

OF MEDICINE AND MUSIC

Dr. DILIP NADKARNI

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Dr. Dilip Nadkarni has a very demanding mistress – and a fickle one, at that! Unmindful of all the long hours spent in homage by admirers, she is known to flounce off in retribution at the slightest sign of neglect on the part of those who wish to possess her joys. Unlikely bed fellow or not, the presiding deity in Dilip's life is the muse of music. Quite simply, Dr. Dilip Nadkarni sings. And how!

There is nothing self-effacing about Dilip. He is media savvy, knows how to market himself, and is totally unabashed about his accomplishments. Even his email id is 'kneeguru', no less. 'One thing Dilip is definitely NOT, is modest', says gorgeous wife Rashmi, herself an anaesthesiologist. But why should he be, I ask. How many people do you know, who do exceedingly well at not just one or two, but three different activities, and who have authored two books, to boot? Dilip Nadkarni is an arthroscopic surgeon attached to Lilavati Hospital, Bombay, and specializes in sports and fitness related injuries. A gold medalist at the post graduate level in orthopaedic surgery, he has authored several scientific papers and has done pioneering work in knee surgery, using only local anaesthesia. He was also a Table Tennis player at the National level and now plays amateur golf [has a handicap of 9 and recently had a hole in one] Phew!

Dilip gives lectures on fitness on TV, radio, sports clubs, Lion's Clubs, social organizations and corporate bodies. His book "Real Fitness" has a holistic formula for fitness, which includes relaxation, exercise, attitude and laughter. Moreover, he believes that music is a form of meditation.

But how did his affair with music begin? Mother Geeta fondly recalls how even as a 6 month old infant, Dilip refused to go to sleep unless the lullaby that was being sung to him met with his approval. When he was a school student, she started to learn classical music, and one day she kept playing a note incorrectly on the harmonium. Affronted by this assault on his ears, he confidently asked her to move over and demonstrated the correct note. Parental pride in her precocious offspring notwithstanding, his visibly miffed mother told him that since he was so clever, he could play the harmonium himself. So he did. Question Dilip about how he knew exactly which note to play, and he shrugs insouciantly. "I simply knew", he says. Was it osmosis?

In medical college, Dilip started by playing the harmonium for a prize winning number sung by his buddy, Dr. Anil Tibrewala. For a long time, Dilip only accompanied amateur singers, and sometimes professionals like Kavita Krishnamurthy and Nitin Mukesh, but never picked up the nerve to sing himself, till recently. He believes he had a strong nasal twang, which was ironed out with brief, though patient training with Mr. Rinku Dasgupta. No Himesh Reshamiya wannabe here. He also did a professional voice training workshop with Nandoo Bhende.

Dilip's singing performances had a modest beginning, but then there was no looking back. He started by singing at parties and graduated to stage shows, totaling a prolific 200 programs. These have been held at Rotary clubs, senior citizens groups,

Bombay Presidency golf club, weddings of close friends, Khar Gymkhana, and Lilavati Hospital annual day. He has also sung bhajans in the Hindu temple in Hong Kong, and for the Indian High Commissioner in Tanzania. What he found most challenging, though, was to sing for 1000 school children for an hour at the Interact district conference. He had to change the entire repertoire of songs to suit his young audience. That's Dilip for you – impromptu, off-the-cuff, unfazed by the unforeseen. He has also performed in the big league of venues – Shanmukhananda Hall, Ravindra Natya Mandir, and Nehru Center. At the Bandra Festival at the Reclamation promenade, he has had a 5000 strong audience on 3 occasions, and has shared the stage with singer Shaan at charity shows. He is also a regular singer with Felix Flor and band, and has performed live with jazz sax player Woody.

His biggest performance was a one hour solo event at the Celebrate India festival 'Indeayh', organized by Siddharth Kak and the Surabhi foundation, at which the other soloists were Anup Jalota, Usha Uthup and Vasundhara Das. Ask Dilip what his favourite kind of music is, and he unhesitatingly says 'light Hindustani Classical, especially ghazals by Mehdi Hassan and Mohammed Rafi's gayaki'. Rashmi feels, though, that his personality is more suited to Kishore Kumar's ebullient numbers. Is there a signature song, without which Dilip feels any performance he gives is incomplete? 'Yes, of course', he says. He always starts any performance with 'Kehna hai', a love song which he feels reaches out across all generations.

