



“NOT A BIG CROWD, I PREFER PEOPLE WHO CAN CONNECT WITH MY EXPRESSIONS”

Deft fingers expertly strum the strings, resulting in mellifluous sounds that are known send lovers of Hindustani music into a swoon. *Sami Said Ali* talks to Poly Varghese, known as one of the best musicians of the upcoming generation.

Photos by: Biju R Nambiar

Copper strings producing Hindustani music, poems deeply rooted with life sentiments, expressions of emotional roller-coasters, Poly Varghese is a very unusual musician. He drapes his Mohanaveena, the 20-string guitar invented by his guru, Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, like a part of himself and swirls around playing it. The music from the strings attract more women than men, according to a conducted research, he grins.

Hailing from the cultural capital of the southern state of Kerala, Trissur, Poly Varghese found his haven in music at an age kids would rather run out and play. He concentrated his life on music from the age of eight and today, he is a professional performer of all the instruments he has dealt with. Somersaulting among twenty musical instruments today, Poly has lived the life of a wanderer. Flourishing life experiences created within him, his own line of ethics, one which the realities had

taught him. He is embraced by his friends who are considered the poor in the society—the beggars, pick-pocketers, drivers to name a few.

Poly is a missing man who was declared as dead in his home state, Kerala, as he left the place without leaving an address, to wander for seven long years. He lived as a street musician walking across climates and soils of all kind. Little did anyone who heard him then, knew that he was playing



an instrument which had only five other replicas in the world. And that he was one among the only five Mohanaveena players left.

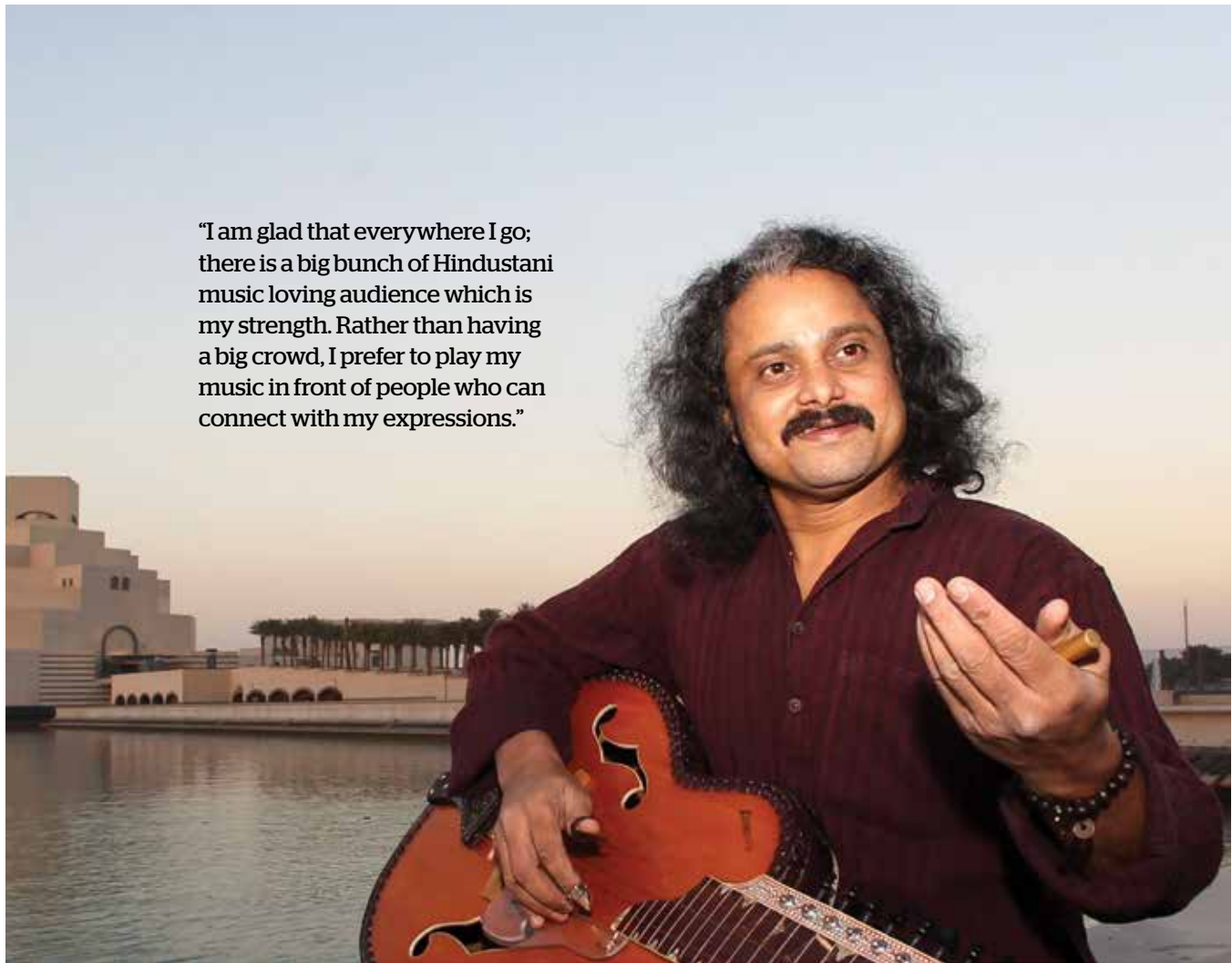
Poly had walked to the India-Pak border while wandering aimlessly. The Pakistan soldiers gave him water and asked him to return to native land. He strolled back again searching for something he is yet to know. He grew exhausted to the level that he might die when a village woman

