# Strings of tradition

**L. Subramaniam lights the inaugural lamp for the Spic Macay programme at The Newtown School**

ACCLAIMED VIOLINIST L. Subramaniam was in town recently to perform at the inaugural ceremony of the Spic Macay: National School Intensive 2016 held at The Newtown School.

The National School Intensive is a week-long annual event of Society for Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth and was held from December 24-30. More than 500 students from schools across India participated in the event.

Other renowned artistes such as danseuse Sujata Mohapatra, and secretary, school education department, Dushyant Nariala were also present.

The concert saw remarkable performances in Odissi, Carnatic violin, Carnatic flute, kathakali and sarod.

Workshops were also held on various subjects like Dhrupad, Hindustani vocal, kathak, Odissi, sattariya, kathakali, chhau, gottipua, pung cholam, puppetry, patua folk painting, sholapith craft, Kalighat paintings, papier mache and yoga. They were conducted by artistes from various fields.

Sunil Agarwal, founder-director of The Newtown School, said: "The response has been overwhelming. We have had more than 500 students participating. This will give them a taste of all things Indian."

**The Telegraph Salt Lake** caught up with Lakshminarayana Subramaniam at the coffee shop of Novotel, as he sipped a cup of steaming Bournvita and cookies to talk music. Excerpts from an exclusive interview.

**You like Bournvita?**

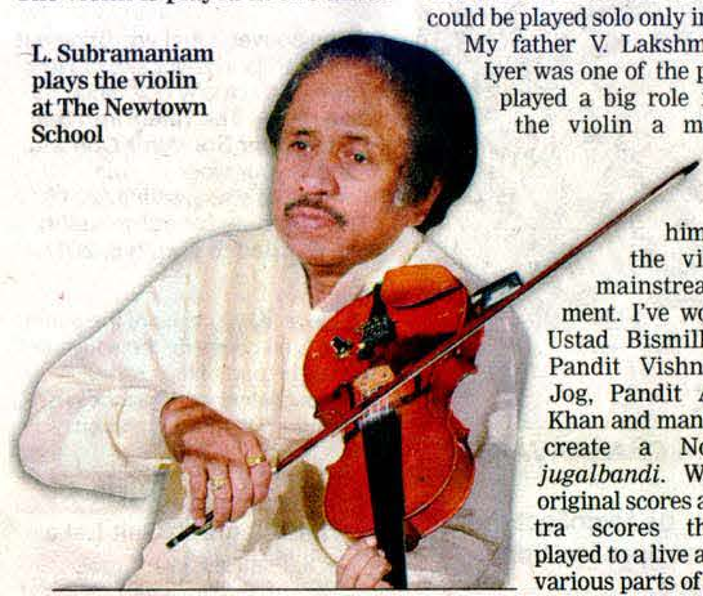
I do. In fact I quite like it. We travel so much that we are constantly into drinking tea and coffee. Bournvita gives me a change! *(smiles)*

**For a stage performance do you decide what to play beforehand?**

Not really. When I go up to the stage I try and judge the mood of the audience. It also depends on who has played before me and played what kind of music. I try and concentrate on bringing life to the notes I play. Sensing the mood of the audience is very important for a performer. I always keep that in mind.

**The violin is played in two different styles in north India and south India. When you are playing in eastern India, especially in Calcutta, which approach do you usually take up?**

I'm very happy that you ask. Ornamentation of the notes of the violin is different in north and south India. This makes the approach also different. In the north, the violin has been influenced by Persian and Mughal music. In the south, the Mughal influence has not worked. Therefore these two distinctive styles of playing the violin emerged only in the 12th century. The violin was first introduced as a string instrument in south India, much under the influence of the East India Company and the British way of playing it was absorbed by most artistes there. Initially, the violin was introduced as an accompanying instrument in an orchestra. It attained the status of a mainstream musical instrument that could be played solo only in the 1930s. My father V. Lakshminarayana Iyer was one of the people who played a big role in making the violin a mainstream instrument. After him, I took up the violin as a mainstream instrument. I've worked with Ustad Bismillah Khan, Pandit Vishnu Govind Jog, Pandit Ali Akbar Khan and many others to create a North-South *jugalbandi*. We've done original scores and orchestra scores that we've played to a live audience in various parts of the world.



**L. Subramaniam plays the violin at The Newtown School**

**Of late, Shillong has created a niche market for music lovers from across the world. Has the movement had an impact on the notes of the violin?**

There is a lot of choir music in Shillong. There are also symphony orchestras. The Trinity School of Music has also influenced the music in Eastern India, since it has such a wide range. Gradually what happens is orchestra players go to films for survival. Others become music teachers. That is why it is important to have a music research centre. That area needs focus.

**For students, when is the right time to take up music? How does it help?**

To learn the violin, a child must be trained and trained well. Violin training should begin by the time the chid is three and half years old. In Bangalore, the learning of music is not optional. It is a compulsory subject. My institute Subramaniam Academy of Performing Arts helps children to learn music where we follow a syllabus. We also give them CDs to practise music at home.

**Many adults take up music lessons as a stressbuster. Do you think the violin is a good option?**

The violin is the queen of all instruments. It is said that the notes of the violin are closest to the human voice when it comes to holding a high note. It is requires six to eight months of labour in learning. After that, the violin can become your lifelong companion.

***Showli Chakraborty***

**Are school students a lost audience for classical music?**
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