

A GOOD PIANIST

-Snehit Sah

'The Eastern Music Theater' was written in bold letters above the ticket counter. Late 1950's when the theater was started by Dheeraj Gupta. He had been to the west several times and much before the trade barriers allowed free foreign trade, he was minting money off western influences – the piano.

The new Bombay youth was different, just like each generation is different from the previous ones. Piano concerts was their idea of modernization in music. So, the Eastern Music Theater was naturally very popular.

Enter the twenty-first century and people moved on to different type of music. Even Dheeraj's son, Arun Gupta moved on to a different business because he saw no potential in a music theater.

What remained of the theater were the creaking doors, broken stairs, dust covered seats, empty halls and three people who called the place their home – two guards and a cleaning staff named Roshan. Although there was no work, they received a monthly salary, because they were legal employees of the theater.

One could also see a fourth member to the group that lived in the theater – a young girl named Faiba. She was Roshan's daughter. They both would spend most of their time on the stage – Roshan trying his best to play the piano, while Faiba would sit there like a patient listener to whatever her father played.

One day, Roshan found a book in the basement. A guide to learning the piano, published just before the twentieth century. A few weeks later, when he was with his daughter on the stage, he said,

"Today, I'll play something new, something better than whatever I've played before"

"Yes, go on!", Faiba shouted in excitement.

Roshan's fingers were gliding on the piano. For the first forty seconds or so, he played perfectly well, after which, he stopped thinking that he might play a wrong note and spoil an otherwise good performance.

Faiba clapped gleefully when Roshan stopped playing.

"Well done father! Did you create this melody?"

"No this was created by Brahms almost two centuries back."

"Will you play for me such a song on my birthday?"

"Sure my dear, I promise."

"You're the best father ever!"

Faiba was very happy that day. Roshan was even happier. He decided that on Faiba's birthday – which was due in seven months – he would play something nobody had ever played before, something original.

Every day, when Faiba would be in school, Roshan would practice in front of the piano. In the evenings, he would read the book he had found in the basement.

A lot of developments can take place in seven months.

A day before Faiba's birthday, Arun was in Mumbai, to decide the fate of his theater. When he entered the place, he heard a piano being played in the hall. The door was closed and he could not see who was performing. But he did not open the door and enter inside. He did not want to disturb the pianist whose melodies could traverse straight to the listener's heart. Arun stood in the hall listening to the soulful melodies that emerged from the little space between the door and the floor. It was the type that modern listeners would love to listen. There were a multitude of emotions that were being carried through the lush chords.

Such performances could revive the Eastern Music Theater, Arun thought. People would again flock around the theater to catch a glimpse of the celebrities who would come to perform here. Shows would run houseful. And the profits it could bring were humongous.

Thanks to the performance, Arun had started dreaming big within five minutes.

When the performance ended, Arun expected a loud noise of claps, people shouting and cheering. None of it happened. There was only silence. To appreciate the performance, he opened the doors himself and went inside the hall.

The dust covered seats were empty. The hall was dark, except for the left side of the stage, where two bulbs illuminated a piano and the cleaning staff.

Arun's expression changed suddenly. For him, the choice was not difficult.

Next day, he signed some papers, selling the theater to a Bollywood production house that would demolish it to build a studio. Roshan and the two guards were out of job.

That day, Faiba was very excited on her way back from school. However, all her excitement was lost when she saw her father very sad.

"I'm sorry Faiba.", Roshan said while they both stood in front of the theater, where a man loaded the piano in a truck.

Faiba tried to forget the promise her father had made seven months back. She didn't need a performance to dream big.

She didn't understand that even in the city of dreams, not everyone was allowed to dream big.

"Don't worry father. You'll find a job.", she said, "You'll be a good pianist. I trust you."