rescued him. He had fifteen thousand rupees in hand but couldn't find food and water. When offered money in return, she refused it telling that her help was not meant for these pieces of paper. "Can you see any shops here?," she asked. "I don't need money. What I did was because I was human." It was a realisation from the middle of the Rajasthan desert that money was not everything.

Poly Vaghese had been a theatre artist

who performed regularly on stages with many theatre troupes including that of Nana Patekar. But then he bid goodbye to his passion for acting. "Not because I didn't like acting. But because of the pseudo personality one has to become when you are part of the acting industry. For me show-off is a put-off and affects me negatively."

He still continues his other two passions- music and literature. "I only have basic



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education and for me to think of a different career is nearly impossible. All I know is music. Also I started writing at a very tender age." Poly is the son of veteran journalist and ex-resident editor of the giant newspaper, Malayalamarama, and the writing ability seemed just the transfer of genes to the next generation. Though he has no formal certificates, he is an avid linguist with deep knowledge in several languages including English, Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, Nepali and Oriya.

Says the blazing sand to my sinews:

***When the needles of my ego
Wither, scorched in you,
How I enjoyed that scent of sweat.
The Castaway, destined to wander,
To the one who immersed his heart
In his own Ashes ...***

Only reminds ...

***That the deserts, where the winds rage
Are still there... waiting...***

(Translated to English from Malayalam by Jaya M)

These lines reflect in-depth emotions. Likewise is his music. It reflects his moods and swings and it's his unique way to communicate with the world. His brilliance is reflected when you hear his rhythms. He has composed over 150 songs in various languages, mostly in Bengali.

Like a bird soaring through the blue, like a rhyming stream embracing graceful silence, at times, overflowing and ferociously acquiring the banks, Poly's music mirrors his moods without boundaries with no hard and fast rules. No wonder he was called on to play Mohanaveena in the Silent Valley National Park for a non-stop 25-hour session. Not much people can be dedicated like Poly.

Poly is still doing his research in music and musical instruments that he hardly has time for anything else. He has invented the poly-string guitar, which has more than double the number of strings than Mohanaveena, 41 to be precise. "I'm

still working on it. I still have to correct the octaves and correct the rhythm. I play it once a while for audience, though I concentrate more on Mohanaveena as a tribute to my guru," he said.

Poly's Mohanaveena case echoes the number of places he has gone to with the 'fragile' sticker imprinted innumerable times. "I've travelled across the world with my music. I am glad that everywhere I go; there is a big bunch of Hindustani music loving audience which is my strength. Rather than having a big crowd, I prefer to play my music in front of people who can connect with my expressions."

He is amused at being a (almost) look-alike of Hariharan, the veteran playback singer and people mistake him for the latter. He loves immersing himself amidst the people and knowing their lives. Doha, the land that promotes culture, was blessed to have had Poly play his melodious Mohanaveena awing the music lovers of the desertscape ●