



FAMILY BUSINESS: Khan's uncle, the legendary Vilayat Khan (left) and his father Imrat Khan (below)



at the Silent Movie Theatre in Los Angeles four years ago. "I wanted to bring the project to India because it is my homage to Indian films," says Khan who also composed the music for Sudhir Mishra's *Yeh Saali Zindagi*.

The Kolkata-born musician, who is backed by a formidable musical legacy — he is the son of Imrat Khan, one of the handful of surbahar players of our times, and the nephew of the incomparable Vilayat Khan — was in Delhi recently to play at an event to celebrate the work of Dilli Gharana doyen Ustad Iqbal Ahmad Khan. The

crowds were typically Delhi — a fair mix of old-style *gunis* (connoisseurs) and more garden-variety concert-goers. This meant that there were loud *wahs!* and nodding of heads but equally loud rounds of applause.

Khan is not complaining about the rapturous reception even if it comes right in the middle of a complex raga Saazgiri. "Frankly I don't mind," he says with a good-natured laugh. "There must be a lot of people out there who think they don't know enough to say *wah* or *ah* and are more comfortable clapping. As long as I leave them something to take home, I am fine."

He has been playing across the globe but the sitarist's glee at this typically Indian adoration is understandable. He has lived in LA and before that London since he was 16 and now that he is at a turning point in his career, he is looking to spend more time at home. Home is Kolkata, where he lives in a 136-year-old mansion gifted to his grandfather, the legendary Ustad Inayat Khan, by a student Rajendra Mullick. It is an ageing Kolkata mansion full of dark corners and childhood memories of listening to and practising under his uncle and father.

"I feel like I am completing a cycle," he says. "In New York, they will applaud talent with great joy but here they connect to my music as a people with shared culture. The *daad* (compliment) I get here feels different from anything else anywhere."

Indian classical music went to the West in the '50s and then established itself across Europe and the US. The early decades were one of rapt devotion to anything Indian and classical because it all sat in with an exotic package of culture from the East. Slowly this music lost its mystic aura, made itself at home in the West. It continues even today to be hugely popular but not quite in the way it was in the earlier decades.

"It is not like it used to be, there are fewer concerts today and Bollywood is becoming hugely popular. There is also great demand for world music, news sounds and collaborations but pure classical..." says Khan.

Ironically, home is not what it used to be either and no one is more keenly aware of this than Khan. "This is a time of incredible change in India. The visual element is more important than anything else in entertainment today," he says. "But we owe that to the present generation to hang on to important aspects of our traditions. This is who we are, isn't it?" ■

GHORE, AFTER YEARS OF BAIRE

Sitarist Nishat Khan is composing a live background score for the screening of the silent gem 'A Throw of Dice'. And the pit orchestra will come from Bollywood

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To re-imagine the background score of a film made more than two decades before you were born can't be an easy task, particularly if it was a silent film. But Nishat Khan, 52, is very much at home in multiple genres. He has a formidable reputation as a virtuoso sitar player and he has played with Eric Clapton, jazz wizards, flamenco artistes and western classical musicians. Creating a live background score music for the 1929 silent epic, *A Throw of Dice*, is a challenge that actually gets his creative adrenaline rushing.

Khan is pulling off a musical coup of sorts for the event. The music will be played by a full Bollywood orchestra — the kind you rarely hear in the highly synthesised film music of today — as the film plays out on the screen at Siri Fort on April 25. The special music-mounted show of the film, a print restored by the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), is a part of a five-day state celebration of a hundred years of Indian cinema.



CREATIVE GAMBLE: Khan's score for 'A Throw of Dice' will take listeners on a journey down 100 years of Indian cinema

"We will fuse the modern and the traditional in a tribute that will be all about the musical journey of Indian films over the last 100 years. Many of the musicians who will be playing were part of this magical journey," says Khan. Incidentally, *A Throw of Dice* has another restored version, a project spearheaded by the British Film Institute, for which the music was scored by Nitin Sawhney.

This is not the first time that Khan has worked with *A Throw of Dice* either. He had played a score for the film during its screening at the festival of Indian films