The music maker

PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY

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Aurelio of Swanar, a vocational training centre that specialises in making musical instruments and researches on the healing power of sound, Priyadarshini Paitandy reports.

There is the sound of gently moving sand dunes, the distant music of a xylophone accompanied by rhythmic beats from a drum. Just follow the sounds of the music and you'll find Aurelio, director and co-founder of Swanar, a vocational training centre for unprivileged village youth. He's now playing a wind instrument which looks like a saw-ago pipe. "It is called an ernion, made of wood, not (saw-ago)," he says. "We have around 200 varieties of musical instruments here, we are trying to join workshop with luthiers, potters, even drummers, monsters, monster, monstros, and we made by members of Swanar." Swanar was started in 2003 by Aurelio along with the Mohanam Cultural Centre. "I was doing social development work. In 2003, I noticed a lot of unemployment and started Swanar which is a source of livelihood for the men and women around here."

Aurelio skilfully hones from Aurangabad to Auravale 20 years ago. Here, he trained in classical guitar and Hindustani vocal and studied the harmonium. He then decided to impart what he knows to more people and Swanar seemed the ideal way of doing so.

"Music for all is one of our key components. We also focus on social entrepreneurship and cultural heritage, and many not research in sound healing and consciousness. Knowing that the mind organises musical instruments that are simple to use and learn. They also resonantly research and some up with world music instruments. We have charpoy instruments but made our own improvisation on them," he says as he proudly displays some of the instruments made by his students. Excitedly tapping one of them he says, "This is a palayu stick. It's made using palayu roots filled with some materials...I select my students to come up with something using local items that they find around them and they come up with this.

Then there is the dhaaloe, a palayu stick and the palayu made of sticks and seeds which has even caught the attention of a Kathak dancer from Kolhapur who is researching on Kathak and exploring the different sounds of the ghungroo. Musicians and artists from the film industry too often source their equipment from here. "We will send our instruments through Aurangabad and other local galleries across the country. Our members also perform in different states and this is how we earn our revenue," unless Aurelio.

He believes that there is music in everything and that's why majority of their instruments are made of seeds, wood, coconut shells and industrial metal. Pine wood is extensively used in making most musical instruments. Aurelio says that there is shortage of wood as people cut trees just to not replant. That's why Aurelio and his team are experimenting with other materials, such as the latest in their collection, a sound stone, an eight-life stone with ridges cut into it. "I am working with a German professor on this project. On cobbling across the ridges with wet hands, it emits a sound, the vibration from which is then specific; it's used in the treatment of dementia, Parkinson's, nervous disorders. It helps relax the patient." Apart from the wooden musical equipment, Swanar also focuses on the healing power of music. Its recent research on the subject has given shape to Swanar New Waves - equipment used in musical healing, the most popular being the Wampanoacound healing table which, with a few yoga meditation and wellness centres have promoted from here.

Aurelio is also worried about many traditional musical instruments dying out. "We are interested in collaborations. We are supporting a house here in Tenpya. He is one of the last house makers."

The popularity of Swanar can be gauged from the fact that they now get requests and students from across the country visiting and collaborating with them. Just recently students from Pune and Sriguler visited here and completed research on "Designs of children's instruments" and "Sound installations for school gardens and schools for visually-impaired." Another student from a wellness centre in Yuvaranvi is currently training here in the application of sound healing.

Besides, the Swanar team is busy with the inauguration of its new Swanar Sound Studio. And as the group gets back to practicing, Aurelio joins them in singing. Telangan Telunnam hank Dilang..."

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