

# Music for the soul

**Jodhpur RIFF (Rajasthan International Folk Festival) has turned the sleepy town of Jodhpur into a buzzing destination**



MAHARAJA GAJ SINGH

As the train touches the platform of Jodhpur city, the general lull gives no indication of the buzz that awaits the visitor. For a few days, however, come evening and the sleepy town and the venue for RIFF, the Mehrangarh Fort turns into the most coveted destination for the music lovers that descend into the heritage city from across the globe. With performances enthralling music lovers from dawn to late in the night, RIFF, in its fifth year and ranked amongst the Top 25 International Music Festivals in the world, has turned the sleepy town of Jodhpur into a buzzing city.

“This year there has been a lot of influx especially in the smaller hotels of the city. They are all full and even the flights have been all full. My friend, the ambassador from Trinidad and Tobago, a special guest this year at RIFF, couldn’t get a flight to reach. Also, there have been a lot of tourists because RIFF was held back to back with the Marwar Festival,” says HH Maharaja Gaj Singh II of Jodhpur-Marwar and Patron of the Festival. Divya Bhatia adds that the festival has managed to turn the city of Jodhpur “from a one day destination

to a 2-3 day destination at the time of the festival”. “Over 10 companies are running tours to Rajasthan, culminating at the festival. Citizens are beginning to see how this can be good for the city – the travel agents association and a few citizen bodies have now come forward to be a part of RIFF,” says Bhatia.

RIFF is a not-for-profit partnership project involving two heritage trusts: Mehrangarh Museum Trust (MMT) and Jaipur Virasat Foundation (JVF). The festival has been endorsed by UNESCO as a “Peoples’ Platform for Creativity and Sustainable Development.” The objective of Riff from the very beginning was to give a platform to the local artists from all over Rajasthan. Sustaining and revitalising Rajasthan’s musical heritage is one of the key missions of

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Jodhpur RIFF,” says Singh.

With over 150 musicians and performing artists from across Rajasthan and around the world, “the incredible response for the living legends and dawn and dusk devotional concerts; great appreciation for the Yuri Honing collaboration; genuine awe and curiosity for the unusual instruments from Mewar; the music of Band of Brothers, Davy Sicard and Rupa and April Fishes, took the festival to newer heights,” informed Bhatia.

For Maharaja Gaj Singh, it’s always been an effort to get the right mix of people at the festival. “Not to have too many crowds but to keep the essence and spirit of the festival. And invite the right mix of people, music lovers, tourists,” informed the Maharaja. Recalling his most memorable RIFF outing, he remembers the beauty and the magic the full moon created in one of the early occasions. “In one of the early Riff seasons when Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia was playing

in the main stage, the moon came up behind it. He was already in half trance and when he saw the moon rising, he played at an altogether different level. It was magical,” remembered Singh.

The festival has a collaborative and an evolving model. Costs are primarily covered through critical support from the Taj group and other partners. MMT absorbs fort-related costs, while JVF absorbs key staff costs. I’ve received tremendous support from hoteliers in Jodhpur, giving us complimentary rooms for national and international artists. Donations through passes and food and beverage account for about 10 per cent of all costs. And with increasing awareness and popularity about the festival, Bhatia sees a growth in the ad spend in the coming years. “The fact that the BBC is making a 50 minutes documentary on us and our work with the Rajasthani artists and that we’re being considered among the world’s best festivals tells us that we’re making a mark globally,” says Bhatia. RIFF has also given the local artists a platform to collaborate with the global artists. Band of Brothers from Australia have collaborated with Rajasthani folk artists and the complete collaboration will be featured at RIFF 2012.

Singh feels that the festival is evolving, but has matured now. “All the elements and the segments are there. The dawn and dusk performances were very well attended and received. And the presence and involvement of young people is really heartening as they are growing aware and understanding their own culture and traditions,” says Singh. The festival is surely RIFFING up the right musical notes.

♦ GARIMA PANT



A PERFORMANCE ON THE OPENING NIGHT AT THE CLOCK TOWER