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Meet the musical maverick

Trilok Gurtu is an enigma in India's creative sky. He has steadfastly refused to play to the gallery. But, despite not bowing to market dictates unlike many of his contemporaries, this percussionist son of legendary vocalist Shobha Gurtu has been able to carve his niche in the world of jazz, rock, classical, ethnic and world music.

To get a peek into his mind, just go through a few of his quotes, posted on his website — "It's really the fault of such people that pure musical sounds are stagnating," he says with reference to the "purists" who are critical of him for "straying" from pure music and experimenting with music. "I don't want to be called 'pandit', 'maharaj' or 'ustad'. I'm neither classical nor massical. These are just tags," he says cocking a snook at the title-obsessed world of music. And the best one reflecting his individualist trait — "Mother told me I'll have problems with my attitude, but she also said not to settle for anything I didn't believe in."

He can afford to make such comments. After all, he is respected the world over because of the path he has chosen — playing with sounds and collaborating with diverse musicians. "What I did way back in the 1970s and 1980s was criticised by the purists who could not stomach my improvisations. My debut solo album 'Usfret' in 1987 faced strong criticism for the same. Unfortunately, then the term 'world music' did not exist," he says.

Gurtu's latest album 'Massical' reflects his thought process, which refuses to adhere to a particular genre of music — classical or mass music. Recorded in various studios in Italy, Germany and India, 'Massical' is what one can describe as a true international album,which involves participation by artists of various nationalities, playing compositions influenced

MAN OF MANY WORDS Trilok Gurtu

by many cultures and instruments that come from various continents.

In a sense, this musician creates an autobiographical musical journey in this album, giving samples of various musical traditions that he has imbibed in his journey that started with the music by his mother and her contemporary classical giants. It then moved on to jazz and world music through a stint as a percussionist with RD Burman. "In the 55 minutes of 'Massical', I have put my entire journey from the age of five till now. I went through a lot of hardships, I had to come up with new ways of playing as people didn't understand the way I play," he says.

'Massical' has come after a gap of two years since his last album, and he did not even release his album in India as he felt it won't work here. Critiquing the Indian audio scape, he says, "They still follow the Grammy as if it is they are the ultimate awards in music. It's an American 'purashkar', and is not worth very much in Europe. How can an American decide which Indian classical musician should get a prize? I don't think the success of music should depend on awards," he avers.

Gurtu's musical raison d'être has been to make music sans any label, particularly sans an elitist tag. "Music should not be limited to a few to enjoy. 'Massical' is targeted towards all music lovers, unlike classical which is only for the intellectual sorts," he says.

He has collaborated with legendary jazz musicians like Don Cherry, John McLaughlin, Joe Zawinul and Pat Metheny as well as his mother Shobha Gurtu and percussionist Talvin Singh for his album. Gurtu describes music as something very spiritual. "I feel confident in doing it simple," he says.

German musician Ferdinand Forsch has specially developed an instrument for Gurtu, named 'Trilok Gurtu Basic I' and used extensively in 'Massical' as well as the Australian movie 'Lucky Miles', which he composed music for, is not averse to composing for Indian movies too.

In fact, this musical maestro was highly influenced by his brother Ravi, one of the most admired musicians in the Hindi film industry. "I have done a few movies (the most recent being Siddharth Srinivasan's 'Amavas'). I have also been approached by Aparna Sen and Mira Nair and am already booked till December," he says. And, he is already preparing for his next album, which he will create with a big band from Hamburg.

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