



MUSIC SHILLONG CHAMBER CHOIR

On a High Note

TEXT: URMILA MARAK



Their music, a mixture of jazz, Khasi, Hindi films and pop, has won them global admirers

Few in India had heard the dulcet tones of the Shillong Chamber Choir till they had won the reality show, *India's Got Talent*, aired on entertainment channel Colors last year. But in point of fact the choir has been around since 2001 and had already received much international acclaim: last year, they were awarded three gold medals in the World Choir Games, an Olympic-styled event, in Shaoxing China. But it was when the group sang *Yeh dosti hum nahin todenge* from the Hindi film, *Sholay* or classics such as *Ajeeb dastaan hai yeh* from the film *Dil Apna Aur Preet Parai* that the whole of India got hooked.

However, neither the choir nor its mentor-cum director-cum-manager, 41-year-old pianist Neil Nongkynrih are consciously reaching out for fame and fortune. When the choir is not travelling it is ensconced in a house in Shillong, admittedly India's Rock capital, owned by Nongkynrih's family. Here the youngsters live together, pray together and practice eight hours a day in one seamless thread.

It's a dedicated and loyal group. Some members like Ibarisha Lyngdoh, a soprano with the choir has been offered a place at the prestigious Julliard School of Music in New York, William Basaiawmoit, a student of St Stephen's College has been offered a scholarship in France. But they're not leaving the choir preferring to stay in Shillong under tutelage of 'Uncle Neil.' As Nongkynrih says: "When you join a choir group, you have to look beyond the superficial and materialistic.

We are not just a choir group our goal is to promote peace, humanity and hope."

From single digits the choir has now expanded to a 20-member team ranging from 15 to 29 years. Most of them have come into the fold in search of a more meaningful life, others for inspiration, some for a gap year from their chosen career paths but they all have an almost spiritual faith in their music which is eclectic and timeless – a mixture of jazz, baroque, Khasi, pop, classical and contemporary.

It's a mixture that has won them admirers all over the world. The choir has performed with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, the Sri Lankan choir in China, participated in two World Choir Games and preformed for the Presidents of India and the United States. And this unique music group is now headed towards Europe and Canada for a concert event sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. ■

More on SCC at www.shillongchamberchoir.com

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