

Meet Zakir Hussain

Zakir Hussain, a world renowned tabla maestro is probably one of the most down to earth celebrities you could come across. Charming and gifted with a great sense of humor, he also happens to be very modest. Zakir has been instrumental in revolutionizing the Indian Percussion not only in India but all over the world.

CM: How does it feel to be a child prodigy?

ZH: Child prodigy is a term that is used very loosely, just because you play at a young age doesn't mean that you a master or guru material. Just like children, I wouldn't call myself a child prodigy at age 7. I was playing concerts where other kids were also on display at that age. I also started playing with some masters and I was taught by Alla Rakha, my dad, and Ravi Shankar. By age 12, I started traveling with musicians to play in concerts. At age 18, I was performing with masters like Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan.

I ended up meeting great musicians from Jazz to Rock to Pop. That helped me record more. I was just shooting the gun on someone else's shoulder. There were other Tabla players here at that time. One in particular, Shankar Ghosh, who left to go back to India. If he hadn't left, maybe he could have been where I am. Shankar Ghosh is a big Tabla teacher in Kolkatta.

CM: You seem to be one of the easiest people to talk to, tell us more about you.

ZH: I do my own laundry and iron my own clothes. I cook and I also wash dishes and I am available for hire. It is like focusing on things that you need to do, sort of like preparing for your pooja.

I installed a washer/dryer in my home in India so that I can do my laundry there. My nephews and nieces laugh at me because they are used to having it done by servants.

I travel alone. I enjoy the work I do. CM: Tell us about your tours in the US

ZH: I do one full tour a year and individual concerts, but no more than one show in a city each year.

CM: How was your schooling?

ZH: In Mumbai, I was the first child in my family to go to an English medium school. It was a confused upbringing. *laughing* I had to get up at 4 a.m. to do my practice and do my Saraswati pooja, which was strange as I am a muslim. Then I would go to my Arabic school to study the Koran. After which I

went to my Catholic school and sing hymns and go to church.

Later I went to

University of Washington in Seattle. At age 19, I was teaching. I studied Ethnomusicology and since then I made it a habit to live in India for 3 months each year.

CM: Tell us about your family

ZH: I met my wife, Antonia Minnecola, when I was teaching at Ali Akbar school. She came to study Kathak, she is a Kathak teacher and performer, we have been married for 30 years. Anisa and Isabella are my daughters. Anisa works as a film producer in LA while Isabella teaches Ballet, Modern and Jazz dance.

CM: So, you are going to perform in Tampa.

ZH: I haven't played in Tampa in the last millennium! Now that I am a thousand, we are bringing the Masters of Percussion group to Tampa for the first time. This is a group that was started by my father and I in 1996 to showcase rarely found percussion firsts from India. This is a biannual event. Every time we have a couple of the same drummers and new percussion elements are brought from India, from East, West, North and South. We have drummers from all over. This event will have folk and traditional drumming. It is an event that seems so seamless on stage that comes through various events.

This concert is not about me. Each performer in this concert is the best in his field and is a master. This concert is a bird's eye-view of drumming.

CM: Your views on Indian Percussion and its place in world music.



ZH: Cuban or Jazz percussion both have their salient features. They have the ability to highlight certain aspects of rhythm traditions.

We have standard styles in Indian Percussion and are confirmed rhythmists. We have ancient traditions. We are also refined. Cuban traditions, I believe, deal with rhythm in similar traditions as India.

A science has been assigned and worked to a feel that you are able to ride based on your studies and gut feeling which is the exclusive precision element of South India.

CM: What would say to parents that see the talent in their children but don't know how to go about it?

ZH: When I was a little kid I was never made to sit down and practice. I used to watch them lean, watch them in practice and the information was coming to me in my ears. At dinner, my dad would talk about the masters and a prologue was created. I was being watched.

You can't force a child to study – the child has to have aptitude or talent. History/Math/Painting/ - open up the whole gamut to them, let them play music, read, go to museums. Let the kid reveal what they are interested in.

You have unplugged yourself when you moved from India – to bring a child here and to force them to learn what is taught in India is unfair to the child.

CM: Message to CityMasala readers:

ZH: Happy New Year and Happy Republic Day. Be proud of our traditions and roots.