

Best of both worlds

The king of tablatronics, Talvin Singh, goes on a nostalgic trip down memory lane and talks about his musical journey in Britain and India

ALLAN MOSES RODRICKS

For UK-based tabla player, composer and performer Talvin Singh, India and Britain are similar worlds playing equal roles in shaping his journey in music. The veteran percussionist, renowned for blending classical Indian music with drums and bass and pioneering a form of music popularly known as tablatronics, says he owes it to both countries for where he is now.

Here in the city to perform as part of the YES BANK Art Bengaluru 2015 festival, held at The Collection, UB City, recently, the musician shares insight into his work and his plans for the future.

Thrilled to be in Bengaluru, Talvin says he loves the city of music.

"I am sure one of my best ever performances was a solo show I did here late one night several years ago. Though I was nervous and went on stage after 100 veena players from all over the South had performed, I managed to pull off a spectacular show. Bengaluru is close to me. My DJ sets have always been good here. There's also less of a commercial vibe so when I'm playing I feel that people want to listen to what I play whereas in other cities people want to listen to what they want to listen to."

The acclaimed composer and pioneer of the Asian underground music genre recalls the spiritual connect his music gave him. "I started playing when I was five and



AN OPEN MIND To music is Talvin's approach

it's been a beautiful journey so far. The spiritual energy of making music has helped in the journey. More than the profession, the spiritual aspect of being in the performing arts is a great feeling."

With his multi-cultural background, he says: "It has helped in shaping my identity to be global. I've got the best of both worlds and felt comfortable in the extreme cultural upbringing I have. With my dad very British father and mom very Indian mother, the music of both worlds helped me make the beautiful connection."

He reiterates that music

and spirituality are closely linked, especially in India and that's what has made me open minded."

While he confesses that Indian classical music has always been a motivation with his aesthetics having really developed from Indian classical music, Talvin says he's open to listen to various styles of music, from jazz to electronica. "This bringing of two worlds of music together came up from those roots."

On what inspires him, he says art was what drew him first. "I used to collect records, which I still do. Buying records is not just about the

music; it's also the art since I'm claiming a piece of artefact that has stunning album covers."

Looking back, Talvin says he grew up with two things - "My tabla and my father's analogue equipment, since he was an electronic engineer. Even my medium of listening and recording music was analogue since I used to use his equipment to listen and two tape recorders to layer my initial work."

He admits there was no jump start and the whole process of venturing into music was natural. "I learnt that music can be made by any-

thing. The best music is often by people who have limited resources."

Pointing out that his career has been parallel with learning, the tabla maestro agrees that he's said no to more things than he's said yes to. "Like commercial work and things I'm not comfortable with. That's my own discipline. Today I feel that's good for me since I'm in a good space."

Sharing his views on the Indian music scene, Talvin says he loved the Indian film music from yesteryears. "It's not like it used to be. I should spend more time on this. Right now my focus is on my new record company which I just started. We are encouraging new content since there many young people making good music, across genres, and they need more support and infrastructure. That's where Indian record companies need to step up. Young musicians in India need this support more than ever before now. That's the only way the scene will improve and justice can be done to music."

The scene has to change, he points out. "It's interesting how music is shaping up and music needs help in India. We need more venues and a box office culture where artistes get paid. That can work in India. I personally want to be more involved in India. I also feel good about doing film music since I love working with the framework of ragas and completely dissecting them."