

IMMERSION IN INDIA: A STUDY OF TABLA & MUSIC EDUCATION



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Incredible. Truthfully, incredible is the only word that can describe that beautiful, crazy, wonderful place. India is a place that is just too unbelievable to fully comprehend, even after you've been there. I still look back on my time now and think to myself, it must have just been a dream. My three month adventure in India allowed me to follow my dream and focus on my passion in life – music. This passion has taken on many forms over the years, from western classical percussion to pit orchestra for musicals to West African drumming and now North Indian classical music.

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In early January in preparation for my Burch Fellowship Experience, I initiated my study of tabla (my north Indian classical drum of choice). Undoubtedly, there is something about living in a foreign culture while studying



music from that culture that expedites your learning process and deepens your true grasp of the music. With the help of my guru Anubrata Chatterjee, I dove deep into the classical music, studying both techniques and compositions. I've never grown so musically in my life or felt so connected to a culture's music in such a short span of time. In addition to studying music on a performance level, I also visited several local primary/secondary schools, surveying music in youth education in order to develop a sense of how music education is approached in India versus in America or in Uganda. Along with taking lessons, practicing countless hours, and visiting schools, I attended many concerts in the area to get a sense of music in the day-to-day culture and what it means to the average, non-musical person. These different musical experiences allowed me to see many perspectives of India through seeing many perspectives of the music of India.

Although music was my focus

in India it was by no means my whole experience there. Of course, I developed friendships and went on a few adventures to take in the sites and experience the India that lies beyond Kolkata.

My favorite destination: the Taj Mahal. Of course, you can't go to India and not see the Taj Mahal! Simply put, the Taj is perfect. But beyond the Taj, riding a huge elephant in Jaipur at the Amber Fort, and taking a camel safari through the deserts of Jaisalmer, my traveling in India was pretty amazing.

Despite the exotic beauty India provided, it also allowed me to see true hardships in life. While there, I volunteered at an orphanage once a week. At first, my visits there tested me more than the wear and tear of daily life, but as I grew closer to these children I understood why they were so rough initially and how difficult their lives actually are. These children were used to living on the streets, foraging for food, trafficking and using drugs – all in the name of survival. On my second day at the orphanage, one of the older girls broke down in my arms crying because of things haunting her from her past. I don't think true pain and hardship can be understood without



experiencing something outside of your comfort zone/your realm of living – whether it be in India or simply down the street. Until you've been extremely close to the emotions and heartache, it's impossible to understand it.

My time in India has done so much for me, but not all of it has been clarifying. While it has assured me that I could focus on India for my degree in ethnomusicology in the future, it has also renewed my love for the education system dealing with both math and music, here at

home and in foreign countries. As far as the future is concerned, the possibilities are endless and my time in India has only opened my eyes to even more options



and pushed me to seek out more opportunities to return. As for now, my experience and training there has allowed me to connect to the local Indian community, participating in events, playing with traditional Indian dance-dramas and just in general, feeling more connected. I could speak for days about India and the effect it's had on me, but that wouldn't even be scratching the surface. Experiencing a culture as an outsider, but with an insider connection (music) is something that is indescribable. Music is defined and shaped by culture, and after living in India for three months, it's evident to me why their music is the way it is. It's difficult and complicated, yet simplistic; it's unpredictable and chaotic, yet structured; it's dirty and loud, yet beautiful and serene. India is everything all at once, all in one place, and that place can easily repel you, but always leaves you wanting more. Hobnob? Not possible you say? That's what I thought, but then, I went to India and everything changed.

