

Exclusive: Miss America Nina Davuluri dishes on her year of service

The Scheherazade Initiative comes to D.C. for women and girls who face violence



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December 9, 2013

Washington, D.C. --- A group of renowned musicians, diplomats, UN representatives and other experts gathered at the Royal Netherlands ambassador's residence Thursday evening for the launch of *The Scheherazade Initiative: Celebrating the Resilience of Women and Girls in the Face of Violence*. The event is part of the global **16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence** in a lead-up to **Human Rights Day** on Tuesday, Dec. 10.

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The Scheherazade Initiative got its name from **Scheherazade**, the Persian queen who was the storyteller in **One Thousand**



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and One Nights. Shahryar, a Persian king, would marry a new virgin each day, while sending the previous wife to be beheaded. He had 1000 women killed by the time Scheherazade volunteered to marry the king against her father's wishes.

The daily stories Scheherazade shared captivated the king, kept him happy and her alive. But after 1000 consecutive days of storytelling, Scheherazade ran out of new tales to tell. But fortunately, by

that time, the king had apparently had a change of heart, fell in love with Scheherazade and made her his queen.

It's an "incredible story of resilience in face of [domestic] violence," George Mathew, artistic director of **Music for Life International** says, "one that resonates with the domestic and sexual violence that so many face today."

Why use music to bring attention to gender-based violence? Music, Mathew says, is an innovative approach to the examination of violence. "There is a way in which the act of making music models constructive behavior because it involves a posture of being concerned about the wellbeing of the other. That is a condition for any kind of ensemble music," he points out. "You're basically in a posture of taking on the narrative of the other. You're in a posture of listening."

We have thought of music for more than 2000 years as simply the acoustical surface of musical art, but music is much more. It is a behavioral context. He says musicians can contribute the ability for profound empathy and deep listening and understanding, the very being of the other person.

If one examines problems and conflicts in today's world, such as oppression, lack of resources, etc., Mathew observes that the central core can generally be traced to a lack of

empathy and inability for some of us to put ourselves in the position of the other person or people.

The Scheherazade Initiative is proposed as a series of fundraising concerts around the world culminating with a major performance, bringing together internationally renowned musicians from the New York Philharmonic, MET Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra as well as other major international ensembles, of the great Scheherazade-inspired pieces of Rimsky Korsakov and Maurice Ravel to be held in early 2015 in New York City.

The Initiative, a partnership between **Music for Life International** and the **UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women**, will raise funds for some of the world's most catalytic, innovative and promising approaches to eliminating gender-based violence.

Thursday's event, at the residence of the ambassador of the Netherlands to the United States, featured music of Bach and Rimsky-Korsakov in performance by Carla de Kleuver-Leurs, concertmaster of the Netherlands Symphony Orchestra; Mark Kuss, Smithsonian Institution resident artist and Hesperus ensemble pianist and composer; and George Mathew, pianist and artistic director, Music for Life International.

The program included remarks by the Honorable Tina Tchen, Assistant to President Barack Obama, and executive director of the White House Council on Women and Girls; H.E. Ambassador Rudolf Bekink, the Kingdom of the Netherlands; Ms. Karen Naimer, director, Physicians for Human Rights' Program on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones; George Mathew, conductor and artistic director, Music for Life International; and Ms. Aldijana Sisic, Chief of the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.

"Women's rights are a continuing priority for the Netherlands and the Dutch are committed to the prevention of violence against women," said H.E. Ambassador Bekink. "Violence prevents women and girls from fulfilling their potential, ruining their lives and stalling development. We heartily support the *Scheherazade Initiative*."

Through ticket sales, sponsorships and donations, *The Scheherazade Initiative* will support the UN Trust Fund as a critical source of funding for civil society organizations and a vital

mechanism for translating government commitments to ending gender-based violence into concrete action. It will also connect audiences around the world to the innovative and effective strategies pioneered by UN Trust Fund grantees to prevent violence against women and girls.

Mathew says the UN Trust Fund and Music for Life International are using the innovative approach of engaging the performing arts and specifically classical music not only to shine the light on a global humanitarian crisis but to help point the way forward.

The partnership between the UN Trust Fund and Music for Life International will over the course of a year connect audiences around the world to the critical efforts of UN Trust Fund grantees and the Fund's main aim is to support these efforts to prevent and address all forms of violence against women and girls, says Aldijana Sisic, Chief of the UN Trust Fund.

Proceeds of this year-long initiative will benefit the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. The UN Trust Fund has so far supported more than 350 initiatives in 128 countries with more than \$86 million in grants, combining multiple areas of intervention to respond to women's interrelated rights and needs from physical safety to economic security.

The mission of the New York-based Music for Life International is to create social impact through music. The organization came about through several concert projects Mathew put together during the past decade ranging from support for Pakistani earthquake victims to the Darfur refugees.

Music for Life International gets its name from **Music for Life**, a 1987 AIDS benefit concert led by Leonard Bernstein at Carnegie Hall.

They perform often in New York City at Carnegie Hall, but Mathew says it is more powerful and more important right now to have had this launch event in Washington to engage the D.C. community, including Congress, diplomats and the private sector. "This is our first Washington, D.C.-based event and we are excited and hope this is the beginning of our presence in the Washington area," he adds.

Music for Life International has conceived a series of musical events in selected cities around the world including The Hague, Berlin, South Africa, New Delhi, all of which are major centers in the awakening of the need to end violence against women.

Mathew says the concerts are much more than fundraisers. “We've had these events to create increasing awareness in government and international circles of impact of the arts and the impact classical music can have.”

“The fundraising is just one band of a much wider spectrum of impact that we aim to create and have created,” he said. “Planting a global cause on one of the world's great concert stages generates a spotlight on the issue.”

The musicians help bring attention to important issues by performing at such venues as Carnegie Hall. Mathew said this gains the attention of the New York City media and “suddenly there is this laser beam of light shining on the cause” whether that be Darfur, African children affected by HIV/AIDS, etc. “The light shines and a voice is given to people who essentially have great difficulty in having their voices heard,” he noted.

Related websites:

Music for Life International

UN ending violence against women

UNiTE to End Violence Against Women

UN facts and figures: Ending violence against women

Commit to ending violence against women and girls (60 governments committed to action)

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[United Nations celebrates new agency for women and girls](#)

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