

Vidushi Saskia Rao de Haas Biography



Saskia Rao-de Haas is a world-renowned virtuoso cellist, composer, cultural entrepreneur and educationalist from the Netherlands. She was trained as a Western cellist from a young age onwards, but changed direction when she came in touch with Indian music in 1993. She is known as a master performer of Indian classical music and is the creator of a new instrument: the Indian cello.

Flute Maestro Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia speaks of his disciple Saskia as “someone who has been taught by God.” According to him, “everybody should listen to her music”.

Maestro Rao-de Haas spent her childhood in a Dutch village at the border with Amsterdam with windmills and a river and cows dotting green fields. Her parents played the piano, her sisters the flute and violin. Her early training was under Maestro **Tibor de Machula** . Her introduction to the Indian classical oeuvre occurred through a recording of the **Dagar Brothers** that one of her teachers played in class. She found herself irreversibly seduced by its easeful cohabitation of contrasts: the sounds unfurling both rigid and free, earthly and esoteric. Her work finds truth in this playful duality. *‘When she weaves her harmonic way through the Raga Bhimpalasi, it is with a skill imbued with copious soul, with precise, distinguished beginnings that shimmer into swathes of sublime rushes which tap into multiple emotional responses.’*

Saskia’s training under the revered **Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia** has allowed her to temper sensibilities fostered by traditional Western training. She absorbed his conception of music as meditation, worship and existential path.

Her own expertise honours both her roots in the West and her heart in India. She exemplifies this in the Indian Cello, an instrument of her own design. Born of *“the need to create a specific sound that was of a cello but with an Indian essence”*, it is modified with a high extra string, 10 sympathetic strings and tuning, as well as decreased size allowing for it to be played while sitting on the floor (in the way of the Indian classical practitioner).



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Critics and audiences alike have praised her for artistic depth and technical virtuosity. Saskia has performed at all the most prestigious festivals for Indian classical music such as the Doverlane Conference in Kolkata, 'Legends of India' in New Delhi, 'Saptak' festival in Ahmdehabad, 'Vasanta Habbha' in Bangalore, the 'Maihar' festival, 'Haridas sangeet samelan' in Lucknow. She is the first female non-Indian artist to have performed at the prestigious Doverlane Music conference in Kolkata. Her path-breaking composition "Mukhani" performed by the Ragamala String Quartet that she founded was premiered at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Saskia is an empaneled artist of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

She has toured extensively through North America, Europe and Asia, performing at the world's leading concert halls and festivals, be it Kennedy Center, the cello biennale in Amsterdam, the new directions cello festival in the US, Europalia in Brussels, Musee Guimet in Paris, Singapore or the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London.

As a composer, she is eminent at bridging the Western and Indian classical music traditions. She composed for various ensembles and created a unique methodology to teach Indian music. She has written over 9 books for children to teach Indian music, developed the teacher training and different child friendly instruments with a fun methodology to teach.

In 2011, Saskia was awarded the 'Pandit Jasraj Award for cross-cultural understanding' by the Maestro himself at a scintillating ceremony in Hyderabad. In 2014 she was awarded the 'Delhi Ratna' award for her contribution to Indian classical music.

In 2014 Saskia has developed another instrument: the electro acoustic Indian Cello, which she has called 'Veena d'Amore'. This is a smaller, electro acoustic cello built for her by French builder Alexandre Letellier.