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Zitar Maestro Says B-town Music is Like Storytelling

Niladri Kumar says that he aims at relating to the audience with different kinds of music

• Pratima Shantaveeresh

Niladri Kumar has been creating ripples with his performance on the sitar and zitar. During his performances, the 43-year-old always aims to relate to the audience, no matter what their age group is.

This is what motivated him to invent the zitar - a remodelled sitar. The instrument has five strings while the sitar has 20, it also been tweaked with an electric pickup which sharpens its tone.

Kumar pegs its invention to "following one's passion and walking the path that is not trodden."

The audience he is trying to reach out is mostly youngsters who are drifting away from the traditional form of music. But he is not entirely certain if they really are. "What are people interested in," he asks. "I don't think anyone has an answer for it. It's about reaching the right kind of people with the right kind of music," says the musician who first performed at the age of six at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Puducherry.

He is set to perform in the city, on June 11, for Soul to Soul, a cultural event at The Art of Living International Centre. "The concert will be a classical one to suit the ashram environment," he says. He will be accompanied by Padmashri Pt Vijay Ghate ji on the tabla. Niladri Kumar has composed many Bollywood hits such as *Crazy Kiya Re* from *Dhoom 2*, *Tore naina bade dagabaaz re* from *Dabangg 2* and *Tere Naina* from *My Name Is Khan*. All were composed on the zitar and sometimes also on the sitar.

Explaining to us how he looks at the two, he says, "Concerts and movies are two different things. I enjoy doing both. In concerts, I get to connect with the audience immediately. But the music in films is like storytelling. They have different challenges and different rewards."

His work with renowned musicians such as Zakir Hussain, Jonas Hellborg, V Selva-ganesh and John McLaughlin was enriching and exhilarating, he says. It exposed him to new challenges which further honed his skills.

A musician since childhood, he says he feels fortunate to have made a career in it. "For many it remains their passion," he says.

Playing the sitar and zitar have certain similarities, he says. "But the approach is different as zitar is electric and sitar is acoustic."

He says a musician should be open to

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change. "Change is the only constant, music might change again tomorrow. One has to welcome it to be successful," he says.

The composer's next is the upcoming Sandalwood film *Nirutara*. Another one on the list is directors P Singh and Jitendra Tiwari's *Shorgul*, a Bollywood film. The song is titled *Tere Bina*. The song is penned by former union minister Kapil Sibal and sung by Arijit Singh.



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— Niladri Kumar,
zitar player and music
composer