

● **Tabla maestro**

Caught by the rhythm

A Punjabi born in London, Talvin Singh is known as the father of modern Asian electronic music. A DJ, music producer, composer and electronic musician, he is best known as a tabla player. He has completed 25 years in the music industry and is known to have created his own genre of music — 'Asian underground'. He fuses the sounds of tabla with electronic beats and creates music that merges Indian classical with Western pop, drum and bass, hip hop and jazz. With many accolades to his credit, he holds the prestigious Mercury Music Prize (now called as the Barclaycard Mercury Prize). The artiste, who recently performed in the City as part of 'Art Bengaluru', talks about his inspirations and journey so far.

"Yes, I have completed 25 years in the field. But music has been in me for the longest time now. I started playing the tabla at the age of five and it has been a beautiful journey so far. There have been quite a few turbulences but it is a blessing to be associated with the spiritual aspect of the art," says the versatile musician.

Brought up by a British father and an Indian mother, Talvin was exposed to extreme cultures, which he says shaped his identity. He explains, "I have had the best of both worlds. It was comforting. I always spoke to my mother in Punjabi or Hindi and learnt about Indian culture from her." He terms the music of India as spiritual and it is this spirituality that has made him what he is today. "I am very open-minded and it is music that has made me so."

A devoted learner of tabla, he came to India to study the art from Pandit Laxman Singh. He recalls the days of his training and says, "My 'guruji' is unbelievable. I have been very lucky to learn from



DYNAMIC Talvin Singh

him. An old-school teacher, he is like a 'shastri', who is strict and loving at the same time. The bonding and energy I share with him, till date, is very strong."

The disciplined artiste is known for not involving himself in any commercial production. He goes back in time and recalls his days as a boy who grew up with musical beats. "I grew up with two things — my tabla and analogue instruments (as my dad was an electrical engineer). My medium of listening to music was electronic. It all began with observation."

During the initial days, his studio consisted of merely two tape recorders and a tabla! While listening to hip hop on one recorder, he would play the tabla to match the beats and

record both the sounds in the second recorder. And that is how his magical journey began.

He holds Bengaluru close to his heart as he has had some of his best performances here. "People here want to hear something different each time, which is encouraging." He finds spiritual solace in the tabla. "When you play the instrument sitting cross-legged, you get involved in it completely. It is like you are playing and the instrument is massaging the body."

Looking forward to exploring the music market in the country, he ends on the note, "Music is not meant to be just sold. It has to be made. If it is interesting, it will be discovered later by someone and uncovered."

Prajna GR