

Inspiring Story on Association of Performing Arts of India [www.apaiart.com](http://www.apaiart.com) by the courtesy of Broward County Cultural Division who appointed David Schwartz: who is a freelance writer and photographer based in Fort Lauderdale. He regularly writes for the Broward Arts Journalism Alliance (BAJA) through the Broward County Cultural Division.

Beginning more than 20 years ago with a few friends meeting in the dining room of a house in Pembroke Pines to hear Indian classical music, the Association of the Performing Arts of India promotes Indian culture by bringing musicians, dancers and vocalists to audiences throughout Broward County.

"Our goal is to preserve our culture through concerts, lectures, demonstrations and classes," said Bharti Chokshi, APAI co-founder and executive director.

The music is the classical music of northern and southern India, not Bollywood, added APAI co-founder and board chairman Dr. Deenbandhu Chokshi. The dances are opera, studies about scripture and ancient folk stories, he said.

Performances have become "a kind of a treasure" for American audiences, Deenbandhu Chokshi added, Performances "appeal to the higher senses – to the mind and intellect, and to spirituality," Deenbandhu Chokshi said. They even have a "meditative power."

Fort Lauderdale attorney Georgia Robinson said a concert performance by Manju Bhatt Mehta on March 12-2016, the "first lady of sitar," was a "mind blowing experience. It just went right to the soul."

Art, music and dance, as well as experiencing different cultures, "tenderize" the soul, Robinson said. "When you leave, you feel that your soul has been touched in a way."

Dr. Radha Kotamraju, who dances in the Kuchipudi style of southern India which goes back to the seventh century, said the popular dance form explores the mythology and history of her ancestors and combines classical music and poetry with dance.

"It ties you to your roots," said the Miami physician who began dancing when she was five years old and later studied dance in India. "You find yourself in some way giving back or never giving up. It shows that you really care and feel really committed to the art."

Calcutta, India native Gourisankar Karmakar, a percussionist who now lives in Austin, Texas, often performs for APAI audiences, usually playing tabla (Indian drums) while accompanying an artist playing sitar.

Karmakar said he enjoys performing in South Florida because "not only Indians but Americans too come to the concert. We get exposure to a bigger audience."

Bharti Chokshi said APAI's classical Indian performances usually attract people from ages 15 to 75. Artists often perform at schools, after school programs, libraries and museums to bring Indian music and dance to children. Some artists give master classes at South Florida colleges, she said.

APAI has "the best quality performers from India," said dancer Ranjana Warier. Students from her Indian classical Rhythms School of Dance in Davie have participated in workshops at public schools and danced in stage shows.

Dancers from APAI performances have conducted master classes at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. "Students learned something culturally different," said Clarence Brooks, associate professor and director of dance.

Brooks said he was impressed by the visiting dancers' strength as performers, how strongly they were connected to the music and how well they told the story with their eyes and hand gestures.

Broward College's Davie campus has hosted several master classes with visiting Indian musicians. One class, with about eight students, featured tabla. "They were learning a style of percussion that we don't offer," said Scott Miller, associate dean of visual and performing arts.

"Without [Bharti Chokshi] and her organization, there's probably almost a 100 percent chance that the type of culture she brings to South Florida would not be brought here," Miller said. "She's providing us with a window to a culture that otherwise we would not have. Having this type of culture here really enriches our environment."

APAI performances at the Broward County Main Library, Broward Center for the Performing Arts, Coral Springs Center for the Arts, and other venues have included:

Chitram – a Portrait of Indian Culture, performed in April 2011, featured Kanniks Kannikeswaran's music and a co-ed choir, orchestra and singers, and dancers performing a 90-minute theatrical production. It gave the audience a glimpse of the diverse cultures, beliefs, practices and lifestyles of 5,000 years of Indian history.

Unity Through Diversity, a March 2014 program in which the APAI choir performed four choral compositions/arrangements created by composer Kanniks Kannikeswaran. The compositions were in Sanskrit and were based on classical Indian ragas (a melodic mode used in Indian classical music). Texts conveyed the Indian ideal of universal peace and the individual's connection to the universe and its creator.

The Enchanting Sound of Sitar and Tabla concert on March 12-2016 featured sitarist Manju Bhatt Mehta and percussionist Gourisankar Karmakar.

Here's a look at some upcoming performances:

**Ustad Zakir Hussain, Friday, April 8 at 8:00 PM** in collaboration with the Duncan Theater, 4200 Congress Ave., Lake Worth. For tickets, visit [web.ovationtix.com/trs/pe.c/1034831](http://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pe.c/1034831).

International artist and "tabla virtuoso" Zakir Hussain's performance in Lake Worth is part of a U.S. tour that began in California and will end in Washington, D.C.

Hussain's biography says: "His playing is marked by uncanny intuition and masterful improvisational dexterity. Widely considered a chief architect of the contemporary world music movement, Zakir's contribution to world music has been unique, with many historic collaborations including Shakti, which he founded with John McLaughlin and L. Shankar."

He has performed with George Harrison, YoYo Ma, Joe Henderson, Van Morrison, Airto Moreira and Pharoah Sanders.

**Gundecha Brothers, 5 to 8 p.m., Sunday, May 8** at the Broward Center/JM Family Studio, 201 SW Fifth Ave., Fort Lauderdale-33312.

Vocal masters, brothers Umakant Gundecha and Ramakant Gundecha are leading Dagarvani dhrupad singers. They have performed at renowned music festivals in India and around the world.

In a review of a performance that featured the morning raga Gurjari Todi, The Hindu newspaper said, "The shimmering lyricism and subliminal value of Umakant and Ramakant Gundecha's dhrupad recital gripped one and all in the auditorium."

**Musicians Krishna Mohan Bhatt, sitar; Nitin Mitta, tabla; Saraswathi Ranganathan, veena; and Ganapathi Ranganathan, mridangam will perform from 7 to 9:30 p.m., Saturday, September 10** at the Broward Center/Amaturo Theater, 201 SW Fifth Ave., Fort Lauderdale.

Bhatt is known for his sitar performances of Hindustani ragas. His innovative music blends vocal and instrumental techniques and musical compositions.

Nitin Mitta has performed with some of India's finest musicians. He also collaborated with pianist Vijay Iyer and guitarist R. Prasanna on the album "Tirtha," which blends contemporary jazz with North and South Indian traditional ragas and compositions.

Saraswathi Ranganathan, Veena, and Ganapathi Ranganathan, Mridangam, performed for APAI in a Sept. 2014 concert.