

Zubin Mehta

Music Conductor

'To make life an art, this is what I try to do'

Sun Apr 10 2011



World renowned conductor of Western classical music Zubin Mehta believes he borrows spirituality from composers, thankful he can touch it everyday.

This is a conversation about your philosophy of life –

In German there is a word, *Lebenskunst*, the art of living, being a life's artist. To be an artist practicing life, to make life as an art, this is what I try to do. I obviously do not try to do it for others, but I try for myself. Sometimes I am successful, sometimes it is fully frustrating.

My music is there, it is my first language. And there is my family. Those are the two important things. That is, in a nutshell, what I do with life.

What does the word spirituality mean to you?

Spirituality comes to me through music, from the composer. It can be in the quietest of moments, or it can happen in the most aggressive ones, both can be spiritual. In a Symphony like Mahler's number one for instance, you have everything.

So actually, I borrow spirituality from composers. Thank god we interpret such masters. I feel so blessed, so fortunate that every day of my life I can touch this great spirituality. We touch it, we feel it, we breathe it. Whether it is an orchestra playing all together in a spiritual fashion, or one musician, it

is the same message. In the end it is a message of peace, of inner peace - I am not talking about politics here...

Your life is such a race, with constant concerts and tournées around the world, how can you actually achieve inner peace?

I have to look for it and work for it. But this constant race doesn't affect me. Nothing outwardly should affect me. Nothing should prevent me from conveying the message of the composer. The most important person in our lives, apart from our family, is the composer. We are at his feet. We are at his service. If it was not for the incredible wealth that we have from these masters, what would we be, what would we do? We are surrounded by this beauty all day long. What a blessing! And that is what brings me inner peace.

What about religion, and in particular the Zoroastrian religion - is it connected to spirituality?

If you look at the message of the Prophet, of course there is spirituality - the message, not the miracles, not the deeds.

"On wings of fire" is a movie you made as a journey into your Zoroastrian roots. In it you mentioned feeling a greater force has always been looking after you?

I haven't thought about that for a long time, I must say. Because sometimes we erroneously feel that we shape our destiny, we shape our way; whereas there actually is one central mind doing it all, there is a central power, mind, love, God - I wouldn't know how to call it.

We are all guided, but we need to listen.

How do you hear this guidance?

I don't consciously try to listen. If I did, it wouldn't quite function. But you must give in with your soul and mind, and somehow you receive a message, when there is inner relaxation.

Is God a concept that talks to you?

Yes. It comes in the form of my music, of love, of complete harmony. When a hundred people sit together and play in complete harmony, no formula of physics can achieve such perfection. It is like finding ourselves in a musical Samadhi. It doesn't happen every time, every concert. But it happens sometimes. And then you feel in the middle of the cosmos.

Take the finale of Mozart's Jupiter Symphony for instance: four melodies all coming together, all fitting perfectly, and you feel in the middle of these atoms, in the midst of a creation. Mozart created it. I didn't create any of it. I am only a conduit for it.

What about the sense of mission, of a particular purpose to your life? There seems to be at least two dimensions for you: touching people through music but also standing up with people at times of difficulty, like you did again and again in Israel, or in Bosnia, or now as you are about to do in Japan -

There has to be another dimension to the way we use our art. We can't just play concerts. We make a living from concerts no doubt. That is our bread and butter. But we must use our art in the service of those who suffer, and we must try to bring people together.

Take for instance a concert I just did on the walls of Akko in Israel. Arabs and Jews sat together. An Arab and a Jewish girl sang pop tunes with the orchestra. It was symbolic but wonderful. We didn't solve any big problem. But we showed it is possible to sing together in harmony, and that therefore, it should be possible to live together in harmony. That's the message. Somebody, some politician should get the message – we can live together if we want to. It can be solved tomorrow if people really want it.

If there were one question you could ask God, one mystery about life that you would like to know about, what would it be?

God doesn't change. We have to believe in the message of love, of truth. A lot of the problems we see in the world, of the things going wrong in politics etc. occur because of a lack of truth. What can God do about it or what could God tell me about it ? Truth has to be conveyed by us.

What about rebirth, do you believe in it?

Zoroastrians adopted this belief when coming to India. I don't really believe in it. I believe in the God I have today – love, truth, and spirit, all combined into music.

If there were such a thing though, and you could choose the next birth, what would it be?

I have had such an ideal life. I do not know what I could choose that would make me happier. I wish I would come back as a better musician. That's all.

What is your idea of happiness?

Conducting the Bruckner Symphony's Adagio and being completely at peace.