessed!!!!!!

14. What was single handedly the most difficult work you ever performed? Specifically what was so challenging?

For me it was the Scriabin Concerto)))) Especially the last movement with its scintillating passage work and velvet sound....but with my teacher helping me with her special fingering and wonderful tips it finally turned out fine.....(theres a marvellous account of her version on youtube)

15. What attributes should the perfect pianist possess? What are truly the most important of these?

Most important are great willpower and extraordinary talent. Since the life of a concert pianist is full of unexpected twists and turns a very important attribute is enormous flexibility and suppleness in body mind and character.. Physically the pianist has to be extremely strong to withstand the rigours of travel and just being able to play the concerts. And finally the pianist got to have a very emotional deep profound relationship with the music.

16. If you had to pick a favorite pianist who would that be? Do you like only their playing or are there other outstanding qualities about them?

I like the old school of piano playing because it seems more individual and exciting. From the recordings and the concerts attended one can very easily be swept away by the charm of a magnetic personality. Already as a child I was mesmerised by the Chopin recordings of the great pianist A. Cortot. Later I discovered V Horowitz in my teens and it had the same effect on me as a joint or something close to ecstasy !!! In my late teens as I started out on my Russian adventure I was introduced to V. Sofronitsky by my late teacher Margarita Fyodorova. There was a time too that I was heavily influenced by the pianism of Michelangeli, Later on M Argerich was a very big influence on me too because of her fiery stage presence and unbelievable technique.(heard this great artist many a times and am also very impressed by her humble helpful nature too) If I had to pick just one it would be difficult since I am always evolving and feeling differently.

17. Many experts say that classical music is on its way out. That audiences are losing interest. What can we do as musicians to interest more people, children in particular, in classical music?

According to me this is a very complex problem, It goes back to good taste, upbringing and intelligence. Good taste starts with being well educated and well behaved. How can one expect a child to sit still through a concert when its been allowed to shout and scream at home watch TV 24/7 play computer games and in general be hyperactive just most of the day. Upbringing at home and school is at this moment not very well rounded. It either tends to exaggerate or is absent. By which I mean that many aspects of living and learning are not taught to the child. And finally intelligence nowadays is beginning to really be all virtual (not that I'm against modern methods of learning). I just think one should be taught quality over sheer quantity.

18. If you were not a professional musician, what would you have been?

As a child I wanted to be a pilot ,,,,,,but at this given moment I would have been a healer (there is so much of pain in this world) or doctor.

19. Great playing comes with great sacrifice. What is the single thing you regretted giving up to reach your level?

Well there is one thing I wanted to learn and time was always Maybe in another life!!!! LOL!!

20. What would be your dream concert? What would be your dream recording?

Well my dream concert would be playing the turangalila from O Messiaen with Daniel Barenboim and the Berliner Philharmoniker.. Its always been one of my favourite works!!!!



21. What would you want your legacy to be?

This is a tricky question since the answer is always laced with uncertainty.. The question is what do we leave behind some recordings concert memories reputation as pianist some guided words for students some love some friendship. Character assessment???? Actually I want to be remembered as a pianist and human being who never gave up. Yes that is my greatest quality.

22. What is your favorite Rock Band? Jazz Musicians? Pop Song?

I love Jazz musicians!!!! Oscar Peterson Eroll Gardner Billy Holiday Ella Fitzgerald and many many more the list is endless!!! It comes from my abilities to improvise too although I dont do jazz more the transcriptions for fun.....

23. What are your future projects?

Well there are a lot of things going on but the most important are my Scriabin recordings I need to be in the recording studio a lot to bring the complete cycle to the end. As some probably already know volume 5 was out this year. I am also doing a cycle of the complete piano works of L van Beethoven in Berlin(every six months a concert) Next year is playing at the great Scelsi Festival in Basel. And also all three sonatas of J Brahms for violin and Piano at a famous chamber music recital center in Germany.

Thank You Maestro, for sharing so generously your thoughts and reflections!! I am deeply appreciative for your time and valuable insight!!!!

Dear Stephen, it's been a pleasure answering these questions. They really got me thinking a lot more about the entire musical process within me, and made me pause think and reflect on many important aspects that blossomed anew. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my manager/ agent and wonderful friend Bettina Styrnol for her tireless efforts and support in my musical career. I wish the Pianists Corner great success further it has been indeed a wonderful inspiring page where really wonderful creative people get together. Thanks once again dear Stephen Vaglica for your creative energy!!!!