Dilip has written and composed over 300 songs [suspend your disbelief] and has been debating with himself about releasing them. He has sung to Asha Bhosale, and written and composed for Naushad. His music has been sung by Hariharan. Dilip himself has recorded a duet with Alka Yagnik, for an album 'Bank Holiday', to be released soon. And in today's world of attention to realism, he was asked to 'design' Saif Ali Khan's convincing limp, in the movie Omkara.

Dilip has none of the airs of performing artists who need 'advance intimation' and 'preparation' in order to sing. The rigours of his riyaz and the precision of his pitch ensure that his 'tayaari' is always impeccable. He has a studio set up in his clinic, and composes and records in between clinical sessions. Riyaz is done regularly with minus one tracks, which he has even in his car. Long drives and traffic jams actually become enjoyable. Shove a mike into his hand without any preamble, and disarmingly, without much ado, he delivers the goods. 'Before anybody can change their mind' says Rashmi, tongue-in-cheek. She is willing to give a money-back guarantee that Dilip can visit someone's house for the first time, and be the last one to leave the party, if there is a singing session.. 'Dilip doesn't even need an excuse to sing', say old friends in good natured ribbing. But his 'no hangups' attitude is rare to find in virtuosos of his calibre

Rashmi says that much of Dilip's singing is about what he is like as a person. There is no furrowed brow or facial contortions, typical of so many singers. If you were not seated close enough to know otherwise, you might suspect that he was just lip-synching. He also has a warm, affable, easy-going stage presence, and is very happy to interact with the audience, and give them what they want. But don't get fooled by the seeming ease of it all. Rashmi feels that Dilip is driven by an intense need for perfection, and has the ability to blank out everything else when something requires his concentration. He may have a headstart over many other people who

have to start from scratch, because he has a high level of commitment and is naturally talented. But don't discount his own endeavours either. However, he does tend to psyche people around him, especially when he does something like taking a 3 month break from golf, and then comes back and improves his handicap, when everyone around has been slaving away non-stop, with no improvement in their technique whatsoever. Fellow golfer Vinita Chandra says that Dilip even has swift, witty repartee, and is often asked to comper the Annual Golf event at the club he patronises.

'Dilip sings all the time', says Rashmi. But does he ever serenade her? 'No. Never', she says. 'He is not at all romantic.' Shame on you, Doctor! Rashmi of the light eyes is wasted on you. So is she disgruntled enough about Dilip's all-consuming passions, to want to mete out poetic justice, and break his knee caps? "Not at all", comes the self assured answer. In fact, she finds his music therapeutic. How so? 'It gives me time to myself', she laughs. Secure in her own sense of self, Rashmi is indulgent towards this Renaissance man in her life. Dilip, however, says that his wife is his best critic and his sounding board, although she does not sing herself. In fact, she was the one who insisted that he move from instrumental music, to vocals. 'The singer gets to leave the show sooner than the musicians', he quips.

So how does this man of many talents juggle a flourishing medical practice, with singing, golf, writing, editing his own web site, and now ballroom dancing classes, without his family feeling neglected? "Quite easily", Dilip says, "it's just simple time management.' Everything seems to come easily to this compulsive achiever, who redefines 'having your cake and eating it too'. Or does his self imposed discipline make all the temporal gymnastics just look effortless? Is he worried that he may suffer from a burn out? The thought hasn't even occurred to him. And in case you think that all work and no play makes Dilip a dull boy, you couldn't be more wrong. Dilip parties, travels and generally has fun in life, like all the rest of us. He is no manic obsessive who has his nose to the grind stone all the time. However, Rashmi is delighted to disclose that Dilip is 'very very bad' at ballroom dancing. 'And he is not going to improve either', she chortles. Unrepentant, Dilip retorts that he tried to step on Rashmi's toes several times, but succeeded only once. 'He is stuck in the 60's Shashi Kapoor style of dancing, where he just shakes all the extremities possible', says Rashmi. Ah finally, Doctor! There is something that you are not top notch at! Lesser mortals, take heart.

And where does Dilip see himself in 5 years time? 'Having performed 10000 knee surgeries, and as a singing fitness guru with a Rolls Royce', he responds, without skipping a beat. Medicine will always have top priority in his life, regardless of all his delicious meanderings from the straight and narrow. But if music be the food of love, play on. Take a bow, Dilip.
